

How We Got the Bible

in English

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Genesis 1:1 taken from

תורה נביאים וכתובים, *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, edited by K. Elliger and W. Rudolph (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1977). [abbreviated as BHS]

John 1:1 taken from

The Greek New Testament, Fourth Revised Edition edited by Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, and Bruce M. Metzger, (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft / United Bible Societies, 2010). [abbreviated as UBS4]

See the last page of this course—page 52

How We Got the Bible in English in English

Table of Contents

I	Introduction	4
	1 Four facts	4
	2 Focus on the New Testament	4
	3 Answers to three questions	4
	4 OT / Biblical Hebrew alphabet	5
	5 NT / Koinē Greek alphabet	6
II	The Bible Comes into Being	7
	1 Revelation	7
	2 Inspiration	7
	3 Canonization	7
	4 The Canon	8
	5 Preservation	8
	6 Masoretes: OT scholars	8
III	Chronology of Jesus and the Bible	8
IV	Transmission of the New Testament Text	9
	1 The Scriptures—originals and copies	9
	2 Capitalization, punctuation, paragraphs, chapter and verse numbers	11
	3 The need for textual criticism	13
	4 Types of variant readings	15
	5 Historical factors affecting the NT text	24
	6 Geographic centers of copying NT manuscripts, resulting text-types	25
	7 Printed Greek New Testament	27
	8 More discoveries of NT manuscripts	27
	9 Criteria for evaluating textual variants	28
	10 Current state of the NT text	32
	11 We have an accurate New Testament	33
	12 Same basic ideas apply to the Old Testament	34
	13 Bible believers and textual criticism	34

How We Got the Bible in English in English

Table of Contents

V	Access to the Word of God in Writing	35
1	Hearers rather than readers	35
2	The Bible as one book?	36
3	Cost of writing materials prohibitive	37
4	Widespread illiteracy	37
5	Availability of the Bible as one book	37
VI	Translating the Bible	38
1	Two myths concerning translation	38
2	Two major factors in Bible translation	45
VII	Translations on a “Literal to Paraphrase” Continuum	48
VIII	Translations and the Deity of Christ	49
IX	Which Bible Translation(s) Should I Read?	53
	Remaining Questions	54

How We Got the Bible in English

I Introduction

1 Note the following four facts:

- A The Bible was written in the approximately 1,500–year period from about 1,400 BC (about 3,400 years ago) to about AD 100 (about 1,900 years ago).
- B The Bible was written in the Middle East (9–12 times zones east of the US).
- C The Bible was written in Hebrew (the OT) and Greek (the NT).
- D English did not exist until more than 1,000 years after the Bible was finished.

In light of these facts, how did we get the Bible in our language?

Important: It is not only a matter of *our language (English)*.

The question is much broader than that. We must ask: how did the Bible get into the language of *any* people beyond the original hearers / readers?

Note: Whatever the language about which we inquire, the answer is essentially the same.

2 This study will cover the OT only briefly. The focus will be on the NT. This is for three reasons.

- A The teacher is not as familiar with the OT story.
- B The OT story enjoys more agreement than the NT story.
- C The basic understanding of how we got the NT applies as well to the OT.

3 Some of the questions that will be answered in this study are these:

- A What do Hebrew and Greek look like?
- B Did we get capitalization, punctuation, paragraphs, and numbers for chapters and verses from the biblical authors?
- C Why do translations of the Bible differ from one another?

How We Got the Bible in English

4 The OT / Biblical Hebrew Alphabet

	Letter	Name	English equivalent
1	א	Aleph	?
2	ב	Beth	b, v
3	ג	Gimel	g (hard, as in go)
4	ד	Daleth	d, dh (dh = th in “this”)
5	ה	He	h (sometimes part of an “a”)
6	ו	Waw	w (sometimes part of an “o” or “u”)
7	ז	Zayin	z
8	ח	Kheth	k
9	ט	Teth	t
10	י	Yod	y (sometimes part of an “e” or “i”)
11	כ	Kaf	k
12	ל	Lamed	l
13	מ	Mem	m
14	נ	Nun	n
15	ס	Samek	s
16	ע	Ayin	?
17	פ	Pe	p, ph
18	צ	Tsade	ts
19	ק	Qoph	q
20	ר	Resh	r
21	ש	S(h)in	s, sh
22	ת	Tau	t, th (th = th in think)

***See *Additional Material 1* (pages 1–2)

Genesis 1:1—בראשית ברא אלהימאת השמימואת הארץ

Genesis 1:1—בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ [BHS]

Regarding the second line above, see below (page 8) on the work of the Masoretes.

Hebrew is read from right to left, the opposite of English, like this—werbeH.

How We Got the Bible in English

5 The NT / Koinē Greek Alphabet

	Minuscule	Name	Uncial	English equivalent
1	α	Alpha	A	a (ah)
2	β	Beta	B	b
3	γ	Gamma	Γ	g (hard, as in go)
4	δ	Delta	Δ	d
5	ε	Epsilon	E	e (like e in met)
6	ζ	Zeta	Z	z
7	η	Eta	E	ē (like a in hay)
8	θ	Theta	Θ	th
9	ι	Iota	I	i (like i in it or in machine)
10	κ	Kappa	K	k
11	λ	Lambda	Λ	l
12	μ	Mu	M	m
13	ν	Nu	N	n
14	ξ	Xi	Ξ	x
15	ο	Omicron	O	o (like o in long)
16	π	Pi	Π	p
17	ρ	Rho	P	r
18	σ, ς	Sigma	Σ	s
19	τ	Tau	T	t
20	υ	Upsilon	Υ	u (like oo in boo)
21	φ	Phi	Φ	f / ph
22	χ	Chi	X	ch
23	ψ	Psi	Ψ	ps
24	ω	Omega	Ω	o (like o in omega)

John 1:1—ΕΝΑΡΧΗΗΝΟΛΟΓΟΣΚΑΙΟΛΟΓΟΣΗΝΠΡΟΣΤΟΝΘΕΟΝΚΑΙΘΕΟΣΗΝΟΛΟΓΟΣ

John 1:1—εναρχηηνολογοςκαιολογοςηνπροςτονθεονκαιθεοςηνολογος

John 1:1—Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος. [UBS4]

The first example is in *uncial* or *majuscule* script—what we would call upper case letters.

The second and third examples are in *minuscule* script—what we would call lower case letters.

Of the three Greek lines, only the third has accents, breathing marks, punctuation, and spacing.

Greek is read from left to right, like English.

How We Got the Bible in English

II The Bible Comes into Being

1 Revelation

This term describes the transmission of God's truth to the writers of the Bible. The term *revelation* makes clear that the truth God wanted in the Bible could not have been discovered by its writers on their own.

Note: There is truth that exists apart from the Bible. Such truth is not in the Bible because it is not necessary for communicating God's message.

Examples of truth outside the Bible include:

mathematical truth
surgical truth
athletic truth

Revelation *does not* say that all of God's truth is in the Bible. There is an infinity of truth that God has not revealed to us because God knows that we don't need to know that.

Revelation *does* say that God has put in the Bible everything that humanity does need to know to come into a right relationship with him.

2 Inspiration

This term says that God saw to it that the revelation he communicated to the writers of the Bible was accurately recorded. Thus God's revelation has been preserved for humanity by inspiration, the oversight of the biblical authors by the Holy Spirit.

