



History of the English Bible

Ben Irwin

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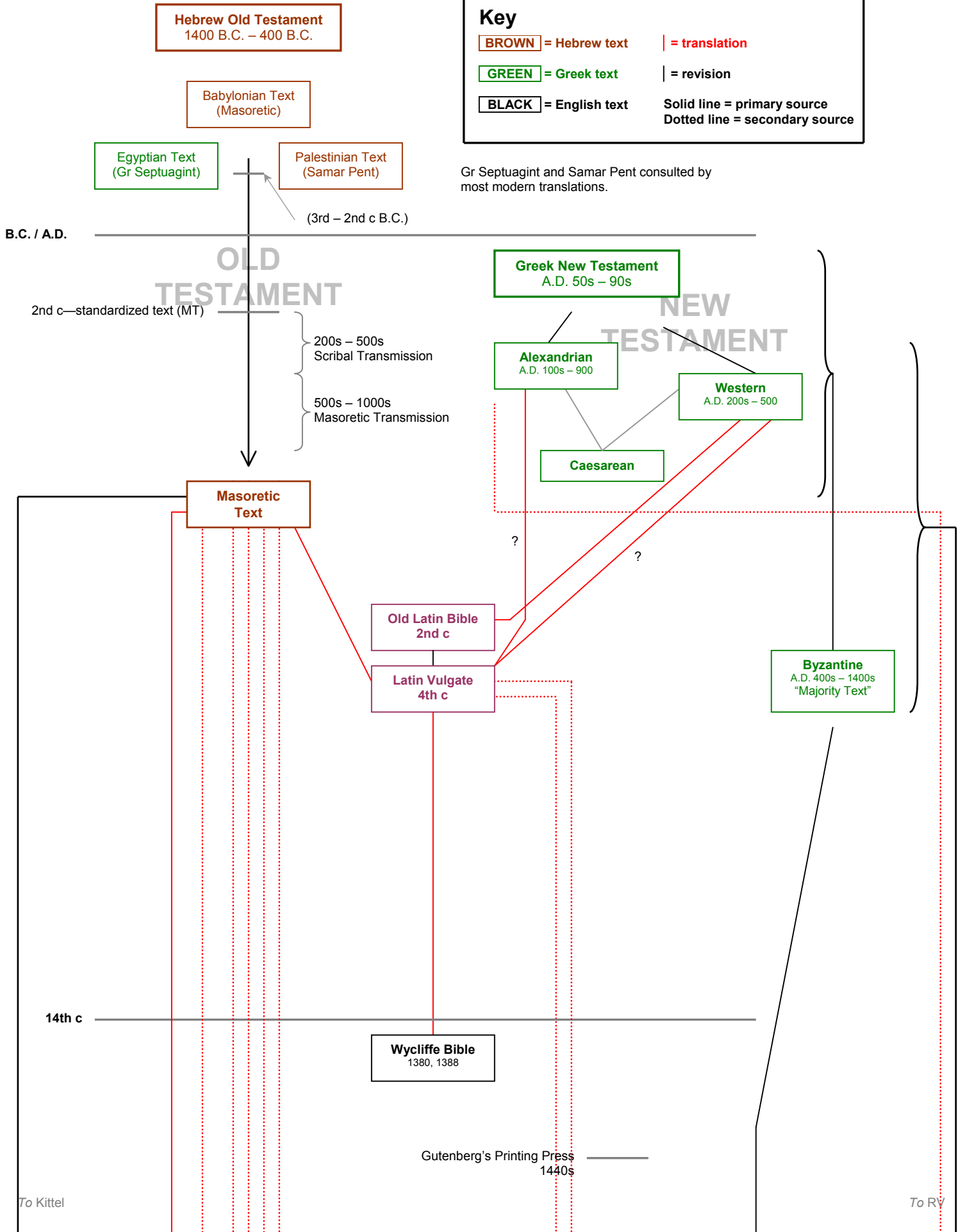
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Chart: Development of the English Bible

Key

| | |
|--|---|
| BROWN = Hebrew text | = translation |
| GREEN = Greek text | = revision |
| BLACK = English text | Solid line = primary source Dotted line = secondary source |

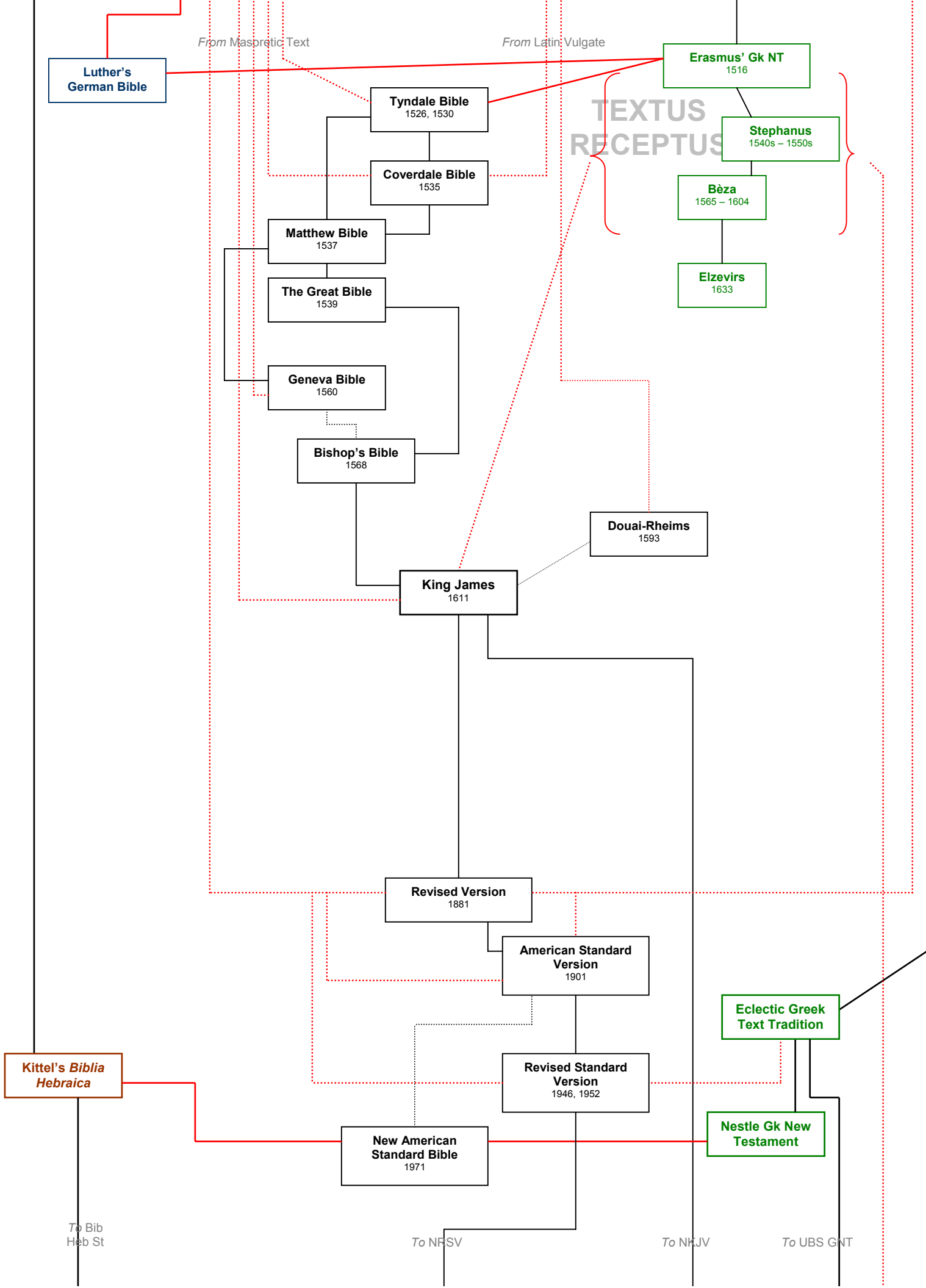
Gr Septuagint and Samar Pent consulted by most modern translations.



