

The Bible in English

Maxie B. Boren

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—Maxie B. Boren

Foreword

According to the Wycliffe Bible Translators (www.wycliffe.org/about/statistics), there are over 6,900 languages spoken in the world today. Just over 2,000 of those languages have no part of the Bible translated into them. The total number of people who do not have access to a Bible in their language is estimated to be 350 million.

To be among one of the language communities in the world with access to the entire biblical text is indeed one of God's great blessings. Though one can logically deduce from observing the natural world that an infinite God exists (Rom. 1:20; Ps. 19:1–4; Acts 14:17), had the Bible not been translated into modern English, we would miss so much.

We could not stand amazed at the compassion and wisdom of the Almighty as we watch His plan for man's redemption unfold across the expanse of time. We could not picture Eden's perfection. We could not stand amazed at the providence of God playing out in the lives of Joseph and Esther. We could not share in the emotions of the psalmists. We could not feel the pain of Jeremiah as he tried in vain to bring Judah to repentance. The wisdom of the Proverbs would be hidden. We could not stand in awe of the prophets and their finely detailed yet minutely fulfilled prophecies. We would know nothing of a quiet, inconspicuous birth in a Bethlehem barn that caused joyous praise to break out among the angels in heaven. We could not benefit from the simple, yet powerful parables of Jesus. We could not weep with Jesus at the graveside of His beloved friend. We could not stand in awe of His miracles. We would know nothing of the wondrous beginning of the church, nor could we marvel at its amazing growth. We could not rejoice with the Ethiopian treasurer who found forgiveness in Christ.

Most important, we would know nothing of the matchless love of our Creator in sending His own Son to live among us and die to purchase our redemption from sin, and we could not break out in hymns of praise at the discovery of an empty tomb. We would exist without the confident expectation of heaven's bliss. How dreary and hopeless our lives would be without the Bible!

But if the English translations of the Bible from which we read are not accurate representations of the original documents, why bother reading them?

How can we trust them? In the book you now hold in your hands, Maxie Boren will take you on a journey of discovery through the centuries of time that bridge the gap between the original sources and today's modern English translations of the Bible. In his unique conversational style, Maxie translates, if you will, material that is technical by nature into the language of average reader.

What's more, since too much that has been written about the Bible in recent decades has been tainted with the poison of theological liberalism and thereby eroded people's confidence in Scripture, this book can rebuild that confidence and leave the reader secure in his trust that what he reads on the pages of his Bible "is in truth the Word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe" (1 Thess. 2:13).

Eddie Parrish, Preacher
Brown Trail Church of Christ

Introduction

The author makes no claim of knowing all there is to know about the subject matter of this book. His singular desire is to share insights gained through countless hours of study of how the Bible came to be as we know it today. If readers will consider carefully this material, the author believes they will gain a better understanding and appreciation for the Bible. At least, that is his sincere desire and prayer.

This study assumes that the reader believes in God. It further assumes that the reader accepts the Bible as the Word of God. Proof of God and His Word is outside the scope of this work.

This work attempts to show four things:

1. The “mechanics” of how we got the Bible—a look at the materials used and the manuscripts extant.
2. The formation of the canon—a look at how the books of the Bible came to be accepted.
3. The translations of the Bible—a look at how, when, and where the Bible was translated into various languages.
4. Special emphasis is given to the history of the Bible in English.

I. BASIC FACTS ABOUT THE BIBLE

- A. The Old Testament is composed of 39 books: 5 books of law, 12 books of history, 5 books of poetry, and 17 books of the prophets.
 1. There were 32 writers of the Old Testament. The familiar are Moses, David, Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. These men were instrumentalities through whom the Holy Spirit revealed the Word of God. Samuel said, “The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue” (2 Sam. 23:2). And “men spoke from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet. 1:21). So, as we read the Bible, we must realize that the real author is God (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16–17).
 2. The Old Testament was written over a period of 1100 years, from about 1500 BC to 400 BC.
 3. Except for small portions written in Aramaic, the Old Testament was written in the Hebrew language.

- a. The language spoken by the Jews is known as “Hebrew”—the root meaning of which is “to cross or pass over.” Abraham was called “the Hebrew” in Genesis 14:13; Abraham, “the come-across man,” or as the Septuagint expresses it, “the man from the other side” (cf. Joshua 24:2–3). The word *Hebrew* is used some 30 times in the Old Testament to refer to Abraham’s offspring. As these people became known as “the Hebrews,” so did the language they spoke. It is referred to by New Testament writers in several instances (cf. John 5:2; 19:13, 17, 20; Rev. 9:11; 16:16).
 - b. The Aramaic language originated with Aram, one of the five sons of Shem mentioned in Genesis 10:22. *Aram* is sometimes translated “Syria,” the name more often attached to the descendants of Aram; thus the language “of the Syrians” or “Aramaic” (cf. 2 Kings 18:26; Ezra 4:7). It was the language of Mesopotamia, Abraham’s homeland, so Hebrew undoubtedly grew out of Aramaic. This accounts for the similarities and for the fact that the Jews could speak it and often used it. Jeremiah 10:11 is in Aramaic. So also are Daniel 2:4–7:28; Ezra 4:8–6:18; and Ezra 7:12–26.
 - c. By the time of Christ, Aramaic is believed to have been the prevailing language used by the Jews. For the most part, Hebrew had become the language of the priesthood and the other educated elite of Israel, so it was the language of the religious literature of the times.
- B. The New Testament is composed of 27 books: 4 books of biography, 1 book of history, 21 books of letters, and 1 book of prophecy.
1. Eight men penned the New Testament: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, Peter, James, and Jude between AD 40 and AD 96.
 2. The New Testament was written almost exclusively in common (Koine) Greek, with only an occasional Aramaic, Latin, or Hebrew word.
 Alexander the Great spread Greek culture and language extensively during the 3rd century BC. Koine Greek had been retained in many places, including Palestine.
 In the 1st century AD three languages were spoken quite freely among the people who lived in Palestine: Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic. (The Romans had introduced Latin, but it never gained acceptance among the Jews.) Most of the Jews in the time of Christ spoke Aramaic and/or Koine Greek.

