

~Translations of the English Bible~

~Early Versions~

A number of Old English Bible translations (pre-1066) were prepared in medieval England, translations of parts of the Bible into the **Old English** language. Many of these translations were in fact glosses, prepared and circulated in connection with the Latin Bible that was standard in Western Christianity at the time, for the purpose of assisting clerics whose grasp of Latin was imperfect. Old English literature is remarkable for containing a number of incomplete Bible translations that were not glosses and that were meant to be circulated independently.

Aldhelm (b. 639 d. 25 May 709) is thought to have written an Old English translation of the Psalms, although this is disputed.

St. Cuthbert's Evangelistarium, which is a Latin translation with an interlinear English (689);

Caedmon is mentioned by **Bede** as one who sang poems in Old English based on the Bible stories, but he was not involved in translation per se. The **Caedmon manuscript** which was initially ascribed to **Caedmon**, was written between 700-1000. The extant manuscript was copied about 1000. It includes Biblical material in vernacular verses. **Caedmon's** versifications of an English translation (689);

Eadfurth's translation (720)

A translation of the Gospel of John into Old English by the **Venerable Bede**, which he is said to have prepared shortly before his death around the year 735. This translation is lost; we know of its existence from Cuthbert's account of **Bede's** death. [1]

The **Vespasian Psalter** [2], an interlinear gloss found in a manuscript of the Book of Psalms. The gloss was prepared around 850. This gloss is in the **Mercian dialect**.

Eleven other 9th century glosses of the Psalms are known including **Eadwine's Canterbury Psalter** [3]

King Alfred (901) had a number of passages of the Bible circulated in the vernacular in around 900. These included passages from the Ten Commandments and the Pentateuch, which he prefixed to a code of laws he promulgated around this time. Alfred is also said to have directed the Book of Psalms to have been translated into Old English. Many scholars believe that the fifty Psalms in Old English that are found in the Paris Psalter [4] represent Alfred's translation.

Between 950 and 970, **Aldred** added a gloss in the Northumbrian dialect of Old English (**the Northumbrian Gloss on the Gospels**) to the **Lindisfarne Gospels** as well as a forward describing who wrote and decorated it.

the Lord's Prayer - *Suae ðonne iuih gie bidde fader urer ðu arð ðu bist in heofnum + in heofnas; sie gehalgad noma ðin; to-cymed ric ðin. sie willo ðin suae is in heofne J in eorðo. hlaf userne ofervwistlic sel*

us to dæg. J forgef us scylda usra suae uoe forgef on scyldgum usum. J ne inlæd usih in costunge ah gefrig usich from yfle

At around the same time, a priest named **F arman** wrote a gloss on the Gospel of Matthew that is preserved in a manuscript called the **Rushworth Gospels**. [5]

In approximately 990, a full and freestanding version of the four Gospels in idiomatic Old English appeared, in the West Saxon dialect; these are known as the **Wessex Gospels**. Seven manuscript copies of this translation have survived; they apparently had some currency. This version gives the most familiar Old English version of Matthew 6:9–13, the Lord's Prayer:

Fæder ure þu þe eart on heofonum, si þin nama gehalgod. To becume þin rice, gewurþe ðin willa, on eorðan swa swa on heofonum. Urne gedæghwamlican hlaf syle us todæg, and forgyf us ure gyltas, swa swa we forgyfað urum gyltendum. And ne gelæd þu us on costunge, ac alys us of yfele. Soþlice.

At about the same time as the Wessex Gospels, a priest of Dorsetshire named **Ælf ric** (995) produced an independent translation of the Pentateuch with Joshua and Judges.

These, however, were all made from the Lat. and not from the original Heb.

In 1066, the Norman Conquest marked the beginning of the end of the Old English language and initiated profound changes in its vocabulary. The project of translating the Bible into Old English gradually ended after that process began. We then enter the period of change from Old English to Middle English, with concurrent efforts for Bible translations in that language.

There were portions of the Bible, and possibly the entire work, rendered into the English vernacular very early in the history of the language. Gildas states that "when the English martyrs gave up their lives in the 4th century all the copies of the Holy Scriptures which could be found were burned in the streets."

Cranmer, **Thomas More**, and **Foxe**, with many others, bore testimony to the existence of "divers copies of the Holy Bible in the English tongue." The following are fragments of translations that are clearly traced:

Wycliffe's Version.

