

Lesson 10

**THE TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE ENGLISH BIBLE**

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. The English translation of the Bible, as no other translation, has made the biggest impact upon the world for Christ. Our English Bibles have been brought to us with no small amount of hardship and persecution by those who longed to bring the Word of God to the English-speaking peoples.
- B. We cannot take our English, Protestant heritage lightly, and we must regain an appreciation that God has preserved our English Bibles for us so we can love God and spread the gospel to the ends of the earth.
- C. One of the greatest speeches ever made was Daniel Webster's address delivered at the completion of the Bunker Hill Monument on June 17, 1843. Speaking of the coming of the Pilgrim Fathers to the New World, he said,

They brought with them a full portion of the riches of the past in science, art, morals, religion and literature. The Bible came with them. The Bible is a book of faith and a book of doctrine; but it also is a book which teaches man his own responsibility, his own dignity, and his equality with his fellow man.

II. ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS

- A. Introduction: A translation is a putting of the Word of God from one language to another without changing its meaning. NOTE: The task of a translation is to get the words as close to the meaning of the originals as possible. However, there is always something lost in the spirit of writing from the original to a translation.
- B. Caedmon Bible Songs (680): Caedmon was a good musician and singer and with the help of a Roman Catholic priest, he translated Bible stories into English and sang them to the people. He was the first to bring a portion of the Bible to the English-speaking people. These stories were paraphrases and not accurate in translation.
- C. Aldhelm (640-709): He was bishop of Sherborne in South England. Aldhelm translated fifty of the Psalms into English and this was the first attempt to give the Bible to the people in written form.
- D. Bede (674-735): Bede was the most famous scholar of his day and translated the Gospel of John into English (Anglo-Saxon). He finished the work on his deathbed. He would not die until the translation was finished. No copy of Bede's Gospel remains but his work represents the beginning of the English translations.
- E. Alfred the Great (849-901): He was a Christian Saxon, a scholar, a soldier, a statesman and a king. He was a language fiend and gave eight hours a day to study and devotions of the Bible. He worked upon the Psalms and the Gospels, but his work was cut short by his earth death at age 52.
- F. Aelfric (11<sup>th</sup> Century): Aelfric, Archbishop of Canterbury, partially translated the first seven books of the Old Testament.
- G. Wycliffe (1320-1384): The first complete English Bible was translated by John Wycliffe, a graduate and teacher at Oxford, about 1382. Wycliffe knew only the Latin Vulgate, so his translation was a translation of a translation. Nevertheless, his work was monumental and he is called the "Morning Star of the Reformation." Manuscripts of this work are in existence in many public libraries. NOTE: There were no printing presses at this time so each copy of the Bible was copied by transcribers who produced about 150 manuscripts. One copy of Wycliffe Bible would have cost the equivalent of over fifteen years salary today to purchase a single copy. In contrast, a copy of the New Testament in clear type and well-bound can today be secured from a Bible society for less than \$3.00 NOTE: God works in mysterious ways.

Wycliffe attacked the false and wicked position of the Roman Catholic Church on indulgences, transubstantiation, etc., and he was brought to trial by the Roman Catholic Church at Blackfriars. The result was that Wycliffe's teachings were condemned. Thus he returned to his home discouraged and for the next two years he translated the Bible into English. This great work had a major impact upon England in setting the stage for the Reformation which was to come.

- H. Tyndale (1484-1536): William Tyndale was a Roman Catholic priest and the first to translate the Bible into English from the original Greek and Hebrew in 1526. He trained at Oxford and Cambridge and came under the influence of Erasmus, the foremost Greek scholar of the day. Tyndale also became a Greek scholar. He longed to put the Bible into English but realized he could never do it as long as he was in the country, for many were being thrown into prison for their reformed ideas which were not as serious as his. Tyndale left England, never to return and went to Hamburg and Cologne, Germany. Here he worked on his English translation, facing poverty, disgrace and danger. Much of the translation was finished and some of it was already at the printers when a bigoted priest got the printers drunk, getting from them some of the manuscripts, and showed them to the authorities. The magistrates ordered Tyndale's arrest, and Tyndale, being warned by his friends, picked up his manuscripts hurriedly and left. He then went to Worms, Germany, which was a stronghold of the Reformers. Here Tyndale found refuge, and completed his Bible. With the invention of the printing press, hundreds of copies could be made cheaply. Tyndale smuggled hundreds of Bibles into England the Word of God circulated far and wide. This became the Bible of the people. The Roman Church decided to buy all copies of this Bible they could and then burn them. So effective were the enemies of the gospel that today there are only a few fragments of the original edition and only two copies of the second edition. Tyndale was later arrested, strangled at the stake and then burnt to ashes. What was he accused of? "Putting the Bible into the language of the people." Before he died he prayed, "Lord, open the King of England's eyes, and Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." NOTE: Tyndale's Bible became the foundation for the King James Bible, and many of the common sayings in the King James were part of Tyndale's early editions.
- I. Coverdale Miles Coverdale, a friend of Tyndale, translated his Bible in 1536. This translation was merely a revision of Tyndale's work. God did answer Tyndale's prayer, for King Henry VIII, who broke from Rome in 1532, gave permission for the Coverdale Bible to be circulated freely in all England.
- J. The Great Bible (1539): This was little more than a revision of Tyndale's Bible, but it became the first authorized copy of the English Bible by Henry VIII. These Bibles were chained to stands in the larger churches and the people were permitted to read them.
- K. The Geneva Bible (1560): This Bible came into existence during the time the Roman Catholic Queen Mary (Bloody Mary) reigned and many Protestants left the country and fled to Geneva, Switzerland. There they worked upon this new translation. This is the first Bible to use verse and chapter divisions. This became the Bible of the Puritans and was brought to America by the Pilgrims.
- L. The King James Bible: (1611): When King James ascended the throne, there were three versions (see above) which were in use and there was a need for a scholarly authorized version of the English Bible. At this time there was a strong Protestant movement and the Puritans wanted a better Bible. They did not want to use certain prayer books, ritual, etc., in their churches. King James called an assembly of 54 scholars to translate the Bible into English, but the king himself was probably not a Christian. NOTE: The King James Version was not an original work, but was rather a revision of the Bishop's and Great Bibles. The translators confessed that it was not their purpose to make a new version, not "to make a bad one good, but to make a good one better." NOTE: Seven men died before the work was completed. The scholars were organized into six different groups: two at Oxford, two at Cambridge and two at Westminster. The work of each group was double-checked by the other two. The work as started in 1604 and completed in 1611. Fant comments,

