

Missions, Translations, and Scripture

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1. What we believe

“We believe the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments to be the verbally inspired Word of God, written by men by God’s control, inerrant and infallible in the original manuscripts, and the final authority in faith and life.” —First Bible Church Constitution, Article III

2. Who has the original autographs today?

- 2.1 No one. The "original manuscripts" refer to the actual papyrus (paper) or leather (parchment) on which the authors of Scripture recorded the revelation given to them by God.
- 2.2 God wisely permitted the disintegration of the original manuscripts perhaps because we tend to idolize physical objects that were involved in God’s special revelation (2 Kings 18:4).
- 2.3 Jesus received copies of the original manuscripts of the text of the Old Testament as an accurate representation of the original manuscripts. (Lk. 4:17,20,21).
- 2.4 Conclusion: Inspiration does not extend to the work of copyists or translators. However, copies and translations are the authoritative Word of God to the degree that they reflect the original manuscripts. We acknowledge minor errors were made when scribes copied the Scriptures, but that they do not affect the message God originally gave.

3. So how can we trust *any* version of the Bible?

- 3.1 The enormous number of surviving (extant) manuscripts allows us to pinpoint where a copyist’s errors make the text uncertain.
- 3.2 No doctrine of Christianity is threatened by uncertainty in the text. Since the variances are minor they are of little or no consequence. Example in John 3:20:

*For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest **his works** should be exposed.*

Various Greek manuscripts give three possibilities for the last few words:

- 1) *ta erga autou* : his works
 - 2) *autou ta erga*:: his works
 - 3) *ta erga autou hoti poneera estin* : his works that are evil
- 3.3 Archaeology verifies the success of the transmission process. Example: Dead Sea Scrolls.
 - 3.5 This does not destroy the reliability of Scripture for two reasons:
 - 3.5.1 The discipline of textual criticism shows us where possible additions are.
 - 3.5.2 The possible additions do not mislead. They were designed to help the reader understand the Bible and that’s what they do.
 - 3.6 *“Furthermore, no variant readings are significant enough to call into question any of the doctrines of the New Testament. The New Testament can be regarded as 99.5% pure, and the correct readings for the remaining 0.5% can often be ascertained with a fair degree of probability by the practice of textual criticism.”* (Boa and Moody, 77)

4. A Brief History of Bible Translation

- 90: Revelation, the last book of the Bible, is completed by John. Copies of all the gospels and letters written by the apostles are made by hand and widely circulated (Gal. 1:2).
- 200–380: Hebrew and Greek manuscripts translated into Latin (*Vetus Latina*; Old Latin)

- 381: Jerome revises Latin Bible to produce the *Latin Vulgate* (vulgar, common).
 404–494: Latin Bible translated into Armenian, Georgian, and Ethiopian.
 862–867: Latin Bible translated into Bulgarian, Serbian, Russian, Arabic
 1295–1360: Latin Bible translated into French and Czech.
 1395: Latin Bible translated into English by **John Wycliffe**.
 1435: Latin Bible translated into Hungarian
 1522: **Martin Luther** translates the Bible from original languages into German. “My wish to God is that this book were in every language and in every home.”
 1529: **William Tyndale** “Father of the English Bible” translates Bible into English from original languages which is printed on the Guttenberg Press.
 1560: William Whittingham, Protestant English exile in Geneva, produces Geneva Bible with marginal notes and commentary that demonstrates the Biblical basis for Calvin’s theology and the need for the Protestant Reformation. The Bible of Shakespeare and Milton.
 1563: At Council of Trent, Roman Catholic Church makes *Latin Vulgate* official Bible.
 1569: First translation of the Bible into Spanish.
 1611: King James Version (KJV) published. King James did not like the Protestant flavor of the Geneva Bible. By now Bible translated into only 33 languages out of 6000 languages.
 1663: John Eliot translates Bible into the Massachusett language.
 1676: Bible translated into Portugese.
 1736: Bible translated into Latvia
 1800: In early 1800’s William Carey translates Bible into Bengali, Sanskrit, and Marathi (India).
 1887: Bible translated into Japanese and Korean.
 1934: Cameron Townsend translates New Testament into Cackchiquel (Guatemala). Then founds Summer Institute of Linguistics to help missionaries serve minority language communities.
 1942: Wycliffe Biblical Translators (WBT) founded with help of Cam Townsend. Goal is to translate the Bible from original Hebrew and Greek into every language in the world.
 1971: New American Standard Bible is published. Literal translation of original languages.
 1979: Wycliffe celebrates 100th New Testament translation.
 1983: Wycliffe celebrates 200th New Testament translation.
 1985: New International Version is published. Smooths out literal translation.
 1989: Wycliffe celebrates 300th New Testament translation.
 1995: Wycliffe celebrates 400th New Testament translation.
 2000: Wycliffe celebrates 500th New Testament translation.
 2001: English Standard Version published. Essentially literal translation of original languages.

5. The Great Commission Work Remaining

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Mt. 28:19–20

6. How can we “teach them all that” Christ commanded if they don’t have a Bible in their own language?

Languages in the world:	6918
Languages with at least a portion of Bible:	2900
Languages with New Testament:	1329
Languages with entire Bible:	531
World Population:	7 billion
People with no full Bible in their first language:	1.3 billion
People with no Bible in their language at all:	350 million