

LESSON-12

BIBLE- Translation and Printing

References : Psalm. 119: 129 -144

Memory verse : 1 Peter. 1 : 23 -25

Objective: To gain information about the manuscripts, the first translations of the Bible and the beginning of Bible printing and to trust the authenticity of the Bible.

Introduction: Had the Bible been in its original manuscript stage, could we understand the great truths of the Bible? Several men of God suffered untold troubles to copy the Bible manuscripts and translate it in the midst of very adverse circumstances. Many of them were martyred. Overcoming the difficult times and the arch - enemies, the Bible has become the book having the widest circulation in the world. When we study about the historical background of the Bible, we will get really inspired.

THE FIRST TRANSLATION

The Septuagint (Greek):

The Old Testament was written in Hebrew. The same was translated into Greek about the time between 250 and 150 B.C. After the conquests of Alexander the Great, Greek became a world language. So the Hebrew Old Testament was translated into that language. At the interest of the Ptolemies of Egypt about seventy Jewish translators came from Jerusalem to Alexandria and began translating. The translation of the entire Old Testament took about a hundred years. This translation is known as the Septuagint. When Jesus Christ was on this earth, the Old Testament was available both in Hebrew and Greek. It was written on leather scrolls. Christ used mostly the Hebrew scrolls. Most of the New Testament books were written in Greek. Although some were written

in Aramic, they were soon translated into Greek. The old and the new Testament were thus available to the Greek people in their tongue in the first century itself. For in those days Greek was the international language.

When the Christian Church grew and expanded into other language groups, the Bible began to be translated into those languages. By the end of the second century A.D. there were translations in Syriac and Latin. Before long, the New Testament was translated into many vernaculars like Gothic, Arminian, Ethiopian, Arabic, Persian, Slavonic etc.

2. The Latin Vulgate:

By about 4th century A. D. there were many Latin translations of the Bible. The Church leaders of that time in Rome appointed Jerome to translate the Bible into the Latin Language. Jerome went to the birth place of Jesus in 387 A.D. and carried out his task in 25 years. It is evident that he had access to many old Hebrew manuscripts, to the Septuagint and Syriac versions, and to other authentic sources unknown today.

This translation is known as the Latin Vulgate. For more than one thousand years until reformation, this Bible was in use in Western Europe.

THE MANUSCRIPTS:

1. Leather Scrolls:

Before the 15th century A.D. Bible copies were written by hand on leather scrolls. A group of people known as 'scribes' did the copying of the Scriptures. Today there are more than four thousand such manuscripts in existence. They include those that were written about A. D. 200. The scriptures were written on leather scrolls knit together.

2. Papyrus Rolls:

Besides leather scrolls, the Scriptures were written papyrus rolls. The Papyrus is a tall sledge (a coarse grass growing in swamps and river side) which grows near the sea of Galilee and Lake Merom. Formerly it flourished near the Nile. The Egyptians used it in the manufacture of shoes, boats, baskets etc. The pith of the papyrus was cut into thin, flat strips, six or seven inches in length. These would be laid at right angles to the side of a table. Then a thick paste of glue

would be applied, and other strips would be laid crosswise and pressed. Thus the papyrus sheet was produced. Several sheets attached to one another would form a roll. Such manuscripts are known as Codex. The manuscripts were very rare as the transcription was very expensive. The oldest transcriptions available to us are given below;

- i) **The Sinaitic Codex:** This belongs to the fourth century. It was discovered in 1859 by the great scholar, Dr. Tischendorf, in the convent of St. Catherine at Mt. Sinai. It was preserved in Russia until 1933; but now it is kept in the British Museum.
- ii) **The Alexandrian Codex:** This belongs to the early fifth century and was given to Charles I of England in 1628 by the Patriarch of Constantinople. Now it is Preserved in the Library of the British Museum.
- iii) **The Vatican Codex:** It was written in the fourth Century. It has been preserved in the Vatican Library at Rome since 450 A. D. Even after 1500 years of existance, the writing is still clear and legible.

THE BIBLE PRINTING:

The printing press and movable type was invented in the thirteenth century in China. In Europe, the first man to begin printing was **John Guten Berg** (in A.D. 1450). The Latin Bible was the first ever printed book in his press. Following this printing in other languages of Europe also began. Cacston in England started English printing and published Bible stories. The first man to print the Greek New Testament was Erasmus in 1516. With the invention of printing, various Bible translations were printed in largre quantities and copies were available at a price within the reach of common people. This is how the fire of reformation spread in Europe. Not long after the Greek New Testament of Erasmus was ppublished, Martin Luther of Germany questioned the rituals and practices of the Roman Catholics which were against the Bible doctirnes. In 1522 Martin Luther translated the New Testament into the German. Following that, in the midst of hardest oppositions from the Roman Catholics, Luther translated the entire Bible into simple German language and published it. Luther's translation became a guidepost to the future translations.

THE ENGLISH BIBLE (JOHN WYCLIFFE):

Soon after Jerome had completed the Latin translation, missionaries began to carry the Gospel into the regions of Great Britain. Many of the eager listeners were unable to read and of those who could, very few had access to a Latin Bible. Soon certain portions of the Bible were translated into the vernacular. The Gospel of John was translated by Beda. But until the last decade of the fourteenth Century there was not a complete English Bible. The man who first translated the entire Bible into English was John Wycliffe. Born at Yorkshire of Northern England in 1320, Wycliffe later became a Bible scholar and prominent English reformer. With a firm decision to make the Bible available to the common man he began translating the Bible into English. He completed the translation of the New Testament in 1380 and then the Old Testament in the next two years. Yet it could not be printed and published. The Roman Catholics excommunicated him. After he was dead and buried, by their unabated indignation towards him they disinterred (dug up) his bones and burnt them. Nevertheless, John, Wycliffe's work did not go futile. It was proved by later events. The fire of reformation that Wycliffe had kindled spread into the whole world.

EXERCISE -12

Answer the following questions

1. When was the Old Testament translated into Greek?
2. What is meant by Septuagint?
3. On what was the Old Testament written?
4. When was the Bible translated into Syriac and Latin?
5. Who was appointed in Rome to translate the Bible into the Latin Language?
6. Who did the work of copying of the scriptures?
7. What is a codex?

8. What is the Latin Vulgate?
9. Which are the oldest transcriptions available to us?
10. When and where was the printing press invented?
11. Who was the first man to begin Printing in Europe?
12. Who started English printing in England?
13. Who was the first man to print the Greek New Testament?
14. How did the fire of reformation spread in Europe?
15. Who questioned the rituals and practices of the Roman Catholics?
16. Who translated the New Testament into German?
17. Who was the first man to translate the entire Bible into English?

