

## **Resource: Bible Dictionary (Tyndale)**

### **Aquifer Open Bible Dictionary**

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## Bible Dictionary (Tyndale)

### V

*Vaizatha, Vajezatha, Valley Gate, Valley of Craftsmen, Valley of Decision, Valley of Decision, Valley of Gad, Valley of Hinnom, Valley of Jehoshaphat, Valley of Jezreel, Valley of Rephaim, Valley of Rephaim, Valley of Salt, Valley of Shaveh, Valley of Siddim, Vaniah, Vashni, Vashti, Vegetable, Veil of the Temple, Versions of the Bible (Ancient), Versions of the Bible (English), Vespasian, Vestments, Vine of Sodom, Vine, Wild Vine, Vinedresser, Vinegar, Vines, Vineyard, Viol, Viper, Virgin, Virgin Birth of Jesus, Vision, Visions, Vophsi, Vow, Vows, Vulgate, the, Vulture*

### Vaizatha, Vajezatha

One of Haman's ten sons. Haman was an important official who plotted to kill all the Jewish people in Persia. When his plan failed, the Jewish people defended themselves against their enemies. During this time, Vaizatha and his brothers were killed ([Esther 9:9](#)).

### Valley Gate

The gate Nehemiah used to exit and reenter when he inspected the walls of Jerusalem ([Nehemiah 2:13-14](#)). It was on the west side of the city facing the Tyropeon Valley. King Uzziah is said to have built and strengthened a tower at this gate ([2 Chronicles 26:9](#)).

### Valley of Craftsmen

Translation and alternate name for Ge-harashim in [Nehemiah 11:35](#). See Ge-harashim.

### Valley of Decision

A place mentioned in [Joel 3:14](#), where the Lord will judge the non-Jewish nations who gathered against Judah. It is the same as the valley of Jehoshaphat (see [Joel 3:2](#)).

See Jehoshaphat, Valley of.

### Valley of Decision

A valley near Jerusalem, also called the valley of Jehoshaphat in [Joel 3:2, 12](#).

See Jehoshaphat, Valley of.

### Valley of Gad

The Valley of Gad is a place mentioned in [2 Samuel 24:5](#). The name means "the river or streambed of Gad" in Hebrew. Different Bible translations describe this location in various ways:

- "In the midst of the river of Gad" (King James Version)
- "In the middle of the valley, toward Gad" (Revised Standard Version)
- "The valley of Gad" (American Standard Version)
- "In the direction of Gad" (New Living Translation)

This valley was the starting point for King David's census of the Israelites. Most scholars believe the "river" or "valley" refers to the Arnon River, an important waterway in the region.

### Valley of Hinnom

Valley on the south side of Jerusalem, called Gehenna in the Greek NT. See Gehenna.

### Valley of Jehoshaphat

See Jehoshaphat, Valley of.

## Valley of Jezreel

See Jezreel Valley.

## Valley of Rephaim

The Valley of Rephaim is a geographical landmark that formed part of the border between the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. The King James Version calls it "the valley of the giants" ([Joshua 15:8; 18:16](#)). It is a wide valley in the southwestern edges of Jerusalem.

People thought giants like the Anakim and the Nephilim often visited this valley. During King David's rule, the Philistine armies traveled from the coast to search for David in the Valley of Rephaim. This was after they heard David had been anointed king ([2 Samuel 5:18-22](#); [1 Chronicles 14:9](#)).

The Valley of Rephaim connected to the Wadi Serar, which led down to the Philistine coast. This valley was a fertile area where farmers grew grain ([Isaiah 17:5](#)).

## Valley of Rephaim

See Rephaim, Valley of.

## Valley of Salt

The Valley of Salt is a dry valley near the southern part of the Dead Sea.

Two important battles in the Old Testament happened in this valley.

First, David won a major victory over the Edomites there. One of David's top warriors, Abishai, killed 18,000 Edomite soldiers during this battle ([2 Samuel 8:13](#); [1 Chronicles 18:12](#)).

Later, King Amaziah of Judah also defeated the Edomites in the same valley. After the battle, he captured the city of Sela. Sela was an important Edomite town in the nearby hills ([2 Kings 14:7](#); [2 Chronicles 25:11](#)).

We do not know the exact location of the Valley of Salt. Some think it is Wadi el-Milh (which means "salt valley"), east of Beersheba in Judah. But many believe it is es-Sebkha, a dry and salty plain just

south of the Dead Sea. This area leads toward the hill country of Edom.

## Valley of Shaveh

Valley near Salem, also called the King's Valley in [Genesis 14:17](#). See King's Valley.

## Valley of Siddim

See Siddim Valley.

## Vaniah

Bani's son and one of the priests who divorced his foreign wife at Ezra's command ([Ezr 10:36](#)).

## Vashni

KJV alternate name for Joel, Samuel's son, in [1 Chronicles 6:28](#). See Joel (Person) #2.

## Vashti

Vashti was a queen of Persia. She was married to King Ahasuerus, who was also called Xerxes I. She lost her position as queen after she refused to appear before the guests at a royal banquet ([Esther 1:9-19](#)).

Neither Vashti nor Queen Esther (who came after her) are mentioned in historical records outside the Bible. Because of this, some scholars have suggested they might have been less important wives or concubines (women who lived with the king but had lower status than wives) who were given the title "queen."

A Greek historian named Plutarch wrote about Persian customs. He said Persian kings usually ate meals with their official wives. However, when the kings wanted to have feasts with heavy drinking, they would send their wives away and bring in their concubines.

Some people use this information to argue that Vashti was only a concubine. But several facts show that Vashti was truly a queen:

- She was asked to wear a royal crown at the banquet.
- She is called "queen" in all references before she was removed from her position.
- The king said her actions would influence all women in the kingdom.

Her refusal to come to the banquet makes more sense if she was a queen since queens were not usually present at drinking feasts.

## Vegetable

Scriptural references to vegetables are probably, in most cases, to the dried leguminous seeds of beans and lentils.

*See* Bean; Food and Food Preparation; Lentils.

## Veil of the Temple

The curtain in the sanctuary separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place ([Exodus 26:31–33](#)).

*See* Tabernacle.

## Versions of the Bible (Ancient)

To understand how the Bible has spread across the world, imagine Palestine as the center of a pool on a map of the eastern hemisphere. Think of God revealing himself through the prophets, Jesus Christ, and the apostles as a stone dropped into the center of the water. As the stone hits, ripples (waves) spread out across the world from Palestine. As these ripples move out, think of the languages they reach:

- To the South: Coptic, Arabic, and Ethiopic
- To the West: Greek, Latin, Gothic, and English
- To the North: Armenian, Georgian, and Slavonic
- To the East: Syriac

The farther the Bible traveled from its original languages of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, the later it was translated into new languages.

### *Languages of the Bible*

God's message in the Bible first came from the Middle East, where most of it was written in two of Palestine's main languages. The Old Testament was mostly written in Hebrew, except for parts of Daniel and Ezra, which were possibly written in Aramaic (the language used during Israel's captivity). The entire New Testament was likely written in common Greek, known as *koine*. This form of Greek was the main language spoken in the eastern part of the Roman Empire and was understood in most places across the empire. So, anyone who did not speak Hebrew or Greek would not have access to God's message in written form unless the Bible was translated into their language.

### *The Earliest Biblical Translations*

Bible translation began even before the birth of Christ, with Old Testament translations into Greek and Aramaic. Many Jewish people living in different regions before Jesus's time did not understand Hebrew, so they needed the Bible in Greek or Aramaic. The most famous Greek translation was the Septuagint, which was used by both Jews and the first Christians. The Septuagint became the "Bible" for the early Christians, including those who wrote parts of the New Testament.

Early Christian missionaries carried the Septuagint (or Hebrew Bible) and the Greek New Testament with them as they traveled from the churches in Jerusalem and Antioch, as we read in Acts. These missionaries would learn the local languages and orally translate or paraphrase Bible passages for teaching, preaching, and worship. As people converted to Christianity, new churches were formed. The missionaries, seeing the need for people to have the Bible in their own language, would begin translating the whole Bible for them. The desire to spread the Bible in new languages has

always been at the heart of Christian missions, leading to many new versions of the Bible.

### *The Spread of the Bible Through Translation*

Bible translation in the early church was spontaneous and often informal, starting as oral translations. It was also driven by a strong desire to spread the gospel. The early church supported and encouraged Bible translation. Even as late as the ninth century, popes Adrian II and John VIII supported the creation of the Slavonic version of the Bible. However, a major change occurred in the Western church's attitude toward translation. Latin became the dominant language, and fewer people could read Greek. As education became something only for the wealthy and powerful, and as the Roman Catholic Church tightened its control over Christianity, the Bible was taken out of the hands of ordinary people. As long as priests could read and recite the Latin Bible during church services, there was little effort to translate the Bible into the everyday language of the people.

### *Challenges to Biblical Translation*

Latin became almost a sacred language, and the church grew suspicious of Bible translations. Pope Gregory VII, around AD 1079, tried to stop the circulation of a Slavonic translation of the Bible, even though popes before him had supported it. Gregory argued that God may have wanted Scripture to remain secret in some areas because if everyone had access to it, people might disrespect it or misunderstand it, leading to mistakes in interpretation.

At the same time, Islam began spreading in Palestine and North Africa, changing the religious landscape of the region. Within 100 years of Muhammad's death, Islam had destroyed over 900 churches, and the Qur'an became the sacred text for much of the Mediterranean's eastern and southern regions.

Bible translations slowed for the next 500 years due to opposition from both the Western church and the rise of Islam in the East. However, the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century revived the translation efforts. With the invention of the printing press by Johannes Gutenberg, missionaries could now produce multiple Bible translations. Describing the motivation of translators, Erasmus, in 1516, wrote that he wished everyone, even the poorest people, could read and understand the Gospel in their own languages:

"I wish that even the weakest woman should read the Gospel—should read the Epistles of Paul. And I wish these were translated into all languages, so that they might be read and understood, not only by Scots and Irishmen, but also by Turks and Saracens. To make them understood is surely the first step. It may be that they might be ridiculed by many, but some would take them to heart. I long that the husbandman should sing portions of them to himself as he follows the plough, that the weaver should hum them to the tune of his shuttle, that the traveller should beguile with their stories the tedium of his journey."

### *Materials and Manuscripts*

What materials did the early Bible translators and copyists use? At the time of Christ and for the first two centuries of the church, writing was typically done with ink on papyrus, a paper-like material. Books were scrolls made from long sheets of papyrus glued together and rolled up. In the first century, a new form of a book was invented called the *codex* (similar to modern books with folded pages and a spine). Christians were some of the first to use this new form. In AD 332, Emperor Constantine I ordered 50 Bibles for the churches in Constantinople, specifying that they be codices made from vellum (animal skins) rather than papyrus scrolls. By the late third and early fourth centuries, codices and vellum had largely replaced scrolls and papyrus.

For many centuries, scribes copied the Bible by hand, writing in capital letters. The oldest surviving Bible manuscripts are written in this style, called "uncials." Around the 9th and 10th centuries, writing in lowercase letters became more common, and these manuscripts are called "minuscules" or "cursives." Though cursive writing existed as early as the second century before Christ, minuscules are the most common form of surviving Bible manuscripts from the 10th to the 16th century.

In 1454, Johannes Gutenberg revolutionized Bible production by using movable type to print books. His first printed Bible, a beautiful Latin version, appeared in 1456.

Today's printed Bibles include chapters and verses, but these divisions were added much later. Chapter divisions began in the Latin Vulgate Bible and may have been created by various church leaders in the 11th and 13th centuries like:

- Lanfranc, archbishop of Canterbury in the 11th century
- Stephen Langton, archbishop of Canterbury in the 13th century
- Hugo de Sancto Caro in the 13th century

Verse numbers were first used in the 1551 Greek New Testament published in Geneva and in a 1559–61 edition of the Hebrew Old Testament.

#### *Preview*

- **Earliest Versions of the Old Testament**
- **Complete Bible Versions of Christendom**
- **Latin Versions**
- **Coptic Versions**
- **Gothic Version**
- **Syriac Versions**
- **Armenian Version**
- **Georgian Version**
- **Ethiopic Version**
- **Arabic Versions**
- **Slavonic Version**

#### *Earliest Versions of the Old Testament*

##### **The Samaritan Pentateuch**

The Samaritan Pentateuch is the first version of the Old Testament to consider, although it is not technically a translation. It is a Hebrew version of the first five books of the Old Testament (also called the Law), which is the entire Scripture for the Samaritan community. This community still exists today in modern Nablus, Palestine.

