

Translations of the Bible

For English Readers

This paper is written to give an overview of the development of the English Bible up to the modern day (2005) and a background to the main texts of the Greek New Testament. The Massoretic text of the Old Testament is less controversial and more easily established, hence it needs no discussion here. A couple of important non-English translations are also included, as they are so important.

The English Bible is adopted from two translations of the original Hebrew scriptures. Our text is taken from the Hebrew version (the Massoretic text which has vowels points unlike ancient Hebrew). The order of books, and the book titles, follows another OT text (the Septuagint or LXX) which is in Greek. [The Hebrew book names are taken from the first word of the book, thus Genesis is called 'Beginning'.] The apostles usually quoted from the Septuagint, which was the common version available to them. This explains slight differences in quotes from the Hebrew text. The Hebrew ideas and modes of thought are transfused into its Greek. Today the Septuagint is examined to give light to translators where the Hebrew text is unclear.

The Septuagint (LXX)

Date: Around 280-250 BC.

Translators: By legend, seventy Alexandrian Jews under request from the king.

Background: This was the first translation of the Old Testament into Greek. After the rise of the Greek/Macedonian Empire under Alexander, the then known world finally had a lingua franca - Greek. Many Jews lived in Mediterranean Greek provinces (later Roman) and spoke Greek; also many Jews in Palestine spoke and wrote Greek. Some say that this translation was requested by ruler, Ptolemy Lagi, for the famed Alexandrian library, others that it was Ptolemy Philadelphus. This version was called *The Septuagint* since it was supposedly translated by 70 or 72 elders (hence the abbreviation LXX - '70' in Latin). The Pentateuch is the best part of the version, being the first translated; the other books betray increasing degeneracy of the Hebrew manuscripts, with decay of Hebrew learning. The Septuagint translators did not have Hebrew manuscripts with pointed vowels as ours; nor were their words divided as ours.

The work of Ulfilas

Date: 4th century

Translator: Ulfilas, bishop of Antioch, was a missionary to the Goths who produced a translation for them.

Background: Portions of this were translated into Saxon and other languages.

The Vulgate

Date: Completed 405.

Translator: The Church Father, Jerome.

Background: Translated from the original languages into Latin (the current academic lingua franca) and contained the apocrypha.

The work of Aldhelm

Date: Around 700

Translator: Aldhelm, bishop of Sherborne in Dorset.

Background: He translated the Psalms into Saxon English.

The work of Bede (d.735)

Date: Unknown.

Translator: Bede, the historian monk.

Background: The 'Venerable' Bede translated parts of the Bible from the Vulgate into Saxon English. He supposedly died while dictating a translation of John's Gospel.

The Work of Alfred and Aelfric

Parts of the Bible are thought to have been translated into Old English by Alfred the Great, King of Wessex (849-899), along with other great theological works of the Fathers. Portions include: the Ten Commandments, parts of Exodus 21-23, Acts 15, and a number of Psalms. Later in the tenth century Abbot Aelfric, and perhaps others, translated significant parts of the Old Testament into English, as well as the Gospels and some other New Testament books.

The work of Rolle & William

Around 1330 Richard Rolle and William of Shoreham translated the Psalms into Middle English, in a Psalter that was widely distributed.

Wycliffe's Bible

Date: 1380-1384.

Translators: John Wycliffe; aided by Nicholas of Hereford and revised by John Purvey in 1388.

Background: The first complete English Bible (note that this was Chaucerian Middle English). Translated from the Latin Vulgate. Remember, this was a hand-written Bible.

The Gutenberg Bible

Date: 1456.

Background: This was the first Bible to be printed on a printing press. It was an edition of the Vulgate.

Luther's German Bible

Date: NT 1522, whole Bible finished by 1534.

Translator: Martin Luther (the great German reformer).

Background: This was the first complete Bible vernacular translation for a nation based upon the original texts (the NT recently published by Erasmus). Luther's work was so unique that it set the tone for future German literature.

Tyndale's Bible

Date: New Testament 1525; Old Testament 1535.

Translator: William Tyndale.

Background: This was the first Bible to be translated from the original languages into English. Much of Tyndale's translation appears in the KJV word for word (up to 90%).

Coverdale Bible

Date: 1535.

Translator: Miles Coverdale, approved by Henry VIII.

Background: This was the first printed Bible in English. Although it had Royal sanction from Henry VIII, it was poorer than Tyndale's work being based upon Tyndale, the Vulgate, Zwingli's Zurich Bible and Luther's work.

