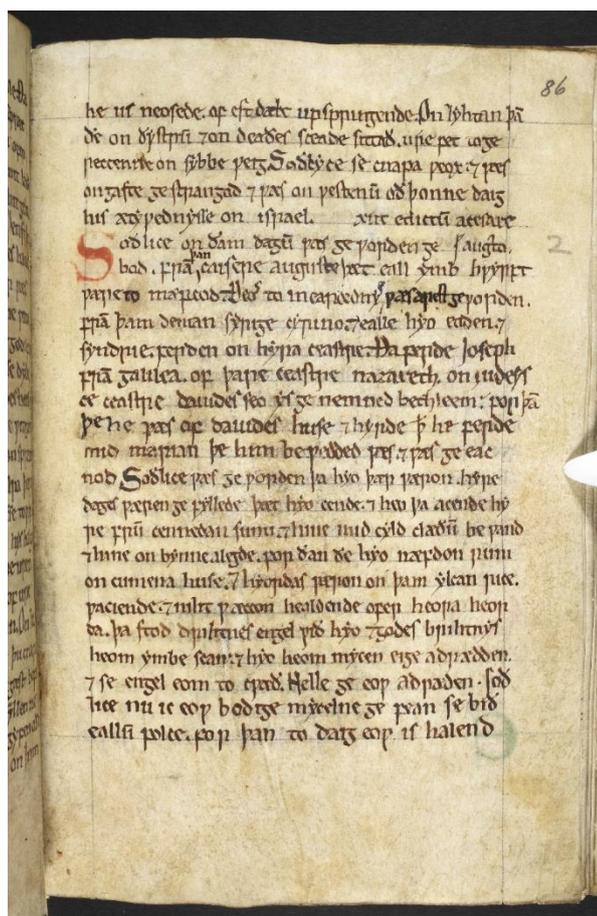


The English Bible (Part 1)

A number of ancient and contemporary Bibles in English and other foreign languages are now on display at Church. Take time to have a look at them. Ponder on the fact that although characters and formats have varied over the decades, unlike emperors and dynasties, the heart of His Word has never changed.

This 2-part article, written to accompany the Bible exhibition, will not cover the origins of the Old and New Testaments as Hebrew and Greek manuscripts, or the Septuagint (LXX, translation of the Old Testament from Hebrew into Greek by 70 scholars around 200 BCE), or the first major evolution of translations into Latin, and the canonization of the scripture. These would merit separate expositions. We will focus mainly on the arrival of the Holy Bible in the English language. I will be a modest storyteller, and I hope it can inspire!

The first translation of portions of the Bible into English probably occurred at around the 8th to 9th century, written in the "**Old English**" of the time. Regrettably no copies of these works have survived. The earliest surviving manuscripts of biblical texts in English are the "**West Saxon Gospels**" dating from around the 10th century, a copy of which is now housed in the British Library.