II. MATERIALS USED IN WRITING THE BIBLE

- A. The historical details of writing loses itself in antiquity, and that leaves us with many questions we will probably never answer. Stone, tree leaves, bark, clothes, clay tablets, metals, wax, animal skins, and paper have been used as writing materials.
- B. Here are some materials used by Bible writers.

1. *Stone and clay tablets*: These materials were used as early as 2500 BC. Stone writings have been found in Egypt and date back to near 4000 BC. Babylonian inscriptions dating back to 3750 BC, the time of King Sargon I, have been found. "Stone letters" have been unearthed in Palestine dating to 1500 BC. Many of these are preserved in museums and universities throughout the world.

The Ten Commandments were written on stone: "And he gave to Moses . . . two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God" (Exod. 31:18; cf. 34:1, 28).

In AD 1868 the famous Moabite Stone was found with the inscription written by King Mesha of Moab, mentioned in 2 Kings 3:4. Many other discoveries of varying importance substantiate the fact that stones were used as writing materials in ancient times.

The famous Tel-el-Amarna Tablets were found on the banks of the Nile in upper Egypt in AD 1887. Most of these tablets were official letters from Egyptian governors in Palestine, reporting to the kings of Egypt. Palestine and much of Syria were under Egyptian rule during those times (1380–1360 BC), and most of these tablets consisted of frantic appeals of those Egyptian governors for reinforcements against hostile rebels and invaders. These tablets reveal much of the "other-side view" of the Joshua-Judges era of the conquest of Canaan.

Clay material was very likely used by some of the earliest Bible writers, as was stone. Ezekiel was instructed to use "tile" (clay) upon which to portray the city of Jerusalem (cf. Ezek. 4:1).

2. *Wooden tablets*: The tables upon which Isaiah and Habakkuk were told to write are believed by many scholars to have been wooden tables (tablets), though the texts do not specifically say so (cf. Isa. 30:8; Hab. 2:2).
3. *Metals: gold, silver, bronze, and lead*. Job expressed the desire that his words be written and "graven with an iron pen and lead" (Job 19:24).
4. The Old Testament was written on three primary materials.
 - a. Clay tablets

- b. Papyrus—the most widely used ancient writing material. Almost certainly, papyrus was used as early as 2500 BC, perhaps earlier. The word *papyrus* is derived from the papyrus plant from which it was made. According to the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*,

“the white cellular pith of the long triangular papyrus stalk was stripped of its bark or rind and sliced into thin strips. Two layers of these strips were laid at right angles to each other, pasted together, dried, and smoothed. The sheets were then pasted one to another to form a roll of any length desired” (pp. 223–229).

The average roll was about 30 feet long and 9 to 10 inches high. The roll was often put in a protective covering and placed in a wooden case for storage.

- c. Leather—mostly the skins of sheep or goats (parchment), but also some skins from calves and antelopes (vellum). Animal skins were probably used for writing as early as about 2700 BC. Most scholars believe they were not widely used until the 4th century AD. If so, most of the Old Testament was written on papyrus and clay tablets. Papyrus, parchment, and vellum were pieced together to form rolls called “scrolls.” Scrolls were gradually replaced by codices, plural of “codex” meaning “book form.” This transition from scroll to codex began to emerge in the 2nd century AD. The codex form had some definite advantages over the scroll form.

C. Writing instruments: a stylus fashioned from metal, hard wood, or bone for clay. Pens made from the hollow stalks of coarse grass or reeds were normally used on papyrus and skins. Inks were of undetermined mixtures but are believed to have been made from soot, gums, and dyes.

III. MANUSCRIPTS

This is a very important part of our study, one the average person does not understand. It is my intent, therefore, to make it as plain as possible. To know about the manuscripts is also a key in understanding the work of translating.

A. Defining some terms

1. A manuscript is a literary composition written by hand, as opposed to a printed copy. In scholarly reference works a manuscript(s) is designated by the capital letters MS(S).
2. An original manuscript is the actual one that comes from the author’s hand, also called an *autograph*.

3. A manuscript copy is a handwritten copy of either the original manuscript or of a copy of the original.
 - a. Today we have available only manuscript copies. Because of the ravages of time—natural deterioration and decay, calamities of nature, wars—ancient original documents are rare. No original manuscript of any book of the Bible has been discovered to date.
 - b. Someone may ask, “Why did not God cause the original manuscripts to be preserved?” Here are two possible explanations:
 - (1) Original manuscripts are not necessary to the preservation of His Word.
 - (2) Original manuscripts, if they existed, would no doubt be objects of veneration. (Note: The brazen serpent, 2 Kings 18:4.)
 - c. The abundance of manuscript copies, fragments of copies, quotations from manuscripts, and other materials available give assurance that we have today, in our own language, that which is substantially identical with the original.
4. A Bible manuscript is a handwritten copy, written in the same language as the original. There are two kinds of these.
 - a. Uncial manuscript—written in capital letters, each formed separately. These are the earliest manuscripts available, dating from the 4th century to the 10th century AD.
 - b. Minuscule manuscript—written in small letters. These manuscripts extend from the 9th to the 15th century AD, with some overlapping. These are often in cursive, or “running hand” writing, though not always.
5. A codex manuscript is simply a manuscript in book form instead of scroll form.
6. For those who ask, “Can we depend on copies?” note the Jewish law found in the Talmud, governing the copying of the Sacred Text:
 - a. The scribe could write no word or letter from memory. He was required to have an authentic copy before him and to pronounce aloud each word before writing it.
 - b. The scribe had to reverently wipe his pen each time before writing the word God, and was required to wash his whole body before writing *Yahweh*, the name of Jehovah.
 - c. Strict rules governed the forms of the letters, spaces between letters, words, and sections, the use of the pen, and the parchment.
 - d. One mistake on a copiest’s sheet condemned the entire sheet! Three mistakes on one page condemned the entire manuscript; it was destroyed.