From Masoretic Text

From Latin Vulgate

TEXTUS
RECEPTUS



Luther's German Bible

Tyndale Bible
1526, 1530

Coverdale Bible
1535

Matthew Bible
1537

The Great Bible
1539

Geneva Bible
1560

Bishop's Bible
1568

King James
1611

Revised Version
1881

American Standard Version
1901

Revised Standard Version
1946, 1952

New American Standard Bible
1971

Erasmus' Gk NT
1516

Stephanus
1540s - 1550s

Beza
1565 - 1604

Elzevirs
1633

Douai-Rheims
1593

Eclectic Greek Text Tradition

Nestle Gk New Testament

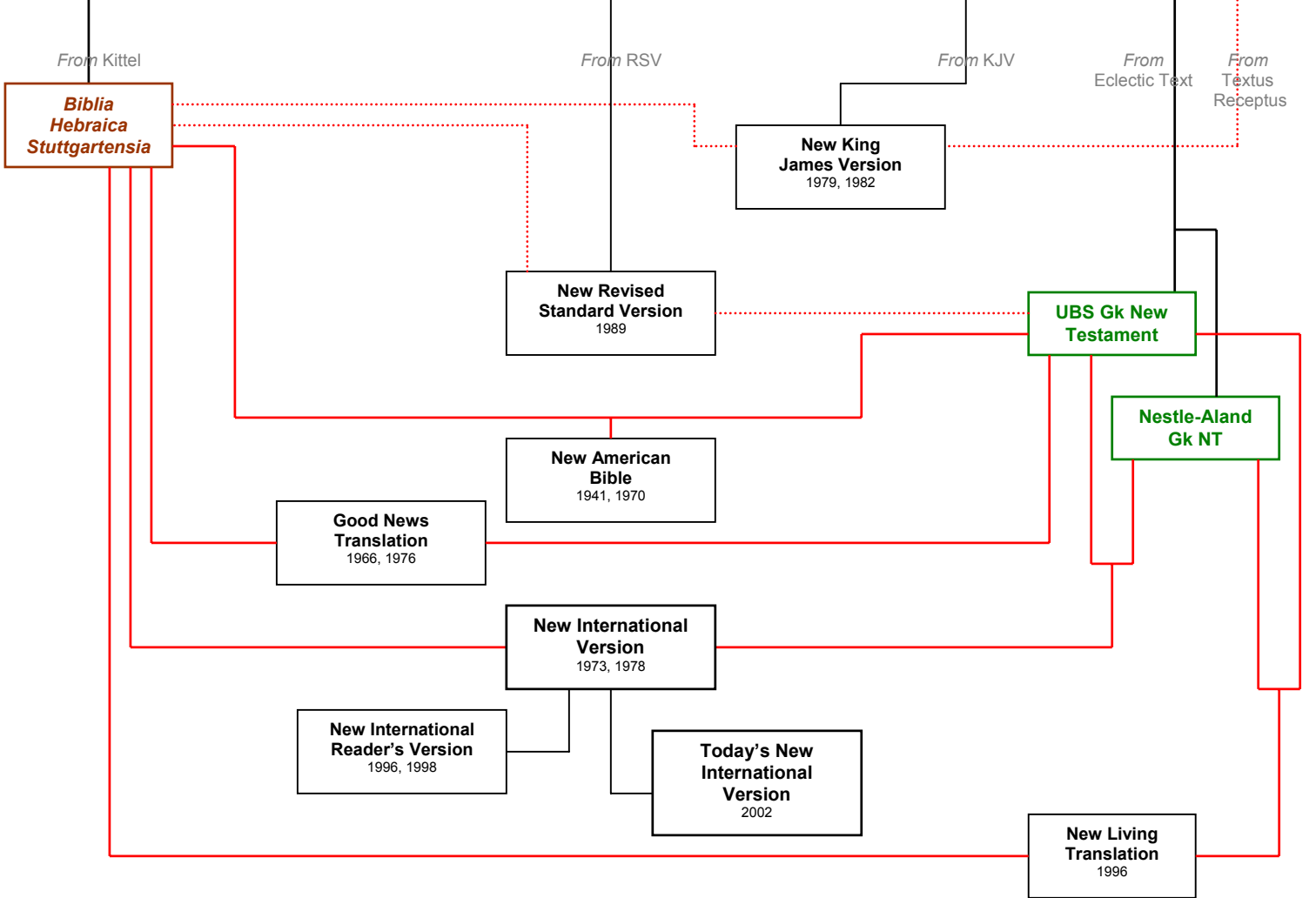
Kittel's Biblia Hebraica

To Bib Hebraica

To NRSV

To NKJV

To UBS GNT



Quick Terms: A Glossary

Styles

- **Literal** “Word for word” approach to translation, generally following the syntax and word order of the text being translated. This classification identifies Bibles that practiced principles of formal equivalence before its emergence as a formally developed philosophy.
- **Idiomatic** “Thought for thought” approach to translation, generally conforming to the syntax and word order of the receptor (receiver) language for the sake of clearly representing the original text’s meaning. This classification identifies Bibles that practiced principles of dynamic equivalence before its emergence as a formally developed translation philosophy.
- **Formal equivalence** Technical term for the “word for word” approach to translation, generally following the syntax and word order of the text being translated.
- **Dynamic equivalence** Technical term for the “thought for thought” approach to translation, generally conforming to the syntax and word order of the receptor (receiver) language for the sake of clearly representing the original text’s meaning.
- **Blend of dynamic and formal equivalence** A translation philosophy that attempts to incorporate the strengths of both dynamic and formal equivalence. Versions that follow this translation philosophy tend to follow the syntax and word order of the original text when doing so does not obscure the text’s meaning for the contemporary reader. When necessary to make the meaning of the text transparent, the blended approach will produce a more dynamic rendering.
- **Paraphrase** A free-form approach to translation that generally produces the most idiomatic rendering possible. Most paraphrases are the work of single individuals and may or may not be based on the original texts.

Types

- **Translation** A Bible version that renders the text from one language (usually Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek) into English.
- **Revision** A Bible version that uses an earlier English Bible as its primary text

Texts

- **Primary text** The base text from which a translation or a revision is produced
- **Secondary text** Additional sources consulted, occasionally followed instead of the primary text
- **Apocrypha (Deuterocanonical books)** A series of books dated to the intertestamental period and included in the Septuagint. The Catholic Church recognizes many of the books as part of a “second canon” (deutero-canonical); the Eastern Orthodox Church accepts even more of these books as canonical.
- **Latin Vulgate** A revision of Old Latin Bibles from the 2nd, 3rd and 4th centuries (also consulted Hebrew and Greek texts). The Vulgate was prepared by a 4th century scholar named Jerome. Jerome’s work, which follows a fairly dynamic approach to translation, eventually became the standard Catholic Bible.
- **Septuagint** The 2nd century BC Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament. The Septuagint also includes the Apocryphal (or Deuterocanonical) books.
- **Dead Sea Scrolls** A collection of ancient Hebrew manuscripts, also known as the Qumran scrolls, discovered hidden in caves located in modern-day Israel. These scrolls date between the 3rd and 1st centuries BC.
- **Targums** An Aramaic translation of part of the Old Testament
- **Syriac Peshitta** An ancient translation in Syriac (once spoken in the region now occupied by Iraq)
- **Hebrew Masoretic Text** Commonly regarded as the standard Hebrew text. The standardization process began no later than the 2nd century AD. Its transmission shepherded first by rabbis then by scribes, the Masoretic Text is known for its meticulous preservation.
- **Biblia Hebraica** A modern edition of the Hebrew Masoretic text
- **Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia** A modern edition of the Hebrew Masoretic text

Texts (continued)

