

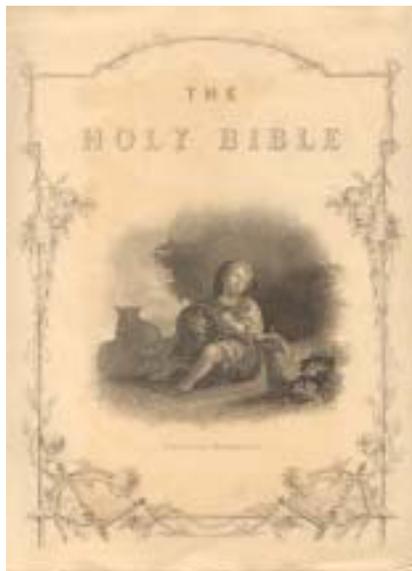
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The following MP3 document is of the eminent Bible scholar of his day, Doctor William Smith 's writing called "The History of the Translation of the Bible!" This writing was scanned and digitized for MP3 narration for the Blind. And is also available in PDF at Jesus This Way dot com.

Doctor William Smith was born in 1813, in the town of Enfield England. On October 7th of 1893 William Smith died. Sir Doctor William Smith was a writer, editor, teacher, knight, and regarded as a Trailblazer of the Church.

This Document was prepared by Richard P Beobide for Jesus This Way Ministries.

Doctor William Smith's article "The History of the Translation of the Bible!"



THE Scriptures were originally written upon rolls of parchment, similar probably, to those which are to be seen in the holy place of Jewish synagogues at the present day. These manuscripts were copied with the utmost care. Many versions of them were made from the original Hebrew and Greek into other tongues. The manuscripts which have come down to the present day, all agree essentially in their contents. This is admitted both by believers and unbelievers.

By whom, and at what time, Christianity was first introduced into the British Isles, cannot now be ascertained with any degree of precision. It is certain that many manuscript copies of the Scriptures, or parts of Scripture, in the Saxon tongue, existed at a very early date. One translation of the Psalms is ascribed to King Alfred. For several centuries after this, the general reading of the Bible was prohibited by the Papal See, whose supremacy was then felt and acknowledged.

The first translations of the Bible into English were previous to the invention of printing. They were the result of incalculable labor and expense of time. Transcripts were obtained with great difficulty, and, being rare, were purchased at a price which seems to us incredible. The monks who employed their time, in lone seclusion, in executing these beautiful manuscript copies of the Word of God, knew not for what vast and glorious results they were laboring: like the electric chain, unconscious itself of the tremendous power it is transmitting to others.

The first person who conceived the idea of giving to his countrymen the whole Bible in the English tongue, was the illustrious Reformer, John Wickliffe. With the assistance of the ripest scholars among his followers, he completed a translation of the Old and New Testaments in the year 1384. This version was not made from the original Hebrew and Greek Scriptures, of which no copies existed at that time in Western Europe, but from the Latin Vulgate, the celebrated translation made by Jerome in the fourth century of the Christian era. For a period of a hundred and thirty years, Wickliffe's translation was the only one in the English language. *No* book, before the invention of printing, ever had such facilities for wide circulation. It was at once put into the hands of the itinerant preachers, who, under the auspices of Wickliffe, had traversed every part of England, and were fully acquainted with the wants of the population. When first sent abroad, moreover, it enjoyed the favor of Ann of Bohemia, the accomplished wife of Richard II., who was herself a decided student of the Scriptures. Nearly twenty years elapsed before its progress was materially checked by persecution. The character of this version furnished, for all time, the type and pattern of the English Bible. Its homely and childlike phraseology became consecrated in the English mind as the appropriate medium of inspiration. The subsequent versions which have found favor with the common people, have been the offshoots of this parent stock. Whatever improvements they may have received, they are in all essential points but reproductions of that which was *translated* into English-but not printed- in the fourteenth century, by Wickliffe.