In the fourteenth century there was a growing demand for an English version. This need was met by two translations, made respectively by **John Wycliffe** and **John Purvey**. Each carried on his work without the knowledge of the other. Wycliffe's was completed in 1384 and Purvey's in 1388. The latter, however, was thought to be only a correction of the former and at one time was even published in the name of Wycliffe. The Wycliffe version is distinctive in several ways. (1) It is written in the everyday speech of the common people. In many instances the word children is rendered "brat"; father is "dad"; chariot is "cart." (2) It gives the exact rendering of the English idiom for the ancient. Thus, *raca* is "Fy" or "Pugh"; *mammon* is "richesse." (3) It is highly literal in its translation. The following is a specimen: "The disciplis scien to hym, Maister now the Jewis soughten for to stoon thee, and est goist thou thidir? Jheus answered whether ther ben not twelue ouris of the dai? If ony man wandre in the night he stomblish, for light is not in him. He seith these thingis and aftir these thingis he seith to hem Lazarus oure freend slepith but Y go to reise hym fro sleep. Therfor hise disciplis seiden: Lord if he slepith he schal be saaf."

Tyndale's Version.

In 1526 **William Tyndale** made a translation of the NT from the original Gk. He afterward made a translation of the Pentateuch and other portions of the OT. The whole was printed in Germany and imported into England. Tyndale's introduction and comments awakened intense opposition; and many copies of the work were publicly burned by the order of the Bishop of London. As in Wyclif's version, the language was the common speech of the people. Many of his words have lost their old-time meaning, as is seen in the following rendering of <Titus 1:1>: "Paul, the rascal of God and the villein of Jesus Christ."

The aim of the translator was to render the simple sense of the original uninfluenced by theological thought. Thus, instead of "grace" he used the word "favor," "love" instead of "charity," "acknowledging" instead of "confessing," "elders" instead of "priests," "repentance" instead of "penance," "congregation" instead of "church."

Coverdale's Version.

In 1535 **Miles Coverdale** completed and printed an English translation of the entire Bible. It was probably done under the influence of **Cromwell** and with the aid of many assistants. It was not with Coverdale, as it was with Tyndale, a work of love. He undertook it as a task imposed upon him and did it perfunctorily and mechanically. Nor was it a translation from the original, but mainly from the German and Latin. It shows a strong royal and ecclesiastical influence. It uses a variety of English equivalents for the same original. It bears the marks of haste and carelessness.

Matthew's Bible.

This is the first "**Authorized Version**" of the Holy Bible in English. It is a fusion of the Tyndale and the Coverdale versions and was printed in London by the king's license in 1537, by publishers Grafton and Whitchurch. It bears the name of **Thomas Matthew**, which is undoubtedly a pseudonym. The real editor was **John Rogers**. His notes and comments were far in advance of his time and soon evoked a strong ecclesiastical opposition to this version.

Taverner's Version.

This version appeared in 1539 and was made necessary by ecclesiastical opposition to the Matthew's Bible. It, however, is but an expurgated edition of this version.

Cranmer's Version.

This version was printed in 1539 with the sanction of **Cranmer's** name. The translation was made by a corps of scholars under the direction of the archbishop and his assistants. It was a large folio and illustrated with a picture supposed to be the work of **Holbein**. It had the license of the king and was called "**The Great Bible.**"

The Geneva Bible.

This was a popular revision of "The Great Bible" made by Hebrew and Greek scholars who were refugees in Geneva. The cost of the latter (about \$30) made it inaccessible to the people. The purpose of the Geneva version was to give to England a household edition of the Word of God. It was a small book with marginal notes and was divided into chapters and verses. It at once became popular, and more than two hundred editions were published.

The Bishop's Bible.

This work appeared in 1568 and was made on the suggestion of **Archbishop Parker**. He was assisted in his work by eight of his bishops and some of the scholars of the church. It was elegantly printed, profusely illustrated, and ornamented with elaborate initial letters. From one of these, introducing the epistle to the Hebrews, this version was popularly called "**The Leda Bible**." It never received the approval of the scholars, and its cost kept it from the possession of the people.

The Rheims and Douay Version.

A translation was made by **Martin, Allen, and Bristow**, refugees in Rheims, where in 1582 they published the NT. The work was completed by the publication in 1609 of the OT. This was done in Douay, which fact gives the name to the version. Altogether aside from its Roman Catholic viewpoint, it is the poorest rendering into English of any of the versions. The following are given as fair specimens of its literary style: "Purge the old leaven that you may be a new paste, as you are asymes." "You are evacuated from Christ." In <Gal. 5:21-22> this version substitutes "ebrieties" for "drunkenness" "comessations" for "carousing," and "longanimity" for "patience." In <Heb. 9:23>, for "the copies of the things in the heavens," the Douay has "the exemplars of the celestials." In <Heb. 13:16>, "and do not neglect doing good and sharing; for with such sacrifices God is pleased," the Douay reads, "Beneficence and communication do not forget, for with such hosts God is promerited."