3 Canonization

This term states that all the writings inspired by God have been included in the canon (collection of books) of Scripture, that is, the Bible.

God oversaw the collection of sacred writings so that no inspired document was left out, neither was any uninspired document included in the canon of Scripture.

Whatever God inspired is in the Bible.
Whatever is in the Bible, God inspired.
Whatever God did not inspire is not in the Bible.

Whatever is not in the Bible, God did not inspire.

How We Got the Bible in English

4 The canon

OT Canon: The OT Canon was agreed upon by the end of the first century (no later than AD 100).

NT Canon: The NT canon was agreed upon by the end of the fourth century (no later than AD 400).

Those who believe that the Bible is the Word of God believe that the Holy Spirit oversaw the agreement on both of these canons (the gathering of both of these collections).

5 Preservation

From time to time there have been enemies of the Bible who have tried to remove it from the earth by destroying all copies of it they could find.

God has made sure that none of these opponents of his has succeeded. The Bible has never been lost to humanity, nor will it ever be destroyed.

6 Masoretes: OT Scholars

The Masoretes did their work between the 6th and 10th centuries (AD 500s–900s).

Because the Hebrew letters are all consonants, the Masoretes created a system of vowel signs (called “vowel points”) comprised of various marks put under, over or within the Hebrew letters. This vowel “pointing” helped to preserve both the sound of the language and the understanding, at that time, of different words with the same consonantal spelling. As an example, the English letters BT can represent BAT, BET, BIT, or BUT. Notice the difference in the look of the two examples of Genesis 1:1 (above, page 3). The second example has vowel points.

III Chronology of Jesus and the Bible

- 1 Writing of the Old Testament, finished by about 400 BC
- 2 Ministry of Jesus, AD 27–30
- 3 Coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, AD 30
- 4 Spread of the gospel and the formation of Christian congregations, AD 30 onward

5 Writing of the New Testament, AD c 50 to c 95 (last half of first century)

How We Got the Bible in English

IV What, No Printing Press?! Transmission of the New Testament Text

1 The Scriptures—Originals and Copies

Note 1: “manuscript” means “hand written”

Note 2: ms = manuscript, mss = manuscripts

***See *Additional Material 2–6 (pages 3–8)*

A Original biblical manuscripts

- 1) *There are no original manuscripts.*
- 2) Scrolls wore out from continual use, unlike the case with modern books.

Note Luke 4:17—the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him [Jesus]. *Unrolling it*, he found the place where it is written.

- 3) It is unknown when the codex replaced the scroll for NT mss, but the NT was almost certainly originally written on papyrus scrolls.

B Copies of NT mss

- 1) In order to preserve a deteriorating document or to make an additional copy, a scribe was employed to make a copy of the document. A single scribe most likely read aloud to himself as he copied from the exemplar (the original) to the new document. In a scriptorium, the ancient “copy center,” . . . a group of scribes would make multiple copies as a lector (reader) read the exemplar for them to duplicate.

From http://legacy.earlham.edu/~seidti/iam/mss_trans.html

- 2) Copies of NT mss were made by hand for more than 1400 years, until the invention of the printing press in the 1440s.
- 3) Note: Even after the invention of the printing press, copying mss by hand continued for some time.

***See Additional Material 7 (pages 9–12)

How We Got the Bible in English

C What do you mean, mistakes??!!

- 1) Mistakes in copying were inevitable when copies were made by hand, much more than in the era of printed books.
- 2) Note: *This was no surprise to God!*
- 3) Mistakes were both unintentional and intentional.

a Unintentional mistakes

marks]
[unintentional]

“The absence of spacing between words and the lack of punctuation and of diacritical marks [accents and breathing in the earliest mss help to account for many variants.”

J. Harold Greenlee, *Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 63.

b Intentional mistakes

error.

With regard to intentional mistakes, the intention of copyists was a good one: to help by “correcting” what they thought was an

But it would have better not to “help!”

- 4) See below for examples of unintentional and intentional mistakes.
- 5) Note: That copying errors can be detected and their causes understood is good news, not bad!

How We Got the Bible in English

2 Capitalization, punctuation, paragraphs, and numbers for chapters and verses

A Capitalization, punctuation, spaces between words, and paragraphs, as well as numbers for chapters and verses did **not** come from the biblical authors.

These were added later, when copies were made.

Note: Hebrew letters are all the same size, and Greek letters were so originally. Obviously, then, God doesn't care about capitalizing pronouns referring to him!

B The addition of capitalization, punctuation, spaces between words, and paragraphs.

1) Editors of the Hebrew OT rely on Masoretic markings (besides pointing) for punctuation and paragraphs found in the Aleppo and Leningrad codices, though those editors might find additional evidence from other mss. [Additional Material 7—Biblical Manuscripts]

Editors of the Greek NT can determine, in the great majority of cases, where to place accents, breathing marks, capitalization, punctuation, spaces between words, and paragraphs.

2) Since these matters are not part of the inspired text, their placement is up to the editors of Hebrew and Greek Testaments.

C Example of a text with two possible punctuations—John 7:37–38 [ESV, ESV mg]

37 On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. **38** Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.” [ESV]

37 On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me, and **38** let him who believes in me drink. As the Scripture has said, Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.” [ESVmg]

Note the poetic form [chiasm—a b b' a'] that supports the second option:

37 On the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood up and cried out,

“If anyone thirsts [a], let him come to me [b],
and let him drink [b’] 38 who believes in me [a’].”

How We Got the Bible in English

D Numbers for chapters and verses

- 1) When were numbers for chapters and verses added to the biblical text?

Chapters were added in 1227 or 1228.

Verses were added in 1551.

Note that these dates are 1,100 and 1,400 years *after* the NT was written.

- 2) **Very Important Hermeneutical (Interpretive) Note**

In understanding how chapters and verses came to the Bible, it is important to realize that they were completely arbitrary. They were not applied with any logical or consistent method, do not represent literary units, and do not define the author’s unit of thought. *The Bible was not intended to be read in bits and pieces!* Chapters and verses are simply reference points and should not be used to influence the interpretive approach of the Bible student! [italics mine]

From helpmewithbiblestudy.org, 2003.

Chapter and verse numbers are for reference purposes only.

Chapter and verse numbers have nothing to do with interpretation.

Read the Bible in paragraphs, and read whole books when possible (what is “possible” here is entirely up to the reader).

For longer biblical books, read large sections at a time.

Note: It is true, unfortunately, that translations that make each verse a separate paragraph—such as the KJV, the NKJV, and the NASB—lend themselves to poor interpretation, because they encourage, even if unwittingly, reading the Bible “in bits and pieces.”

One should make every effort to avoid this kind of Bible reading

Why? *Because “in bits and pieces” is not how God wrote the Bible!*

How We Got the Bible in English

3 The need for textual criticism

A NB: Understand the term “criticism.”

“Criticism” is used here in a positive sense to mean an intelligent, logical investigation or examination of the facts pertaining to the biblical mss that have been discovered.

It is the employment of critical thinking to the task of determining the original text of the Bible from the available mss.

without NB: “Critical thinking” is consideration of something with one’s eyes and ears open, investigation with one’s “thinking cap” on, examination without naiveté or gullibility.

Everyone on the planet employs critical thinking every day, from selecting a tomato to selecting a spouse!

Criticism, in its positive sense, means appraising, assessing, weighing, evaluating.

