



**13**

# Book of Books

***Lesson Thirteen: How We Got Our Bible  
Complete and Keep***

**A General Introduction to the Bible**

THIS BOOK [the Bible] contains the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners, and the happiness of believers. Its doctrines are holy, its precepts are binding, its histories are true, and its decisions are immutable. Read it to be wise, believe it to be safe, and practice it to be holy. It contains light to direct you, food to support you, and comfort to cheer you. It is the traveler's map, the pilgrim's staff, the pilot's compass, the soldier's sword, heaven opened, and the gates of hell disclosed. Christ is its grand object, our good its design, and the glory of God its end. It should fill the memory, rule the heart, and guide the feet. Read it slowly, frequently, and prayerfully. It is a mine of wealth, a paradise of glory, and a river of pleasure. It is given you in life, will be opened in judgment, and be remembered forever. It involves the highest responsibilities, will reward the greatest labor, and will condemn all who trifle with its sacred contents.

~Author Unknown

## **Course: The Book of Books**

- Lesson 1: The Bible: Its Uniqueness
- Lesson 2: Can I Understand the Bible?
- Lesson 3: How to Read the Bible
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- Lesson 10: Books That Help in Studying the Bible
- Lesson 11: The Joy of Discovery in Bible Study
- Lesson 12: Bible Criticism
- Lesson 13: How We Got Our Bible**

These lessons come from the kindness and diligence of those at Middletown Bible Church in Connecticut. The lessons are designed to be used with a King James Version of the Bible.

# LESSON 13

## HOW WE GOT OUR BIBLE

The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the Word of our God shall \_\_\_\_\_.

~Isaiah 40:8

Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall \_\_\_\_\_ [never] pass away.

~Matthew 24:35

### The Bible Under Attack

#### Attacked by Rome

The early Christians suffered great persecutions under the government of the Roman Empire. The Apostle Paul and the Apostle Peter and many other Christians were put to death under the cruel reign of Emperor Nero. During the first 300 years of the church, persecution followed persecution, and many believers were martyred (put to death because of their faith in Jesus Christ).

In 303 A.D., the Emperor Diocletian issued a royal decree (edict) that every Bible should be destroyed. As a result, many Bibles were burned and many Bible believers were put to death. This fierce attack against the Bible did not last too long, because the next emperor was Constantine, who allowed freedom of religion and who even ordered copies of the Scriptures to be made.

#### Attacked by the Catholic Church

In the centuries that followed, Satan used another method to get the Bible out of the hands of the common people. In some ways, this method was even more effective than burning Bibles. The Roman Catholic Church taught that the common man could not understand the Bible, and that the only ones who could understand and interpret the Bible were the priests, bishops, and the pope. To the average man, the Bible was a “closed book” and he had no access to it. As a result, most people were completely ignorant of what the Bible really taught. In 1229 A.D., the Church Council of Toulouse actually forbade the use of the Bible by laymen (the mass of common people; those who were not priests or bishops). Thus, for centuries the Roman Catholic Church did not want to put the Bible into the hands of the common people.

#### Attacked by Infidels (Unbelievers)

In more recent years, the Bible has been under attack by wicked unbelievers. In Lesson 12 we saw how unbelievers have attacked the Bible by their criticism. This is another of Satan’s methods to try to destroy the Bible.

Voltaire (1694–1778), a noted French infidel and one of the most fertile and talented writers of his time, used his pen to slow the growth of and demolish Christianity. Of Christ, Voltaire said, “Curse the wretch!” He once boasted, “In 20 years Christ will be no more. My single hand shall destroy the edifice it took twelve apostles to rear.”

Shortly after his death, the very house in which he printed his foul literature became the depot of the Geneva Bible Society. The nurse who attended Voltaire said, “For all the wealth in Europe I would not see another

infidel die.” The physician, Trochim, waiting up with Voltaire at his death, said that he cried out most desperately, “I am abandoned by God and man! I will give you half of what I am worth if you will give me six months’ life. Then I shall go to hell, and you will go with me. O Christ! O Jesus Christ!” (*Last Words of Saints and Sinners* by Herbert Lockyer, page 133).