- **Erasmus' Greek New Testament** The first printed Greek New Testament distributed publicly. Erasmus' work was based on only a handful of late Greek manuscripts that are generally representative of the so-called Majority Text (see below). Erasmus completed work on his text in only ten months.
- **Complutensian Polyglot** A parallel Bible that included the Hebrew Old Testament, the Septuagint, the Latin Bible and the first printed Greek New Testament. While the Polyglot was completed before Erasmus' text, due to the reluctance of the organized church, the Polyglot was not published until 1522, several years after Erasmus' text was distributed.
- **Majority Text** A late text family of similar manuscripts that comprise the majority of all extant Greek New Testament manuscripts.
- **Textus Receptus** The New Testament text tradition based on Erasmus' Greek New Testament. Latin for "Received Text," *Textus Receptus* was a marketing title applied to the text by Bonaventure and Abraham Elzevir, publishers who promoted their edition as the one in which "we give nothing changed or corrupted."
- **Westcott-Hort Greek New Testament** The first critical edition of the Greek New Testament to challenge the Textus Receptus. The Westcott-Hort text was based on older manuscripts generally considered superior to those behind the Textus Receptus.
- **Eclectic Greek text** Any Greek text based on comparison of the many Greek New Testament manuscripts. Eclectic texts generally weigh evidence from all text families in order to determine which most likely contains the original reading. Examples of eclectic texts include (1) the United Bible Societies (UBS) Greek New Testament, (2) the Nestle Greek New Testament and (3) the Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament.
- **United Bible Societies (UBS) Greek New Testament** A modern eclectic edition of the Greek New Testament.
- **Nestle Greek New Testament** A modern eclectic edition of the Greek New Testament
- **Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament** A modern eclectic edition of the Greek New Testament

Features

- **Verse paragraphs** Each verse starts a new line on the page
- **Sense paragraphs** The division of the text into paragraphs designed to represent the original text's progression of thought
- **Gender inclusive language** Refers to the use of language that is not gender-specific (e.g., *person*, *human being*, *they*, etc.) where Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek terms grammatically classified as "masculine" occur in the original text without reference to a particular biological gender

Quick Facts: English Bibles Through the Ages

Wycliffe New Testament (first edition)

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| Date | 1380 |
| Translator(s) | Followers of John Wycliffe |
| Style | Literal |
| Type | Translation |
| Base text | Latin Vulgate |
| Comments | A Middle English, pre-printing press translation |

Wycliffe New Testament (second edition)

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| Date | 1388 |
| Translator(s) | John Purvey and associates |
| Style | Idiomatic |
| Type | Revision |
| Base text | Wycliffe Bible, first edition |
| Comments | Like its predecessor, a Middle English, pre-printing press translation. Purvey's approach to translation was "sentence-for-sentence," rather than "word-for-word." Purvey engaged in a rudimentary form of textual criticism, and took the committee approach to translation. |

Tyndale Bible

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| Date | 1526, 1530 |
| Translator(s) | William Tyndale |
| Style | Idiomatic |
| Type | Translation |
| Base text | Erasmus' Greek New Testament |
| Features | Sense paragraphs |
| Comments | First Modern English New Testament. Also the first English version translated from the original texts. The Tyndale Bible did not contain the entire Old Testament. Tyndale's translation featured very idiomatic English. |

Coverdale Bible

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| Date | 1535 |
| Translator(s) | Miles Coverdale |
| Style | — |
| Type | Revision |
| Base text | Tyndale Bible (primary source) Latin Vulgate (secondary source) Martin Luther's German Bible (secondary source) |
| Features | Apocryphal text placed between Old and New Testaments. |
| Comments | First complete Modern English Bible. |

Matthew Bible

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| Date | 1537 |
| Translator(s) | John Rogers (pseudonym: Thomas Matthew) |
| Style | — |
| Type | Revision |
| Base text | Tyndale Bible (primary source) Coverdale Bible (secondary source, used for those Old Testament books not translated by Tyndale) |
| Features | Apocrypha placed between Old and New Testaments |
| Comments | First officially sanctioned English Bible. |

The Great Bible

| | |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Date | 1539 (followed by several revisions) |
| Translator(s) | Miles Coverdale |
| Style | — |
| Type | Revision |
| Base text | Matthew Bible |
| Features | 16½" x 11" trim size |
| Comments | First "authorized" English Bible. |

Geneva Bible

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| Date | 1560 |
| Translator(s) | William Whittingham and other British exiles in continental Europe during the reign of Mary Tudor |
| Style | — |
| Type | Revision |
| Base text | Tyndale Bible (primary source) Hebrew text (secondary source, for those OT books not translated by Tyndale) |
| Features | First English Bible to use modern verse divisions. Verse paragraphs. Marginal notes heavily influenced by Calvinist theology. |
| Comments | The most popular English Bible until the printing of the King James Version, despite never receiving "authorized" status. |

Bishop's Bible

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| Date | 1568 |
| Translator(s) | A group of British bishops and scholars led by Matthew Parker |
| Style | — |
| Type | Revision |
| Base text | The Great Bible (primary source) Latin Vulgate (secondary source, for some OT passages) The Geneva Bible (secondary source) |
| Features | Verse paragraphs |
| Comments | Received "authorized" status, yet it was unable to compete with the popularity of the Geneva Bible. |

Douai-Rheims Bible

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| Date | 1593 |
| Translator(s) | Gregory Martin, William Allen and Richard Bristow |
| Style | Literal |
| Type | Revision |
| Base text | Latin Vulgate |
| Features | Sense paragraphs |
| Comments | First Bible printed specifically for English Catholics. |

King James Version (KJV)

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| Date | 1611 |
| Translator(s) | Six committees composed of 47 university scholars |
| Style | Literal (with some elements of dynamic translation) |
| Type | Revision |
| Base text | Bishop's Bible (primary source) Complutensian Polyglot (secondary source, edition of the Hebrew Masoretic Text) Antwerp Polyglot (secondary source, edition of the Hebrew Masoretic Text) Textus Receptus (secondary source, edition of the Greek New Testament) Several English and European Bibles (secondary source) |
| Features | Omission of controversial marginal notes giving theological interpretation Marginal notes giving alternative translations of difficult passages Variety of words used for the same Hebrew, Aramaic or Greek word Italics used to mark any words supplied for the sake of readability Standardized spelling of Biblical names Verse paragraphs |
| Comments | An early success despite initial opposition from Puritans. In "The Translators to the Reader" the KJV scholars laid the foundation for the ongoing work of translation and revision. The supremacy of the KJV was unchallenged for 300 years. |

Revised Version (RV)

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| Date | 1881 (NT), 1885 (OT) |
| Translator(s) | Two committees of British scholars |
| Style | Formal equivalence |
| Type | Revision |
| Base text | King James Version (primary source) Hebrew Masoretic Text (secondary source) Westcott-Hort Greek New Testament (secondary source) |
| Features | Poetry set as poetry Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek words always translated with the same English word |
| Comments | Based on a more accurate New Testament text, the RV featured improved precision; but it did so at the expense of clarity. |

American Standard Version (ASV)

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| Date | 1901 |
| Translator(s) | Committee of American scholars |
| Style | Formal equivalence |
| Type | Revision |
| Base text | King James Version (primary source) Hebrew Masoretic Text (secondary source) Septuagint (secondary source) Westcott-Hort Greek New Testament (secondary source) |
| Features | Paragraph format No Apocrypha |
| Comments | Initially well accepted, the ASV was quickly rendered obsolete by advances in Biblical studies and by the emerging trend toward modern speech versions. |

A New Translation (Moffatt)

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| Date | 1913 (NT), 1924 (OT) |
| Translator(s) | James Moffatt |
| Style | Paraphrase |
| Type | Translation |
| Base text | Hebrew Masoretic Text Unspecified Greek text |
| Features | Scottish idiom Some archaic English Sense paragraphs Pentateuch translation influenced by source-critical theories |
| Comments | Three factors limited the accuracy of Moffatt's work: (1) Moffatt did not use the best Greek texts available in his day, (2) he divided the Pentateuch according to source-critical theories which reject Mosaic authorship and (3) his skill with Hebrew was limited. Still, <i>A New Translation</i> was the clearest English translation available in the early part of the twentieth century. |

