

## **THE BIBLE**

### **Its Origin, History, and Place in the World**

**THE** Bible contains proof in itself of its divine origin. No other book can answer the questionings of the mind or satisfy the longings of the heart as does the Bible. It is adapted to every age and condition of life, and is full of that knowledge which enlightens the mind and sanctifies the soul.

In the Bible we have a revelation of the living God. Received by faith, it has power to transform the life. During all its history a divine watch-care has been over it, and preserved it for the world.

### **How, When, and Why Written**

After the flood, as men became numerous, and darkness was again settling over the world, holy men wrote as they were moved by the Spirit of God. Thus God spoke to His people, and through them to the world, that a knowledge of God and of His will might not perish from the earth.

For centuries this work went on, until Christ, the promised Seed, came. With Him, and the blessed message of light and salvation proclaimed by Him and by His apostles, the Scripture record closed, and the Word of God was complete.

### **Original Writings and Translations**

The Old Testament Scriptures were first written in Hebrew, upon scrolls, or rolls of parchment, linen, or papyrus. These were later translated into Greek, the oldest translation being known as the Septuagint, or "Version of the Seventy," made at Alexandria, for the Alexandrian Library, by a company of seventy learned Jews, under the patronage of Ptolemy Philadelphus, about 285 B.C. The original order for this translation is said to have been given by Alexander the Great, who previously, upon visiting Jerusalem in 332 B.C., had learned from the prophecy of Daniel that Grecia was to overthrow the Persian kingdom. See Josephus's "Antiquities of the Jews," book 11, chap. 8, par. 5. This was the version in common use in the time of Christ.

The New Testament was all originally written in Greek, except Matthew, which was first written in Hebrew, and later translated into Greek.

At an early date, Latin translations, both of the Septuagint and of the Greek New Testament, were made by different individuals, and the more carefully prepared Latin Vulgate of Jerome, the Bible complete, was made A.D. 383–405.

### **Printing and the Bible**

Printing, however, being yet unknown, copies of the Bible could be produced only by the slow, laborious, and expensive process of handwriting. This necessarily greatly limited its circulation. Worse still, its illuminating and saving truths were largely hidden for centuries by the errors, superstitions, and apostasy of the dark ages. During this time the common people knew little of its contents.

But with the invention of the art of printing about the middle of the fifteenth century, and with the dawn of the great Reformation in the century following, the Bible entered upon a new era, preparatory to the final proclamation of the gospel throughout the world.

Not a little significant is the fact that the first book printed from movable type was the Bible in Latin, which came from the press of John Gutenberg, at Mentz, Germany, in 1456, a copy of which, in 1911, was sold in New York City for fifty thousand dollars, the highest price ever paid for a single book.

### **The Bible in Native Tongues**

Thus far, however, the Bible had been published only in ancient tongues, now little understood by the common people. Without the Word of God in their hands, the good seed sown among them was easily destroyed. “O,” said the advocates of its pure teachings, “if the people only had the Word of God in their own language, this would not happen! Without this it will be impossible to establish the laity in the truth.”

And why should they not have it in their own tongue? they reasoned. Moses wrote in the language of the people of his time; the prophets spoke in the tongue familiar to the men whom they addressed; and the New Testament was written in the language then current throughout the Roman world.

The translation of the Bible into English by John Wyclif, in 1380, was the chief event in the beginning of the Reformation. It also prepared the way for the revival of Christianity in England, and the

multiplying there of the Word by the millions, for all the world, that has followed.

To make such a translation at that time, says Neander, "required a bold spirit which no danger could appal." For making it Wyclif was attacked from various quarters, because, it was claimed, "he was introducing among the multitude a book reserved exclusively for the use of the priests." In the general denunciation it was declared that "thus was the gospel by him laid more open to the laity, and to women who could read, than it had formerly been to the most learned of the clergy; and in this way the gospel pearl is cast abroad, and trodden underfoot of swine." In the preface to his translation, Wyclif exhorted all the people to read the Scriptures.

A sense of awe and a thrill of joy filled the heart of the great German Reformer, [Martin Luther] when, at the age of twenty, while examining the volumes in the library of the university of Erfurt, he held in his hands, for the first time in his life, a complete copy of the Bible. "O God," he murmured, "could I but have one of these books, I would ask no other treasure." A little later he found in a convent a chained Bible. To this he had constant recourse.

