

A Brief History of the English Bible



**Including the story of the Geneva Bible
and
Certificate of Authenticity for the Accompanying
1607 Folio Edition printed by Robert Barker**

Certificate of Authenticity

The authenticity of the item described below is guaranteed without time limit to the original purchaser for the full price of the purchase.

An original leaf from the folio edition, Geneva Bible, printed in London by Robert Barker in 1607/8 - commonly known as “The Pilgrim’s Bible” and “The Breeches Bible.”

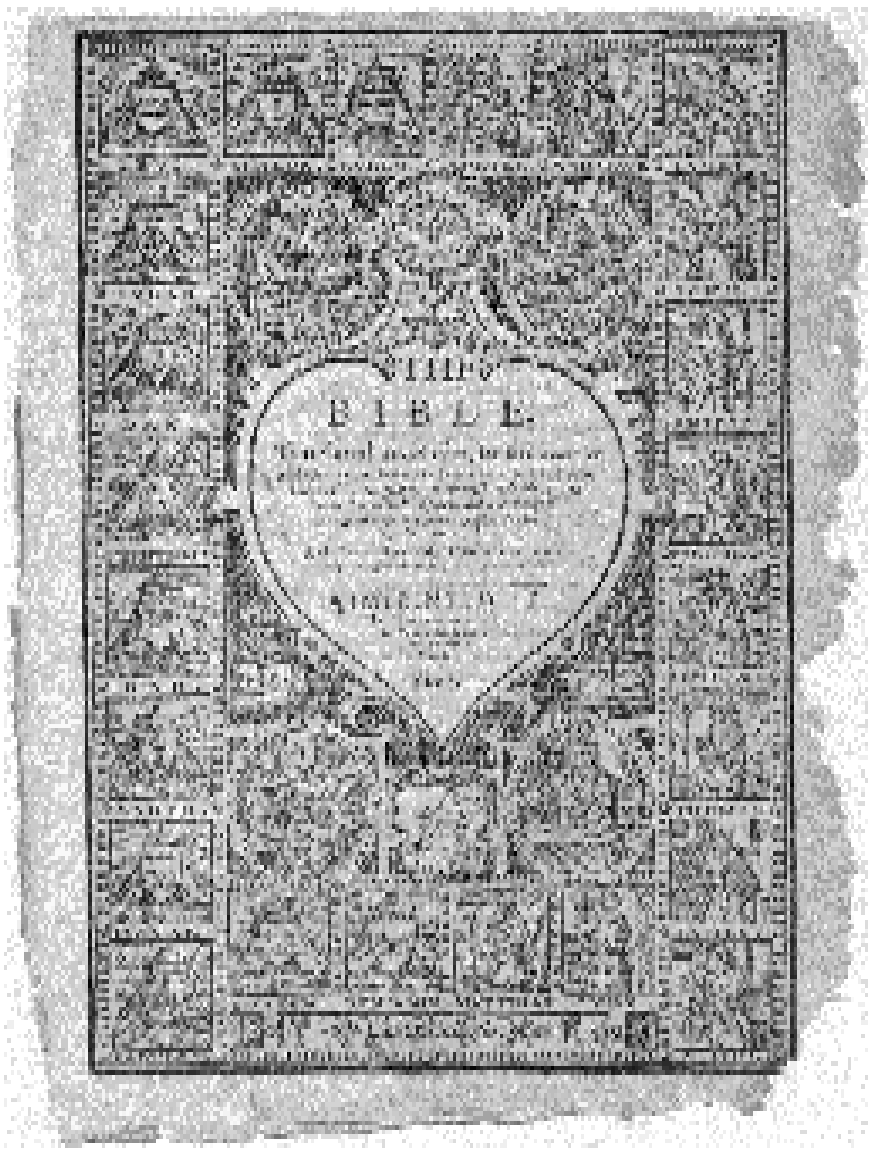
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Above is a reproduction of the title page from the damaged copy of the 1607/8 edition of the Pilgrim's (Geneva) Bible from which the accompanying leaf came.