An American Translation (Goodspeed)

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| Date | 1923 (NT), 1927 (whole Bible) |
| Translator(s) | Edgar J. Goodspeed and colleagues (enlisted for OT translation) |
| Style | Paraphrase |
| Type | Translation |
| Base text | Westcott-Hort Greek New Testament Hebrew Masoretic Text |
| Features | First translation to eliminate archaic pronouns (<i>thee, thou, etc.</i>) entirely |
| Comments | Regarded as a high-quality early twentieth century modern speech version. |

Berkeley Version

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| Date | 1945 (NT), 1959 (whole Bible), 1969 (revised and re-released as the Modern Language Bible) |
| Translator(s) | Gerrit Verkuyl (NT), Verkuyl and 20 scholars (OT) |
| Style | — |
| Type | Translation |
| Base text | — |
| Comments | Similar to RSV—makes limited use of modern speech while retaining archaic pronouns for references to God. Occasionally uses awkward wording and inconsistent renderings of the term <i>Yahweh</i> . The 1969 revision made considerable improvement upon the original. |

Revised Standard Version (RSV)

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| Date | 1946 (NT), 1952 (OT), 1957 (Apocrypha), 1977 (expanded edition) |
| Translator(s) | Committee of American scholars on behalf of the International Council of Religious Education (now part of the NCC) |
| Style | Formal equivalence |
| Type | Revision |
| Base text | American Standard Version (primary source) Hebrew Masoretic Text (secondary source) Eclectic Greek text (secondary source) |
| Features | Elimination of <i>-th</i> endings <i>Thee, thou, thy</i> and <i>thine</i> replaced with <i>you</i> (except when referring to God) Paragraph format Poetry set as poetry Quotation marks |
| Comments | Eventually gained broad acceptance as a highly respected translation. It faced vehement criticism from some conservatives, however, because of (among other things) (1) its association with the NCC, (2) its use of the phrase "young woman" instead of "virgin" in Isaiah 7:14, (3) its omission of the word "begotten" in John 3:16 and (4) its placement of John 3:16-21 outside the quotation marks indicating Jesus' speech. |

J.B. Phillips' New Testament

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| Date | 1958 |
| Translator(s) | J.B. Phillips |
| Style | Paraphrase |
| Type | Translation |
| Base text | United Bible Societies (UBS) Greek New Testament |
| Comments | Intended to be a translation that would have the same impact on the contemporary reader as it had on the original audience. Highly popular New Testament modern speech version. |

Amplified Bible

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| Date | 1958 (NT), 1962-1964 (OT) |
| Translator(s) | Frances Siewert |
| Style | — |
| Type | Revision/translation |
| Base text | American Standard Version (primary source) <i>Biblia Hebraica</i> (primary source) Westcott-Hort Greek New Testament (primary source) Nestle Greek New Testament (primary source) Septuagint (secondary source) Dead Sea Scrolls (secondary source) |
| Features | Provides in-text parenthetical material explaining the meaning of words Provides in-text bracketed material commenting on the text Italicizes text to highlight passages of questionable authenticity and to mark words supplied for the sake of readability |
| Comments | Unique combination of a formal equivalence-style text with dynamic expansion within the text itself. Maintains a small but loyal following. |

New English Bible (NEB)

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| Date | 1961 (NT), 1970 (whole Bible) |
| Translator(s) | Joint committee, representing the Church of Scotland, the Church of England (Anglican), the Catholic Church of England, and various Protestant churches in England. Literary scholars included for stylistic consultation |
| Style | Dynamic equivalence |
| Type | Translation |
| Base text | <i>Biblia Hebraica</i> Eclectic Greek text (e.g., the most recent Nestle-Aland and UBS editions) |
| Features | Verse numbers assigned to side column Complete Bible includes Apocrypha |
| Comments | When completed, the most lengthy and expensive translation undertaken. Occasionally features archaic English. The English used was distinctly British, limiting the translation's international appeal. |

Jerusalem Bible (JB)

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| Date | 1966, 1985 (revised and re-released as the New Jerusalem Bible) |
| Translator(s) | Committee of 30 scholars (including J.R.R. Tolkien), sponsored by the Roman Catholic Church |
| Style | Dynamic equivalence |
| Type | Translation |
| Base text | Hebrew Masoretic text (primary source) Eclectic Greek text (primary source) Septuagint (primary source) <i>La Bible de Jérusalem</i> (secondary source, French translation) |
| Features | Footnotes providing Catholic interpretation Sense paragraphs Poetry set as poetry Apocrypha (Deuterocanonical books) included within Old Testament |
| Comments | First English translation made for the Roman Catholic Church directly from the original languages (prior versions, like the Douai-Rheims Bible, translated the Latin Vulgate). Text itself compares well to other modern translations and is generally free from theological bias. |

Living Bible (LB)

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| Date | 1967 (NT), 1971 (whole Bible) |
| Translator(s) | Ken Taylor |
| Style | Paraphrase |
| Type | Revision |
| Base text | American Standard Version |
| Comments | Perhaps the most popular modern speech version published. While it was frequently criticized for over-expanding on the original, the Living Bible helped spark interest in clear translations of Scripture. |

New American Bible (NAB)

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| Date | 1970 |
| Translator(s) | The Catholic Biblical Association of America |
| Style | Dynamic equivalence |
| Type | Translation |
| Base text | Hebrew Masoretic Text (primary source) United Bible Societies Greek New Testament, 3rd edition (primary source) Septuagint (primary source) Hebrew text behind the <i>Liber Psalmorum</i> (secondary source, for Catholic Psalter) |
| Features | Sense paragraphs Poetry set as poetry Apocrypha (Deuterocanonical books) included within Old Testament Gender inclusive language used when biological gender not specified by the text (with the exception of the generic term "brothers") |

Good News Translation (GNT)

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| Date | 1966 (NT), 1976 (whole Bible), 1986 (revised) |
| Translator(s) | Translation committees (NT and OT) sponsored by the American Bible Society, as well as a review committee |
| Style | Dynamic equivalence |
| Type | Translation |
| Base text | <i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i> (primary source, edition of Hebrew Masoretic Text) United Bible Societies Greek New Testament, 3rd edition (primary source) Septuagint (secondary source) Latin Vulgate (secondary source) Syriac Peshitta (secondary source) |
| Features | Avoids technical or religious jargon Sense paragraphs Poetry set as poetry Gender inclusive language used when biological gender not specified by the text (added to the 1986 revision) Line drawings by Swiss artist Annie Vallotton |
| Comments | Designed specifically for seekers and people for whom English is a second language. The GNT enjoyed enormous popularity in the 1970s and 1980s and was reintroduced commercially by Zondervan in 2001. |

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| Date | 1971, 1995 (revised) |
| Translator(s) | Anonymous committee of scholars on behalf of the Lockman Foundation |
| Style | Formal equivalence |
| Type | Revision/translation |
| Base text | Nestle Greek New Testament (primary source) Kittel's <i>Biblia Hebraica</i> (primary source, edition of the Hebrew Masoretic Text) Dead Sea Scrolls (secondary source) American Standard Version (secondary source) |
| Features | <i>Thee, thou, thy</i> and <i>thine</i> replaced with <i>you</i> (except when referring to God). Beginning with 1995 edition, modern pronouns used exclusively. |
| Comments | Well received among conservative evangelicals. |

New International Version (NIV)