B Definition of Textual Criticism:

Since the originals of the NT books have perished, textual criticism is required to restore the original text of the NT.

The task of the textual critic is to:

- 1) compare the extant mss (handwritten copies)
- 2) find differences, called *variant readings*
- 3) decide, for any given passage, which reading is most likely the original

Although this task may seem daunting, it is very doable for virtually all readings.

How We Got the Bible in English

C NB: Important! *We have an accurate New Testament!*

Although the following remarks will be better understood toward the end of this study, it seemed a good idea to make them at this point.

- 1) All extant manuscripts of all text-types are at least 85% identical and most of the variations are not translatable into English, such as word order.

Illustration involving word order in English versus word order in Greek:

a English

- 1] John loves Mary
 John is the subject—he is the one loving
 Mary is the object—she is the one being loved
- 2] Mary loves John
 Mary is the subject—she is the one loving
 John is the object—he is the one being loved

NB: the only difference in these sentences that gives the correct meaning is the order, or the placement, of the names. John and Mary are spelled the same in both sentences.

and

b Greek

- 1] Ioannes agapei Marian—John loves Mary
 John is the subject—he is the one loving
 Mary is the object—she is the one being loved
- 2] Ioannen agapei Maria—Mary loves John
 Mary is the subject—she is the one loving
 John is the object—he is the one being loved

NB: The difference in meaning has to do with the endings of the names John and Mary, not with their placement in the sentence.
This cannot be reproduced in English.

- 2) Almost all variants are inconsequential to the meaning, and none affect theology!

The NT text is 90%–95% certain.

How We Got the Bible in English

4 Types of variant readings

A NB: The tendency among copyists was to *add* words, not to delete them (intentional).

1) Note Revelation 22:18–19

18 I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this scroll: If anyone **adds anything to them**, God will add to that person the plagues described in this scroll. **19** And if anyone **takes words away from this scroll** of prophecy, God will take away from that person any share in the tree of life and in the Holy City, which are described in this scroll.

2) Revelation 22:18–19 is an echo of Deuteronomy 4:2

Do not add to what I command you and **do not subtract from it**, but keep the commands of the Lord your God that I give you.

The point of citing the two passages above is to make clear that it is just as bad to **add** to the Bible as it is to **subtract** from the Bible.

The biblical mss we have testify to the prevalent practice of **adding** to Scripture.

B **Complements** (intentional):

- 1) “Christ” is added to “Jesus”
- 2) “Lord” is added to “Jesus Christ”
- 3) “spirit” is added to “body” (1 Corinthians 6:20)
- 4) “fasting” is added to “prayer” (Mark 9:29)

C **Reverential additions** (intentional)—Revelation 4:8

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty,
who was, and is, and is to come.

This text is an echo of Isaiah 6:3—Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty;
the whole earth is full of his glory.

There is one ms with “holy” four times, one with “holy” five times, one with “holy” six times, one with “holy” eight times, and one with “holy” thirteen times!

How We Got the Bible in English

D **Conflation:** the combining of two variant readings (intentional)—Luke 24:53

Mss of this text have one of the readings below:

- 1) Some mss have “continually at the temple, praising God”
- 2) Some mss have “continually at the temple, blessing God”
- 3) Some mss have “continually at the temple, praising and blessing God”

The third reading above is a conflation of the first two readings.

Note: Although one of the terms above often means “bless,” that word can also be used to mean “praise;” thus the words are sometimes synonyms meaning “praise.”

E Inclusion of **marginal glosses** in the text (unintentional)—John 5:3b–4

- 1) The following is John 5:2–5 in the NIV and in the KJV.

NIV

2 Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. 3 Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. [4] 5 One who was there had been an invalid for eight years.

KJV

2 Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches. 3 In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered,

waiting for the moving of the water.

4 *For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had.*

thirty-

stepped in

5 And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years.

How We Got the Bible in English

2) NB: The *italicized* words in the KJV are not in any new translation.

a Why is that?

The answer is that the best and oldest mss lack those words.

b Why is that?

1] The real reason for the movement in the pool was that water from the Siloam tunnel built by Hezekiah BC irrupted from time to time in this had no idea that this caused

about 700 pool. The ancients the water to move.

2] Because those words are a marginal gloss, that is, they are written in the margin of at least one earlier ms to *Jewish belief that explains why sick around this pool.*

cite the people are lying

3] A copyist of that ms (the ms that had the marginal gloss) then carelessly inserted the words into the text he making, which was then copied into more copyists.

was mss by later

3) The words clearly do not belong in the text, and are, in fact, an insult to God.

What?! God plays “healing roulette” with sick people??!!

No, God does not play “healing roulette” with sick people, in spite of the Jewish tradition / belief.

4) Potential objection: “But then there is no verse 4.”

Recall: verse numbers were not part of the text until AD 1551!

By then, the NT text had “grown” considerably, and verse numbers were added to the “bloated” text.

Thus, verse numbers have zero bearing on determining the text of the NT.

How We Got the Bible in English

F Corrections / improvements— Mark 1:2–3

1) Mark 1:2–3 (KJV)

one
make his paths

2 As it is written in **the prophets**, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. 3 The voice of crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, straight.

2) Mark 1:2–3 (NIV, and almost all new translations)

2 as it is written in **Isaiah the prophet**:
“I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way” —
3 “a voice of one calling in the wilderness,
‘Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.’”

3) Notes on the texts above:

a The words after “prophet[s]” come from the OT

1] the first part of the OT “quote” is from Malachi 3:1

Malachi 3:1—“I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me”

2] the second part of the OT “quote” is from Isaiah 40:3

—“A voice of one calling:
‘In the wilderness prepare
the way for the Lord;
make straight in the desert
a highway for our God.’”

- b “Isaiah the prophet” is the harder reading, since what comes from the OT comes from two prophets, not one.
- c According to Jewish teaching (Mark was Jewish), because Isaiah was the better known prophet, only Isaiah needed to be

cited.

How We Got the Bible in English

G Harmonization (intentional)—the Lord’s prayer in Luke and Matthew

1) Matthew 6:9–13 (NIV)

- 9** “This, then, is how you should pray:
“Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
- 10** your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
- 11** Give us today our daily bread.
- 12** And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
- 13** And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.

2) Luke 11:2–4 (NIV)

- 2** He said to them, “When you pray, say:
“Father,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come.
- 3** Give us each day our daily bread.
- 4** Forgive us our sins,
for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.
And lead us not into temptation.

3) Most translations since the 19th century have the passages as cited above.

The KJV and the NKJV include the following additions [**bold**] to Luke in order to bring it into harmony with Matthew:

2 **Our Father which art in heaven**, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. **Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth.**

4 And lead us not into temptation; **but deliver us from evil.**

4) This kind of harmonizing takes place often in the mss of the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke).

How We Got the Bible in English

H **Liturgical additions** (unintentional)—Matthew 6:13c

The best mss do not include “For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.”

Even the KJV does not include these words at the end of Luke 11:4.

Note 1 Chronicles 29:11

**Yours, Lord, is the greatness and the power
and the glory** and the majesty and the splendor,
for everything in heaven and earth is yours.

Yours, Lord, is the kingdom;
you are exalted as head over all.

