

CHAPTER 13

HOW WE GOT OUR BIBLE

"The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall _____ " (Isaiah 40:8).

"Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall _____ (never) pass away" (Matthew 24:35).

THE BIBLE UNDER ATTACK

Attacked by Rome

The early Christians suffered great persecutions under the government of the Roman empire. The Apostle Paul and the Apostle Peter and many other Christians were put to death under the cruel reign of emperor Nero. During the first 300 years of the church, persecution followed persecution, and many believers were MARTYRED (put to death because of their faith in Jesus Christ).

In 303 A. D. the emperor Diocletian issued a royal decree (EDICT) that EVERY BIBLE SHOULD BE DESTROYED. As a result many Bibles were burned and many Bible believers were put to death. This fierce attack against the Bible did not last too long, because the next emperor was Constantine who allowed freedom of religion and who even ordered copies of the Scriptures to be made.

Attacked by the Catholic Church

In the centuries that followed, Satan used another method to get the Bible out of the hands of the common people. In some ways, this method was even more effective than burning Bibles. The Roman Catholic Church taught that the common man could not understand the Bible, and that the only ones who could understand and interpret the Bible were the priests, bishops and the Pope. To the average man, the Bible was a CLOSED BOOK and he had no access to it. As a result, most of the people were totally IGNORANT of what the Bible really taught. In 1229 A.D. the Church Council of Toulouse actually forbade the use of the Bible to **laymen** (the mass of common people; those who were not priests or bishops). Thus for centuries the Roman Catholic church did not want to put the Bible into the hands of the common people.

Attacked by Infidels (Unbelievers)

In more recent years the Bible has been under attack by wicked unbelievers. In the last chapter we saw how unbelievers have attacked the Bible by their CRITICISM. This is another of Satan's methods to try to destroy the Bible. In the last part of the 18th century the French infidel Voltaire said, "It took centuries to build up Christianity, but, I'll show how one Frenchman can destroy it within 50 years." Then as one author wrote, "He took his pen, dipped it into the ink of unbelief and wrote against God." Voltaire was convinced that he could destroy Christianity and the Bible. He believed that people would become so enlightened that they would neither believe in God, the Bible or their need of salvation through Jesus Christ.

Voltaire died in 1778. On his deathbed he said, "I wish I had never been born." Then, just before he passed from this life he cried, "O Christ, O Jesus, I must die abandoned by God and men." His condition had become so frightful that his infidel associates were afraid to approach his bedside. After he died his nurse said repeatedly, "For all the wealth in Europe I would never see another infidel die." Since Voltaire's death millions upon millions of Bibles in numerous languages have flooded the world. Today most people in our country have a copy of the Bible, but few have the writings of Voltaire! He is dead and gone, but the Bible lives on. The Word of God "_____ and A _____ forever" (1 Peter 1:23)! Twenty years after Voltaire's death the Geneva Bible Society bought his former home and used it for printing Bibles. It later became the headquarters for the British and Foreign Bible Society.

**"HAMMER AWAY YE HOSTILE HANDS --
OUR HAMMERS WILL BREAK,
GOD'S ANVIL STANDS!"**

The following by Dr. Payson illustrates the INDESTRUCTIBILITY of the Book of Books:

For thousands of years this volume has withstood, not only the iron tooth of time, but all the physical and intellectual strength of man: pretended friends have endeavored to corrupt and betray it; kings and princes have perseveringly sought to banish it from the world; the civil and military power of the greatest nations of the world have been leagued for its destruction; the fires of persecution have been lighted to consume it and its friends together; and at many seasons death in its most horrid forms has been the almost certain consequence of affording it an asylum from the fury of its enemies. Though it has been ridiculed more bitterly, misrepresented more grossly, opposed more rancorously, and burnt more frequently, than any other book, and perhaps than all other books united, it is so far from sinking under the efforts of its enemies that the probability of its surviving until the final consummation of all things is now much greater than ever. The rain has descended, the floods have come, the storm has arisen, and beaten upon it; but it fell not, for it was founded upon a rock. Like the burning bush, it has been in the flames, yet it is still unconsumed; a sufficient proof were there no other, that He who spake from the bush is the Author of the Bible.

THE BIBLE TRANSLATED

The Bible in Greek

Under Alexander the Great, the Greeks conquered a large part of the known world (around 331 B.C.), and the Greek language and culture spread throughout the empire. Even when the Romans took over, the common language throughout the Mediterranean world was still Greek. People everywhere knew how to speak Greek.