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| Date | 1973 (NT), 1978 (OT), 1983 (revised) |
| Translator(s) | 110 evangelical scholars divided into 20 translation teams (each including 2 translators, 2 consultants and 1 English stylist). Also involved were Intermediate Editorial Committees and a General Editorial Committee. The 15-member Committee on Bible Translation (CBT) oversaw the translation process. |
| Style | Blend of dynamic and formal equivalence |
| Type | Translation |
| Base text | <i>Biblia Hebraica</i> (primary source, edition of the Hebrew Masoretic Text) Eclectic Greek text (primary source, eclectic text as represented in the Nestle-Aland and UBS texts) Septuagint (secondary source) Dead Sea Scrolls (secondary source) Latin Vulgate (secondary source) Syriac Peshitta (secondary source) Targums (secondary source) <i>Jerome's Juxta Hebraica</i> (secondary source, consulted for the Psalms) |
| Features | Sense paragraphs Poetry set as poetry (including long portions from the OT prophetic books) Translates the contextual meaning of words Subject headings More than 3,350 text footnotes providing alternate renderings, text apparatus information, and identifying OT quotations in the NT text. International English |
| Comments | The most successful translation since the KJV—among evangelicals, more popular than the KJV. Widely regarded as one of the most accurate English translations. Because of its use of international English, the British edition required few modifications. A truly interdenominational translation, endorsed or accepted by 30 major denominations. |

New King James Version (NKJV)

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| Date | 1979 (NT), 1982 (whole Bible) |
| Translator(s) | 130 independently working scholars, governed by a board of executive directors |
| Style | Formal equivalence |
| Type | Revision |
| Base text | King James Version (primary source) Hebrew Masoretic Text (secondary source) Textus Receptus (secondary source, 1894 Scrivener edition) |
| Features | Verse paragraphs Modern pronouns used exclusively Modernized spelling and punctuation |
| Comments | While it improves on some of the archaic features of the KJV, the NKJV generally retains 17th century vocabulary and sentence structure, limiting readability. The New Testament revisions are based on a Greek text widely regarded as less accurate than the modern critical texts. |

New Century Version (NCV)/International Children's Bible (ICB)

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| Date | 1986 |
| Translator(s) | World Bible Translation Center and a small number of outside scholars |
| Style | Dynamic equivalence |
| Type | Translation |
| Base text | Unspecified Greek and Hebrew texts |
| Features | Simplified English—simple words and short sentences Sense paragraphs Poetry set as poetry |
| Comments | Low reading level—3.9 |

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| Date | 1989 |
| Translator(s) | Committee of scholars led by Bruce Metzger on behalf of the NCC |
| Style | Formal equivalence |
| Type | Revision |
| Base text | Revised Standard Version (primary source) <i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i> (primary source, edition of Hebrew Masoretic Text) United Bible Societies Greek New Testament (secondary source) |
| Features | Sense paragraphs Modern pronouns used exclusively Gender inclusive language used when biological gender not specified by the text |
| Comments | Regarded by many scholars as one of the finest formal equivalence versions. |

Revised English Bible (REB)

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| Date | 1989 |
| Translator(s) | W.D. McHardy and 26 British scholars |
| Style | Dynamic equivalence |
| Type | Revision |
| Base text | New English Bible |
| Features | Updates archaic English of the NEB Gender inclusive language used when biological gender not specified by the text |
| Comments | Despite improvement upon the NEB, the REB never gained wide acceptance. |

Contemporary English Version (CEV)

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| Date | 1991 (NT), 1995 (whole Bible) |
| Translator(s) | Translation team sponsored by the American Bible Society; reviewed by Christian and Jewish scholars, linguists, literary experts and denominational representatives |
| Style | Dynamic equivalence |
| Type | Translation |
| Base text | <i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i> (edition of the Masoretic Text) United Bible Societies Greek New Testament |
| Features | Emphasizes the <i>hearing</i> of Scripture over the <i>reading</i> of Scripture Sometimes uses conjunctions to convey the force of punctuation Sense paragraphs Poetry set as poetry Gender inclusive language used when biological gender not specified by the text |
| Comments | Has not attracted a sizable following. |

The Message (Peterson)

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| Date | 1993 (NT) |
| Translator(s) | Eugene Peterson |
| Style | Paraphrase |
| Type | Translation |
| Base text | Greek New Testament (edition uncertain) |
| Features | Omits verse numbers |
| Comments | One of the most idiomatic paraphrases published. Generally regarded to be a more accurate paraphrase than the Living Bible. |

God's Word (GW)

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| Date | 1995 |
| Translator(s) | William F. Beck (NT), small group of Lutheran scholars (OT) |
| Style | Dynamic equivalence |
| Type | Translation/revision |
| Base text | Beck's <i>The New Testament in the Language of Today</i> (1963) (primary source) <i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i> (primary source, edition of Hebrew Masoretic Text) Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament (primary source) |
| Features | Sense paragraphs Poetry set as poetry Gender inclusive language sometimes used when biological gender not specified by the text |

New International Version, Inclusive Language Edition (NIVI)

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| Date | 1995 (NT), 1996 (whole Bible) |
| Translator(s) | Committee on Bible Translation |
| Style | Blend of dynamic and formal equivalence |
| Type | Revision |
| Base text | New International Version |
| Features | Identical to the NIV text with the exception of gender related changes Gender inclusive language sometimes used when biological gender not specified by the text |
| Comments | Published in Great Britain only—never distributed in North America. |

New International Reader's Version (NIRV)

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| Date | 1996, 1998 (revised) |
| Translator(s) | 40 scholars, including some from the original NIV translation project. A 3-person committee including 1 Old Testament scholar, 1 New Testament scholar and an educator reviewed every manuscript. Oversight was given by the Committee on Bible Translation |
| Style | Dynamic equivalence |
| Type | Revision |
| Base text | New International Version |
| Features | Simplified English—simple words and shorter sentences Sense paragraphs Poetry set as poetry Gender inclusive language used in the 1996 edition, removed from the 1998 edition |
| Comments | Lowest reading level of an English Bible—3.0. |

New Living Translation (NLT)

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| Date | 1996 |
| Translator(s) | 90 scholars on behalf of Tyndale House Publishers |
| Style | Dynamic equivalence/paraphrase |
| Type | Translation |
| Base text | <i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i> (primary source, edition of Hebrew Masoretic Text) Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament (primary source) United Bible Societies Greek New Testament (primary source) Living Bible (secondary source) |
| Features | Sense paragraphs Poetry set as poetry Nearest modern equivalents used for weights, measures, monetary values, times and dates Explicit interpretation of metaphors (e.g., "Your eyes are <i>soft</i> like doves," SS 1:15) |
| Comments | Gender inclusive language used when biological gender not specified by the text Intended to continue the Living Bible tradition with improved accuracy. The NLT positions itself as a dynamic equivalence translation, but it tends toward paraphrased renderings, sometimes interpreting the text where there is no scholarly consensus as to its correct meaning. Elsewhere, the NLT bears a high degree of similarity to the NIV. |

New English Translation (NET)

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| Date | 1997 (NT), 1999 (OT) |
| Translator(s) | 20 evangelical scholars |
| Style | Blend of formal and dynamic equivalence |
| Type | Translation |
| Base text | Unspecified Hebrew text Eclectic Greek text |
| Features | Primarily available in online format Extensive footnote system provides technical linguistic information, justification for translation choice, alternative literal renderings, and interpretive options for difficult passages Sense paragraphs Gender inclusive language sometimes used when biological gender not specified by the text |
| Comments | Ideal translation for serious Bible students; however the extensive note system makes widespread physical distribution impractical. |

Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB)

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| Date | 2001 (NT) |
| Translator(s) | 90 scholars, including 30 Southern Baptist translators |
| Style | Blend of dynamic and formal equivalence |
| Type | Translation |
| Base text | Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament United Bible Societies (UBS) Greek New Testament |
| Features | Follows what it refers to as "optimal equivalence" translation Gender inclusive language generally avoided |
| Comments | The text features some inconsistencies, particularly with respect to the avoidance of gender inclusive language. The HCSB is one of two translations published in direct response to the gender inclusive language controversy of 1997. |