Voltaire was convinced that he could destroy Christianity and the Bible. He believed that people would become so enlightened that they would neither believe in God, the Bible, or their need of salvation through Jesus Christ. Voltaire died in 1778. Since Voltaire’s death, millions upon millions of Bibles in numerous languages have flooded the world. Today, most people in our country have a copy of the Bible, but few have the writings of Voltaire! He is dead and gone, but the Bible lives on. The Word of God “\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ for ever” (1 Peter 1:23)!

Hammer away ye hostile hands—  
Our hammers will break;  
God’s anvil stands!

The following by Dr. Edward Payson illustrates the indestructability of the Bible, the “Book of books.”

For thousands of years this volume has withstood, not only the iron tooth of time, but all the physical and intellectual strength of man: pretended friends have endeavored to corrupt and betray it; kings and princes have perseveringly sought to banish it from the world; the civil and military power of the greatest nations of the world have been leagued for its destruction; the fires of persecution have been lighted to consume it and its friends together; and at many seasons death in its most horrid forms has been the almost certain consequence of affording it an asylum from the fury of its enemies. Though it has been ridiculed more bitterly, misrepresented more grossly, opposed more rancorously, and burnt more frequently, than any other book, and perhaps than all other books united, it is so far from sinking under the efforts of its enemies that the probability of its surviving until the final consummation of all things is now much greater than ever. The rain has descended, the floods have come, the storm has arisen, and beaten upon it; but it fell not, for it was founded upon a rock. Like the burning bush, it has been in the flames, yet it is still unconsumed; a sufficient proof were there no other, that He who spake from the bush is the Author of the Bible.

## **The Bible Translated**

### **The Bible in Greek**

Under Alexander the Great, the Greeks conquered a large part of the known world (around 331 B.C.), and the Greek language and culture spread throughout the empire. Even when the Romans took over, the common language throughout the Mediterranean world was still Greek. People everywhere knew how to speak Greek.

The Old Testament was written in the Hebrew language, but many of the Jews who were scattered throughout the empire could no longer speak Hebrew. Therefore, there was a real need for the Bible (the Old Testament) to be translated into the Greek language so that Greek-speaking people everywhere could understand it. About 200 years before Christ, the Old Testament was translated into the Greek language. That Bible translation is today

called the Septuagint (abbreviated as LXX because of the approximately 70 translators who were involved in the project). As far as we know, this was the very first Bible translation. The Septuagint Bible was used by the Lord Jesus Christ, the Apostles, and the early Christians, and it played an important part in spreading the Gospel to the Greek-speaking world, because it gave them an Old Testament in a language they could read and understand.

### **The Bible in Latin**

As the years rolled on, the eastern part of the Roman Empire continued to speak Greek, but the western part of the Empire spoke Latin. Since the people in the West could no longer speak Greek, it became necessary for the Bible to be translated into Latin (the language that the people understood). The most famous Latin translation was done by a man named Jerome in 404 A.D. Jerome was a great scholar who knew Greek and also Hebrew (which he had learned from Jewish rabbis when he studied in Israel). His translation of the Bible was called the Latin Vulgate (because it was translated into the common or “vulgate” language of the people). The Latin Vulgate translation was the official Bible of the Roman Catholic Church for the next 1,000 years.

### **The Bible in German**

In the early 16th Century, the great reformer Martin Luther led a “back to the Bible” movement in Germany known as the Reformation. He believed that the Bible was the final authority on all matters of faith (what we believe) and practice (how we live). Luther believed that the Bible should be the book of the people, and it should be used in church, in school, and in the home. He wanted to have an open Bible for all. Most of the German people could not understand Latin, and so Jerome’s Vulgate would be useless to them. Thus Luther worked hard in 1522 to translate the Bible into the German language. Luther did an excellent job, and the German people owe a great debt to this man of God who gave them the Bible in their own tongue.

