

The background of the page is a repeating pattern of decorative, illuminated initials and numbers. The initials are in various colors and styles, including gold, red, and blue, and are set within ornate, geometric frames. Some of the visible numbers include 'No 50.', 'No 58.', 'No 59.', 'No 63.', 'No 64.', and 'No 68.'. The overall aesthetic is reminiscent of a medieval manuscript or a historical book cover.

**Text from the King James 400th Anniversary Bible
Exhibition in the Saffron Walden Library by Christine
Flitney March 2011**

Early History of the Christian Bible

The Old Testament part of the bible began as the oral story of the Jewish nation. It was first recorded in archaic Hebrew, but by 400BC it was in modern square script Hebrew with some parts in Aramaic, the language Jesus and the apostles are thought to have spoken.

When the Jews went into exile in Egypt they recorded their scriptures in their adopted Greek language. This became known as the Septuagint version, LXX from the number of scholars chosen from the twelve tribes of the Jews to compile an agreed translation. From that time, the history of the Jewish scriptures parts company with those of the Christian church.

The New Testament is a collection of works written after the life of Christ, they are thought to have been originally written in Greek.

Earliest surviving versions are the Codex Vaticanus and the Codex Sinaiticus , both from the 4th Century AD, and the Codex Alexandrinus from the 5th Century AD. (Codex is the Latin for block of wood)

Decision as to what was to be recognised and included as part of the bible was set down by The Council of Rome in 382AD under the authority of Pope Damasus I, and he commissioned the Latin translation known as the Vulgate Bible, St Jerome produced his Vulgate version translated from Greek into Latin in 383AD.

The Latin Vulgate was the Bible used throughout Western Europe for the next thousand years.



The Bible in English

A limited number of translations of parts of the bible were made in monastic communities: Caedmon's Anglo-Saxon stories in 680AD; the Venerable Bede translated the Gospel of St John in to Old English before 735AD; King Alfred produced what are known as the Wessex Gospels, four gospels in West Saxon dialect c990AD.

Pope Innocent III in 1199 banned unauthorized versions of the Bible. This was the era of heresy and inquisition. The church controlled what they wanted the common man to know. What little the ordinary people knew about the Bible was often distorted by individual poorly educated preachers who had little knowledge themselves.

In 1382 AD Wycliffe produced the first true English Bible, translated from the Vulgate, containing all 80 books of the Old Testament, each copy was handwritten. Wycliffe, a brilliant scholar, attacked corruption in the church. The Peasants Revolt in 1381 made his teachings very dangerous to the authorities and all his writings were banned. Wyclif died in 1384 following a stroke. After his death he was condemned for heresy and his body dug up, burned and scattered in 1428.

In 1455 AD Gutenberg invented the printing press, and books became available to many more people. The first book Gutenberg printed was his two volume Latin Bible.

Across Europe there was growing demand from people wanting to read the bible for themselves. Scholars began to study the original Greek scriptures and began to ask questions about the translation of the accepted Latin Vulgate. In 1516 Erasmus produced a parallel Greek / Latin Bible which may have helped Martin Luther produce the first German New Testament in 1522.

Foxe's Book of Martyrs records that in 1517, seven people were burned at the stake by the Roman Catholic Church for the crime of teaching their children to say the Lord's Prayer in English rather than Latin.

In 1525-1526 the Tyndale New Testament became the first printed edition of the scriptures in the English language, based mainly on the Greek. Subsequent printings of the Tyndale New Testament in the 1530's were often elaborately illustrated. One risked death by burning if caught in mere possession of Tyndale's forbidden books. Tyndale was hunted by the establishment, strangled and burned at stake in 1537. Tyndale's last words were, "Oh Lord, open the King of England's eyes".

In 1535 Myles Coverdale printed the first complete printed Bible in English.

1537 saw the Thomas Matthew Bible, a revision of Tyndale by John Rogers.

1539 saw the Taverner's Bible, a revision of Matthew minus most of the notes.