The Authorized Version.

It is also known as the **King James Bible**, from **James I**, by whose authority and support it was undertaken and completed. It was begun in 1604 and finished in seven years (1611). Forty-seven of the ablest scholars were selected to do the work, each taking a portion and finally reviewing the whole. It was to correspond with the Bishop's Bible, except where the original Hebrew and Greek made this impossible. The excellence of the work done is attested by the simple fact that this version has held the heart of the English-speaking world for nearly three centuries and that no subsequent version has been able to supplant it. (*Since the writing of this article, the NIV has now surpassed the KJV in world usage--bob*)

~Modern Versions~

The Revised Version.

There have been a number of attempts at revision of the KJV, but nothing of importance was done until 1870 when the convocation of Canterbury formally originated an inquiry that resulted in a new version completed in 1885. This version was felt to be needed because of the change that two centuries had made in the meaning of many English words; because of the fuller knowledge then possessed of the Heb. and the Gk. text; because of the confessed inaccuracy of many of the renderings in the KJV; and because of the obscurities occasioned by the form of the English text where there is no distinction made between prose and poetry, and where the divisions into chapters and verses make unnatural and abrupt breaks in the inspired thought. The aim of the translators was to introduce as few alterations into the text of the KJV as faithfulness to the truth would allow and to make the language of such alterations conform to that of the rest of the book. The new version has not won the heart of the English-speaking world but is accepted as an able commentary on the text that since 1611 has been a sacred classic.

The American Standard Version.

The RV with such alterations as were recommended by the American branch of revisers, and that was not published until 1901.

The Polychrome Version.

An entirely new translation made from the original text, under the direction of Professor Haupt of Johns Hopkins University, and which aims to give the rendering on the basis of the most recent school of higher criticism. This translation has had only slight acceptance.

The Twentieth Century New Testament.

This version, by a group of some twenty scholars representing various segments of the Christian church, used the Westcott and Hort Gk. text. It came out in London (1898-1901), with a revised edition appearing in 1904. One of its distinctive features, besides modern language and idiom, was its chronological placement of the various books, Mark's gospel appearing first instead of Matthew's in the traditional order.

Historical New Testament.

This was translated by James Moffatt in polished modern idiom and appeared in Edinburgh in 1901. It reflects the higher-critical scholarship current at the beginning of the century. Moffatt's second translation appeared in Edinburgh in 1913. This contained several transpositions of chapters, paragraphs, and verses based upon Von Soden's edition of the Gk. NT. Moffatt published a translation of the OT in 1924, rendering the divine name Jehovah as "The Eternal." This translation, lucid in many places, followed higher-critical hypotheses and conclusions, which are seen throughout. In 1935 a revised and final edition of the Moffatt Bible was published. This too reflects higher-critical views, especially the documentary partition theories of the Pentateuch.

The Westminster Version of the Sacred Scriptures.

This was a Roman Catholic translation. Heading the general editorship was Cuthbert Lattey of the Society of Jesus. The work dates from 1913, with a freely translated NT published in New York in 1937, containing footnotes indicating variation in Greek and Vulgate readings. The OT books follow the Heb. original.

The Holy Scriptures According to the Masoretic Text, A New Translation.

This was a Jewish rendering that appeared in 1917. It was prepared by a committee of Jewish scholars headed by Max L. Margolis as editor-in-chief. It closely follows the Masoretic Heb. text, reflecting a curious mixture of Jewish traditional readings and the results of modern biblical scholarship. Cf. Alexander Sperber, "A New Bible Translation," Alexander Marx Jubilee Volume, English Section (1950), pp. 547-80.

The New Testament in Modern Speech.

This was produced in 1903 by Richard F. Weymouth, D. Litt. It was edited and partly revised by E. Hampden-Cook. It is a serviceable translation and effects careful rendering of the aorist and perfect tenses in Greek. The first American edition, revised by J. A. Robertson, appeared at Boston in 1943.

The New Testament, An American Translation.

Based on the Westcott and Hort Gk. text, this version was prepared by Edgar J. Goodspeed (Chicago, 1923). In 1927 The Old Testament, An American Translation was prepared by Theophile J. Meek of the University of Toronto, Leroy Waterman of the University of Michigan, J. M. Powis Smith of the University of Chicago, and A. R. Gordon of the University of Montreal. Ninety-one pages of appendix in this edition list emendations of the Heb. preferred over the Masoretic text. In 1939 The Complete Bible, An American Translation appeared. This consisted of Theophile J. Meek's literary revision of the OT, Goodspeed's rendering of the Apocrypha, and Goodspeed's NT, which had appeared in 1931, as The Bible, An American Translation.