- e. Every word and every letter was counted and, under careful scrutiny, if anything was not completely proper, the manuscript was condemned and destroyed at once.
- f. Thus, we must admire the Jews for their care of the Scriptures! Consider Romans 3:2 in the light of the painstaking care they took of the Scriptures.

IV. MAIN MANUSCRIPTS AVAILABLE TODAY

A. The Old Testament Manuscript Copies

1. The Dead Sea Scrolls—The first was discovered in 1947 at Qumran, near the northwest corner of the Dead Sea. Some 350 rolls, most of them fragmentary, were found. Two scrolls of Isaiah are the most important. One is complete, except for a few words, and substantiates our present English text to a remarkable degree. That scroll dates back to 100 BC, and is the oldest Old Testament manuscript known.
2. The Cairo Codex—dated AD 895 contains the works of the prophets.
3. The Leningrad Codex—dated AD 916, also of the prophets.
4. The British Museum Codex of the Pentateuch—dating back to the 10th or 11th century AD.
5. The Leningrad Codex—the entire Old Testament, completed in AD 1008.
6. Many other sources are available, assuring us of the accuracy of our Old Testament text. The Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into the Greek language took place around 280 BC. *Septuagint* means “seventy.” Six men from each of the 12 tribes of Israel were chosen to do the work of translating. The 72 worked together diligently. Some sources say they completed their work in 72 days. This might be more tradition than fact.

Also, Jerome’s Latin Vulgate, dated around AD 400, was a translation directly from Hebrew into Latin.

The famous Samaritan Pentateuch is the Hebrew Pentateuch written in Samaritan letters dating back to 430 BC.

Also, the work of the Massoretes of the city of Tiberias must be noted. They lived and worked there from AD 500 to 1000 and produced the Massoretic Text.

B. The New Testament manuscript copies: There are more than 4,000 New Testament manuscripts! Some of the main ones are:

1. The Codex Sinaiticus (AD 340): Discovered in 1844 near Mount Sinai. It contains portions of the Greek Old Testament and the entire New Testa-

ment, written on excellent vellum. It is presently in the British Museum in London.

2. The Codex Vaticanus (AD 350): Has been in the Vatican library since 1481. It contains the Old Testament and large portions of the New Testament.
3. The Codex Alexandrinus (AD 450): Contains a large part of both the Old Testament and New Testament, but neither in its entirety. It has been in the British Museum since 1624.
4. The Codex Ephraemi Rescripts (AD 450): Contains most of both Testaments. It is located at the National Library in Paris, France.
5. The Codex Bezae (AD 550): Presently located in the Cambridge University Library, England. It is a very valuable Greek text.
6. The Codex Washingtonensis (4th or 5th century AD): In the National Library in Washington D.C. It, too, is written on good vellum.
7. The Chester Beatty Papyri (2nd or 3rd century AD): Purchased from manuscript dealers of Egypt by Mr. Beatty in 1931.
8. The Codex Claromontanus (AD 550): National Library in Paris.
9. The Codex Regius (8th century AD): National Library in Paris.
10. The Koridethi Gospels (8th century AD).

Conclusion

- A. Men inspired of God recorded His Word on the materials at hand. The accumulation of vast amounts of materials and the great numbers of discoveries made through archaeology, along with advanced technological and scientific methods of research, have given undeniable evidence and verification, authenticating the text of our present Bible.
- B. God has providentially protected His recorded Word through the instrumentality of many people of many nations.
- C. We can be positively assured that our English versions of the Bible today are substantially the same as the original, when first recorded. (Note: In our study of translating and subsequent review of several of the versions or translations, we will consider the matter of variations in the texts and the pros and cons involved. But for this lesson, I trust the information supplied will suffice.)

Formation of the Canon

Part I

Who wrote the Bible? When was it written? What kind of writing materials were used? What languages were involved? Do we have the original manuscripts? If not, what about the copies? Are they reliable? Do we have sufficient numbers of manuscripts available, that by careful comparison we can be confident of textual authenticity?

The above questions, considered in the previous chapter, are only the beginning of inquiries which challenge our minds. The list continues. Why does the Bible contain the books it does? Why were other books rejected? Does our Bible contain any book it should not? Are any books missing? What were the determining factors in selecting the books we have? Was God's providential hand involved? (While non-believers would scoff at this last question, believers feel it is a very legitimate consideration.)

This lesson is designed to answer the questions posed above and to give the student a reasonable understanding of the formation of the canon.

I. DEFINITIONS

A. *Canon*: literally "a measuring rod, a rule." It comes from the Greek word *kanon* probably derived from the Hebrew word *kaneh*. A canon was usually a straight rod or bar, having one side true to a straight line, used for measuring and ruling. Carpenters and masons used canons for measuring and keeping construction materials straight. Metaphorically it means "anything that serves to regulate or determine other things; a standard or testing rule." In that way it has been used in many different fields such as art, music, languages, and in connection with the Scriptures.

1. *Kanon* is used five times in the Greek New Testament. In Galatians 6:16 and Philippians 3:16 it is translated by the English word *rule* and means "that which measures . . . as a ruler." In 2 Corinthians 10:13–16 the word is variously rendered by the English words *rule*, *line*, *province*, *limit*, or *measure*, with the meaning being "a definitely bounded or fixed space within the limits of which one's power or influence is confined."
2. These insights should help us understand the meaning of the word as it is

used by scholars pertaining to the Bible. (*Canon* was first applied to the Scriptures in the 4th century AD by Athanasius of Alexandria, Egypt. But the process of scrutinizing and evaluating the writings that were extant from some 400 years before the time of Christ to some 400 years after His atoning sacrifice was going on all that time. At first it was not a conscious, concerted effort involving widespread cooperation but more of a local undertaking. As time went by there was increasing awareness among the churches, and an interchange of information, understanding, and convictions on the matter. The canon is the measuring-rod, the testing-rule, the straight-edge, the standard by which each book of the Bible has been tested. Those individual books which met the testing-rule have been received and recognized; those which did not have been rejected. This testing-rule or measuring-standard was applied throughout the gradual process of collecting all the books into the two parts of the Bible, the Old and New Testament.