The next attempt at English translation was the version of the New Testament by *William Tindal*, sometimes printed Tyndale, The day had begun to dawn. It was not in the power of man to roll back the "living wheels" which the prophet saw. A child may put in motion the nicely poised rocking stone, but the arm of a giant cannot stay it. The art of printing was invented. The Reformation had commenced, and Europe was beginning to shake with the volcanic fires which were rumbling beneath her. Already had Luther begun to give his German Bible to his

countrymen, when *Tindal*, who had been forced to leave his own country by persecution, was led to translate the New Testament into English from the original Greek, and publish it in Holland for the benefit of the English nation. In this undertaking he was assisted by the learned John Fryth, and a friar called William Roze, both of whom afterwards suffered death as heretics. The work appeared in the year 1526, and makes the first *printed* edition of any part of the Bible in the English language. In the same year, Cardinal Wolsey and the bishops consulted together on the subject of the translation, and published a prohibition against it in all their dioceses, charging it with false and heretical glosses, wickedly brought into corrupt the Word of God. Still many copies continued to make their way into the country; whereupon, to enforce the prohibition, Tonstal, bishop of London, bought up all the copies he could find, and committed them to the flames at St. Paul's Cross. This had a hateful appearance to the people, and only led them to look after the Scriptures more earnestly than before. Several other editions of this translation were published in Holland before the year 1530, and found a ready sale. In that year a royal proclamation was issued, for totally suppressing the translation of the Scriptures, "*corrupted* by William Tindal." The king, it was said, would, at a suitable time, provide a fair and learned translation for the use of the nation, if it should be considered expedient. All this while Tindal had been going forward with the work of translating the Old Testament, and this same year accordingly (1530) appeared his edition of the five books of Moses. He afterwards translated all the historical books, besides revising and correcting his translation of the New Testament. In 1531, through the influence of his enemies in England, he was seized and imprisoned at Villefort, near Brussels, and after a confinement of years, he was condemned to death by the emperor's decree, in an Assembly at Augsburg, in consequence of which he was strangled, and had his body afterwards reduced to ashes. His dying prayer, repeated with much earnestness, was, "Lord, open the king of England's eyes."

In the year 1535, appeared the Bible of *Miles Coverdale*, the first *printed* edition of the entire Scriptures in the English language. This was dedicated to the king, Henry VIII., and seems to have been substantially Tindal's translation, as far as he had gone, filled out by his friend Coverdale himself, with what was wanted to make up a version of the whole Bible. It was called, however, a "special translation," and did not agree altogether with Tindal's, and besides, it omitted Tindal's prefaces and notes, which had been offensive to many. It was probably published at Zurich, in Switzerland, and on the last page were the words:

"Printed in the year of our-Lorde, 1535, and fynished the fourth day of October."

After this, versions of the Scriptures were multiplied.

There was *Taverner's Bible*, which was little more than a revision of Tindal. In 1539, a reprint of Tindal's whole Bible was published by Archbishop Cranmer. In 1558, the *Geneva Bible* made its appearance, which was the work of the English exiles who had taken refuge in Switzerland from the religious persecutions in their own country, and which was highly valued among the Puritans, chiefly, perhaps, on account of the brief annotations that went along with it, which came all of the Calvinistic school.

In 1568, Archbishop Parker, by royal command, undertook to form, with the help of several learned men, chiefly bishops, a version of the "*Great Bible*," which had been published in 1539, for the use of the Church, so as to have a copy free from the popish charge of being a false translation. This was called, for distinction, the *Bishops' Bible*.

The *Douay Bible* was translated by several English Catholics, who had once been connected with the University of Oxford, but who, on the accession of Elizabeth to the English throne, had fled to the Continent, and found refuge in the Romish seminaries of Douay and Rheims. The New Testament, in this version, was published in 1582, and the Old Testament in 1610. It was made from the Latin Vulgate, in preference to the Greek and Hebrew Scriptures. But, as yet, there was no common standard. To other times was reserved the emission of that version of the Sacred Text which we now possess, which generally passes by the name of *King James Bible*, during whose reign, and at whose instance, the translation was undertaken, and to whom it is dedicated;

and which, we believe, is destined to stand to the end of time, as one of the most splendid monuments of scholarship and success the world has ever seen.

