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## HOW WE GOT OUR BIBLE

### Step #5 - Translation

A “translation” is the rendering of a document in one language into another language. Whenever this is done, there are always some terms which have no perfect parallel in the other language, so translators have to come as close as possible. Thus, knowledge of the original language will always be helpful for preachers/teachers/communicators clarifying such cases.

Possibly the earliest “translation” (put into another national language) of a major portion of Scripture would be the Samaritan Pentateuch (5-4th century B.C. text). Another ancient form of the Bible in another language would be the Aramaic *Targums* (written paraphrases of Hebrew texts for Synagogue lessons) that were even produced “officially” in Babylon. The best-known translation of the Old Testament would be the Greek translation (for Jews in Alexandria, Egypt and the Greek-speaking Diaspora) - the Septuagint (LXX). The Pentateuch was probably translated into Greek around 285-246 B.C., with the rest of the Old Testament writings translated by 100 B.C. However, Judaism dropped the LXX when it became the OT of the early church. Several versions of the Septuagint were produced: (1) by Aquila of Sinope, Pontus (c.130 A.D.) very literal; (2) Theodotion (c. 200 A.D.) a very free translation; (3) Symmachus (c. 170 A.D.) for Jewish Christians, tried to be idiomatic and accurate, (4) Origen's *Hexapla* (c. 240 A.D.) - six versions in parallel columns. Most OT quotations in the NT are from the Septuagint. The New Testament was written in *Koine* Greek, although many Hebrew thought forms and a few Aramaic words are present.

Coptic (Egyptian) translation of the NT occurred within 50 years of the writing of John's Gospel. Then, it appears that Syriac translations of the Greek NT writings began to appear. Among these are Tatian's *Diatessaron* (170 A.D.), which wove the four Gospels into one shorter account, as well as the Old Syriac version and the Peshitta ("simple & clear"), used from 450 A.D. on. Sahidic and Bohairic Coptic (Egyptian) versions were produced for non-Greek speaking peoples as a part of missionary efforts. Armenian, Georgian, and Ethiopic versions of the NT books were also produced. The Roman world was given the Old Latin version and Jerome's Latin Vulgate, which became the standard text for Roman Catholicism for centuries. Ulfilas' Gothic version was the oldest written literature in a Germanic language.

As far as the English Bible is concerned, there were several versions produced before the arrival of the King James Bible in 1611. English versions were produced by John Wycliffe (1380's), William Tyndale (1526), Miles Coverdale (1535), John Rogers' "Matthew's Bible" (completed Tyndal'e OT), the Great Bible (in 1560, with 16x11 inch pages), the Geneva Bible (1560, many mistaken versions), and the Bishop's Bible (1568).

Roman Catholicism depended on the Douai-Rheims English Catholic version (1593), while the English-speaking Protestants adopted the "Authorized" (by King James I) Version. The King James Bible spawned a number of mis-printings (Wicked, Vinegar, Murderers, etc.) and Archbishop Ussher's dates were inserted in the 1701 edition. The Cambridge (1726) and Oxford (1769) revisions reworked the language into the form we have today.

After a long run of popularity in the English-speaking world, the King James has begun to give way to a number of new translations and paraphrases: American Standard Version (1901), New American Standard Version (1971), King James II (1971) and New King James (1982). Between 1900-1950, other translations and paraphrases appeared - Weymouth, Moffatt, Goodspeed, Knox, and Phillips (perhaps the best "paraphrase"). All translations are in some sense "paraphrases," but a paraphrase is, properly, focused on translation of the IDEA, while translation is properly more limited to trying to represent the original WORDS used. Between 1950-1970, the Revised Standard Version (RSV - 1952), Modern Language/Berkeley Version (MLB - 1945), and The New English Bible (1970) appeared. From 1970-1979, more translations have been offered to the English-speaking world. Catholics were given the Jerusalem Bible (1956) and New American Bible (1970). Protestants began to use the New American Standard (NAS - 1971), The Living Bible (1971 - a paraphrase), the Good News Bible/Today's English Version (66-76), and, finally, the New International Version (1978). One of the advantages of the NIV is that the text is divided into SENSE paragraphs rather than VERSES separated from one another.

***Why New Translations?*** Because living languages do evolve (change over time), it is necessary to upgrade the translation of Scripture from time to time so that the fixed message of Scripture is communicated in terms of our language now. This is necessary, simply, because words change their meaning over time, slang enters in and changes, and Bible translations must be redone so as to constantly relate the original message in words appropriate to the current culture. As long as the original language texts of the Bible are available and understood, translation updates are a positive thing. However, if new "versions" are produced with the intention of accommodating the current culture's values, rather than clarifying the original, intended message, then they cease to be of spiritual value.