

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

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People are always asking questions about the writing, translating, and preservation of the Bible text. As you read and study the Bible, you will want to know answers to the questions most often asked.

### ***1. Who wrote the Bible?***

With our present knowledge we cannot name all the inspired writers of the Bible. Some of them may never be known, for ancient authors seldom signed their books. According to tradition, however, certain books are ascribed to well-known Bible people. Modern scholars constantly study the books for evidences of their authorship.

### ***2. When was the Bible written?***

The 39 Old Testament books were written during a period of a thousand years, beginning about 1100 B.C. The 27 New Testament books were written in less than a hundred years, between A.D. 50 and 150.

### ***3. How were the books of the Old Testament first written?***

They were handwritten in ink, usually with a reed pen, on scrolls made of leather or papyrus. Often a writer dictated to a professional scribe, as Jeremiah dictated his prophecies to Baruch (Jer 36.4).

### ***4. How was an Old Testament scroll made?***

A scroll was made from a number of sheets of papyrus or prepared animal skins. After the sheets were sewed together to make a strip measuring ten to thirty or more feet long, it was rolled around a stick in the manner of a map or window shade. The reader unwound the scroll with one hand, while with the other hand he rewound the scroll around a second stick, exposing only a few columns of writing at a time. Jeremiah's first scroll was never rewound, for the king cut off and burned the columns as they were read to him (Jer 36.23). Usually only one side of a roll was used for writing. Many Old Testament books are just long enough to fill a normal roll.

### ***5. In what manner were the New Testament books written?***

The Gospels and Acts were probably written originally on scrolls, but early copies of them were made in the new codices which began to take the place of scrolls in the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. A codex was made of several quires of parchment or papyrus sheets folded to make pages. The quires were stitched together in much the same manner as a modern book. Short New Testament letters were originally written on a single sheet of parchment. Paul dictated his letters to a scribe, but usually wrote the final greeting with his own hand (1 Cor 16.21; Gal 6.11).

**6. *In what language was the Bible originally written?***

There are two original languages of the Bible: Hebrew and Greek. The Old Testament was written in Hebrew, except for four chapters of Ezra, six chapters of Daniel, and Jeremiah 10.11. These were written in Aramaic. The entire New Testament was written in Greek, the language commonly spoken and written throughout the Roman Empire in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries A.D.

**7. *What is Aramaic?***

Aramaic is a Semitic language related to Hebrew somewhat as Italian is related to Spanish. Aramaic had become the everyday language of Palestine by the time of Jesus, who undoubtedly preached in Aramaic. His sayings and teachings were probably first recorded in this language, for a few traces of Aramaic remain in the Gospels (Mk 5.41; 15.34). Though Aramaic documents were doubtless used by the Gospel writers, they recorded the story of Jesus' life in Greek.

**8. *What is a Targum?***

A Targum is an Aramaic translation of the Hebrew scriptures. In Jesus' day when everyone spoke Aramaic, few people understood the Hebrew scriptures read in the synagogues. For this reason an interpreter made a running translation, verse by verse, of the Hebrew into Aramaic, in the manner of a modern translator at meetings of the United Nations. At first the Targums were oral, but later they were written down. Surviving copies of the Targums give valuable evidence of the Hebrew text of the Bible at an early period. Footnotes in this Bible referring to the Targum indicate places where the text has been revised according to these ancient translations.

**9. *Why is the Samaritan Old Testament important?***

In the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. the Samaritans separated themselves from the Jewish community. Thereafter, as the woman at the well said to Jesus, "Jews have no dealings with Samaritans" (Jn 4.9). The Samaritan Bible, which is in Hebrew, has been handed down independently of the Hebrew since about 425 B.C. Thus it is a check on errors that crept into the Hebrew text.

**10. *Why is the Greek translation of the Old Testament called the Septuagint?***

Septuagint means "of seventy." The name may refer to the 72 scholars, 6 from each of the 12 tribes, who are said to have translated the Hebrew Bible into Greek in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. According to legend, 72 scholars went from Palestine to Egypt where each man worked independently for 72 days, during which time they produced 72 identical Greek translations! The Septuagint is often indicated by roman numerals, LXX. This Greek version of the Old Testament was the Bible of the early Christians, most of whom spoke Greek (Acts 18.28; 2 Tim 3.16).

**11. *Why is the discovery of a really ancient Bible manuscript greeted with so much enthusiasm?***

Every time a book is copied by hand, errors are certain to be made. Some copyists also edit the text. With successive copying, more and more mistakes and changes are made. It is obvious that a book copied directly from the original manuscript or from its first

copies will contain fewer errors than one which is thirty, forty, or two hundred copies removed from the original. A very ancient manuscript often gives valuable evidence of the original Bible text.

