

Bible Versions

Which is the REAL WORD of God?

Amos 8:11

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6. THE CHURCH FATHERS

Before the art of printing was known (before AD 1450) the church fathers of the early Christian era wrote - **by hand** - their letters, sermon notes, commentaries and books. Their manuscripts contain many quotations from the **original autographs** or the **earliest copies**. Some fathers had actually seen the New Testament autographs or very early copies; and had personally hand-copied large portions of Scripture. The writings of these early elders help verify the original text and form a valuable source of information as to what the first apostles wrote. Scripture tells us that Satan began his attack on the New Testament Scriptures very early, even before the first apostles died. Listen to Paul's testimony concerning this matter about corrupting of the **Word of God**; and of some who even wrote letters as though they were composed by the apostle himself.

Paul writes:

2 Corinthians 2:17 *For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ.*

2 Thess.2:2 *That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand.*

During the latter part of his life the apostle John strongly defended the **Word of God**. Being an eye-witness of the events involving the ministry of **Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ)**, John was well

qualified to refute written or spoken error and to put the record straight. The enemies of truth had this reliable eye-witness banished to the island of Patmos. Note the reason why.

John writes:

Revelation 1:9 *I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.*

There were many church fathers who hand-copied the whole or portions of Scripture. Let me mention a few who greatly influenced the church, particularly in Europe.

In his book **Story of Our English Bible** W Scott writes: "**Crysostom**, the most eloquent of the fathers, spoke of them (the Scriptures) as **The Divine Books**, **Polycarp**, who lived at a still earlier date, having been personally instructed by the Apostle John, spoke of the Bible as **The Sacred Scriptures**, as also the **Oracles of the Lord**. **Clement** of Rome, whom Paul styles his 'fellow-labourer' (Phil.1V.3), termed the **Scriptures** **The True Sayings of the Holy Spirit**. **Irenaeus**, of the second century, makes about 1200 citations or references from the New Testament; **Tertullian**, also of the second century refers to or quotes from the New Testament about 2500 times; **Clement** of Alexandria, another of the second century Fathers, cites from or refers to the New Testament 800 times; and **Polycarp**, already referred to, in a brief epistle addressed to the Philippians, quotes from the New Testament about 50 times." (Ref: A6)

Lucian of Antioch

Lucian (AD 250-312) was born in Antioch in Syria where the early believers in Jesus were first called Christians. (Acts 11:26) In his book **Truth Triumphant** the historian Benjamin George Wilkinson Ph.D writes this about Lucian:

Quote: "**Lucian** founded a college at Antioch which strove to counteract the dangerous ecclesiastical alliance between Rome and Alexandria. How bitter the situation became and how it finally split West and East will be clarified by the following four facts:

First, the original founders of the ecclesiastical college at Alexandria strove to exalt tradition. Justin Martyr, as early as 150, had stood for this.

Second, Clement, most famous of the Alexandrian college faculty and a teacher of Origen, boasted that he would not teach Christianity unless it was mixed with pagan philosophy.

Third, Victor 1, bishop of Rome, entered a compact with Clement, about 190, to carry on research around the Mediterranean basin to secure support to help make Sunday the prominent day of worship in the church. Sunday was already a day exalted among the heathen, being a day on which they worshipped the sun; yet Rome and Alexandria well knew that most churches throughout the world sanctified Saturday as the Sabbath of the fourth commandment.

Fourth, when Victor 1, in lordly tones, pronounced excommunication on all the churches of the East who would not with him make Easter always come on Sunday, Alexandria supported this exhibition of spiritual tyranny by the bishop of Rome. Lucian opposed Alexandria's policies and for this has been bitterly hated and his name kept in the background." (Ref: J1)

Patrick in Ireland

Patrick belonged to the Celtic race. Tradition has it that he was born about **AD 360** in the kingdom of **Strathclyde in Scotland**. Wilkinson writes of Patrick:

Quote: "Patrick preached the Bible. He appealed to it as the sole authority for founding the Irish Church. He gave credit to no other worldly authority; he recited no creed. Several official creeds of the church of Rome had by that time been ratified and commanded, but Patrick mentions none. In his Confession he makes a brief statement of his beliefs, but he does not refer to any church council or creed as authority. The training centres he founded, which later grew into colleges and large universities, were all Bible schools. Famous students of these schools - **Columba, who brought Scotland to Christ, Adrian, who won pagan England to the gospel, and Columbanus with his successors, who brought Christianity to Germany, France, Switzerland and Italy** - took the Bible as their only authority, and founded renowned Bible training centres for the Christian believers. One authority, describing the hand-written Bibles produced at these schools, says, 'In delicacy of handling and minute but faultless execution, the whole range of palaeography offers nothing comparable to these early Irish manuscripts... **Patrick, like his example, Jesus, put the words of Scripture above the teachings of men.** He differs from the papacy, which puts church tradition above the Bible. In his writings he nowhere appeals to the church of Rome for the authorization of his mission. Whenever he speaks in defence of his mission, he refers to God alone, and declares that he received his call direct from heaven... Patrick believed that Christianity should be founded with the home and the family as its strength. Too often the Christian organizations of that age were centred in celibacy. This was not true in the Irish church and its Celtic daughters in Great Britain, Scotland and on the continent. **The Celtic Church, as organized and developed under Patrick, permitted its clergy to marry.**" (Ref:J3)