English Standard Version (ESV)

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| Date | 2001 |
| Translator(s) | Publishing team of more than 100 individuals, including a Translation Oversight Committee, Translation Review Scholars, and an Advisory Council |
| Style | Formal equivalence |
| Type | Revision |
| Base text | Revised Standard Version (primary source) <i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i> (primary source, edition of Hebrew Masoretic Text) UBS Greek New Testament (secondary source) Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament (secondary source) Dead Sea Scrolls (secondary source) Septuagint (secondary source) Samaritan Pentateuch (secondary source) Syriac Peshitta (secondary source) Latin Vulgate (secondary source) |
| Features | Theologically conservative revision of the RSV Gender inclusive language generally avoided |
| Comments | Promotional material associated with the ESV attempts to persuade readers that a dynamic translation style is inferior to a formal, literal style because dynamic translations invite theological and culture bias into the text. Noticeable theological bias, specifically with regard to gender language and some theologically motivated revisions made to the RSV text (e.g., Isaiah 7:14). |

Today's New International Version (TNIV)

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| Date | 2002 (New Testament) |
| Translator(s) | 15-member Committee on Bible Translation (CBT) |
| Style | Blend of dynamic and formal equivalence |
| Type | Revision |
| Base text | New International Version (primary source) Eclectic Greek text (primary source, eclectic text as represented in the Nestle-Aland and UBS texts) |
| Features | Sense paragraphs Gender inclusive language used when biological gender not specified by the text |
| Comments | Thorough revision of the NIV; approximately 7% of the NIV text was revised. Less than 1/3 of the changes are gender-related. The TNIV was produced in light of CBT's ongoing mandate to continually improve its translation. In general, changes were made to enhance both clarity and accuracy. The TNIV retains the same overall style and feel of the NIV, though a significant number of the non-gender-related changes lean toward a slightly more literal rendering of the original. |

The Lord's Prayer: Translation Samples Compared

The following samples from various English Bible versions illustrate both the development in the English language and different approaches to translation.

A Late 14th c. Version for Monks and Nuns

Oure Fader that art in heuene, halewed be thi name. Thi kyngdom come to us. Thi wylle be don, as in heuene, and in erthe. Oure eche dayes breed yeue us to day. And foryeue us oure dettys, as we forheue oure dettourys. And ne lede us not in temptacyon, but delyuere us of yuel. Amen.

Wycliffe Bible

Oure fadir that art in hevenes, halowid be thi name. Thi kyngdom come to. Be thi wille don in erthe as in hevene. Geve to us this day oure breed ovir othir substaunce. And forgeve to us oure dettis, as we forgiven to our dettouris. And lede us not in temptacioun, but delyver us fro yvel. Amen.

Tyndale Bible

Oure father, which arte in heaue, hallowed by thy name. Thy kyngdome come. Thy wyll be fulfilled upo the earth, as it is in heauen. Geve vs thys daye our dayly breade. And forgeve vs oure dettes as we also forgeve oure deters. Lede vs not in to temptacyō but delyuer vs frō euell. For thyne is the kyngdome and the power for euer. Amen.

Coverdale Bible

O oure father which art in heauen, halowed be thy name. Thy kyngdome come. Thy wyll be fulfilled vpon earth as it is in heauen. Geue vs this daye oure dayly bred. And forgeue vs oure dettes, as we also forgeue oure detters. And lede vs not in to temptacioun: but delyuer vs from euell. For thyne is the kyngdome, and the power, and the glorye for euer. Amen.

Matthew Bible

Oure father which arte in heuen halowed be thy name. Let thy kingdome come. Thy will be fulfilled as well in erth as it is in heuen. Geve vs this daye oure dayly bred. And for geue vs oure treaspases euen as we forgeue oure trespassers. And leade vs not into temtacion: but delyuer vs frō euyll. For thyne is the kyngdome + the power and the glorye foreuer. Amen.

Great Bible

Oure father which art in heuen, halowed be thy name. Let thy kingdome come. Thy will be fulfilled, as well in erth, as it is in heuen. Geue vs this daye oure dayly bred. And forgeue vs oure dettes, as we forgeue our detters. And leade vs not into temptation: but delyuer vs from euyll. For thyne is the kyngdom and the power, and the glorye for euer. Amen.

Geneva Bible

Oure father which art in heauen, hallowed be thy Name. Thy kingdome come. Thy will be done euen in earth, as it is in heauen. Giue vs this day our daily bread. And forgive vs our dettes, as we also forgiue our detters. And lead vs not into tentation, but deliuer vs fro euil, for thine is the kingdome, and the power, and the glorie for euer, Amen.

Bishop's Bible

Our father, which art in heauen, halowed be thy name. Let thy kyngdome come. Thy wyll be done, as well in earth, as it is in heauen. Giue vs this day our dayly breade. And forgeve vs our dettes, as we forgeve our detters. And leade vs not into temptacion, but delyuer vs from euyll. For thine is the kyngdome, and the power, and the glory, for euer. Amen.

Douai-Rheims Translation

Ovr Father which art in heauen, sanctified be thy name. Let thy Kingdom come. Thy wil be done, as in heauen, in earth also. Giue vs to day our supersubstantial bread. And forgiue vs our dettes, as we also forgiue our detters. And leade vs not into tentacion. But deliuer vs from euil. Amen.

King James Version

Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. The will be done in earth, as *it is* in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

American Standard Version

Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so on earth. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil *one*.

Revised Standard Version

Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; And forgive us our debts, As we also forgive our debtors; And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil.

New American Standard Bible

Our father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. [For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.]

New King James Version

Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as *it is* in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

New Revised Standard Version

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one.

Amplified Bible

Our Father Who is in heaven, hallowed (kept holy) be Your name. Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven (left, remitted, and let go of the debts, and have given up resentment against) our debtors. And lead (bring) us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. *For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.*

New American Bible

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and do not subject us to the final test, but deliver us from the evil one.

Good News Translation

Our Father in heaven: May your holy name be honored; may your Kingdom come; may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today the good we need. Forgive us the wrongs we have done, as we forgive the wrongs that others have done to us. Do not bring us to hard testing, but keep us safe from the Evil One.

New International Version

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

Contemporary English Version

Our Father in heaven, help us to honor your name. Come and set up your kingdom, so that everyone on earth will obey you, as you are obeyed in heaven. Give us our food for today. Forgive us for doing wrong, as we forgive others. Keep us from being tempted and protect us from evil.

The Message

Our Father in heaven, Reveal who you are. Set the world right; Do what's best—as above, so below. Keep us alive with three square meals. Keep us forgiven with you and forgiving others. Keep us safe from ourselves and the Devil. You're in charge! You can do anything you want! You're ablaze in beauty! Yes. Yes. Yes.

New Living Translation

Our Father in heaven, may your name be honored. May your kingdom come soon. May your will be done here on earth, just as it is in heaven. Give us our food for today, and forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And don't let us yield to temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

New International Reader's Version

Our Father in heaven, may your name be honored. May your kingdom come. May what you want to happen be done on earth as it is done in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, just as we also have forgiven those who sin against us. Keep us from failing into sin when we are tempted. Save us from the evil one.

Introduction

For its first 500–700 years, the English language had no complete translation of the Bible.¹ Much has changed since a translation of the Latin Vulgate bearing John Wycliffe's name appeared near the end of the 14th century. Today, more Bibles are distributed in English than in any other tongue. The English language now boasts a wealth of translations, from the classic King James Version to the modern, best-selling New International Version.

The proliferation of translations is both a blessing and a challenge for the reader. On the one hand, English readers have a range of translation choices—whether they prefer a relatively literal rendering of the *words* from the original or a more dynamic rendering of the original's *sense*. In a previous era, common people were told what Bible they could read, if they were allowed to read one at all.

On the other hand, selecting a translation from among so many can be a daunting process, especially since nothing less than God's revelation to humanity is at stake. Readers often ask tough questions, and rightly so. How do the different Bible translations compare to one another? Just how did we get our Bible in the first place?

