

Bibles and Bible Study

Spreading the Word

The Spanish Armada was defeated by a combination of the hand of God in the weather and the British fleet under Sir Francis Drake. From then on British naval power began to grow. The importance of the development of this power was recognised by successive rulers who needed to ensure that the trade and supply routes around the world were maintained, in order to ensure the survival and prosperity of Great Britain.

This also made possible the spread of the Word of God around the world and the King James (or Authorised) Version had an important part to play in that development. There were three factors which proved important.

❖ English Navy

1. 1514 – King Henry VIII invested in maintaining a permanent Navy of about 30 ships. By 1544 the number of ships had increased to 50 vessels. Queen Elizabeth I continued to develop the Navy through improved efficiency and promoted the global ambitions of her merchants and seamen.

❖ English Bible

2. 1611 – God had overseen the development of a version of the English Bible that was destined to endure and be in use for at least 400 years.

❖ British Empire

3. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries British power and influence spread round the globe. It

has been said that during the reign of Queen Victoria, when the empire was at the zenith of its power, the sun never set on the British Empire. History shows us that the British Empire was to fulfil a unique role determined by God. It was by this means that the King James Bible was distributed to the English speaking peoples of the world.

Other Empires and trading powers had existed, for example, Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch and French. They had Bibles in their mother tongues and they had their missionaries. However, none can be compared to the rigour with which Great Britain took to the work of distributing the Word of God around the world.

Bible Societies

❖ **1698** The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge was founded with the purpose of the distribution of the Scriptures. In the early 1790s they distributed 500 Welsh Bibles with a further 10,000 Welsh Bibles in 1799. The demand for Bibles in Wales was so great that there were whole districts where the demand could not be satisfied: Montgomeryshire, Cardiganshire and Carmarthenshire!

Many other Societies were formed to spread the Word of God.

❖ **1701** The Society for the Promotion of the Gospel in Foreign Parts was founded. Through the communication routes of the Empire

they distributed Bibles in many places beyond the shores of England.

- ❖ **1709** The Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge (in Scotland).
- ❖ **1750** The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge among the Poor.
- ❖ **1780** The Bible Society (for soldiers and seamen).
- ❖ **1785** The Society for the Support and Encouragement of Sunday Schools.
- ❖ **1804** The British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS).

Many Languages

Bibles were printed in many languages and millions of copies were distributed throughout the world. Between 1804 and 1853 the BFBS printed 8.3 million Bibles in the United Kingdom languages of English, Gaelic, Irish, Manx and Welsh. A further 1.45 million Bibles were printed for distribution covering 26 languages. The work was funded by annual and lifetime subscribers.

The 'Laws and Regulations of the BFBS' included one important rule that held the society together and contributed to its longevity. The BFBS's "sole object shall be to encourage a wider circulation of the Holy Scriptures without note or comment: the only copies in the languages of the United Kingdom to be circulated by the Society shall be the Authorised Version." In 1901 the rule was amended to include the Revised Version of 1881.

In the first hundred years of its existence, the Society distributed 180 million copies of the Bible in languages

spoken by seven-tenths of the population of the planet. In the early eighteen hundreds, Bibles were distributed to British and foreign mariners at ports around the country including Portsmouth, Whitby, Hull and Aberdeen. The first systematic effort to distribute Bibles was started at Gravesend. In 1818 an agent was appointed to visit every outward-bound ship from Gravesend to sell Bibles to seamen. In the first year the agent boarded 1681 ships at Gravesend to distribute Bibles to crew members.

Bible Prophecy Fulfilled

Thus through its many Bible societies, Britain took the Gospel message around the world. It is a matter of historical fact that, in the purpose of God, Great Britain made a significant contribution to the fulfilment of the words of the prophet Jeremiah.

"Hear the word of the Lord, O nations, and declare it in the isles afar off, and say, 'He who scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him as a shepherd does his flock' (Jeremiah 31:10).

The Lord issued this challenge to the nations. He would scatter Israel because of their sins and their lack of faith. They were indeed scattered and every nation had its Jewish community. The Lord also stated that He would regather them to the land of Israel. The return of the Jews to the land is the most reliable witness for us that God is working in the affairs of the nations as a prelude to the return of Jesus Christ to set up the Kingdom of God on earth.

