

DIVINE GUIDANCE OF THE BIBLE PATH

The historic journey of the written Word of God reads like a dramatic mystery novel, complete with political intrigue, brave heroes, hush money, treachery and murder.

To the sincere Christian, the Bible is not just a compilation of wise proverbs and interesting stories, but a priceless treasure — the words and thoughts of the Divine Creator Himself. Both the Old and New Testaments have been provided by inspiration, and written by holy men of old who were moved by the spirit of God. (2 Peter 1:21) Christians should not only reverence the words of this incredible book, but they should also appreciate the divinely directed *journey* that it took to arrive at this *end time* destination.

ANCIENT PATH OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

The journey of the Bible begins with the patriarchs and prophets of the Old Testament. When the Hebrew captives returned to Palestine from Babylon, Jewish tradition holds that Ezra, of the priestly line of Aaron, collected together all of the writings of Moses, the prophets and other faithful ancients — dutifully and carefully preserving them throughout the turmoil of the nation's exile.

None of the books that were written between Ezra's time and the time of Christ — known as the *Apocrypha* — were considered by the Jews to be inspired. In fact, the books of the *Apocrypha*, included in Catholic Bibles today, are not considered inspired even by Catholic scholars; and, unlike the inspired books of the Old Testament, they were not originally written in Hebrew. In addition, the Jews rejected the *Apocrypha* because of many magical claims found there, such as in the book of Tobit 6:5-8: "*If the Devil, or an evil spirit troubles anyone, they can be driven away by making a smoke of the heart, liver, and gall of a fish...and the Devil will smell it, and flee away...*" This and many other passages throughout the *Apocrypha* clearly contradict the inspired Word of God to the Hebrews.

Written between B.C. 1200 and 500, the original manuscripts of the Old Testament are considered faithful to the original words of the writers, due to the great reverence the Jewish scribes held for the Word of God and their consequent carefulness in transcribing. In fact, Jewish transcribers were so meticulous that if an error was found, that manuscript would be destroyed.

The *Masoretes* were Jewish scribes who worked diligently around the seventh through eleventh centuries A.D. Their care in transcribing was aided by a process called *gematria* wherein each Hebrew letter was assigned a number, and each line of text must total a consistent assigned numeric value. Confirmation of the accuracy of the Masoretic transcriptions was found in the mid 1900s when ancient manuscripts written circa B.C. 100, known as the *Dead Sea Scrolls*, were shown to retain remarkable fidelity to the most ancient of Hebrew manuscripts.

Between the third and first centuries B.C., seventy Hebrew scholars translated the Hebrew manuscripts of the Old Testament into the Greek language which was common to the world at Jesus' time. Known as the *Septuagint Version*, copies were considered rare and were later treasured by early Christian congregations. Also rare were the few Hebrew copies of the Old Testament manuscripts available only to larger Christian congregations.



THE NEW TESTAMENT JOURNEY BEGINS

While Jesus lived, his words were the voice of authority to his followers and were compiled in the four *Gospels*. After Jesus' death, the Apostles became the voice of authority, and their words were primarily conveyed to the faithful by letters (*epistles*). The only other books of the New Testament considered to be inspired are the recorded *Acts* of the Apostles and the *Revelation* of Jesus to John. It was not until 20 years after the death of the Apostle John, about A.D. 120, that these writings, all in Greek, were compiled as the New Testament. These were scarce and most precious.

In the fourth century, all of these manuscripts were regarded as *canon* — God's finished Word to the Church. Three primary factors were taken into consideration to qualify a manuscript as *canon*: 1) the text had to have been written or authorized by an apostle; 2) its teaching had to be consistent with those of Christ and the apostles; and 3) it had to have been acknowledged and used by Christians since the early Church.

From the time of Christ to the fourth century, Satan used pagan Rome in an attempt to blot out the Word of God. But, God's Word and His children survived Satan's demonic plot. Then, in the fourth century, Christianity became popular when Emperor Constantine declared it as the religion of the state. Even though his actions helped to preserve the Bible, he adversely introduced the church to numerous erroneous pagan customs and doctrines.