For three years the translations were closely engaged. While little is known of the actual work, a passing remark of Selden, the historian, is interesting:

“When they met together, one read the translation, the rest holding in their hands some Bible either of Greek, or Hebrew, or French, Italian, or Spanish. If they found any fault they spoke, and if not he read on.” (D.J. Fant, The Story of our Bible).

NOTE: The source of their translation was the Massoretic texts of the Old Testament and the Textus Receptus, a tenth century New Testament manuscript. Many scholars feel that the Textus Receptus is not based on the best early manuscripts. NOTE: The King James Bible is one of the most majestic, best-known and time-tested translations of all English Bibles. The great majority of the translators were “born-again” men who approached the test with proper theological understanding. While many of the better manuscripts were not yet discovered, and this translation is filled with old English, it is still one of the best over-all translations of the Bible into English. The King James Bible has endeared itself to the hearts of the English speaking world because of its poetic style and theological accuracy. It is doubtful whether any existing translation will replace it.

### III. ENGLISH VERSION

- A. Introduction: For this study a version will be defined as a revision of the Bible in the English. The King James Bible (Authorized text) is an excellent Bible, but since its printing in 1611 there have been many new valuable manuscripts discovered. None of the Papyri were yet in existence. The oldest and best manuscripts in the Greek were not yet discovered, such as the Codex Sinaiticus, Codex Alexandrenus, Codex Vaticanus. Because of a greatly improved knowledge of ancient languages, as well as the possession of more correct texts of the original scriptures, there was a need to revise the King James Bible.
- B. The English Revised Version (1895): Due to the many manuscript discoveries, some of the ablest English scholars from various denominations, aided by American linguists, set out to revise the King James Bible. This version was begun in 1870 and completed in 1894. This undoubtedly was the most thorough translation on the English Bible up to that time.
- C. The American Standard Version (1901): This Bible is a revision of the English Revised Version of 1895. While the ASV is not too popular with the masses, it is regarded by conservative Bible scholars as the most reliable and best translation available today. NOTE: The New American Standard Version of 1971 is even a better translation than the ASV. This version deals with the best in modern scholarship, using the newly discovered manuscripts of the Old and New Testaments.
- D. The Revised Standard Version (1952): This work was published and heavily promoted by the National Council of Churches of Christ in America. It has been the center of much controversy. In places the translators have improved upon the text, but in many others they have not. Theological bias of the translators in several passages leans toward a liberal view of the Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ. For instance, Isa. 7:14 is translated “maiden” rather than “virgin” because many of the translators did not believe in the virgin birth. The RSV falls short of being the final answer to a clear, up-to-date translation that can be used today.
- E. The Berkley Version (1959): This is a good translation but makes little contribution that other versions have not already made.
- F. The New English Bible: This translation has theological bias and on the whole would not favor the conservative evangelical position of theology.
- G. Twentieth Century New Testament: This has been recommended by some evangelicals but there are places there liberal thinking is more than obvious.
- H. Wuest’s New Testament: This is a very good translation for study purposes, but it does not read easily. It is very conservative and is highly recommended.
- I. New International Bible (1978). This translation is from what many scholars believe to be the better manuscripts, and the NIV has become a very popular Bible.
- J. New Geneva Bible (1995). This is a study Bible with the New King James translation. As yet, this translation has not caught on with the masses.

### IV. PARAPHRASES OF THE ENGLISH BIBLE

- A. Introduction: Some Bibles out today are not literal translations but paraphrases. The idea is to reproduce the exact thought of the original, not the exact words. These paraphrases are good to get the general gist of a passage, but would not be good for detailed Bible study. They are recommended to give to unbelievers and new Christians.
- B. Reliable Paraphrases: Philip's Bible, Weymouth Bible, Moffatt Bible, Smith-Goodspeed Bible, Living Bible, Amplified Old and New Testaments.
- C. Unreliable Paraphrases: The Bible in Modern English, Good News for Modern Man are Bibles that are theologically very shaky although a man could learn the general gospel from them.

V. CONCLUSION

- A. Dr. A.W. Tozer makes this statement:

As I write, I can see fifteen versions before me without turning my head and there are many more stashed about here and there. And they all say the same thing to me; namely, that I must trust Christ Jesus the Lord as my Savior, love God with all my heart, soul and mind, and my neighbor as myself. They all say that I must be holy, humble, obedient, prayerful, pure, kindly, courageous and faithful. They all say that God is my Father and the Holy Spirit the inhabitant of my nature through the mystery of the new birth. And they all end with the cry for Christ's returning.

- B. In conclusion, your pastor recommends as the best over-all translation the New American Standard Version of 1971. However, all translations, versions and paraphrases are helpful if you are aware of their strong points and shortcomings.