The Old Testament was written in the Hebrew language, but many of the Jews who were scattered throughout the empire could no longer speak Hebrew. Therefore there was a real need for the Bible (the Old Testament) to be translated into the Greek language so that Greek speaking people everywhere could understand it. About 200 years before Christ, the Old Testament was translated into the Greek language and this Bible translation is today called the Septuagint (abbreviated as LXX because of the 70+ translators that were used in this project; this is a rounded number because legend has it that there were 72 translators). As far as we know, this was the very first Bible translation. The Septuagint Bible was used by the Lord Jesus Christ, the Apostles and the early Christians, and it played an important part in spreading the gospel to the Greek speaking world, because it gave them an Old Testament in a language they could read and understand.

The Bible in Latin

As the years rolled on, the Eastern part of the Roman Empire continued to speak Greek, but the Western part of the Empire spoke Latin. Since the people in the West could no longer speak Greek it became necessary for the Bible to be translated into Latin (the language that the people understood). The most famous Latin translation was done by a man named Jerome in 404 A.D. Jerome was a great scholar who knew Greek and also Hebrew (which he had learned from Jewish rabbis when he studied in Palestine). The Bible which he translated was called the Latin Vulgate (*Vulgate* means "common" because it was translated into the common language of the people). The Latin Vulgate translation was the official Bible of the Roman Catholic Church for the next 1000 years.

The Bible in German

In the early 16th century, the great Reformer Martin Luther led a "back to the Bible" movement in Germany known as the Reformation. He believed that the Bible was the final authority on all matters of **faith** (what we believe) and **practice** (how we live). Luther believed that the Bible should be the book of the people, and it should be used in church, in school and in the home. He wanted to have an open Bible for all. Most of the German people could not understand Latin, and so Jerome's Vulgate would be useless to them. Thus Luther worked hard in 1522 to translate the Bible into the German language. Luther did an excellent job, and the German people owe a great debt to this man of God who gave them the Bible in their own tongue.

Martin Luther once wrote this about the Bible:

It is no small miracle how God has so long preserved and protected this Book; for the devil and the world have been

sore foes to it...let us not lose the Bible, but with diligence, in fear and invocation of God, read and preach it...Oh! how great and glorious a thing it is to have before one the Word of God! (selected from "The Table Talk of Martin Luther" translated by William Hazlitt)

THE ENGLISH BIBLE

Wycliffe

John Wycliffe (known as "the morning star of the Reformation", born about 1324) was the first person to translate the complete Bible into the English language. This was done in 1382 over a hundred years before the Reformation began in Germany. Wycliffe wanted to give the English speaking people the Bible in their own language. He believed that it was a Book which should be studied by ALL CHRISTIANS. He clearly saw that God's Word was the indispensable bread of life, and that it must be rendered in the language of the people, and made known everywhere as God's good news of salvation. He believed that the plain meaning of the Bible could be ascertained by simply taking the text literally. He believed that every syllable of the Old and New Testaments were absolutely true. "If any error seem to be found in them, the error is due to human ignorance. Nothing is to be believed that is not founded upon this book, and to its teachings nothing is to be added" (Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. VI, p. 340).

Wycliffe believed that to withhold the Bible from the common people was a great sin. Every effort must be made to make the Scriptures known in the mother tongue. Englishmen needed to have the Bible in English.

He translated the Bible from the Latin Vulgate, not from the original languages of Hebrew (O.T.) and Greek (N.T.). He translated from the Latin very accurately, but if the Latin translation was erroneous or faulty, then the problem would be carried over into the English translation. This was not the fault of Wycliffe but was the fault of the translation which he was using. The New Testament was completed in 1382. Much of the Old Testament was done by his friend Nicholas de Hereford, but Wycliffe did some of the work as well, completing it at least a year before his death in 1384.

Since the printing press had not yet been invented, and these Bibles had to be hand copied, much time and effort was involved in their production. Some of the copies were pocket size, and were intended for ordinary folk and for daily use. They were very expensive, since it took a copyist about months to produce one copy. Wycliffe's Bibles were eagerly sought after by spiritually hungry people but few could afford to buy their own personal copies. Some people were willing to pay large sums just to read from the Scriptures for an hour or two. Foxe records that a whole load of hay was paid for the loan of a single New Testament for an hour a day. [If the Bible were not available, how much would we be willing to pay to borrow a Bible for only one hour?] The Word of God was very precious in those days!

