

How We Got Our English Bible

Session 8

Notes on Translations and Versions

Some Definitions

1. A **translation** is the rendering of a given literary work from one language to another.
2. A **literal translation** is the rendering of a given literary work from one language to another in a rigid word-for-word manner.
3. A **transliteration** is the rendering of one languages letters to the letters of another.
4. A **version** is a translation from an original language to any other language, e.g. NEB.
5. A **revision** or **revised version** is a translation that has been critically examined and reviewed to correct errors or to make other necessary emendations, e.g. KJV, RSV.
6. A **recension** is a critical and systematic revision of a text, e.g. NASB.
7. A **paraphrase** is a free or loose translation. It attempts to translate thoughts and ideas rather than actual words. Examples are *Phillips New Testament in Modern English*, TEV, and the Living Bible.
8. A commentary is an explanation of Scripture, e.g. *Weust's Expanded Translation of the New Testament*.

Periods of Translations

Ancient Translations

1. Appeared prior to the church councils of A.D. 350.
2. Generally consisted of the Old Testament only although some had portions of the New Testament.
3. Include such versions as the Samaritan Pentateuch, LXX, Aramaic Targums, Talmud, Midrash, and Origin's Hexapla.

Medieval Translations

1. Generally contained both the Old and New Testaments.
2. Completed from A.D. 350-1400.
3. The major translation during this time was the Latin Vulgate.

Modern Translations

1. Came following Wycliffe and others.
2. Include the many translations of today.

Aramaic, Syriac, and Related Translations

The Samaritan Pentateuch

1. May date back to the time of Nehemiah - 450 B.C.
2. Contains the five books of Moses and is independent of the Masoretic text.
3. Claims Mt. Gerizim rather than Zion as the center of worship.
4. It's 6,000 variants from the Masoretic text are insignificant.
5. Whenever the Samaritan Pentateuch and LXX agree, scholars consider it to be the original text.

The Aramaic Targums

1. Targums are oral paraphrases of the Old Testament Scriptures used in public worship.
2. Date from around A.D. 200.
3. The targums are not important in regards to textual criticism, but they do lend insight into how the ancient Jewish rabbis interpreted the Old Testament.

The Talmud and Midrash

1. Originated from A.D. 100 to A.D. 500 as a formal body of scribal teachings on the law.
2. The Talmud consists of two parts, the Mishnah (a digest of all oral laws) and the Gemara, and expanded commentary on the Mishnah.
3. The Midrash was a formal doctrinal study on the Hebrew scriptures written in Hebrew and Aramaic.

Syriac Translations

1. The Syriac Peshitta.
 - a. Comparable to the Latin Vulgate.
 - b. The Old Testament text used to translate the Peshitta dates to the mid-second or early-third century.
 - c. The New Testament text dates to somewhere around the middle of the fifth century A.D.
 - d. Denoted in UBS as syr^p
2. The Syro-Hexaplaric Version
 - a. A Syriac translation of Origin's fifth column in his Hexapla, which is no longer extant.

- b. It's fairly literal rendering makes it possible to determine the original text of the Hexapla.
3. The *Diatesseron* of Tatian
 - a. Tatian wrote a "cut and paste" harmony of the four gospels.
 - b. No copies of the *Diatesseron* exist today as they were all destroyed by the Bishop of Cyrrhus in 423.
4. The Old Syriac
 - a. Contain the Gospels only.
 - b. Exist in two manuscripts, the Curetonian Syriac and the Sinaitic Syriac.
 - c. Denoted in UBS as syr^c and syr^s respectively.
 - d. Both represent a text dating to the late second or early third century A.D.
5. Other Syriac Versions
 - a. In 508 a new Syriac version was completed which included the books omitted by the Peshitta (2 Peter, 2 John, 3 John, Jude, Revelation).
 - b. Thomas of Harkel reissued this text adding some marginal notes. This is known as the Harklean version or syr^h.
 - c. The Palestinian Syriac, syr^{pal}, exists in fragmentary form only.

Greek and Related Translations

The Septuagint LXX

1. Completed sometime during the second century B.C.
2. Produced by the Jews in Alexandria Egypt.
3. Most likely it was authorized by Ptolemy for inclusion into the library at Alexandria.
4. The translation is not consistent. It is very accurate in the Torah but then almost becomes a paraphrase in the Writings.
5. Provides us with a third major witness of the Old Testament text along with the Masoretic text and the Samaritan Pentateuch.
6. All in all, the LXX is very consistent with the Masoretic text, the exceptions being rare.
7. The LXX is quoted extensively by the writers of the New Testament, the most notable example being the writer of Hebrews.