Because Rome was the dominating world government, Latin became the unifying language throughout the Roman Empire. In the mid-fourth century, Jerome, a religious scholar, was commissioned by the Bishop of Rome to compile all of the various attempts at Latin translations into one consistent Latin translation of the Bible, termed the *Latin Vulgate* — *vulgar* meaning the common language of the people. Jerome translated, not from the Hebrew, but primarily from the Greek Septuagint of the Old Testament and the Greek New Testament, finishing his work in A.D. 405. Although Latin was the language of the common people at the time, most were illiterate, and so this Latin translation was only useful to the church hierarchy and a few of the privileged classes.

Within 500 years after the death of Jerome, Latin became a *dead language*, and as a consequence of this, the Scriptures were kept from the congregations, cloaked in a language only understood by the clergy. This became the time of darkness prophesied in Revelation 11:3 "*And I will give power unto my two witnesses [Old and New Testaments], and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days [1260 prophetic years], clothed in sackcloth [worn by those who mourn — the dead language of Latin].*" Even though the *original* intention may have been to produce a Bible that the common man could read, the Church of Rome, at this later period of time, determined that it was expedient to keep the Scriptures from the people to maintain papal domination. This suppression of God's Word was thought to be so vital that many of the precious ancient Hebrew manuscripts of the Old Testament were commanded to be destroyed during the Crusades and other anti-Jewish persecutions. *JewishEncyclopedia.com*

A TREACHEROUS PATH THROUGH THE CENTURIES

The systematic effort to ban the Word of God from getting into the hands of the common people, caused the Scriptures to travel a grim path paved with intrigue and the blood, toil and tears of many faithful martyrs. Work of translating the Bible into the common languages of the day had to be done in secret. The Church of Rome — in union with the kings of Europe — hunted down and persecuted these brave heroes of faith who were thought to be *seditionary traitors*. It is a sad fact of history that these persecutions came at the hand of those who *claimed* to be God's *mouthpiece on earth*. The attitude of those in religious authority was that "*ignorance is holiness*." This was quite a contrast to the words of the Apostle Paul who admonished the faithful to "*Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*" (2 Timothy 2:15) Without the Word of God, the apostasy of the clergy went unchecked, and the common people were bound more tightly to the Church of Rome with superstition, fear and unscriptural rituals.

In spite of the persistent opposition by the Church of Rome, God overruled that the translating work into the common language of the people continued. One of the first complete English versions of the Bible was translated in 1384 by John Wycliffe — *the Morning Star of the Reformation*. Wycliffe produced dozens of *handwritten* English copies of the Scriptures. Regrettably, the only source text available to Wycliffe from which to translate was Jerome's *Latin Vulgate*. And so, this valiant effort to feed God's people the truth suffered from being a translation from a translation.

At this time in history, the Roman Church ruled all of England and Europe with an iron fist. Disdain for Wycliffe grew as his translating work exposed the numerous erroneous creeds and practices that had been effectively holding the congregations in ignorance. Contempt for Wycliffe became so severe that forty years after he died, his bones were exhumed from his grave and burned for heresy. Even though hated by the corrupt church in power, Wycliffe was beloved by faithful independent Christians for his steadfast preaching that "*believers should ascertain for themselves what are the true matters of their faith, by having the Scriptures in a language which all may understand.*" Many of Wycliffe's followers, such as Jan Hus, actively promoted Wycliffe's mission and spoke out against the tyranny of the corrupt Roman Church which was threatening execution of anyone possessing even a small portion of a Bible. And so Hus was eventually burned alive at the stake in 1415 with Wycliffe's manuscripts used as kindling for the fire. Thousands of other heroes of faith joined Wycliffe and Hus in putting the following words of Jesus above their own lives: "*Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.*" John 8:32

God continued to direct the path of His Divinely inspired Word when, in 1455, the first book ever to be printed by a printing press was the Bible. Printed in Latin, it was published by Johannes Gutenberg, the inventor of movable type. By His providence, God was preparing for the soon rapid spread of His Word into the hands of those who longed to know His real truth.

