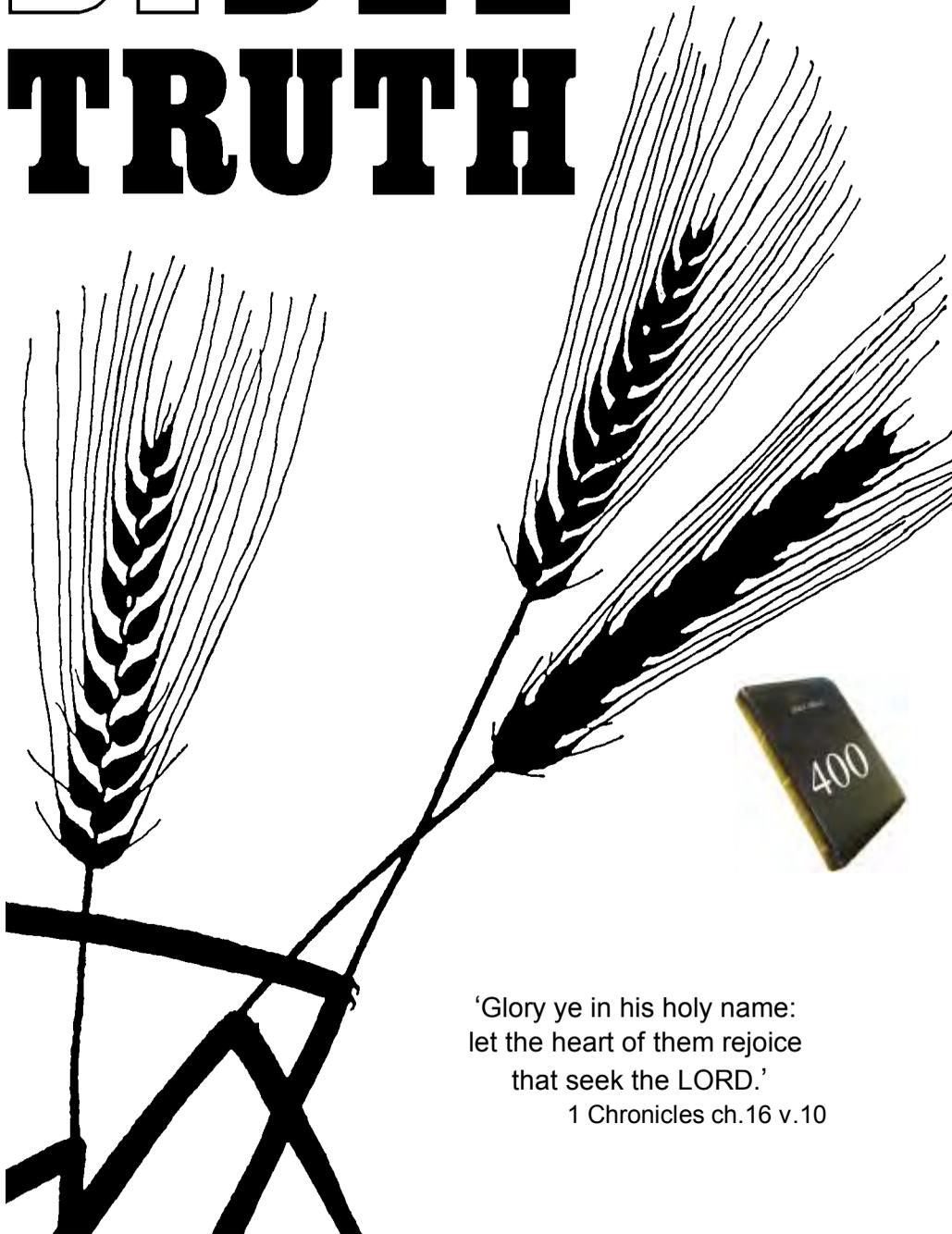


BIBLE TRUTH

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'Glory ye in his holy name:
let the heart of them rejoice
that seek the LORD.'