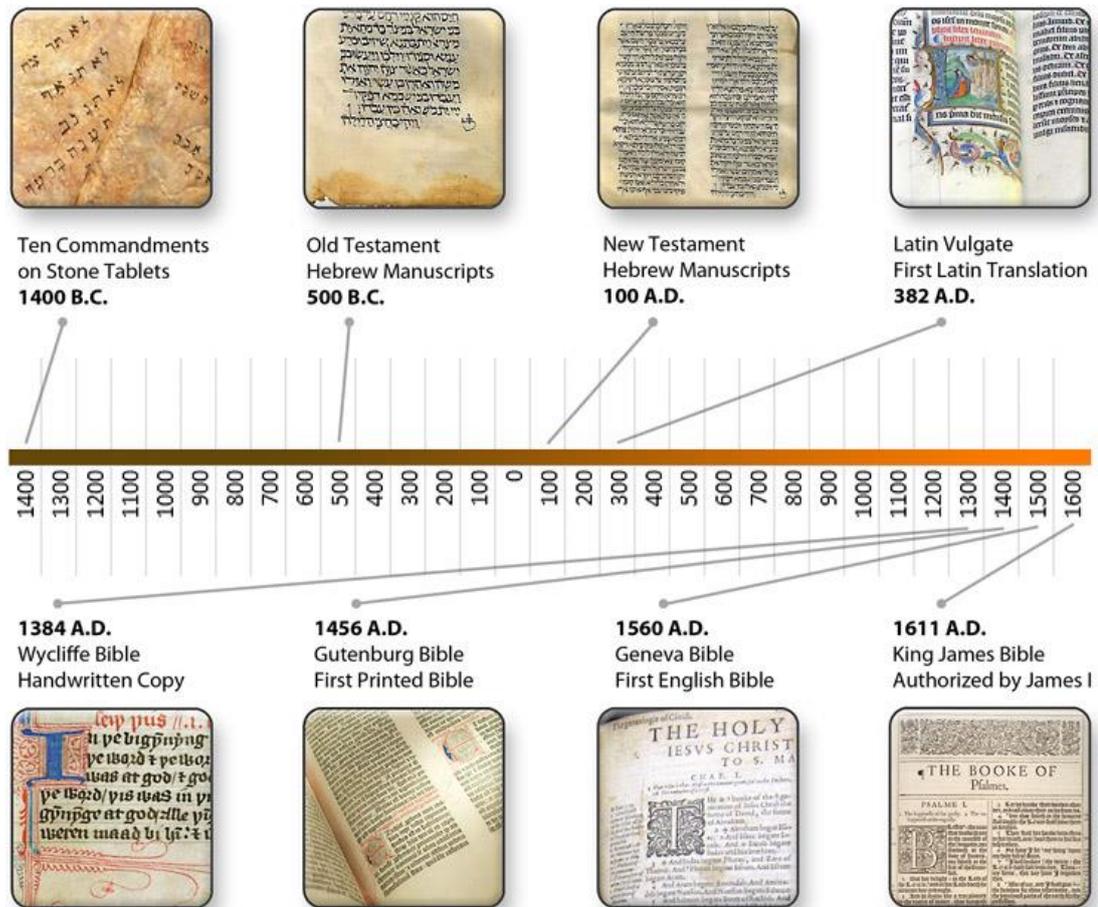
The West Saxon Gospels, now housed in the British Library, is probably the earliest Bible in English surviving to this day. (image credit: Wikipedia)

In time, as the English language changed, such early translations fell into disuse. While people thought that the King James Version is "Old English" (Thou art, thy, thee etc.), it is actually an early form of modern English. Here are a few lines from the **Lord's prayer** in the **West Saxon Gospels**:

"Fæder ure þu þe eart on heofonum; Si þin nama gehalgod to-becume þin rice gewurþe ðin willa on eorðan swa swa on heofonum," (Matthew 6:9-10, West Saxon Gospels of 990, in old English).

Translation from the "Old English" would be: ***"Our Father you who are in heaven, may your name be sanctified may your realm come may your will be realized on earth as in heaven"***.

In modern familiar versions: ***"Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven"***.



Landmarks of the evolvement of English Bible Translations
 (Credits: <http://lordsave.weebly.com>)

The earliest note-worthy translation of the Bible into English was the **John Wycliffe Bible** of the 14th Century. John Wycliffe was in many ways a forerunner to the Protestant Reformation. He taught against the power of the pope, the idolatry of the celebrated Mass, the attachments to relics, and prayers to saints. Together with many Christian scholars, he inspired the first complete translation of the entire Bible into English. In the early Middle Ages, most Christians encountered the Bible only in the form of oral versions of Scriptures in Latin. The translators worked from the **Vulgate** (BIBLIA SACRA VVLGATAE), the Latin Bible* that was the standard Biblical text of Western Christianity. It conforms fully with Catholic teaching.