James came to the throne in 1603. As complaints abounded on the subject of religion, a conference was held at Hampton Court the following year, for the purpose of settling the order and peace of the Church. Here a number of objections were urged against the translation of the Bible then in use, and the result was a determination on the part of his majesty to have a new version made, such as might be worthy to be established as the uniform text of the nation. Fifty-four learned and pious men were accordingly appointed to perform the important service, who were to be divided into six separate classes, and to have the Bible distributed in parts according to this division, that every class might have its own parcel to translate at a particular place by itself. In every company, each single individual was required first to translate the entire portion assigned to that company, then they were to compare these versions together, and, on consultation, unite in one text the common judgment of all, after which, the several companies were to communicate their parts each one to all the rest, that in the end the entire work might have the consent and approbation of the whole number of translators together. In addition to this, an order was issued by the king, making it incumbent on all the bishops in the land, to inform him of all such learned men within their several dioceses as, having especial skill in the Hebrew and Greek tongues, had taken pains in their private studies to understand and elucidate difficult passages in the Scriptures, and to charge them to send in their observations, as they might see fit, for the use of the regular translators; so as to bring, as it were, all the learning of the kingdom, so far as it could be of avail in the case, to bear on the great and notable undertaking that was now to be commenced.

Some delay occurred in entering upon the business, so that it was not fairly begun before the year 1607, and before this time seven of the persons first nominated were either dead or had declined acting, so as to leave but forty-seven for carrying on the translation. Ten of these met at Westminster, and had the Pentateuch, with the historical books that follow from Joshua to the end of the second book of Kings, for their portion. Eight more, at Cambridge, had charge of the rest of the historical books, together with Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Canticles, and Ecclesiastes. At Oxford, one company of seven had the Prophets assigned to them, and another company of eight, at the same place, were intrusted with the four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, and the Apocalypse. There was a second company also at Westminster, that had in charge the rest of the New Testament; and finally, a second company at Cambridge, consisting of seven, to which were allotted the books of the Apocrypha - a part which it would have been better not to have associated in this way at all with a solemn translation of the true and proper Word of God.

The translators received certain general instructions from the king, to regulate them in their work. They were required by these to go by the "Bishops' Bible," as much as the original would allow, to retain proper names in their usual form; to keep the old ecclesiastical terms; out of different significations belonging to a word, and equally suitable to the context, to choose that most commonly used by the best ancient fathers; to abide by the standing division of chapters and verses; to use no marginal notes, unless to explain particular Hebrew or Greek words; to employ references to parallel places, so far as might seem desirable. If any one company should differ from another, in reviewing its part of the translation, about the sense of any passages, notice was to be returned of the disagreement and its reasons; and if this should not induce a change of views on the other side, the whole was to be referred for ultimate decision to a general meeting of the chief persons of each company, to be held at the end of the work. **In** cases of special obscurity, letters might be sent to any learned man in the kingdom, by authority, for his opinion.

Nearly three years were occupied with the work - a period that seemed long to the impatience of many at the time, and was made the occasion of charging these good men with negligence and sloth; but not too great certainly for the solemn nature of the service itself, and the deeply

interesting bearing it was destined to have on the history of the Church in coming years. *Ten* years of so many lives, thus employed, had not been too much to expend for an object so vastly momentous as the formation of a version, by which so many millions of people speaking the English language were to be instructed in the will of God, to the end of time. The work became complete in the year 1610.