In 1534, the great English translator, William Tyndale completed his work of translating the Bible into the English language from the oldest known Greek and Hebrew manuscripts — texts which Wycliffe was not privileged to secure. At this time in England's history, King Henry VIII was still a strong defender of the Roman Catholic Church, and, therefore, saw Tyndale's work as a threat. In order for Tyndale to complete his task of translating he was forced to leave England and became an exile in Germany. While in Germany he befriended Martin Luther who had translated the Bible into German. Both were strongly united by the motto "*sola scriptura*" — the Scriptures alone! The seeming misfortune of exile in Germany was actually by *providence of God* to put Tyndale in contact with a printer brave enough to print his manuscripts. Large quantities of *Tyndale's English Version* of the Bible were then secretly smuggled into England, contrary to King Henry's decree. To complicate matters, King Henry became angry with the Pope for not granting him a divorce. He then broke from the Church of Rome and formed the Anglican Church of England — a sect which was neither Catholic nor Protestant. All of this political wrangling culminated in Tyndale being hated and hunted by both the Roman and Anglican churches.

The Anglican Bishop hit upon what he thought was an excellent plan to put a stop to what he called "*a plague of Bibles*" coming into England. He contacted

Augustine Parkington, a merchant trading between England and Antwerp, and suggested that Parkington buy up all of Tyndale's copies of the Bible and bring them to England where the Bishop could burn them. Providentially, Parkington was a friend of Tyndale and sympathetic with his mission, so, only pretending to enter into the Bishop's plot, Parkington purchased every Bible at four times the usual price. With the money he received, Tyndale published a far superior and larger edition, and so for every Bible burned, King Henry essentially paid for three more to be published. Hence, the Bishop's plan failed, and *Tyndale's Bible* continued to pour into England. Finally, in 1536, King Henry and his Anglican Bishop forcibly brought Tyndale back to England, and had him strangled and then burned at the stake. Tyndale's last utterance — "*LORD, open the King of England's eyes.*"

Two years after his death, Tyndale's prayer was answered. In a reversal of course, and to spite the Catholics, the first major act as *head* of his new church, King Henry sanctioned the printing of the first *legal* English Bible. Known as *The Great Bible*, Henry commanded that it be placed in the pulpit of every church in England. The King's motivation was not exactly noble, but it was purported to be fueled by vanity and a desire to defy the Pope for not allowing his divorce from Queen Catherine to marry Anne Boleyn.



The intriguing turn of events that led to the royal embrace of the Bible again took a deadly path when, in 1553 Queen Mary I (*Bloody Mary*) took the throne six years after the death of her Father, King Henry VIII. Queen Mary was raised as Catholic by her mother, Henry's first wife Catherine, and Mary felt a strong contempt for her father after he abandoned her mother for young Anne Boleyn. Mary was determined to pull down her despised father's Anglican Church and restore England to its Roman Catholic roots. Thus, again, the English Bible was considered a threat to this Roman Catholic revival, and so began another persecution of the Puritans and other Protestants in England. Escaping this persecution, many of the faithful fled to Geneva, Switzerland and there began the work of yet another important English translation known as the *Geneva Bible* — the first Bible completely translated, not from Latin, but from Hebrew and Greek manuscripts. Completed in 1560, it stands as the translation with the greatest impact upon the Protestant Reformation in England.

The *Geneva Bible*, known as the first *study* Bible, provided excellent study tools such as modern chapter and verse divisions, maps, a dictionary of proper names, a concordance of principle subjects, a chronology chart from Adam to Christ, and scripture cross references — in total about forty pages of study tools. Its use of italics for the interpolated (uninspired inserted) words is a testimony to the integrity of the translators. The most controversial study tools of the *Geneva Bible* were the marginal notes. These notes presented the distinctive doctrinal stance held by the Reformers in opposition to the Church of Rome united to the kings of Europe. The notes pointed out the hope of salvation without the need of the priest-craft and the erroneous system of the sacraments. They boldly identified the Papacy as the anti-Christ and the Church of Rome as the cruel scarlet woman riding the beast in Revelation 17:4. While the *Geneva Bible* served to edify the Reformation Movement, it infuriated the religious hierarchy then in power.

Another twist of religious history occurred when Rome's great supporter Queen Mary died in 1558. Mary was succeeded by her half-sister Elizabeth I, who, much like her mother Anne Boleyn, strongly embraced the Protestant Reformation. Now feeling safe, many of the Puritan and Protestant exiles in Geneva returned to England, bringing with them their beloved *Geneva Bible*.

