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How We Got the Bible (1500 BC to AD 1881)

1500 BC	God tells Moses to write down the Law for the people. The first five books of the Old Testament (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) are called the “Law of Moses.” Written in Hebrew.
1500-400 BC	Books of history, prophecy, and poetry are written by Samuel, King David, King Solomon, Daniel, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Amos, and others, in Hebrew (portions in Aramaic).
1500-400 BC	Scribes copy books as originals wear out.
450? BC	Ezra collects and arranges the books, according to Jewish tradition. These books make up the Hebrew Scriptures also called the “Old Testament.”
250-100 BC	Hebrew Scriptures translated into Greek by Jewish scholars. This Greek translation is called the Septuagint, meaning “seventy,” for the tradition that 70—or 72—men translated it.
100 BC-AD 100?	Dead Sea Scrolls: copies of portions of Old Testament books and other writings are sealed in clay jars and hidden in caves.
6? BC-AD 30?	Life of Jesus
AD 45?-100	Jesus’ followers, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, Peter, Jude, and James, write letters and historical accounts to churches and friends throughout the Roman Empire. They quote from all but eight of the Old Testament books.
AD 100-500	The writings of Jesus’ followers are copied and translated from Greek into other languages and spread across the world as far as India and China.
AD 200-300	Christianity reaches Britain.
AD 250-350	Church fathers accept the writings of the Gospels and Paul’s letters as canonical (from a Greek word referring to the rule of faith and truth). The Council of Carthage lists 27 books as authentic. These 27 books make up the New Testament today.
AD 313	Christianity legalized in Roman Empire.
AD 325	Codex Vaticanus: A fine, early handmade copy of nearly all of the Bible. It resides in the Vatican Library from 1481 and is released to scholars in the late 1800s.
AD 350	Codex Sinaiticus: A fine, early handmade copy of all of the New Testament and part of the Old Testament. It is discovered in 1844 in St. Catherine’s Monastery at Mt. Sinai by Constantin von Tischendorf, and acquired in 1859.
AD 410	Jerome is commissioned by Pope Damasus to translate the Bible into Latin. This translation is called the Latin Vulgate and takes 22 years to complete. It is the Bible used for the next 1000 years.
AD 430	Patricius (St. Patrick) evangelizes Ireland.
AD 450-600	Roman Empire falls. Angles and Saxons over-run Britain. Pope Gregory sends missionaries.

AD 500-900	Jewish scribes, the Masoretes, develop a meticulous system of counting words to insure the accuracy of each copy of the Hebrew Scriptures.
AD 676?	Caedmon, a monk, paraphrases portions of scripture into Old English (Anglo-Saxon).
AD 735?	Bede, a monk and scholar, makes a common English translation of portions of scripture for uneducated monks who cannot read Latin.
AD 1382	First whole Bible in English is translated from Latin and named the Wycliffe Bible, after John Wycliffe, Oxford scholar and priest.
AD 1408	It becomes illegal to translate the Bible into common English without permission.
AD 1455	First printed book! Gutenberg prints the Latin Bible.
AD 1516	Erasmus, priest and Greek scholar, publishes a new Greek edition of the New Testament.
AD 1525	William Tyndale, an Oxford scholar, translates New Testament from Greek. The Bible is printed in Germany and smuggled into England. Tyndale is strangled and burned at the stake for heresy in 1536.
AD 1535	The Coverdale Bible, the first printing of the complete English Bible.
AD 1537	The Matthew's Bible is the first Bible to receive the king's permission. The New Testament is almost an exact copy of Tyndale's. It is translated by his friend John Rogers (pen name "Thomas Matthew").
AD 1539	The Great Bible. Also called the "Chained Bible" because copies were chained to church pillars to avoid theft.
AD 1555	England's Queen Mary Tudor outlaws English Bible versions by Protestants. Persecutes Protestant leaders.
AD 1560	Geneva Bible. Hundreds of people flee to Switzerland to avoid persecution. A new English translation is printed in Geneva, and contains theological notes by Protestant scholars.
AD 1568	The Bishops Bible is translated in answer to the Geneva Bible, but with "no bitter notes."
AD 1582/1609	The Rheims-Douai Version becomes the official English translation of the Catholic church.
AD 1611	King James Version. King James I of England commissions 54 scholars to translate a Bible without theological notes. The scholars used the Bishops Bible and some available Greek and Hebrew texts.
AD 1881	Revised Version, a revision of the King James Bible, reflecting linguistic and manuscript discoveries.
AD 1850-present	Many new English translations. Dead Sea Scrolls discovered (earliest copies of portions of the Old Testament), prove the remarkable reliability of the transmission of the Old Testament.

