

## Part 6: My English Bible

### Wycliffite Bibles (1382, 1388)

The first complete Bible in the English language was the result of John Wycliffe's teaching and activities (about 1330-1384). Wycliffe has come to be known as the "morning star of the reformation." He may not have done any of the translating himself, but he was its motivating force. His pupils and colleagues, John Purvey and Nicholas of Hereford were the primary translators. They translated directly from the Latin Vulgate. The first version (about 1382) was very literal (word for word from the Latin) and a second (about 1388) was more consistent with the native English idiom.

### Tyndale's Bible (1526)

William Tyndale (born 1492) produced the first printed English New Testament in 1526, with revisions in 1534 and 1535. He did not live to complete the Old Testament — he only translated the Pentateuch and Jonah. His translation (from the Greek and the Hebrew — not the Latin) was quite idiomatic.

- Genesis 3:4 – "Tush, ye shall not die"
- Genesis 39:2 – "the Lorde was with Joseph, and he was a luckie fellowe"
- Exodus 15:26 – "the Lord thy surgeon"

He was put to death on October 6, 1536. His last words were "Lord, open the king of England's eyes."

80% of the text of all subsequent English Bibles up until 1881-1885 (the British Revised Version) is basically Tyndale's translation in passages he translated.

### Coverdale's Bible (1535)

The first complete printed English Bible was produced by Miles Coverdale (1488-1568) in York. For the first time the Apocrypha were published in a separate appendix rather than as part and parcel of the text. Coverdale improved Tyndale's English in a number of places:

- Psalm 23:4 – "the valley of the shadowe of death"
- Psalm 23:5 – "Thou enoyntest my heade with oyle"

### **The Great Bible (1539)**

The first “authorized” English Bible receives its name from the size of the volume—the largest published to that time (pages were 15 inches x 10 inches). Miles Coverdale undertook the translation at the suggestion of Thomas Cromwell. It was basically a revision of the translation known as Matthew’s Bible (1537) which was probably produced by John Rogers, a friend of William Tyndale.

### **The Geneva Bible (1560)**

This translation was produced by English Protestant scholars who fled persecution by the English Roman Catholic church under Queen Mary. They found refuge in Geneva, Switzerland. The translation is thought to have been mainly that of William Whittingham, brother-in-law of John Calvin.

- “Breeches Bible” – “They sewed figge-tree leaves together and made themselves breeches” (Genesis 3:7).
- Marginal notes explaining difficult portions of the text.
- First use of Roman type.
- First English Bible with verse numbers.
- First English use of italics to represent additions to the original text.
- Maps, tables, woodcuts, chapter summaries, and running titles were all included.

New editions were produced annually from 1560 until 1616. This was the Bible used by William Shakespeare, John Bunyan, Oliver Cromwell’s army, the Puritan pilgrims who colonized America, and King James.

### **The Bishops’ Bible (1568)**

Since neither the church nor the state liked the Geneva Bible, Matthew Parker, archbishop of Canterbury, initiated a major revision. All of the translators were bishops or became bishops — thus the name of the Bible. It became the second “authorized” English version (after the Great Bible).

- Psalm 45:9 note: “Ophir is thought to be the Iland in the west coast, of late founde by Christopher Columbo: from whence at this day is brought most fine gold.”
- 4% of the King James Version’s wordings are from the Bishops’ Bible.

### **King James Version (KJV, 1611)**

King James I of England (who was also King James VI of Scotland) convened a conference of bishops and Puritan clergy in 1604 at Hampton Court. As a result, a translation committee of 48-50 men were appointed to perform the revision of the English Bible.

- The Bishops' Bible was to be followed as much as the original languages permitted.
- Tyndale's, Matthew's, Coverdale's, the Geneva, and the Great Bibles were all to be consulted. It was more of a revision than a new translation.
  - The KJV's vocabulary is basically that of Tyndale.
  - Its cadences are basically those of Coverdale.
  - Its scholarship and accuracy are basically those of the Geneva Bible.
- No notes were to be included except to explain Hebrew or Greek words.
- The Apocrypha were included in the project.
- Work was begun in 1607 and completed in two years and nine months.
- The KJV was never officially "authorized" like the Great Bible or the Bishops' Bible even though the original title page read: "Appointed to be read in Churches."
- An 11-page preface ("The Translators to the Reader") written by Miles Smith explained the purpose of the translators and the principles they followed.