What follows is a brief historical outline of the English Bible, tracing it to its roots from the original languages of the Old and New Testaments. It is important not only to arrange English Bibles along a timeline but also to show their relationship to one another and to the original texts.

Types of Bible Versions

Before proceeding, we must understand that not all Bible versions are alike. First, there is a distinction between translations and revisions. A **translation** works directly from the original Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek texts, rendering them into the receptor (receiver) language. A **revision** begins with a previously translated (or already revised) Bible, although many revisions consult the Greek and Hebrew as secondary sources. For example, the RV (Revised Version, 1881) was based on the KJV text. However, the scholars who developed the RV made frequent use of Greek manuscripts discovered since the KJV's release in 1611. By contrast, the NIV is an entirely new translation, working directly from the Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek texts.

Second, different styles of translation (or revision) may be employed: (1) formal equivalence (sometimes referred to as "literal"), (2) dynamic equivalence (sometimes called "functional" equivalence), (3) a blend of formal and dynamic equivalence or (4) paraphrase.

A **formal equivalence** Bible tries to match the syntax and word order of the original text as closely as possible, following a "literal" approach to translation. In many cases, a specific word in Hebrew, Aramaic or Greek is consistently translated with the same word in English. Formal equivalents like the KJV or the NASB are valuable for those who want to catch a glimpse of the original text's structure. However, because English syntax and word order differ so greatly from those of Hebrew and Greek, formal equivalents have a tendency to produce awkward English that can sometimes obscure the meaning of the original text.

A **dynamic equivalence** version tries to match the meaning of the original while expressing the same idea using English syntax and word order. Dynamic equivalents like the NLT and the GNT are helpful for those who want to understand the meaning of the text as its original readers would have understood it. However, in its pursuit of idiomatic language, a dynamic equivalence version might on occasion obscure noteworthy grammatical details of the original text. Also, the

¹ The emergence of Old English is generally associated with the first great English literary work, *Beowulf*.

translators are sometimes forced to make difficult interpretive choices at places where more than one option exists.

Recognizing the benefits and limitations of both formal and dynamic equivalence, some scholars have called for a **blend** of the two translation philosophies. Such an approach was used for the NIV. The NIV translators weighed the significance of grammatical structure and word order when translating the original text. However, because of the stylistic and syntactical differences between English and the original languages, the NIV modifies word order and sentence structure where necessary to accommodate good English style. Also, because the meaning of a Hebrew, Aramaic or Greek word may vary according to its context, the NIV occasionally uses different English words to translate the same word in the original text. This blending of translation philosophies avoids the awkward English of formal equivalence versions while maintaining a close connection to the original texts.

The twentieth century witnessed the emergence of **paraphrase** as a popular translation (or revision) style. A paraphrased version is generally the work of a single individual and may or may not be based on the original text. (The Living Bible was paraphrased from the 1901 ASV. By contrast, *The Message* is a paraphrased rendering of the original languages.) While paraphrased versions offer fresh, creative renderings of Scripture, they sometimes do so at the expense of accuracy. Individual biases may have undue influence on the translation (or revision). In preparing a paraphrase, the translator—who may or may not be fluent in the original languages—might read more into the original text than is really there.

Early Transmission of the Hebrew and Greek

The Bible is a foreign book. It was written in ancient languages—mostly Hebrew and Greek. Its story was composed in a culture far removed from our own. The challenge of translation is to overcome the distance between ourselves and the language and culture of the Bible. Otherwise the message of Scripture will be unintelligible to the contemporary reader.

For this reason, any attempt to understand the heritage of the English Bible must begin with a look at the languages in which the Scriptures were originally written. Every English Bible is either a direct or indirect translation of Hebrew and Greek manuscripts. If we want to understand the history of the English Bible, we must start here.

Hebrew Old Testament

The opening words of the Bible were most likely written during the 1400s BC, penned by Moses as the Israelites wandered in the wilderness between Egypt and the promised land. The Old Testament's last prophet, Malachi, recorded his message to post-exilic Israel roughly a millennium later, around 400 BC. Another 2,000 years followed before the invention of the printing press, meaning that the oldest books of the Old Testament were copied by hand for three millennia before the first printed edition was made (more time than has elapsed between Jesus' incarnation and the present day).

Not surprisingly, none of the original Old Testament manuscripts (autographs) exist today. The earliest extant (currently existing) documents date to the time following the writing of Old Testament (1400-400 BC).¹ One such collection of manuscripts, known as the Qumran scrolls (named for the caves in which they were found in 1948, dated between the 3rd and 1st centuries BC) has shed significant light on the transmission of the Old Testament. Readings contained in these scrolls bear resemblance to the various Old Testament text traditions—the Babylonian (Masoretic) text tradition, the Palestinian (Samaritan Pentateuch) tradition and the Egyptian (Septuagint) tradition.²

By the 2nd century AD, a movement to standardize the text of the Hebrew Bible led to the acceptance of the Babylonian (Masoretic) text as the standard text. The Masoretic text (as it later came to be known) has enjoyed prominence ever since, thanks to its meticulous preservation, first by Jewish rabbis (2nd c. BC – AD 500) and later by a group of scribes known as the Masoretes (AD 500 – AD 1000). The rabbis were likely responsible for the original paragraphing and versification of the Old Testament. Later, the Masoretes introduced accent marks and a written vowel system (which the Hebrew text originally lacked) to enhance readability.³ Both groups took the integrity and preservation of the text seriously. The rabbis followed a self-imposed set of rituals governing the transmission of Scripture, which included ceremonial washing before a new scroll was begun. The Masoretes verified the accuracy of a new scroll against an older copy by counting letters to ensure that the middle letters of both scrolls matched.⁴

Other major text traditions are also valuable. The Septuagint (a Greek translation of the Old Testament produced in Egypt between the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC) was the Bible of the New Testament authors. Variant readings in the Samaritan Pentateuch (a contemporary of the

¹ See the following works. Bruce Waltke, "The Textual Criticism of the Old Testament" in Frank E. Gæbelein, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), p. 211. Ellis Brotzman, *Old Testament Textual Criticism: A Practical Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), p. 38, 42. Paul D. Wegner, *The Journey From Texts to Translations: the Origin and Development of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), p. 166.

² Brotzman, p. 42-43. Wegner, p. 167-168.

³ Brotzman, p. 47.

⁴ Wegner, p. 170.

Septuagint) shed light on the ethnic tension between the Jews and their cousins the Samaritans (descended from Assyrians and northern Jews who had intermarried).

The transmission of the Old Testament presented some unique challenges affecting the way we read the Bible today. The limitations of scrolls, for example, helped determine some of the book divisions of modern Bibles. The average scroll was 30 feet long—long enough to fit Isaiah onto a single scroll. It is possible that the limitation posed by a 30-foot scroll required the division of the Pentateuch into 5 separate books (scrolls). Samuel, Kings and Chronicles were originally regarded as single books. However, when these books were translated into the Greek Septuagint, the larger Greek characters required that they be divided so they could fit onto two scrolls each, resulting in the divisions familiar to readers today.

Greek New Testament

The New Testament was composed during the 1st century AD. As with the Old Testament, no original copies exist today. However, there is a wealth of ancient manuscripts—over 5,000—that can be studied and compared to one another.

The oldest extant manuscripts of the New Testament are known as the papyri (named for the material on which they were written), some dating as early as AD 200. (One fragment is dated around AD 125.) Though the papyri exist in fragmentary form today, they provide invaluable insight into the shape of the Bible early in its transmission. As early as the 4th century, uncial manuscripts (characterized by a more formal handwriting, similar to our capital letters) emerged.⁵ Minuscule manuscripts, known by their cursive handwriting, were particularly common from the 11th to 15th centuries.