- B. “Sacred Canon Q Scripture” is the terminology used by scholars, theologians, commentators, and authors to designate those genuine, authentic, recognized as inspired books which, taken together, comprise the complete revelation of God’s will to humankind. In other words, the “Sacred Canon of Scripture” is the Bible we have today.
- C. Here are some other related terms.
 1. *Canonical*: a book that has met the standard testing rule.
 2. *Uncanonical*: a book which does not “measure up.”
 3. *Canonicity*: the state or quality of being canonical. Canonicity gives a book a place in the Sacred Canon, because it has met the canonical standard. The word is used of a single book, whereas *canon* is used of the total books.

II. THE TEST OF CANONICITY

- A. The books in the Bible were given by inspiration of God so, even though written by human hands, they are God-approved. Never did mere men make a book canonical! Men have only recognized and approved, through the process under consideration, the books which God inspired and wanted in His Book!
- B. Canonical books existed long before the 66 books were brought together as the complete Bible.

- C. But let us note the standard-test—canon process—applied by men as to a book’s canonicity.
1. *The determination of divine authorship*: Is the book inspired of God? Is its human author a known and recognized spokesman of God: prophet, apostle, or inspired writer? Is this book a product of men apart from supernatural guidance? What did the carefully scrutinized evidence indicate?
 2. *The determination of genuineness*: Is the evidence sufficient to substantiate its genuineness? Can it be traced to the writer from whom it supposedly came? Does it have the marks of identification as a genuine book from God? is it true? is it factual? is it authentic? Or is there any indication that the book lacks the characteristics of canonicity? Is it spurious—not legitimate or genuine, false, counterfeit?
 3. *The determination by recognition*: Did the vast majority of mainstream believers view the book as being from God? In the case of an Old Testament book, was it read and studied in the synagogues? In the case of a New Testament book, was it viewed by the early Christians as being inspired? Was it read in the churches?
 4. *The determination by close examination of the content*: Were the contents deemed as blending with the other books, free from contradictions, in harmony with known historical events and people, and beneficial?
- D. There were three steps in the long process we refer to as “the formation of the canon.”
1. *Divine inspiration*: a book given by God, through the agency of the Holy Spirit, guiding some man to record that message which was to be received as being from God.
 2. *Man’s recognition*: people recognizing, realizing, and receiving a book as being from God.
 3. *The collecting*: the process of gathering into one volume the books deemed canonical, thus completing the obviously providential purpose of God . . . His complete revelation for humankind.

III. THE OLD TESTAMENT CANON

- A. By the time of Jesus, the Old Testament canon had been formed. Time and again Christ and the apostles quoted from “Scripture.” Jesus referred to the “law of Moses, and the prophets, and the psalms” (Luke 24:44). Paul refers to “all scripture” in 2 Timothy 3:16.
- B. The famous Septuagint translation (LXX), a translation of the Hebrew Old

Testament into Greek (280 BC), was oftentimes quoted by the Lord and His apostles.

- C. Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament, written about 400 BC, was included in the Septuagint, so between 400 BC and 280 BC. the Old Testament canon was completed.
- D. Philo, an Alexandrian Jewish philosopher (20 BC–AD 50), quoted freely from the 39 books which make up our Old Testament. And to appreciate the reverence with which the Jews esteemed their sacred scriptures, we observe what Philo had to say about “his people” and those scriptures: “They [the Jews] have not changed so much as a single word in them. They would rather die a thousand deaths than detract anything from these laws and statutes.”
- E. Josephus, a world renowned Jewish historian of the 1st century AD, said of the 39 books which make up the Old Testament canon,

“During so many ages as have already passed, no one has been so bold as either to add anything to them, to take anything from them, or to make any change in them; but it becomes natural to all Jews, immediately and from their very birth, to esteem those books to contain divine doctrines, and to persist in them, and, if occasion be, willingly die for them.”
- F. The Jewish Council of Jamnia (AD 90) ratified the Old Testament canon. Even though their books are arranged in a different order, they ratified the same 39 books we have in our Old Testament. The Jews have never considered any of the Old Testament apocryphal books as canonical. (The word *apocrypha* means “hidden, concealed.” Such writings are generally believed to have been written by people in heretical sects and were phrased with secretive, mysterious words and meanings. A secondary meaning of the apocryphal is “spurious, forged, of unknown or fraudulent authorship,” thus suspect, and not to be accepted—uncanonical.) Jerome, who made the famous translation known as the Latin Vulgate in the 5th century AD, said of the 39 books in our Old Testament, “Anything outside of these must be placed within the Apocrypha.”

IV. THE OLD TESTAMENT APOCRYPHA

- A. The Old Testament Apocrypha contains 14 books, the most prominent being: 1 and 2 Esdras, Tobit, Judith, The Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, and 1 and 2 Maccabees.

