

How We Got Our Bible

THE COPYING OF THE BIBLE

Introduction to Preservation

After inspiring the Bible, God has preserved it through time. Otherwise, the original words would have been lost, garbled, or destroyed. We want to consider the following questions:

1. Did God promise to preserve His Word?
2. Does God preserve His Word miraculously or providentially? In other words, does God intervene supernaturally to preserve His Word, or does He use man in ordinary ways to preserve it?
3. To what detail has God preserved His original words?

Did God promise to preserve His Word?

Some people say God explicitly gave such a promise in the following verses. But close examination shows that God has not explicitly given such a promise.

Psa. 119:89 Forever, O LORD, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens.

- This means God will not change His mind about what He has said, and it will never turn out to be false.

The same idea is meant by the following verses:

Psa. 119:152 Long have I known from your testimonies that you have founded them forever.

Is. 40:8 The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.

Matt. 5:17–19 “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, **until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.** Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

- This means even the smallest portions of Scripture are binding and are fulfilled by Christ

Matt. 24:35 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

- This means that Christ’s words will be fulfilled.

Luke 16:16–17 “The Law and the Prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone forces his way into it. But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void.

- This means that no part of Scripture will fail to accomplish its purpose.

1 Pet. 1:22–25 Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and **abiding word of God**;

for

“All flesh is like grass
and all its glory like the flower of grass.

The grass withers,
and the flower falls,

but **the word of the Lord remains forever.**”

And this word is the good news that was preached to you.

- Peter quotes Isa 40:8 and is saying that the Word of God makes a lasting impact upon the life of the believer.

So God has not explicitly promised to preserve His Word. However, the Bible and church history show God preserving His Word, as we will see in the next section.

Does God preserve His Word miraculously or providentially?

The Bible shows God using men to preserve Scripture.

Jer 36:1-4, 22-23, 26-28, 32

- God did not miraculously prevent the king from destroying Scripture. God did not miraculously reconstitute the book from the ashes. Instead, He used Jeremiah and Baruch to preserve Scripture.

God expects men to be zealous in preserving His Word. The Book of Moses was lost for about 50 years before the reign of Josiah. During this time, God punished Israel for being careless with His Word. See 2 Kings 22:8, 10-13.

Church history shows God providentially preserving Scripture.

- James Boice: “Today, after the Bible has been translated, in part or whole, into many hundreds of languages, many with multiple versions, and after millions of copies have been printed and distributed, it would be nearly impossible to destroy the Bible. However, such conditions did not always prevail. Until the time of the Reformation, when Gutenberg’s remarkable discovery of moveable type enabled the Bible as well as other literature to be mass-produced and distributed easily throughout civilized lands, the text of the Bible was preserved by the laborious and time-consuming process of copying it over and over again by hand, at first onto papyrus sheets and then onto parchments. Throughout much of this time, the Bible was an object of extreme hatred by many in authority. They tried to stamp it out, but the text survived. In the early days of the church, Celsus, Prophyry, and Lucien tried to destroy it by arguments. Later the emperors Diocletian and Julian tried to destroy it by force. In some periods of history it was a capital offense to possess a copy of the Bible. Yet the text survived.”¹

¹ Boice, *Psalms*, 3:1012-1013.

The reason we say God preserves His Word providentially rather than miraculously is because of what we observe in the oldest manuscripts in our possession, as described in the next section.

To what detail has God preserved His original words?

God has not preserved every single original word. Here are some examples.

1 Samuel 13:1

- **NASB** “Saul was *thirty* years old when he began to reign, and he reigned *forty* two years over Israel.”
 - The words “*thirty*” and “*forty*” are in italics because those words were lost between the time of inspiration and the time our manuscripts were copied.

Compare the next two verses:

2 Sam. 8:4 And David took from him **1,700 horsemen**, and 20,000 foot soldiers. And David hamstrung all the chariot horses but left enough for 100 chariots.