The Wycliffe Bible, New Testament. Pen written, early 15th Century

Wycliffe, and many that followed, believed that the Bible belonged to all the people of God, and it was out of this conviction that brought forth the effort of bringing the Bible into the common English of the day. When the Reformation began through men like **Martin Luther*** and **Philipp Melancthon** two centuries later, they quickly recognized the need to make the **Word of God** available in the languages spoken by everyday Christians.

As the New Testament was written in Greek and the Old Testament in Hebrew, the English translation ought to be coming from these initial languages (tongues) and not from Latin. This is another reason why despite the fact that the Wycliffe's Bible circulated widely in the later Middle Ages, it had very little influence on the first English biblical translations of the Reformation era such as those of **William Tyndale** and **Myles Coverdale**, and consequently was generally ignored in later English Protestant biblical scholarship. About 200 copies of the Wycliffe's Bible (hand-written) have survived to this date. A copy was sold at a Sotheby's auction in 2016 for 1.7 million US dollars.

In 1516, Dutch scholar **Desiderius Erasmus**, living against the backdrop of the growing European religious Reformation, had very importantly published the first edition of his Greek New Testament, with four other editions to follow between 1519 and 1536. **Erasmus** derived his text primarily from two **12th century Greek New Testament manuscripts**. It was later called the "**Textus**

Receptus". Stephanus (also called Robert Estienne) from France followed on with important revisions*. In 1526, William Tyndale published the first edition of his English New Testament, a translation from Erasmus' Greek text.



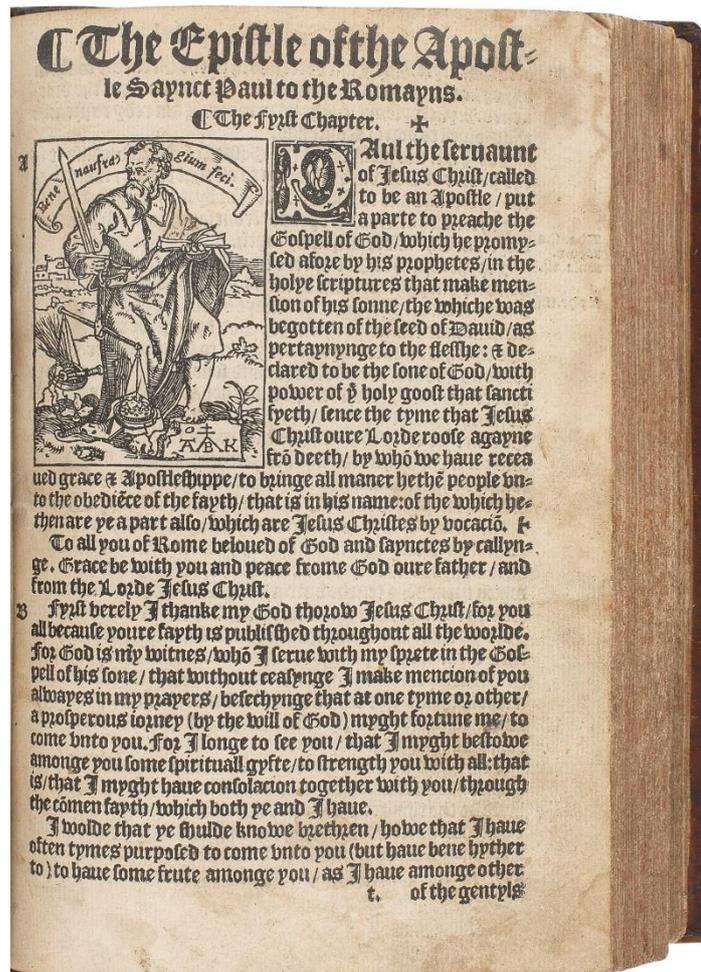
Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536)

William Tyndale (1494 – 1536) was an English scholar who became a leading figure in the Protestant reformation in the years leading up to his execution. He is well known for his (incomplete) translation of the Bible into English. More importantly, Tyndale's translation was the first English Bible to draw directly from Hebrew and Greek texts and the first English translation to take advantage of the newly invented printing press (*Johannes Gutenberg process, "the Work of the books", see below*). It was also taken to be a direct challenge to the authority of both the Catholic Church and the monarchy and laws of England that were governing the church's position.