Columba in Scotland

Quote: "Columba, an Irishman, was born in Donegal in 521, and both his parents were of royal stock. He founded a memorable college on the small island of **Iona** which was a lighthouse of truth in Europe for centuries. That the Celtic, not the Latin, race populated the British Isles was a determining factor, for the Christian churches in which Patrick had been reared received their doctrine, not from Rome, but from their brethren of the same faith in Asia Minor. Here was the link which connected the faith of Patrick and Columba with primitive Christianity. The farthest lands touching the Atlantic saw the rise of a vigorous apostolic Christianity not connected with the Church of Rome, but independent of it..."

Columba possessed a superior education. He was familiar with Latin and Greek, secular and ecclesiastical history, the principals of jurisprudence, the law of nations, the science of medicine, and the law of the mind. He was the greatest Irishman of the Celtic race in mental powers; and he founded in **Iona** the most learned school in the British Islands, and probably in Western Europe for a long period..." (Ref:J4)

Comparatively few Christians know that **Columba** kept the seventh day of the week (Saturday) as the Sabbath of the fourth commandment. Wilkinson writes about this little known fact.

Quote: "The last hours of Columba are recorded as follows: Having continued his labours in Scotland thirty four years, he clearly and openly foretold his death, and on **Saturday**, the ninth of June, said to his disciple Diermit: '**This day is called the Sabbath, that is the day of rest, and such will it truly be to me: for it will put an end to my labours.**'" (Ref:J5)

We in Scotland are greatly indebted to **Columba**, who founded many churches in this country. He is credited with having hand-copied the New Testament **300 times!** His writings show that he used the **Itala** version of the Bible. In **Stewarton** there is a church called **St Columba's Church**.

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7. Ancient Versions

Bear in mind that a **version** is a translation made directly from the original Hebrew or Greek: i.e. from Hebrew or Greek into Syriac, Latin or English; whereas a translation of a version into yet another language is simply called a **translation**. Bible versions were made in several languages within a few years of the New Testament's creation. This was a rarity in the ancient world for any book.

Josh McDowell writes on pages 16-17 of his book **Answers to Tough Questions**.

Quote: "...Translation of a document into another language was rare in the ancient world, so this is an added plus for the New Testament. The number of copies of the versions is in excess of 18,000, with possibly as many as 25,000. This is further evidence that helps us establish the New Testament text. Even if we did not possess the 5,500 Greek manuscripts or the 18,000 copies of the versions, the text of the New Testament could still be reproduced within 250 years from its composition. How? By the writing of the early Christians. In commentaries, letters, etc., these ancient writers quote biblical text, thus giving us another witness to the text of the New Testament.

Quote: **John Burgon** has catalogued more than 86,000 citations of the New Testament in the writings of the early church fathers who lived before A.D.325. Thus we observe that there is so much more evidence for the reliability of the New Testament text than any other comparable writings in the ancient world." (Ref: M1)

In his book **Final Authority** William P Grady quotes John Burgon on pages 33-34 concerning the reliability of a version over any single manuscript.

Quote: "*I suppose it may be laid down that an ancient Version outweighs any single Codex, ancient or modern, which can be named: the reason being, that it is scarcely credible that a Version - the Peshitto , for example, an Egyptian or the Gothic - can have been executed from a single exemplar (copy).*

A second reason for the value of ancient versions is in their ability to exhibit a text which antedates the oldest Greek manuscripts. Readings which are challenged in the Authorized Version for their non-existence in the 'two most ancient authorities' (Codex Sinaiticus or A; and Codex Vaticanus, or B, fourth century) are frequently discovered in the Syrian and Latin translations of the second century."

In the course of time many versions (translations from the original language) of Scripture were made. Let us now consider a few.