1 Chr. 18:4 And David took from him **1,000 chariots, 7,000 horsemen**, and 20,000 foot soldiers. And David hamstrung all the chariot horses, but left enough for 100 chariots.

Compare the following verses:

Ezra 2:3-16 the sons of Parosh, 2,172.

⁴ The sons of Shephatiah, 372.

⁵ The sons of Arah, **775**.

⁶ The sons of Pahath-moab, namely the sons of Jeshua and Joab, **2,812**.

⁷ The sons of Elam, 1,254.

⁸ The sons of Zattu, **945**.

⁹ The sons of Zaccai, 760.

¹⁰ The sons of **Bani**, **642**.

¹¹ The sons of Bebai, **623**.

¹² The sons of Azgad, **1,222**.

¹³ The sons of Adonikam, **666**.

¹⁴ The sons of Bigvai, **2,056**.

¹⁵ The sons of Adin, **454**.

¹⁶ The sons of Ater, namely of Hezekiah, 98.

Nehemiah 7:8-21 the sons of Parosh, 2,172.

⁹ The sons of Shephatiah, 372.

¹⁰ The sons of Arah, **652**.

¹¹ The sons of Pahath-moab, namely the sons of Jeshua and Joab, **2,818**.

¹² The sons of Elam, 1,254.

¹³ The sons of Zattu, **845**.

¹⁴ The sons of Zaccai, 760.

¹⁵ The sons of **Binnui**, **648**.

¹⁶ The sons of Bebai, **628**.

- ¹⁷ The sons of Azgad, **2,322**.
- ¹⁸ The sons of Adonikam, **667**.
- ¹⁹ The sons of Bigvai, **2,067**.
- ²⁰ The sons of Adin, **655**.
- ²¹ The sons of Ater, namely of Hezekiah, **98**.

Hebrew numbers are notoriously difficult to copy accurately. Clearly, man made some mistakes many centuries ago in copying

Though a few of the original words of the Bible have been lost, there is compelling objective evidence that the texts of both the Old and New Testaments have been providentially preserved in remarkable purity.

God has preserved for us 5,600 Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, even some partial ones from the 1st century

- By “manuscripts,” scholars mean hand-written copies produced before the invention of the printing press (A.D. 1440)

Compare this with the preservation of other significant historical documents from the same time period:

1. We have 10 manuscripts of Caesar’s Gallic Wars, the oldest one 900 years after Caesar
2. 8 manuscripts of Thucydides’ History of the Peloponnesian Wars
3. 8 manuscripts of Herodotus’ History
4. The oldest manuscripts from Thucydides and Herodotus are from 1300 years later

At least 95% of the variants between Greek manuscripts are insignificant, like spelling and word order. There is incredible agreement between the 5,600 Greek manuscripts.

Bahnsen: “The providence of God superintends matters so that copies of Scripture do not become so corrupt as to become unintelligible for God’s original purposes in giving it or so corrupt as to create a major falsification of His message’s text.”

Despite the fact that not every original word is preserved in copies of Scripture, the Bible still says that copies are the Word of God. Notice this in the following verses:

Deut. 17:18–20 “And when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law, approved by the Levitical priests. And it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes, and doing them, that his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers, and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or to the left, so that he may continue long in his kingdom, he and his children, in Israel.

Matt. 22:29–32 But Jesus answered them, “You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you

by God: ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not God of the dead, but of the living.’”

John 5:39 You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me,

Praise the Lord for His providential preservation of His Word!

The Copying of the Bible

The original manuscripts of the different books of the Bible are called the *autographs*. None of them have survived. All ancient manuscripts that currently exist are copies of earlier ones.

The Bible was copied by hand, until the invention of the printing press in the 15th century.