John Calvin as sketched by one of his Geneva Academy students.

The Geneva Bible

Bloody Mary's five year reign ended in 1558. During her reign she tried to reestablish Catholicism and executed over three hundred Protestants. Miles Coverdale and John Knox chose exile in Switzerland where they joined John Calvin and his son-in-law William Whittingham to publish the 1557

Geneva New Testament, and in 1560, the Geneva Bible. the Geneva Bible text was Whittingham's excellent revision of Tyndale's translation. the publishers

wanted readers to share their understanding of the scriptures. So, beside the text they included extensive notes of explanation, "a Bible college in a Bible." the Geneva Bible is also called the "Breeches Bible," because it says Adam and Eve made themselves "breeches" of fig leaves. the first Bible to have verse numbers, it was published in a smaller size than most previous Bibles and in Roman type style, so it was easier to carry and read. It became very popular and over 140 editions were printed. the Geneva Bible was the Bible of Shakespeare, Bunyan, and Milton, the greatest writers of that time. It was this Bible that was brought to America by Captain John Smith and the Pilgrims on the Mayflower. the Geneva Bible was the Bible of the Puritans and of most Americans for over 100 years. However, the notes in the Geneva Bible criticized the royalty and the clergy. The Bishop's Bible of 1568 and the 1611 King James Version were produced, mainly because the people in power objected to the Geneva Bible's marginal references and in 1616 Geneva became outlawed. Also Geneva was so popular that the new King James Version did not sell. While it is believed that at least one copy of the 1611 King James version was brought to the New World on the Mayflower, Geneva was the Bible of choice and the one most Pilgrims brought with them on the voyage. Even though outlawed, Geneva continued to be printed for many years.

When the Pilgrims went to church, they carried their muskets and their Geneva Bibles. From a painting by George H. Boughton



The above is reproduced with permission from "God Has Protected His Word", A Brief History of the English Bible by F.J. Maisel, Jerusalem, 1997

A Brief History of the English Bible

This is a very well done history of the English Bible taken from several religious oriented sites on the Internet. Some of this text is probably copyrighted, but my purpose is not plagerism. I would credit the authors if I knew who they were. This was e-mailed to me by a fellow collector and I thought it worthy enough to include for those interested in religious printing.

The dates given are the earliest printings. However, there is little difference in the various editions other than the actual printing. One may use a different type style or size. Some may be illustrated and others not. In the case of one like the 1611 and the 1613 KJV, it is virtually impossible to tell the difference between individual leaves unless one has certain specific leaves to compare or has knowledge of the provenance of the individual leaf.



The first hand-written English language manuscripts of the Bible were produced in 1380's AD by Oxford theologian John Wycliff (Wycliffe). Wycliff was also the inventor of bifocal eyeglasses. He spent many of his years arguing against the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church which he believed to be contrary to the Bible. Though he died a nonviolent death, the Pope was so infuriated by his teachings that 44 years after Wycliff had died, he ordered the bones to be dug-up, crushed, and scattered in the river!

In about 1455 Johannes Gutenberg developed a method of "automatic handwriting" or printing, and the first book he printed was a Latin version of the Bible. The first printings of the Bible in the English language were produced during the onset of the Reformation...illegally and at great personal risk of those involved. William Tyndale was a leader of reformers, and their spiritual leader. He worked most of his translating years alone, with occasional help. Indirectly, he had the help of Erasmus in the publication of his Greek/Latin New Testament printed in 1516. Erasmus and the great printer, scholar, and reformer John Froben, published the first non-Latin Vulgate text of the Bible in some 1,000 years. Latin was the language of scholars and it was understood by virtually every European who could read or write. Erasmus' Latin was not the Vulgate translation of Jerome, but his own fresh rendering of the Greek New Testament text that he had collated from six or seven partial New Testament manuscripts into a complete Greek New Testament.