The Peshitta Version (AD 150)

The Peshitta was the first Syrian translation from the original languages. Even to this day there are around **350 copies** of the Peshitta (or Peshitto) version in existence. In his book **Which Bible?** David O Fuller writes this of the Peshitto:

Quote: "*It was at Antioch, capital of Syria, that the believers were first called Christians. And as time rolled on, the Syrian-speaking Christians could be numbered by the thousands. It is generally admitted that the Bible was translated from the original languages into Syrian about 150 AD. This version is known as the Peshitto (the correct or simple). This Bible even today generally follows the Received Text. One authority tells us this - 'The Peshitto in our days is found in use amongst the Nestorians, who have always kept it, by the Monophysites on the plains of Syria, the Christians of St.Thomas in Malabar, and by the Maronites on the mountain terraces of Lebanon.'*" (Ref: F8)

The Old Latin Vulgate (AD157)

The word '*vulgata*' is Latin for *vulgar* or *common*. The Old Latin Vulgate is a version. It was used by early believers in Europe when Latin was in popular use. It was sometimes referred to as the **Itala** version.

The Old Latin Vulgate must not be confused with Jerome's Vulgate, which was produced over 220 years later in AD 380. Jerome's Vulgate (also written in Latin for the Roman Church) was rejected by the early Christians for almost a millennium. The **Waldenses, Gauls, Celts, Albigenses** and other groups throughout Europe used the **Old Latin Vulgate** and rejected Jerome's Vulgate. In his book **An Understandable History of the Bible** Rev. Samuel Gipp Th.D confirms this fact. He writes:

Quote: "The Old Latin Vulgate was used by the Christians in the churches of the Waldenses, Gauls, Celts, Albigenses and other fundamental groups throughout Europe. This Latin version became so used and beloved by orthodox Christians and was in such common use by the common people that it assumed the term 'Vulgate' as a name. Vulgate comes from 'vulgar' which is the Latin word for 'common' It was so esteemed for its faithfulness to the deity of Christ and its accurate reproductions of the originals, that these early Christians let Jerome's Roman Catholic translation 'sit on the shelf.' Jerome's translation was not used by the true Biblical Christians for almost a millennium after it was translated from corrupted manuscripts by Jerome in 380 A.D. Even then it only came into usage due to the death of Latin as a common language, and the violent, wicked persecutions waged against true believers by Pope Gregory IX during his reign from 1227 to 1242 A.D." (Ref:B2)

David Fuller confirms this fact:

Quote: "It is clearly evident that the Latin Bible of early British Christianity was **not** the Latin Bible (Vulgate) of the Papacy." (Ref:F9)

The Italic Bible (AD157)

Quote: "Italy, France and Great Britain were once provinces of the old Roman Empire. Latin was then the language of the common people. So the first translations of the Bible in these countries were made from the Greek Vulgate into Latin. One of the first of these Latin Bibles was for the Waldenses in northern Italy, translated not later than 157 AD and was known as the **Italic Version**. The renowned scholar Beza states that the Italic Church dates from 120 AD. Allix, an outstanding scholar, testifies that enemies had corrupted many manuscripts, while the Italic Church handed them down in their apostolic purity." (Ref:D2)

The Waldensian (AD 120 & onwards)

Quote: "The Waldenses were among the first of the peoples of Europe to obtain a translation of the Holy Scriptures. Hundreds of years before the Reformation, they possessed a Bible in manuscript in their native tongue. They had the truth unadulterated, and this rendered them the special objects of hatred and persecution ... Here for a thousand years, witnesses for the truth maintained the ancient faith...In a most wonderful manner it (the **Word of Truth**) was **preserved uncorrupted through all the ages of darkness.**" (Ref:F7)

The Gallic Bible (Southern France) (AD177)

The Gothic Bible (AD 330-350)

The Old Syriac Bible (AD 400)

The Armenian Bible (AD 400) There are **1244 copies** of this version still in existence.

The Palestinian Syriac (AD 450)

The French Bible of Oliveton (AD 1535)

The Czech Bible (AD 1602)

The Italian Bible of Diodati (AD 1606)

The Greek Orthodox Bible: Used from Apostolic times to the present day by the Greek Orthodox Church.

All the above mentioned Bibles and the vast majority (about 99%) of the **5200 extant New Testament MSS** are in agreement with the text now known as **Textus Receptus**; the Text which underlies the **Authorized King James Bible.**

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English Bibles

John Wycliffe's Translation (1380-82). This was the first manuscript (hand-written) Bible in the English language. Strictly speaking, it was not a **version**, but a translation into English from the Old Latin Vulgate. Wycliffe, often described as the '*Morning Star of the Reformation*', was an able Latin scholar. Alas! so hated was he for making Scripture available to the common man that some 44 years after his death his bones were dug up and burned, and his ashes cast into the river Swift.

