

LANGUAGES OF THE BIBLE
NEW TESTAMENT
May 15, 2019

Septuagint

Aramaic was the mother-tongue of Jesus.

More than likely he preached and taught in Aramaic.

All the New Testament books were originally written in Classical Greek (or Common Greek).

It was the language of Alexander the Great of Macedon when he lived in Northern Greece.

In the fourth century BC he conquered a large portion of the known world.

He took his language with him wherever he went in and around the Mediterranean.

As a result, Common Greek became the international language during Jesus' time.

However, the New Testament Common Greek is not identical to that of the Roman world.

The Hebraic background of the writers is seen throughout the biblical texts.

Their influence affected the grammar and meaning of words.

So the New Testament Greek is Common Greek with a Semitic accent (Koine Greek).

We must remember that all the New Testament writers were Jews except for Luke.

Bible which most early Christians used was the Septuagint.

It was the very first Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible dated as early as the 3rd Century BC.

Legend (with some truths):

Septuagint is Latin for *seventy* as tradition states it had seventy-two translators.

King Ptolemy II wrote a letter to Eleazar, the high priest at Jerusalem.

He requested 6 elders of each tribe (seventy-two men) to translate the Hebrew Bible into Greek.

Each man was to be exemplary in life and knowledgeable in the Torah.

On arrival at Alexandria, the translators were greeted by the king and given a lavish banquet.

They were then housed in a secluded place on the island of Pharos.

Lighthouse of Pharos is one of the Seven Wonders of the World.



Under the direction of Demetrius, the royal librarian, it was completed in seventy-two days. Alexandrian Jewish community assembled to hear a reading of the new version. It was so well received that a curse was pronounced on anyone who would alter the text. King also marveled at the results of their work. Translators were sent back to Jerusalem endowed with gifts for themselves and the high priest. Septuagint made the Hebrew Scriptures available to both Jews and Greek.

Distinctive Features of the Septuagint (LXX) Translation

- In Proverbs 6:6-8 (after the Hebrew proverb of the ant) the Septuagint adds a Greek proverb of the bee.
Or go to the bee, and learn how diligent she is, and how earnestly she is engaged in her work; whose labors kings and private men use for health, and she is desired and respected by all though weak in body, she is advanced by honoring wisdom.
- Original Septuagint translation of Daniel was thought to be too much of a paraphrase. It was replaced by another translation ascribed to Theodotion (of Asia Minor) at the end of the second century AD. In the long passage in Daniel 11 about the kings of the north and the kings of the south, the original Septuagint of Daniel consistently translates the term *king of the south* with *king of Egypt*. Version of Theodotion has *king of the south* throughout.
- The four letters YHWH that form the personal name of God in the Hebrew text are rendered *Kyrios* throughout the Septuagint. It would be translated *the Lord* in English versions.
- In several places in Scripture the Septuagint translators explain the metaphor.

The Lord tends me as a shepherd, and I shall want nothing. In a place of green grass, there he has made me dwell. He has nourished me by the water of rest. He has restored my soul. He has guided me into the paths of righteousness, for his name's sake. Yea, even if I should walk in the midst of the shadow of death, I will not be afraid of evils for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, these have comforted me. Thou hast prepared a table before me in presence of them that afflict me. Thou hast thoroughly anointed my head with oil and thy cup cheers me like the best wine. Thy mercy also shall follow me all the days of my life and my dwelling shall be in the house of the Lord for a very long time.

Limitations of the Septuagint

Septuagint of Job is about a sixth shorter than the traditional Hebrew text of the Bible (MT). Missing portions were put in the Greek version of Theodotion. Septuagint of Jeremiah is about an eighth shorter than the Masoretic Text. Repeated passages are cut out and the order is changed. Septuagint often preserves different numbers (such as the ages of some of the patriarchs). In Genesis 5:3, the age of Adam at the birth of Seth is 130 years (MT) or 230 years (S).

Many applauded the work of the translators.