New Testament manuscripts can be grouped into different text “families”—groups of manuscripts that have certain distinguishing characteristics in common. Until the early 1500s, every copy of the Greek New Testament was written by hand. Over time, a large number of variant readings—places where two or more manuscripts offer conflicting renderings—were introduced. In such cases, modern textual criticism seeks to determine which variant most likely matches the original. Some variants reflect inadvertent changes to the text, caused by the drudgery of hand-copying long passages in one sitting. Other changes were made intentionally to smooth out difficult readings contained in the original. These variants affect only a small percentage of the New Testament text (about 10%), and most are relatively minor (e.g., spelling differences).⁶ No variant reading threatens to undermine any area of Christian doctrine.

Once a variant reading was introduced into a manuscript, it generally perpetuated itself in subsequent copies. Thus, a family of manuscripts is often characterized by certain variant readings that appear with some frequency. Because churches and other communities of the New Testament world were more geographically isolated than we are today, these text families are generally associated with a specific locality. The four text families are as follows:

1. Alexandrian
 - *Associated with Alexandria, Egypt, and presumably based on a very early text. The oldest Greek manuscripts, including most of the papyri and all of the uncial manuscripts, belong to this family.*
2. Western
 - *Associated with the Western (Latin) church, although many Western manuscripts enjoyed fairly wide circulation. The Western manuscripts formed the basis for the earliest Latin translations of the Bible.*

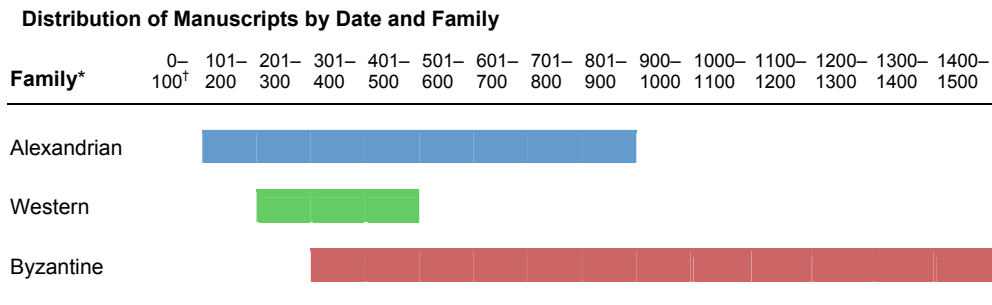
⁵ Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, third edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 9.

⁶ Wengert, p. 213.

3. Caesarean
 - *Associated with Caesarea (though it is believed to have originated in Egypt) and represented by a relatively small number of manuscripts. The Caesarean family appears to have been an attempt at compromise between the Alexandrian and Western text families. Not all scholars believe the Caesarean manuscripts should be treated as a distinct text family.*
4. Byzantine
 - *Associated with the Byzantine Empire. Today, a majority of extant Greek manuscripts—sometimes referred to collectively as the Majority Text—belong to this text family. However, none of the manuscripts in this family pre-date the 5th c. AD; most are from the 9th c. AD. Most miniscule manuscripts belong to the Byzantine family.*

Today, most Biblical scholars regard the Alexandrian text family as the most accurate, largely because it is attested so early. While a majority of the manuscripts known today belong to the Byzantine family, this was not the case until the 9th century AD, when a many of the Byzantine manuscripts were first copied. Before this time, the Alexandrian text family enjoyed prominence. In fact, many variant readings so well attested today in a majority of manuscripts—that is, in the Majority Text or the Byzantine tradition (advocated by some to be original)—appeared only infrequently before the emergence of the Byzantine family. For example, most Greek manuscripts (i.e., those from the Byzantine family) include the “longer ending” to Mark’s Gospel (Mark 16:9–20). However, the 4th century church father Jerome noted that, in his day, the opposite was the case: Almost *none* of the manuscripts included this longer ending.⁷

While some text families tend to be more accurate than others, all of them deserve attention. In the end, principles of textual criticism demand that *all* the manuscript evidence be carefully weighed in order to judge which manuscripts most likely give the original reading.



*The Caesarean family does not appear on this chart because scholars are divided as to whether it should be recognized as a distinct text family.

†New Testament composed during this period.

⁷ For a discussion of the Majority Text tradition versus what he calls “reasoned eclecticism,” see Daniel B. Wallace, “The Majority Text and the Original Text,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, V148 #590 (April 1991), p. 151-169.

Ancient Bible Versions

Early Bible translators wasted little time initiating a work that has continued to the present day. Sometime during the 2nd or 3rd century, a Coptic (Egyptian) New Testament, based on the Alexandrian manuscript family, emerged. The New Testament was also translated into Syriac (spoken in the region occupied by modern-day Iraq), using either the Western or Alexandrian text family.¹

Old Latin

The translation of the Scriptures into Latin is of particular significance to the history of the English Bible. The New Testament may have been translated into Old Latin (pre-Vulgate Latin) by late 2nd century A.D. Old Latin translations appear to have been based on a Western text type. In general, these translations were literalistic (though some renderings were rather dynamic). It is possible that the earliest copies were made in interlinear form (that is, Latin written between lines of Greek text).

There was no single Old Latin translation of the Bible. Among the copies of Luke 24:4-5 that survive to this day, there are 27 different renderings. When Jerome set out to prepare the Latin Vulgate, he bemoaned the fact that there were so many conflicting translations.²

Latin Vulgate

Driven by a desire to standardize the Latin Bible, in the late 4th century Pope Damasus I commissioned a scholar named Jerome to prepare an official Latin revision. Because of his skill with the languages, Jerome was uniquely qualified for the task. For this revision, he consulted both the Hebrew and the Greek—at a time when most of his colleagues in the Western Church were ill equipped to do so.³

At the outset, Jerome intended to revise the existing Latin versions. When preparing the New Testament, Jerome used various Old Latin texts while comparing them to the Greek text. There are indications that he practiced a form of textual criticism, comparing different Greek readings to determine which was most likely the original. As he continued his work—particularly as he moved into the Old Testament—it seems that Jerome began to interact with the original languages more and more. Thus, the Vulgate is in some ways both a *revision* and a *translation*.

Another important feature of Jerome's Vulgate is its style. The wording of the Vulgate is less wooden than that of the Old Latin Bibles, generally favoring a more dynamic equivalent approach to translation.

Virtually every new Bible translation or revision has met with controversy and resistance, the Vulgate being no exception. Jerome was well aware of the perilous nature of a translator's life, as shown by his own words:

The labor is one of love, but at the same time both perilous and presumptuous; for in judging others, I must be judged by all ... Is there not a man, learned or unlearned, who will not, when he

¹ Wegner, p. 242–5. Wallace, p. 161.

² For a discussion of the Old Latin versions, see Metzger, p. 72–75 and Wegner, p. 250–252.

³ As time passed, the Church grew increasingly divided between East and West. Latin was the preferred language of the West, while Greek continued to be used in the East. In the 11th century, the two sides finally split into the Roman Catholic (West) and Orthodox (East) churches. Few in the Church of Jerome's day knew Hebrew, because the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament) was regarded as inspired.

*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?*⁴

Jerome finished his revision of the Gospels in AD 383. The rest of the Bible was completed in the years that followed, around the turn of the century. Though the initial reception was mixed, by the 8th or 9th century the Vulgate had won widespread acceptance. Eventually, the Catholic Church declared it to be its authoritative Bible version.⁵ As with all previous copies and translations of Scripture, duplication quickly gave birth to a host of variant readings, so that in the 8th century the Catholic Church devoted its attention to preparing a standardized edition of the Vulgate.⁶

The Vulgate had a significant impact on the history of the English Bible. In some ways, high regard for the Vulgate actually hindered English translation efforts. However, when Wycliffe's followers undertook the first successful translation of the whole Bible, it was the Vulgate to which they turned.

⁴ Quoted in Frederic G. Kenyon, *Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts*.

⁵ This occurred at the Council of Trent in 1546.

⁶ Wegner, p. 274.