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We exist to love Jesus and live for Him.

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We envision a congregation whose love for Jesus and one another leaves a clear and compelling witness for Christ.

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men.
Colossians 3:23

Bible Trivia

From what New Testament event do we derive the English word "excruciating?"

Answer from last month: The word "maudlin" comes from Mary Magdalene, who was thought to be excessively penitent and sentimental.



The Bible Translated, Part 1 by Brian Watson

In last month's article, I wrote about the way the Bible was transmitted over time through thousands of manuscripts. This month, I am writing about the early history of Bible translations in English. Though this subject may seem dry, it is imperative for the Christian to understand how we have received the Bible. The foundation of our faith rests securely on the authority of God's Word, and many enemies of Christ continue to challenge the Bible's authority. They base their attacks upon dishonest and biased attempts to cast doubts upon the transmission and translation of the Bible that we use today. Knowing a bit of history will help you to trust the Bible as well as aid your selection of the best translation for you.

To review from last month, the Hebrew and Greek manuscripts used for the basis of all translations of the Bible were copies of copies of copies. No original manuscripts (called autographs) written by the authors of the Bible exist, at least to our knowledge. Some manuscripts are older and are therefore closer to the time of the Bible's writing. We have other manuscripts that were produced later and, because they are further removed in time from the Bible's writing, are thought to be less reliable - though certainly not *unreliable*. This information is important to bear in mind as we look at the history of Bible translations.

It is also important to remember that the original Greek text of the New Testament is itself, in part, a translation. In the Gospels and Acts, Jesus, his disciples and those around them spoke Aramaic, yet the manuscripts that we have are almost completely in Greek. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John therefore translated the Aramaic dialogue into Greek, the common language of the Mediterranean. This fact is important to know. God, in His sovereignty, made sure that the Bible incorporated translation from the beginning.

Since the New Testament was written in Greek, it could be read widely across the Roman Empire, accelerating the advance of Christianity. I also get the sense that God wanted us to be comfortable with receiving His Word in translation from the beginning. After all, most Christians have learned the Gospel by reading the Bible in translation, not from the original languages. God's message comes through powerfully regardless of the translation - and, in some cases, even in spite of the translation.

One of the most significant early translations of the Bible is the Latin Vulgate, made by Jerome. His work at the end of the fourth century A.D. was extremely influential to the church. The Old Testament of the Vulgate is the first translation from Hebrew into Latin (previous translations used the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament made between 250 -100 B.C.). The New Testament is a revision of an earlier Old Latin translation, using the best Greek manuscripts available. Latin had superseded Greek as the language of the Roman Empire and, consequently, the Roman Catholic Church. Jerome completed the Old Testament in 405 and the Latin Vulgate was the Bible of the Western church for about a thousand years.

During that thousand-year period, there were a few isolated attempts at translating the Bible into English, but, in general, there was little interest in making an English translation from the original languages. A strong desire to translate the Bible into English came only as the seeds of the Protestant Reformation were sewn and started to take root.

The earliest translation of the

entire Bible into English came from John Wycliffe (c. 1324-1384) and his followers. Wycliffe railed against the papacy and is referred to as "The Morning Star of the Reformation." Mostly the work of his followers, the Lollards, the Wycliffe Bible was translated from the Vulgate. The Catholic Church did not want the Bible translated into the language of the people, at least not outside of their control, and they tried to thwart this translation. At the Council of Constance, held between 1414 and 1418 - well after Wycliffe's death from natural causes - the Church declared that he was a heretic. They ordered his bones to be exhumed and burned, an event that happened in 1428.

Before we continue to the next major English translation, we must take note of a few events in history. One major event was the development of the printing press in the mid-fifteenth century by Johannes Gutenberg. The famous "Gutenberg Bible" was the printing of the Latin Vulgate in about 1455. The printing press helped make books more available and encouraged literacy. Before this time, all books were handwritten. Now copies of the Bible could be produced quickly and inexpensively. The other major event in history was the Protestant Reformation. Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the door of the Castle Church at Wittenberg, an event regarded as the catalyst for the Reformation. Before that happened, an anti-Catholic sentiment had already been growing and in 1516 Erasmus had produced the first printed Greek New Testament. The desire to go "to the source" was an underlying factor in both the Reformation and the desire to translate the Bible into the common language for the common man. (Luther himself published his German Bible in 1534.)