Wycliffe died because of a paralytic stroke in 1384. In 1414 the reading of the English Scriptures was forbidden, and those who were caught reading the Bible in English could lose their land and possessions and even their life. The Church Council of Constance declared that

Wycliffe was a heretic and this pronouncement was made after he was already dead. Wycliffe's only crime was that he wanted to put the Bible into the hands and into the minds of the English people. In 1428, over forty years after his death, his bones were dug up, his remains were burned and his ashes were thrown into the river Severn. Of course, this did not trouble or hurt Wycliffe, because at the time they did this to his bodily remains, he was with His Lord (see Philippians 1:23 and 2 Corinthians 5:8). Just as Wycliffe's ashes, were carried by the river into the ocean, so also his teachings were dispersed and spread the world over!

Many copies of Wycliffe's Bible were confiscated and burned, and no doubt many perished through accident and negligence during the next five hundred years. The 170 copies which have survived to this day must be just a small fraction of the total number originally copied out neatly and laboriously by hand.

Filip seith to him, lord schewe to us the fadir, and it sufficith to us. ihesus seith to hym, so long tyme I am with you: and han ye not knowen me? Filip, he that seeth me seeth also the fadir, bileuest thou not that I am in the fadir and the fadir is in me; the wordis that I speke to you, I speke not of my self; but the fadir hym silf dwellinge in me, doith the workis..."

[John 14:8-10, from the Wycliffe Bible; the reason it is difficult to read is because Wycliffe wrote in Middle English which differs in many ways from modern English]

The writings of John Hus, the Bohemian reformer, which got him condemned and burned at the stake, depended heavily on translations and adaptations of tracts, treatises, and sermons by John Wycliffe.

At the Diet of Worms in 1521, Martin Luther was accused of renewing the errors of Wycliffe and Hus by making the Scriptures his final authority. In the library in Prague, Czechoslovakia there is a triad of medallions. The first medallion shows the figure of Wycliffe striking sparks from a stone; the second shows John Hus kindling a fire from the sparks; and the third presents Luther holding high a flaming torch. These three medallions tell in symbolic form the story of the Reformation as it began, continued and crystallized under the influence of an Englishman, a Bohemian and a German.

1984 was the 600th anniversary of Wycliffe's death.

Tyndale

The next great name to remember in connection with the English Bible is William Tyndale, born in 1494. He has been called "the father of the English Bible." The place of his birth (Gloucestershire) was a Roman Catholic stronghold. This area boasted one of the most valued relics of the Church, a vial that was said to contain some of the actual blood of Christ. So esteemed was this relic that priests told the faithful that they need only look upon it to be granted eternal salvation. How sad that people trust in worthless relics instead of the living Christ who "is _____ to _____ to the uttermost all those who come to God through Him" (Heb. 7:25).

Persecution was so great in England that Tyndale had to do his work of translation in Germany. He translated the Bible from the original Hebrew and Greek. A contemporary of his wrote, "He (Tyndale) was so skilled in seven languages--Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Italian, Spanish, English, and French--that whichever he spoke you would suppose it his native tongue." He also was influenced by Martin Luther's excellent German translation. He did an excellent job, although he did not live long enough to complete the entire Old Testament. The great desire of Tyndale's heart was to get the Bible into the language of the common man. In 1523 he stated this burden of his heart: "that the poor might also read and see the simple, plain Word of God." In 1522 he was told by a learned Roman Catholic priest that "we were better without God's laws than the Pope's." [How sad this this priest valued the words of the Pope far more than he did the Word of God.] Tyndale replied, "If God spare my life, ere many years I will cause a boy that driveth the plough to know more of the Scriptures than thou dost." This prophecy would actually come true to the glory and praise of God.

In 1524 Tyndale sailed to Germany, never again to set foot in England. He never married and he never owned a home. Threats against his life would prevent him from returning to his beloved country. Tyndale was able to take advantage of a new technology known as the printing press, an advantage Wycliffe never had. His Bible was printed in Germany in two sizes--a large print Bible and a small print Bible. Tyndale thought that if the Catholic bishops found the large ones, he might still be able to hide the smaller ones. These Bibles were "smuggled" into England--in barrels all covered with cloth and articles for sale, in bales that looked like cloth, in sacks of flour, in every way that could be found to hide them. Large numbers these Bibles reached England, but soon the Catholic bishops found out that they were being sold. Every seaport was carefully watched, and many packages of Bibles were found by the officers and burned. However, they could not find them all and they could not burn them all, and some of these Bibles would get to the people who really wanted to read them.