1 Chronicles ch.16 v.10

Origin of the Bible

by Paul Boyd-Lee

It was from around the 5th century AD onwards that the books of the Old and New Testaments comprising the '**Canon of Scripture**' became known collectively as the Bible. The word 'Canon' is the technical word for those books officially received as Scripture as opposed to other '**Apocryphal**' books (those excluded at the Reformation as not establishing doctrine, though they may be read for example of life and instruction). The word 'Bible' comes from the Latin and Greek 'biblia or biblios' and simply means 'The Books'. The name did not actually find popular usage in this country until the 15th century when many of the great English translators were at work.

Where did the Bible come from, how accurate is it, where are the oldest reliable manuscripts found today? Detailed study of these questions might lead to asking how many mistakes it could contain which may well then discourage Christians. However, the completed work needs to be constantly born in mind, after leaving aside for a moment its origin or possible errors, there still remains an extremely accurate, prolific and beneficial book for all to use. Any apparent contradictions can usually be settled with deeper study and its text has a timeless character, which though written in the past, could find application to any time in history.

There are different versions and translations of the Bible and so scripture students are likely to ask, why is this and whether one in particular is superior to others? For a start, the words 'version' and 'translation' when used for the Bible have become misleading. In common English a 'version' might be assumed to be a text slanted towards a specific belief whereas a 'translation' could refer to a straightforward transfer of words from one language to another. Unfortunately this is not the case; for example the Authorised '*Version*' (*King James Version*) is considered largely to be a diligent transfer of words between languages. On the other hand the *Good News Bible* and *New International Version* call themselves translations but in fact are not faithful word for word or even sense for sense, transfers between languages. As far as the casual reader is concerned the pattern and theme of virtually all Bibles up until the 1970s was similar so it might be argued that it would be better to read something one is comfortable with rather than nothing at all.

If this is done, readers may well find they need to unpick a small amount of their learning later. Certainly problems can arise should they study deeper, for example with the Books of the Prophets, the Divinity of Christ and so on. Here it is imperative that, in some cases word for word translation is made, rather than '**eclectic**' translation. An 'eclectic' translation selects elements from different schools of thought and combines them. This produces a text which is acceptable to the dogma of certain sects. E.g. If the translators of a new Bible do not believe in the Trinity or Deity of Christ they are likely to select only manuscripts (often minority texts) which favour their view. It is a fact that increasingly during recent decades new publications have followed this approach. Expressing the original, or most correct translation of a phrase from one language to another is an exacting and sometimes uncertain task. Scripture itself encourages us in this pursuit; 'seek and ye shall find' (Luke ch.11 v.9).

What then do we know of the history of the Bible? First, no part of it was initially written in English! Thus, there will be translation challenges as there always are when going from one language to another where parallel concepts or cultures do not exist. The Old Testament was complete and in use in the Holy Land during the lifetime of our Lord Jesus whom it seems would read from a version in Greek though this was previously written in Hebrew, or at times, Aramaic. Worthy of note is the Septuagint (also known as the LXX), so called because around 277 BC, seventy-two translators were said to have engaged in translating it from Hebrew to Greek.

The New Testament is composed of '**Epistles**' (letters), between sections of the growing Christian Church and other writings such as the Gospels (Greek = Good News), all of which originally consisted of separate manuscripts. These did not all exist together in one place but several centuries elapsed before they were collected into single volumes to comprise the New Testament (see 'Canon' above).

The earliest known combined volumes are often called **Codices**. 'Codex' is the Greek name for a book and the earliest Biblical ones that have come to light, date between the 3rd and 5th centuries after Christ. These are all written in Greek, mostly in the 'Uncial' (capital letters) script. In addition to these there was the Latin Vulgate produced in the 4th century AD. Note that these were all being compiled within a century or so and could have had some influence

on each other. Examples of all these have all been recovered. In addition there are parts (fragments) of other manuscripts which clearly have biblical content though some may be apocryphal in nature. All the aforementioned scripts are largely those responsible for producing the text of Bibles in circulation today.

Finally, there is the **Textus Receptus** (Received Text), the Greek text which is in substance the Byzantine text. It is this text that largely underlies the Authorised Version. The Textus Receptus has come to be the name referred to by those people who see it as a more faithful and reliable source than other scripts which are considered as liberal or even heretical.