Matthew's Bible

Date: Licensed by Henry VIII in 1537.

Translator: John Rogers, with the support of Archbishop Cranmer. [Thomas Matthew was a pen name for John Rogers.]

Background: This was Tyndale's NT and some parts of his OT with Coverdale's remainder of the OT. It also contained provocative Protestant notes and Rogers was later martyred under Queen Mary.

Cranmer's Bible (The Great Bible)

Date: 1539.

Translators: Produced from the original languages by several scholars, mainly Miles Coverdale, and was very similar to the Coverdale Bible. Authorised by Henry VIII, the first formally authorised English Bible.

Background: This was a revision of the Matthew's Bible, hence of the Tyndale Bible, especially in relation to OT corrections. It was called 'great' due to its size and 'Cranmer's' due to the preface by the Archbishop. It had no extensive notes and was thus less provocative. It became the official Bible for the Anglican Church in 1547.

Geneva Bible

Date: NT appeared in 1557 and the OT in 1560.

Translators: William Whittingham, and others (inc. Coverdale) exiled in Geneva.

Background: This Bible was the first to use verse divisions, the first to use Roman (modern) type and the first to use *italicised* words to designate words not in the original text. Also called the 'Breeches Bible' due to its translation of Gen 3:7 ('aprons' in KJV). It had copious Calvinistic notes, a Bible dictionary and was a favourite of the Puritans preferable even to the KJV. Based on the availability of good texts, this was the most accurate Bible to date.

The Bishop's Bible

Date: 1568-72.

Translators: 8 bishops and some other scholars under the supervision of Archbishop Matthew Parker.

Background: It was based upon Cranmer's Bible but was too large and expensive to compete with the Geneva. It was a reaction to the Calvinism of the Geneva Bible notes.

Rheims-Douay

Date: New Testament (Rheims) 1582; Old Testament (Douay) 1609.

Translators: Two committees; based on the Vulgate.

Background: This was the first authorised English version produced for Roman Catholics.

King James Version (Authorised Version)

Date: 1611.

Translators: 47 protestant scholars from diverse factions.

Background: It is better known as the KJV in the US and increasingly so in the UK, where it was previously known as the AV. It was a revision of the 1602 edition of the Bishop's Bible. It resulted from the 1604 Hampton Court conference of ministers with James I. The Bishop's Bible was obnoxious to the Puritans, but the Geneva was hated by the king, many scholars hated both. The translation managed to keep the peace and not depart far from previously accepted versions. It is an elegant, simple, dignified and accurate translation of the originals that features a famous melody of English language that has kept it in favour for 400 years. Like Luther's Bible, the AV had a huge effect on English literature. The KJV has been revised several times.

Robert Aitken Bible

Date: 1782.

Translator: Robert Aitken.

Background: This was the first King James Version printed in America; the Mayflower Pilgrims had taken the Geneva Bible with them to America. This was the only Bible formally authorised by the US Congress. He was also commended by President George Washington for providing Americans with Bibles during the embargo of imported English goods due to the Revolutionary War. In 1808, Aitken's daughter, Jane, became the first woman to print a Bible. In 1791, Isaac Collins improved the quality of type of American Bibles, producing the first US 'Family Bible'.

Revised Version

Date: NT 1881, OT 1885.

Translators: Two companies of scholars, one for OT one for NT.

Background: This was a revision of the King James Version but based upon the Westcott-Hort NT neutral text plus the Massoretic text for the OT. This was the first Bible to use paragraphs for narrative and line-by-line stanzas for poetry.

American Standard Version

Date: 1901.

Translators: A committee of American scholars who revised the Revised Version for American readers.

Background: It was partially based on the modern principles of textual criticism. The Old Testament is based on the Massoretic text. It is felt by many to be very stiff, but is one of the more accurate translations.

Note: the RV and the ASV, being based upon the Wescott-Hort Greek text, represent a sea-change in translation. They are not really revisions of the KJV, but are new translations based upon completely new textual principles and emphasising different manuscripts that are contested by many evangelicals. [See Greek text editions later.]

Young's Literal Translation

Date: 1862, 1887, 1898.

Translator: Robert Young.

Background: This is one of the most literal translations. Young's purpose was not a new translation for readers but a tool for Bible students; striving to preserve the original Hebrew and Greek tense and words. It was similar in linguistic style to the KJV.

Darby Bible

Date: 1884, 1890.

Translator: Brethren leader, John Nelson Darby.

Background: The Darby Bible is a literal translation of the Bible from the original texts.