- B. The Jews worldwide have the same books in their canon as we do in our Old Testament canon. They have never accepted any of the apocryphal books.
- C. The apocryphal books became a part of the official Catholic Bible during the Council of Trent (AD 1546–1562). There is no doubt that the main reason this Catholic Council convened was to discover ways and means of offsetting the influence of the new Protestant Reformation Movement begun by Martin Luther in 1517. There is little doubt that they adopted the Apocrypha as part of their official Bible to undermine and confuse. In addition, the Roman church had been in a quandary for many years as to how it should deal with the Apocrypha. The Council of Trent provided a unique opportunity to issue that controversial decree.
- D. Reasons Protestant scholars reject the Apocrypha
 - 1. Not one of these books has a place in the Hebrew canon. Since the Old Testament was produced through the Jewish people, surely they know what belongs.
 - 2. New Testament writers never quoted from any of the apocryphal books, but they did quote many times from the Old Testament. But since Jesus did quote from the Septuagint translation some of the time, and since Catholic theologians and some few others claim that the apocryphal books were included in the LXX, they argue these were approved by Christ. Dr. J. D. Thomas, former head of the Bible department at Abilene Christian University, observed, “On the basis of our present information, it cannot be proved that the original Septuagint contained any of the apocryphal books, and there are very good reasons why it may have been identical with the Hebrew list” (*Our Bible*, p. 48).
- E. The apocryphal books were rejected by Josephus, Philo, and the Council of Jamnia, as well as many early Christian writers such as Melito, Origen, and Jerome.
- F. There are many other reasons for rejecting the apocryphal books, but to go into detail on this matter goes beyond the scope of this work. Suffice it to say that the overwhelming evidence is that they should be rejected!

Formation of the Canon

Part II

We have affirmed that the books often referred to as the “Old Testament Apocryphal Books” were never accepted by the Jews or the vast majority of scholars in general. Let’s spend a little more time on that subject.

Because the Roman Catholic Church officially incorporated the apocryphal books into their Bible during the Council of Trent (1546–1562), controversy has abounded regarding their universal acceptance. Indeed, the Catholic Church succeeded in “muddying the water,” as I believe they intended.

The Reformation Movement began in 1517 when Martin Luther nailed his famous 95 theses to the Catholic Church door in Wittenburg, Germany. One main purpose for the Council of Trent was to counteract the influence of the “protesting” (Protestant) movement. How better could they succeed than in causing confusion as to what should constitute God’s revelation? The Catholic Church claimed, and still does claim, that authority in religion comes from three sources: (1) the Bible, (2) the handed-down tradition, and (3) the living voice of the Catholic Church, that is, the decrees of the popes and councils. Whereas the Protestant appeal was more exclusively to the Bible alone, while rejecting the apocryphal books, this point is clearly seen almost a century later in what was placed in the Protestant “Westminster Confession of Faith” (1643):

“The books commonly called Apocrypha, not being of divine inspiration, are no part of the canon of Scripture; and are therefore of no authority in the Church of God, nor to be otherwise approved and made use of than other human writings” (Chapter 1, article 3, as quoted in *General Biblical Introduction*, H. S. Miller, p. 116).

That position, articulated in the Westminster Confession in 1643, was the position held by the Protestants, and probably the majority of Catholics, in the early years of the Reformation Movement that commenced in 1517. But undoubtedly the Council of Trent perceived that by making the Apocrypha a part of the official Catholic Bible, they could then charge the Protestants with having an incomplete Bible. Since most people were so ill-informed in these matters, the Catholic prelates knew full well that confusion would result from their decree. And even today, they still use this ploy when it is to their advan-

tage. Woe be unto any person or religious body that would dare “play politics” with the word of the living God! Please remember this point because the Catholic Church now boasts of having “given the world the Bible.” They distort the facts!

One of the main arguments for the Apocrypha’s being part of the Old Testament canon is that those books were a part of the Septuagint. So when Jesus and His apostles quoted from the Septuagint, they legitimized the apocryphal books along with the 39 canonical books. But evidence is lacking that any of the apocryphal books were originally a part of the Septuagint. In fact, it is extremely doubtful that any of them could have been because it is doubtful that any of the apocryphal books had been written by then. For example, we know that the two Maccabees’ books could not date earlier than 165 BC. Most scholars date the Septuagint at 280 BC, though some say it wasn’t completely finished for a number of years after that, 20 years or more. Even if that were the case, most of the Apocrypha was not even in existence at the time. Most scholars generally assign the writings of the Old Testament apocryphal books to the time from 200 BC until the coming of Christ—some say as late as AD 100. But more important, Jewish scholars have rejected the Apocrypha as part of the Old Testament canon from ancient times until the present. This is weighty proof they would not have added it to the Septuagint (LXX) when that work was done, even if the apocryphal books had been available to them. That they were later added to the Septuagint proves nothing because there are many unanswered questions as to who added them and when.

The Old Testament canon was complete and recognized by Jewish scholars, scribes, and leaders by 280 BC. On that point all agree. It might be interesting to note how the Jews view those 39 books that we recognize as the “Old Testament Scriptures.”

1. While we view them as:

Five books of law (Genesis–Deuteronomy); 12 books of history (Joshua–Esther); 5 books of poetry (Job–Song of Solomon); 17 books of the prophets (Isaiah–Malachi).

2. The Jews view them as:

Five books of law (same ones as we do),
Eight books of the prophets,
Earlier prophets: the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel (1 and 2 Samuel being combined into one book), and Kings (1 and 2 Kings being combined into one book).

- Later prophets: the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and The Twelve (the 12 minor prophets being combined into one book). The Writings: Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra (Ezra and Nehemiah being combined into one book), Chronicles (1 and 2 Chronicles being combined into one book), Job, Psalms, and Proverbs.
3. While we speak of 39 books in the Old Testament, the Jews speak of 24, but we're talking about the same books grouped differently.
 4. The Jews, and what are called Protestants in the realm of so-called Christendom, recognize the same Old Testament Canon. The Catholic Church added the Apocrypha in the middle of the 16th century for reasons quite clear.

I. THE FORMATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CANON

- A. From the establishment of the church (AD 33), and throughout the apostolic period, the gospel was communicated orally by the apostles and evangelists.
- B. From approximately AD 50 to 100, the New Testament Scriptures were written.
- C. The Gospel according to Luke is believed to have been written around AD 60, but it is interesting to note that he penned,

“Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to draw up a narrative concerning those matters which have been fulfilled among us . . . it seemed good to me also, having traced the course of all things accurately from the first, to write unto thee, most excellent Theophilus; that thou mightest know the certainty concerning the things wherein thou wast instructed” (Luke 1:1–4).