The Copying of the OT Prior to A.D. 100

The earliest known copies of any portion of the OT are two silver amulets, dated to the mid- or late-seventh century B.C., found outside Jerusalem

1. **Photos**

PowerPoint

The Dead Sea Scrolls include OT manuscripts from this period

1. They were first discovered in 1947 in a cave in Israel near the Dead Sea
2. They contain the oldest known copies of portions of the OT
3. They contain portions of all the OT books except Esther and Nehemiah²
4. They are dated between about 250 B.C. and A.D. 50³
5. **Photos** of the caves, Qumran, and jars
6. Essenes lived in Qumran, and had a scriptorium (a room where they copied Scripture)
7. When the Roman armies came to crush the Jewish revolt in 67 AD, the Qumran community fled to Masada
8. It has been said that these scrolls are the greatest archaeological find of all time
9. Some of the scrolls are now stored and displayed in Jerusalem in “The Shrine of the Book” museum
10. Scholars continue searching for more scrolls in the Qumran area

Scrolls were found in eleven caves near Qumran.⁴ Cave 4 held fragments from about 600-800 scrolls.⁵

² Plummer, 51.

³ Paul D. Wegner, *The Journey from Texts to Translations: The Origin and Development of the Bible*, 166.

⁴ Wegner, 187.

⁵ Wegner, 189.

Manuscripts at Masada

1. During the excavations of Masada in 1963-65, the remains of 14 scrolls were discovered.
2. They are clearly dated before A.D. 73 when the fortress was stormed by the Romans
3. The biblical texts come from Genesis, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Psalms, and Ezekiel

The Copying of the Old Testament, A.D. 100-500

The Murabbaʿat Manuscripts

1. In 1951, some scrolls and scroll-fragments were discovered in caves located 11 miles south of the Dead Sea Scroll caves. These caves are located in the Wadi Murabbaʿat.
2. The most complete text is a scroll containing ten of the Minor Prophets, dated to the 2nd century A.D.
3. All the OT manuscripts found here are virtually identical to the Masoretic Text (discussed later). For example, there are only three meaningful variants in the Minor Prophets scroll.⁶

The Jews developed meticulous rules for preserving the OT text in synagogue scrolls, and for reminding the scribe that he was copying sacred material. The rules were included in Jewish writings called the Mishnah, Gemara, and Talmud, and included among many other rules the following:

1. Each written column of the scroll was to have no fewer than 48 and no more than 60 lines whose breadth must consist of 30 letters
2. No word or letter was to be written from memory
3. There was to be the space of a hair between each consonant and the space of a small consonant between each word
4. The scribe must wash himself entirely before beginning to copy the scroll
5. The scribe could not take notice of anyone, even a king, while writing the sacred name *Yahweh*
6. A scroll written by a Sadducee, proselyte, slave, woman, madman, or minor was not to be used for reading in the synagogue
7. The scribe could not erase God's personal name nor some of God's titles⁷

Some Jewish groups began to form verse and paragraph divisions in the text⁸

The Copying of the Old Testament, A.D. 500-1000

A group of scribes called the Masoretes carried on the work of preserving the Hebrew OT

1. They were extremely careful and treated the text with great reverence
2. They even counted and recorded the number of letters used in each book
3. From about A.D. 500 to 800 they added vowel points, accent marks, and other notations to the text to help safeguard the text from error
4. They corrected scribal errors that had entered the text

⁶ Wegner, 188-90.

⁷ Paul D. Wegner, *The Journey from Texts to Translations: The Origin and Development of the Bible*, 171-72.

⁸ Wegner, 172.

5. Their text is called the Masoretic Text (MT)

From the second half of the 8th century to the mid 10th century, the Ben Asher family played a leading role in copying the Masoretic Text in Tiberias (on the western coast of the Sea of Galilee). The following are some important Ben Asher manuscripts:

1. Codex Cairensis
 - Contains the Former and Latter Prophets
 - A.D. 895
2. Aleppo Codex
 - First half of the 10th century
 - Originally contained the complete OT, but during anti-Jewish riots in Aleppo in 1947 and 1948, one quarter of it was destroyed
3. Oriental 4445
 - Genesis 39:20-Deuteronomy 1:33
 - The majority of the manuscript is dated about A.D. 950. Part was added by a later hand and is dated about 1540.
4. Codex Leningradensis
 - A.D. 1008