The 20th Century New Testament

Date: 1898-1902, revised 1904.

Translators: Produced by a committee of 20 men and women. None were language or textual experts, but were pastors and laymen mainly from liberal backgrounds.

Background: Focuses on ease of reading. Many consider it an excellent translation (inc. F. F. Bruce).

New Translation in Modern Speech (Weymouth Translation)

Date: 1903.

Translator: R F Weymouth.

Background: This was done from the Greek giving particular attention to the verb tenses. The author attempted to give the proper idea of the tenses as he set the information into English.

A New Translation of the Bible (Moffatt)

Date: New Testament 1913; Old Testament 1928.

Translator: James Moffatt.

Background: This is a paraphrase. Moffat was a liberal who made unnecessary changes to the text. This version was the most popular in England for many years.

An American Translation

Date: 1923-1938.

Translators: E.J. Godspeed, J. M. Powis Smith and other liberals.

Background: Intended as an American counterpart to the Moffat translation.

New Testament in the Language of the People

Date: 1937.

Translator: C.B. Williams.

The Bible in Basic English

Date: 1940-1949.

Translators: S. H. & B. E. Hooke.

Background: Uses simplified vocabulary and grammar.

Revised Standard Version

Date: New Testament 1946; Old Testament 1952.

Translators: 32 Protestants and Catholics.

Background: This was a revision of the 1901 American Standard Version, with a more liberal bent. Many evangelicals have criticised this version (most famously for using 'young woman' instead of 'virgin' in Isa 7:14), yet it is often more accurate than many more modern versions, which they endorse. It is also probably the last translation in the Tyndale tradition.

Knox Version

Date: 1945-1949.

Translator: R. A. Knox.

Background: Based on the Vulgate. Produced for Roman Catholics in Britain.

New Testament in Plain English

Date: 1952.

Translator: C. K. Williams.

Background: Williams uses verbose words plus some inappropriate modern terms such as 'police' and 'handcuffs.'

New Testament in Modern English

Date: 1947-1958, revised in 1966.

Translator: J. B. Phillips

Background: Originally written to use in his youth club, and encouraged by C. S. Lewis. Although this is a paraphrase, it is a very good one.

Berkeley Version

Date: New Testament 1945; Old Testament 1959.

Translators: The work of 20 scholars edited by Gerrit Verkuyl of Berkeley, CA.

Background: Many believe this to be an evangelical, good work (especially F. F. Bruce). It aimed to be a plain an up-to-date expression based on serious scholarship and reverence.

Expanded Translation of the New Testament

Date: 1960.

Translator: Kenneth Wuest, an instructor in Greek at Moody Bible Institute.

Background: This is a triumph of technical accuracy over style; very useful for study purposes.

New English Bible

Date: New Testament 1961, complete Bible 1970.

Translators: General Director - C H Dodd (a universalistic, liberal scholar).

Background: Begun as a project suggested by the general assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1948 and involved inter-denomination representatives. They avoided the Tyndale tradition and ventured into modern English. Considered a poor translation by evangelicals.

The New World Translation

Date: 1961

Translators: Published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society.

Background: A very inaccurate version produced by the Jehovah Witnesses that is doctrinally and textually corrupt. For example: the NWT follows the 1881 Westcott & Hort

text; yet it deletes the word 'me' in Jn 14:14, despite it being in the Greek text. This is specifically to avoid having another reference of prayer to Christ, whom JW's claim is not God.

Amplified Bible

Date: Completed 1965.

Translators: Mrs. Siewert, et. al. Sponsored by the Lockman Foundation.

Background: Intended as a companion to other versions. The text has a multiple range of definitions of key words. The problem is that the range of meanings is arbitrarily chosen by the reader instead of a qualified translator.

The New Testament Revised Standard Version Catholic edition

Date: NT 1965; OT 1966.

Background: This was produced as an ecumenical Bible and is accepted by the Roman Catholic Church. Soon overtaken by the Jerusalem Bible.

Good News for Modern Man (Today's English Version)

Date: NT 1966, OT 1976.

Translators: Overseen by a committee sponsored by the American Bible Society: Robert G. Bratcher and six others.

Background: Does not conform to traditional vocabulary or style but seeks to use modern colloquial English. The NT was done by a man that reportedly denied the deity of Christ and rejected verbal inspiration. In seeking to be conversational, it becomes inaccurate in translating the original words.

Jerusalem Bible

Date: 1966.

Translators: Based on the original texts.