It did not receive a universally favourable reception among the Jews.

That day was as ominous for Israel as the day on which the golden calf was made since the Law could not be accurately translated (from Tractate for Scribes).

Adoption of the Septuagint by the early Church was biggest factor in its abandonment by Jews. Example: Septuagint used *parthenos* (virgin) in Isaiah 7:14 as evidence for Jesus' virgin birth.

Examples of New Testament Greek Words with Hebrew Meaning

For an Athenian the Greek word *ekklēsia* meant an assembly of citizens for political reasons. Word is used in this way in Acts 19:32, 39, and 41.

When early Christians called themselves the *ekklēsia* it meant they were the people of God.

Greek word in Hebrew is *qāhāl* which is the Old Testament word for Israel.

To an Athenian the *ekklēsia of God* would have been verbal nonsense.

To a Jewish person it was filled with meaning.

Greek word for *repentance* is *metanoia* and to a Greek it would mean *change of mind*.

When Jesus called for repentance he called for a complete *change of direction*.

New Testament *repentance* reflects the Old Testament meaning of a radical return to God.

Early Christian Documents

We do not possess any of the originals but we know they were written on papyrus rolls.

Single papyrus sheet would suffice for a short letter like the one written to Philemon.

For any of the gospels they would join many sheets together to form a roll (30 feet long).

For 1400 years (100 to 1450 AD) the New Testament was copied by hand.

Manuscripts were studied by textual critics to assure their accuracy.

About 5,000 known manuscripts vary in length from a few verses to several books.

Early Christians needed to read both the Old and New Testaments.

They inherited the Old Testament tradition and had to understand Hebrew accurately.

Need prompted the biblical scholarship undertaken by Origen in the third century AD.

Origen arranged six versions of the Old Testament in parallel columns for comparative study.

In the *Hexapla* the first column was in the original Hebrew.

Next column was a transliteration in Greek so Christians could pronounce the Hebrew text.

Septuagint was included and the rest were Greek translations by Christian scholars.

| Hebrew language text—Column 1 | Transliteration: Column 2 | Aquila Column 3 | Symmachus Column 4 | Septuagint Column 5 | Theodotion Column 6 |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------|----------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| הָיָה | היה | היה | היה | היה κς | היה |
| וְ | χι | θη | ο | ση | ση |
| וַיִּשְׁמָע | σμας | ηκουσε | επακουσας | εισηκουσε | εισηκουσε |
| τῆς | κωλ | φωνης | της φωνης | της φωνης | της φωνης |
| ·:הַיְהוָה | θανουκαί | δεησεως μου. | της ικεσις μου. | της δεησεως μου. | της δεησεως μου. |
| הָיָה | היה | היה | היה | היה κς | היה |
| וַיִּבֶן | όζει | καπάτος μου | ισχύς μου | βοηθός μου | βοηθός μου |
| וַיִּבֶן | οήμωγεννη | (καλ) θυρεός μου | και υπερασπιστής μου | καλ <υ>περασπιστής μου | (καλ) υπερασπιστής μου |
| וַיִּבֶן | βα | έν αύτω | αύτω | εν αύτω | έν αύτω |
| וַיִּבֶן | βατε | έπεποιθησεν | έπεποιθησεν | ήλιπσεν | ήλιπσεν |

During the first century, Greek was the language of the small Christian community. With the spread of the faith through the Roman Empire a Latin version of the Bible was needed. By the second century there was one version in use in North Africa and another in Italy. Versions became corrupted.

By the fourth century there were almost as many texts as manuscripts.

In 382 Pope Damasus I commissioned St. Jerome to provide a definitive Latin version.

Pope Damasus I presided over the Council of Rome (382) that determined the canon.

St. Jerome produced the *Vulgate* while living in a monastery at Bethlehem.

It was the Bible of the whole western church until the time of the Reformation.

Timeline of English Bibles

The first hand-written English language Bible manuscripts were produced in 1380.

Work was done by John Wycliffe who was an Oxford professor and scholar / theologian.