The Samaritan Pentateuch follows a different textual tradition than the Hebrew text used in traditional Judaism, which was preserved by the Masoretes. The Masoretes were scribes who worked from around AD 600 to the 10th century to carefully preserve the Old Testament text. They added marks (vowel points) to indicate missing vowels in the Hebrew text. This Masoretic Text is

the basis for the King James Version of the Old Testament.

The Samaritan Pentateuch goes back to the fourth century BC and differs from the Masoretic Text in about 6,000 places, with around 1,000 differences considered important by scholars. In some cases, the Samaritan Pentateuch agrees with the Greek Septuagint and other ancient versions, making it a valuable witness in those instances. The two oldest manuscripts of the Samaritan Pentateuch outside Nablus are codices found in England. One is dated around AD 1211–1212 and is housed in the John Rylands Library in Manchester, while the other is from before 1149 and is in the University Library at Cambridge. There are also two minor translations: an Aramaic Samaritan Targum from early Christian times and an Arabic translation from about the 11th century.

##### **The Septuagint**

The second Old Testament version, the Septuagint, is an actual translation from Hebrew into Greek. It was the first known translation of the Old Testament and was the Bible used by the apostles. Most of the Old Testament quotes in the New Testament come from this version, making it the Bible of the early church.

The story of the Septuagint's creation is told in a document called "The Letter of Aristeas," written between 150 and 100 BC. According to this letter, an Egyptian king, Ptolemy Philadelphus, wanted to collect all the world's books in his library in Alexandria. Since he did not have a Greek translation of the Old Testament, he asked the high priest in Jerusalem to send him scholars and texts. The letter says 72 Jewish elders were sent to Egypt, and after being entertained by the king, they produced the full Greek translation in 72 days. This version became known as the Septuagint, named after the number 70 (LXX in Roman numerals).

However, scholars believe the real story is less dramatic. The Septuagint was likely a translation made for Greek-speaking Jews who no longer understood Hebrew. Portions of it were probably translated as early as 250 BC, with other parts completed by 100 BC. The translation was likely done over several centuries by different translators and then gathered into one collection. The Septuagint also includes up to 15 additional books (called apocryphal or non-canonical) not found in most modern English Bibles.

## Aramaic

The third Old Testament version is the Aramaic, which was called Chaldee until the 19th century. Biblical Aramaic was the language spoken by the rulers who conquered Israel, and over time, it became the language of the Jewish people. When the Jews returned from Babylonian exile in 536 BC, they brought Aramaic with them. Many scholars think that when Ezra and the Levites explained the law in [Nehemiah 8:8](#), they were paraphrasing Hebrew into Aramaic. Aramaic was the primary language in Palestine until the Bar-Kochba revolt against the Romans in AD 132 to 135. Hebrew was mostly a religious language for religious figures. As priests and scribes read the Law and Prophets, the custom of following the reading with an Aramaic translation spread. These translations were called *targums* or *targumim*.

Rabbis did not want to write down the targumim, but inevitably they were. The earliest Targum was of the Law written by someone known as Onkelos in the second or third century AD. Targums on the historical and prophetic books were written in the third and fourth centuries AD. The most important one was Targum Jonathan ben Uzziel. The earliest Targum of the Wisdom Literature (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job, some Psalms) was written in the fifth century AD. Finally, rabbinical Aramaic Targums included all of the Old Testament except Daniel, Ezra, and Nehemiah.

The Islamic conquest of the Middle East made Arabic the common language. Rabbis began to write Arabic targums, and became less and less spoken.

## Complete Bible Versions of Christendom

As the early Christian church gathered the New Testament and added it to the Old Testament, Bible translation began. This work helped spread Christianity from Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, and eventually to the farthest parts of the world.

## Latin Versions

Similar to the Aramaic Targums (translations) used by Jewish worshipers, the Old Latin Bible developed informally. In the early Roman Empire, Greek was the main language of Christians, and even the first bishops of Rome spoke and wrote in Greek. However, as both the empire and church aged, Latin became more common, especially in the western part of the empire. As a result, priests and bishops started translating the New Testament and

the Greek Old Testament (Septuagint) into Latin. These early translations became known as the Old Latin Bible, although no full copy of this Bible has survived. Most of the Old Testament and much of the New Testament can be reconstructed from quotations by early church leaders. Scholars think the Old Latin Bible was being used in Carthage, North Africa, by AD 250. There were two main types of Old Latin text: African and European, with an Italian version also found in Europe. The Old Latin Bible is important for comparing it to the Septuagint because it was translated before Origen created his famous six-version text *Hexapla*.

Church leaders began calling for an official, consistent Latin translation of the whole Bible. Pope Damasus I, who was pope from AD 366 to 384, asked his secretary, Jerome, to create a new Latin version of the Gospels in AD 382. Jerome finished this work in AD 383, and the rest of the New Testament likely followed. The Gospels were a careful retranslation based on the European Old Latin and a Greek text from Alexandria. However, the rest of the New Testament was less carefully revised and still relied heavily on the Old Latin, unless the Greek text clearly needed a correction. Jerome may not have completed all of this work himself.

In AD 385, Jerome left Rome and settled near Bethlehem in 389, where he focused on translating the Old Testament. He realized that a new translation from Hebrew was needed, rather than simply revising the Greek Septuagint. With the help of Jewish rabbis, he completed the books of Kings by AD 390, and by AD 396, he had finished:

- The prophets
- Job
- Ezra
- Chronicles

After recovering from an illness, he translated:

- Proverbs
- Ecclesiastes
- The Song of Songs

In AD 404, he translated:

- Joshua
- Judges
- Ruth
- Esther

Also parts of the apocryphal additions to:

- Daniel
- Esther

He also translated the Apocryphal books:

- Tobit
- Judith

However, Jerome did not translate:

- The Wisdom of Solomon
- Ecclesiasticus
- Baruch
- The books of Maccabees

These books remained in the Old Latin form. His work varied in quality and was not collected into one complete Bible.

Jerome's translation faced much criticism, but even though he defended it strongly, he did not live to see it fully respected. Over time, his work became known as the Vulgate Bible, named after the everyday language of the people, so-called "vulgar" Latin. It is believed that Cassiodorus may have compiled Jerome's work into one Bible. The earliest full manuscript of Jerome's Bible is the Codex Amiatinus, created around AD 715 in Jarrow, Northumbria, England. The old Vulgate texts are second only to the Septuagint in importance for studying the Hebrew Bible because Jerome worked from Hebrew texts that were older than those used by the Jewish scholars known as the Masoretes.

It took over 1,000 years for the Vulgate to officially replace the Old Latin Bible. The Roman Catholic Church made the Vulgate its official Bible during the Council of Trent in 1546. This council also approved a corrected version of the Vulgate, which Pope Sixtus V issued in 1590. However, it was unpopular, and Pope Clement VIII released a new official version in 1592, which remains the standard today.

## Coptic Versions

Coptic was the last stage of the Egyptian language, used by people along the Nile River. It survived despite the Greek influence of Alexander the Great and his successors and even resisted the Latin of the Roman Caesars. The Coptic script included 25 Greek letters and 7 additional symbols to represent sounds not found in Greek. Over time, five main dialects of Coptic developed:

1. Akhmimic
2. Sub-Akhmimic
3. Sahidic
4. Fayumic
5. Bohairic

Bible fragments have been found in the Akhmimic, sub-Akhmimic, and Fayumic dialects, but it is not known if the entire Bible was ever translated into these dialects. These dialects gradually disappeared, and by the 11th century, only Bohairic (spoken in the Nile Delta) and Sahidic (spoken in Upper Egypt) remained. By the 17th century, they were mostly forgotten and only used for religious purposes in Coptic churches, as Arabic had become the dominant language after the Islamic conquest of Egypt in 641.

The earliest Coptic translation of the Bible was in the Sahidic dialect, in Upper Egypt, where Greek was less commonly understood. The Sahidic Old Testament and New Testament were likely completed around AD 200. In the Delta, Greek was more widely spoken, so the Bohairic translation of the Bible probably came later. However, since Bohairic was used in Alexandria, where the Coptic religious leader lived, it eventually became the main language of the Coptic church. The Copts separated from the Roman Empire and the wider Catholic Church after the Council of Chalcedon in AD 451 due to theological differences and were further removed from the West by centuries of Islamic rule.

## Gothic Version

The Gothic language was an East Germanic language. The earliest known writings in any Germanic language are fragments of the Bible translated by Ulfilas (also called Wulfila). He made the translation to share the gospel with his own people. Ulfilas, one of the most famous early missionaries, was born in Dacia. His parents were Roman Christians who had been captured by the



Goths. Ulfilas later traveled to Constantinople and may have converted to Christianity there. Around AD 340, he was ordained as a bishop by Eusebius of Nicomedia, an Arian bishop. Ulfilas himself followed Arian beliefs, which taught that Christ was the Savior and Lord by God's appointment and his obedience, but that he was not equal to God.

Ulfilas returned to preach to the Goths. He apparently created an alphabet for their language so he could translate the Bible into it. Records say that he translated the entire Bible except for the books of Kings. He left them out because he thought they would encourage violence in the already warlike Goths. Only scattered fragments of his Old Testament translation remain, and about half of the Gospels survive in the *Codex Argenteus*, a manuscript from the fifth or sixth century that is now in Uppsala, Sweden.

### Syriac Versions

Syriac, a Semitic language, was the main language of Edessa and western Mesopotamia. The version of the Bible known today as the Peshitta (which is still the Bible used by Christians from the old Assyrian area) developed over several stages. The Peshitta often lacks:

- 2 Peter
- 2 and 3 John
- Jude
- Revelation

One of the most famous early translations was the *Diatessaron*, a harmony of the Gospels made by Tatian, a disciple of Justin Martyr in Rome. He translated it from Greek around AD 170, and it became very popular among Syriac-speaking Christians. Bishops had difficulty persuading Christians to use a version of the Gospels where the four books were separated rather than combined, called "The Gospel of the Separated Ones."

Other parts of the Bible were also translated into Old Syriac. Writings from early church fathers suggest that a second-century Old Syriac Bible existed along with the *Diatessaron*. The Old Testament in this version may have originally been a Jewish translation into Syriac that Christians adapted, similar to how Greek Christians adapted the Septuagint. Around the end of the fourth century, this version went through an official revision, resulting in the *Peshitta* (which means "simple" or "basic"). According to tradition,

Rabbula, bishop of Edessa, helped create the New Testament part of this version.

In AD 431, Syriac-speaking Christians split into two groups: the Monophysites (also called Jacobites) and the Nestorians. The disagreement was about the nature of Christ. At first, both groups used the *Peshitta*, but the Jacobites wanted a new translation. In AD 508, Bishop Philoxemus (also called Mar Zenaia) of Mabbug translated the Bible from the Septuagint and Greek New Testament manuscripts into Syriac. His translation included, for the first time, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, and Jude, which were later added to the standard *Peshitta* text.

Although the *Peshitta* has been used continuously since the fifth century and was spread as far as India and China, it has not been as valuable for biblical studies as the Septuagint. The *Peshitta* underwent frequent revisions based on comparisons with various Greek texts, Hebrew manuscripts, and other sources, making it difficult to trace its original form. One of the most important surviving *Peshitta* manuscripts is the *Codex Ambrosianus* from the sixth century, which contains the entire Old Testament.

### Armenian Version

Syrian Christians spread their faith to the Armenians in eastern Asia Minor. Armenia became the first Christian kingdom in history when Tiridates III, who ruled from AD 259–314, converted. In the fifth century, an Armenian alphabet was created to translate the Bible into the Armenian language. The Armenian Bible is known for its beauty and accuracy, although it may have been first translated from Syriac and later revised based on Greek texts. The Armenian language is similar to Greek in grammar and structure. According to tradition, the New Testament translation was done by Mesrop, a bishop in Armenia, who is also credited with inventing the Armenian and Georgian alphabets. Armenian churches did not accept the book of Revelation as part of their Bible until the 12th century.

### Georgian Version

The same tradition that credits Mesrop with translating the Bible into Armenian also credits an Armenian slave woman with spreading Christianity among Georgian-speaking people. The earliest Georgian Bible manuscripts are from the eighth century, but they are based on an older translation that shows traces of Syriac and

Armenian influences. The Gospels may have first arrived in Georgia as the *Diatessaron*. Some important Georgian fragments have been helpful in studying that text. There is a complete Georgian Bible manuscript in two volumes at the Iberian Monastery on Mount Athos.

Another Caucasian group, the Albanians, received an alphabet from Mesrop for translating the Bible. However, their church was destroyed during Islamic wars, and no remains of their Bible translation have been found.