How We Got The Bible

Ten Key Points

1. The Bible is inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21).
2. The Bible is made up of 66 books that were written over 1600 years (from approximately 1500 BC to AD 100) by more than 40 kings, prophets, leaders, and followers of Jesus. The Old Testament has 39 books (written approximately 1500-400 BC). The New Testament has 27 books (written approximately AD 45-100). The standard Hebrew Bible today has the same text as the English Bible's Old Testament, but the Hebrew Bible divides and arranges the text differently.
3. The Old Testament was written mainly in Hebrew, with some Aramaic. The New Testament was written in Greek.
4. The books of the Bible were collected and arranged and recognized as inspired sacred authority by councils of rabbis and councils of church leaders based on careful guidelines.
5. Before the printing press was invented, the Bible was copied by hand. The Bible was copied very accurately, in many cases by special scribes who developed intricate methods of counting words and letters to insure that no errors had been made.
6. The Bible was the first book ever printed on the printing press with moveable type (Gutenberg Press, 1455, Latin Bible).
7. There is much evidence that the Bible we have today is remarkably true to the original writings. Of the thousands of copies made by hand before AD 1500, more than 5,300 Greek manuscripts from the New Testament alone still exist today. The text of the Bible is better preserved than the writings of Caesar, Plato, or Aristotle.
8. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls confirmed the astonishing reliability of some of the copies of the Old Testament made over the years. Although some variations exist (mostly spelling variations), no variation affects basic Bible doctrines.
9. As the Bible was carried to other countries, it was translated into the common language of the people by scholars who wanted others to know God's Word. By AD 2000, there are still 3,000 groups with no Bible in their own language.
10. By AD 200, the Bible, or some of the Bible, was translated into seven languages; by AD 500, 13 languages; by AD 900, 17 languages; by AD 1400, 28 languages; by AD 1800, 57 languages; by AD 1900, 537 languages; by AD 1980, more than 1,800 languages.; by AD 1980, the Bible, or some of the Bible was translated into 2,322 languages. By AD 2003, there were 1,638 languages in which Bible translation is in progress.

Sources: The World Christian Encyclopedia and Wycliffe Bible Translators

Four Important People

Jerome (342?-420)

BETHLEHEM, PALESTINE—The first Christians wrote their New Testament in Greek and joined to it the Greek Septuagint translation of the Old Testament. But years later the language of common people was Latin instead of Greek, and only highly educated people knew Greek.

The great classical scholar Jerome was asked to compose a complete and accurate translation of the whole Bible into common Latin. He worked for 22 years in Bethlehem on the new version and completed it about AD 400. It is called the Vulgate. The Vulgate became the principle Bible of Western Europe for a thousand years. Its words and its distinctive style inspired worship, theology, and art until the 1500s. When moveable metal type was invented by Gutenberg, the first substantial book printed by that method was the Vulgate.

Why was the Latin Vulgate important? _____

Bede (died AD 735)

ENGLAND—The monk Bede lived in Jarrow in the 700s. He was the most renowned Christian scholar of his day.

He is called the “Father of English Learning” because his writings spanned the whole range of the knowledge in his day. He wrote most of his forty titles in Latin, at a time when there was no written English (Anglo-Saxon) language. For the sake of his fellow monks who did not know Latin, Bede prepared Old English (Anglo-Saxon) translations of portions of the Bible for them. Bede finished translating John’s Gospel on his deathbed in AD 735. No trace of his translations survived the destruction of the Viking invasions. He is remembered as the pioneer who inspired later efforts.