1539 saw a change in the attitude of the state and church following Henry VIII's fallout with Rome, an English bible became not only acceptable but desirable. Thomas Cranmer, the Archbishop of Canterbury, hired Myles Coverdale at the bequest of King Henry VIII to publish the Great Bible or First Authorised Version. With all 80 books it is often called the Cranmer. It was ordered that copies should be placed in every church.

The Geneva Bible. By 1560 Queen Mary was trying to restore the country to Catholicism and many Protestants sought exile in Geneva, from there was produced the first Study Bible. This compact pocket book with hardly flattering comments about the Catholic Church was the first Bible to have printed verse numbers. It remained popular for 100 years after the King James Version.

In 1568 the Bishop's Bible became the 2nd Authorised Bible, intended to supersede the Great & Geneva.

In 1582 Rome surrendered its "Latin only" edict and in 1609-10 the Douay/Rheims Bible was published, this first Catholic English translation became the seed bible for nearly all Catholic Bibles.



From Dangerous Heresy to the Authorised King James Bible

This year we celebrate one of the greatest and best-loved English translations of the Bible. But the Bible in English has not always been available or even safe.

1408 Most Bibles are in Latin. Ordinary people can only hear the Bible from priests, religious plays and handed down stories. Translating the Bible into English carries the death penalty as heresy. Despite the dangers, translations begin to spread as people thirst to read the Bible themselves.

1525 William Tyndale's translation is the first printed English New Testament. Copies are smuggled into the country from abroad. Tyndale is forced into hiding and within ten years is arrested, condemned for heresy and put horribly to death.

1538 The demand for Bibles that people can read themselves is growing.

Every parish priest is required to place an English Bible in their church.

1604 King James I abolishes the law against translating the Bible into English and commissions a new "Authorised Version". A group of 50 scholars begin work on the best, most accurate translation they can produce.

1611 King James' Bible, or the Authorised Version, is published and appointed to be read in churches.

Four Hundred Years On. "A Cornerstone of our Culture and Language"

2011 The Authorised Version is the most widely published book in the English language. Its words and phrases are part of our everyday language.



The King James Bible or 3rd Authorised Version

In 1604, King James I convened the Hampton Court conference and an entirely new translation from the original scriptural languages, to take advantage of yet more available manuscripts and increased scholarship over the years.

The King repealed the act prohibiting translation into English.

The work started properly in 1607 produced by six groups of divines and scholars in Westminster, Oxford and Cambridge. It took the best of what had gone before in style, prose, chapter and verse division, and translation accuracy.

The first draft was available in 1609, and completed for publication in 1611.

It got off to a slow start, but once accepted it reigned supreme until 1881. Used by many to this day, and loathed by some as clinging onto the past. Carried far beyond Britain's shores by pilgrims, missionaries, traders and travellers, the KJV brought coherence to the English language and set English on the path to becoming a world language.



The Victorian era produced another flurry of Biblical work.

In 1841 the English Hexapla New Testament was published. An Early Textual Comparison showing the Greek and six famous English translations in parallel columns, it supplied the need for study material for bible translators and scholars.

Between 1881-5, the Revised Version was based on the KJV, it was a literal translation of Hebrew & Greek by 65 English scholars. This became the modern bible of the 19th century.



20th Century Bibles

In 1947 the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, made much 1st Century material available to highly skilled translators. This work generated new versions, all translations of very high quality. The differences between these bibles were in the balance between literal translation and creative interpretation.

1961: NEB The New English Bible: Completely new scholarly translation. contemporary in idiom, rather than word-for-word translation.

1971 Living Bible: Liberal translation chiefly inspired for use with children, not favoured by purists.

1976 TEV Today's English Version (Good News): Wide appeal English Bible with a limited modern vocabulary, popular with English speakers from other countries.

1978 NIV New International Version: One of the most popular modern versions; a new translation from Hebrew & Greek by conservative scholars. "a balance between word-for word and phrase for phrase"..

1982: "New King James Version" (NKJV) is a modern English version maintaining the original style of the KJV"