NT mss were eventually copied, for the most part, by clergy, men used to reading and elaborating on Scripture in church services. The lectionaries are examples of NT Scripture used for this purpose. It is not surprising that some of what the clergy prepared for church readings or lessons, because such tasks happened so often, were retained in the memory of those clergymen, and then found their way into mss when the task of the clergyman changed from preparation for church services to making copies of NT mss.

I **Errors of sight**

J. Harold Greenlee, *Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 63–64.

1) **Division of words**

Mark 10:40—“To sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared.” [NIV]

- a Some mss have *allois hetoimastai* (αλλοις ητοιμασται)
“it is prepared for others”
- b Some mss have *all ois hetoimastai* (αλλ οις ητοιμασται)
“but it is for those for whom it is prepared”
- c This second reading is the text in United Bible Societies (4th edition) and is reflected in the NIV.

How We Got the Bible in English

2) Confusion of similar letters

Α Δ Λ [A D L], Ε Σ [E S], Ο Θ [O TH], Η Ν [E N], Π Ι Τ Τ Ι [P I T T I]

3) Homoioteleuton (“similar ending”)

A scribe might inadvertently repeat a letter, especially when the following word could begin with the same letter. The reverse could also

happen.

In 1 Thessalonians 2:7, note the single additional letter (bold, underlined) in the second Greek word in “a.”

- a Some mss have egenēthēmen **nēpioi**—“we became infants”
- b Some mss have egenēthēmen **ēpioi**—“we became gentle”

J Errors of hearing

- 1) John 14:15—If you love me, ——— my commandments.

In this verse, the Greek verb (from “to keep”) is found with three spellings—there is a *one-letter* difference..

The letter in question is in bold type and is underlined, both below and in the three citations that follow, to show the *one-letter* difference.

reading a: τηρή**στε** (future indicative)—tērēsete
 reading b: τηρή**ση**τε (aorist subjunctive)—tērēsēte
 reading c: τηρή**σ**τε (aorist imperative)—tērēsate

- a Some mss have τηρήσετε (tērēsεte—future indicative)—“you will keep” [statement of fact]

This is the translation of the ESV

- b Some mss have τηρήσητε (tērēsηte—οrist subjunctive)—“you should keep” [hopeful statement]

- c Some mss have τηρήσατε (tērēsαte—οrist imperative)—“keep” [command]

This is the translation of the NIV and NLT

How We Got the Bible in English

2) Revelation 1:5c

read (a

- a Sometimes, instead of making their ms copy by *looking* at another ms, copyists made their ms copy by *listening* to someone (lector) from another ms [called an *exemplar*].

Of course, there would be several copyists listening to the reader and making copies simultaneously.

b In Revelation 1:5c

1] The earlier mss have “To him who . . . has *freed* us”

2] Later mss have “Unto him that . . . *washed* us”

c In Greek, wash is *louo* (lou–oh) and loose is *luo* (loo–oh).

1] In *louo*, the ou is like the ou in soup.

2] In *luo*, the u is like the u in truth.

That is to say, they sound identical.

and, at
heard *louo* and

- d It is apparent that some copies of Revelation were made by copyists who listened to a lector reading from another ms, this point in Revelation, some of those copyists others of them heard *luo*.

K **Theological reason** (intentional)

1) Matthew 5:22

[italics

KJV I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother
without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment.
mine]

ESV I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother
will be liable to judgment.

NIV I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister,
will be subject to judgment.

NLT I say, if you are even angry with someone, you are subject
to judgment.

The earliest manuscripts lack the Greek word *eikei*, a word that means
“without cause,” “to no purpose,” “without reason.”

“It is much more likely that the word [*eikei*] was added by copyists
in order to *soften the rigor of the precept* [= ‘Lighten up, Jesus!’]
than omitted as unnecessary.” [italics and comment mine]

Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New
Testament*, 3rd edition (London / New York: United Bible
Societies, 1971), 13.

2) Matthew 6:4, 6, 18

KJV thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee *openly*.
[italics mine]

ESV / NIV / NLT lack *openly*.

Does the Father always reward his children openly?

While God's rewarding of his children may be out in the open or hidden from the view of others, it seems that is more often private than it for public review.

is open

To promise outward reward may foster an ungodly reason for righteous behavior.

How We Got the Bible in English

5 Historical factors affecting the NT text

Why are the majority of mss the longer, “bloated,” kind?

A Rise of Latin in the western part of the Roman empire (AD 5th century—400s)

- 1) For this reason, Greek manuscripts were no longer copied in the west of the Roman Empire or in the western part of North Africa.
- 2) But Greek manuscripts were copied for another 1,000 years in the east.
- 3) This fact explains why most mss are like those from Byzantium / Constantinople / Istanbul, in present-day Turkey).

B Fall of Constantinople (in the east) and the consequences for the NT text

- 1) The fall of Constantinople took place in 1453, in what is now Turkey.
- 2) Eastern scholars fled to the west with their NT copies made in the east. These mss, of course, were of the Byzantine text-type.

C Renaissance

- 1) The Renaissance occurred roughly between the 13th and 17th centuries (between the 1200s and the 1600s).
- 2) It was characterized by renewed interest and advances in the arts, the sciences, politics, philosophy, classical literature, and religious

thought.

- 3) The point for this study is that the interest in mss of the Bible (especially the NT) was part of a larger interest in ancient literature.

D The upshot of this section [5] is that the mss available to those preparing Greek NTs in the 16th century were late, that is to say, far removed from the NT authors compared with the many mss that would be discovered during the next several centuries.

How We Got the Bible in English

6 Geographic centers of copying NT manuscripts and the resulting text-types

A Mss were copied in basically four main centers:

- 1) Byzantium (modern Istanbul, Turkey)
- 2) Caesarea (Israel / Palestine)
- 3) Rome (Italy)
- 4) Alexandria (Egypt)

B So there are four types of NT mss:

- 1) Byzantine
- 2) Caesarean
- 3) Western
- 4) Alexandrian

B Important implications of text-types for textual criticism

- 1) That means that mss must not be simply “counted,” but “weighed.”

****See Additional Material 8 and 9 (pages 13–14)*

Regarding Additional Material 9, Diagram 2, suppose the following:

- a X is the manuscript being copied.
- b A is copied somewhere.
- c B and C are copied in the same geographical area widely separated from the one where A is copied.
- d Then this yields,
 - 1] not one witness (A) against fourteen witnesses (B–O),
 - 2] but one witness (A) against two witnesses (B and C),
because D–O may all be traced to B and C.

How We Got the Bible in English

- 2) Thus, even though most mss are of the Byzantine text-type, that does not mean that their version of the NT text is the closest to the original.

This is because:

- most
- a almost all of Byzantine mss are late (none are on papyrus), that is, they were copied at times far removed from the originals, often centuries later than the papyri.
 - b Byzantine mss exhibit the features that betray “editing” tendencies, that is, they typically have:
 - 1] a longer text
 - 2] a greater tendency toward smooth Greek
 - 3] fewer instances of textual variation between parallel Synoptic Gospel passages
 - 4] fewer contradictory or “difficult” issues of exegesis

How We Got the Bible in English

7 Printed Greek New Testament

- A The printing press was invented by Johannes Gutenberg in about 1450.
- B This led to a race to publish the first Greek NT.
- C Almost all manuscripts available were from the East, none earlier than the 12th century (1100s).
- D Desiderius Erasmus and the Textus Receptus
 - 1) Erasmus prepared the Greek NT eventually called the Textus Receptus.
 - 2) Erasmus had six or seven mss available to him, only one of which was non-Byzantine, and none earlier than the 12th century (1100s).
 - 3) “Textus Receptus” was part of an advertising blurb used by the publishers, the Elzevir brothers.
 - 2) The Textus Receptus is based on 1% of the Byzantine evidence.
- E Bible chapters were added in 1227–1228, and verses were added in 1551: this explains “missing” verses

Printed Bibles include chapter and verse numbers.