The Bible Transmitted, Part 2 *continued from front*

All of these developments bring us to William Tyndale, "the true father of the English Bible." One can see his goal in translating the Bible into English in a famous quote delivered to one of his opponents: "If God spare my life, before many years I will make sure that a boy who drives the plough knows more of the Scripture than you do." He first translated the New Testament from Erasmus's Greek text, then began work on the Old Testament, all the while fleeing from persecution. His New Testament was printed as early as 1524 and his Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible) was printed in 1530. He was able to translate a good portion of the Old Testament, from Genesis through 2 Chronicles, as well as Jonah. Unfortunately, England was still tied to the Catholic Church when he began his work and though Henry VIII broke from the Church in 1534, Tyndale was still arrested in 1535 and was burned at the stake soon after. As he was dying, he cried out, "Lord, open the King of England's eyes."

Tyndale rightly desired that his translation be in the language of the people, not in the language of the scholar. The Bible was indeed written for the people and the New Testament was written in the common form of Greek known as *koine*. Tyndale's translation deserves to be known because not only was it the first English Bible to be made from the original languages, but also because his ear for the English language produced many memorable phrases. Tyndale's influence upon the English Bible is still felt today and his translation was the basis for a number of versions of the Bible that were produced in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. (If you own a KJV, NKJV, NASB, or ESV Bible, you are indebted to Tyndale, for all of these Bibles can be traced back to his work.)

Tyndale's work was incorporated into a number of English Bibles of the 1500s. The Coverdale Bible (1535), Matthew's Bible (1537), Taverner's Bible (1539), the Great Bible (1539), and the Bishops' Bible (1568) were all revisions of Tyndale's work. The Geneva Bible (1560) remained very popular for quite some time, even after the King James Version was published in 1611. It was the Bible of Shakespeare, the Jamestown Settlement in Virginia, and the Pilgrims. The Geneva Bible is

notable because it was the first English Bible to use verse numbers (chapters and verses were not in the original manuscripts of the Bible, but were incorporated in the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries, respectively). It was printed in Roman type, as opposed to Gothic type, and it came with a number of study helps, such as maps, indexes, and even commentaries.

While Tyndale's Bible might have been more influential, the most famous English Bible translation is the King James Version, also known as the Authorized Version. King James I succeeded Queen Elizabeth on the throne in 1603, and he began to seek reconciliation between various religious parties such as the Protestants, Catholics, and Puritans. He wanted a Bible that did not have biased marginal notes or commentaries. Work on the KJV started in 1607 and was completed by 1611. This translation was not entirely new. The goal was to revise the 1602 edition of the Bishops' Bible, while consulting earlier translations such as the Tyndale, Coverdale, Matthew and Great Bibles. The KJV was the best translation available at the time because Hebrew and Greek scholarship had improved, the language (more 75 percent of which was Tyndale's) was couched in classic English style, and it was the work of a committee, as almost all subsequent major translations are.

That being said, the KJV is not a perfect translation, nor is it the best one available today by any means. A number of factors make modern translations more accurate and desirable. The first and perhaps most important factor is that of the underlying Hebrew and Greek texts. The earliest and best manuscripts were found well after the King James Version was published and after it underwent significant revision in 1769. (The KJV Bibles on sale today are based on the 1769 revision; the original 1611 version had the Apocrypha, books of the Old Testament that are not recognized as inspired.) Also, advances in archaeology and Hebrew and Greek study have improved our understanding of certain words, such as names of geographical locations. A third factor is the constant changing of

the English language. In James 5:11 of the KJV, we read that "the Lord is very pitiful." Of course, "pitiful" used to mean full of pity, or compassionate. Psalms 47:2 states "the LORD most high is terrible." "Terrible" used to mean capable of producing terror or fear. In Philemon 20, Paul writes "refresh my bowels in the Lord." These are but a few examples of why new translations are continually needed.

We must remember that the purpose of a translation is to take the source language (Hebrew or Greek) and translate it into the receptor language (in this case, English). Though the source languages do not change, the receptor language will. My point in the paragraph above is not to disparage the King James Version of the Bible. This translation is important and is beloved; if you use it today and understand it, there is no need to change to another Bible. However, there are newer translations that are both more understandable in today's English and more accurate, and these, too, are God's Word. Unfortunately, there are those in America who believe that the KJV is the only perfectly preserved English version of God's perfectly inspired Word. They believe that God ordained the KJV to be the only legitimate English Bible. Scripture does not support this belief, nor does history or archaeology or even common sense, and this belief is one that is divisive. As Christians, we have the freedom to read whichever translation of the Bible we feel is best. If you are reading a translation made by honest scholars who are experts in the source and receptor languages, you will be reading the Word of God. Remember that there is no perfect translation; if you want to read the original words of the Bible, you'd better start learning Hebrew and Greek.

To help you understand which translation is best for you, I will discuss translation philosophies and modern Bible translations in next month's article. In the meantime, I suggest David Dewey's *A User's Guide to Bible Translations* to those interested in this subject.