Verse divisions were standardized by the scribes in the Ben Asher family around A.D. 900. This is the basis of our verse divisions in the OT.⁹

The Copying of the Old Testament, after A.D. 1000

Present-day chapter divisions were first added to the OT and NT by Stephen Langton (1150-1228), archbishop of Canterbury, England, to a copy of the Latin Vulgate. They were later transferred to the Hebrew text by Salomon ben Ishmael (c. 1330). Salomon must have adjusted them to some extent because chapter divisions in the English Bible sometimes differ from those in the Hebrew Bible (especially in Psalms.)¹⁰

In 1488, for the first time a complete Hebrew OT was printed with a printing press.¹¹

Show my copy

The most recent edition of the Hebrew Masoretic Text is *Biblica Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS), completed in 1977 by a committee of international scholars. It mostly follows the text of one Hebrew manuscript (the Codex Leningradensis, dated to 1008) which is the oldest known complete copy of the Masoretic Text.¹²

The Copying of the NT

⁹ Plummer, 23.

¹⁰ Wegner, 176.

¹¹ Wegner, 175.

¹² Wegner, 177, 187.

There are at least 5,800 known extant fragments or manuscripts of the NT text, compared with about 800 for the OT. The number for the NT increases yearly.¹³

The Copying of the NT, before A.D. 100

The apostle Paul sometimes instructed for his letters to be circulated to other churches. Copies may have been made at this point so that each church could have their own copy.

- **Col. 4:16** And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea.

Over time, more mistakes were made in the copying of the Greek NT than the Hebrew OT.

The Copying of the NT, A.D. 100-400

It is fairly surprising that any fragments of the NT exist from this period, since the early church did not have great libraries for storing Scripture and was often persecuted.

P52

1. A fragment from John 18
2. Dated to about 125
3. Written on front and back, suggesting it was part of a codex and not a scroll

P90

1. A fragment of the gospels
2. Dated to the 2nd century

P32

1. A fragment from Titus chapters 1 and 2
2. Dated to the 2nd century

P46

1. A major portion of the Pauline Epistles and Hebrews
2. Dated to about 200
3. Discovered in 1931 along with other manuscript fragments in a Coptic graveyard in Egypt¹⁴

P64 & P67

1. A few chapters from the Gospel of Matthew
2. Dated to about 200

P66

¹³ Paul D. Wegner, *The Journey from Texts to Translations: The Origin and Development of the Bible*, 235. Robert L. Plummer, *The Story of Scripture: How We Got Our Bible and Why We Can Trust It*, 53.

¹⁴ Wegner, 237.

1. A major portion of the Gospel of John
2. Dated to about 200
3. Discovered in 1952

Codex Vaticanus

1. Dated to about 350
2. Originally contained all the OT and NT in Greek
3. Hebrews 9:14 and on is missing
4. Known to have existed in the Vatican library since 1475 or 1481. Initially the Vatican discouraged work on it. Released to scholars in 1889 by the Vatican library.

Codex Sinaiticus

1. Earliest complete copy of the NT
2. Includes part of the Greek OT
3. Dated to about 350
4. Found in St. Catherine's Monastery near Mt. Sinai, by Constantin von Tischendorf, in 1859

The Copying of the NT, A.D. 400-1000

Codex Alexandrinus

1. Dated to the mid-5th century
2. Missing most of Matthew, part of John, and most of 2 Corinthians
3. Includes the Greek OT
4. There are many corrections in the margin, sometimes by the original hand and other times by a later hand, suggesting that it was compared with other manuscripts
5. In 1624, the Eastern Orthodox Church in Turkey presented it to the English ambassador as a gift to King James I. However, it came to England after King James died.

