

How We Got Our English Bible

Session 9

Old English Versions

John Wycliffe

1. John Wycliffe (1320-1384 A.D.) is known as the “morning star” of the Reformation.
2. Directed the Lollards, a group of itinerant preachers who went around the countryside preaching the gospel.
3. Translated the N.T. into English in 1380 in order to help the Lollards in their task. The O.T. was completed in 1388 after his death.
4. Translated from the Latin Vulgate, hence it is rightfully a second-generation translation.
5. Wycliffe died in peace in 1384. His bones were dug up by papal edict some years later and burned. The ashes were thrown into the River Swift and from there to the oceans of the world.
6. John Purvey (1354-1428) produced a revision of the Wycliffe Bible. He replaced many of the Latinate constructions with normal English idioms.

William Tyndale

1. William Tyndale (1492-1536 A.D.) produced the second major English translation.
2. The work was completed on the continent and shipped back to England in flour sacks.
3. Tyndale, on the run most of his life, was finally captured and tried in 1536.
4. Tyndale's last words as he was being burned at the stake on October 6, 1536, was “Lord, open the King of England's eyes.”

Miles Coverdale

1. Miles Coverdale (1488-1569 A.D.) was William Tyndale's assistant. He produced the first complete English Bible in 1535.
2. Coverdale introduced chapter summaries and separated the apocrypha from the rest of the O.T.
3. The Coverdale Bible was reprinted twice in 1537, again in 1550, and lastly in 1553.

Matthew's Bible

1. Thomas Matthew (1500-1555) was the pen name of John Rogers, the first martyr under Bloody Mary.
2. Matthews published a Bible in 1537 that was a combination of the O.T. texts of Tyndale and Coverdale with the N.T. text of Tyndale.
3. The Matthew's Bible contained copious notes and references.
4. His 1537 edition was approved by Henry VIII.

The Great Bible

1. Instigated by those who wanted a translation without any notes or references.
2. Produced by Coverdale in 1538.
3. Due to its size and cost, it was chained to the pulpits to prevent theft.
4. The Great Bible was actually a revision of a revision.

The Geneva Bible

1. Produced in Geneva by Miles Coverdale and John Knox who had fled to the continent to escape the persecutions of Mary Tudor.
2. The N.T. was first printed in Geneva in 1557.
3. First English Bible to have chapter divisions and verses.
4. In 1560 the complete Bible was produced. By 1644 it had gone through 140 editions and served as the basis for the KJV Bible.
5. The Geneva Bible was the Bible of the puritans and Shakespeare.

The Bishop's Bible

1. Produced by a group of scholars including eight bishops.
2. Although it was meant to be merely a revision of the Great Bible, the scholars went beyond their instructions and extensively updated the N.T.
3. The Convocation of 1571 instructed that a copy of this Bible be in every church for public access and reading.

The Rheims-Douay Bible

1. Instigated by the Roman Catholic church to be a translation of the Latin Vulgate.
2. The N.T. was completed in 1582 with many notations.
3. Originally intended to counteract the protestant translations. As a result it is very polemical in nature.
4. The Old Testament was printed in 1600.

5. The Rheims-Douay Bible never became a serious contender for any of the Protestant translations.

King James Version

1. Produced in 1611 under the sponsorship of James I of England.
2. James I authorized its translation as a way to end strife between the Puritans and the Church of England.
3. The translation was the work of a large number of scholars unlike many of the previous versions that were the products of one or two men.
4. The KJV translation is based on Erasmus' Greek Text of 1516 and 1522 thus ignoring many of the twelfth to fourteenth century texts.
5. The original 1611 version contained the apocrypha, although later revisions removed it.
6. The KJV is the most popular book ever printed and had gone through several revisions since its first publication in 1611.

Modern English Versions

English Revised Version (ERV)

1. First version based on a Greek manuscript family other than the ones underlying the KJV.
2. Two prominent translators were B.F. Westcott and F.J.A. Hort.
3. Based on two major manuscripts, Vaticanus and Sinaiticus.
4. Based on Westcott and Hort's canons of textual criticism:
 - a. The Syrian text type (Byzantine) was a revision of an earlier text which was found in Sinaiticus and Vaticanus (which WH said was a "neutral" text).
 - b. When Alexandrian and Western texts agree with the "neutral" text, that reading is preferred.
 - c. The Byzantine text family can be disregarded since it is a conflation of the "neutral" text. This goes along with point a).
 - d. The "neutral" text is to be preferred over all others.
5. Intended to be a revision of the Authorized Version (KJV) although it turned out to be much more than that.

American Standard Version (ASV)

1. The "Americanized" version of the ERV.
2. First published in 1901.

Revised Standard Version (RSV)

1. Started in the 1930's as a scholarly work to use the best scholarship of that day to produce a Bible designed for public and private worship.
2. The O.T. was completed in 1952, the N.T. in 1946.
3. The translators did not attempt a new version, but rather a revision of the ASV of 1901.
4. Conforms a great deal to the wording and general pattern of Tyndale's work.
5. Received a lot of flak from fundamentalists who attacked its use of "young woman" in Isaiah 7:14.

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

1. First appeared in 1963 with the entire Bible available in 1971.
2. It is basically a revision and modernization of the ASV of 1901.
3. The NASB is a "literal" translation which makes it hard to understand in some places.
4. All translators had to subscribe to the conservative theological statement of the Lockman Foundation.

New King James Bible (NKJV)

1. Sponsored by Thomas Nelson publishers as a revision of the KJV.
2. The N.T. was first published in 1979 with the O.T. following in 1982.
3. The translators were drawn from many denominational backgrounds.

New International Version (NIV)

1. Produced by the New York Bible Society to produce an evangelical translation for all modern English readers.
2. N.T. was published in 1973 with the whole Bible in 1979.
3. The goal of this work was to provide a translation to replace the KJV.
4. Much criticism is leveled against the NIV since many translators did not hold to a strictly conservative theological position.

Choosing a Translation - Some Questions to Ask

1. Who were the translators? Were they theologically conservative or liberal? Do they believe in the verbal-plenary view of inspiration or are they merely translating some ancient textual work.
2. What text is used? Is it an eclectic text based on all mss evidence or does it favor only a handful of mss or a single textual family.
3. What method of translation was used? Is the translation more of a paraphrase (dynamic equivalence) or is it truer to the text (formal equivalence)?

4. What was the theological persuasion of the translators when it comes to the deity of Christ, the virgin birth, the resurrection, the substitutionary atonement, and other fundamental doctrines of the faith?
5. What style of language is used? Is the translation done with archaic word forms or is modern language used?
6. What is the general background of the reader? If a person is a relatively new Christian a newer translation may be preferred while someone who has grown up with a particular version may have trouble switching.