The Latin that Erasmus translated from the Greek revealed many errors in the Vulgate's integrity amongst the rank and file scholars, many of whom were already convinced that the established church was doomed by virtue of its evil hierarchy. Pope Leo X's declaration that "the fable of Christ was very profitable to him" infuriated the people of God.

With Erasmus' work in 1516, the die was cast. Martin Luther declared his intolerance with the Roman Church's corruption on Halloween in 1517, by nailing 95 Theses of Contention to the Wittenberg Door. Luther, who would be exiled in the months following the Diet of Worms Council in 1521 that was designed to martyr him, would translate the New Testament into German from Erasmus' Greek/Latin New Testament and

publish it in September of 1522. Simultaneously, William Tyndale would become burdened to translate that same Erasmus text into English. It could not, however, be done in England.

Tyndale showed up on Luther's doorstep in 1525, and by year's end had translated the New Testament into English. Tyndale was fluent in eight languages and is considered by many to be the primary architect of today's English language. Already hunted because of the rumor spread abroad that such a project was underway, inquisitors and bounty hunters were on Tyndale's trail to abort the effort. God foiled their plans, and in 1525/6 Tyndale printed the first English New Testament. They were burned as soon as the Bishop could confiscate them, but copies trickled through and actually ended up in the bedroom of King Henry VIII. The more the King and Bishop resisted its distribution, the more fascinated the public at large became. The church declared it contained thousands of errors as they torched hundreds of New Testaments confiscated by the clergy, while in fact, they burned them because they could find no errors at all. One risked death by burning if caught in mere possession of Tyndale's forbidden books.

Having God's Word available to the public in the language of the common man, English, would have meant disaster to the church. No longer would they control access to the scriptures. If people were able to read the Bible in their own tongue, the church's income and power would crumble. They could not possibly continue to get away with selling indulgences (the forgiveness of sins) or selling the release of loved ones from a church-manufactured "Purgatory". People would begin to challenge the church's authority if the church were exposed as frauds and thieves. The contradictions between what God's Word said, and what the priests taught, would open the public's eyes and the truth would set them free from the grip of fear that the institutional church held. Salvation through faith, not works or donations, would be understood. The need for priests would vanish through the priesthood of all believers. The veneration of church-canonized Saints and Mary would be called into question. The availability of the scriptures in English was the biggest threat imaginable to the wicked church. Neither side would give up without a fight.

The Tyndale New Testament was the first ever printed in the English language. Its first printing occurred in 1525/6, but only one complete copy of the first printing exists. Any Edition printed before 1570 is very rare and valuable, particularly pre-1540 editions and fragments. Tyndale's flight was an inspiration to freedom-loving Englishmen who drew courage from the 11 years that he was hunted. Books and Bibles flowed into England in bales of cotton and sacks of flour. In the end, Tyndale was caught: betrayed by an Englishman that he had befriended. Tyndale was incarcerated for 500 days before he was strangled and burned at the stake in 1536. His last words were, "Lord, open the eyes of the King of England".

Myles Coverdale and John Rogers were loyal disciples the last six years of Tyndale's life, and they carried the project forward and even accelerated it. Coverdale finished translating the Old Testament, and in 1535 he printed the first complete Bible in the English language, making use of Luther's German text and the Latin as sources. Thus, the first complete English Bible was printed on October 4, 1535, and is known as

the Coverdale Bible.

John Rogers went on to print the second complete English Bible in 1537. He printed it under the pseudonym "Thomas Matthew", as a considerable part of this Bible was the translation of Tyndale, whose writings had been condemned by the English authorities. It is a composite made up of Tyndale's Pentateuch and New Testament (1534-1535 edition) and Coverdale's Bible and a small amount of Roger's own translation of the text. It remains known most commonly as the Matthews Bible.

In 1539, Thomas Cranmer, the Archbishop of Canterbury, hired Myles Coverdale at the bequest of King Henry VIII to publish the "Great Bible". It became the first English Bible authorized for public use, as it was distributed to every church, chained to the pulpit, and a reader was even provided so that the illiterate could hear the Word of God in plain English. It would seem that William Tyndale's last wish had been granted...just three years after his martyrdom. Cranmer's Bible, published by Coverdale, was known as the Great Bible due to its great size: a large pulpit folio measuring over 14 inches tall. Seven editions of this version were printed between April of 1539 and December of 1541.