William Tyndale (1494 - 1536)

In 1530, **Tyndale** opposed **King Henry VIII's** planned marriage to Catherine of Aragon in favour of Anne Boleyn, on the grounds that it was unscriptural. Eventually, Tyndale was seized in Antwerp, Belgium in 1535, was tried on a charge of heresy in 1536, and condemned to be executed by burning to death.



Tyndale's New Testament c. 1536. Printed by metal press.
(This page: The Epistle to The Romans)

Tyndale died failing to complete his goal of producing an entire English Bible. One of his associates, **Miles Coverdale** carried on the work after him. In 1535, the Coverdale Bible was published, becoming the first complete Bible in modern English. Shortly afterwards in 1537, John Rogers, (a publisher and devout Christian scholar, who himself died being a martyr for his convictions), released a Bible under the pseudonym, "**Thomas Matthew.**" This "**Matthew Bible**"* was deliberately based mostly on the work of **William Tyndale.**



Myles Cloverdale (1488-1569)

Obviously, it was not before long the English Monarchs began to see the value and necessity of having the Bible in the native tongue. Rather than continuing to resist and punish Bible translations, the state commissioned the first official, authorized version of the English Bible, which was first published in 1539. The resulting translation came to be known as the "**Great Bible**," in part because its copies were printed very large and were meant for formal use in church services. Other authorized versions would follow, namely the **Bishop's Bible** (published in several revisions from 1568-1602), and finally the very celebrated **King James Version (Bible)** of 1611.

*(The **Gutenberg Bible** was among the first books printed using mass produced **movable metal type**, rather than each book having to be written by hand. It marked the start of the "Gutenberg Revolution", the age of printed books in the West. In a scientific paper written after completion of the Bible, Johannes Gutenberg referred to the process as *Das Werk der Bücher* ("the work of the books"). He had created the technology to make printing finally efficient enough for the mass production of entire book. In a very real way, the publication of the Geneva Bible at the beginning of the 16th century marked the beginning of the modern printed Bible).*

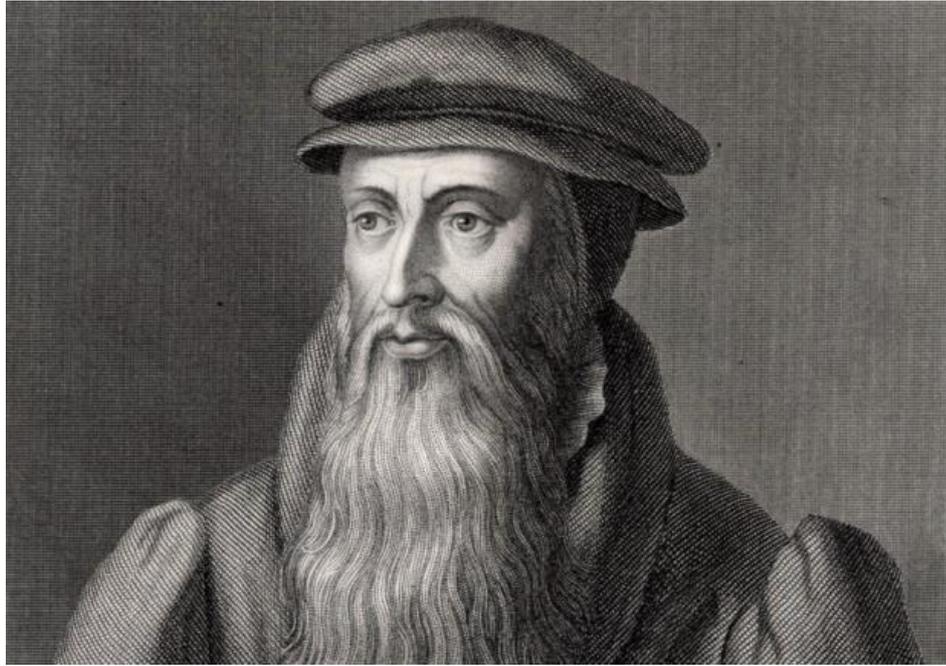
Persecution against protestants broke out again in England during the reign of Queen Mary I of England (1553–58) and a number of Protestant scholars fled from England to **Geneva, Switzerland**, which was then ruled as a republic in which **John Calvin** and **John Knox** provided the primary spiritual and theological leadership. There, with other authors, they published the very influential "**Geneva Bible.**" *