### Ethiopic Version

By the middle of the fifth century, Ethiopia (also called Abyssinia) was ruled by a Christian king, and the country had close ties with Egyptian Christianity until the Islamic conquests. The Old Testament was probably translated into Old Ethiopic (called Ge'ez) by the fourth century. This version is interesting for two reasons: First, it is the Bible of the Falashas, a group of African Jews who claim to be descendants of Jews who migrated to Ethiopia during the time of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. Second, it contains books not included in the Hebrew Apocrypha, such as the book of Enoch, which is quoted in [Jude 1:14](#). The book of Enoch was unknown to scholars until a copy was brought to Europe in 1773. 3 Baruch, an apocryphal book, is only preserved through the Ethiopic version.

The New Testament was translated into Old Ethiopic later than the Old Testament. It includes writings mentioned by Clement of Alexandria, such as the *Apocalypse of Peter*. Although both Testaments are still available in Ethiopic manuscripts, none are older than the 13th century. These manuscripts depend heavily on Coptic and Arabic sources. The chaos in Ethiopia between the seventh and 13th centuries destroyed earlier manuscripts. Since the surviving manuscripts are so late, they have had little value for biblical scholars.

### Arabic Versions

In AD 570, Muhammad was born in Mecca. He married a wealthy widow, Khadijah, at age 25. His "call" to be a prophet came when he was 40. In 622, he moved to Medina (an event called the "Hegira"), and he died in 632, having united Arabia under Islam. Within a hundred years, Islamic conquests had spread across North Africa, Spain, and into Bible lands. This relentless spread put pressure on Byzantium and eventually led to the fall of

Constantinople in 1453. The Islamic conquest reached as far east as India, making Arabic the most widely spoken language since the days of Alexander the Great, nine centuries earlier.

There were many Jewish communities in Arabia during Muhammad's time, and Islamic conquests also took over hundreds of Christian communities. However, an Arabic version of the Bible did not appear until Saadya Gaon translated the Pentateuch from Hebrew in the 10th century. Other parts of the Old Testament were translated from Hebrew, Syriac, and Greek, but not necessarily by Saadya himself. The following were translated from the Syriac *Peshitta*:

- Judges
- Samuel
- Kings
- Chronicles
- Job

While the following were translated from the Greek Septuagint:

- The prophets
- Psalms
- Proverbs

His version has been used by Arabic-speaking Jews until modern times. However, other Jewish groups who disagreed with Saadya's free translation made their own versions.

New Testament translations into Arabic came from Syriac, Greek, and Coptic sources between the seventh and ninth centuries. John I was a Jacobite patriarch of Antioch from 631 to 648. According to Arab historians, he translated the Gospels from Syriac into Arabic. Another translation of the Gospels was made by John, Bishop of Seville, from the Latin Vulgate around AD 724. The final Arabic New Testament relied mostly on the Coptic Bohairic. Due to their late date and mixed sources, Arabic versions have not been very important for biblical studies.

### Slavonic Version

Although the Slavs lived close to the centers of early Christianity, Bible translations into Slavonic did not begin until the ninth century. Two brothers, Constantine and Methodius, sons of a Greek nobleman, started by translating church services

into Slavonic. With the approval of popes Adrian II and John VIII, they also translated the Bible. Constantine (later known as Cyril) and Methodius worked among the Slavs and Moravians. Cyril invented the alphabet (now called Cyrillic) to help with their translation work. Manuscripts from the 10th or 11th century survive, but the oldest full Bible manuscript is the *Codex Gennadius* from AD 1499, which is too late to be very useful for biblical studies.

## **Versions of the Bible (English)**

An English Bible version is a translation of the Bible into English. There have been many translations of the Bible into English over time.

### *Preview*

The following English Bible versions are discussed in this article:

- Early Translations: Caedmon's, Bede's, Alfred the Great's
- Other Early Versions: Lindisfarne Gospels, Shoreham's Psalms, Rolle's Psalms
- Wycliffe's Version
- Tyndale's Translation
- Coverdale's Version
- Thomas Matthew's Version: The Great Bible
- The Geneva Bible and the Bishops' Bible
- The King James Version
- The English Revised Version and the American Standard Version
- The Twentieth Century New Testament
- *The New Testament in Modern Speech*
- *The New Testament: A New Translation*
- *The Complete Bible: An American Translation*
- The Revised Standard Version
- *The New English Bible*
- *The Good News Bible: Today's English Version*
- *The Living Bible*
- *The New American Standard Bible*
- The New International Version
- *The Jerusalem Bible and The New American Bible*
- *The Holy Scriptures according to the Masoretic Text, A New Translation*
- The New King James Version
- The Revised English Bible
- New Revised Standard Version
- New Living Translation

### *Early Translations: Caedmon's, Bede's, Alfred the Great's*

The gospel spread and churches multiplied in the early centuries of the Christian era. Christians in many countries wanted to read the Bible in their own language. As a result, many translations were made in several different languages. This happened as early as the second century.

For example, the Bible was translated into Coptic for the Egyptians. It was translated into Syriac for those whose language was Aramaic. It was translated into Gothic for the Germanic people called the Goths. It was translated into Latin for the Romans and Carthaginians.

Around AD 400, Jerome made the most famous Latin translation. This translation is known as the Latin Vulgate. *Vulgate* means "common." The Latin translation was used for the common person. It was used extensively in the Roman Catholic Church for centuries and centuries.

The gospel was brought to England by missionaries from Rome in the sixth century. The Bible they carried with them was the Latin Vulgate. The Christians living in England at that time needed monks for any kind of teaching from the Bible. The monks read and taught the Latin Bible.

After a few centuries, more monasteries were founded. The need arose for translations of the Bible into English. As far as we know, the earliest English translation is from the seventh century. It was translated by a monk named Caedmon. He made a metrical version of parts of the Old and New Testaments.

Another English churchman, named Bede, is said to have translated the Gospels into English. Tradition has it that he was translating the Gospel of John on his deathbed in AD 735. Another translator was Alfred the Great. He reigned from 871 to 899. He was regarded as a very literate king. He included in his laws parts of the Ten Commandments translated into English. He also translated the Psalms.

### *Other Early Versions: Lindisfarne Gospels, Shoreham's Psalms, Rolle's Psalms*

All translations of the English Bible prior to the work of Tyndale (discussed later) were done from the Latin text. Some Latin versions of the Gospels were made with word-for-word English translations written between the lines. These are

called interlinear translations. The oldest of these are from the 10th century.

The most famous translation of this period is called the Lindisfarne Gospels (AD 950). In the late 10th century, Aelfric (around AD 955–1020) made idiomatic translations of various parts of the Bible. Aelfric was the head of the monastery of Eynsham. Eynsham is near Oxford. Two of these translations still exist. Later, in the 1300s, William of Shoreham translated the Psalms into English. Richard Rolle also translated the Psalms into English. Richard's editions of the Psalms included a verse-by-verse commentary. Both of these translations were metrical and therefore called Psalters. They were popular when John Wycliffe was a young man.

### *Wycliffe's Version*

John Wycliffe, who lived from around 1329 to 1384, was the most famous and respected Oxford theologian of his day. The people who worked with him were the first to translate the entire Bible from Latin into English.

Wycliffe has been called the "Morning Star of the Reformation" because he boldly questioned the authority of the pope. He criticized the sale of indulgences. These were supposed to release a person from punishment in purgatory. He denied the reality of transubstantiation. This is the belief that the bread and wine are changed into Jesus Christ's body and blood during Communion. He spoke out against church hierarchies.

The pope criticized Wycliffe for his "heretical" teachings and asked that Oxford University dismiss him. Oxford and many government leaders stood with Wycliffe. He was able to survive the pope's assaults.

Wycliffe believed that if people had the Bible available in their own language the church would not be able to abuse its authority. Then they could read for themselves about how each one of them could have a personal relationship with God through Christ Jesus. This can be done apart from any church authority.

Wycliffe and his partners completed the New Testament around 1380 and the Old Testament in 1382. Wycliffe concentrated his labors on the New Testament, while a partner, Nicholas of Hereford, did a major part of the Old Testament. Wycliffe and his coworkers were unfamiliar with the original Hebrew and Greek. They translated the Latin text into English.

After Wycliffe finished the translation work, he organized a group of poor Christians to go throughout England preaching Christian truths and reading the Scriptures in their mother tongue to all who would hear God's Word. They were known as Lollards.

As a result, the Word of God became available to many Englishmen through Wycliffe's translation. He was loved and yet hated. His church enemies did not forget he fought to their power. They did not like that he translated the Scriptures so everyone could read them. Several decades after he died, they condemned him for heresy. They took his body from the grave and burned it. They threw his ashes into the Swift River.

One of Wycliffe's close associates was John Purvey (around 1353–1428). Purvey continued Wycliffe's work by producing a revision of his translation in 1388. Purvey was an excellent scholar. His work was very well received by his generation and the following generations. Within less than a century, Purvey's revision had replaced the original Wycliffe Bible.

As was stated before, Wycliffe and his associates were the first Englishmen to translate the entire Bible into English from Latin. Therefore, their Bible was a translation of a translation. It was not a translation of the original languages. With the coming of the Renaissance came the recovery of the study of the classics. The study of Greek as well as Hebrew also returned because of the Renaissance.

Latin was the main language for scholarship, except in the Greek church from 500–1500. For the first time in nearly 1,000 years, scholars began to read the New Testament in its original language, Greek. By 1500, Greek was being taught at Oxford.

### *Tyndale's Translation*

William Tyndale was born in the age of the Renaissance. He graduated in 1515 from Oxford, where he had studied the Scriptures in Greek and in Hebrew. By the time he was 30, Tyndale had committed his life to translating the Bible from the original languages into English. His heart's desire is exemplified in a statement he made to a clergyman when arguing against the view that only the clergy were qualified to read and correctly interpret the Scriptures. Tyndale said, "If God spares my life, over many years, I will cause a boy that drives the plow to know more of the Scripture than you do."

In 1523, Tyndale went to London seeking a place to work on his translation. The bishop of London

would not give him a place to work. He was provided a place by Humphrey Monmouth. Humphrey was a cloth merchant.

In 1524, Tyndale left England for Germany because the English church tried to stop the Bible from being given to common church members. The English church was still under the authority of the pope in Rome. Tyndale first settled in Hamburg, Germany. He may have met Luther in Wittenberg soon thereafter. Even if he didn't meet Luther, he knew Luther's writings and Luther's German translation of the New Testament. Luther's translation was published in 1522. Throughout his lifetime, Tyndale was attacked for continuing Luther's ideas. Both Luther and Tyndale used the same Greek text in making their translations. The Greek text was compiled by Erasmus in 1516.

Tyndale completed his translation of the New Testament in 1525. Fifteen thousand copies, in six editions, were smuggled into England between the years 1525 and 1530. Church authorities did their best to take copies of Tyndale's translation and burn them. They could not stop the flow of Bibles from Germany into England. Tyndale himself could not return to England because his life was in danger since his translation had been banned.

However, he continued to work outside of England. He corrected, revised, and reissued his translation until his final revision appeared in 1535. Later in May of 1535, Tyndale was arrested and carried off to a castle near Brussels. After being in prison for over a year, he was tried and sentenced to death. He was strangled and burned at the stake on October 6, 1536. His final words were so very touching: "Lord, open the king of England's eyes."

After finishing the New Testament, Tyndale began work on a translation of the Hebrew Old Testament. He did not live long enough to complete his task. He translated the Pentateuch or the first five books of the Old Testament, Jonah, and some historical books.

While Tyndale was in prison, his associate completed an entire Bible in English. His name was Miles Coverdale. He lived from 1488–1569. Coverdale's Bible was based largely on Tyndale's translation of the New Testament and other Old Testament books. In other words, Coverdale finished what Tyndale had begun.

### *Coverdale's Version*

Miles Coverdale was a Cambridge graduate. Like Tyndale, Coverdale was forced to flee England

because he had been strongly influenced by Luther. He was boldly preaching against Roman Catholic beliefs. While he was outside of England, Coverdale met Tyndale and then served as his assistant. Coverdale helped Tyndale translate the Pentateuch.

By the time Coverdale produced a complete translation in 1537, the king of England, Henry VIII, had broken all ties with the pope. Henry VIII was ready to see the appearance of an English Bible. Perhaps Tyndale's prayer had been answered in an unplanned way. The king gave his royal approval to Coverdale's translation. This translation was based on the work done by Tyndale who Henry VIII had earlier killed.

### *Thomas Matthew's Version: The Great Bible*

In 1537, when Coverdale's Bible was endorsed by the king, another Bible was published in England. Thomas Matthew produced this Bible. Thomas Matthew is a false name for John Rogers. Matthew's lived from around 1500 to 1555. He was a friend of Tyndale.