The translations of the Bible, then, may be thus summarily stated: it was translated by Wickliffe, in 1384; by Tindal, in 1530; by Coverdale, in 1535; by Cranmer, in 1539; at Geneva, in 1558; by the bishops, in 1568; and by the celebrated authorized translators, as they are called, the most accomplished scholars and eminent divines of their day, in the year 1610.*

The first Bible printed on the continent of America was in native Indian - the New Testament in 1661, and the Old in 1663, both by Rev. John Eliot. They were published in Cambridge, Mass. The second was in German, a quarto edition, published at Germantown, near Philadelphia, by Christopher Sower, in 1676. The first American edition of the Bible in English was printed by Kneeland and Green, at Boston, in 1772, in small quarto, 700 or 800 copies. The next edition was by Robert Aitken, of Philadelphia, in 1781-2. He sent a memorial to Congress-praying for their patronage. His memorial was referred to a committee, who obtained the opinion of the chaplains of Congress as to its general typographical accuracy, and thereupon a resolution was passed (Sep. 12, 1782) recommending this edition of the Bible to the people of the United States.

It is admitted on all hands that the received English version of the Bible far excels every other translation. If accuracy, fidelity, and the strictest attention to the text, says Doctor Geddes, be supposed to constitute the qualities of an excellent version, this, of all versions, must, in general, be accounted the most excellent. Every sentence, every word, every syllable, every letter, and every point, seem to have been weighed with the nicest exactitude, and expressed, either in the text or in the margin, with the greatest precision. There is no book, says the illustrious Seldon, so translated as the Bible for the purpose. If I translate a French book into English, I turn it into English phrase, not French English. *Il fait froid; I say 'tis cold, not, makes cold.* But the Bible is rather translated into English words than into English phrase. The Hebraisms are kept, and the phrase of that language is kept. The style of our present version, says Bishop Middleton, is incomparably superior to any thing which might be expected from the finical and perverted taste of our own age. It is simple, it is harmonious, it is energetic, and, which is of no small importance, use has made it familiar, and time has rendered it sacred. Bishop Lowth himself, whose literary taste is known to have been of the most pure and classical order, has not hesitated to pronounce it "the best standard of our language." Bishop Horsley represents it to have been the means of enriching and adorning the English tongue, by its close adherence to the Hebrew idiom. And Doctor Clarke, author of the Commentary on the Bible, says: "Those who have compared most of the European translation with the original, have not scrupled to say, that the English translation of the Bible, made under the direction of King James the First, is the most accurate and faithful of the whole. Nor is this its only praise: the translators have seized the very spirit and Soul of the original, and expressed this almost everywhere with pathos and energy. They have, also, not only made a standard translation, but they have made their translation the standard of our language."

* (Subnote: Page 2b, Paragraph 3) We have drawn this chapter from several reliable sources, to which we here make a general acknowledgment of indebtedness.

While, therefore, we would most earnestly encourage every effort, on the part of all who have it in their power, to prosecute the study of the Scriptures in their original tongues, - while we feel that the Church has a right to expect this of those who are set for the defence of the gospel, we are very sure, that the result of all such investigations will be to heighten confidence in the present version, and fill the heart with unfeigned gratitude to God, for that blessed book which we now enjoy, and which, for nearly two centuries and a half, has been pouring its light and consolation wherever the English tongue is spoken. Let science toil, and diligence labor in original investigation-for the Hebrew Scriptures are a mine of solid and inexhaustible gold, where giants may dig for ages - let literature hold up her torch, and cast all possible light upon the sacred text, but we must and ever shall deprecate any wanton attacks upon our received version - any gratuitous attempts to supersede it by a new and different translation. It is the Bible which our godly fathers have read, and over which they have wept and prayed. It is the GOOD OLD ENGLISH BIBLE, with which are associated all our earliest recollections of religion. As such let it go down unchanged to the latest posterity. Let us give it in charge to coming generations, and bid them welcome to all the blessings it has conveyed to us. Let it be our fervent prayer, that the light of the resurrection morning may shine on the very book which we now read, - that we may then behold again the familiar face of our own Bible, the very same which we read in our childhood.

ANCIENT DIVISIONS AND ORDER OF THE BIBLE.

After the return of the Jews from the Babylonish captivity, Ezra collected as many copies as he could of the sacred writings, and out of them all prepared a correct edition, arranging the several books in their proper order. These books he divided into three parts: I. The Law. II. The Prophets. III. The Hagiographa, *i. e.*, The Holy Writings.