Why did Bede translate the Bible into English (Anglo-Saxon)? _____

John Wycliffe (1330-1384)

ENGLAND—The first translation of the whole Bible into English is named after John Wycliffe, an English priest, scholar, and diplomat. John Wycliffe wrote that the Bible is God's most authoritative statement and that a translation was needed so that the humblest person could learn from it.

His teaching at Oxford inspired other scholars to translate Jerome's Vulgate into the English of their time. This was done by 1382. Each copy of their translation was written by hand on animal skin pages. The copies took about ten months to make and cost a year's wages. About 170 of these copies exist today. The translators named their version the Wycliffe Bible because of the inspirational role John Wycliffe had in bringing it about.

Many Christians honor Wycliffe as a symbol of zeal to spread the Bible to as many nations and languages as possible.

Why is it important for people to be able to read the Bible in their own language?

William Tyndale (1492-1536)

ENGLAND—William Tyndale was an Oxford scholar who was fluent in five languages.

Tyndale asked for permission to translate and print the New Testament from Greek and Hebrew into English, but it was denied. He wanted to translate from Greek and Hebrew because these were the languages in which the Bible was originally written.

Tyndale left England and translated the New Testament in Germany and had it printed. Thousands of copies of Tyndale's Bible were smuggled into England.

King Henry VIII offered Tyndale safe passage back to England, but Tyndale refused to return unless the king approved his translation. Henry VIII would not. In 1536, Tyndale was imprisoned and burned at the stake. His dying words were "O Lord, open the king of England's eyes." One year later, the Matthew's Bible—much of it based on the Tyndale Bible—was printed with the King's permission. Tyndale is called the "Father of the English Bible" because much of the style and vocabulary of the King James Version Bible—and "biblical English"—is traceable to his work.

Why was it important to translate the Bible from Greek and Hebrew? _____

Teaching Tips for How We Got The Bible

1. Pre-Test Before teaching, ask your students what they know about how we got the Bible. Who wrote it? What was used to write it? Where was it written? When was it written? Why was it written? How was it written? Write their responses on a big sheet of paper without correcting them. Use it to refer to as you teach. List questions they have about how we got the Bible.

2. Bulletin Board Surround the *How We Got The Bible* wall chart with information, maps, and news articles about the Bible, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and other biblical archeology finds and places. Or, add pictures of places the Bible was written or translated. Travel agency brochures have great pictures of places the Bible was written: Israel (where the Old Testament and some of the New Testament was written), places Paul was when he wrote his letters (Antioch in Syria, Corinth in Greece, Ephesus in Turkey, Rome in Italy, Macedonia), places Paul wrote to (Thessalonica and Philippi in Greece, Galatia and Colossae in Turkey), and the island of Patmos where John wrote the Revelation. You'll also find pictures of England, Germany, and Switzerland where Bible scholars worked. Post questions students can answer by reading the chart and articles.

3. Book Bazaar Below the bulletin board, set up a reading table.

Include books for children, such as:

How the Bible Came to Us by Meryl Doney, Lion Publishing Press
(historical fiction based on William Tyndale's life)

Fine Print, A Story about Johann Gutenberg by Joann Johansen Burch,
Carolrhoda Books, Inc.

For adults, add:

The Origin of the Bible, editor Philip Wesley Comfort, Tyndale House

History of the Bible in English by F. F. Bruce, Oxford University Press

How We Got The Bible by Neil R. Lightfoot, Baker Book House

A General Introduction to the Bible by Norman L. Geisler, Moody Press

4. God's Word Make sure students know that the Bible is inspired by God, and is not an ordinary book. Have them pick slips with verses to read aloud and discuss.