Background: This is a Roman Catholic work and, as such, includes the Apocrypha. It was originally done in French at the Dominical School in Jerusalem.

New Scofield Reference Bible

Date: 1967.

Editor: C. I. Scofield

Background: A revision of Scofield's original Dispensational study Bible of 1909. The revisers were: John Walvoord, Charles Feinberg, Allan MacRae, E. Schyler English, Frank Gaebelin, Alva McClain, Clarence Mason, William Culbertson, Wilbur Smith, and Wilber Ruggles. Not really a translation, but mentioned as it is so popular.

The Cotton Patch Version

Date: 1968, 1969.

Translator: Clarence Jordan who has a Ph.D. in New Testament Greek from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Background: The NT is set in the modern day southern US states using Southern dialect. The Jews and Gentiles are viewed as black and whites, Acts is titled the Happening, while the book of Romans becomes Washington!!! Only Luke, Acts, Paul's Letters, Hebrews and the General Letters.

New American Bible

Date: 1970.

Translators: 45 Catholic and five Protestant scholars. Translated from the original languages.

Background: Includes the Apocrypha.

New American Standard Bible

Date: 1971, updated 1995.

Translators: 54 conservative Protestants. Sponsored by the Lockman Foundation.

Background: A revision of the 1901 ASV. The work is an excellent translation of the original; however, readability and style was sacrificed in doing so. The Greek verbs were translated so that the English reader could determine the true tenses. Unfortunately, as with almost all modern translations, the Alexandrian, eclectic textual family is the foundation. Based on Biblia Hebraica (KBH) for OT and NA23 for NT.

Living Bible

Date: Completed in 1971

Translator: Kenneth N. Taylor

Background: This is a paraphrase based on the ASV. As a paraphrase and often an interpretation, it is frequently very inaccurate. However, it is highly readable and useful for young children (his original purpose). Biased towards Premillennialism.

The New Testament in the Language of Today: An American Translation

Date: 1963, 1976

Translator: William F. Beck, a Lutheran.

Background: This version is well received for its accuracy.

New International Version

Date: NT 1973, OT 1978.

Translators: 115 evangelical scholars. Published by International Bible Society.

Background: Uses the dynamic equivalent method, which veers towards a paraphrase as it gives thought-for-thought rather than a literal translation of the actual words. It is often inaccurate and in disagreement with the Byzantine NT textual family (the basis of the KJV, NKJV). OT mostly based on BH; NT - eclectic Greek text (varies from UBS in about 300 places).

New King James Version

Date: 1979.

Translators: 119 scholars; based upon 'complete equivalence' methods.

Background: A revision of the KJV that seeks to be absolutely accurate in translating the original texts and yet more readable to modern English speakers. Based on Biblia Hebraica Stuttgart (BHS) for OT; Textus Receptus for NT with notes from Hodges/Farstad Majority Greek Text and the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament (UBS).

New Jerusalem Bible

Date: 1985.

Translators: A revision of the 1966 Jerusalem Bible.

Background: Less of a paraphrase and more dignified.

New Revised Standard Version

Date: 1989.

Translators: An ecumenical committee of 30 men and women.

Background: Revisions include gender-neutral language. It claims to be a literal translation and is based upon the BHS for OT; 1983 UBS Greek New Testament (UBS 3) for NT.

New Century Version

Date: 1991.

Translators: Scholars from a variety of backgrounds.

Background: Ancient measurements are converted to modern equivalents. Gender-neutral language is used. Obscure words are put into plain English. This reduces what the Bible actually says to a generalised idea. For example: 'He rested with his fathers', implies an understanding of resurrection; 'he died' (which is used instead) does not.

The Message

Date: 1993

Translator: Eugene H. Peterson.

Background: A pastor's efforts to bring scripture to life for modern people. An appalling extreme paraphrase, much worse than the Living Bible. The writer also appears to have very liberal ideas about scripture from his preface. This translation is so bad that it can only damage the understanding of readers.

New International Reader's Version

Date: 1995.

Translator: Based on the NIV.

Background: This version is for children and people starting to read English. It is a very dumbed-down Bible version using gender-inclusive language.

Contemporary English Version

Date: 1995.

Translator: Sponsored by the American Bible Society.