Rogers used Tyndale's unpublished translation of the Old Testament historical books, other parts of Tyndale's translation, and still other parts of Coverdale's translation, to form an entire Bible. This Bible also received the king's approval. Matthew's Bible was revised in 1538 and printed for distribution in the churches throughout England. This Bible is called the Great Bible because of its size and costliness. It became the first English Bible authorized for public use.

Many editions of the Great Bible were printed in the early 1540s. However, its spread was limited. King Henry's attitude about the new translation changed. As a result, the English government passed a law in 1543 limiting the use of any English translation. It was a crime for any unlicensed person to read or explain the Scriptures in public. Many copies of Tyndale's New Testament and Coverdale's Bible were burned in London.

English Bibles were limited even more in the following years. After a short period of mercy during the reign of Edward VI, from 1547 to 1553, severe attacks came from the hands of Queen Mary. She was a Roman Catholic who planned to bring back Catholicism to England and stop Protestantism. Many Protestants were killed, including John Rogers, the Bible translator. Coverdale was arrested and then released. He fled

to Geneva. It was a safe place for English Protestants.

### *The Geneva Bible and the Bishops' Bible*

The English exiles in Geneva chose William Whittingham to make an English translation of the New Testament for them. Whittingham lived around 1524 to 1579. He used Theodore Beza's Latin translation and checked the Greek text.

This Bible became very popular because it was small and moderately priced. The introduction to the Bible and its many notes had a strong evangelical influence. It was also influenced by the teachings of John Calvin. Calvin was one of the greatest thinkers of the Reformation. He was a well-known biblical commentator and the main leader in Geneva during those days.

The Geneva Bible was popular among many English men and women. It was not acceptable among many leaders in the Church of England because Calvin influenced it. Leaders recognized that the Great Bible was not as good as the Geneva Bible in style and scholarship. They started a revision of the Great Bible.

This revised Bible was published in 1568. It became known as the Bishops' Bible. It continued in use until it was replaced by the King James Version of 1611.

### *The King James Version*

After James VI of Scotland became the king of England, he became known as James I. He invited many clergymen from Puritan and Anglican groups to meet together. He hoped that differences could be solved.

The meeting did not achieve this. During the meeting one of the Puritan leaders, John Reynolds asked the king to authorize a new translation. Reynolds was president of Corpus Christi College, Oxford. Reynolds wanted to see a translation that was more accurate than previous translations.

King James liked this idea because the Bishops' Bible had not been successful. He also liked it because he considered the notes in the Geneva Bible to be dangerous. The king started the work and took an active part in planning the new translation.

He suggested that university professors work on the translation to ensure the best scholarship. He strongly urged that they should not have any marginal notes besides those about literal

renderings from Hebrew and Greek. The translation would have a better chance of being accepted by all the churches in England without interpretive notes.

More than 50 scholars began the work in 1607. They were trained in Hebrew and Greek. The translation went through several committees before it was finalized. The scholars were told to follow the Bishops' Bible as the basic version, as long as it stuck to the original text. They were also told to use the translations of Tyndale, Matthew, Coverdale, the Great Bible, and the Geneva Bible when they seemed to better reflect the original languages.

This use of other versions is stated in the introduction to the King James Version. "Truly, good Christian reader, we never thought from the beginning that we should need to make a new translation, nor yet to make of a bad one a good one... but to make a good one better, or out of many good ones one principal good one."

The King James Version is known in England as the Authorized Version. This is because it was authorized by the king. It captured the best of all the prior English translations and easily passed all of them. It was the top of all the previous English Bible translations. It united high scholarship with Christian devotion and devotion.

It was translated when the English language was healthy and beautiful. This was the English of Queen Elizabeth and William Shakespeare. This version has justifiably been called "the noblest monument of English prose." The King James Version has become an enduring monument of English writing because of its style, language, and rhythms.

No other book has had such a major influence on English literature. No other translation has touched the lives of so many English-speaking people for centuries and centuries, even until the present day.

### *The 18th and 19th Centuries: New Discoveries of Earlier Manuscripts and Increased Knowledge of the Original Languages*

The King James Version became the most popular English translation in the 17th and 18th centuries. It became the standard English Bible. The King James Version had faults that certain scholars recognized:

1. Knowledge of Hebrew was limited in the early 17th century. The Hebrew text was adequate. They used the Masoretic Text. Their understanding of the Hebrew vocabulary was not good enough. It would take many more years of language studies to strengthen and sharpen my understanding of the Hebrew vocabulary.
2. The Greek text underlying the New Testament of the King James Version was not as good as we have today. The King James translators used a Greek text known as the Textus Receptus. This is also called the "Received Text." It came from the work of Erasmus. He compiled the first Greek text to be produced on a printing press. When Erasmus compiled this text, he used five or six very late manuscripts dating from the 10th to the 13th centuries. These manuscripts were far inferior to earlier manuscripts.

The King James translators had done well with the resources that were available to them. Those resources were lacking. The resources for the New Testament text were very poor compared to the years that followed.

After the King James Version was published, earlier and better manuscripts were discovered. Around 1630, Codex Alexandrinus was brought to England. A fifth-century manuscript containing the entire New Testament, it provided a fairly good witness to the New Testament text, especially the original text of Revelation.

Two hundred years later, a German scholar named Constantin von Tischendorf discovered Codex Sinaiticus in St Catherine's Monastery. The manuscript is dated around AD 350. It is one of the two oldest manuscripts of the Greek New Testament.

The earliest manuscript, Codex Vaticanus had been in the Vatican's library since at least 1475. It was not made available to scholars until the middle of the 19th century. This manuscript dates to AD 325. It is one of the most reliable copies of the Greek New Testament.



As these manuscripts and others were discovered and made public, certain scholars worked to compile a Greek text that would more closely represent the original text than did the Textus Receptus. Around 1700 John Mill produced an improved Textus Receptus. In the 1730s, Johannes Albert Bengel published a text different than the Textus Receptus according to the evidence of earlier manuscripts. Bengel is known as the father of modern textual and philological studies in the New Testament.

In the 1800s, certain scholars began to abandon the Textus Receptus. Karl Lachman, a classical philologist, produced a fresh text in 1831. Lachman's text represented the fourth-century manuscripts. Samuel Tregelles published a Greek text, which came out in six parts, from 1857 to 1872. Tregelles was self-taught in Latin, Hebrew, and Greek, laboring throughout his entire lifetime.

Tischendorf spent a lifetime of work discovering manuscripts and producing accurate editions of the Greek New Testament. In addition to discovering Codex Sinaiticus, he had many other major discoveries. He interpreted the palimpsest Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus. A palimpsest is a manuscript that has been reused. He compared countless manuscripts. He also produced several editions of the Greek New Testament. The eighth edition is considered the best.

The work of these scholars helped two British men to produce a volume called *The New Testament in the Original Greek* (1881). Brooke Westcott and Fenton Hort worked together for 28 years to produce the book. This edition of the Greek New Testament was based largely on Codex Vaticanus. It became the standard text that was responsible for bringing down the Textus Receptus.

### *The English Revised Version and the American Standard Version*

By the latter part of the 19th century, the Christian community had been given three very good Greek New Testament texts. These texts are those by Tregelles's, Tischendorf's, and Westcott and Hort's. They were very different from the Textus Receptus.

As was mentioned earlier, the scholarly community had gathered more knowledge about the meaning of various Hebrew words and Greek words. Therefore, there was a great need for a new English translation based on a better text. There was a need for more accurate renderings of the original languages.

A few individuals attempted to meet this need. In 1871, John Nelson Darby produced a translation called the *New Translation*. John Nelson Darby was the leader of the Plymouth Brethren movement. His translation was largely based on Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus.

In 1872, J. B. Rotherham published a translation of Tregelles's text. Rotherham tried to show the basic emphasis in the Greek text. This translation is still being published under the title *The Emphasized Bible*. In 1875, Samuel Davidson produced a New Testament translation of Tischendorf's text.

The first major collective effort began in 1870 by the Convocation of Canterbury. They decided to sponsor a major revision of the King James Version. Sixty-five British scholars worked in different groups to make major changes to the King James Version.

The Old Testament scholars corrected bad translations of Hebrew words and changed the format of poetic passages into poetic form. The New Testament scholars made thousands of changes. They had better textual evidence to use. Their goal was to make the New Testament revision reflect the texts of Tregelles, Tischendorf, and Westcott and Hort.

When the complete Revised Version appeared in 1885, it was received with great excitement. Over three million copies were sold in the first year of its publication. Unfortunately, its popularity did not last long. Most people continued to prefer the King James Version over all other translations.

A few American scholars were invited to join the revision work. They were told any of their ideas not accepted by the British scholars would appear in an appendix. The American scholars had to agree not to publish their own American revision until after 14 years. When the time came in 1901, the American Standard Version was published by several surviving members of the original American committee. This translation is viewed as better than the English Revised Version. It is an accurate literal translation of two trustworthy texts, the Old Testament and New Testament texts.

### *The 20th Century: New Discoveries and New Translations*

The 19th century was a fruitful era for the Greek New Testament and following English translations. It was also a century in which Hebrew studies were greatly developed. The 20th century has also been fruitful for textual studies.

Those living in the 20th century have witnessed the discovery of many ancient texts of the Bible. These include the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Oxyrhynchus Papyri, the Chester Beatty Papyri, and the Bodmer Papyri. These amazing discoveries provided scholars with hundreds of ancient manuscripts. They have greatly improved the effort to recover the original wording of the Old and New Testaments.

At the same time, other archaeological discoveries have supported the historical accuracy of the Bible. They help Bible scholars understand the meaning of certain ancient words. For example, the Greek word *parousia* is usually translated as “coming.” It was found in many ancient documents dated around the time of Christ. Very often the word meant the visitation of royalty. This word was used in the New Testament about Christ’s return. The readers would think of his coming as being the visitation of a king.

Another example is that in koine Greek. The expression *entos humon* literally means “inside of you.” It often meant “within reach.” Jesus’s statement in [Luke 17:21](#) could mean “the kingdom is within reach.”

As earlier and better manuscripts of the Bible have emerged, scholars continue to update the Bible texts. Old Testament scholars have still used the Masoretic Text. They note significant differences found in the Dead Sea Scrolls. The current edition used by Old Testament scholars is called *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*.

New Testament scholars, for the most part, have come to rely upon an edition of the Greek New Testament known as the Nestle-Aland text. Eberhard Nestle used the best editions of the Greek New Testament made in the 19th century to compile a text that represented the majority consensus. The work of making new editions was carried on by his son for several years. Then it came under the care of Kurt Aland. The latest edition is the 27th. This edition of the Nestle-Aland’s *Novum Testamentum Graece* appeared in 1993. The same Greek text appears in another popular volume published by the United Bible Societies. This text is called the *Greek New Testament*. The fourth edition was published in 1983.

### *Early 20th-Century Translations in the Language of the People*

The thousands and thousands of papyri were discovered in Egypt around the turn of the century.

They displayed a form of Greek called koine Greek. Koine means “common.” It was the common language of almost everybody living in the Graeco-Roman world from the second century BC to the third century AD. In other words, it was the *lingua franca* or trade language of the Mediterranean world.

Every educated person back then could speak, read, and write in Greek just like every educated person in modern times can speak a little English, read some English, and perhaps write in English. Koine Greek was not literary Greek. Literary Greek was the kind written by Greek poets and authors of the Greek tragedies. Koine Greek was the kind of Greek used in personal letters, legal documents, and other nonliterary texts.

New Testament scholars began to discover that most of the New Testament was written in Koine Greek. It was written in the language of the people. As a result, there was a strong desire to translate the New Testament into the language of the people.

Various translators chose to separate themselves from the formal English of Queen Elizabeth found in the King James Version. This same language was used in the English Revised Version and the American Standard Version. These translators wanted to produce fresh translations in the language of the people.

### *The Twentieth Century New Testament*

The first of these new translations was *The Twentieth Century New Testament* (1902). The introduction to a new edition of this translation published in 1961 by Moody Press provides an excellent description of the work:

*"The Twentieth Century New Testament is a smooth-flowing, accurate, easy-to-read translation that captivates its readers from start to finish. Born out of a desire to make the Bible readable and understandable, it is the product of the labors of a committee of twenty men and women who worked together over many years to construct, we believe under divine surveillance, this beautifully simple rendition of the word of God."*

### *The New Testament in Modern Speech*

A year after the publication of *The Twentieth Century New Testament*, Richard Weymouth published *The New Testament in Modern Speech* (1903). Weymouth received the first doctor of literature degree from the University of London. He was headmaster of a private school in London.