8 More discoveries of NT manuscripts

- A Thousands of NT manuscripts have been discovered since the 1800s, most of which differ from those previously known—the total has now surpassed 5,800.
- B About 80%–85% of manuscripts are Byzantine, from the 8th century or later.

How We Got the Bible in English

9 Criteria for evaluating textual variants

There are two kinds of evidence for the NT text that must be considered

A External evidence means consideration of the following:

- 1) The **date** of the manuscript(s) supporting a given reading, as best it can be determined
- 2) The **geographical distribution** of the manuscripts supporting a given reading, as best it can be determined
- 3) The **number of text-types** supporting a given reading, as best it can be determined

NB: So, one must not just count manuscripts, but must weigh them.

B Internal evidence means consideration of the following:

- 1) The **shorter** (shortest, if more than two variants) reading is preferred.

Example: Romans 8:1

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus [NIV]

There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, *who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit* [KJV]

Spirit

NB verse 4:

in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, *who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit* [NIV]

according to

that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, *who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit* [KJV]

How We Got the Bible in English

The addition “who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” comes from verse 4. It is clearly a theological misunderstanding of Paul—of the gospel!—in the direction of legalism, a theology that grew within the Church as time passed.

- 2) The **harder** (hardest, if more than two variants) reading is preferred.

Example: Mark 1:2–3 (see notes on page 18)

- 3) In parallel passages, the **different** reading is preferred.

Example: Luke 11:2–4 (see notes on page 19)

- 4) The reading more (most, if more than two variants) consistent with the **style and vocabulary of the author** is preferred.

Example: Matthew 17:20

Because you have so little faith [NIV]

oligopistian (ὀλιγοπιστίαν—little faith)

Because of your unbelief [KJV]

apistian (ἀπιστίαν—lack of faith, unbelief)

The word *oligopistian* (little faith) is used only here in the NT.

But Matthew uses the related word *ologopistos* (ὀλγόπιστος—of little faith) four times (6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8).

The only other time that this related word *ologopistos* (of little faith) is used in the NT is in Luke 12:28, which is a parallel to Matthew

6:30.

So, *ologopistos* (of little faith) / *oligopistian* (little faith) are words used especially by Matthew.

Also, *oligopistian* (little faith) has better mss support than does *apistian*.

How We Got the Bible in English

- 5) The reading more (most, if more than two variants) consistent with the **context** is preferred.

Example: Romans 5:1

Since we have been justified through faith, **we have** peace with God [NIV]

echo-men (ἔχ~~ω~~μεν, indicative, “we have”)

Since we have been justified through faith, **let us have** peace with God [NIVmg]

echō-men (ἔχ~~ω~~μεν, subjunctive, “let us have”)

“Although the subjunctive ἔχ~~ω~~μεν . . . has far better external support than the indicative ἔχομεν . . . a majority of the committee judged that internal evidence must here take precedence. Since in this passage it appears that Paul is not exhorting but stating facts (“peace” is the possession of those who have been justified), only the indicative is consonant with the apostle’s argument. Since the difference in pronunciation between o and ω in the Hellenistic age was almost non-existent, when Paul dictated ἔχομεν, Tertius, his amanuensis [“secretary”] (16:22), may have written down ἔχ~~ω~~μεν.”

Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London/New York: United Bible Societies, 1971), 511.

- 6) The **Basic Rule**: the reading that better (best, if more than two variants) explains the origin of the other(s) is more (most) likely to be the original.

How We Got the Bible in English

C Example of how the Basic Rule works

John 11:17—“Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.”

1) Below are the variant readings for “already . . . four days”

#1 tessaras ede hemeras—“four already days”

#2 tessaras hemeras ede—“four days already”

#3 ede tessaras hemeras—“already four days”

#4 tessaras hemeras—“four days”

2) Reasons for adopting reading #1

a Reading #1 is the hardest reading— if reading #2 or #3 were original, there is no reason for a copyist to change it to reading #1.

b Some copyists didn’t like “already” between “four” and “days,” so:

1] Some put “already” after “four days” (reading #2)

2] Some put “already” before “four days” (reading #3)

3] Some omitted the word “already” accidentally (reading #4)

So, reading #1 best accounts for the origin of the other three.

c Note that “already” is supported by the manuscript evidence for readings #1, #2, and #3—thus it certainly belongs in the text, and reading #4 is eliminated from consideration for the original.

d In addition, reading #1 is the reading of some of the oldest mss.

- 3) Finally, no matter which of the first three readings is adopted, *the meaning is the same.*

****See Additional Material 10 (pages 15–17)*

How We Got the Bible in English

10 Current state of the NT text

A Which mss are used to arrive at the text of the NT?

- 1) Textual scholars have examined as many mss as are available for every line of the NT.

The resultant text is called an *eclectic* text, that is, a text based on *all* of the available evidence.

- 2) The vast majority of textual scholars have more confidence in the Alexandrian text-type than in the other text-types.

This is because, after more than a century of painstaking examination, the Alexandrian text-type has earned its reputation for being the most reliable of the four basic text-types.

B Note on the Majority (Byzantine) text and the Textus Receptus

- 1) There remains a very small number of scholars who still favor the Majority text.

This is the text supported by 80+% of extant Greek mss.

- 2) The Majority text is for the most part late, that is, farther removed from the writing of the NT than most of the remaining mss.

- 3) The Majority text is close to, but not identical with, the Textus Receptus.

- 4) The Textus Receptus is the text from which the KJV is translated.

- 5) The Majority text is the basis for the NKJV.

- 6) As far as I know, all other translations use an eclectic text as the basis for their work.

C The certainty of the NT text has reached a stage with which scholars are quite confident. Unless some stunning manuscript find is made, it is not likely that any change of significance will be made to the NT text we now have.

[See next page]

How We Got the Bible in English

11 We have an accurate New Testament!

A All extant mss of all text-types are at least 85% identical and most of the variations are not translatable into English, variations such as word order or spelling.

B The number of extant (existing, known, discovered, surviving) manuscripts far exceeds the number of copies of any other document from antiquity.

The temporal proximity of many NT manuscripts to the originals exceeds that of any other document from antiquity.

In regard to these two facts—number of extant manuscripts and temporal proximity of manuscripts copies to the originals—those working to determine the original text of the NT are “wealthy!”

C The NT text is 90%–95% certain.

Almost all variants in the mss are inconsequential to the meaning—none affect theology [the Bible’s teaching].

How We Got the Bible in English

12 **Though the details differ, *basically* the same ideas apply to the Old Testament**

13 **Important observation—Bible believers and textual criticism**

The Conservative/Evangelical (Bible-believing) view of Scripture as the inspired Word of God should mean that such believers would have a genuine interest—*certainly more interest than liberals (non-believers)*—in textual criticism.

This is not to say that you or I should practice textual criticism. It is only to say that we who believe that the Bible is the Word of God should be supportive of scholars who do this painstaking and necessary work.