Other Greek Translations

1. The reasons for additional Greek translations were:

- a. The Jews were reacting against the use of the LXX by the Christians to support their teachings.
 - b. A new text of the Hebrew Old Testament became available around A.D. 100.
2. Aquila's Version - A.D. 130-150
 - a. Became the official Greek text of used by non-Christian Jews.
 - b. Survived today only in quotes and fragments.
 - c. Supposedly written by Aquila, a Jewish proselyte.
 3. Theodotian's Revision - A.D. 150-185.
 4. Symmachus' Revision - A.D. 185-200
 5. Origen's Hexapla - A.D. 240-250.
 - a. Really a recension as opposed to a translation or revision.
 - b. Corrected textual errors in a "corrupted" LXX which differed from the Hebrew text.
 - c. Contained six columns in order: Hebrew, Greek transliteration, literal translation of Aquila, Symmachus, Origen's version of the LXX, Theodotian's Revision.
 - d. Origen's work was a real attempt at comparative textual criticism including notes and annotations.
 - e. The difference, however, was Origen's goal was to produce as accurate an LXX translation as possible with the Hebrew text, not to determine the correctness of the Hebrew text.

Translations of the Greek Text

1. Coptic - ancient form of Egyptian.
 - a. Sahiditic - denoted by cop^{sa}. Originated in upper Egypt.
 - b. Boharic - denoted by cop^{bo}. Originated in lower Egypt.
 - 1). Closely related to the Alexandrian text type.
 - 2). Sheds light on John 5:3b-4 and John 7:53-8:11.
 - c. Other texts include Fayumic, Achmimic, and sub-Achmimic, denoted by cop^{fay}, cop^{ach}, and cop^{ach2} respectively.
2. Ethiopic
 - a. Done sometime during the fifth to seventh century A.D.
 - b. About 100 mss have survived, none later than the thirteenth century.

- c. Denoted by eth^{ro}, eth^{pp}, and eth^{ms} for the Ethiopic Rome, Ethiopic Pell Platt and Praetorius, and Ethiopic Paris mss respectively.
3. Gothic
- a. From the area of the Germanic tribes between the Rhine and Danube.
 - b. Dates from the fourth century A.D.
 - c. First known literary monument in the Germanic dialect.
 - d. Adheres closely to the Byzantine text type.
 - e. Six fragmentary manuscripts have survived to today.
 - f. Denoted by goth in textual critical works.
4. Armenian
- a. Date to the fifth century A.D.
 - b. Armenia was most likely evangelized by the Syrian Christians ca. A.D. 420.
 - c. Most likely translated from the Syriac.
 - d. Denoted textually by arm.
 - e. Oldest text dates to the ninth century.
5. Georgian (Iberian)
- a. Dates to the middle of the fifth century A.D.
 - b. Translated from the Armenian version.
 - c. Denoted textually by geo.

Latin and Related Translations

Old Latin - italia

1. Composed prior to A.D. 200 from the LXX.
2. The O.T. translation was used extensively in North Africa and does not exist today outside of a few fragments.
3. The N.T. translation exists today in the form of 27 mss from the gospels, 6 mss from Acts, and six mss. from Paul.
4. Date from the fourth to thirteenth centuries A.D.
5. Among the oldest witnesses to the N.T. text in the west.
6. Basically exists in two flavors: Bobensius (it^k) and Vercellensis (it^b).

Latin Vulgate

1. Translated by Jerome starting in A.D. 382, finished in A.D. 405.
2. Was needed because of the many divergent texts written by heretical groups such as the Marcionites and Arians.
3. The apocrypha was included more as an afterthought rather than being carefully translated and included.
4. In reality, the Vulgate N.T. was more a revision of the Old Latin text than an actual translation. The O.T. Vulgate, however, has great importance as it is really a translation of the Hebrew text available to Jerome at that time.
5. The Vulgate became corrupted in the middle ages due to careless copying practices. An authentic copy was commissioned by the Catholic Church only to never really succeed.
6. Two major editions are available today, Wordsworth and White, and Clementine, denoted by vg^{ww}, and vg^{cl} respectively.
7. Became the dominate translation in the Church during the middle ages.