During his life, he spent time producing an edition of the Greek text. It was published in 1862. It was more accurate than the Textus Receptus. He then labored to produce an English translation of this Greek text in modern speech. His Greek text was called *The Resultant Greek Testament*. His translation was very well received. It has gone through several editions and many printings.

### *The New Testament: A New Translation*

Another new and fresh translation to appear in the early twentieth century was written by James Moffatt. Moffatt was a brilliant Scottish scholar. In 1913, he published his first edition of *The New Testament: A New Translation*. This was actually his second translation of the New Testament. His first was done in 1901. It was called *The Historical New Testament*. In his *New Translation*, Moffatt's goal was "to translate the New Testament exactly as one would translate any piece of contemporary Hellenistic prose."

His work was brilliant and independent from other versions. Unfortunately, it was based on Hermann von Soden's Greek New Testament, which scholars now know is quite defective.

### *The Complete Bible: An American Translation*

The earliest American modern speech translation was produced by Edgar J. Goodspeed. He was a professor of New Testament at the University of Chicago. He had criticized *The Twentieth Century New Testament*, Weymouth's version, and Moffatt's translation. As a consequence, he was challenged by some other scholars to do better. He took accepted the challenge. In 1923, he published *The New Testament: An American Translation*.

When he made this translation, he said he wanted to give his "version something of the force and freshness that reside in the original Greek." He said, "I wanted my translation to make on the reader something of the impression the New Testament must have made on its earliest readers. I wanted to invite the continuous reading of the whole book at a time." His translation was a success. An Old Testament translation followed. It was produced by J. M. Powis Smith and three other scholars. *The Complete Bible: An American Translation* was published in 1935.

### *The Revised Standard Version*

The English Revised Version and the American Standard Version gained a reputation of being

accurate study texts but very "wooden" or rigid in their construction. The translators who worked on the Revised Versions attempted to translate words consistently from the original language regardless of their context and sometimes even followed the word order of the Greek. This made for bad English and called for a new revision.

The demand for revision was strengthened by the fact that many important biblical manuscripts had been discovered in the 1930s and 1940s. These manuscripts are the Dead Sea Scrolls for the Old Testament and the Chester Beatty Papyri for the New Testament. It was felt that the fresh evidence displayed in these documents should be reflected in a revision.

The revision showed some textual changes in the book of Isaiah due to the Isaiah Scroll. It showed many changes in the Pauline Letters based on the Chester Beatty Papyrus, P46. There were other significant revisions. The story of the woman caught in adultery found in [John 7:52-8:11](#) was not included in the text. It was placed in the margin because none of the early manuscripts contain this story. Similarly, the ending to Mark found in [16:9-20](#) was not included in the text. It is not found in the two earliest manuscripts, Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus.

The International Council of Religious Education held the copyright to the American Standard Version. It authorized a new revision in 1937. The New Testament translators generally followed the 17th edition of the Nestle Text from 1941. The Old Testament translators followed the Masoretic Text. Both groups followed readings from other ancient sources when they were considered to be more accurate. The New Testament was published in 1946. The entire Bible with the Old Testament in 1952.

The principles of the revision were specified in the preface to the Revised Standard Version:

"The Revised Standard Version is not a new translation in the language of today. It is not a paraphrase which aims at striking idioms. It is a revision which seeks to preserve all that is best in the English Bible as it has been known and used throughout the years."

This revision was well received by many Protestant churches. It soon became their "standard" text. The Revised Standard Version was later published with the Apocrypha of the Old Testament in 1957, in a Catholic Edition (1965). It also appeared in what is called the *Common Bible*, which includes the Old

Testament, the New Testament, the Apocrypha, and the deuterocanonical books.

It had international endorsements by Protestants, Greek Orthodox, and Roman Catholics. Evangelical and fundamental Christians did not receive the Revised Standard Version very well. This was primarily because of one verse, [Isaiah 7:14](#). It reads, "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel." Evangelicals and fundamentalists contend that the text should read "virgin," not "young woman." As a result, the Revised Standard Version was avoided by many evangelical and fundamental Christians.

### *The New English Bible*

The New Testament of the Revised Standard Version was published in 1946. The Church of Scotland suggested to other churches in Great Britain that it was time for a completely new translation of the Bible to be done. Those who began this work asked the translators to produce a fresh translation in the modern language of the original languages. This was not to be a revision of any foregoing translation. It was not to be a literal translation.

C. H. Dodd led the translators. They were instructed to translate the meaning of the text into modern English. The Introduction to the New Testament was published in 1961. It was written by C. H. Dodd. It explains this more fully:

"The older translators, on the whole, considered that faithfulness to the original demanded that they should reproduce, as far as possible, characteristic features of the language in which it was written, such as the syntactical order of words, the structure and division of sentences, and even such irregularities of grammar as were indeed natural enough to authors writing in the easy language of popular Hellenistic Greek, but less natural when turned into English. The present translators were enjoined to replace Greek constructions and idioms by those of contemporary English."

"This meant a different theory and practice of translation, and one which laid a heavier burden on the translators. Fidelity in translation was not to mean keeping the general framework of the original intact while replacing Greek words by English words more or less equivalent. . . . Thus we have not felt obliged (as did the Revisers of 1881) to make an effort to render the same Greek word everywhere by the same English word. We have in

this respect returned to the wholesome practice of King James's men, who (as they expressly state in their preface) recognized no such obligation. We have conceived our task to be that of understanding the original as precisely as we could (using all available aids), and then saying again in our own native idiom what we believed the author to be saying in his."

The entire *New English Bible* was published in 1970. It was well received in Great Britain and in the United States. The expressions used in the translation are extremely British. It was praised for its good literary style. The translators were very experimental, producing renderings never before printed in an English version. They adopted certain readings from various Hebrew and Greek manuscripts never before adopted. As a result, *The New English Bible* was both highly praised for its ingenuity and severely criticized for its liberty.

### *The Good News Bible: Today's English Version*

The New Testament in Today's English Version is also known as *Good News for Modern Man*. It was published by the American Bible Society in 1966. The translation was originally done by Robert Bratcher and then further refined by the American Bible Society. Bratcher was a research associate of the translations department of the American Bible Society.

The translation was heavily promoted by several Bible societies and very affordable. It sold more than 35 million copies within six years of the time of printing. The New Testament translation was based upon the first edition of the *Greek New Testament*. This was published by the United Bible Societies in 1966.

The translation is a natural version in modern and simple English. The translation was greatly influenced by the linguistic theory of dynamic equivalence. Dynamic equivalence is a translation method that is more thought-for-thought rather than a literal translation. It was quite successful in providing English readers with a translation that accurately reflects the meaning of the original texts. This is explained in the preface to the New Testament:

"This translation of the New Testament has been prepared by the American Bible Society for people who speak English as their mother tongue or as an acquired language. As a distinctly new translation, it does not conform to traditional vocabulary or style, but seeks to express the meaning of the Greek

text in words and forms accepted as standard by people everywhere who employ English as a means of communication. Today's English Version of the New Testament attempts to follow, in this century, the example set by the authors of the New Testament books, who, for the most part, wrote in the standard, or common, form of the Greek language used throughout the Roman Empire."

Because of the success of the New Testament, the American Bible Society was asked by other Bible societies to make an Old Testament translation following the same principles used in the New Testament. The entire Bible was published in 1976. It is known as the *Good News Bible: Today's English Version*.

### *The Living Bible*

In 1962, Kenneth Taylor published a paraphrase of the New Testament letters in a volume called *Living Letters*. This new dynamic paraphrase was written in common language. It became well-received and widely celebrated. It was praised for its ability to communicate the message of God's Word to the common man.

In the beginning, it was distributed widely because of the endorsement of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. The association actively publicized the book and distributed thousands of free copies.

Taylor continued to paraphrase other portions of the Bible and publish successive volumes.

1. *Living Prophecies* (1965)
2. *Living Gospels* (1966)
3. *Living Psalms* (1967)
4. *Living Lessons of Life and Love* (1968)
5. *Living Books of Moses* (1969)
6. *Living History of Moses* (1970).

The entire Living Bible was published in 1971. The *Living New Testament* was printed in 1966.

Using the American Standard Version as his working text, Taylor rephrased the Bible into modern speech. Taylor wanted anyone even a child to understand the message of the original writers. In the preface to *The Living Bible*, Taylor explains his view of paraphrasing:

To paraphrase is to say something in different words than the author used. It is a restatement of the author's thoughts, using different words than

he did. This book is a paraphrase of the Old and New Testaments. Its purpose is to say as exactly as possible what the writers of the Scriptures meant and to say it simply, expanding where necessary for a clear understanding by the modern reader.

Many modern readers have greatly appreciated the fact that *The Living Bible* made God's Word clear to them. Taylor's paraphrase has been criticized for being too interpretive. That is the nature of paraphrases. It is also the danger as well. Taylor was aware of this when he made the paraphrase. Again, the preface clarifies:

"There are dangers in paraphrases, as well as values. For whenever the author's exact words are not translated from the original languages, there is a possibility that the translator, however honest, may be giving the English reader something that the original writer did not mean to say."

*The Living Bible* has been very popular among English readers worldwide. More than 40 million copies have been sold by the publishing house Taylor specifically created to publish *The Living Bible*. The company is called Tyndale House Publishers. It is named after William Tyndale. He is the father of modern English translations of the Bible.

### *The New American Standard Bible*

Two modern translations are both revisions of the American Standard Version (1901). They are the Revised Standard Version (1952) and the *New American Standard Bible* (1971).

The Lockman Foundation is a nonprofit Christian corporation committed to evangelism. It promoted this revision of the American Standard Version because "the producers of this translation were filled with the belief that interest in the American Standard Version 1901 should be renewed and increased" (from the preface).

Indeed, the American Standard Version was a major work of scholarship and a very accurate translation. However, its popularity was shrinking. It was fast disappearing from the scene. So the Lockman Foundation organized a team of 32 scholars to prepare a new revision. These scholars were all committed to the inspiration of Scripture. They wanted to produce a literal translation of the Bible. They believed that such a translation "brings the contemporary reader as close as possible to the actual wording and grammatical structure of the original writers" (from the preface).

The translators of the *New American Standard Bible* were told by the Lockman Foundation to follow the original languages of the Holy Scriptures as closely as possible. They were also told to obtain a fluent and readable style according to current English usage. After the *New American Standard Bible* was published in 1963 for the New Testament and in 1971 for the entire Bible. It received a mixed response. Some critics liked its literal accuracy, while others sharply criticized its language for hardly being contemporary or modern.

On the whole, the *New American Standard Bible* became respected as a good study Bible that accurately reflects the wording of the original languages yet is not a good translation for Bible reading. Additionally, this translation was originally supposed to follow the 23d edition of the Nestle text. It tends to follow the Textus Receptus. This is true in its inclusion of passages considered fake by most modern scholars.

### *The New International Version*

The New International Version is a completely new rendering of the original languages. It was completed by an international group of more than 100 scholars. These scholars worked many years and in several groups to produce an excellent thought-for-thought translation. It was translated into contemporary English for private and public use.

The New International Version is called "international" because it was prepared by distinguished scholars from English-speaking countries such as the United States, Canada, Great Britain, Australia, and New Zealand. It is also called international because the translators sought to use vocabulary common to the major English-speaking nations of the world.

The translators of the New International Version sought to make a version that was midway between a literal rendering as in the *New American Standard Bible* and a free paraphrase such as in *The Living Bible*. Their goal was to communicate in English the thought of the original writers. This is succinctly explained in the original preface to the New Testament:

"Certain convictions and aims guided the translators. They are all committed to the full authority and complete trustworthiness of the Scriptures. Therefore, their first concern was the accuracy of the translation and its fidelity to the thought of the New Testament writers. While they

weighed the significance of the lexical and grammatical details of the Greek text, they have striven for more than a word-for-word translation. Because thought patterns and syntax differ from language to language, faithful communication of the meaning of the writers of the New Testament demanded frequent modifications in sentence structure and constant regard for the contextual meanings of words."

"Concern for clarity of style—that it should be idiomatic without being idiosyncratic, contemporary without being dated—also motivated the translators and their consultants. They have consistently aimed at simplicity of expression, with sensitive attention to the connotation and sound of the chosen word. At the same time, they endeavored to avoid a sameness of style in order to reflect the varied styles and moods of the New Testament writers."

The New Testament of the New International Version was published in 1973 and the entire Bible in 1978. This version has been phenomenally successful. Millions and millions of readers have adopted the New International Version as their "Bible." Since 1987 it has outsold the King James Version. The King James Version was the best-seller for centuries. This is a major sign of its popularity and acceptance in the Christian community.