Britain was destined to play a role in supporting the establishment of the State of Israel. In 1917 the Balfour Declaration expressed a commitment by the British Government to support the establishment of the State of

Israel, “His Majesty’s Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people...”. This declaration preceded the birth of the State of Israel in May 1948 and the regathering of the Jews began, as spoken by the prophet Jeremiah.

More Bible Versions

Since 1881 there has been a proliferation of Bible versions. Many are paraphrases or a mix of paraphrase with some literal translation and are based on manuscripts which some scholars consider to be corrupt.

| Byzantine Text | Alexandrian Text |
|---|--|
| <p>From 1633, after the Reformation, the half dozen texts used to translate the New Testament of the King James Bible were known as ‘Textus Receptus’.</p> <p>Many New Testament manuscripts (over 5,000) have been found since and the Textus Receptus may be said to be representative of 90% of them because there are no variations that challenge or change Bible teaching.</p> <p>These manuscripts were found over a wide geographical area and the consistency between them gives us confidence that the King James Bible was translated from reliable sources.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ King James Version (KJV) 1611 ❖ Young’s Literal Translation 1863 ❖ New King James Version (NKJV) 1979  | <p>1881 Dr. Westcott & Dr. Hort produced an eclectic Greek New Testament text mainly based on two manuscripts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Codex Vaticanus, and ❖ Codex Siniaticus. <p><i>Eclectic</i> means, ‘free selection’. The two scholars constructed texts from manuscripts they preferred. Therefore, there is no single Greek manuscript that corresponds to an ‘Eclectic Text’. The work of Westcott & Hort has influenced the majority of modern versions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ <i>Revised Version (RV)</i> 1881 ❖ <i>American Standard Version (ASV)</i> 1901 ❖ <i>Revised Standard Version (RSV)</i> 1952 ❖ <i>New English Bible (NEB)</i> 1970 ❖ <i>New International Version (NIV)</i> 1973 ❖ <i>Good News Bible (GNB)</i> 1976 ❖ <i>Revised English Bible (REB)</i> 1989 ❖ <i>New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)</i> 1990 ❖ <i>English Standard Version (ESV)</i> 2002 |

Bible Study Tools

Today we have the benefit of a wealth of different study aids to help us enrich our Bible knowledge and understanding.

❖ Cross references

Many Bibles have cross references either printed in a centre-page column or at the foot of the page. We should not neglect this source of Bible links. Such references can be useful to us in finding links with other parts of the Bible that build on what God has already said. Here is an example.

In the Book of Revelation we read that a time is coming when:

“God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away” (Revelation 21:4).

This Scripture tells us that God has a plan and purpose with mankind and that the work of Jesus, when he returns, will be completed when he finally eliminates sin and abolishes death. But is this plan something that is only revealed in the last book of the Bible? Surely not! This is where cross references can help.

In the margin of my Bible there is a cross reference to Isaiah 25:8. We learn from this that God is consistent, for He made this promise of a better future for the earth in Old Testament times and has repeated it in the New Testament. This is what Isaiah said that God will do:

He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces; the rebuke of His people He will take away from all the earth; for the Lord has spoken (Isaiah 25:8).

❖ Bible Concordances

The purpose of a Bible concordance is to enable you to find verses in the Bible and then work out the meaning of words. The concordance is an alphabetical index of all the words in a particular Bible version. For the King James Bible, *Young’s Analytical Concordance* lists the different English words and shows the different Hebrew or Greek words that are translated this way. *Strong’s Concordance* lists the Bible references in sequence for a particular English word and gives a Hebrew or Greek reference number. The meaning of the Hebrew or Greek word can then be looked up in the Concordance.

For example, using *Young’s Concordance*, if we wanted to learn what the Bible has to say about the life of Abraham we can find where in the Bible “Abraham” is named. We can then follow the series of references listed. The first reference to Abraham is:

No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations (Genesis 17:5)

Abraham was a man of great faith who pleased God. Therefore God changed his name from Abram (‘father of height’) to Abraham (‘father of a multitude’).

Bible Concordances can be purchased in book form or can be downloaded or accessed from the Internet. With the aid of a computer we can search for a phrase or find where several different words appear within a single verse.

Peter Moore

Next month: Comparing Bible Versions