The ebb and flow of freedom continued through the 1540's...and into the 1550's. The reign of Queen Mary (a.k.a. "Bloody Mary") was the next obstacle to the printing of the Bible in English. She was possessed in her quest to return England to the Roman Church. In 1555, John Rogers ("Thomas Matthew") and Thomas Cranmer were both burned at the stake. Mary went on to burn reformers at the stake by the hundreds for the "crime" of being a Protestant. This era was known as the Marian Exile, and the refugees fled from England with little hope of ever seeing their home or friends again.

In the 1550's, the Church at Geneva, Switzerland, was very sympathetic to the reformer refugees and was one of only a few safe havens for a desperate people. Many of them met in Geneva, led by Myles Coverdale and John Foxe (publisher of the famous Foxe's Book of Martyrs, which is to this day the only exhaustive reference work on the persecution and martyrdom of Early Christians and Protestants from the first century up to the mid-16th century), as well as Thomas Sampson and William Whittingham. There, with the protection of John Calvin and John Knox, the Church of Geneva determined to produce a Bible that would educate their families while they continued in exile.

The New Testament was completed in 1557, and the complete Bible was first published in 1560. It became known as the Geneva Bible. Due to a passage in Genesis describing the clothing that God fashioned for Adam and Eve upon expulsion from the Garden of Eden as "Breeches" (an antiquated form of "Britches"), some people referred to the Geneva Bible as the Breeches Bible.

The Geneva Bible was the first Bible to add verses to the chapters, so that referencing specific passages would be easier. Every chapter was also accompanied by extensive marginal notes and references so thorough and complete that the Geneva Bible is also considered the first English "Study Bible". William Shakespeare quotes thousands of times in his plays from the Geneva translation of the Bible. The Geneva Bible became the Bible of choice for over 100 years of English speaking Christians. Between 1560 and 1644 at least 144 editions of this Bible were published. Examination of the

1611 King James Bible shows clearly that its translators were influenced much more by the Geneva Bible, than by any other source. The Geneva Bible itself retains over 90% of William Tyndale's original English translation. The Geneva in fact, remained more popular than the King James Version until decades after its original release in 1611! The Geneva holds the honor of being the first Bible taken to America, and the Bible of the Puritans and Pilgrims. It is believed that at least one copy of the 1611 KJV was brought over on the Mayflower as well as the Geneva (primarily the editions of 1599 through 1608). Since the crown outlawed the printing of Geneva in 1616, many editions printed after that date were dated 1599.

With the end of Queen Mary's bloody rein, the reformers could safely return to England. The Anglican Church, under Queen Elizabeth I, reluctantly tolerated the printing and distribution of Geneva version Bibles in England. The marginal notes, which were vehemently against the institutional Church of the day, did not rest well with the rulers of the day, however. Another version, one with a less inflammatory tone was desired. In 1568, the Bishop's Bible was introduced. Despite 19 editions being printed between 1568 and 1606, the version never gained much of a foothold of popularity among the people. The Geneva may have simply been too much to compete with.

By the 1580's, the Roman Catholic Church saw that it had lost the battle to suppress the will of God: that His Holy Word be available in the English language. In 1582, the Church of Rome surrendered their fight for "Latin only" and decided that if the Bible was to be available in English, they would at least have an official Roman Catholic English translation. And so, using the Latin Vulgate as a source text, they went on to publish an English Bible with all the distortions and corruptions that Erasmus had revealed and warned of 75 years earlier. Because it was translated at the Roman Catholic College in the city of Rheims, it was known as the Rheims (or Rhemes) New Testament. The Old Testament was translated by the Church of Rome in 1609 at the College in the city of Doway (also spelled Douay and Douai). The combined product is commonly referred to as the "Doway/Rheims" Version.