The New International Version was sponsored by the New York Bible Society. The New York Bible Society is now the International Bible Society. It is published by Zondervan Publishing House. It has become a standard version used for private reading and pulpit reading in many English-speaking countries.

### *Two Modern Catholic Translations: The Jerusalem Bible and The New American Bible*

In 1943, Pope Pius XII issued the famous encyclical encouraging Roman Catholics to read and study the Scriptures. At the same time, the pope recommended that the Scriptures should be translated from the original languages. Previously, all Catholic translations were based on the Latin Vulgate. This includes Knox's translation. This translation began in 1939. The New Testament was published in 1944 and the whole Bible in 1955.

The first complete Catholic Bible to be translated from the original languages is *The Jerusalem Bible*. It was published in England in 1966. *The Jerusalem Bible* is the English counterpart to a French



translation entitled *La Bible de Jerusalem*. The French translation was “the result of decades of research and biblical scholarship” (from the preface to *The Jerusalem Bible*), published by the scholars of the Dominican Biblical School of Jerusalem.

This Bible, which includes the Apocrypha and deuterocanonical books, contains many study helps. These include introductions to each book of the Bible, extensive notes on various passages, and maps. The study tools are an intricate part of the whole translation. It is the belief of Roman Catholic leadership that laypeople should be given interpretive tools in their reading of the sacred text.

The study tools in *The Jerusalem Bible* were translated from the French. The Bible text itself was translated from the original languages with the help of the French translation. The translation of the text was produced under the editorship of Alexander Jones. It is considerably freer than other translations, such as the Revised Standard Version. The translators sought to capture the meaning of the original writings in a “vigorous, contemporary literary style” (from the preface to *The Jerusalem Bible*).

The first American Catholic Bible to be translated from the original languages is *The New American Bible*. This is not to be confused with the *New American Standard Bible*. Although this translation was published in 1970, work had begun on this version several decades before. Prior to Pope Pius’s letter, an American translation of the New Testament based on the Latin Vulgate was published. It was known as the Confraternity Version. After the pope’s letter, the Old Testament was translated from the Hebrew Masoretic Text and the New Testament. It was based on the 25th edition of the Greek Nestle-Aland text. *The New American Bible* has short introductions to each book of the Bible and textual notes. Kubo and Specht provide a just description of the translation itself (*So Many Versions?* p 165):

“The translation itself is simple, clear, and straightforward and reads very smoothly. It is good American English, not as pungent and colorful as the N.E.B. [New English Bible]. Its translations are not striking but neither are they clumsy. They seem to be more conservative in the sense that they tend not to stray from the original. That is not to say that this is a literal translation, but it is more faithful.”

### *Jewish Translations*

In the 20th century, some very important Jewish translations of the Bible were published. The Jewish Publication Society created a translation of the Hebrew Scriptures called *The Holy Scriptures according to the Masoretic Text, A New Translation* (published in 1917). The preface to this translation explains its purpose:

“It aims to combine the spirit of Jewish tradition with the results of biblical scholarship, ancient, medieval and modern. It gives to the Jewish world a translation of the Scriptures done by men imbued with the Jewish consciousness, while the non-Jewish world, it is hoped, will welcome a translation that presents many passages from the Jewish traditional point of view.”

In 1955, the Jewish Publication Society appointed a new committee of seven respected Jewish scholars to make a new Jewish translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. The translation called the New Jewish Version was published in 1962. A second, improved edition was published in 1973. This work is not a revision of *The Holy Scriptures according to the Masoretic Text*. It is a completely new translation in modern English. The translators attempted to produce a version that would carry the same message to modern man as the original did to the world of ancient times.

### *Revisions of the Late 20th Century*

In the 1980s, several significant revisions appeared:

1. The New King James Version (1982)
2. *The New Jerusalem Bible* (1986)
3. *The New American Bible*, revised New Testament (1986)
4. The Revised English Bible (1989), which is a radical revision of *The New English Bible*.

Other translations, such as the New International Version and Today’s English Version, were also revised in the 1980s but not publicized as such. Two other important revisions in the late 1980s and 1990s are the New Revised Standard Version and the New Living Translation.

One reason for this continual influx of new revisions and translations is the ever-changing consensus regarding the original text of the Bible. Most contemporary translators of the Old

Testament use the Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Bible because it is generally considered the most authoritative standard text of the Old Testament. At the same time, they make use of the findings of the Dead Sea Scrolls and a few other important versions, including the Septuagint. The Masoretic Text is published in an edition called *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (1967, 1977) with up-to-date textual notes.

Most translators of the New Testament use two standard editions of the Greek New Testament. These are the *Greek New Testament* published by the United Bible Societies (fifth revised edition, 2014) and *Novum Testamentum Graece*, edited by Nestle and Aland (28th edition, 2012). These two volumes have the same text. They differ in punctuation and textual notes. They represent the latest in modern textual scholarship.

Most contemporary translators and revisers also make it their goal to reflect the changes that have occurred in the English language. One of the most obvious recent changes has been in the area of gender-inclusive language. Today's English readers have come to expect that translations will not employ unnecessarily male-dominant language. This creates problems for modern translators of the ancient biblical text. It was originally written in a male-oriented culture. Modern translators must respect both the ancient milieu and the modern audience. Often the original language itself allows a rendering that is gender-inclusive.

For example, the Greek word *anthropos*, traditionally rendered "man," really means "human being" or "person." A different Greek word, *aner*, specifically refers to a male. Likewise, in Hebrew the word '*adam*, traditionally translated "man" usually means "human being," while '*ish* specifically designates an adult male.

There are other occasions where the original language is male-oriented primarily because there is no neutral gender to be used. In these cases, the biblical writers defaulted to the masculine gender. For example, in the Pentateuch most of the laws are stated in language that is replete with masculine pronouns. Since it is clear that the recipients of these laws were both males and females, many translators generally use gender-neutral language.

### *The New King James Version*

The New King James Version (NKJV) was published in 1982. It is a revision of the King James Version, which is itself a literal translation. As such, the New

King James Version follows the historic precedent of the Authorized Version in maintaining a literal approach to translation. The revisers have called this method of translation "complete equivalence." This means that the revisers sought to provide a complete representation of all the information in the original text with respect to the history of usage and etymology of words in their contexts.

The most distinctive feature of the New King James Version is its underlying original text. The revisers of the NKJV New Testament have chosen to use the Textus Receptus rather than modern critical editions. This includes the Majority Text and the Nestle-Aland text. By way of concession, they have footnoted any significant textual variation from the Majority Text and modern critical editions. The Majority Text is the text supported by the majority of all known New Testament manuscripts. It hardly differs from the Textus Receptus.

Thus, there are few significant differences noted. There are well over a thousand differences footnoted regarding the Nestle-Aland/United Bible Societies' text. This means that there are at least that many significant differences between the Textus Receptus and these modern critical editions.

Though exhibiting an antiquated text, the language of the NKJV is modern. The English of Queen Elizabeth of the original King James Version has been replaced with contemporary American English. Though much of the sentence structure of the NKJV is still dated and Stiff. Contemporary readers like the King James Version but can't understand its old language will appreciate this revision.

### *The Revised English Bible*

The Revised English Bible was published in 1989. It is a revision of *The New English Bible* (NEB). The *New English Bible* was published in 1971. The NEB gained such popularity in British churches and was being regularly used for public reading. Several British churches decided there should be a revision of the NEB to keep the language current and the text up-to-date with modern biblical scholarship.

For the Old Testament, the revisers used the Masoretic Text as it appears in *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (1967, 1977). They also made use of the Dead Sea Scrolls and a few other important versions, including the Septuagint.

The revisers of the New Testament used Nestle-Aland's *Novum Testamentum Graece* (27th edition,



1993) as their base text. This choice resulted in several textual changes from *The New English Bible* text, which followed a very eclectic text. The Greek text used by the NEB was produced by R. V. G. Tasker *after* the English translation had been published. This Greek text was decided upon by the translation committee on a verse-by-verse basis.

The resulting Greek text was very uneven and yet very interesting. The translators of the NEB adopted readings never before put into print by English translators. The scholars working on The Revised English Bible eliminated many of these readings. They did so in hopes of providing a more balanced text.

### *New Revised Standard Version*

The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) was published in 1989. It is an excellent example of the current trend to publish revisions rather than new translations. Bruce Metzger was the chair of the original revision committee. In the preface to this revision, he wrote:

"The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible is an authorized revision of the Revised Standard Version, published in 1952, which was a revision of the American Standard Version, published in 1901, which, in turn, embodied earlier revisions of the King James Version, published in 1611."

The need for issuing a revision of the Revised Standard Version of the Bible arises from three circumstances:

1. The acquisition of still older Biblical manuscripts
2. Further investigation of linguistic features of the text
3. Changes in preferred English usage

Metzger's three reasons for producing the New Revised Standard Version are essentially the same reasons behind all revisions of Bible translations.

Of all the translations, the NRSV most closely follows the text of NA26/UBS3. No doubt this is due to Bruce Metzger's involvement in both editorial committees—a leading member of the NA26/UBS3 committee and the chair for the NRSV committee.

Perhaps the most notable feature of the NRSV is its attention to gender-inclusive language. The translators respected the historicity of the ancient texts. They also attempted to make this new revision more palpable to readers who prefer

gender-inclusive language. They did this by avoiding unnecessarily masculine renderings wherever possible.

For example, in the New Testament letters, the believers are referred to with a word that is traditionally rendered "brothers" (*adelphoi*). It is clear that these letters were addressed to all the believers including both male and female. Thus, the NRSV translators have used such phrases as "brothers and sisters" or "friends" and including a footnote saying "Greek, brothers." The translators did this in order to represent the historical situation while remaining sensitive to modern readers.

Metzger and the other translators were careful not to overemphasize the gender-inclusiveness principle. Some readers had been hoping for a more radical revision regarding gender-inclusiveness. Many of these readers were hoping that the revision would incorporate this principle with language about God. Such readers wanted phrases such as "God our father" to be changed to "God our parent." The NRSV revisers, under the leadership of Metzger, decided against this approach. They considered it an inaccurate reflection of the original text's intended meaning.

### *New Living Translation*

With over 40 million copies in print, *The Living Bible* has been a very popular version of the Bible for more than 30 years. But various criticisms motivated the translator of *The Living Bible* to produce a revision of his paraphrase. Kenneth Taylor was the translator. Under the sponsorship of Tyndale House Publishers, Taylor's company, *The Living Bible* underwent a thorough revision. More than 90 evangelical scholars from various theological backgrounds and denominations worked for seven years to produce the New Living Translation (NLT). As a result, the NLT is a version that is exegetically accurate and idiomatically powerful.

The scholars carefully revised the text of *The Living Bible* according to the most reliable editions of the Hebrew and Greek texts. For the Old Testament, the revisers used the Masoretic Text as it appears in *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (1967, 1977). They also made use of the Dead Sea Scrolls and a few other important versions, including the Septuagint. The revisers of the New Testament used the text of NA27/UBS4 as their base text.

The translation method behind the NLT has been described as “dynamic equivalence” or “functional equivalence.” The goal of this kind of translation is to produce in English the closest natural equivalent of the message of the Hebrew and Greek texts. Translators attempt to produce this in both in meaning and in style.

Such a translation should attempt to have the same impact upon modern readers as the original had upon its audience. To translate the Bible this way requires that the text be interpreted accurately and then rendered in understandable, current English. In doing this, the translators attempted to enter into the same thought pattern as the author.

They sought to present the same idea, connotation, and effect in the receptor language. The translators wanted to guard against personal subjectivism and ensure the messages accuracy. The NLT was produced by a large group of scholars who were each well-studied in his or her particular area. To ensure that the translation would be extremely readable and understandable, a group of stylists adjusted the wording to make it clear and fluent.

A thought-for-thought translation created by a group of capable scholars has the potential to represent the intended meaning of the original text even more accurately than a word-for-word translation. This is illustrated by the various renderings of the Hebrew word *hesed*. This term cannot be adequately translated by any single English word because it can connote love, mercy, grace, kindness, faithfulness, and loyalty. The context must determine which English term is selected for translation not the lexicon.

The value of a thought-for-thought translation can be illustrated by comparing [1 Kings 2:10](#) in the King James Version, the New International Version, and the New Living Translation.

1. “So David slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David” (KJV).
2. “Then David rested with his fathers and was buried in the City of David” (NIV).
3. “Then David died and was buried in the City of David” (NLT).

Only the New Living Translation clearly translates the intended meaning of the Hebrew idiom “slept with his fathers” into contemporary English (from the introduction to the New Living Translation).

## Vespasian

Vespasian was a Roman general who became emperor after a time of war and confusion. He brought peace and stability to the Roman Empire. He was born in AD 9 and died in 79.