Few punctuation marks appear in the earliest manuscripts. For example, P46 and P66, both dated to about 200, include occasional punctuation marks. More were added by scribes during the 6th and 7th centuries.¹⁵

After Constantine legalized Christianity, many copies of the Greek NT were made throughout the Mediterranean world. But as time went on, far fewer Egyptians read Greek, and much of the Mediterranean world turned to Latin. Only Greek-speaking churches in Greece and Byzantium continued to make copies of the Greek text. From the 6th to the 14th century, the great majority of NT manuscripts were produced in Byzantium (roughly modern-day Greece and Turkey).¹⁶

The Copying of the NT, after A.D. 1000

The Greek NT was first printed in 1516, and was based on a Greek text that Erasmus compiled, using a few late Byzantine manuscripts. It was printed in parallel with a Latin translation. This

¹⁵ Wegner, 214.

¹⁶ Philip W. Comfort, "Texts and Manuscripts of the New Testament," in *The Origin of the Bible*, rev. ed. (2012), 195.

printed Greek text, with minor revisions, became the Textus Receptus (TR), meaning the “received text.”¹⁷

Our current verse divisions in the NT were added by Robert Stephanus (Estienne), who published a Greek and Latin edition of the NT in Geneva in 1551. The first English Bible to include numbered verse divisions was the Geneva Bible translated by William Whittingham in 1560.¹⁸

Textual Criticism

The many biblical sources that have been discovered can be compared and evaluated to determine the most accurate reading of a text. This is the main goal of textual criticism, which can be defined as *the science and art that seeks to determine the most reliable wording of the biblical text*.¹⁹

There are footnotes in today’s English translations that give some of the more significant textual variations.

- *Example:* ESV footnotes for Mark 10:24; 11:25

Common mistakes in copying ancient manuscripts include:

1. Confusion of similar letters

- *Example:* In Isaiah 9:9, the Masoretic Text reads וַיֵּדְעוּ (‘‘and they will know’’). But the first Isaiah Scroll from Qumran has a ך instead of a ך (‘‘and they will be friends’’). The latter reading makes little sense in context and is probably the one in error.

2. Substitution of similar sounding words

- *Example:* In Isaiah 9:3, the word לֹא (‘‘not’’) appears to have been incorrectly substituted for the word לוֹ (‘‘to him/it’’), which is pronounced the same. Compare KJV ‘‘Thou hast multiplied the nation, *and* not increased the joy,’’ with ESV ‘‘You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy [lit. joy to it].’’

3. Omission of a letter or word usually due to a similar letter or word in context

- *Example:* In Judges 20:13, it appears בְּנֵי בְנֵימִן (‘‘sons of Benjamin’’) was mistakenly changed to בְּנֵימִן (‘‘Benjamin’’).

4. Writing a letter or word twice rather than once.

¹⁷ Comfort, 195.

¹⁸ Wegner, 214.

¹⁹ Wegner, 177.

- *Example:* In Jeremiah 51:3, “Let not the archer bend his bow,” it appears that the word “bend” was accidentally written twice.
5. An omission caused by two words or phrases that begin or end similarly
- *Example:* In 1 Samuel 14:41, a portion is missing from the Masoretic Text that appears in other versions. The Septuagint reads:
 O Lord, God of **Israel**, why have you not answered your servant this day? If the iniquity is in me or in my son Jonathan, O Lord, God of Israel, give Urim; but if this iniquity is in thy people **Israel**, give Thummin.”
 The words between the two words in bold do not appear in the Masoretic Text, probably because the scribe jumped from the first occurrence of the word, ‘Israel,’ to the third, omitting the words in between.

Textual criticism makes use of various sources, including the Samaritan Pentateuch (3rd or 2nd century B.C.), ancient translations, and ancient quotations.

It has been said that the church fathers quoted the NT so extensively that if all our other sources of the NT were to be destroyed, it could be reconstructed from the church fathers’ quotations alone. However, these quotations must be used with care since the fathers sometimes quoted from memory or modified the text to fit a given situation.²⁰

NT Textual Criticism

Textual criticism (analysis) is more of an issue for the NT than for the OT.

The greatest number of variants between manuscripts are differences or errors in spelling that make no difference to the meaning of the text. For example, in Codex Vaticanus, Ἰωάννης (“John”) is spelled with only one ν instead of the common spelling with two.