Finally the Catholic bishop of London decided he would buy all the copies that were printed, through a merchant in Germany. Then there would be no more Bibles to come across the water. What he failed to realize was that the merchant was a friend of Tyndale. This friend realized that this was a way to help Tyndale. At that time Tyndale's greatest need was money so that he could pay his printers for the work they had done and also start a new printing of the Bibles. The Catholic bishop paid a very good price for the Bibles so he could burn them all. The Catholic bishop thought that when he burned all these Bibles, there would never be another English Bible. Imagine how he felt when he learned that more Bibles than ever before were coming into England, so many that the officers simply could not stop them. He was especially shocked when he later learned that his own money was used to print these Bibles!

Tyndale longed to return to England, his beloved homeland, but he knew he had too many enemies there who wanted to kill him, so he remained in Germany. Tyndale's life was a model of holy living. Even Sir Thomas More, one of Tyndale's bitter opponents, admitted this about Tyndale's life:

"[He was] a man of right good living, studious and well learned in Scripture, and in diverse places in England was very well liked, and did great good with preaching...[he was] taken for a man of sober and honest living, and looked and preached holily."

The Lord Jesus was betrayed by a man who was supposed to be his friend, and the same thing happened to Tyndale. Tyndale's "Judas" was a man named Phillips, a man Tyndale trusted, believing that he was faithful and true. But Phillips was a spy sent by the pope to trap Tyndale. One evening as Tyndale walked out from his home to enjoy the evening air, a band of men seized him, bound him and carried him away to a dark prison.

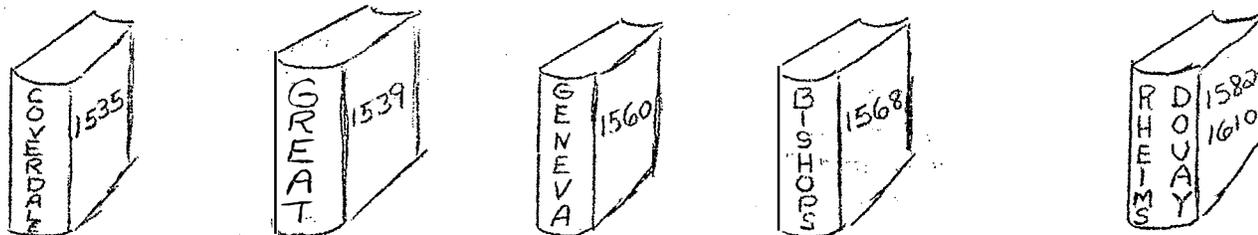
In 1536 Tyndale was strangled to death and his body burned. He died at the young age of 42. His great crime was that he placed God's Word in English into the hands of the English speaking world. They could imprison Tyndale and kill him but "the Word of God is not bound" (2 Tim. 2:9), and Tyndale's life's work, the Bible he translated, could not be killed or destroyed. It is reported that his last words were these: "Lord, open the King of England's eyes." Less than a year after Tyndale's martyrdom, an edition of the whole Bible, based largely upon Tyndale's work but without his name, was being circulated and read in England, openly, with the permission of the King, so Tyndale's dying prayer was already being answered. Less than 100 years later, the King of England, James I, endorsed and sponsored a new Bible translation (or revision) which has been known as the King James Bible. Tyndale's influence on the King James Bible is great, because most of the King James Version (90%) is worded just as Tyndale had it. Tyndale's translation is woven into the very fabric of the King James Version. We who speak English are greatly indebted to Tyndale and the work which he did, even at the cost of his own life. From the sixteenth through the twenty-first centuries the ploughboy has had God's Word in English.

In the days of Tyndale the English Catholic church had in effect a law that made it a crime punishable by death to translate the Bible into English. One day in 1519, the church authorities publicly burned a woman and six men for nothing more than teaching their children English versions of the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments and the Apostles' Creed!

Are you thankful for the Bible you have in your hands and for the price that men paid so that you could have it?

One event which bore heavily on the spread of the Bible was the invention of printing with movable type. It was in 1455 that Johannes Gutenberg printed his first major work, an edition of the Latin Vulgate, now called the Mazarin Bible.

The English Bibles Before the King James Version



1) ***The Coverdale Bible (1535)***. This was the first completed Bible in English. Coverdale finished the work of Tyndale.