***12. How many different readings and changes have been found in manuscripts of the Bible as a result of centuries of hand copying?***

Thousands of variant readings are known, most of which are unimportant. Footnotes in this Bible record the important ones.

***13. Is our Christian faith affected by these different Bible readings?***

No. Not one of the great Christian teachings has had to be changed in the light of any variant reading.

***14. What are the most ancient Old Testament manuscripts discovered so far?***

Some fragments from the book of Samuel found in Cave 4 at the Dead Sea date probably from 200 B.C. and earlier. These are thought to be the oldest manuscripts so far discovered. The Nash Papyrus, written in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C., is a single sheet of papyrus. The oldest complete manuscript of any book of the Bible is the scroll of Isaiah, copied about 100 B.C. It was found in 1947 sealed in a jar in one of the Dead Sea caves.

***15. What ancient New Testament manuscripts have been discovered so far?***

The oldest is a papyrus fragment containing John 18:31-33, 37-38. It is dated about A.D. 150, only a few years after the Gospel of John was written. This fragment is now in the John Rylands Library, Manchester, England. Dating from about A.D. 200 is the Bodmer II Gospel of John in the Bodmer Library, Geneva, Switzerland. Three 3<sup>rd</sup>-century codices in the Chester Beatty Papyri collection contain the oldest extensive text of the New Testament. No less than 175 papyrus copies of various parts of the New Testament have been found. These papyrus documents date from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 4<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. We also have 200 other manuscripts written in capital letters and dating from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 9<sup>th</sup> centuries. Supported by all these ancient manuscripts, the New Testament is the best preserved ancient text in the world. No other Greek or Latin book exists in so many nor in such early copies.

***16. Have important Bible manuscripts been brought to America?***

Yes, several are in the United States. Chief among them is the 5<sup>th</sup>-century Washington Codex of the Gospels which gives important evidence of their original text. The Washington Codex, written on a fine calfskin called vellum, was purchased in Egypt by Charles Freer in 1906. Today it is exhibited in the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

***17. Has any original manuscript of the Bible been found?***

No. It is not impossible that beneath the dry sands of Egypt, or sealed in some jar, an original New Testament manuscript may someday be discovered, for some of the Dead Sea Scrolls are considerably older than the original New Testament books. These, however, were probably reread and handled so many times that they soon disappeared.

**18. *What is a version of the Bible?***

A version is a translation of the original languages of the Bible. The early Greek version of the Old Testament is called the Septuagint. The 4<sup>th</sup>-century Latin version of the entire Bible is called the Vulgate. Other early versions of the Bible are in such languages as Syriac, Coptic, Ethiopic, Armenian. Old manuscripts of ancient versions are important because they give the text of the Bible before many copying errors were made.

**19. *What was the first Bible ever printed?***

The Vulgate was the first Bible and indeed the first book ever printed. It was published in two volumes by Johannes Gutenberg at Mainz, Germany, between 1452 and 1456. The first Gutenberg Bible brought to America came in 1847 and is now in the New York Public Library. Copies of this beautiful, rare, and extremely valuable Bible are treasured in other American libraries.

**20. *When was the Bible first translated into English?***

In 1382 John Wycliffe and his associates produced the first English version of the Bible. They made a word-for-word translation of the Latin Vulgate which the common people of England no longer understood.

**21. *How did the invention of printing affect the Bible?***

Printing enabled the common people to have their own Bibles. It also led the printers to ask for an accurate Bible text to set in type, for centuries of hand copying had produced many errors. Notable editions of the Greek text of the New Testament were prepared and published by the Dutch scholar Erasmus from 1516 to 1535, by the Spanish Cardinal Ximenes in 1514 (published in 1522), and by Calvin's friend, Theodore Beza, from 1565 to 1604. The Greek text published by Robert Stephanus in 1551 is the first New Testament with verse divisions. These are said to have been made by Stephanus on a horseback journey from Paris to Lyons.

**22. *Who were the Masoretes?***

The Masoretes were Jewish scholars living in Palestine and Mesopotamia during the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 10<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. Their name comes from the Hebrew word meaning "tradition." The Masoretes guarded and preserved the traditional Hebrew text of the Old Testament. They also created a system of vowel signs, because the traditional text was written in consonants alone. The most famous of the Masoretes were the five or six generations of the Ben Asher family, A.D. 775-950.