But all these Bibles here, as elsewhere, save in England, were in an ancient tongue, and could be read only by the educated. Why, thought Luther, should the living Word be confined to dead languages? Like Wyclif, therefore, he resolved to give his countrymen the Bible in their own tongue. This he did, the New Testament in 1522, and the Bible complete, the crowning work of his life, in 1534.

Impressed with the idea that the people should read the Scriptures in their mother tongue, William Tyndale, likewise, in 1525, gave to the English his translation of the New Testament, and later, of portions of the Old Testament Scriptures. His ardent desire that they should know the Bible was well expressed in the statement that if God spared his life he would cause the boy that drives the plow to know more of the Scriptures than was commonly known by the divines of his day.

The first complete printed English Bible was that of Miles Coverdale, printed at Zurich, Switzerland, in 1535. Matthew's Bible, Taverner's Bible, and The Great Bible prepared at the suggestion of Thomas Cromwell, Earl of Essex, appeared soon after. Thus the light of truth began to shine forth once more; but not without opposition.

## **Burning of Bibles**

As Jehoiakim, king of Judah, and the princes under King Zedekiah showed their contempt for God by burning the writings of Jeremiah, and confining the prophet in a dungeon (**Jeremiah 36:20–23; 38:1–6**), so now men sought to stem the rising tide of reform by burning the Bible and its translators.

Bible burning was inaugurated in England by the destruction of copies of the Antwerp edition of Tyndale's New Testament, at St. Paul's Cross, London, in 1527, followed by the burning of a second edition in 1530. A little later there were wholesale burnings of the writings and translations of Wyclif, Tyndale, Basil, Barnes, Coverdale, and others.

Forty-three years after the death of Wyclif, or in A.D. 1428, by order of the Council of Constance his bones were dug up and burned. Oct. 6, 1536, by order of Charles V of Germany, Tyndale was strangled and burned at the stake at Vilvorde, near Brussels. "If Luther will not retract," wrote Henry VIII of England, "let himself and his writings be committed to the flames."

Such, under the spiritual tyranny that ruled in those times, was the fate of many who stood for God and His Word.

## **The Word Not Bound**

But the Word of God could not be forever bound. In attempting to prevent its circulation men soon discovered that they were undertaking a work beyond their strength.

The Bible had taken deep root in the hearts of the people. What kings and prelates had sought to suppress and destroy, kings and prelates now began to foster and supply.

In his "Stories From English History," pages 196, 197, Henry P. Warren says: "Henry, by Cromwell's advice, ordered a translation of the Bible to be made in English, and a copy to be placed in every church. There had been English translations before, but they had not been in the hands of the people generally, and had only been read secretly and in fear. . . . Cromwell then appointed Cranmer and the bishops to revise the Bible, and publish it without note or comment; and in the year 1539 a copy of the English Bible was chained to the reading-desk of every parish church. From that time the Bible has never ceased to be printed and sold freely."

Says Charles C. Coffin, in his "Story of Liberty," page 44: "The people listen to the reading with wonder and delight. They begin to think; and when men begin to think, they take a step toward freedom. They see that the Bible gives them rights which hitherto have been denied them,—the right to read, to acquire knowledge. Schools are started. Men and women who till now have not known a letter of the alphabet, learn to read; children teach their parents. It is the beginning of a new life, a new order of things in the community—the beginning of liberty."

### **The Bible to All the World**

Finally great Bible societies were organized in England, America, and many of the countries of Europe, for the purpose of giving the Bible to the world,—to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people in its own language. Since its organization in 1804, the British and Foreign Bible Society, up to 1912, had published the Scriptures, or portions of them in 440 languages and dialects, with a total of 53,274,516 entire Bibles, 84,059,610 New Testaments, and 89,816,644 portions of the Bible, or a grand total of 227,150,770 copies.

The total issue of the American Bible Society in the first ninety-six years following its organization, or from 1816 to 1912, amounts to 96,219,105 copies. It now publishes the Bible in over one hundred languages.

These, while the largest of their kind, are but two of the twenty-seven Bible societies now disseminating the Scriptures.

Thus is the world being provided with the Word of God, preparatory to the giving of the closing gospel message to all mankind, the ending of the reign of sin, and the advent of the Lord in glory. "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come." **Matthew 24:14.**