Background: The aim was to catch the spirit of the KJV but it sacrifices accuracy to readability as it is a near paraphrase aimed for young children; similar to TEV but worse. Words are changed unnecessarily and gender-neutral language is used, except in the case of references to God. It replaces complex theological language with simple phrases that express the same theological truth but in a much clearer fashion - this is an interpretation rather than a translation. There are unexplainable errors; for example: in 1 Cor 11:10 the CEV says a woman should wear a head covering not merely as a 'sign of authority' (i.e. her husband's authority) but 'as a sign of *her* authority.' The word 'Jews' is also avoided wherever it appears as opposition to Jesus. OT based on BHS; NT based on UBS3.

New Living Translation

Date: 1996.

Translator: 90 scholars from a wide variety of backgrounds. It is a revision of the Living Bible (itself only a paraphrase!).

Background: Uses thought-for-thought into everyday English, rather than literal translation of words. Uses gender-inclusive language.

The New English Translation / Net Bible

Date: NT 1998. OT ?

Translators: Committee of 20 scholars sponsored by the Society of Biblical Literature. Comments and suggestions can be made on-line to netbible.org

Background: This is a project to translate the Bible specifically for free transmission over the internet. It has extensive technical and textual notes to ensure that 'the Bible explains itself.' It attempts to be accurate, readable and elegant, even though these goals are often in conflict.

The Holman Christian Standard Version

Date: NT 2001, OT 2004.

Translators: Over 90 scholars sponsored by the Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Background: The shock caused by the announcement that the revision of the NIV would become gender-inclusive caused an uproar. This was a reaction to it. Basis: Nestle-Aland text. More literal than the New International Version, but much less literal than the New American Standard Bible or the English Standard Version.

The English Standard Version

Date: 2001.

Translators: Over 60 evangelical scholars.

Background: An evangelical reaction to the NRSV. Crossway Books bought the rights to the RSV and revised it in a different way to the NRSV; especially seeking non gender-inclusive language. It is a literal translation, more literal than the New International Version but more idiomatic than the New American Standard Bible. Some evangelicals are championing this but scholars have already shown that it is not as accurate as it could be. Occasionally it is less accurate than the RSV. The OT is based on BHS; NT based on UBS4 with some variations.

World English Bible (WEB)

Date: The NT, Psalms, and Proverbs were finished in 2003, rest of OT by 2005.

Translators: Rainbow Missions Inc. a Colorado non-profit corporation using many volunteers who freely offered their time.

Background: This is an update of the ASV of 1901 in modern English, published as a modern non-copyrighted work for free distribution and publication on the internet. Readers can send in suggested corrections.

Examples of translation Methods

| Formal Equivalence [Literal or word-for-word] | Dynamic Equivalence¹ [Thought-for-thought] | Paraphrase [Modern English interpretation] |
|---|---|--|
| Douay-Rheims (Catholic) | NIV (Protestant) | Phillips |
| KJV (Protestant) | NEB (Ecumenical) | Moffat |

¹ Also known as 'functional equivalence'.

| | | |
|-------------------------|------------------|--------------|
| NKJV (Protestant) | REB (Ecumenical) | Living Bible |
| RSV (Ecumenical) | CEV (Protestant) | TEV (GNB) |
| NRSV (Ecumenical) | JB (Catholic) | The Message |
| NAB / NASB (Protestant) | NJB (Catholic) | NLT |

Recent translations have chosen what they call ‘optimal equivalence’, that is the best of literal, functional, elegant and readable methods. Thus they fall outside the above definitions. Whether they are successful in this venture remains to be seen. Such would include the ESV, NetBible, Holman.

Readability of the main modern versions

| | |
|---|---|
| King James Version — | 18 years old (presuming full education) |
| American Standard Version — | 16.6 |
| New American Standard Bible — | 16.3 |
| Revised Standard Version — | 15.4 |
| Phillips Translation — | 14.6 |
| New King James Version — | 14.1 |
| New English Bible — | 13.5 |
| Living Bible — | 13.3 |
| New International Version — | 12.8 |
| Today’s English Version — | 12.3 |
| International Children’s Version - | 8.9 |