Who were these to whom Luke referred? Maybe Mark and perhaps even some who were not inspired. Certainly it is conceivable that uninspired men could have written their versions of what they were seeing and hearing. No doubt it was needful that accurate accounts be given, thus Luke was guided by the Holy Spirit in giving an exact account so we might be certain of what happened.

- D. Some believe Mark was the first of the New Testament writers. His account of the life of Christ is generally believed to have been written about AD 50. Others believe the epistle of James was the first book penned, perhaps as early as AD 45. Paul's earliest writings were his letters to the Thessalonians (c. AD 52). It is hard to know exact dates, especially of the earlier writings.

Dating such books as Mark and James is guesswork, but there are enough pieces of information to cause scholars to offer probabilities.

- E. During the apostolic days while the New Testament was being written, the people had the benefit of being instructed by inspired men. Christ had fulfilled His promise to give the apostles the Holy Spirit who would bring to their remembrance His teachings (John 14:26) and guide them into all truth (John 16:13). He had told them to remain in Jerusalem after His ascension to receive the power from on high (Luke 14:49). They followed His instructions (Acts 1:4–5, 8) and were baptized in the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1–4). Other men, such as Philip and Stephen, were given miraculous gifts of the Spirit by the laying on of the apostles' hands (Acts 6:1–10; 8:4–5, 12, 16–17).
- F. By the time of the death of the last apostle—probably John, who most likely expired shortly after penning the book of Revelation (AD 96)—all the books of the New Testament had been written. But they had not been collected into one volume. Churches shared letters they received. Note Paul's instructions to the Colossians: "And when this epistle hath been read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye also read the epistle from Laodicea" (Col. 4:16).
- G. The early Christians were careful and diligent in making copies of the inspired writings, as the Jews had been. As time passed and more copies were made, it is not surprising that they started gathering them together. There is evidence that the letters of the apostle Paul were circulating together among the churches as early as AD 90 and that the accounts of the life of Christ (the "four Gospels") were circulating together by AD 120. This is powerful evidence that the early Christians immediately recognized these writings as inspired, authentic, and authoritative and were eager to make them available to the faithful everywhere.
- H. Some have wondered: *What if some Christians didn't have immediate access to all the books at once?* In caring for the infant church, God made miraculous gifts of the Spirit available "to profit" the brethren (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:4–11). Even after the last apostle died, there were undoubtedly many who survived at least for a few years with gifts of knowledge and prophecy. All the while, those well versed in the truth were busy teaching others as is encouraged by Paul in 2 Timothy 2:2: "And the things which thou hast heard from me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also."

- I. So how were Christians directed between the death of the last apostle and the collection of the inspired writings, recognized universally among the saints as being the last will and testament of Jesus Christ? God in His providence saw to it that sufficient numbers of the writings were available, and that sufficient knowledge was passed on through teaching by faithful teachers and preachers to sustain the church. God chose to give His total revelation to humankind in His own way. This study is not to ask why but to understand how.
- J. Christians of the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd centuries did not have printing presses or typewriters; neither did they have modern transportation and communication systems. The process of copying and compiling books written in different times and places and by various writers was not an easy task. It took time. But we who believe in God and have studied the matter are amazed by His providence in the preservation and distribution of His Word.
- K. One of the most convincing proofs of the canonicity of the 27 New Testament books is that they are quoted from so extensively by the recognized leaders in the early church immediately following the apostolic times. That generation of leaders is called “the early church fathers.” The “ante-Nicene fathers” wrote before the Nicene Council (AD 325); “post-Nicene fathers,” after the Council.

A few of the more prominent ones are:

- 1. Clement of Rome (AD 30–100)
- 2. Ignatius (AD 30–115): believed to have been a fellow-disciple with the apostle John and with Polycarp
- 3. Polycarp (AD 69–155)
- 4. Justin Martyr (AD 100–165)
- 5. Irenaeus (AD 120–192)
- 6. Clement of Alexandria (AD 150–217)
- 7. Tertullian (AD 150–220)
- 8. Cyprian (AD 200–258)
- 9. Origen (AD 185–254)
- 10. Eusebius (AD 270–340)
- 11. Athanasius (AD 296–373)
- 12. Cyril of Jerusalem (AD 315–386)
- 13. John Chrysostom (AD 340–420)
- 14. Jerome (AD 340–420)
- 15. Augustine (AD 354–430)

Irenaeus, in his writings, appealed “to the apostles and their writings” to settle controversies among brethren. By the end of the 2nd century it was evident that there was to be a specific collection of books to serve as “the authority” in the “Christian religion.” By this time most of the books that were ultimately placed in the “New Testament Canon” were already recognized and accepted as inspired and authoritative. Origen compiled a list of 25 of the 27 books of our New Testament, questioning only two, 2 and 3 John. Eusebius agreed with Origen. Athanasius listed the 27 books as we have, with this note: “Let no man add to these; and let nothing be taken away.” His statement seems to have been the climax of the process of the formation of the New Testament canon because by then, this was evidently the consensus view. Jerome and Augustine both concurred with Athanasius.

- L. The Council of Damascus (AD 382), the Council of Hippo (AD 393), and the Council of Carthage (AD 397) recognized, accepted, and ratified the 27 books which comprise our New Testament.
- M. The only books of our New Testament ever disputed were James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude, and Revelation. Even though a few critics raised questions concerning these particular books through the years following the apostolic days, the preponderant evidence and the convictions of the vast majority of scholars in the first four centuries esteemed all 27 as canonical.
- N. Though to us the formation of the New Testament canon might appear slow, remember that the acceptance of each of these books as inspired and authentic dates from the days of the apostles. These books have been serving as God’s Word to humankind since they were first recorded. They had authority before they were collected together and were canonical from the day they were written, long before they were ever ratified by a council of men.
- O. By the close of the 4th century, “Christendom” was unanimous as to the canonicity of the same 27 books we have in our New Testament, to the exclusion of all others. The New Testament canon was not the result of an arbitrary selection by any council of men. Neither were the books picked and chosen by a “cafeteria line” approach. They were canonical because God gave them to us, and in His providence He has seen to it that we have exactly what He wanted us to have.