The beginning of significant NT textual criticism may have been when Jerome studied Latin and Greek manuscripts to determine the correct text for the Latin translation of the NT (382-390).²¹

Textual criticism scholars have produced three Greek texts that are currently in use. Two texts, commonly known as the “United Bible Societies’ Greek Text” and the “Nestle-Aland Greek Text,” have the same actual Greek text but differ in the kind of information they give about textual variants. These have gone through a number of editions and have been in use for some time. Recently, Tyndale House at Cambridge produced a Greek text that Crossway published.

- *Show Greek Bible*
- *Show textual commentary*

THE TRANSLATION OF THE BIBLE

²⁰ Paul D. Wegner, *The Journey from Texts to Translations: The Origin and Development of the Bible*, 227.

²¹ Paul D. Wegner, *The Journey from Texts to Translations: The Origin and Development of the Bible*, 217.

The first record of the Bible being translated in any way is probably **Nehemiah 8:8 (read 8:1-8)**.

- 8:8 “clearly”
 - ESV footnote
 - NASB “translating to give the sense”
 - CSB “translating and giving the meaning”

Bible translation is vitally important! The Word of God will not profit a person if they do not understand it.

Greek OT

The OT was translated into Greek between 250-100 B.C. This translation is called the Septuagint, a name that comes from a Latin word meaning “seventy.” This name probably was derived from an account (possibly legend) of the translation of the Septuagint, dated about 100 B.C., which states that 72 Jewish scholars translated the Pentateuch in 72 days.²² The name, ‘Septuagint,’ is often abbreviated LXX.

The Septuagint translation was done because many Jews knew Greek better than Hebrew, including the large number of Jews living in Egypt.

In the NT, a good number of OT quotations seem to have been taken from the Septuagint rather than the Hebrew OT.

Good translations of the Septuagint into English are the Brenton translation (1851), and *The Lexham English Septuagint* published by Lexham Press in 2019.

- *Show a copy*

Syriac

Syriac is an Aramaic dialect that was used in Syria.

Some of the Jews who were saved on Pentecost were visiting Jerusalem from the other side of the Euphrates River, a region largely outside the border of the Roman Empire.

- **Acts 2:9** “Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia...”

From this area, Syriac translations of the Bible emerged. It appears the OT was translated the middle of the 1st century A.D. Several translations of the whole Bible were made. One of these translations is called the Peshitta and was the standard version from the 5th century onward.²³

Latin

Greek prevailed over Latin in most of the Roman Empire until the 3rd century, except in southern Gaul (modern-day France) and northern Africa, where the earliest Latin translations emerged. By the 3rd century, Latin emerged as the major language throughout the empire.²⁴

²² Wegner, 194-95.

²³ Wegner, 244, 246..

²⁴ Wegner, 252.

It appears that a translation of at least part of the NT was made by 180 A.D.²⁵

The most important Latin version is called the Vulgate. It was translated by Jerome from 383-405. It played a dominant role in Western Europe for about 1,000 years. During the Reformation, the Latin Vulgate was translated into many other languages.²⁶

Pope Damasus I, bishop of Rome, commissioned Jerome, his secretary, to revise and standardize the Latin version. At that time, there were many significant differences among Latin texts in circulation. Jerome was a brilliant scholar with a firm grasp of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. His work was later known as the Vulgate, meaning “common” or “plain.” In general, he translated in a sense-for-sense rather than a literal, word-for-word manner.²⁷

Jerome anticipated the severe criticism he would face. He wrote to Damasus in the preface to the four Gospels the following:

You urge me to revise the old Latin version, and, as it were, to sit in judgment on the copies of the Scriptures which are now scattered throughout the whole world; and, inasmuch as they differ from one another, you would have me decide which of them agree with the Greek original. The labor is one of love, but at the same time both perilous and presumptuous; for in judging others I must be content to be judged by all; and how can I dare to change the language of the world in its hoary old age, and carry it back to the early days of its infancy? Is there a man, learned or unlearned, who will not, when he takes the volume into his hands, and perceives that what he reads does not suit his settled tastes, break out immediately into violent language, and call me a forger and a profane person for having the audacity to add anything to the ancient books, or to make any changes or corrections therein?²⁸