I. *The law* contains: I. Genesis; 2. Exodus; 3. Leviticus; 4. Numbers; 5. Deuteronomy.

II. The writings of the Prophets are: I. Joshua; 2. Judges, with Ruth; 3. Samuel; 4. Kings; 5. Isaiah; 6. Jeremiah, with his Lamentations; 7. Ezekiel; 8. Daniel; 9. The twelve minor prophets; 10. Job; II. Ezra; 12. Nehemiah; 13. Esther.

III. The Hagiographa consist of: I. The Psalms; 2. The Proverbs; 3. Ecclesiastes; 4. The Song of Solomon.

This division was made for the sake of reducing the number of the sacred books to the number of the letters in their alphabet, which amount to twenty-two. Afterwards the Jews reckoned twenty-four books in their canon of Scriptures, in disposing of which the law stood as in the former division, and the prophets were distributed into *former* and *latter*: the former prophets are Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings; the latter prophets are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the twelve minor prophets; and the Hagiographa consist of the Psalms, the Proverbs, Job, the Song of Solomon, Ruth, the Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, and the Chronicles. Under the name of Ezra they comprehend the name of Nehemiah. This order has not always been observed, but the variations from it are of no moment. The five books of the law are divided into fifty-four sections. This division many of the Jews hold to have been appointed by Moses himself, but others, with more probability, ascribe it to Ezra. The design of this division was, that one of these sections might be read in their synagogues every Sabbath day: the number was fifty-four, because, in their intercalated years, a month being then added, there were fifty-four Sabbaths: in other years they reduced them to fifty-two, by twice joining together two short sections.

MODERN DIVISIONS OF THE BIBLE.

The division of the Scriptures into chapters, as we at present have them, is of modern date. Some attribute it to Stephen Langton, archbishop of Canterbury, in the reigns of John and Henry III., but the true author of the invention was Hugo de Sancto Caro, commonly called Hugo Cardinalis, because he was the first Dominican that ever was raised to the degree of cardinal. This Hugo flourished about A. D. 1240: he wrote a comment on the Scriptures, and projected the first concordance, which is that of the vulgar Latin Bible. The aim of this work being for the more easy finding out of any word or passage in the Scriptures, he found it necessary to divide

the book into sections, and the sections into subdivisions, for till that time the vulgar Latin Bibles were without any division at all. These sections are the chapters into which the Bible has ever since been divided, but the subdivision of the chapters was not then into verses, as it is now. Hugo's method of subdividing them was by the letters, A, B, C, D, E, F, G, placed in the margin, at an equal distance from each other, according to the length of the chapters.

The subdivision of the chapters into verses, as they now stand in our Bible, had its origin from a famous Jewish rabbi, named Mordecai Nathan, about 1445. This rabbi, in imitation of Hugo Cardinalis, drew up a concordance to the Hebrew Bible, for the use of the Jews. But though he followed Hugo in his division of the books into chapters, he refined upon his inventions as to the subdivision, and contrived that by verses. This being found to be a much more convenient method, it has been ever since followed. And thus, as the Jews borrowed the division of the books of the Holy Scriptures into chapters from the Christians, in like manner the Christians borrowed that of the chapters into verses from the Jews. The present order of the several books is almost the same (the Apocrypha excepted) as that made by the council of Trent.

The division into verses, though very convenient, is not to govern the sense, and there are several instances in which the sense is injured, if not destroyed, by an improper division. Very often the chapter breaks off in the midst of a narrative, and if the reader stops because the chapter ends, he loses the connection, as, for example, Matt. x. 42. Sometimes the break is altogether in the wrong place, and separates two sentences which must be taken together in order to be understood, as, for example, 1 Cor. xii. 31; xiii. 1. Again the verses often divide a sentence into two different paragraphs, when there ought scarcely to be a comma between them, as in Luke iii. 21, 22. And sometimes a fragment of a subject is separated from its proper place, and put where it is without any connection (Coloss. iii. 25; iv. 1). The punctuation of the Bible was probably introduced as lately as the ninth century.