When it comes to the question of the earliest texts in English the beautifully illuminated **Lindisfarne** Gospels have an important place. In the 7th c AD these were produced in Northumbria and are actually in Latin but above the words 'cribs' have been written in Anglo-Saxon. From this time onwards various early English translations slowly began to appear. In the 14th c John Wycliffe, leader of the Lollards, wrote an early English version from the Latin Vulgate. Then in the 16th c Miles Coverdale with William Tyndale were actively working on what eventually led to the **Authorised Version** (1611) and the form we recognise today; the rest is history.

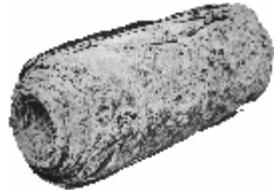
Needless to say, these early translators were not popular with the church authorities of the day and lived in peril of their lives. Tyndale for example suffered terribly and died before his prayer that the, 'King of England's (Henry VIII) eyes should be opened' was answered by the issue of a Royal Decree commanding a Bible to be placed in every parish church in England. This was a truly expensive exercise for those days, hence the 'chaining' of them to lecterns.

In 1885 the **Revised** Version was completed but although considered to be more accurate, having advantage of the wealth of information gathered since the Authorised Version (archaeological finds and discovery of Codices), it was not received well.

In 1952 the **Revised Standard** Version was compiled with recent knowledge gained from archaeological finds including Ur, Babylon and Nineveh, cities hitherto unknown outside of the Bible as well as the Dead Sea Scrolls which had recently been discovered (1947). It was further assisted by increased knowledge of ancient writings and the Septuagint which was used extensively.

The **Septuagint** - is said to have been translated into Greek by seventy Jews for the library in Alexandria in 277 BC. Its value is because it originated prior to Christ's birth, although it could be subject to copying errors in the meantime.

The **Dead Sea Scrolls** - were found in 1947 near Qumran in caves bordering the north-west shore of the Dead Sea. Their particular relevance lies in the fact that some are dated as early as the 4th c BC, (though others come from New Testament times). Thus some scrolls predate sects that might have tried to alter Scripture to disprove prophecies relating to Christ's birth. They contain many parts of both testaments.



THE CODICES

all these are in Greek capital letters (Biblical Uncial Script)

The **Vaticanus** - is dated about AD 350, and is known to have been in the Vatican since the 16th century. As such it is said not to have been fully utilised.

The **Sinaiticus** - is dated circa AD 350 discovered as loose sheets in a rubbish basket in St Catherine's Monastery, Sinai, by Constantine Tischendorf a German Bible student. It contains all the New Testament, a good proportion of the Books of the Law and most of the Prophets. It is in excellent condition for its age and written on vellum (animal skin). In 1933 the British Museum acquired it for £100,000 and people queued for days outside the Museum to glimpse it. In 1975 further pages were found at the Mount Sinai monastery.

The **Alexandrinus** - is dated about 5th century AD and is known to have come from Alexandria in Egypt to Cyril Lucar, Patriarch of Constantinople. Three centuries after receiving it he gave it to James I who died before its arrival in England, but Charles I eventually received it and in George II's time it was presented to the British Museum. It is virtually complete with the Apocrypha and other non-canonical books included.

The **Ephraemus** - an early 5th century AD manuscript is housed in Paris and was published by Constantine Tischendorf.

Copying errors

Considering that up to the 14th century AD everything had to be copied one letter at a time by hand one might expect the cumulative result to become disastrously inaccurate over the years. However, this has not been found to be so. Its scribes are noted for their meticulous care by counting the letters at regular intervals, constantly checking each other's work and so on. This diligence is born out by the magnificent and exemplary illustrations often accompanying some texts.

Translation Errors

These often account for producing more versions. It can be difficult to match phrases in one language when translating to another and this is of course limited by the translator's command of language. A further difficulty arises through the lack of vowels in ancient Hebrew (and indeed punctuation), scribes later inserting them where considered appropriate. At times words have been inserted in an effort to convey a particular meaning which sometimes differs from what is inferred in the original text, thus changing its meaning entirely.

So a few errors, in the main minor ones, are found but let us marvel and praise God for the compilation and preservation of the scriptures to our day. When considering challenges confronting Bible students in past ages, and indeed many parts of the world, we should appreciate our fortune of having neatly bound Bibles, in our language and indeed nearly every other in the world, at a price within our pockets. May God grant us time and wisdom to study it.

Articles to follow will look at the giving of The Word to Israel, How they spread the Word; Its inspiration and so on.