Jerome used the Hebrew text as a basis for his OT translation, and for this he was severely criticized by the church, which claimed the Septuagint was inspired and therefore authoritative, and viewed Jerome’s actions as a sign of Judaizing.²⁹ He did much of his work on the Vulgate after moving to Bethlehem, where he was further trained in Hebrew by a rabbi who came to him at night for fear that the Jews would condemn him for teaching the sacred language to a Gentile. Jerome’s knowledge of Hebrew, though defective, was much greater than that of the small handful of other church fathers who knew any Hebrew.³⁰

The Latin Vulgate has had a great influence on the language and thought of the Western church. English words like “justify” and “sanctify” derive from Latin.³¹

The Latin Vulgate was the first book ever to be printed by moveable print in the West, and was Johann Gutenberg’s greatest printing achievement. It is called the Gutenberg Bible. He printed a second edition in 1457-1458.³²

²⁵ Wegner, 253.

²⁶ Wegner, 254.

²⁷ Wegner, 254.

²⁸ In Wegner, 255.

²⁹ Wegner, 255.

³⁰ Wegner, 256.

³¹ Wegner, 256.

³² Wegner, 263-64.

Coptic

Egyptian Jews were present at Pentecost (Acts 2:10). And following Pentecost, the gospel spread quickly into Egypt. While the Greek language had significant influence on Egypt, native Egyptians would probably have spoken primarily Coptic (meaning “Egyptian”), of which there are multiple dialects. The Bible was probably translated into Coptic in the 3rd century for the evangelization of non-Greek-speakers.³³

Armenian

This word is not to be confused with the word, Arminian!

The Armenians lived north of Mesopotamia between the Roman and Persian empires. The gospel spread to Armenia by the middle of the 3rd century. The first version of the Armenian Bible appears to have been produced in the early 5th century. In order to make the translation, a new alphabet was created. Prior to this, all books in this region were written in Syriac or Greek.³⁴

Other Early Translations

At an early time, the Bible was also translated into Gothic, Slavonic, Georgian, Ethiopic, and Arabic. For some of these translations, an alphabet had to first be created.

The spread of Islam in the 7th century forced Jews and Christians in conquered lands to adopt Arabic. Translation of the bible into Arabic was outlawed, but Jews and Christians translated it undercover.³⁵

The Reformation

In the Protestant Reformation, many translations of the Bible were made, including Italian, French, Spanish, Dutch, and German.³⁶

The Reformers recognized the great value of the Greek text published by Erasmus (1516), which was the first Greek New Testament accessible to the people. However, the Roman Catholic Church fought any nonallegiance to the Latin Vulgate. Erasmus’ Greek New Testament was based on about six Greek manuscripts. The manuscript of Revelation that Erasmus used was missing the last page. So Erasmus translated the Latin Vulgate back into Greek for the last six verses. Erasmus’ Greek NT was used by Martin Luther for his German translation (1522), and William Tyndale for his English translation.³⁷

³³ Wegner, 246, 248.

³⁴ Wegner 248-49.

³⁵ Wegner, 252.

³⁶ Wegner, 266.

³⁷ Wegner, 266-67.

Luther made his German translation of the Bible in hiding. His vibrant and easily understood translation helped standardize the German language.

Greek New Testaments were also published by others. In 1633, the Elzevir family from Leiden, in the Netherlands, published the second edition of their Greek New Testament. The preface states that even the most minute mistakes had been corrected and thus this edition was “the text which is now received by all, in which we give nothing changed or corrupted.” This sentence gave rise to the name *Textus Receptus* (“Received Text”). Since the King James Version was translated from this Greek text, it too is often called the received text.³⁸

³⁸ Wegner, 270.