The Geneva Bible* , 1576.

The first full edition of the **Geneva Bible**, with a further revised New Testament, appeared in 1560, but it was not printed in England until 1575 (New Testament) and 1576 (the complete Bible). The very first Bible printed in Scotland was also the Geneva Bible, which was first issued in 1579. In fact, by that time, a law was passed requiring every household of sufficient means to buy a copy!

The Geneva Bible was the first Bible to use verse numbers based on the work of **Stephanus (Estienne)**, then living in Geneva. This version of the Bible is also significant because it came with a variety of scriptural study guides which included verse citations that allowed the reader to cross-reference relevant verses with the rest of the Bible.



**John Knox (1514-1572),
one of the major contributors of the Geneva Bible**

Summary and Timeline of Bible Translations in the English language

500 BC: Completion of All

Original Hebrew Manuscripts

which made up the 39 Books of the Old Testament.

200 BC: Completion of the

Septuagint Greek Manuscripts

which contained the 39 Old Testament Books AND 14 Apocrypha Books.

1st Century AD: Completion of all original Greek Manuscripts which made up the 27 Books of the New Testament.

315 AD: Athanasius, the Bishop of Alexandria, identified the 27 books of the New Testament which were recognized as the canon of scripture.

382 AD: Jerome's Latin Vulgate

Manuscripts produced, containing all 80 Books (39 Old Testaments. + 14 Apocrypha + 27 New Testaments).

500 AD: Scriptures have been translated into over 500 languages.

600 AD: LATIN was the only language allowed for Scripture.

1384 AD: Wycliffe was the first person to produce a hand-written manuscript copy of the Complete Bible; All 80 Books.

1455 AD: Gutenberg invented the printing press; books may now be mass-produced instead of individually hand-written. The first book ever printed was Gutenberg's Bible in Latin.

1516 AD: Erasmus produced a **Greek/Latin Parallel New Testament.**

1522 AD: Martin Luther's German New Testament.

1526 AD: William Tyndale's New Testament; The First New Testament printed in the English Language, and Tyndale eventually executed.

1535 AD: Myles Coverdale's Bible; The First Complete Bible printed

in the English Language (80 Books: O.T. & N.T. & Apocrypha).

1537 AD: Tyndale-Matthews Bible; The Second Complete Bible printed in English. Done by John "Thomas Matthew" Rogers (80 Books).

1539 AD: The "Great Bible" printed; The first English Language Bible authorized for public use (80 Books).

1560 AD: The Geneva Bible Printed; The first English Language Bible to add numbered verses to each chapter (80 Books).

1568 AD: The Bishops Bible Printed; The Bible of which the King James was a Revision (80 Books).

1609 AD: The Douay Old Testament was added to the Rheims New Testament (of 1582) making the first complete English Catholic Bible; translated from the Latin Vulgate (80 Books).

1611 AD: The King James Bible Printed; originally with all 80 Books. The Apocrypha was officially removed in 1885 leaving only 66 Books.

1782 AD: Robert Aitken's Bible; The first English language Bible (KJV) printed in America.

1791 AD: Isaac Collins and Isaiah Thomas respectively produced the first Family Bible and first illustrated Bible printed in America. Both were King James Versions, with all 80 Books.