Timeline of Bible Key Translation History

| | |
|------------------|---|
| 500 BC | Original Hebrew manuscripts complete. |
| 200 BC | Septuagint Greek manuscripts complete [contains the 14 Apocrypha books]. |
| 1st c. AD | Completion of original Greek manuscripts. |
| 315 | Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, identifies the 27 books of the NT. |
| 382 | Jerome's Latin Vulgate manuscript. |
| 995 | Anglo-Saxon translations of NT appear. |
| 1384 | Wycliffe’s manuscript of the complete Bible. |
| 1455 | Gutenberg invents the printing press. |
| 1516 | Erasmus publishes a Greek/Latin parallel NT. |
| 1522 | Martin Luther's German NT. |
| 1526 | William Tyndale's NT; the first NT printed in English. |
| 1535 | Miles Coverdale's Bible; the First complete Bible printed in English. |
| 1537 | Matthews Bible; produced by John Rogers. |
| 1539 | The Great Bible. |
| 1560 | The Geneva Bible; the first English Bible to add numbered verses. |
| 1568 | The Bishops Bible. |
| 1609 | The Douay OT added to the Rheims NT (1582) - the first English Catholic Bible. |
| 1611 | The King James Bible Printed. |
| 1782 | Robert Aitken's Bible. |
| 1841 | Hexapla NT; an early textual comparison showing the Greek and 6 English translations in parallel columns. |

| | |
|-------------|--|
| 1885 | Revised Version. |
| 1901 | American Standard Version. |
| 1952 | Revised Standard Version complete. |
| 1971 | New American Standard Bible. |
| 1973 | New International Version. |
| 1982 | New King James Version. |
| 2002 | English Standard Version is published as a bridge between the accuracy of the NASB and the readability of the NIV. |

Printed Greek NT Texts

The General Problem of Textual Criticism

- We only have copies of copies - no original manuscript of any biblical book has survived!
- The extant (existing) manuscripts have many textual variations! There are thousands of minor differences, while some manuscripts have whole sections missing.
- The new discoveries of more manuscripts give translators more understanding.
- The meanings of some biblical words are uncertain (or have several meanings) as they occur once in scripture and nowhere else in ancient literature. Increasing knowledge of these languages (e.g. from new manuscript discoveries of secular literature) aids translation.
- Every translator is reduced to choosing from certain options, and thus the translation is an interpretation. (Compare the various translations of Calvin's Institutes, the Saxon story of Beowulf or Homer's Odyssey.)
- New translations are required as English changes.

The Blessing of NT Textual Criticism

- There are thousands of extant manuscripts.
- There are more manuscripts to aid translation than for any other piece of ancient literature.
- The oldest manuscripts are closer in time to the original monographs than any other piece of ancient literature.
- Despite many minor differences, no Christian doctrine is affected by the disagreements.

Erasmus's Greek Text

Date: 1516.

Editor: Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam.

Background: Erasmus used five incomplete 12th century manuscripts that were available; only one had the complete NT and no two perfectly agreed. He compared one with another to determine what was the original text and what were variant readings. This was the start of Textual Criticism. Erasmus had to back translate some parts of Revelation from the Latin Vulgate as the last sheet was missing.

Stephanus Text

Date: 1546-1551.

Editor: Robert Stephens [Latinised as Stephanus.].

Background: Stephens is the anglicised name of a Protestant Frenchman, Robert Estienne. He produced several editions of the Greek text as manuscripts became available. His third edition was published in Paris and his 1551 Genevan edition was the first NT ever to divide the text into numbered verses. Stephens had access to about 15 manuscripts.

Beza Texts

Date: 1565-1604.

Editor: Theodore Beza (Calvin's successor).

Background: Beza published various editions of Stephen's work and his own. He continued to produce editions, as more manuscripts became available. The KJV translators had Beza's works to hand and the KJV agrees more closely with Beza's 5th edition (1598) than any other.

Textus Receptus or Received Text

Date: 1633.

Editors: Elzevir family in Leyden, Holland.

Background: The Greek NT text had stabilised by 1633 as more manuscripts emerged and the Elzevir brothers published their first edition in 1624. The 1633 Elzevir second edition had included in the introduction in Latin an advertisement, 'You have, therefore, the text now received by all, in which we give you nothing altered or corrupt.' As it was distributed, it became known as the 'text received amongst us' or 'Textus Receptus' (TR). Note that this is over 20 years after the first edition of the KJV (1611).

There is no single manuscript, which reads precisely as the KJV New Testament. Like others, the translators had to make choices (called 'eclectic methodology'). The second edition differs only slightly from the first edition, being a collation of the first with Robert Stephen's third edition of 1550. The Elzevirs' edition disagrees with Stephen's third in about 150 places.

The TR is the accepted text of the Erasmus, Stephanus, Beza tradition in 1633. This was the basis of all Bibles until 1881. That TR used today is normally the one created by Scrivener in 1894, which took as its basis the English translation of the KJV, giving the reader the Greek textual choices made by the KJV translators.