Appendage

Just as there were apocryphal writings surrounding the Old Testament, there were also apocryphal books surrounding the New Testament. These writings have been placed in two categories by scholars.

(NOTE: Remember, *apocrypha* means hidden or concealed; books of unknown origin, viewed as non-canonical. For example, Irenaeus said of a particular sect known as the Marcosians, “They adduce an unspeakable number of apocryphal and spurious writings, which they themselves have forged” (*The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, vol. 1, p. 213). The books called Pseudepigrapha, though certainly apocryphal also, are distinguished from the other apocryphal books in classification because they are books claiming to be by biblical writers and about biblical characters (ibid., vol. 9, p. 334). There is Old Testament Pseudepigrapha which we did not bother to distinguish from the broad Apocrypha and New Testament Pseudepigrapha. The distinction, quite frankly, seems a rather minute point but, nonetheless, is made.

1. Primary books of the New Testament Apocrypha—to mention some of the main ones:
 - a. The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles
 - b. The Epistle of Barnabas
 - c. The 1st and 2nd Epistle of Clement
 - d. The Shepherd of Hermas
 - e. The Apocalypse of Peter
 - f. The Acts of Paul
 - g. The Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians
 - h. The Gospel of Nicodemus
 - i. The History of Joseph the Carpenter
2. Primary books of the Pseudepigrapha—to mention some of the main ones:
 - a. Seven different books claiming to be accounts of the gospel—The Gospel of: Andrew, Bartholomew, Barnabas, Matthias, Thomas, Peter, Philip
 - b. Eight different books entitled Acts of: Paul, Peter, John, Andrew, Thomas, Matthias, Philip, Thaddaeus
 - c. Four books entitled The Apocalypse of: Peter, Paul, Thomas, John the Theologian

Translations of the Bible

Part I

This study is vital to a correct understanding of how we got the Bible in its present form. We've learned basic information about the time and place of writings, both of the Old and New Testament books, the languages in which they were written, the materials used, the difference between the original manuscripts, the manuscript copies available to scholars today, and something regarding the formation of the Old Testament and New Testament canons.

The scope of this work is not exhaustive. It would require several full-length books to address these matters fully. Beginning with this lesson, we will focus on the work of translating the Bible. We will learn why it was done, who did it and when, and something about the products of their labors. We owe a debt of gratitude to the great men of centuries ago who worked tirelessly, sometimes under perilous circumstances, so that others might have the Scriptures in their own languages.

From a practical standpoint, this is probably the most important lesson thus far. However, all the information previously supplied is needful.

I. DEFINITIONS AND FACTS OF INTEREST

- A. Translating is "the act of changing a composition from one language to another; a rendering in one language from another." It is the act of taking a composition which has been written in one language and putting it into another language.
- B. A translation is "a composition which has been changed from one language into another." Concerning translations with which we are familiar, there are two broad styles or methods. Usually our translations are a combination of the two. One translation may tend toward one method or style, and another toward the other method or style. That is where information (knowledge) is so important for us. We need to know as much as possible about all we're studying.
 - 1. A "literal translation" expresses, as nearly as possible, the exact meaning of each word being translated. This type of translation does not concern

itself with the flow of words so much as with accuracy. It tries to render each original word as a word in the new language nearest the meaning of that original word. While this sounds good, and certainly is to be desired, it does present problems because of the differences in languages, such as idioms—expressions peculiar to a particular language. While a literal translation is preferred, it is sometimes necessary to supply additional words in order to convey the precise meaning of the original text. The American Standard Version is generally considered the most literal English translation ever made.

2. A paraphrase is a “free translation” or a “restatement of a word, sentence, or context in which the sense of the original is retained, but expressed in other words, usually more fully so, for the purpose of making the meaning clearer.” This method can be helpful in giving the sense of what was written, but it is also fraught with the danger of the translator injecting his own personal bias or opinion. Especially is this true, and so often seen, as in the case of *The Living Bible, Paraphrased*, which is a one-man production filled with the error from the theological bias of the man who produced it.
3. A version is “a translation of a literary composition from one language to another.” Obviously it is a word that for all intents and purposes can be used interchangeably with “translation.” A revised version is simply a translation, which at a later date, has been revised. A prime example of the latter is the Revised Standard Version of 1952, which is a revision of The American Standard Version of 1901.
4. Facts of interest
 - a. No book has come close to being translated into so many languages as has the Bible. For any book to be translated into as many as three languages is considered an accomplishment. And on those rare occasions when one is translated into 10 languages, that is considered quite amazing.
 - b. The Bible, even before the printing press was invented in the middle of the 15th century, had been translated in whole or part into more than 30 languages! By 1800 it was in over 70 languages! So speedily did the work of translating continue that by 1830, 86 additional languages were added, making a total of more than 150! By 1950 the Bible had been translated in whole or in part into more than 1000 languages and dialects—179 of these of the complete Bible, and 212 of the whole New Testament.

- c. Before the end of the 20th century, the entire Bible was available in nearly 300 languages and parts of it in nearly 2000 other languages and dialects! And how many other language translations have been made in the last 15 years! No other book can even come close to making such a claim. How could this possibly be explained apart from acknowledging the Bible as being God's inspired Word? In His providence God has used the minds and hands of many people to dispense His Word. We can be glad for such organizations as the World Bible Translation Center, the American Bible Society, and the Gideons, organizations who have made Bibles available to people all over the world. (This is not an endorsement of the particular religious beliefs of any of these organizations, but merely a statement of gratitude for their dissemination of God's Word.)