1885 AD: The "English Revised Version" Bible; The first major

English revision of the KJV.

1901 AD: The "American Standard Version"; the first major American revision of the KJV.

1971 AD: The "New American Standard Bible" (NASB) was published as a "modern and accurate word for word English translation" of the Bible.

1973 AD: The "New International Version" (NIV) was published as a "modern and accurate phrase=for=phrase English translation" of the Bible.

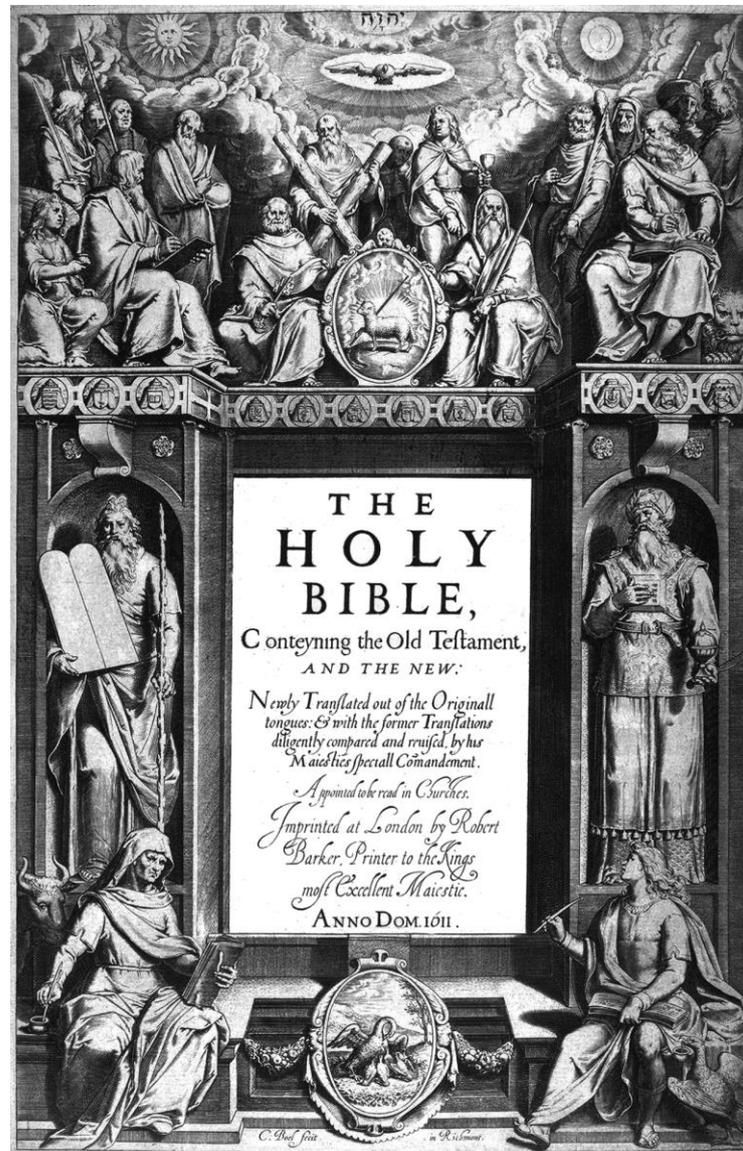
2002 AD: The English Standard Version (ESV) was published as a translation to bridge the gap between the accuracy of the NASB and the readability of the NIV.

More important translations and their significance are in bold-type.