Comprehensive revisions of the KJV were made by Dr. Thomas Paris of Cambridge in 1762 and by Dr. Benjamin Blayney of Oxford in 1769. The latter is the text commonly called the "King James Version" today.

- By 1847 the American Bible Society discovered that there were over 24,000 variations among the six editions being published by major printers.
- Spelling changes were made in 1861 and in 1932 — the latter to conform to American usage.

### **New American Standard Bible (NASB, 1971; Updated, 1995)**

When the British produced the English Revised Version (ERV, 1885), an American committee was formed to produce the American Standard Version (ASV, 1901). The ASV was not as disappointing as the ERV, but it still did not replace the KJV. Both the ERV and ASV retained a lot of archaic language. After the copyright on the ASV expired, the Lockman Foundation was able to revise the text.

- 58 anonymous translators from different denominations.
- Used archaic pronouns of God only in prayer.
- Capitalized pronouns referring to God.
- Includes a number of changes in the text of the New Testament and even some in the Old Testament.
- The updated version (1995) makes almost 20,000 changes in the NASB involving word omissions, additions, transpositions, or substitutions.

### **New International Version (NIV, 1978)**

Partly due to the severe criticism leveled against the Revised Standard Version (RSV, 1952), evangelicals determined to produce a translation preserving a high view of Scripture as well as being interdenominational and international in scope.

- Represents a freer and more idiomatic translation of the original languages. Thus, there are significant omissions and additions:
  - Matthew 5:2 – “opened his mouth and” (omitted)
  - Jeremiah 7:22 – “just” (added)
  - Matthew 13:32 – “your” (added in “the smallest of your seeds”)
  - 1 Corinthians 4:9 – “at the end of the procession” and “in the arena” (added)
- Simple English of about 7th grade level vocabulary.
- English style sometimes over-ruled the text in final editing.
- Inconsistencies remain in the treatment, for example, of time: “the third hour” and “the sixth hour” in the Gospels, but in Acts “nine in the morning” (2:15), “three in the afternoon” (3:1), and “at nine tonight” (23:23).
- Old Testament translation tends to favor the Greek Septuagint in a number of passages.

### **New King James Version (NKJV, 1982)**

The NKJV is the most recent revision of the King James Version.

- Includes textual notes (see Isaiah 10:16 and 1 John 5:7).
- Pronouns referring to God are capitalized.
- Old English pronouns are modernized.
- Poetic portions of the text are printed in poetic line-forms.
- Language and vocabulary are generally updated, although some Elizabethan English words still occur (e.g., “dandled” in Isaiah 66:12 and “hew down trees” in Jeremiah 6:6).

**Is my English Bible the inspired and inerrant Word of God?**

- ◆ A Bible translation in any language is the inspired and inerrant Word of God only insofar as it accurately reflects the text in the original biblical languages.
- ◆ God has graciously seen fit to preserve His Word on earth through the instrumentality of fallible human beings.
- ◆ He has not allowed major omissions from His Word to continue for long periods of time (see 2 Kings 22:1-13 and Jeremiah 36:1-37).
- ◆ It is our responsibility to preserve God's Word on earth and God will hold us accountable for how we treat it.
  
- ◆ Every believer needs to read the Word with care, comparing Scripture with Scripture and translation with translation.
- ◆ No human translation of the Bible is perfect.
- ◆ The final court of appeal in any dispute over translation or meaning resides in the original biblical languages.
- ◆ The church must provide translations of the Word of God in the heart languages of those who do not know the original languages of Scripture.
- ◆ Whether in the realm of preaching, teaching, or translation, the man of God must obtain a certain degree of proficiency in the biblical languages if he is to be fully equipped for ministry.

Would a church support a missionary to France who refuses to learn French? Would a church hire a director of music who could not read a note of music and who was tone-deaf? Would an illiterate individual be given a children's Sunday School class to teach? Unthinkable. Yet, some churches have come to accept the unequipped pastor in the pulpit.

Church members rightly cringe at the thought of having a med tech do open heart surgery on a family member. No one would knowingly want to enroll in a college French literature course if the professor could not read that literature in its original language. Who would entrust their investment folder to someone with no experience in the stock market? Why accept spiritual guidance and teaching from supposed experts in the Word of God, who are unable to read the Bible in its original languages?