

# How We Got Our English Bible

## Session 6

### *The Languages and Materials of the Bible*

#### **The Importance of Written Language**

1. **Precision.** Written language provides for a precise and accurate method to transmit God's truth through the ages.
2. **Permanence.** Written language is a permanent medium for storing and transmitting God's truth.
3. **Objectivity.** Written language preempts objective interpretations involved in orally transmitted stories and accounts.
4. **Dissemination.** Written language provides an excellent medium for the copying and rapid transmittal of God's truth to many cultures and geographical regions.

#### **Biblical Languages**

1. **Hebrew.** The entire Old Testament with the exception of a few chapters was written in Hebrew. Two major characteristics of the Hebrew language are:
  - a. Pictorial
  - b. Personal
2. **Aramaic.** The lingua franca of Old Testament and New Testament Palestine. Used in Ezra 4:7-6:18, 7:12-26, and Daniel 2:4-7:28.
3. **Greek.** The lingua franca of the Roman world. The entire New Testament is written in *koine*, or common Greek. Characteristics of the Greek language are:
  - a. Precision
  - b. Intellectual
  - c. Common to the Roman world

#### **Major Writing Materials**

1. **Papyrus.** Used in Egypt from 2100 B.C. Used by John in writing Revelation (Revelation 5:1) and 2 John (2 John 12).
2. **Parchment or vellum.** Made from the skins of animals. Used for most of the Old Testament.

#### **Determining the Age of Manuscripts**

1. **Materials.** Papyrus scrolls were used in New Testament times whereas parchment scrolls were used in Old Testament times.

2. **Letter Size and Form.** Sizes and forms of letters change through the centuries. For the New Testament, **uncial** (capital letter) manuscripts are older whereas **miniscule** date somewhat later and **cursive** manuscripts are very late.
3. **Punctuation.** Punctuation began to be used around the sixth century A.D.
4. **Text Divisions.** Added to the Old Testament starting just prior to the Babylonian captivity.
5. **Miscellaneous.** These include text size and shape, ink used, color of materials, etc.

### **The Production of Old and New Testament Manuscripts**

1. Old Testament
  - a. Talmudic Period - 300 B.C. to A.D. 500
  - b. Masoretic Period - A.D. 500 - A.D. 1000
2. New Testament
  - a. Early period - first three centuries.
  - b. Legalization period - fourth and fifth centuries A.D. when Christianity was legalized.
  - c. Monastic period - sixth to the ninth centuries A.D.
  - d. Miniscule period - tenth century A.D. onward.

### *The Major Manuscripts of the Bible*

#### **Old Testament**

1. Masoretic Text - dates from ninth century A.D.
  - a. *Biblic Hebraica Stuttgarstensia* is based on four manuscripts.
  - b. Some major manuscripts are:
    - 1). Leningrad Codex - A.D. 1008.
    - 2). St. Petersburg Codex - A.D. 916.
    - 3). Aleppo Codex - A.D. 930.
    - 4). British Museum Codex - A.D. 930.
  - c. The scarcity of Hebrew Manuscripts can be attributable to:
    - 1). Antiquity and destructability.
    - 2). Ravages of deportation and wars.
    - 3). Scribal laws regarding the destruction of worn manuscripts.

- 4). Masorites presumably destroyed all manuscripts that did not agree with their vocalizations.
- d. In spite of this, the Masoretic text is actually very good because:
  - 1). Very few variants which indicate great care was taken in their copying. The root text was established around A.D. 100.
  - 2). Parallel passages in the Old Testament, e.g. Psalm 14 and 53, agree very closely with one another.
  - 3). The text itself, most particularly names of kings and places, has been archaeologically verified.
  - 4). The LXX is almost a verse-by-verse translation of the Masoretic text.
2. Dead Sea Scrolls
  - a. Date from the first and second centuries B.C.
  - b. Agree almost word-for-word with the Masoretic text.

## New Testament

1. Papyri
  - a. Date from the second and third centuries A.D.
  - b. We have about 76 of these.
  - c. Designated by a P and a superscript, e.g. P<sup>52</sup> is John Rylands Papyrus.
2. Uncial Manuscripts
  - a. Written in capital letters with no spaces between words.
  - b. Denoted by capital or Hebrew letters.
  - c. Most important Uncial manuscripts are:
    - 1). Codex Vaticanus - B  

The oldest uncial dating from around A.D. 325-350. It contains most of the LXX of the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the Apocrypha.
    - 2). Codex Sinaiticus - Aleph  

Dates from the fourth century. It was discovered in a monastery on Sinai in 1844 and 1859. It was presented to the Czar Alexander II as a gift.
    - 3). Codex Alexandrinus - A  

Dates from the fifth century. This manuscript made its way from Constantinople to Charles I in 1627, too late to be used in the translation of the King James Bible.

## 4). Ephraemi Rescriptus Codex - C

Originated in Alexandria Egypt around A.D. 345. This is actually a manuscript that has been partially erased for other text to be written on the parchment. Using chemical analysis allows the original text to be recovered.

## 5). Codex Bezae - D

Dates from around A.D. 450-550. It is the oldest bilingual manuscript containing Latin and Greek. Contains the four gospels and 3 John 11-15.

6). Codex Claromontanus - D<sup>2</sup> or D<sup>p2</sup>

A sixth-century complement to Codex D. It contains most of the rest of the New Testament missing from D.

## 7). Codex Washingtonianus I - W

Dates from the fourth or fifth century A.D. Contains the four gospels, Paul's epistles excluding Romans, Hebrews, Deuteronomy, Joshua, and the Psalms.

## 3. Miniscules

- a. Date from the sixth to fifteenth centuries.
- b. Denoted by numbers, e.g. 33.
- c. Number almost 5,000.
- d. Fall into four major families of manuscripts:
  - 1). Alexandrian - manuscript 33 is the "Queen of the Cursives."
  - 2). Caesarean - f<sub>1</sub> - contains manuscripts 1, 118, 131, and 209.
  - 3). Italian family - f<sub>13</sub> - contains 13, 69, 124, 230, 346, 543, 788, 826, 828, 983, 1689, and 1709.
  - 4). Byzantine - come from the area of Constantinople.
  - 5). Western - come from the area of Rome.