But the truth is that most believers are uninformed, uninterested, and some are even antagonistic to finding the most accurate text of NT. *This is a sad state of affairs and should not be so!*

NB: Without textual scholars for Hebrew and Greek and translators of Hebrew and Greek—four teams of biblical scholars—*no one* has a Bible to read!

How We Got the Bible in English

V Access to the Word of God in Writing

1 Hearers rather than readers

Starting with the Law of Moses (the first five books of the Bible), most of God's people have not been able to **read** the Scriptures but have had to **hear** the Scriptures **read to them**.

A Deuteronomy 31:9–13

Then Moses canceling Israel comes to appear will choose, you shall **read** this law

9 So Moses wrote down this law and gave it to the Levitical priests, who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and to all the elders of Israel. **10** commanded them: “At the end of every seven years, in the year for debts, during the Festival of Tabernacles, **11** when all before the Lord your God at the place he before them **in their hearing**.

12 Assemble the people—men, women and children, and the foreigners residing in your towns—so they can **listen** and learn to fear the Lord your God and carefully all the words of this law. **13** Their children, who do not must **hear** it and learn to fear the Lord your God as long as you live in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess.”

B Nehemiah 7:73–8:3, 7–8

73 When the seventh month came and the Israelites had settled in their towns, **1** all the people came together as one in the square before the Water Gate. They told Ezra the teacher of the Law to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded for Israel.

2 So on the first day of the seventh month Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, which was made up of men and women and all who were able to understand. **3** He **read it aloud** from daybreak till noon as he faced the square before the Water Gate in the presence of the men, women and others who could understand. And all the people **listened attentively** to the Book of the Law. . . .

7 The Levites . . . instructed the people in the Law while the people were standing there. **8** They **read** from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people understood what was being **read**.

How We Got the Bible in English

C Luke 4:16–17a

16 He [Jesus] went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up **to read,** **17a** and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him.

D Revelation 1:3

Blessed is the one who **reads aloud** the words of this prophecy [the Book of Revelation], and blessed are those who **hear** it and take to heart what is written in it.

E Revelation 22:18a

I warn everyone who **hears** the words of the prophecy of this scroll.

2 The Bible as one Book?

The totality of the Scriptures in a single book was unheard of because it was impossible until the last few hundred years.

A scroll could contain one long or several shorter biblical books.

A Examples of books that each took up a single scroll or most of a scroll:

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy
1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles
Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel
Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts
Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Hebrews, Revelation

Cf Luke 4:17—*the scroll of the prophet Isaiah* was handed to him.

B Example of several books that together took up a single scroll:

The twelve minor prophets, Hosea through Malachi
The shorter letters of Paul, the General Letters (Epistles)

How We Got the Bible in English

3 Cost of writing materials was prohibitive

From antiquity until modern times writing materials have been expensive, thus putting the purchase of books out of reach for most people.

4 Widespread illiteracy

Most of the world's population has been illiterate throughout history.

So, even if the Bible were available, most could not read it.

5 Availability of the Bible as one Book

The Bible *as a whole* has not been available to the public until the last few hundred years.

Thus, most of God's people throughout most of history have had no access to any part of God's Word in writing!

How We Got the Bible in English

VI Translating the Bible

A common question is this:

“Why don’t translators just pick the same English words that correspond to each of the Hebrew and Greek words in the Bible so that all translations are the same?”

1 Two myths concerning translation

A **Myth One:** There are “English words that correspond to each of the Hebrew and Greek words in the Bible.”

This first myth concerns *vocabulary*—the meaning of words.

1) Words—*in any language*—have multiple meanings.

Example from English: ****See Additional Material 11 (pages 18–22)*

2) The English word chosen to translate a given Hebrew or Greek word must be the English word from whose *range of meaning* one definition the best with the meanings of the Hebrew or Greek word being

overlaps
translated.

3) Example from Kinyarwanda (the language of Rwanda)

Words for “mother” in Kinyarwanda

a *umutegarugori* —mother who has just given birth

b *mawe*—my mother, our mother (used when addressing one’s mother)

c *nyina*—mother or maternal aunt of someone

d *nyoko*—mother or maternal aunt of person being spoken to (*this is rude*)

e *mama*—mother or maternal aunt of person speaking (commonly used to refer to anyone’s mother)

How We Got the Bible in English

- f *mama*—my mother
- g *mama wacu*—my maternal aunt
- h *mabukwe*—mother-in-law of person speaking
- i *nyirabukwe*—mother-in-law of someone else
- j *nyokobukwe*—mother-in-law of person being spoken to

4) Examples from Hebrew

a 'adam (אָדָם), pronounced *ah-dahm*

- 1] In Genesis 1:27 'adam (אָדָם) means “mankind,”
“humanity,” “humankind”

27 God created **mankind** ('adam) in his own image,
in the image of God he created *them*;
male and female he created *them*.

28 God blessed *them* and said to *them* [NIV]

- 2] In Genesis 2:7 'adam means “a man.”

The Lord God formed **a man** (ha'adam—“the man”) from
the dust of the ground.

- 3] In Genesis 5:3 'adam means “Adam.”

“When **Adam** ('adam) had lived 130 years.”

How We Got the Bible in English

- b dabar (דָּבָר), pronounced *dah–bahr*
- 1] In Isaiah 1:10 dabar means “word.”
“Hear the **word** (dabar) of the Lord.”
 - 2] In Exodus 34:28 dabar means first “word” and then
“commandment.”
“Moses . . . wrote on the tablets the **words** (dabar) of the
covenant—the Ten **Commandments** (dabar).”
 - 3] In 1 Kings 15:5 dabar means “matter,” “instance,” “case.”
“David had done what was right . . . all the days of his life
—except in the **case** (dabar) of Uriah the Hittite.”

5) Examples from NT Greek

- a *angelos* (ἄγγελος), pronounced *ahn–gel–oss* [the g is hard]

It is used 175 times in the Greek NT, meaning “messenger” or
“angel.”

- 1] of humans—Matthew 11:10 (John the Baptist)
““I will send my **messenger** ahead of you.”
- 2] of supernatural beings:
 - a) godly ones—Luke 1:26 (Gabriel)
“The **angel** went to her (Mary) and said.”
 - b) ungodly ones—Matthew 25:41 (devil’s underlings)
“The eternal fire prepared for the devil and his
angels.”

How We Got the Bible in English

b *xulon* (ξύλον), pronounced *zoó-lawn*, basically means “wood.”

It is used 20 times in the Greek NT, in the following senses:

1] tree—Revelation 22:2

“On each side of the river stood the **tree** of life.”

2] wood (it comes from a tree)—1 Corinthians 3:12

“If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, **wood**, hay or straw”

3] something made of wood, that is, made from a tree:

a) clubs—Mark 14:43

“A crowd armed with swords and **clubs**.”

b) stocks—Acts 16:24

“He . . . fastened their feet in the **stocks**.”

c) tree = cross (the cross of Jesus)—Acts 5:30

“You killed by hanging him on a **cross**.”

How We Got the Bible in English

B **Myth Two:** “All languages express people’s thoughts in the same ways.”

This second myth concerns *syntax*—how ideas are expressed.

Languages are products of the cultures in and for which they are created. Because no two cultures are alike, no two languages express ideas in identical ways.

1) Examples from OT Hebrew

a In OT Hebrew there is no verb meaning “to have.”