2) ***The Great Bible (1539)***. This Bible was called "great" because it was a HUGE book intended to lie on a church lectern or pulpit. This was the first authorized Bible in English (*authorized* means that it was approved by the king and the church for use in public worship, and thus became the official church Bible).

3) ***The Geneva Bible (1560)***. This was a very popular Bible that was loved by the English people. It was an excellent translation. This Bible was never authorized for use in church, but it was widely used as a home Bible. This was the Bible of Shakespeare and of the Pilgrim Fathers who came to America. It was also the Bible of Cromwell (English general and statesman). It was the basis of Cromwell's Soldier's Bible. It was also the translation used by John Bunyan, the author of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. King James' opinion of the Geneva Bible was not favorable. He hoped that his translation would replace it. There was a marginal note in the Geneva Bible for Exodus 1:9 indicating that the Hebrew midwives were correct in disobeying the Egyptian king's orders. King James, who believed it was very important for everyone to obey the king, did not like this marginal note and felt it might be a political threat to his kingdom.

4) ***The Bishops' Bible (1568)***. This was the second authorized Bible in English, and was the Bible used in the churches. Yet the Bishops' Bible was never as popular as the Geneva Bible. The King James Bible was never intended to be a new translation, but was intended to be a revision of the Bishops' Bible.

5) ***The Rheims-Douay Bible (1582-1610)***. This was the first Roman Catholic Bible translated into English (translated from the Latin Vulgate).

THE KING JAMES VERSION

King James I sponsored a Bible translation project in order to produce another official, authorized Bible for use in churches. The King wanted this to be a revision of the Bishops' Bible, although the translators made use of all the previous English Bibles, as well as the original Greek and Hebrew to do their work. There were 47 scholars who worked on this project and it took nearly three years to complete. Finally in 1611 the Authorized King James Bible was published.

At first the Geneva Bible was still the most popular, but gradually the people began to use the King James Version more and more. Many would agree that this is the best translation that has ever been done in English, and it has been the most popular and the most loved Bible of the English speaking world for over 350 years. It is truly a masterpiece. The King James Bible is still in common use in many Bible believing churches to this day.

Modern English Translations

In the last hundred years there have been a great number of Bible translations. We will list some of the more influential ones. This listing does not mean that we recommend or endorse these Bible translations. See **Chapter 4** which discusses some of the problems with modern translations. These translations are listed in chronological order:

Revised Version (England) - RV - 1881-1885
 American Standard Version - ASV - 1901
 Revised Standard Version - RSV - 1952, a revision of the American Standard Version
 Amplified Bible - AB - 1965
 New English Bible - NEB - 1970, includes the Apocrypha
 Living Bible - LB - 1971, a paraphrase version
 Today's English Version - TEV - 1976, a.k.a. Good News Bible
 New American Standard Version - NAS - 1977
 New International Version - NIV - 1978
 New World Translation - NWT - 1984 (done by Jehovah's Witnesses)
 New American Bible - NAB - 1987, includes the Apocrypha (a Catholic Bible)
 New Revised Standard Version - NRS - 1989, the authorized revision of the Revised Standard Version
 New King James Version - NKJ - 1990
 The Message - TM - 1993, a.k.a. New Testament in Contemporary English
 The New Living Translation - NLT - 1996
 English Standard Version - ESV - 2001, a revision of the Revised Standard Version
 Holman Christian Standard Bible - 2004
 Today's New International Version - TNIV - 2005

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

1.	Today in America the Bible is not very expensive, copies can be easily obtained, and people are not persecuted for reading it. Is the Bible valuable and precious today to the average person? Why or why not.
2.	Are there some countries today where people are not allowed to have Bibles?
3.	Are there some people today who do not have the Bible in their own language because it has never yet been translated into their native tongue?

4.	Should a person be careful about how he takes care of the Bible and how he handles the Bible? Should it be handled reverently? Should it be handled like any other book?
5.	Is it possible that someday our freedom to own and read the Bible will be taken away from us? If all the Bibles were suddenly removed and destroyed, how much of God's Word would we have stored away in our minds and hearts?

"Century follows century--There it stands.

Empires rise and fall and are forgotten--There it stands.

Dynasty succeeds dynasty--There it stands.

Kings are crowned and uncrowned--There it stands...

It outlives, out lifts, outloves, outreaches, out ranks, outruns all other books.

Trust it, love it, obey it, and Eternal Life is yours."

--Dr. A.Z. Conrad

The Bible stands, and we believe it!

THE HOLY BIBLE