Early 19th century texts

- 1807 **J J Griesbach** (1745-1812): based his Text on a theory of three recensions of the Greek text, which he observed from the manuscripts. A reading that had support of two or three he regarded as genuine. He was so opposed to evangelical orthodoxy that variant readings which supported orthodoxy were automatically neglected in favour of other readings. In his 1796 edition he removed the ending to Mark 16 merely because he had heard that the Vaticanus manuscript (then considered the oldest but not published at that time) omitted these verses.
- 1808 **J L Hug** (1765-1846): Theorised that the NT text became corrupt in the 2nd century and that extant texts were revisions of a degenerate text.
- 1850 **Karl Lachmann** (1793-1851): Professed to give the text as it was accepted in the East in the 4th century and produced editions in Berlin in 1842 and 1850. His method was to use the same presuppositions with the NT as he did with editing the texts of the classics to establish the original text. These principles ignore divine sovereignty in preserving the text and the faithful, loving care of copyists. He took into account the Latin and African

authorities when the Eastern texts disagreed. He cited the most ancient manuscripts but totally neglected the uncial and cursive manuscripts. By avoiding the internal evidence, he chose obvious errors simply on the grounds that it was the best attested in the 4th century. His edition seldom rested on more than four manuscripts, often on three, and sometimes on two or even one. Such was the error of presuming the oldest manuscript was the most accurate.

- **Constantine Tischendorf** (1815-74): followed the theory of Lachmann, but not to the neglect of the evidence of the ancient versions and the Fathers. His 8th edition is much closer to the principles of Lachmann. [See later.]
- **Samuel Tregelles** (1813-1875): Evangelical in theology and no modernist (unlike most other editors), but followed modernist textual theories. Similar principles to Lachmann but allows the uncial evidence up to the 7th century and compares against various authorities. His text was scrupulously accurate and was considered by many the most faithful representation of the ancient Greek NT.

Tischendorf and Sinaiticus

Background: In the late 19th century certain Greek manuscripts were discovered that caused a revolution in textual criticism. These texts were not known previously and differ significantly from the TR. Constantine von Tischendorf was a Protestant scholar who looked for new manuscripts in Middle Eastern monasteries and, in 1844, found an ancient copy of the LXX in the Convent of St Catherine, at the foot of Mt Sinai, being burned by monks. He was allowed to take 43 vellum leaves and returned in 1853 and 1856 to copy the remainder whereupon it was published in St Petersburg. It was fully procured in 1862 and taken to St Petersburg where it was more fully published and thence to Leipzig where it was published in 1863. He called this text 'Aleph' (Hebrew for 'a', ahead of others designated with letters from the Hebrew alphabet as it was supposed to be the oldest and best), it is better known as 'Sinaiticus' (now in the British Museum). This is considered to be the work of the 4th century and is possibly the oldest manuscript of the Greek NT. Tischendorf collated the differences from the TR and subsequently produced a new 8th edition of the Greek text based on this manuscript, making 3,369 changes as a result.

Tischendorf also brought the Vaticanus manuscript to light. This lies in the Great Vatican Library in Rome where it has remained since before 1481. After difficult negotiations, he was allowed to copy it. Note: certain readings from this were available to Erasmus, who rejected them.

Problems with Sinaiticus:

- There are nine levels of corrections on this made by revisers throughout the centuries between the lines of text. It shows plain evidence of corruption.
- The manuscript has many unique readings (words not used in any other text).
- There are huge numbers of disagreements even with other 'old' manuscripts found in the 19th century.
- Traditional evangelical scholars consider this to be a very bad manuscript.

Westcott - Hort Greek Text

Date: 1881.

Editors: BF Westcott and FJA Hort.

Background: This is the Greek text that most modern translations are based on. They also developed rules for textual criticism and sorted the existing manuscripts into families of texts:

- The Syrian: used in the Byzantine Empire and is represented by the TR. They considered this family inferior and later. (Better known today as the Byzantine family of texts.)
- The Western: a relatively rare European type.
- The Alexandrian: text type, which they considered as older and better (though fewer).
- Their neutral text: which they considered as the oldest and purest type (i.e. Aleph and the manuscript called Vaticanus - kept in the Vatican library). This is a variation of the Alexandrian type.

These findings have been vigorously opposed by scholars such as: J. W. Burgon, H. A. Scrivener and George Salmon. Many of the textual decisions made by Westcott and Hort are not explained properly and there is no listing of manuscripts to support the readings. There is also no historical evidence for certain foundational claims, such as a supposed 4th century revision of texts. From this point on, all Bible translations (apart from the KJV and the NKJV based on the Syrian or Byzantine family) became essentially founded upon the Westcott-Hort text (Alexandrian family).

