

## **Your Word is Truth (John 17:17)**

### **Session 4**

#### **Transmission and the Translations of the Bible<sup>1</sup>**

In our fourth and last session I want to focus on two topics.

1. The Transmission of the Bible.
2. The Translations of the Bible.

Let's begin by looking at our first topic.

##### 1. The Transmission of the Bible.

- Definitions:
  - A. Transmission is the copy of one manuscript to another manuscript in the same language.
  - B. Translation is the translation of one language to another language.
  - C. A version is a translation that goes back to the original language; a revision is where they compare the version to the original languages.
  - D. Transliteration is the rendering of the letters in one language to the corresponding letters in another language.
- Materials in which manuscripts were written.
  - A. Papyrus (comes from a reed in Egypt).
  - B. Vellum (animal skins).
  - C. A codex is where the manuscripts are bound together to make a book.
- Types of writing

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<sup>1</sup> Notes are based on lectures from Joseph Holden of Calvary Chapel Bible College.

A. Uncial: these are capital letters without spaces (Codex Vaticanus, Sinaiticus and Codex Alexandrinus 4<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> century).

B. Minuscule's: These were lower case cursive. The dates of these manuscripts are from the 10<sup>th</sup> century to the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Majority of our manuscripts are this kind of writing.

C. Writing was replaced with the moveable type printing press by Gutenberg in the 1500's.

- Periods of Transmission.

1. (100-300 AD) not many manuscripts were copied during these times. Many lectionaries which were the writings of early church fathers have been found on papyri, walls and ossuaries.

2. (300-500AD) there was an explosion during this time because Constantine legalized Christianity. Most of these manuscripts were written on Vellum and parchment.

3. (500-1000) this period is characterized by monks who copied scriptures. The quality of manuscripts decreased at this time because the monks wanted to copy them faster. The Quality refers minor things like grammar and punctuation.

4. (1000-1400) in this period the minuscule's replaced the uncials which helped them produce copies faster. After 1500 everything changed with the printing press.

## 2. The Translations of the Bible.

The fact that the Bible has been translated into so many different languages shows us that the Bible is the authoritative word of God. Let's look at a couple ancient translations of the Bible.

- Septuagint

The Old Testament was written primarily in Hebrew. In the third century BC as a result of Greece's influence on the word most people in the west and majority of Jews in Alexandria Egypt spoke Greek.

As a result of this a man named Aristeas said to his brother Philocrates in a letter that Ptolemy requested that his Librarian Demetrius call and oversee seventy Hebrew scholars and have them translate the Hebrew scriptures into Greek.

Based on the fact that there were seventy two scholars the translation was later given the Latin name Septuagint which means seventy.

According to tradition Demetrius sent Aristeas to the High Priest Eleazer in Jerusalem. Eleazer appointed 6 translators from each tribe. These translators went back to Egypt to the island of Pharos and translated the Pentateuch, years later the entire Old Testament was complete.

- Ancient translations of the Christian Bible.

The Septuagint became the Bible of the early Christian church. Christians used this along with the New Testament books which were written in Greek by the Apostles and their associates from 50-100AD.

As a result of the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) the gospel spread throughout the world which required there to be translations in other languages. Three early translations arose from the Greek New Testament.

- Syriac: Syriac was the language spoken in Syria and Mesopotamia. Syriac I'm told is similar to Aramaic. The translations in Syriac were called the Old Syriac and later the Peshitta.
- Coptic: Coptic was an ancient form of Egyptian. The Coptic language was broken up into two dialects. The Sahidic in the south and Boharic in the north.
- Latin: The New Testament was translated into Latin by the second century AD. This early Latin translation is often referred to as the Old Latin version.

In the year 382-383 AD Bishop Damasus of Rome commissioned his secretary a man named Jerome to gather together all the Old Latin translations and produce a revised version. Jerome completed the gospels in 384, but did not complete the entire Bible until years later.

Jerome's Bible officially did not replace the Old Latin version in the Catholic Church until 600AD. Jerome's Bible became the standard Bible for the Catholic Church for one thousand years. In 1546 at the council of Trent the Catholic Church named this Bible the Latin Vulgate, Vulgate is Latin for common. From the thousand years that the vulgate was in circulation we have over 10,000 Latin manuscripts.

- The English Bible

By the 700's missionaries began going west and preaching the gospel. As a result an Old English version of the Bible was need.

Dr. Geisler says, "At first only pictures, preaching, poems and paraphrases were employed to communicate the message of the Bible to the Britons. The early translation of portions of the scriptures were based on the Old Latin and Vulgate translations rather than the original Hebrew and Greek languages, and none of them contained the text of the entire Bible.

Here are some of the first English translations of the Bible

- Caedmon who was a seventh century monk translated part of the Latin Bible into English.
- Aldhelm who was Bishop of Sherborne in Dorset translated the Psalms into Old English in the 700's.
- Bede who was also a church historian, he translated the Synoptic gospels into English, some speculate that he also translated the gospel of John.
- Egbert an archbishop and teacher translated the gospels in Old English in 705.
- Alfred the Great (871-899) He was a King who translated of the Ten Commandments and the Psalms.

There were only partial translations of the New Testament until John Wycliffe.