He believed the teachings of the organized church were contrary to the Bible.

So he developed a new translation based on the Latin Vulgate.

However, his teachings and translation of the Bible infuriated the pope.

John Hus was a follower of John Wycliffe.

He was burned at the stake in 1415 with Wycliffe's Bibles used as kindling for the fire.

Last words of John Hus –

In 100 years God will raise up a man whose calls for reform cannot be suppressed.

100 years later Martin Luther nailed 95 *Theses of Contention* onto the church door in Wittenberg.

Luther was the first to translate and publish the Bible in the dialect of the German people.

Side Note

Johann Gutenberg invented the printing press in 1450.

First book printed was a Latin language Bible.

Invention of the movable-type printing press meant that Bibles and books could be reproduced.

It was an essential tool to the success of the Reformation.

Back to the Timeline

Erasmus wanted to correct the corrupted texts found in the Latin Vulgate.

In 1516 he published a Greek-Latin Parallel New Testament.

Latin part was his own fresh rendering of the text from the more accurate Greek.

It was the first non-Latin Vulgate text of scripture to be produced in a millennium.

It brought to attention just how corrupt and inaccurate the Latin Vulgate had become.

It emphasized how important it was to return to the original Hebrew and Greek.

Luther translated the New Testament into German from the writings of Erasmus.

Luther also published a German Pentateuch in 1523.

In 1525-1526 the Tyndale New Testament was the first printed edition of scripture in English.

They were burned as soon as the bishop and King Henry VIII could confiscate them.

Income and power of the church would crumble if people had access to scripture.

Contradictions between scripture and the church would open the eyes of the people to the truth.

There are only two known copies left of Tyndale's 1525-1526 First Edition.

Myles Coverdale and John Thomas Matthew Rogers carried the English Bible project forward. Coverdale printed the first complete Bible in the English language on October 4, 1535. He used Luther's German text and the Latin as sources.

John Rogers went on to print the second complete English Bible in 1537.

It was translated from the original Biblical languages of Hebrew and Greek.

It was influenced by Tyndale's Pentateuch and New Testament edition and Coverdale's Bible.

In 1539, the Archbishop of Canterbury hired Coverdale to publish the *Great Bible*.

It was at the request of King Henry VIII and became the first English Bible for public use.

It was distributed to every church, chained to the pulpit, and a reader was provided.

Illiterate were to hear the Word of God in plain English.

Bible was known as the *Great Bible* because of its great size (fourteen inches tall).



King Henry VIII requested that the pope permit him to divorce his wife to marry his mistress.

Pope refused and King Henry married his mistress anyway.

He renounced Roman Catholicism and declared himself as the new head of the church.

New branch of the Christian Church became known as the Anglican Church.

First act was to defy the wishes of Rome and fund the printing of the scriptures in English.

Around 1550 Queen *Bloody Mary* wanted England to return to the Roman Catholic Church.

Rogers and Cranmer were both burned at the stake along with other reformers.

Era was known as the *Marian Exile* as refugees fled from England.

Church at Geneva was sympathetic to the reformer refugees and became a safe haven for them.

Church was determined to produce a Bible that would educate their families while in exile.

Geneva Bible was completed in 1557.

In Genesis the Bible described the clothing that God fashioned for Adam and Eve as Breeches.

Some people referred to the Geneva Bible as the Breeches Bible.

It was the first Bible to add numbered verses to the chapters.

It made it easier to reference specific passages.

Every chapter was also accompanied by extensive marginal notes and references.