Martin Luther once wrote this about the Bible: “It is no small miracle how God has so long preserved and protected this Book; for the devil and the world have been sore foes to it...let us not lose the Bible, but with diligence, in fear and invocation of God, read and preach it.... Oh! how great and glorious a thing it is to have before one the Word of God!” (excerpted from *The Table Talk of Martin Luther*, translated by William Hazlitt).

## **The English Bible**

### **Wycliffe**

John Wycliffe (known as “the morning star of the Reformation,” born about 1324) was the first person to translate the complete Bible into the English language. This was done in 1382—more than 100 years before the Reformation began in Germany. Wycliffe wanted to give the English-speaking people the Bible in their own language. He believed that it was a Book that should be studied by all Christians. He clearly saw that God’s Word was the indispensable Bread of Life and that it must be rendered in the language of the people, and made known everywhere as God’s Good News of salvation. He believed that the plain meaning of the Bible could be ascertained by simply taking the text literally. He believed that every syllable of the Old and New Testaments is absolutely true. “If any error seem to be found in them, the error is due to human ignorance. Nothing is to be believed that is not founded upon this book, and to its teachings nothing is to be added” (*History of the Christian Church*, Philip Schaff, Vol. VI, p. 340).

Wycliffe believed that to withhold the Bible from the common people was a great sin. Every effort must be made to make the Scriptures known in the mother tongue. Englishmen needed to have the Bible in English. Do you read the Bible in your own primary language?

He translated the Bible from the Latin Vulgate, and not from the original languages of Hebrew (Old Testament) and Greek (New Testament). He translated from the Latin very accurately, but if the Latin translation was erroneous or faulty, then the problem would be carried over into the English translation. This was not the fault of Wycliffe, but was the fault of the translation that he was using. The New Testament was completed in 1382. Much of the Old Testament was done by his friend Nicholas de Hereford, but Wycliffe did some of the work as well, completing it at least a year before his death in 1384.

Because the printing press had not yet been invented and these Bibles had to be hand-copied, much time and effort was involved in their production. Some of the copies were pocket-sized and were intended for ordinary people and for daily use. They were very expensive, because it took a copyist months to produce one copy. Wycliffe's Bibles were eagerly sought after by spiritually hungry people, but few could afford to buy their own personal copies. Some people were willing to pay large sums just to read from the Scriptures for an hour or two. John Foxe, a Puritan English reformer, notes that a whole load of hay was paid for the loan of a single New Testament for an hour a day. If the Bible were not readily available today, how much would we be willing to pay to borrow a Bible for only one hour? The Word of God was very precious in those days!

Wycliffe died in 1384 following a paralytic stroke. In 1414, the reading of the English Scriptures was forbidden, and those who were caught reading the Bible in English could lose their land and possessions and even their life. The Church Council of Constance declared that Wycliffe was a heretic; the pronouncement was made after he was already dead. Wycliffe's only "crime" was that he wanted to put the Bible into the hands and into the minds of the English people. In 1428, more than 40 years after his death, his bones were dug up, his remains were burned, and his ashes were thrown into the Severn River. Of course, this did not trouble or hurt Wycliffe, because at the time they did this to his bodily remains, he was with His Lord (see Philippians 1:23 and 2 Corinthians 5:8). Just as Wycliffe's ashes were carried by the river into the ocean, so also his teachings were dispersed and spread the world over!

Many copies of Wycliffe's Bible were confiscated and burned, and no doubt many copies also perished through accident and negligence during the next 500 years. The 170 copies that have survived to this day must be just a small fraction of the total number originally copied out neatly and laboriously by hand.

The writings of John Hus, the Bohemian reformer, which got him condemned and burned at the stake, depended heavily on translations and adaptations of tracts, treatises, and sermons by John Wycliffe.