1] *Does this mean that possession cannot be expressed in Hebrew?!*

idea is

No, of course it doesn’t mean that. Rather, possession in Hebrew is expressed differently from the way that expressed in English or in Greek.

preposition
Hebrew L].

2] Rather than using a verb for “have,” one of the ways that Hebrew expresses possession is that it uses the “to” [in Hebrew, ל (lamed), the

3] 2 Samuel 7:14

“I will be his father, and he will be my son.” [NIV, NLT]

The Hebrew for this is, over-literally:

I will be **to** (ל) him for a father and he will be **to** (ל) me for a son.

ESV is very close to the Hebrew: “I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son.”

How We Got the Bible in English

b In Hebrew the word *eth* (אֶת) is a sign of the direct object, a pointer that says, “the next word is the direct object of the verb.”

This word cannot be translated—*it is not intended to be translated*.

Genesis 1:1—bereshith bara elohim **eth** hashamayim w-**eth** haarets

eth is used before “the heavens” (hashamayim) and “the earth” (haarets) to clarify that those two words are the objects of “create.”

English has nothing like this.

2) Examples from NT Greek

a The clause “while he was sewing [seed]” (Matthew 13:4/Luke 8:5) is expressed in NT Greek as (that is, it looks to us like) “in the to sew him” [*this is not a typo*].

b *paidarion* (παιδάριον), pronounced *pie-dáh-ree-awn* means “young child”—the context determines the gender.

So, in John 6:9, the Greek text reads: “there is a **young child** here *who* has five barley loaves and two small fish.” [emphases

mine]

While “who” in English can be either masculine or feminine, in Greek “who” is gender-specific.

In John 6:9 the “who” is masculine, so the *paidarion* (“young child”) is a boy.

Thus, the NIV [the ESV and NLT are very similar] has: “Here is a *boy* with five small barley loaves and two small fish.”

c John 18:6—“When Jesus said, ‘I am he,’ **they drew back** and fell to the ground.” [NIV]

behind.”

“They drew back” is apēlthon eis ta opisō, and may be over-literally translated, “they went into the [“the” is plural]

But it means “they drew back” (so also ESV / NLT).

How We Got the Bible in English

d The (definite) article [“the”] in Greek:

Matthew 25:16 says (over-literally):

- 1] Greek: “**The the** [*this is not a typo*] five talents having received”
- 2] NIV: “**The** man who had received [**the**] five bags of gold”

tah] is talents.

The first “the” [ὁ—ho] is masculine singular nominative and refers to the man, while the second “the” [τά—neuter plural accusative and refers to the

This exact expression is impossible in English.

- 3] NT Greek has 24 forms (with 17 spellings) for the (definite) article!

For the Greek article there are three variables:

- a) case (4 options—nominative, genitive, dative, accusative)
- b) gender (3 options—masculine, feminine, neuter)
- c) number (2 options—singular, plural)

In English the definite article is “the”—that’s it!

C So, both vocabulary (the meaning of words) and syntax (the way languages express concepts) differ from language to language, thus making the matter of translation much more complicated than it might at first appear.

Because, for many words, English has a large array of synonyms, it is a given that translators will differ on the precise English words they employ. For this reason,

the a comparison of translations can be helpful in arriving at the meaning of Bible.

How We Got the Bible in English in English

2 Two major factors in Bible translation (into any language)

A Factor #1: On which Hebrew and Greek texts will the translation be based?

- 1) For the OT, the texts of the Aleppo and Leningrad codices form the basis.
- 2) For the NT, note the following:
 - a The KJV is based on the Textus Receptus and the NKJV is based on the Majority text.
 - b As far as I know, all other translations from the late 19th century (1881) forward are based on an eclectic text (a text based on all of the available evidence).

B Factor #2: Where on the literal–paraphrase spectrum will the translation be?

In light of the foregoing information (“Two myths concerning translation”) a simple “word–for–word translation” is impossible—there is no such thing!

Three basic theories of translation have been employed:

- 1) Formal equivalence—literal.
The example used below is the *English Standard Version*.
- 2) Functional equivalence—dynamic equivalent.
The example used below is the *New Living Translation*.
- 3) Free translation—paraphrase.
The example used below is the *Message*.

[These three labels for theories of translation and the brief descriptions of each theory relative to its “historical distance” from the original, noted below, are taken from Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003).]

NB: The three translations used as examples for each translation theory were chosen by me. Undoubtedly, another teacher might choose different translations for examples of the theories. Below are samples I have

chosen for each of the translations mentioned above.

three basic theories of translation, using the

How We Got the Bible in English in English

4) Example 1: Luke 18:3–5

a **Formal equivalence—literal.**

Historical distance is kept intact at all points: ESV

*while he
fear
keeps bothering
will not beat me down by her*

3 And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, “Give me justice against my adversary.” 4 For a refused, but afterward he said to himself, “Though I neither God nor respect man, 5 yet because this widow me, I will give her justice, so that she continual coming.”

b **Functional equivalence—dynamic equivalent.**

Historical distance is kept intact on historical and factual matters, but the language, grammar, and style are updated: NLT

*ignored her
don't fear God or care
me crazy. I'm going to
because she is wearing me out with her
requests!”*

3 A widow of that city came to him repeatedly, saying, “Give me justice in this dispute with my enemy.” 4 The judge for a while, but finally he said to himself, “I about people, 5 but this woman is driving see that she gets justice, constant

c **Free translation—paraphrase.**

Historical distance is eliminated as much as possible: MSG

*day. But
“I care nothing what
think. 5 But because this widow
do something and see that she
otherwise I'm going to end up beaten black and blue
by her pounding.”*

3 A widow in that city kept after him: “My rights are being violated. Protect me!” 4 He never gave her the time of after this went on and on he said to himself, God thinks, even less what people won't quit badgering me, I'd better gets justice—

How We Got the Bible in English in English

5) Example 2: Romans 12:1

a **Formal equivalence—literal.**

Historical distance kept intact at all points: ESV

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

b **Functional equivalence—dynamic equivalent.**

Historical distance is kept intact on historical and factual matters, but language, grammar, and style is updated: NLT

And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him.

c **Free translation—paraphrase.**

Historical distance eliminated as much as possible: MSG

So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him.

C Thus, the following two questions must be answered before a translation can begin.

- 1) From *which text* (NT text) will this translation be made?
- 2) Which *theory of translation* will be used?

D Note: The NIV is situated somewhere between the ESV and the NLT.

How We Got the Bible in English in English

VII Translations on a “Literal to Paraphrase” Continuum

The following chart of translations is an adaptation from Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 42.

NB: *The placement of translations on the following chart is an approximation only.*

	Formal Equivalence	Functional Equivalence	Free Translation
Original	KJV NASB RSV	NIV GNB JB	NEB LB
Update	NKJV NASU	NRSV TNIV NJB REB NLT	Message

Translations undergo revisions—some of these from the chart above are listed below.

Translation	Revision
KJV	NKJV
NASB	NASBU
RSV	NRSV
NIV	TNIV
JB	NJB
NEB	REB
LB	NLT

***See Additional Material 12 (page 23)

Important note:

Why not make a translation and be done with it? Why not just keep the same translation until Jesus returns?