Not long after this advancing popularity of the *Geneva Bible*, the Roman Catholic Church, in 1582, saw that it could no longer continue to hide the Word of God in Latin, and concluded that, if the Bible was to be available in English, the church would provide its own *official* translation complete with its own marginal notes. Using the *Latin Vulgate* as the only source text, the Pope sanctioned what became known as the *Douay Old Testament* and *Rheims New Testament* which contained the *Apocrypha*. It is interesting to note that the current *U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops* has sanctioned the addition of the *Apocrypha* into the *New Revised Standard Version-Catholic Edition* — approved for Catholic use today.

Elizabeth reigned forty-five years, providing relative peace for the Protestants. After Elizabeth died in 1603, King James I took the throne, and the *Geneva Bible*, which did so much to encourage Protestants, and especially Puritans,

soon became a thorn in his side. James had declared himself *head* of the Church of England by *divine right of kings*, and ruled with a heavy hand over the Puritans who refused to honor him as head of the church. Because of the push by Puritans to denounce church and state, an infuriated James declared, “*I shall make them conform themselves, or I will harry them out of the land.*” This *disappointment* to the Puritans was *God’s appointment*, for many Puritans were either banished or escaped England to settle in America. They took with them their precious *Geneva Bible* which had been exclusively known as the *Protestant Bible*. King James had not only seen the Puritans as a threat to his sovereignty, but he also saw the marginal notes of the *Geneva Bible* as “*seditious*” and “*savouring too much of dangerous and traitorous conceits.*” One of the notes in the *Geneva Bible* on Exodus 1:17, for example, states that Hebrew midwives were right to *disobey* Pharaoh’s command to kill all of the male babies. To King James, this marginal note encouraged civil disobedience to a king’s command.

King James, with the encouragement of a conference of Anglican clergymen, then began the quest to establish a new Bible for his kingdom and to replace every *Geneva Bible*. A committee of scholars was enlisted to translate this new version, removing any marginal notes which would disrespect the church/state crown. The translators took into consideration the *Tyndale New Testament*, the *Great Bible* of Henry VIII, the *Geneva Bible*, and even the *Catholic Rheims New Testament*. In 1611, the *Authorized King James Version* of the Bible was completed and dedicated to the King.

LIGHT SHINING MORE UPON THE BIBLE PATH

From 1611 to 1881 the *King James Version* of the Bible had been a source of spiritual strength to God’s children. However many important discoveries since that time have revealed serious flaws in this Bible authorized by King James, which modern translations have sought to address. Still, some Protestant denominations claim that the *King James Version* is the *only authorized* version by God, “*translated under a God-ordained English King.*” But note that the term *authorized* does not refer to the authority of God, but to the *authority of the King* who only *authorized* the translation work. Also note that the *divine right of kings* doctrine contradicts a very important foundation doctrine of Protestants — that Christ alone is head of the true Church. Ephesians 4:15

Strict advocates of the 1611 *King James Version* should also consider another important fact of Bible history. Until 1666 — forty-one years after the death of King James — the *Apocrypha* was included in the *Authorized King James Version*. This is the version which James commanded should replace every other Protestant Bible in his kingdom. Today most Protestants agree that the books of the *Apocrypha* are *uninspired* and *promoting magic*. Also important to note is that after the *King James Version* was translated, hundreds of much older and more accurate manuscripts have come to light, some dating back as early as the fourth century, and a few to the second century. It is only logical to presume that the earlier the manuscript, the more nearly correct it is likely to be as a source for translating.

The three oldest known manuscripts of the New Testament are those designated the *Sinaitic Codex* (A.D. 350), the *Vatican Codex* (A.D. 325), and the *Alexandrian Codex* (Fifth Century A.D.). The *Vatican Codex* has a number of omissions, including the entire book of *Revelation*. The *Alexandrian* manuscript has a good text from *Acts to Revelation*, but is also incomplete. Discovery of the *Sinaitic Codex* has been the most valuable to translators, since it is a near complete manuscript of the Bible. It was discovered in a convent near Mt. Sinai in 1859 by the German scholar, Dr. Constantine Tischendorf. He made a careful comparison of the *Sinaitic* manuscript with the *King James Version* and compiled a long list of additions and alterations appearing in the *King James* translation which do not appear in the older manuscripts. These are known as *interpolations* or *spurious passages*. Careful students of the Bible should note these uninspired additions and should be suspect of any teachings based on these.