Note: a more recent family is now denoted as the Majority Text since it comprises more manuscripts than any other family. These are associated with the Byzantine family. This is the text used by Greek speaking churches going back to antiquity. It is found in 80-95% of the manuscripts. It is similar to the Textus Receptus (except in Revelation).

In modern terms, these families break down to two key streams:

1. ALEXANDRIAN FAMILY TYPE: sometimes called the Neutral text or Egyptian text (Alexandria was in Egypt).
2. BYZANTINE FAMILY TYPE: sometimes called the Antiochan text, Traditional text, TR. The Majority text is very similar to all intents and purposes.

In a nutshell, the conflict between conservatives and supporters of modern translations is this:

- OLDER = BETTER. Modern translations support the Westcott-Hort principles of textual criticism and claim that the recently discovered Tischendorf manuscripts (and others), of the Alexandrian family, are older and therefore more accurate. But they are few.
- THE MAJORITY = BETTER. Conservatives claim that the Byzantine family, though more recent, has by far the majority of manuscripts and support the textual methodology of the Reformation. One key factor is that older, worn out manuscripts were usually destroyed when a replacement had been copied and checked - hence no old manuscripts. Very old manuscripts = poor manuscripts that escaped burning.

Note: while a good case can be made for preferring the Byzantine or majority textual family, this does not mean that the KJV is the only sound translation. Support for the Byzantine family is based upon:

- It has overwhelming support in the majority of Greek manuscripts.
- It has overwhelming support from the Lectionaries² and the early Versions; this includes the Syriac (or Aramaic) and Latin Versions which go back to the mid-second century; the Peshitta, (a good early Syriac translation) contains Byzantine readings, and the Ulfilas

² Early church service books containing selected readings from the Gospels, Acts and Epistles

Gothic version of the fourth century.

- Approximately 95% of the Uncial³ manuscripts have a Byzantine type of text.
- Over 95% of the Minuscules⁴ have a Byzantine type of text.

Alford's Text

Date: 1881.

Editor: Henry Alford (Dean of Canterbury).

Background: Alford published his text with a commentary (still useful) as *The Greek New Testament*. This is very similar to the text of Westcott-Hort. Differs to other 19th c. editors by placing greater emphasis upon internal probability. He sometimes does this in the face of better evidence in the ancient manuscripts.

Souter's Novum Testamentum Graece

Date: 1910.

Editor: Alexander Souter.

Background: Essentially this is an edition of the TR with copious notes.

Nestle Greek Text

Date: 1989.

Editor: Eberhardt Nestle of the Wurttemberg Bible Society.

Background: This was based on Tischendorf, Westcott-Hort texts but avoided their extremes. This marked the end of the predominance of the TR.

Nestle Greek Text 2

Date: 1927.

Editor: Erwin Nestle, son of Eberhardt.

Background: Included extensive notes on various readings from many manuscripts. The later editions of Nestle's Greek NT became the standard workbook for scholars and students.

Aland Greek Text

Date: 1993 - 27th edition.

Editor: Kurt Aland; Successor to Erwin Nestle from 1950.

Background: Now takes more seriously readings from the Byzantine tradition. This is now widely known as the Nestle-Aland Text and is distributed by the United Bible Society (UBS).

United Bible Societies Greek Text

Date: 4th edition

Editors: The first four editors were Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, Bruce Metzger, and Allen Wikgren, and Eugene Nida 'initiated, organized, and administered' the first UBS project. Carlo M. Martini has been on the editorial committee since 1967. According to David Cloud not one of these men believes the Bible is the infallible Word of God.

Background: Since its third edition, this popular Greek text, published in Münster, Germany, is identical to the 26th edition of the Nestle-Aland Text. The 1st edition was published in 1966; the 4th, in 1983.

³ Capital letters or majuscules.

⁴ Smaller letters in a cursive, free flowing hand.

The current normal Greek NT text used by scholars and in theological colleges is the UBS4-NA 27 text [i.e. United Bible Societies 4th Edition which equals the Nestle-Aland 27th edition].

Glossary of Texts

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| BHS | Biblia Hebraica Stuttgart (An OT text). |
| KBH | Biblia Hebraica |
| NA | Nestle-Aland NT Text; (The number identifies the edition e.g. NA27= 27 th edition.) |
| TR | Textus Receptus (Received Text) |
| UBS | United Bible Societies (The number identifies the edition e.g. UBS = 4 th edition.) |

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