In 1589, Dr. Fulke of Cambridge published the "Fulke's Refutation", in which he printed in parallel columns the Bishops Version along side the Rheims Version, attempting to show the error and distortion of the Roman Church's corrupt compromise of an English version of the Bible.

With the death of Queen Elizabeth I, Prince James VI of Scotland became King James I of England. The Protestant clergy approached the new King in 1604 and announced their desire for a new translation to replace the Bishop's Bible first printed in 1568. They knew that the Geneva Version had won the hearts of the people because of its excellent scholarship, accuracy, and exhaustive commentary. However, they did not want the controversial marginal notes (proclaiming the Pope an Anti-Christ, etc.) Essentially, the leaders of the church desired a Bible for the people, with scriptural references only for word clarification when multiple meanings were possible.

This "translation to end all translations" (for a while at least) was the result of the combined effort of about fifty scholars. They took into consideration: The Tyndale New Testament, The Coverdale Bible, The

Matthews Bible, The Great Bible, The Geneva Bible, and even the Rheims New Testament. The great revision of the Bishop's Bible had begun. From 1605 to 1606 the scholars engaged in private research. From 1607 to 1609 the work was assembled. In 1610 the work went to press, and in 1611 the first of the huge (16 inch tall) pulpit folios known as "The King James Bible" came off the printing press.

A typographical error in Ruth 3:15 rendered the pronoun "He" instead of the correct "She" in that verse. This caused some of the 1611 First Editions to be known by collectors as "He" Bibles, and others as "She" Bibles.

It took many years for it to overtake the Geneva Bible in popularity with the people, but eventually the King James Version became the Bible of the English people. It became the most printed book in the history of the world. In fact, for around 250 years...until the appearance of the Revised Version of 1881...the King James Version reigned without a rival.

Although the first Bible printed in America was done in the native Algonquin Indian Language (by John Eliot in 1663), the first English language Bible to be printed in America (by Robert Aitken in 1782) was a King James Version. In 1791, Isaac Collins vastly improved upon the quality and size of the typesetting of American Bibles and produced the first "Family Bible" printed in America...also a King James Version. Also in 1791, Isaiah Thomas published the first Illustrated Bible printed in America...in the King James Version.

In 1841, the English Hexapla New Testament was printed. This wonderful textual comparison tool shows in parallel columns: The 1380 Wycliff, 1534 Tyndale, 1539 Great, 1557 Geneva, 1582 Rheims, and 1611 King James versions of the entire New Testament...with the original Greek at the top of the page. (Hexaplas are available on our Book Vault Page).

Consider the following textual comparison of John 3:16 as they appear in many of these famous printings of the English Bible:
1st Ed. King James (1611):

"For God so loued the world, that he gaue his only begotten Sonne: that whosoever beleeueth in him, should not perish, but haue euerlasting life."

Rheims (1582):

"For so God loued the vvorlde, that he gaue his only-begotten sonne: that euery one that beleeueth in him, perish not, but may haue life euerlasting"

Geneva (1557):

"For God so loueth the world, that he hath geuen his only begotten Sonne: that none that beleue in him, should peryshe, but haue euerlasting lyfe."

Great Bible (1539):

"For God so loued the worlde, that he gaue his only begotten sonne, that whosoever beleueth in him, shulde not perissh, but haue euerlasting lyfe."

Tyndale (1534):

“For God so loveth the worlde, that he hath given his only sonne, that none that beleve in him, shuld perissh: but shuld have everlastinge lyfe.”

Wycliff (1380):

“for god loued so the world; that he gaf his oon bigetun sone, that eche man that bileueth in him perisch not: but haue euerlastyng lif.”

It is possible to go back to manuscripts earlier than Wycliff, but the language found can only be described as the “Anglo-Saxon” roots of English, and would not be easily recognizable as similar to the English spoken today. For example, the Anglo-Saxon pre-English root language of the year 995 AD yields a manuscript that quotes John 3:16 as:

“God lufode middan-eard swa, dat he seade his an-cennedan sunu, dat nan ne forweorde de on hine gely ac habbe dat ece lif.”