2 Tim. 3:16-17	Ex.. 17:14	Num. 33:2	Judg. 3:4
2 Peter 1:19- 21	Ex. 20:1-17	Josh. 8:31	Ex.34:27,28
Luke 24:44	Ex. 32:15-16	Jer 36:2	Ex. 24:4
John 14:25-26	Josh. 24:26	Dan 9:2	Mal. 4:4
Deut. 31:22	Deut. 31:9, 24	1 Sam. 10:25	John 7:19

5. Projects. Students can work independently or in groups on projects:

- a. Give a book report on Wycliffe, Tyndale or Gutenberg. Dress up, show pictures, use puppets, write news articles. Or, like Caedmon, write songs and poems based on the Bible.
- b. Use calligraphy to illustrate a verse or psalm. Use leaves, designs, and fancy capitals to make your verse appear similar to that of early Bibles.
- c. Write out and compare three versions/translations of The Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13), 1 Corinthians 13 on Love, or Psalm 23.
- d. Paint or draw a mural of the most important people and events that helped bring us the Bible in English.
- e. Use a marker to write the Ten Commandments on a stone (flagstone works well) or on a scroll.
- f. Produce a "Pageant of How We Got the Bible." Have students dress up as writers, scribes, and translators. Act out the history of our English Bible. Have each character tell the story of how we got the Bible. For events that are difficult to act out, use signs to tell what happened. Video tape your pageant and invite parents to see it. Characters who could be included: Moses, Samuel, David, Ezra, a scribe who copied the Dead Sea Scrolls, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, a scribe who copied the New Testament, Jerome, Bede, John Wycliffe, Johann Gutenberg, William Tyndale, John Rogers, a Pilgrim, King James, Bible translator.

6. Missions Teaching Aids. Contact missions organizations connected to your church or denomination for resources and teaching aids.

Other sources for programs, information, and teaching material on missions:

U.S. Center for World Missions	(626) 398-2233
The Billy Graham Center	(630) 752-5909
Wycliffe Bible Translators	(407) 852-3600
The Caleb Project	(303) 730-4170
The Missions Handbook	(630) 752-7158