At the Diet of Worms in 1521, Martin Luther was accused of renewing the errors of Wycliffe and Hus by making the Scriptures his final authority. In the National Library of the Czech Republic in Prague, there is a set of three medallions. The first medallion shows the figure of Wycliffe striking sparks from a stone, the second shows John Hus kindling a fire from the sparks, and the third presents Luther holding high a flaming torch. These three medallions tell in symbolic form the story of the Reformation as it began, continued, and crystallized under the influence of an Englishman, a Bohemian, and a German.

1984 was the 600th anniversary of Wycliffe's death.

**John 14:8-10 from the Wycliffe Bible** (It is difficult to read because Wycliffe wrote in Middle English, which differs in many ways from modern English.)

Filip seith to him, lord schewe to us the fadir, and it sufficith to us. ihesus seith to hym, so long tyme I am with you: and han ye not knowen me? Filip, he that seith me seith also the fadir, bileuest thou not that I am in the fadir and the fadir is in me; the wordis that I speke to you, I speke not of my self; but the fadir hym silf dwellinge in me, doith the workis...

## Tyndale

The next great name to remember in connection with the English Bible is William Tyndale, born in 1494. He has been called “the Father of the English Bible.” The place of his birth (Gloucestershire) was a Roman Catholic stronghold. The area boasted one of the most valued relics of the Church—a vial that was said to contain some of the actual blood of Christ. So esteemed was this relic that priests told the faithful that they needed only to look upon it to be granted eternal salvation. How sad that people trust in worthless relics instead of the living Christ who “is \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_ to the uttermost that come unto God by Him” (Hebrews 7:25).

Persecution was so great in England that Tyndale had to do his work of translation in Germany. He translated the Bible from the original Hebrew and Greek. A contemporary of his wrote, “He [Tyndale] was so skilled in seven languages—Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Italian, Spanish, English, and French—that whichever he spoke you would suppose it his native tongue.” He also was influenced by Martin Luther’s excellent German translation. Tyndale did an excellent job, although he did not live long enough to complete the entire Old Testament. The great desire of Tyndale’s heart was to get the Bible into the language of the common man. In 1523, he stated this burden of his heart: “That the poor might also read and see the simple, plain Word of God.” In 1522 he was told by a learned Roman Catholic priest that, “We were better without God’s laws than the Pope’s.” How sad that this priest valued the words of the Pope far more than he did the Word of God! Tyndale replied, “If God spare my life, ere many years I will cause a boy that driveth the plough to know more of the Scriptures than thou dost.” This prophecy would actually come true to the glory and praise of God.

In 1524, Tyndale sailed to Germany, never again to set foot in England. He never married and he never owned a home. Threats against his life would prevent him from returning to his beloved country. Tyndale was able to take advantage of a new technology known as the printing press—an advantage Wycliffe never had. His Bible was printed in Germany in two sizes—a large-print Bible and a small-print Bible. Tyndale thought that if the Catholic bishops found the large ones, he might still be able to hide the smaller ones. The Bibles were smuggled into England in barrels covered with cloth and articles for sale, in bales that looked like cloth, in sacks of flour, and in every way that could be found to hide them. Large numbers of these Bibles reached England, but soon the Catholic bishops found out that they were being sold. Every seaport was carefully watched, and many packages of Bibles were found by the officers and burned. However, they could not find them all and they could not burn them all, and some of these Bibles would get to the people who really wanted to read them.

Finally, the Catholic bishop of London decided that he would buy all the copies that were printed, through a merchant in Germany, so that there would be no more Bibles to come across the water. What he failed to realize was that the merchant was a friend of Tyndale. This friend realized that this was a way to help Tyndale. At that time, Tyndale’s greatest need was money so that he could pay his printers for the work they had done and also start a new printing of the Bibles. The Catholic bishop paid a very good price for the Bibles so he could burn them all. The Catholic bishop thought that when he burned all these Bibles, there would never be another English Bible. Imagine how he felt when he learned that more Bibles than ever before were coming into England—so many that the officers simply could not stop them. He was especially shocked when he later learned that his own money was used to print these Bibles!