Here is why that idea will not work. Spoken languages change over time. (Example: “mansion” or “room” in John 14?) There is no denying this nor can it ever be otherwise. When a translation is made, the language used is current for that time. However, as time passes, the spoken language that was used in the translation changes, little by little. Yet the same language, in that translation, is “frozen” on the page. Thus a distance is created—without anyone doing anything!—that is unavoidable. The more time that passes, the greater the distance between the spoken language and the translation. The only way to keep any translation “current” in terms of the spoken language is to update the translation from time to time to keep up with that language.

How We Got the Bible in English in English

VIII Translations and the Deity of Christ

Below is a chart of the eight New Testament passages where Jesus *is* or *may be* identified as Deity, and how thirteen Bible translations have rendered those passages. An **X** indicates that the translation in question *does* translate in such a way as to identify Jesus Christ as Deity. A **0** indicates that the version in question *does not* translate in such a way as to ascribe Deity to Jesus. “Mg” means “marginal reading.” Where there is neither an X nor a 0 for a marginal reading it will be understood that there is no marginal reading for that passage in that version. This chart is an adaptation of the chart on page 64 of *The King James Version Debate: A Plea for Realism*, by D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979). Carson’s book is dated, so, where I had access to a translation’s newer edition, I have added information for those newer editions. *This evidence should lay to rest the accusation that translations since the KJV deny the deity of Jesus.*

Translations / Versions included in this chart

1	KJV/AV	King James Version / Authorized Version (1611)
2	RV	Revised Version (1881–1885)
3	RSV	Revised Standard Version (1946, 1952)
4	NRSV	New Revised Standard Version (1989)
5	NEB	New English Bible (1961)
6	REB	Revised English Bible (1989)
7	NASB (1960)	New American Standard Bible (1960)
8	NASBU (1995)	New American Standard Bible [Updated] (1995)
9	TEV/GNB	Today’s English Version / Good News Bible (1966, 1976)
10	NKJV	New King James Version (1992)
11	NIV	New International Version (2011)
12	NLT	New Living Translation (2007)
13	Message	The Message (2005)

How We Got the Bible in English

Version	John 1:1	John 1:18	Acts 20:28	Romans 9:5	2 Thess 1:12	Titus 2:13	Hebrews 1:8	2 Peter 1:1	X Total
1									
KJV/AV	X	0	X	X	0	0	X	0	4
2									
RV	X	0	X	X	0	X	X	X	6
RV mg		X	0	0		0		0	
3									
RSV	X	0	0	0	0	X	X	X	4
RSV mg		X	X,0	X		0	0	0	
4									
NRSV	X	X	0	X	0	X	X	X	6
NRSVmg		X,0	X,0	X,0		0	0	0	
5									
NEB	X	0	0	0	0	X	X	X	4
NEBmg		X,0	X,0	X,0		0	0		
6									
REB	X	0	0	0	0	X	X	X	4
REBmg									
7									
NASB (1960)	X	X	X	X	0	X	X	X	7
NASBmg (1960)		0	0		X	0			
8									
NASBU (1995)	X	X	X	X	0	X	X	X	7
NASBumg (1995)									
9									
TEV/GNB	X	X	0	0	0	X	X	X	5
TEV/GNBmg		0	0	X					
10									
NKJV	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	7
NKJVmg		X	X					X	
11									
NIV	X	X	X	X	0	X	X	X	7
NIVmg		0	0	0	X				
12									
NLT	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	8
NLTmg		0	X	X	X				
13									
Message	X	X	X	X	0	X	X	X	7
Totals	13/13	7/13	7/13	9/13	2/13	12/13	13/13	12/13	

How We Got the Bible in English

The following translations of the eight verses listed above are from the KJV (*King James Version*) and the NLT (*New Living Translation*), because those who say one should read only the KJV claim that new versions deny the deity of Jesus. However, while the KJV ascribes deity to Jesus in four of the eight texts, the NLT ascribes deity to Jesus in all eight of them, and is the only version of which I am aware that does so. A **Y** following the initials KJV or NLT means the translation ascribes deity to Jesus, and an **N** following the initials means the translation does *not* ascribe deity to Jesus.

John 1:1

KJV—**Y**: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

NLT—**Y**: In the beginning the Word already existed.
The Word was with God,
and the Word was God.

John 1:18

KJV—**N**: No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.

NLT—**Y**: No one has ever seen God. But the unique One, who is himself God, is near to the Father's heart. He has revealed God to us.

Acts 20:28

KJV—**Y**: Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.

NLT—**Y**: So guard yourselves and God's people. Feed and shepherd God's flock—his church, purchased with his own blood—over which the Holy Spirit has appointed you as leaders.

Romans 9:5

KJV—**Y**: Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.

NLT—**Y**: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are their ancestors, and Christ himself was an Israelite as far as his human nature is concerned. And he is God,

the one
praise! Amen.

who rules over everything and is worthy of eternal

How We Got the Bible in English

2 Thessalonians 1:12

KJV—N: That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

NLT—Y: Then the name of our Lord Jesus will be honored because of the way you live, and you will be honored along with him. This is all made possible because of the grace of our God and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Titus 2:13

KJV—N: Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ;

NLT—Y: while we look forward with hope to that wonderful day when the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, will be revealed.

Hebrews 1:8

KJV—Y: But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom.

NLT—Y: But to the Son he says,
“Your throne, O God, endures forever and ever.
You rule with a scepter of justice.

2 Peter 1:1

KJV—N: Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ:

NLT—Y: This letter is from Simon Peter, a slave and apostle of Jesus Christ. I am writing to you who share the same precious faith we have. This faith was given to you because of the justice and fairness of Jesus Christ, our God and Savior.

Though they are not included in the sampling above, it should be noted that the *New American Standard Bible*, the *New International Version*, and the *Message* all translate seven of the eight

cited verses in such a way as to ascribe deity to Jesus. The translating of 2 Thessalonians 1:12 in such a way as to ascribe deity to Jesus is admittedly tenuous, which is the reason that the vast majority of translations translate it otherwise.

Which Bible Translation(s) Should I Read?

A suggestion based on principle

A few believers still insist that the only translation Christians should read is the Authorized or King James Version. However, it must be kept in mind that the originals of the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament were written in the ordinary language of the common people. *Translations should follow the same principle.* This principle means that a 400-year-old translation (the KJV was completed in 1611) is, plainly, woefully inadequate to communicate as God intends.

God's word is a *revelation*. That means God is "taking the lid off" of his truth—he is "turning the light on" for people. That is to say, *God wants us to understand the Bible—he wants us to "get it."* Using an old translation like the KJV is poor judgment, because it opposes the principle referred to above. *We need to do what God did in the first place: put the Bible in the ordinary language of the common person.* No one speaks Elizabethan English anymore. If this is true in England, how much more is it so in America, or anywhere else.

Furthermore, many thousands of manuscripts (copies) of the NT have been discovered since the KJV was made. The KJV is based on a handful (about a half dozen) manuscripts. We are overwhelmingly better served today with regard to the original text of Scripture. *We all need to use an up-to-date English translation.* *The New International Version* and *The New Living Translation* are good choices.

Also, *The Message* is a good paraphrase. Although it is a paraphrase, the author, Dr Eugene Peterson, was a scholar who not only began his ministry as a seminary professor of Hebrew and Greek, but who also pastored for 40 years, basing his preaching on the Hebrew and Greek texts of the Bible. Because he was an experienced pastor with an earned doctorate, his paraphrase is both well-based on the original texts and meaningful to the average reader.

Dan Saglimbeni