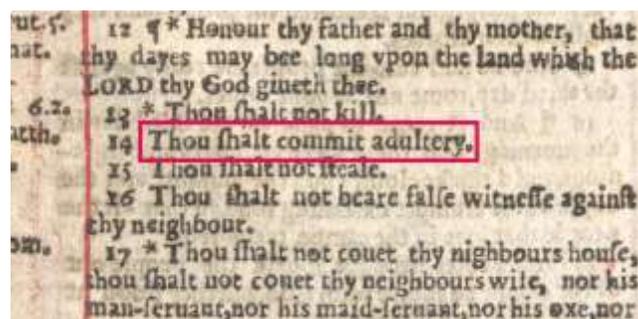
As a result the Geneva Bible is considered the first English *Study Bible*.
Geneva Bible holds the honor of being the first Bible taken to America.
It was the Bible of the Puritans and Pilgrims.

At the end of Queen Mary's reign the reformers could return safely to England.
Anglican Church was now under the authority of Queen Elizabeth I.
Reluctantly she tolerated the printing and distribution of the Geneva Bible.
Marginal notes were inflammatory against the institutional church so a new version was written.
Bishop's Bible was a revision of the Great Bible.
It became the rough draft of the King James Version.

In 1582 the Church of Rome surrendered their fight for *Latin only*.
They went on to publish an English Bible with all the distortions and corruptions of the Vulgate.
It was known as the Rheims New Testament because the translation was done in Rheims, France.
With the death of Queen Elizabeth I, Prince James VI of Scotland became King James I.
Protestant clergy approached the new king for a new translation to replace Bishop's Bible.
Geneva Bible won the hearts of the people but they did not want the controversial notes.
Leaders wanted a Bible for the people with notes only for word clarification or cross-references.

1611 King James Bible was the combined effort of about fifty scholars.
Typographical error in Ruth 3:15 rendered a pronoun *he* instead of *she*.
Collectors named these first editions the *He Bibles* and others as the *She Bibles*.
One year later they began to duplicate normal-size printings of the King James Bible.
Individuals could have their own personal copy of the Bible.

Geneva Bible is textually 95% the same as the King James Version.
King James Bible turned out to be an excellent and accurate translation.
First English language Bible to be printed in America was a King James Version.
Robert Aitken was told by President George Washington to provide Americans with Bibles.



Side Note

In 1631 a Bible was printed with a major typographical error.
The Seventh Commandment read: Thou shalt commit adultery
A thousand copies were printed for the much sought after *Wicked Bible*.

English Revised Version (1880) would become the popular version after King James Version. It was a modern English Bible that removed the fourteen Apocryphal books. There is no known reason for the removal of these books.

Americans responded to the ERV Bible by publishing the American Standard Version in 1901. In 1971 it was further revised and was called the New American Standard Version Bible. It is considered the most accurate word-for-word translation of the original Greek and Hebrew. It is so literal a translation that it does not flow as easily in conversational English. As a result the New International Version (NIV) was produced in 1973. It was designed for phrase-by-phrase accuracy and ease of reading. It was meant for a middle school reading level.

In 1982 the New King James Version was produced. Original intent was to keep the basic wording of the KJV while changing the obscure words. It was not enough of a change for them to be able to legally copyright the result.

In 2002 a major attempt was made to bridge the gap between NIV and NASB. This translation is called the English Standard Version.

The New Revised Standard Version

First appeared in 1989 and has received the widest acclaim from academics and church leaders. It is the only Bible translation that is widely ecumenical. It is the Bible translation most widely *authorized* by the churches. It has been approved by the American and Canadian Conference of Catholic bishops. It has also received the blessing of the Greek Orthodox Church.

It continues the tradition of William Tyndale and the King James Version. It also honors the American Standard Version and the Revised Standard Version. It is as literal as possible in adhering to the ancient texts but free to make the meaning clear. It draws on new sources that increase our understanding of previously obscure passages. Sources include new manuscripts, Dead Sea scrolls, and archaeological finds. It also includes new understandings of Greek and Hebrew grammar.