II. ANCIENT OLD TESTAMENT TRANSLATIONS

- A. The first known translation of any portion of Scripture was parts of the Old Testament into Aramaic from Hebrew. We know that work as "The Targums," coming from the Aramaic word *targem*, meaning "to interpret, to explain, to translate."

The Jews who returned from Babylonian captivity (c. 536 BC) found that in the environs of Jerusalem the Aramaic language had largely replaced Hebrew. Those Jews who returned from captivity about the time of Ezra (458 BC) found it difficult to communicate with the local people. Although Hebrew and Aramaic were very similar, there were enough differences to hinder communication. The Old Testament Scriptures (Hebrew) could be read only through an interpreter. The Targums began to be translated around 450 BC. The completed work required a number of years. The Targums consist of the Pentateuch, the Prophets, and the Holy Writings: Psalms, Proverbs, Job, most of the Chronicles, and Esther.

- B. The next translating project took place in Samaria and resulted in Samaritan Pentateuch. Here is its historical background.

The Samaritan race originated after Sargon, king of Assyria, had conquered the northern kingdom, Israel (721 BC). Sargon is mentioned only one time in the Bible (Isaiah 20:1). Evidence gleaned through writings and inscriptions discovered through archaeology indicate he followed Shalmaneser, who is believed to have died in the siege of Samaria (cf. 2 Kings 17). Customarily, ancient kings, in order to demoralize and denationalize a conquered nation and

squelch rebellion, relocated a portion of the conquered people and brought other conquered people into the newly conquered territory. This procedure confused the captives by complicating their ability to organize, thereby diluting possible concerted efforts to overthrow their conquerors. Pertaining to the region of Samaria, this procedure by the Assyrians is clearly outlined in 2 Kings 17:5–6, 24. The Israelites who remained in the region intermarried with those whom Sargon had brought to Samaria, the region between Judea and Galilee. Between the collapse of the northern kingdom (Israel) in 721 BC to the return of the southern kingdom (Judah) from Babylonian captivity under the leadership of Ezra (458 BC)—Zerubbabel and Nehemiah had already led some back from captivity: 536 BC and 444 BC, respectively—the people of Samaria had become a mixed race and, in the process, their worship of God had also been polluted by pagan practices.

When Ezra and Nehemiah perceived what had happened not only in Samaria but also among the remnant of Judea, they addressed the matter (cf. Ezra 10; Neh. 13:23ff).

The Samaritans became almost totally isolated from the pure Jewish community. They set up their own priesthood, worship, and temple. They continued to observe circumcision, the Sabbath, and the yearly feasts, but their religion became more and more polluted with the passing of time. However, they had in their possession, and held to it tenaciously, the Hebrew Pentateuch. But the reading of it, in time, presented problems, because, along with their religion, their language also had been contaminated. It became an admixture of Hebrew and the languages of the imported peoples. It was indeed an amalgamation language, the language of the Samaritans. Therefore, by about 430 BC, they translated the Hebrew Pentateuch into the Samaritan Pentateuch, using the Samaritan alphabet.

C. Now we come to the most famous Old Testament translation of all time, the Septuagint. Some important historical insights will help us understand the need for such a translation.

1. Just prior to, during, and after the destruction of Jerusalem by King Nebuchadnezzar (586 BC), many Jews fled to Egypt, escaping the Babylonians. Many of them settled for life in Egypt.
2. More than two centuries passed, and several pages in the annals of human history turned. The power structure of the world had shifted from the Mesopotamia area to Greece and from King Nebuchadnezzar to Alexander the Great. Under Alexander's dynamic leadership, the Greeks had conquered Phoenicia, Palestine, Egypt, and several other places. In Egypt in

about 332 BC, Alexander founded a city and appropriately named it Alexandria. Being much impressed with the Palestinian Jews, as well as those living in Egypt, he persuaded many of them to take up residence in Alexandria with full citizenship and positions of leadership.

3. Alexander's aim was to conquer the world and impose Greek language and culture upon it. But he died in 323 BC and his empire was divided into four parts. Egypt, along with Cyrene, Cyprus, Phoenicia, and Palestine came under the Ptolemies. Ptolemy I (323–285 BC) brought thousands of Jews from Jerusalem to Alexandria, gave them full religious freedom and citizens' rights, and bestowed many favors upon them. He founded the famous Alexandrian library which soon became the largest and greatest in the world. He also established a university. Alexandria became a favorable place for the Jews; they flourished there. Ptolemy II—Philadelphus (285–247 BC)—followed in his father's footsteps, giving impetus to Alexandria as the center of learning.
4. By the time of Ptolemy II, the Greek language had been well established throughout most of the Mediterranean region. It had become the language employed in the education center of Alexandria and also in business intercourse among the peoples of the area.
5. Although the Jews held closely to their religion, in order to maintain their social and business standing throughout the region, they had to forego general usage of their beloved Hebrew language in exchange for Greek, especially in Egypt.
6. The need then arose to convert the Old Testament Scriptures from Hebrew to Greek. A most interesting story has been around for centuries, telling how all this came about. The story can be traced back to the time that the Greek translation commenced (280 BC) and was repeated by such notable ancients as Aristobulus (150 BC), Philo (AD 40), and Josephus (AD 90). Later such illustrious "church fathers" as Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Cyril, and Augustine, subscribed to the story.

So the story goes: The librarian, Demetris Phalaris of the great Alexandrian royal library, approached the king concerning having the Hebrew law in the Greek language for the library. The king was pleased with the idea and dispatched distinguished emissaries with costly gifts and a letter to the high priest in Jerusalem asking him to send a copy of the Hebrew Scriptures and six recognized scholars from each of the 12 tribes to Alexandria for the purpose of translating the Old Testament into the Greek language. Upon the arrival of the 72 scholars and a copy of the Old