### *Early Life and Rise to Power*

Vespasian was born into a simple family. His father worked as a tax collector. In AD 66, Vespasian was sent to Palestine (the land of Israel) to stop a Jewish revolt.

In AD 69, during a time of civil war, the Roman army made Vespasian emperor. Rome needed a strong and peaceful leader, and Vespasian gave people hope.

### *His Rule as Emperor*

Vespasian fixed Rome’s money problems and reorganized the army. He also helped restore order and good leadership. A Roman writer named Suetonius said that Vespasian did not punish innocent people. He was sad when criminals had to be killed. He tried to bring back Rome’s older and better ways of governing.

Nero had managed money poorly. To raise money, Vespasian created new taxes and raised some old ones. Some people said he was greedy. But Vespasian used the money to help poor senators and former leaders.

Vespasian created new taxes and raised existing taxes. He did this because Nero had managed money poorly. As a result, some people called him greedy, but he helped poor senators and former leaders with money.

### *Building Projects and Reforms*

Vespasian repaired cities that had been damaged by fire or earthquakes. He supported the arts and sciences. In Rome, he built or repaired many important buildings, including:

- The Temple of Peace, after the destruction of Jerusalem
- A public forum (meeting place)
- The Capitol building, which he restored
- The Colosseum, which he began (his son Titus later finished it)

### *A Time of Peace*

During his ten years as emperor, Vespasian helped bring peace to the empire. His son Titus ended the war in Palestine. Other generals stopped a rebellion in Germany.

People began to trust the Roman government again. Vespasian brought back good moral values and chose his sons Titus and Domitian to rule after him.

*See also* Caesars, The.

## Vestments

*See* Priests and Levites.

## Vine of Sodom

Designation for a plant that produces an enticing but inedible fruit ([Dt 32:32](#)). *See* Plants (Gourd, Wild).

## Vine, Wild Vine

A vine is any plant with a flexible stem that climbs, twines, or spreads along a surface or support. The common grapevine (*Vitis vinifera*) is mentioned throughout the Bible. The fruitful vine ([Ezekiel 17:5-10](#)) and the vine brought out of Egypt ([Psalm 80:8](#)) were used as symbols of the Jewish people. Jesus compared himself to the true vine, with his disciples being the branches ([John 15:1-6](#)).

The grapevine of Europe, Asia, and Africa sometimes grows like a tree, with stems up to 45.7 centimeters (1.5 feet) across. The branches are often trained on a trellis and can produce bunches of grapes weighing 4.5 to 5.4 kilograms (10 to 12 pounds), with individual grapes as large as small plums. Some bunches have been known to weigh as

much as 11.8 kilograms (26 pounds). The vines of the Holy Land were always famous for their abundant growth and for the huge clusters of grapes they produced. This explains why the spies sent to explore the promised land needed a pole to carry some of the grape clusters back ([Numbers 13:23-24](#)).

The wild grape (*Vitis orientalis*) is mentioned in [Isaiah 5:2-4](#), [Jeremiah 2:21](#), and [Ezekiel 15:2-6](#). It is known as the native wild fox grape and has small, black, sour berries about the size of currants with very little juice.

*See* Vines, Vineyard; Wine.

## Vinedresser

*See* Vines, Vineyard.

## Vinegar

*See* Food and Food Preparation.

## Vines, Vineyard

Vines or grapevines are plants cultivated for the production of grapes, raisins, and wine. A vineyard is a cultivated area of grapevines.

Scripture mentions grapevines in both literal and figurative senses. Grapevines probably originated in the Ararat region ([Genesis 9:20](#)). The vine was also cultivated in ancient Egypt, where tomb murals depict wine-making. The Canaanites provided wine for Abraham ([14:18](#)). Moses described the vineyards in the promised land ([Deuteronomy 6:11](#)).

### *Why Were Grapevines Important in Bible Times?*

Excellent grapes from the valleys and plains provided fruit and wine to enhance the bland diet of the Hebrews ([Numbers 13:20, 24](#); [Judges 14:5; 15:5](#)). Wine was an important product that people bought and sold. This trade was very active during the time of Israel's last kings (compare [Ezekiel 27:18](#)). It continued to be important later when the Greeks and Romans ruled over the land. For the Hebrews, an ideal picture of life was of a man peacefully in one place, cultivating his plot of land, and sitting under his vine ([1 Kings 4:25](#)).

### *Growing and Harvesting Grapes*

A protective hedge or fence surrounded the typical vineyard. At harvest time, guards would stay in a watchtower to guard the crop from thieves ([Job 24:18](#); [Isaiah 1:8](#); [Mark 12:1](#)). The vines were planted in rows in the enclosed area. As the plants grew, the tendrils were trained along supports to raise the fruit-bearing branches off the ground ([Ezekiel 17:6](#)). Vinedressers pruned and tended the vines ([Leviticus 25:3](#); [Isaiah 61:5](#); [Joel 3:10](#); [John 15:2](#)). At harvest time the mature fruit was picked and taken to the winepresses ([Hosea 9:2](#)). The treading of the grapes was a celebratory occasion ([Isaiah 16:10](#); [Jeremiah 25:30](#)). The fermenting juice was collected in new goatskin bags or large pottery jars ([Matthew 9:17](#)).

### *The Role of Vineyards in Daily Life*

Grape harvest workers could be exempted from military service, showing its economic importance. Taxes and debts were often paid with wine instead of money. The law provided for the poor to glean in the vineyards as in the wheat fields, collecting any grapes or grain that were left behind after harvest ([Leviticus 19:9-10](#)). Vines that did not produce fruit were used for producing charcoal ([Ezekiel 15:4](#); [John 15:6](#)).

### *Jesus's Teaching About Vines and Wine*

Jesus frequently used the vineyard as a background for his parables ([Matthew 20:1-16](#); [21:28-43](#); [Mark 12:1-11](#); [Luke 13:6-9](#); [20:9-18](#)). Wine-making methods were commonly known and understood. Jesus's story of placing new wine in old wineskins was easily recognizable for New Testament listeners ([Matthew 9:17](#)). In a symbolic sense, Christ described himself as the true vine, and his blood became the sacramental wine of communion ([John 15:1-11](#)).

*See also* Agriculture; Plants (Vine).

## **Viol**

The King James Version translation of harp in [Isaiah 5:12](#); [14:11](#); [Amos 5:23](#); and [6:5](#).

*See* Musical Instruments (Nebel).

## **Viper**

A viper is a poisonous snake with long, hollow fangs for injecting venom.

In the Bible, the word "viper" can refer to the same kinds of venomous snakes as the word "adder." Different Bible translations sometimes use one term or the other for the same snake ([Matthew 3:7](#); [Acts 28:3](#)). These snakes can deliver a dangerous or deadly bite.

*See* Adder; *see also* Animals (Adder).

## **Virgin**

A word used to describe women or metaphorically for places, nations, and the church. It describes a woman who is sexually mature but has not had sex. Mary, mother of Jesus, is an obvious example ([Matthew 1:18-25](#)).

The Old Testament puts a high value on remaining a virgin before marriage. One of Rebekah's qualities that made her a suitable bride for Isaac was her virginity ([Genesis 24:16](#)). The law said that priests must marry only virgins ([Leviticus 21:7, 13-14](#)). They should be the men whose lives most closely conformed to God's standards.

This reflects the Bible's teaching on marriage. It idealizes exclusive faithfulness. The New Testament expresses that ideal by banning premarital sex ([1 Corinthians 6:13, 18](#)). It uses "virgin" to describe Christians who are faithful to their Lord ([Revelation 14:4](#); compare [2 Corinthians 11:2](#)).

Negatively, the Old Testament highlights the same principle in its penalties for losing a woman's virginity. If the man is morally responsible, he must either marry her or pay her father ([Exodus 22:16-17](#)). If the woman herself is to blame, the punishment is death ([Deuteronomy 22:20-21](#)). The Old Testament says little, however, to commend lifelong virginity. Jeremiah was told not to marry, only to reinforce God's warning of coming judgment ([Jeremiah 16:2](#)). From the woman's point of view, it was a tragedy to remain an unmarried virgin and childless for life (compare [Judges 11:37](#)).

The New Testament values marriage, but it more clearly shows the benefits of a commitment to virginity for Christian men and women. Celibacy, for some, is God's gift, declared Paul, because it has positive gains for Christian service ([1 Corinthians](#)

[7:7, 25–38](#)). Jesus commended those who “live like eunuchs” for the kingdom of heaven’s sake ([Matthew 19:12](#)).

See also Family Life and Relations; Marriage, Marriage Customs; Sex, Sexuality; Virgin Birth of Jesus; Woman.

## Virgin Birth of Jesus

The doctrine, based on the birth stories in [Matthew 1](#) and [Luke 1–2](#), says Jesus Christ was conceived by the holy spirit and born to the virgin Mary. The idea of the Incarnation (God becoming human) and Jesus’s divine and human natures rely on this historical event. However, rationalists and literary critics argue that early Christians invented this miracle.

### *The Old Testament Prophecy*

The King James Version of [Isaiah 7:14](#) says a “virgin” will “be with child and will give birth to a son...Immanuel.” [Matthew 1:22–23](#) clearly states that this was fulfilled with Jesus’s birth. This passage has sparked much debate, especially after the Revised Standard Version changed “virgin” to “young woman.” This change was due to the ambiguity of the term in the original manuscripts. The Hebrew word *‘almah* generally refers to a young girl who has reached puberty and is of marriageable age. Another Hebrew word, *bethulah*, specifically means a woman who is a virgin. However, the Septuagint translators rendered *‘almah* as *parthenos*, which does mean a virgin.

These linguistic considerations lead to four interpretations:

1. The “virgin” ([Isaiah 7:14](#)) refers to Ahaz’s new wife, and the son is Hezekiah. However, Hezekiah was nine years old when Ahaz began to reign. Therefore, this prophecy must refer to the future.

2. She was Isaiah’s wife, and their son was Maher-shalal-hash-baz. Many scholars support this interpretation because the definite article with *‘almah* suggests that “the woman” was known to Isaiah and Ahaz. Additionally, [Isaiah 7:14–16](#) seems to indicate that the prophecy was to be fulfilled during Isaiah’s time. The challenge is that Isaiah’s wife already had a son, so she could not be called *‘almah*.
3. The prophecy is entirely about the Messiah. This is the traditional evangelical view. It is based on the child’s name, Immanuel, meaning “God with us,” and the references ([Isaiah 9:6–7](#); [11:1–5](#)), which indicate a divine person.
4. Many evangelicals have recently chosen a fourth interpretation. This view accepts both the historical fulfillment in Isaiah’s time and the future fulfillment. It considers the historical fulfillment in [Isaiah 7:15–16](#) and sees the future fulfillment through the virgin birth of Jesus, as shown in [Matthew 1:22–23](#).

### *The Gospel Records*

Neither Mark nor John describes the birth of Christ; only Matthew and Luke do. Both agree that Mary, a “virgin,” conceived by the holy spirit and gave birth to Jesus. Matthew’s account is simpler and more direct, attributing Jesus’s birth to divine origins and emphasizing its importance. Jesus is called the “Christ [or Messiah],” the son of David ([Matthew 1:1](#)), who comes to start God’s kingdom. This is shown by fulfilling Isaiah’s prophecy ([Matthew 1:22–23](#)) and by his unique conception ([1:18–20](#)). Jesus is “God with us,” here to “save His people from their sins” ([Matthew 1:21](#)). The scene where Joseph plans to quietly divorce Mary highlights the miraculous conception.

Luke told the Nativity story from Mary’s perspective. The angel Gabriel visited her and announced she would give birth to the Messiah ([Luke 1:26–38](#)). She conceived miraculously by the holy spirit, as foretold by Gabriel: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you...So the Holy One to be born will



be called the Son of God." ([Luke 1:35](#)). Luke portrayed Mary as devoutly obedient to God's purposes.

### *Theological Significance for the Church*

From the start of the church, the belief in the virgin birth was key to understanding Christ's divine nature. Early church leaders emphasized this event as proof of Jesus's incarnation and divinity. Justin Martyr and Ignatius defended the virgin birth against critics in the early second century, showing it was already a well-established belief. Over the next three centuries, debates about the virgin birth were significant. Gnostics like Marcion argued that Christ came directly from heaven and was never truly human. Meanwhile, groups like the Arians, who denied Jesus's divinity, also rejected the virgin birth, claiming Jesus was "adopted" as God's Son at his baptism. The Council of Nicaea in AD 325 confirmed Jesus was truly God, and the Council of Chalcedon in AD 451 declared Jesus was both human and divine, a "hypostatic union" of true natures. The Apostles' Creed of the fifth century summarizes this by stating, "I believe in ... Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary." Most creeds link the virgin birth to Jesus's sinlessness, as his divine nature is the source of his sinlessness.