**23. *On what Hebrew text of the Old Testament have the English translations been based?***

The Hebrew text preserved by the Masoretes has been the basis of English versions. Until 1937, English translators used the Bomberg Hebrew Bible printed in 1525. This Bible had been edited by Jacob ben Chayyim from late medieval copies of the Ben Asher text. But an older copy of the Ben Asher text was found in the Leningrad Codex. This Codex contains the complete Hebrew Bible and was copied in 1008 from manuscripts

written by Aaron ben Moshe, the last of the Ben Asher family. The 1938 edition of Kittel's Hebrew Bible printed the text of the Leningrad Codex.

**24. *When was the first English Bible printed?***

The first printed portion of the English Bible appeared in 1525. It was William Tyndale's translation of the New Testament which was printed at Worms in Germany and shipped to England. Tyndale based his version, not on the Vulgate, which as itself a version, but on the Greek text edited by Erasmus and printed in 1522.

**25. *Why is William Tyndale called the father of the English Bible?***

Tyndale translated the first English New Testament ever printed. He also translated much of the Old Testament, basing his work on the standard Masoretic text edited by Jacob ben Chayyim and printed in 1525. Tyndale's accurate scholarship and graceful, simple style influenced succeeding English versions. It has been estimated that 90 per cent [sic] of his work reappeared in the King James Version of 1611. Because of his work on the Bible Tyndale was put to death as a heretic in 1536.

**26. *When was the first complete English Bible printed?***

In 1535 the first complete English Bible was issued by Miles Coverdale and dedicated to King Henry VIII. Coverdale used Tyndale's version of the New Testament and of the Pentateuch.

**27. *What other English Bibles were published in the 16<sup>th</sup> century?***

No less than five important Bibles were printed for English readers between Coverdale's and the King James Version. First came *Matthew's Bible* in 1537, edited by John Rogers, the first martyr burned at the stake in Queen Mary's reign. The handsome *Great Bible* of 1539 was the first authorized Bible. It was chained to church walls for all to read. English refugees from Queen Mary's persecutions published the *Geneva Bible* in Switzerland in 1560. Shakespeare read the Geneva Bible and the early English colonists brought it to America. The *Bishop's Bible* of 1568 was a revision of the Great Bible. Roman Catholic scholars exiled to Rheims and Douay translated the Vulgate into English, 1582-1609. This Bible is called the *Rheims-Douay* Version.

**28. *What is the most famous English Bible?***

The most famous English Bible is the King James Version of 1611, sometimes called the Authorized Version. James I appointed the forty-seven scholars who produced it after seven years of work. It finally supplanted all other English Bibles and for three hundred years reigned supreme as *the* English Bible. Its majestic rhythms and direct, forceful expressions are unsurpassed in English literature. It has rightly been called "the noblest monument of English prose."

**29. *If the King James Version is so greatly admired, why were revised versions published later?***

Revised versions became necessary as the English language grew and changed through the centuries. Moreover, an older and better Greek text than that used for the Authorized Version came to light in newly-discovered ancient manuscripts.

**30. *What old Greek manuscripts were discovered after 1611?***

Three outstanding Greek codex Bibles dating from the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. were discovered. The 5<sup>th</sup>-century Codex Alexandrinus, brought to England in 1629, had a Greek text 600 years older than the earliest manuscript consulted by Erasmus. It was about 200 years before the next great manuscript discoveries were made. The 4<sup>th</sup>-century Codex Vaticanus came to light when Napoleon took it to Paris from Rome where it had been in the Vatican Library at least from the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Another 4<sup>th</sup>-century Greek manuscript of the Bible was discovered by Count Tischendorf. In 1844 he rescued 43 sheets of it from a basket of trash about to be burned by the monks of St. Catherine's Monastery at Mount Sinai. Fifteen years later, when Tischendorf returned to Sinai, he found the rest of the sheets of the Greek manuscript which became known as the Codex Sinaiticus.

**31. *Were the 4<sup>th</sup>- and 5<sup>th</sup>-century codex Bibles used in the revised English versions?***

Yes, the English Revised Version, 1881-1885, and the American Standard Version, 1901, both used the latest textual discoveries in revising the King James Version.

**32. *Were any Bible discoveries made in the 20<sup>th</sup> century?***

Yes, exciting new discoveries included such manuscripts as the Washington Codex of the Gospels, found in 1906, and the Chester Beatty Biblical Papyri, in 1931. In 1947 the Dead Sea Scrolls, dating probably from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. to the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D., were discovered in a cave. In 1956 the Bodmer II Gospel of John dating from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D. was published. Besides Biblical manuscripts, a quantity of Greek papyri were unearthed in Egypt. As they were written in New Testament Greek, they gave scholars a better understanding of the vocabulary and grammar used by New Testament writers. In addition to all these discoveries, the scientific archaeology of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has brought to light a mass of evidence invaluable to Bible students.