Assignment for May 22

God Saves a People

The Exodus (Pattern of God's Saving Acts)

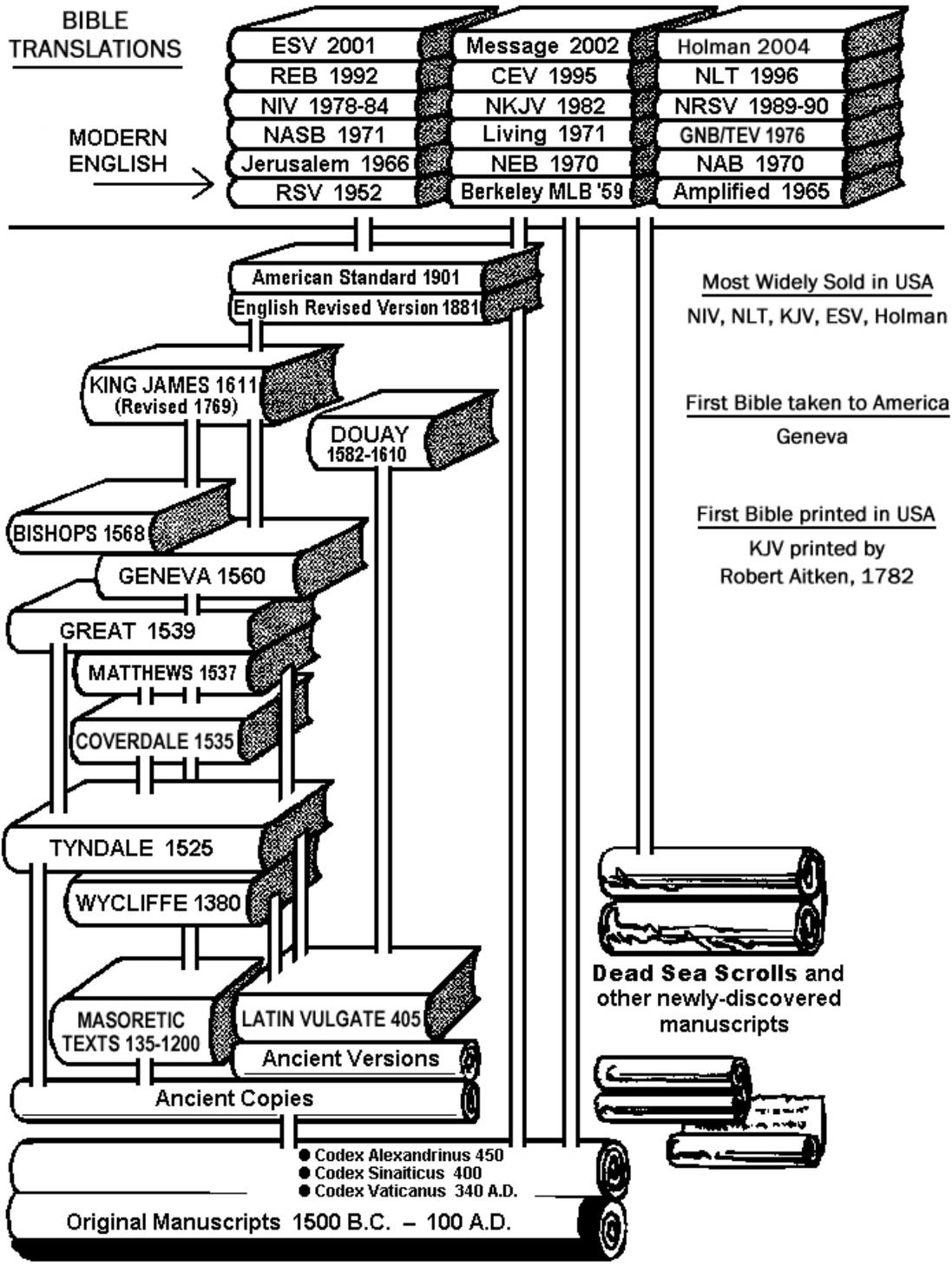
Exodus 1-15

Significance of Names

Major Characteristics of the Exodus Story

Central Focus for the Israelites

Passover



Charted adapted, corrected and updated from Thompson Chain Reference Study Bible by David Ahl, 2015, www.BibleStudyMen.com