

## How did the Bible come to us?

Have you ever wondered what were the languages that the Bible was written in? And what was the process by which it took its present form?

Broadly, it was Hebrew for the Old Testament, and Greek for the New Testament. As far as the Old Testament was concerned, 'Men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit' (2 Peter 1:21). As for the New Testament, the testimony of Christ's apostles was that theirs were 'words taught by the Spirit' (1 Corinthians 2:13). Here were books, then, inspired by the Spirit of God.

The Bible is a LIBRARY of sixty-six books, written over a period of 1,500 years, by a wide diversity of inspired writers. We owe so much to the faithful translators. The first outstanding translation of the Old Testament was the Samaritan (400BC); this Hebrew version was followed (in 270BC) by a translation into Greek, carried out by some seventy Greek-speaking Jews at Alexandria (hence its name The Septuagint). It is The Septuagint which, for the most part, gets to be quoted in the New Testament. Prominent among its many manuscripts are two in the British Museum (Codex Alexandrinus and Codex Sinaiticus), and one in the Vatican in Rome (Codex Vaticanus). As far as the New Testament is concerned, there are also numerous manuscripts.

A mighty translation of the whole Bible (based on the Hebrew of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament) came into being in the fifth century AD, under the hand of Jerome. Intended as a version that all Europe could read in Latin – the common language – this became known as the Vulgate version. It helped to mould the culture of Europe over the next thousand years.

Many have been the scholars who worked on Bible translation. Among them was Baeda (The Venerable Bede, 673 -735), born in Durham, whose last dying work was the translation of John's Gospel. And even King Alfred the Great was recognised for his work with the Psalms. Through his influence the Bible was to become the basis of English law.

None of this work was without opposition. After the Norman conquest of England, learning received a setback, and the Latin Bible became largely unintelligible. None was braver than John Wycliffe (1329 – 1384), who defied the then corrupt Roman church hierarchy – by producing a new translation of the Vulgate into English, so paving the way for the great Reformation a hundred years later.

The Bible in its modern form owes more to the work of the English reformer and scholar William Tyndale (1494 – 1536) than anyone. Translating afresh from the original languages of Hebrew and Greek, and helped by the invention of the printing press, thousands of newly-translated Bibles were published – in the face of relentless persecution – until Tyndale was finally tracked down at Vilvorde, near Brussels, strangled and burnt at the stake. Out of his work came the Authorised Version of 1611 (the King James Version) that shaped the English language for three centuries to come.

So be grateful for your own copy of the Bible. It came to you through the toil of many scholars down more than 24 centuries, and through the blood of many martyrs.

**From: The Top 100 Questions by Richard Bewes (Christian Focus)**