The Riverside New Testament.

This translation leans heavily upon several previous translations and was executed by William G. Ballantine from the 1934 revised Nestle's Gk. text.

Books of the Old Testament in Colloquial Speech.

The rendition of numerous scholars and published by the National Adult School Union (London, 1923 and later).

The Centenary Translation of the New Testament.

This translation appeared in two volumes, Philadelphia, 1924. It was put out by Helen B. Montgomery of Rochester, N.Y. to mark the centenary of the American Baptist Publication Society. It strives after too modern and almost flippant (at times) renderings and popular headings that tend to cheapen the dignity of Scripture idiom.

The New Testament, A Translation in the Language of the People.

Published in Boston in 1937 and reprinted in Chicago, 1950, this was founded on Westcott and Hort's Gk. text. Charles B. Williams, a professor of Gk. at Union University, Tennessee, was the author. Williams aimed at exact translation of the Gk. tenses.

The New Testament in Basic English (Cambridge, 1941).

The Old Testament in Basic English appeared in 1950. This translation aimed to couch the Bible message in less than a thousand common English words supplemented of necessity by as few special biblical words as possible. Simplicity was the aim at the sacrifice of beauty and attractiveness of diction.

The Holy Bible.

This was a Roman Catholic venture and aimed at revising the Challoner-Rheims version, and of course adhering closely to the Latin Vulgate It was prepared by a group of twenty-seven Roman Catholic scholars and published by the Episcopal Committee of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (Paterson,

N.J., 1941). The same committee is publishing the various books of the OT translated from the Heb. The book of Genesis appeared in 1948, the Psalms and Song of Solomon in 1950, and the books from Genesis to Ruth, 1952. The Sapiential books, Job to Serach (Ecclesiasticus), appeared in 1955. Beautifully printed with helpful critical notes, the translations are often fresh and challenging.

The Berkeley Version

of the New Testament. This chiefly used Tischendorf's eighth edition of the Gk. text (1869-1872) and appeared in Berkeley, Calif., in 1945. It is the work of Gerrit Verkuyl, who for many years was associated with the board of Christian education of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. After considerable ministry of the NT alone, the OT (done by various scholars) was added to it in 1959, to form the Holy Bible, The Berkeley Version in Modern English (which see, below).

The New Testament Letters.

This helpful translation with harder passages expanded by clear paraphrase was done by **J. W. C. Wand**, Bishop of London (Oxford, 1946).

Revised Standard Version.

The Revised Standard Version is an authorized revision of the American Standard Version of 1901. The OT section was copyrighted in 1952, the NT section in 1946. This translation of the entire Bible was launched with great fanfare and at great expense. Its reception, however, has been mixed. Hailed by liberals, it has been unfavorably received by many conservatives. Its translators were almost completely of the liberal school. Although possessing the results of the latest scholarship, the translators have departed from the KJV, RV, and ASV in their high veneration for the Hebrew Masoretic text of the OT, and in many instances the translation contains renderings of pivotal passages that are doctrinally weak and unreliable. It appears it will not supplant the KJV, RV, or ASV, at least among conservative Christians.

Letters to the Young Churches.

This was done by **J. B. Phillips** (New York, 1948) of the Anglican church and is characterized by appealing English idiom. Phillips also published *The Gospels Translated into Modern English* (New York, 1953). He completed the translation of the NT, published under the title *The New Testament in Modern English* (New York, 1958).

The New Testament, A New Translation in Plain English (London, 1952).

This was done by **Charles Kingsley Williams** at the invitation, in 1937, of the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge. Its aim was to translate the Scriptures in about 2,000 common words listed by a group of educators in the Interim Report on Vocabulary Selection, 1936.

The Holy Bible, The Berkeley Version in Modern English.

This appeared in Grand Rapids, Mich., 1959. The NT section is that of the Berkeley Version of the NT, by **Gerrit Verkuyl**, that appeared in 1945. The OT is the work of some twenty biblical scholars assisted by others under the editorship of Gerrit Verkuyl. This is translated from the original languages with numerous helpful non-doctrinal notes to aid the reader. It is designated as *The Holy Bible, The Berkeley Version in Modern English* and aims to avoid the archaisms and other expressions that are out-of-date in

the KJV.