Tyndale longed to return to England, his beloved homeland, but he knew that he had too many enemies there who wanted to kill him, so he remained in Germany. Tyndale’s life was a model of holy living. Even Sir Thomas More, one of Tyndale’s bitter opponents, admitted this about Tyndale’s life: “[He was] a man of right good living, studious and well learned in Scripture, and in diverse places in England was very well liked, and did great good with preaching...[he was] taken for a man of sober and honest living, and looked and preached holily.”

The Lord Jesus was betrayed by a man who was supposed to be his friend, and the same thing happened to Tyndale. Tyndale's "Judas" was a man named Phillips, a man Tyndale trusted, believing that he was faithful and true, but Phillips was a spy sent by the Pope to trap Tyndale. One evening as Tyndale walked out from his home to enjoy the evening air, a group of men seized him, bound him, and carried him away to a dark prison.

In 1536, Tyndale was strangled to death and his body burned. He died at the young age of 42. His great "crime" was that he placed God's Word in English into the hands of the English-speaking world. They could imprison Tyndale and kill him, but "the Word of God is not bound" (2 Timothy 2:9), and Tyndale's life's work, the Bible he translated, could not be killed or destroyed. It is reported that his last words were these: "Lord, open the King of England's eyes." Less than a year after Tyndale's martyrdom, an edition of the whole Bible, based largely upon Tyndale's work but without his name, was being circulated and read in England openly, with the permission of the King, and so Tyndale's dying prayer was already being answered. Less than 100 years later, the King of England, James I, endorsed and sponsored a new Bible translation (or revision) that is known as the King James Bible. Tyndale's influence on the King James Bible is great, because most of the King James Version (about 90 percent) is worded just as Tyndale had it. Tyndale's translation is woven into the very fabric of the King James Version. We who speak English are greatly indebted to Tyndale and the work he did, even at the cost of his own life. From the 16<sup>th</sup> through the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, the plowboy has had God's Word in English.

In the days of Tyndale, the English Catholic Church had in effect a law that made it a crime punishable by death to translate the Bible into English. One day in 1519, the church authorities publicly burned a woman and six men for nothing more than teaching their children English versions of the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and the Apostles' Creed! Are you thankful for the Bible you have in your hands and for the price that men paid so that you could have it?

One event that bore heavily on the spread of the Bible was the invention of printing with movable type. It was in 1455 that Johannes Gutenberg printed his first major work—an edition of the Latin Vulgate Bible, now called the Mazarin Bible.

### **The English Bibles Before the King James Version**

1. **The Coverdale Bible (1535)** – This was the first complete Bible in English. Coverdale finished the work of Tyndale.
2. **The Great Bible (1539)** – This Bible was called "great" because it was a huge book intended to lie on a church lectern or pulpit. This was the first authorized Bible in English (authorized means that it was approved by the king and the church for use in public worship, and thus became the official church Bible).
3. **The Geneva Bible (1560)** – This was a very popular Bible that was loved by the English people. It was an excellent translation. This Bible was never authorized for use in church, but it was widely used as a home Bible. This was the Bible of Shakespeare and of the Pilgrim Fathers who came to America. It was also the Bible of Cromwell (English general and statesman). It was the basis of Cromwell's Soldier's Bible. It was also the translation used by John Bunyan, the author of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. King James' opinion of the Geneva Bible was not favorable. He hoped that his translation would replace it. For example, there was a marginal note in the Geneva Bible for Exodus 1:9 indicating that the Hebrew midwives were correct in disobeying the Egyptian king's orders. King James, who believed it was very important for everyone to obey the king, did not like this marginal note and felt it might be a political threat to his kingdom.