William Tyndale's New Testament (1526) was the first printed Testament in the English language. Unlike Wycliffe's translation, Tyndale's New Testament was translated directly from the Greek **Majority Text**, from which came the Received Text - **Textus Receptus**. More about this Text later. Tyndale's work, in other words, was a '**version**'. The first printings of Tyndale's version were burned at St Paul's Cross (London). At that time it was a grievous offence, punishable by fine, imprisonment or death to even possess a copy of Tyndale's New Testament. It was said of William Tyndale that he was:

Quote: "A man so skilled in the seven languages, Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Italian, Spanish, English and French, that which ever he spake, you would suppose it his native tongue." (Ref: E4)

He it was who said to the ignorant clerics of his day that he would '**cause the boy who driveth the plough to know more of the Scriptures than them.**'

Quote: "*Before Tyndale's day the English versions of the Bible had been translations of a translation, being derived from the Vulgate or older Latin versions. Tyndale, for the first time, went back to the original Hebrew and Greek. And not only did he go back to the original languages seeking for the truth, but he embodied that truth when found in so noble a translation that it has ever since been deemed wise by scholars and revisers to make but a few changes in it; consequently every succeeding version is in reality little more than a revision of Tyndale's. It has been truly said that 'the peculiar genius which breathes through the English Bible, the mingled tenderness and majesty, the Saxon simplicity, the grandeur - unequalled, unapproached in the attempted improvements of modern scholars - all are here, and bear the impress of the mind of one man, and that man is William Tyndale.'*" (Ref: E5)

But alas! Tyndale was to suffer the wrath of blind ecclesiastical authority. He was burned at the stake!

Quote: "*The martyr was first confined in the castle of Filford, about 20 miles from Antwerp. He was taken from prison on Friday, October 6th 1536, fastened to the stake, strangled, and his body burned to ashes. The fervent prayer of the martyr Tyndale, when bound to the stake, 'Lord, open the King of England's eyes,' was about to be answered shortly.*" (Ref:A3)

David Fuller writes of Tyndale:

Quote: "*In the Reformation period the Church of Rome sought to maintain its dominant position by burning not only the copies of the bible, but also those who recognized the supreme authority of God's word. Tyndale was burned at the stake at Vilvorde outside Brussels in Belgium on August 6, (October according to some historians) 1536. His great offence was that he had translated the scriptures into English and was making copies available against the wishes of the Roman catholic hierarchy.*" (Ref:F3)

Miles Coverdale's Bible (1535). This was the first complete Bible in the English language. Coverdale was not the scholar Tyndale was, for his translation relied heavily on Tyndale and Luther's German Bible. It was printed just one year before his friend Tyndale was martyred.

Matthew's Bible (1500-1555). This was the first Bible issued with the king's license. It was mostly taken from Tyndale's and Coverdale's work which had gone before. It was printed in Hamburg by the king's printer John Rogers and was dedicated to Henry VIII by Rogers under the name Thomas Matthew, hence its name.

The Great Bible (1539). This Bible was printed in large folio (15x9 inches) hence its name. It was printed in Paris and was mostly a revision of Tyndale's and Matthew's work which went before.

The Geneva Version (1560). During the reign of the Catholic Queen Mary many Protestant believers from Britain fled to the Continent. The Scot **John Knox** was one. The Geneva Bible is a true '**version**' having been translated from the original Hebrew and Greek throughout.

Quote: "*A number of these intellectual pilgrims rendezvoused in Geneva (known as the Holy City of the Alps) to form the first committee to attempt a translation of the Bible. Such men as Theodore Beza, John Knox, William Whittingham and Miles Coverdale laboured six years to produce the celebrated Geneva Bible in 1560. Although this Bible was the first to feature numbered verses and italics, its main achievement was the Hebrew to English rendering of Ezra through Malachi, thus representing the first English Bible translated entirely out of the original languages.*"
(Ref: E6)

Quote: "*The Geneva Bible was the first complete translation into English from the originals throughout. It was addressed to 'the brethren of England, Scotland, and Ireland,'... There were two Bibles at this time in general use in England. The Geneva Bible was the more popular of the two, and was generally read in the household and in private study of the Word by the people. The Cranmer or Bishops' Bible was the one, however, which obtained most favour amongst the clergy and was read in the churches.*" (Ref: A4)

The Bishops' Bible (1568).

Quote: "*Archbishop Parker was the master mind in the preparation of this new edition of the Holy Scriptures, assisted by about 15 scholarly men. He distributed the 'Cranmer Bible' into parts, assigning portions to various learned bishops, the whole being subject to his own personal supervision. The large number of the revisers being from the Episcopal bench gave the name and character to this bible. It was printed in large size, and beautifully executed. It was adorned with numerous cuts; its notes were brief, and, like the 'Geneva Bible,' was divided into verses. It was used in the Churches for about 40 years. Various revised additions of the Bishops' Bible were published. Soon after the appearance of the Authorized Version of 1611, the Bishops' Bible - the last edition of which was published about five years before its noble successor - fell into general disuse...*" (Ref:A5)

The King James Version (1611) This is the Real Word of God for our generation.

The Almighty has used it to further His work for coming on 400 years. See Section 10 for further details of this Bible.



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