Significant Dates

- 500 BC:** Completion of All Original Hebrew Manuscripts which make Up The 39 Books of the Old Testament.
- 200 BC:** Completion of the Septuagint Greek Manuscripts which contain The 39 Old Testament Books AND 14 Apocrypha Books.
- 1st Century AD:** Completion of All Original Greek Manuscripts which make Up The 27 Books of the New Testament.
- 390 AD:** Jerome’s Latin Vulgate Manuscripts Produced which contain All 80 Books (39 Old Test. + 14 Apocrypha + 27 New Test).
- 500 AD:** Scriptures have been Translated into Over 500 Languages.
- 600 AD:** LATIN was the Only Language Allowed for Scripture.
- 995 AD:** Anglo-Saxon (Early Roots of English Language) Translations of The New Testament Produced.
- 1384 AD:** Wycliffe is the First Person to Produce a (Hand-Written) manuscript Copy of the Complete Bible; All 80 Books.
- 1455 AD:** Gutenberg Invents the Printing Press; Books May Now be mass-Produced Instead of Individually Hand-Written. The First Book Ever Printed is Gutenberg’s Bible in Latin.
- 1516 AD:** Erasmus Produces a Greek/Latin Parallel New Testament.
- 1522 AD:** Martin Luther’s German New Testament.
- 1525 AD:** William Tyndale’s New Testament; The First New Testament to be Printed in the English Language.
- 1535 AD:** Myles Coverdale’s Bible; The First Complete Bible to be printed in the English Language (80 Books: O.T. & N.T. & Apocrypha).
- 1537 AD:** Matthews Bible; The Second Complete Bible to be Printed in English. Done by John “Thomas Matthew” Rogers (80 Books).
- 1539 AD:** The “Great Bible” Printed; The First English Language Bible to be Authorized for Public Use (80 Books).
- 1560 AD:** The Geneva Bible Printed; The First English Language Bible to Add Numbered Verses to Each Chapter (80 Books).
- 1568 AD:** The Bishops Bible Printed; The Bible of which the King James

was a Revision (80 Books).

- 1609 AD:** The Douay Old Testament is added to the Rheimes New Testament (of 1582) Making the First Complete English Catholic Bible; Translated from the Latin Vulgate (80 Books).
- 1611 AD:** The King James Bible Printed; Originally with All 80 Books. The Apocrypha was Officially Removed in 1885 Leaving Only 66 Books.
- 1782 AD:** Robert Aitken's Bible; The First English Language Bible (a King James Version without Apocrypha) to be Printed in America.
- 1791 AD:** Isaac Collins and Isaiah Thomas Respectively Produce the First Family Bible and First Illustrated Bible Printed in America. Both were King James Versions, with All 80 Books.
- 1808 AD:** Jane Aitken's Bible (Daughter of Robert Aitken); The First Bible to be Printed by a Woman.
- 1833 AD:** Noah Webster's Bible; After Producing his Famous Dictionary, Webster Printed his Own Revision of the King James Bible.
- 1841 AD:** English Hexapla New Testament; an Early Textual Comparison showing the Greek and 6 Famous English Translations in Parallel Columns.
- 1846 AD:** The Illuminated Bible; The Most Lavishly Illustrated Bible printed in America. A King James Version, with All 80 Books.
- 1885 AD:** The "Revised Version" Bible; The First Major English Revision of the King James Bible.
- 1901 AD:** The "American Standard Version"; The First Major American Revision of the King James Bible.
- 1971 AD:** The "New American Standard Bible" (NASB) is Published as a "Modern and Accurate Word for Word English Translation" of the Bible.
- 1973 AD:** The "New International Version" (NIV) is Published as a "Modern and Accurate Phrase for Phrase English Translation" of the Bible.
- 1982 AD:** The "New King James Version" (NKJV) is Published as a "Modern English Version Maintaining the Original Style of the King James."

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