The Jerusalem Bible.

After World War II, **Roman Catholic** scholars produced the Jerusalem Bible, which was published between 1956 and 1966. It was actually based on a French Bible translated by the Dominican School in Jerusalem but was revised and rendered into good idiomatic English, which in numerous places exhibits striking lyrical and dramatic qualities. The underlying scholarship is liberal in nature, but the translation has been done carefully in the Roman Catholic tradition and resists attempts at paraphrasing quite successfully. Although some liberties have been taken in the rearranging of the Heb. text, the Jerusalem Bible lends itself well to liturgical and devotional use.

The New American Standard Bible.

This is basically a revision of the American Standard Version (1901) and was produced by the **Lockman Foundation** of La Habra, Calif. It is a highly respected literal translation by a committee of conservative scholars and was published in this sequence: the gospel of John (1960), the four gospels (1962), the New Testament (1963), the whole Bible (1967). The three stated objectives of the translators were clarity of English, accuracy of translation, and adequacy of notes. The NT translators followed the twenty-third edition of the Nestle Gk. text, even though they sometimes preferred the text underlying the ASV (e.g., the long ending of <Mark 16:9-20> is adopted). Although the English style is not always smooth, many students and teachers choose the NASB because it avoids paraphrasing that often obscures or even misrepresents the statements and meaning of the original text.

The New English Bible.

The New English Bible emerged from an ecumenical resolve to produce a fresh translation that would convey the sense of the original in contemporary English. Fourteen years after the initial resolution, the NT was published in 1961, and the OT and Apocrypha nine years later. The finished product was marked predominantly by liberal scholarship, and though it exhibited some creditable phraseology it encountered heavy criticism on literary grounds generally. The translators were accused of manipulating the OT text in some areas, allowing liberal theological presuppositions to influence their translation, using unnecessary paraphrasing, limiting the usefulness of the book by including British provincial idioms, and permitting sentences that were either vulgar in meaning or rough in syntax. The attempt to blend scholarship and the popular idiom failed to produce a version that could match the King James Version or the Revised Standard Version liturgically, making the translation more suitable for private use.

The New International Version.

An interdenominational enterprise by evangelical scholars resulted in a widely acclaimed translation known as the New International Version. Underwritten by the **New York Bible Society**, the NT was issued in 1973 and the OT some five years later in 1978. Though the version was not marked by the textual dislocations of earlier liberal translations, it employed the concept of dynamic equivalence in a manner that resulted in a great deal of paraphrasing. On occasions this tendency not only obscured the meaning of the original, but actually misrepresented it. As with many modern translations, the New International Version supplied footnotes that furnished textual information or gave alternative translations. Despite attempts to accommodate the version to liturgical needs, the literary style does not always lend itself to public worship, although the version has been recognized by many evangelical churches because of its conservative theological approach. *The NIV has now (2001) replaced the KJV in*

terms of usage throughout Christendom--bob.

The New King James Bible.

A distinctive contribution to the work of Bible revision was initiated in 1975 by Sam Moore of Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville. Disturbed by the possibility that the King James tradition might disappear in the welter of new translations, he commissioned a revision of the King James Bible that would retain the best elements of the original. As with other versions, archaic literary and syntactical forms were replaced with modern equivalents, but an attempt was made to retain familiar passages in their traditional form as far as possible. Unlike the New International Version, which followed an eclectic text for the NT, the revisers of the King James Version used the **Scrivener** text that reconstructed as closely as possible the one underlying the King James Version. To prevent this procedure from ignoring more recent textual scholarship, the NT was supplied with footnotes that indicated where major manuscripts differed textually from the King James Version, thus enabling the reader to form an individual opinion about the passage in question. Those who revised the OT based their work on the 1977 Stuttgart edition of **Biblia Hebraica**. The international team of scholars employed the concept of total equivalence in a manner that precluded paraphrasing or similar "dynamic" interpretations, and instead produced a careful rendering of the original text. The NT of the New King James Version, as it was called, was issued in 1979 and the complete Bible in 1982. A concurrent British edition was published in 1983 for use in the United Kingdom and Commonwealth countries. The New King James Version has been praised widely for the way in which the revisers managed to capture the flavor and ethos of the King James Version, and the OT has been declared by some scholars to be the best and most accurate rendering of the Hebrew in the past century. *Alas, the NKJV has been rejected by the 'KJV-only' folks because it uses some of the new evidence and better translation of certain words found in the NIV and NASB. The NKJV recognizes that there were certain errors in the old KJV that had to be addressed and bravely did so. However, even it has it's skeptics--bob.*

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