As an example of error due to a *spurious* passage: “*They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them.*” (Mark 16:18) This verse is not found in the oldest *Sinaitic* manuscript, and in view of the fact that God has provided for the discovery of older manuscripts, it stands to reason that God provided for corrections to be made to the *King James Version*.

With the providential discovery by Tischendorf of the *Sinaitic* manuscript, a flood of Bible translations have benefited Bible students. The *Revised Version*, published in 1881 and numerous other translations have been enhanced from the discovery of older Hebrew and Greek manuscripts — correcting many errors and stating thoughts more clearly. Keep in mind that, although newer translations are much better, they may not be entirely free from error, for some also reflect the personal theological bias of their translators.

HOW THE MEANING OF WORDS CHANGED OVER THE CENTURIES

The Word of God *changes not* from generation to generation, but language is an ever-changing form of communication. Old Testament Hebrew is now the official language of Israel, and thus, it is easier to verify word meanings. However, the New Testament Greek today compares only to a degree with the original writings — requiring scholarly investigation to determine the meaning of New Testament words. By God’s providence, Greek and Hebrew scholars have supplied many helpful reference guides, such as *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance*, to determine what specific words mean. Thus, we no longer need to rely on certain biased words chosen by the translators.

For the Christian reader today, the 17th century *King James Version* tends to be confusing because of the old English words which have taken on different meanings since biblical times. Consider, for example, Psalm 119:147: “*I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried...*” The 1885 *Revised Version* of this text reads: “*Arise before dawn and cry for help...*” The 17th century English word “*prevent*” meant to *precede*, so it was a correct translation when first used, but it is confusing in the English of our day.

Another very important example of an English word which has greatly changed in meaning is *hell*. In 17th century England, it meant to *cover*. Burying potatoes in the ground for the winter was referred to as *helling the potatoes*. Thatching a cottage roof was termed *helling the cottage*. Through misapplication, however, the word *hell* has been redefined as a place of fiery torment. In several newer translations, the English word *hell* is not used to translate either the Hebrew word *sheol* of the Old Testament or the Greek word *hades* of the New Testament. Instead, these words are usually left untranslated or they are properly translated as *the grave*.

In addition to changes in the meanings of English words, faulty punctuation can add confusion. Punctuation was not used in the original writings of the Bible, nor does it appear in the oldest manuscripts. Punctuation was not generally used until the end of the fifteenth century. For example: when Jesus spoke to the thief on the cross, he said, “*Verily I say unto thee **today** shalt thou be with me in paradise.*” Depending on where the comma is placed, it will completely change the time frame. If the comma is placed after *today*, then Jesus was comforting the thief that day. If the comma is placed before *today*, then Jesus expected to be in Paradise that day with the thief. The *Rotherham Translation* gives the more accurate understanding of this passage: “*Verily I say unto thee **this day**, with me shalt thou be in Paradise.*” We know this is more accurate, because, according to Scripture testimony, Jesus did not go to paradise that day, but was in the grave for parts of three days after he died. (Mark 8:31) In addition, the Apostle Paul made the clear statement that no one other than Jesus would be resurrected until his second advent, nearly 2000 years later. 1 Corinthians 15:22-23; 1 Thessalonians 4:16

“MEAT IN DUE SEASON”

God promised *meat in due season* to the saints living at the end of the Gospel Age — what the Prophet Daniel called *the time of the end*. (Daniel 12:4) Today, with aid of concordances and discovery of older manuscripts, God’s children are able to determine as nearly as possible the intent of His inspired Word.

By God’s grace, the Bible has survived every attempt to destroy it and its sanctifying influence upon the true Church. It has been the cumulative effort of many faithful hands and hearts which have brought us the enlightenment of the Scriptures that we cherish today. We owe a great debt of gratitude to those whose lives were sacrificed in torture and death to bring us the Word of God that we now freely enjoy. That their lives should not have been taken in vain, we should handle the Scriptures with great care, reverence and appreciation. “*Sanctify them by Thy truth: Thy Word is truth.*” John 17:17





The End Times Bible Report Quarterly
is a **Free Online** Publication of
Associated Bible Students of Central Ohio
P.O. Box 813, Westerville, Ohio 43086-0813
614/742-7980 or 888/77BIBLE
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