- John Wycliffe (1329-1384) Wycliffe was an Oxford scholar though he didn't know Hebrew and Greek. Wycliffe criticized Catholic doctrine, such as Papal authority, transubstantiation, indulgences and the

church hierarchy. Wycliffe believed if he could translate the Latin Bible into English and the people could read it for themselves then they would reject these doctrines. In 1380 the New Testament was complete; Wycliffe after this would pass away and Nicolas Hereford in 1382 would complete the Old Testament.

The Catholic Church later condemned Wycliffe as a Heretic, dug up his bones and burned them and threw the ashes into the Swift River. In 1388 John Purvey produced a revision of Wycliffe's translation which later replaced it.

- William Tyndale (1500's) Tyndale went back to the original languages to translate the Bible. Tyndale graduated from Oxford in 1515 where he studied Greek and Hebrew.

Tyndale like Wycliffe also criticized the Catholic church of false doctrine. At age 30 Tyndale began translating the entire Bible from the original languages into English. Tyndale left England and went to Germany where he probably met Martin Luther.

Tyndale finished the New Testament in 1525 and later smuggled some 15,000 English translations of the Bible into England by 1529.

The Catholic Church banned these translations and condemned Tyndale as a Heretic and later strangled and burned him at the stake. Regarding the Old Testament Tyndale was only able to translate the Pentateuch and Jonah.

Miles Coverdale (1488-1569) God in His providence allowed Tyndale to meet Miles Coverdale when he was in prison. Coverdale finished the Old Testament based on Tyndale's work in 1537.

Thomas Matthew AKA John Rodger's produced the Matthew's Bible. The Matthew's Bible was based on the Coverdale and the Tyndale Bible. The Matthew Bible was later called the Great Bible because of its size and costliness.

In the late 1500's persecution arose from Queen Mary Tudor (Bloody Mary). Thomas Matthew's was executed and many believers fled to places like Geneva.

### The Geneva and Bishop Bible

William Whittinham made a translation of the New Testament based on Theodor Beze Latin text and the current Greek Text. Upon completion they called this translation the Geneva Bible. The Geneva also had John Calvin's commentary and notes.

### The King James Bible

Around the year 1604 James IV of Scotland who was also James the first of England assembled Anglican and Puritan scholars at the Hampton court conference so they could solve the religious differences. The attempt failed. One individual named John Reynolds the leader of the puritans had an idea, he suggested that they make a translation with no notes that all could read.

The King agreed and called 50 scholars from many different Universities to translate the Bible. The 50 scholars were divided up into 6 groups, two at Oxford, two at Cambridge and two at Westminster. The work began in 1607 and completed it in 1611.

The texts that were used to translate the King James Version was the Coverdale, Great Bible and the Geneva Bible when they appeared closer to the Greek Text. Also they used Erasmus's 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> edition Greek text and Robert Stephanus text which was also based on Erasmus's and Theodor Beza's Greek text.

The King James Version after this went under many revisions; a recent revision took place in 1967. The King James Version was the most widely read Bible in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century. In the early 1980's a New Version of the King James came out. This version updated the English and relied on the same Greek manuscripts as the King James Version. That's the basic history concerning the New King James Bible.

The question that is often asked is, “Why there are so many different kinds of translations?” I would submit two reasons.

- Preference of Greek manuscripts.

The King James Version is based on the Stephanus Greek text which comes from Erasmus’s Greek text. Erasmus’ Greek text is also what Luther and the Geneva Bible used.

In 1633 Bonaventure Elzevir’s made a second edition Greek text which was almost identical to the Stephanus Greek text. This Greek text was called the Textus Receptus which means The Received Text, or the standard Greek text.

The Greek manuscripts used for the Textus Receptus was the minuscule manuscripts which dated from the 10<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The Textus Receptus is similar to the Byzantine text.

Beginning in the late 1800’s many manuscript and archeological discoveries were made. Of importance is the discovery of the Codex Alexandrinus, Sinaiticus and Vaticanus. These texts differ from the majority in minor areas such as omissions.

Scholars such as John Mill (1700’s), Albert Bengel (1730’s), Karl Lachman (1831), Samuel Tregelles and Constantine Von Tischendorf sought to form an accurate Greek text based on the discovery of these earlier Greek manuscripts.

This is where the often heard names of Brook Westcott and Fenton Hort come in. These two men took the Greek text produced by these scholars and worked for 28 years and produced a one volume Greek text called the New Testament in the original Greek. The result of this Greek text was scholars favored the Westcott and Hort Alexandrian text over the Textus Receptus because it is based on older manuscripts. The logic is if it is older than it is better.

Based on this text both the English and American revised versions were produced in the early 1900’s.

A little later Eberhard Nestle took the known Greek texts such as those by Tischendorf, Westcott, Hort and Weymouth and made a standard Greek text. Eberhard's son Erwin years later along with Kurt Aland produced the latest and now standard Greek Text which is known as the Nestle- Aland Greek Text, or the Novum Testamentum Graece.

This Greek text is the standard for all new translations such as the New English Bible, Good News for Modern Man, The Living Bible, and the New International Version.

- Preference of the reader

The main reason why there are so many different translations is people have personal preferences concerning translations.

In closing you can rest assured that the Bible you have is the word of God.