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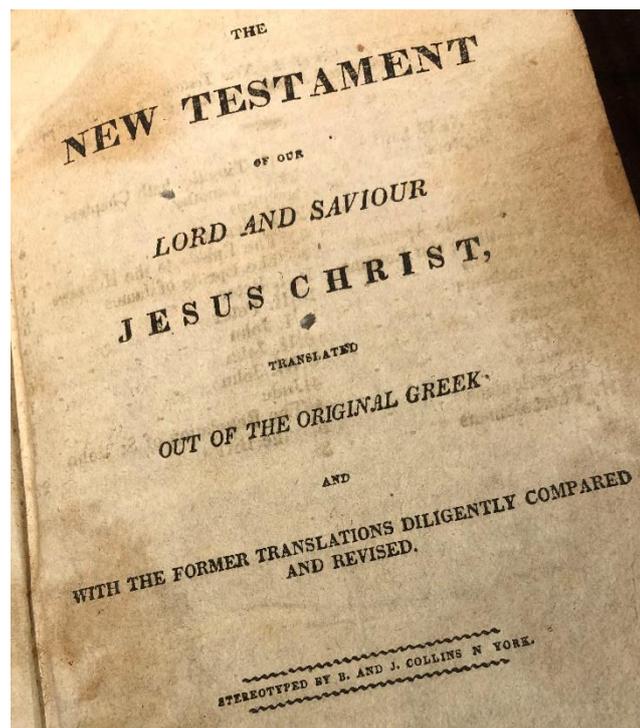
The Monarchy of Kings and Queens changed hands and soon most of the exiled scholars returned to their English homelands. Early in the reign of **King James I**, he called a council of bishops to debate some of the central issues between reformists within the Church of England. A proposal was brought to the King to authorize and commission a new, official translation of the Bible to update and replace the Bishop's Bible. The king agreed, partly because he was very much displeased with perceived "anti-monarchical" statements in some of the study notes in the Geneva Bible. The Geneva Bible was then still the most popular English translation, and the king hoped that the new translation would replace it.



The Authorized Version, or the King James Version, first printing, 1611

Thus, **the King James Version* (KJV)** translators were ready to produce a "fresh" translation, basing on the "literal" approach rather than an "equivalence " approach. Nevertheless, they were still choosing between the wordings used by previous translators. Since these previous translations were often much older, this resulted in the "side-effect" of the KJV retaining some of the language that was dated even in its own day.

Like English translations before it, the KJV included the Apocrypha as an appendix. The translators did not hold these books to be inspired Scripture, but considered them valuable for their historical content and their place in Christian tradition. For the New Testament, the KJV translators consulted the Greek text of the various editions of **Erasmus**, as well as later revisions of his work by **Stephanus**. The Apocrypha was Officially removed in 1885, leaving only 66 Books. (Readers are encouraged to check out articles on the KJV in the Wikipedia website).



The many versions of Bible that came after the **KJV** often has at its front page the indication that **“it is translated out of the original Greek”** and **“with the formal translations diligently compare and revised”**.

Although the **King James Version** is possibly the most “respected” and anchoring version in history, not too many Christians are using it today,

largely because of its "older" language. A good deal of present-day scholars still maintain that therein are the most accurate translations of the original Hebrew and Greek manuscripts. The many versions of Bible that came after the KJV often has at its front page the indication that "it is translated out of the original Greek (or tongue)" and "with the formal translations diligently compare and revised". Important later translations both in Great Britain and North America arose directly or indirectly from the KJV, including the 「和合本聖經 (Union Version)」 in early 20th century China.

Interested brothers and sisters are also encouraged to run through the attached "Summary and Timeline of Bible Translations in the English language", courtesy of the Greatsite.com.

In Part 2 of the article, we will take a look at how the Holy Bible will be classified as a literal or equivalence translations and how we would be choosing from the popular contemporary Bible versions such as the NIV, the ESV, the NRSV and the NASB.

Main text source:

- 1) Wikipedia
- 2) A brief History of Bible Translations - Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry: (Carm.org.)
3. The greatsite .com.
4. lordsave.weebly.com

*A copy of the Stephanus (Erasmus) Textus Receptus (in Greek, 1550), the Geneva Bible (1580), the Martin Luther Bible (in German, 1820), the King James Version (1638) and leaves of the Latin Vulgate (1240) and Matthew Bible (1549) are now on display.