The Origin and Growth of the English Bible

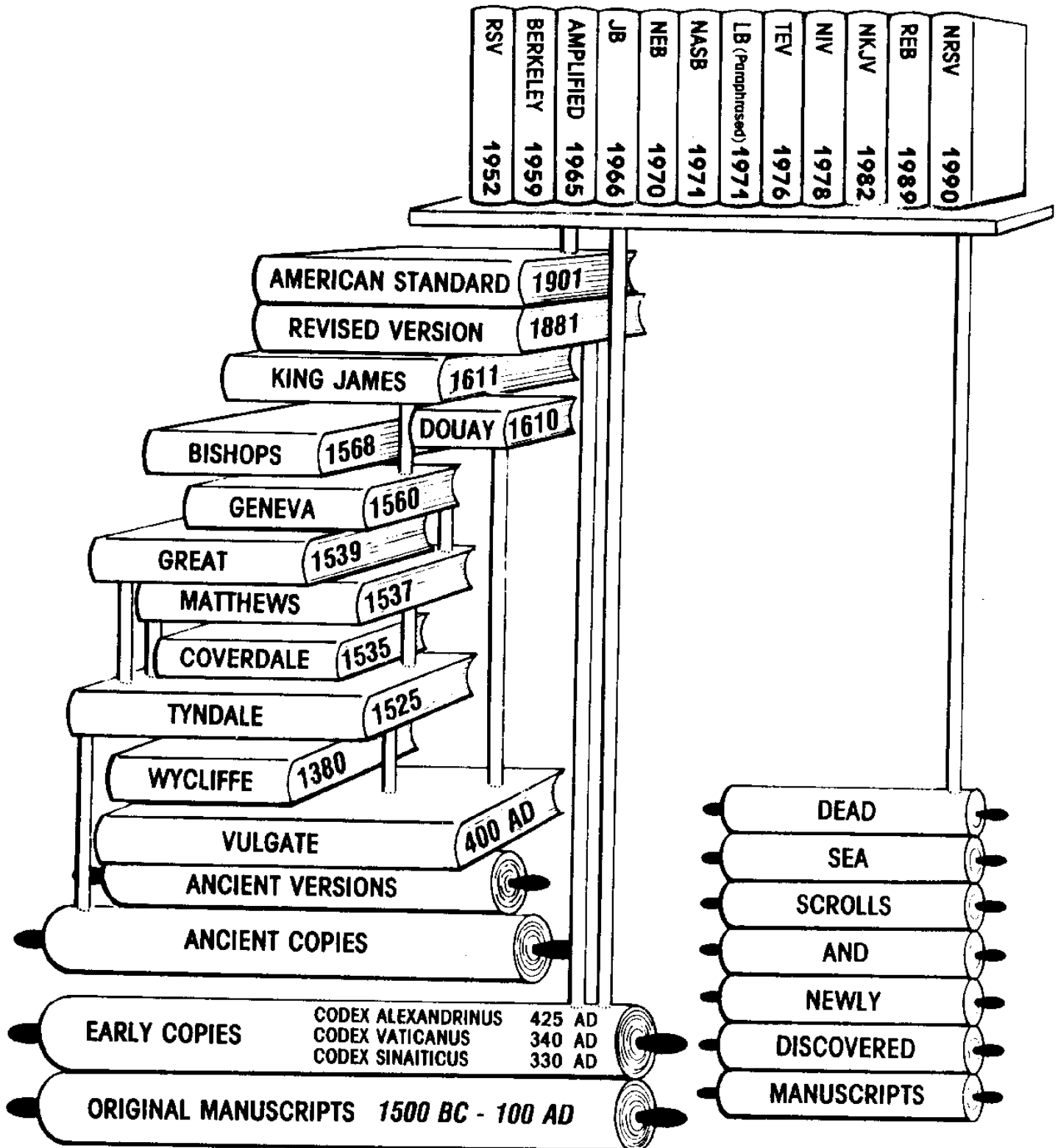


Chart courtesy of BACK TO THE BIBLE BROADCAST, Lincoln, Nebraska
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Bible Translation

Millions of people in the world cannot read the Bible, God's Word, because they do not have a Bible in their own language.

More than 3000 languages have no Bible. By the year 2025, Bible translating organizations hope to be working in all of those languages.

Basic Facts:

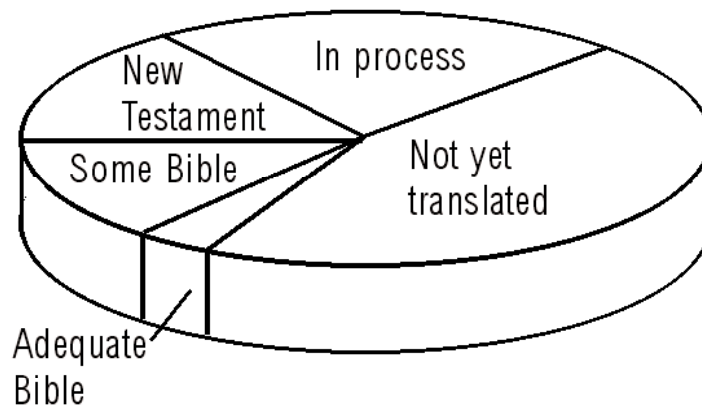
World population: There are more than 6 billion people in the world in 2003 (6,000,000,000).

People with no Bible: More than 380 million have no Bible in their language (380,000,000).

Number of languages in the world: 6809 languages

How many have the Scriptures in their language?

Adequate Bible	405 languages
Adequate New Testament	1034 languages
Some of the Bible	883 languages
Translation process started	more than 1500 languages
May need translation	about 3000 languages



There are more than 14 national Bible translation organizations around the world. They need more than 1,500 linguist/translators, literacy specialists, and support staff.

For more information contact *Wycliffe Bible Translators* at (407) 852-3600 or log on at www.wycliffe.org.