4. **The Bishops' Bible (1568)** – This was the second authorized Bible in English, and was the Bible used in the churches, yet the Bishops' Bible was never as popular as the Geneva Bible. The King James Bible was never intended to be a new translation, but was intended to be a revision of the Bishops' Bible.
5. **The Rheims-Douay Bible (1582–1610)** – This was the first Roman Catholic Bible translated into English (translated from the Latin Vulgate).



### **The King James Version**

King James I sponsored a Bible translation project in order to produce another official, authorized Bible for use in churches. The King wanted this to be a revision of the Bishops' Bible, although the translators made use of all the previous English Bibles, as well as the original Greek and Hebrew to do their work. There were 47 scholars who worked on this project and it took nearly three years to complete. Finally, in 1611, the Authorized King James Bible was published.

At first the Geneva Bible was still the most popular, but gradually the people began to use the King James Version more and more. Many would agree that this is the best translation that has ever been done in English, and it has been the most popular and the most loved Bible of the English-speaking world for over 350 years. It is truly a masterpiece. The King James Bible is still in common use in many Bible-believing churches to this day.

### **Modern English Translations**

In the past 100 years there have been a great number of Bible translations. We will list some of the more influential ones. This listing does not mean that we recommend or endorse these Bible translations. See Lesson 4, which discusses some of the problems with many modern translations. These translations are listed in chronological order:

- Revised Version (England) (RV) – 1881-1885
- American Standard Version (ASV) – 1901
- Revised Standard Version (RSV) – 1952, a revision of the American Standard Version
- Amplified Bible (AB) – 1965
- New English Bible (NEB) – 1970, includes the Apocrypha
- Living Bible (LB) – 1971, a paraphrase version
- Today's English Version (TEV) – 1976, also known as the Good News Bible
- New American Standard Version (NAS) – 1977
- New International Version (NIV) – 1978
- New World Translation (NWT) – 1984 (done by Jehovah's Witnesses)
- New American Bible (NAB) – 1987, includes the Apocrypha (a Catholic Bible)

- New Revised Standard Version (NRS) – 1989, the authorized revision of the Revised Standard Version
- New King James Version (NKJ) – 1990
- The Message (TM) – 1993, a.k.a. New Testament in Contemporary English
- The New Living Translation (NLT) – 1996
- English Standard Version (ESV) – 2001, a revision of the Revised Standard Version
- Holman Christian Standard Bible – 2004
- Today's New International Version (TNIV) – 2005

### **Questions to Ponder**

1. Today in America the Bible is not very expensive, copies can be easily obtained, and people are not persecuted for reading it. Is the Bible valuable and precious today to the average person? Why or why not?
2. Are there some countries today where people are not allowed to have Bibles?
3. Are there some people today who do not have the Bible in their own language because it has never yet been translated into their native tongue?
4. Should a person be careful about how he takes care of the Bible and how he handles the Bible? Should it be handled reverently? Should it be handled like any other book?
5. Is it possible that someday our freedom to own and read the Bible will be taken away from us? If all the Bibles were suddenly removed and destroyed, how much of God's Word would we have stored away in our minds and hearts?

**The Bible stands, and we believe it!**



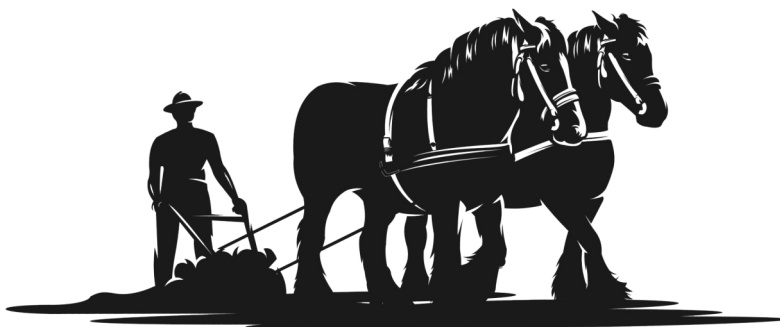
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# **PLOWMAN'S ACADEMY**

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