From the beginning, as shown in Matthew and Luke and by early church writers, the virgin birth has been a key church doctrine. It symbolizes Jesus's dual nature: born of the holy spirit and a woman, he is both God and man.

*See Christology; Incarnation; Jesus Christ, Life and Teachings of; Virgin.*

## **Vision, Visions**

A vision is when someone sees something with their eyes or in their mind. In the Bible, visions usually mean special messages that God showed to prophets.

### *Types of Visions*

#### **Visions About the Present**

In early Old Testament prophecy (when prophets first began speaking God's messages), there are examples of special sight that others did not have. The people saw this special sight as proof that someone was truly a prophet of God.

Samuel was a "seer" or visionary. He was able to "see" where Saul's lost donkeys were and to tell him where they were ([1 Samuel 9:19-20](#)). Elisha was able to follow Gehazi's wrongful actions "in spirit" and confront him on his return ([2 Kings 5:26](#)). This special ability to see things was a gift from God that he gave only to his prophets. These visions showed the prophets things that were happening on earth at that time.

#### **Visions About the Future**

God also gave prophets revelatory visions that showed things about the future. Sometimes, God shared these messages through dreams. Both visions and dreams were true ways that God revealed things to His prophets. The main difference seems to be that visions happened during the day, while dreams came during sleep.

There are different types of revelatory vision. One type was when God's Spirit completely took over the prophet's senses. For example, Ezekiel could be spiritually moved to different places while in this special state ([Ezekiel 8:3; 40:2](#)). Daniel's vision in [Daniel 8](#) was probably of the same type, and so perhaps was Jeremiah's experience in [Jeremiah 13:4-7](#).

#### **Visions of Ordinary Things with Special Meaning**

Another type was when God helped prophets see deeper meaning in ordinary things. For instance, God showed Amos a basket of summer fruit, but it had special meaning. God "caused" Amos "to see" the basket ([Amos 8:1-2](#)). Jeremiah had similar visions when God showed him an almond branch and a pot that was tipping over ([Jeremiah 1:11-13](#)).

#### **Heavenly Visions**

There was also a middle type of vision, where prophets saw pictures of heavenly things. Isaiah saw visions of heaven ([1 Kings 22:19-22; Isaiah 6](#)). The apostle John had similar visions when he wrote the book of Revelation.

### *How God Communicated Through Visions*

Prophets could receive God's messages by seeing things or by hearing God's voice. Typically, a spoken message was communicated with an image the prophet could see so that the seeing and hearing took place at the same time. This was the case with Isaiah, who both "saw the Lord" and heard his voice.

Sometimes, even when prophets only heard God's voice, people called it a "vision" because it was still a message from God. In many places in the Bible, it is hard to tell if "vision" means the prophet mostly saw something or if it just means they received any kind of message from God (for example [Ezekiel 12:21-28](#)). Often, "vision" is used simply as a technical term for any message from God, even if it was just words the prophet heard. When God first called Samuel to be a prophet, the Bible specifically uses the word "vision" to describe this event ([1 Samuel 3:15](#)).

The prophetic books in the Bible contain messages from God delivered through prophets and often include visions, warnings, and promises. Several of the prophetic books have the word "vision" in their first verse ([Isaiah 1:1](#); [Obadiah 1:1](#); [Nahum 1:1](#)). When Nathan told David about God's special promise to him (God's covenant), this message is also called a "vision" ([2 Samuel 7:17](#); [1 Chronicles 17:15](#); [Psalms 89:19](#)). In [Daniel 9:24](#) "to seal both vision and prophet" means to confirm that Jeremiah's prophecy (mentioned in verse [2](#)) was true and would happen.

There is a famous verse in Proverbs that says, "Where there is no vision, the people cast off restraint" ([Proverbs 29:18](#)). In this verse, "vision" means the messages God gave through prophets. These prophetic messages were meant to help guide the people of Israel in how to live.

See Apocalypse; Dreams; Prophecy.

## Vophsi

A man who was appointed by Moses from the tribe of Naphtali to be one of the twelve spies sent to explore the land of Canaan ([Numbers 13:14](#)).

## Vow, Vows

Serious promises or pledges made to God.

### *Vows as a Religious Practice*

Making vows to God is a religious practice mentioned often in Scripture. Most references to vows are found in the Old Testament, especially in the Psalms. There are some vows mentioned in the New Testament

Tithing, sacrifices and offerings, keeping the Sabbath, and circumcision were all commanded by

the Mosaic law. Making vows was not. For example, [Psalm 50:14](#) says, "Sacrifice a thank offering to God, and fulfill your vows to the Most High." The command is to keep or fulfill a pledge that has already been made. No order is given to make a promise, only to fulfill one when it is made. The practice is accepted and regulated but not demanded.

### *Types of Vows in the Bible*

The purpose of a vow is to win favor from the Lord, to express gratitude to him for some deliverance or benefit, or to prove absolute devotion to him. Personal dedication and separation to the Lord were the main features of the Nazirite vow. Samson, Samuel, and John the Baptist are the most familiar examples of those who took this type of vow. [Numbers 6:1-8](#) outlines the conditions of this commitment. Verses [13-21](#) tell how to be released from the vow. Women might also take this vow (verse [2](#)), and it might only be for a designated time. The Recabite clan pledged themselves to a simple and unsettled life. They are a compelling illustration of loyalty to the God of Israel ([Jeremiah 35](#)).

Some vows were taken as a type of bargain with God. At Bethel, Jacob promised God worship and the tithe if God would protect him and supply his needs ([Genesis 28:20-22](#)). Hannah pledged that if God would give her a son, she would return him to God ([1 Samuel 1:11, 27-28](#)). In the Psalms, paying a vow is often associated with thanksgiving for deliverance from danger or affliction (for example, [Psalms 22:24-25](#); [56:12-13](#)).

Once a vow is made, the obligation is serious. Not making a vow is not sin ([Deuteronomy 23:22](#)). Once declared, the vow must be kept ([Deuteronomy 23:21-23](#); see also [Numbers 30:2](#); [Ecclesiastes 5:4-6](#)).

### *Vows in the New Testament*

"Vow" is used only twice in the New Testament. Both uses are connected to the apostle Paul ([Acts 18:18](#); [21:23-24](#)). But the same principle is involved in the case of the word "Corban" ([Mark 7:11-13](#); compare [Matthew 15:5-6](#)). In these two passages, Jesus rebuked those who made a vow because the vow was a way to get out of another obligation. Money was involved in such a "gift" or "offering." But Jesus said that God did not want a gift designed to deny others of care.

Paul may have taken vows to avoid the common objections Jews and Jewish-Christian believers made about him. They often objected to the way Paul lifted the obligations of Mosaic law for gentile believers. Paul was in Jerusalem under the watch of Jewish authorities. He made it a point to join with four other Jewish believers in paying vows in the temple. His enemies then charged Paul with bringing Gentiles into the holy temple.

*See also* Covenant; Oath.

## Vulgate, the

The Latin version of the Bible. It is commonly identified as the work of Jerome. *See* Bible, Versions of the (Ancient).

## Vulture

A large bird of prey that eats dead animals (carriion). Vultures in the Holy Land belong to the hawk family (Accipitridae), subfamily Aegypiinae. There are four species:

- bearded vulture (also called the lammergeier),
- black vulture,
- Egyptian vulture,
- griffon vulture.

The smallest is the Egyptian vulture at about 61 centimeters (24 inches) long. The largest is the bearded vulture, the biggest flying bird in the Holy Land.

Most vultures are brown or black. They have short necks and short, hooked bills for tearing meat. All vultures except the bearded vulture have bare or down-covered heads and necks. This helps them feed deep inside a carcass without dirtying their feathers. Vultures have excellent eyesight but a poor sense of smell. They can spot food while soaring high in the sky. They nest in many types of places, and both parents care for the young.

### Beared Vulture

The bearded vulture or lammergeier (*Gypaetus barbatus*) is the largest vulture in the Holy Land. It is less common than other vultures. Its feathers are grayish brown with white streaks. It has a black tuft

of stiff hairs on its face. This gives it the name “bearded vulture.” Another name for it is “lamb vulture.”

The bearded vulture kills prey in a unique way. Its beak is not very strong. Instead, it carries the prey high into the air and drops it on rocks.

The bearded vulture especially likes to eat tortoises and bone marrow. After jackals and smaller vultures have eaten most of a carcass, the bearded vulture crushes the bones to get the marrow or swallows the bone pieces whole. For this reason it is also called the ossifrage, from a Latin word that means “bone crusher.”

The bearded vulture was an unclean bird under the Law of Moses ([Leviticus 11:13](#)).

### Black Vulture

The black vulture (*Aegypius monachus*) is a large bird of prey that is active during the day. It grows almost a meter (3 feet) long and has a wingspan of more than 2.7 meters (3 yards).

The black vulture has black feathers. Its head and the upper part of its neck are bald, like other birds that eat dead animals. It nests in the Jordan River Valley. It was common in Bible times but is now rare.

The black vulture listed in [Leviticus 11:13](#) and [Deuteronomy 14:12](#) is sometimes translated as “osprey.” In modern bird science, the black vulture and the osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) are different birds. The osprey is a fish-eating bird with brown and white feathers.

### Egyptian Vulture

The Egyptian vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*) is also called the gier eagle, pharaoh’s hen, or carrion vulture. Its feathers are mostly white. Its head has no feathers, and its neck is yellow. It is the smallest carrion-eating bird in the Holy Land, about 61 centimeters (24 inches) long.

The Egyptian vulture often breaks bones left by other vultures. It flies slowly and smoothly. Its call is a croaking sound.

The Bible may refer to it in the lists of unclean birds ([Leviticus 11:18](#); [Deuteronomy 14:17](#)). The Berean Standard Bible translates the bird in these verses as “osprey.” In this context, “osprey” likely refers to the Egyptian vulture, not the modern fish-eating osprey. The King James Version says “gier eagle,” and some other translations say “carrion vulture.”



### Griffon Vulture

The griffon vulture (*Gyps fulvus*) is one of the largest flying birds in the Holy Land.

A generation ago, this bird was very common in the region. Today it is close to extinction. Many have died after eating poison placed for foxes and jackals. They also reproduce slowly. A female lays only one or two eggs each year.

The griffon vulture is about 122 centimeters (4 feet) long. Its wings can spread up to 10 meters (3 feet). It has a very strong beak. Its short toes have blunt claws. Its feathers are light brown. The head and neck are pale yellow and almost bare, with a soft covering of fine down.

This vulture eats mostly dead animals (carrion), but it may also eat locusts and small tortoises. It can go without food for several days. When it does eat, it may eat a large amount at once. In the Holy Land, it is found most often near the Sea of Galilee.

Most vultures in the Bible are probably griffon vultures.

### Vultures in the Bible

The Hebrew word often translated “eagle” in the Old Testament may refer to both eagles and vultures. Some Bible verses about eagles may also describe vultures. These include verses about:

- nesting ([Job 39:27–28](#); [Jeremiah 49:16](#); [Obadiah 1:4](#)),
- care for young ([Deuteronomy 32:11](#)),
- flying ability ([Exodus 19:4](#); [Deuteronomy 28:49](#); [Job 9:26](#); [Lamentations 4:19](#)), and
- high flight ([Proverbs 23:5](#); [30:19](#); [Isaiah 40:31](#)).

Because vultures eat carrion, they are listed among the unclean birds in the Law of Moses ([Leviticus 11:13, 18](#); [Deuteronomy 14:12, 17](#)).

Some modern translations replace “eagle” with “vulture” in passages that show vultures as a sign of doom ([Lamentations 4:19](#); [Hosea 8:1](#)) or as birds that eat the dead ([Proverbs 30:17](#)). The phrase “bald as an eagle” ([Micah 1:16](#)) is better translated “bald as the vulture,” since there are no bald eagles in Israel, but many vultures are bald. In the ancient Near East, vultures and eagles were both symbols of power and rule. This means Ezekiel’s

comparisons of kings to eagles ([Ezekiel 17:3, 7](#)) could also mean vultures. In ([Matthew 24:28](#)), Jesus likely spoke of vultures gathering at a corpse, since eagles usually eat alone, but vultures gather in groups.

Some verses in the King James Version that mention vultures are translated as “kite” or “falcon” in modern versions (compare various versions of [Leviticus 11:14](#); [Deuteronomy 14:13](#); [Job 28:7](#); [Isaiah 34:15](#)).

*See also* Birds; Eagle.