THE TRANSMISSION AND PRESERVATION OF THE BIBLE

SOME BACKGROUND:
Theological battles have been fought through the centuries of Christendom’s history. All the great doctrines taught in the Bible have at some point been challenged and defended. But the 20th Century was the battle for the Bible itself. Early decades saw battle over issues of Authorship (Inspiration), Authority (credibility) and Authenticity (reliability) resulting in Christendom’s two present camps: the liberal and the conservative. Today, Moral Relativism and Evolutionary Humanism attack the existence of God as Creator and Redeemer.

In his textbook for seminaries, THE ENGLISH BIBLE: MANUSCRIPT EVIDENCE, Dr. Robert J. Sargent outlines topics to consider:

- The Revelation of God’s Word, through his inspiration, using chosen men of God as his writers (Biblical verses)
- Transmission and preservation of the Biblical texts
- Desecration of these texts by textual corruption
- Manuscript collection
- Translations into common languages
- The Authorized King James Version
- The rise of Literary Criticism
- Proliferation: a multitude of revisions and versions

Our study cannot discuss all these points, but we will first define some terms. Then, a very brief scan of the years since Apostolic times will place the Bible in perspective with world events and influential people. Finally, the names of some of the prominent Bibles today.

TERMS AND CLARIFICATIONS:

LANGUAGE: Old Testament – in Hebrew, a few texts in Aramaic
New Testament – in Koine Greek (common, colloquial Greek used from Alexander’s Conquests to beginning of Byzantine era)

TRANSLATING:
- Transliteration: the translation of sounds (of no value)
- Literal Translation: translation of words in their original order
- Dynamic translation: gives the sense without concern for words
- Dynamic equivalency: translates the meaning of the words into contemporary speech (frequently used)
- Formal Translation: word for word, with sense, style, emphasis and grammar accurately rendered (the best!)
- Paraphrase: concerns itself with ideas more than the words – to paraphrase is “to put in other words"
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WRITING MATERIALS:
Clay tablets and stylus, stone and chisel, wood and chisel, ostraca (a type of pottery) and pen, Papyrus and pen, parchment and ink, paper (invented by Chinese circa 200 BC)

TERMS:
• Manuscript: hand-written documents
• Scroll: continuous roll of parchment or papyrus
• Codex: simply a book
• Lectionaries: collections of Scripture lessons for meetings
• Unical: upper case (capital) letters
• Minuscule: lower case or cursive script
• Majority text: a text determined by simple majority from all existing manuscripts
• Palimpsest or Rescriptus: parchment scraped and written over
• Polyglot: multi-language Bibles – usually in columns
• Vulgate: common language

CANON: Canonization is the process of determining which writings measure up as real Scripture. It was the recognition of a Book’s God-given authority – (NOT GIVING the Book its authority) The Old Testament canon was formed progressively as the Books were written down and received by the nation of Israel. See: Ex. 24:3, Joshua 24:26-27, I Samuel 10:24-25, New Testament canon decreed in 393 AD at the Council of Hippo

MASORETIC TEXT: Masoretes were a Jewish community circa 500-1000 A.D. They carefully guarded and passed on the Hebrew Bible, following strict rules for copying – basis for the KJV Old Testament


THE APOCRYPHA: the non-canonical Old Testament Books. 15 books of Jewish literature written during the Inter-testamental period - the 400 years between Old and New Testaments. Jews and Protestants do not accept them as Scripture. Roman Catholics accepted 12, (calling them the “deutero-canonical” books,) at the Council of Trent, 1546.

THE SEPTUAGINT: legendary translation of Old Testament by 70 Jews into Greek, around 250 B.C. It is the official version for Greek Orthodox Church. There are 4 extant manuscripts from between 350 and 500 A.D. Some think they are by Origen.

DEAD SEA SCROLLS: 20th century archaeological discovery in a number of caves at Qumran (1947-1956) from a library of the Essenes – a Jewish sect. About 600 Bible manuscripts – Carbon 14 dating place the writings between 100 BC and 200 AD.
TEXTUAL CORRUPTION: Doubting – diluting – distending – diminishing – denying – displacing God’s Words. Most of the changes of the Bible text took place within the early centuries of Christian history. Heresies, revisions, editorial corrections, etc.

KING JAMES VERSION - 1611: Considered a generally accurate translation of the Textus Receptus for close to 300 years. Most new translations are founded on the Wescott-Hort manuscripts which many consider “corrupted”

WESCOTT AND HORT CRITICAL THEORY – late 1800’s: They rejected the Textus Receptus from the Masoretic and Byzantine Manuscripts, and developed a “Neutral Text” based on 2 manuscripts discovered in the 18th century but written in 4th century. The Manuscripts are called Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus, as you will see on the charts. Most importantly, Wescott and Hort themselves questioned many fundamentals, notably the inspiration and authority of Scripture. From their theories have arisen the many different translations we find today (See Chart 4)

HISTORY
- In the centuries after the Apostles died, there was bitter persecution by both Greek and Roman Emperors
- Persecutions ceased by 311 AD under Constantine the Great, when there was an alignment of church and state – a key step in the formation of the Roman Catholic Church. Papacy established by the end of the 6th Century
- Translations of the Scriptures into many common languages from the Greek Vulgate. Old Latin version circa 157 AD – Latin Vulgate of Jerome between 383 and 405 – Syriac in 2nd century – Ethiopic 350 – Armenian and Georgian circa 400 – German in 7th-8th century (these to name just a few)
- Small, persecuted communities tried to follow the Scriptures and rejected new conflicting doctrines of Papal Rome. Paulicians, Anabaptists, United Brethren, Cathari, Albigenses, Waldenses etc.
- The Inquisition began under Pope Innocent III circa 1198 in Italy, France, Spain. Continued through 1834 when finally abolished in Spain. Bibles forbidden to the common man.
- Bibles (or parts) translated and copied into many languages during Middle Ages: Spanish, Old Norse, French, Swedish, Danish, Bohemian, Slavonic etc. the first English by John Wycliffe -1380,
- 1516 – Erasmus’ translation of the Greek New Testament (later the Old Testament)
- Invention of the printing press by moveable type - early 1500’s
- William Tyndale’s Bible, the first English Bible published (1525)
- Protestant Reformation 1517 AD: Luther, Calvin, Zwingli
- Catholic “Counter-Reformation”- Council of Trent: 1545-1564
- Next 200 years: The “Enlightenment” or “Age of Reason” which elevated reason above revelation
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- 1620 The Mayflower brings Puritans to New England – to practice their faith according to the dictates of Church and Scripture
- Prominent people: Philosophers like John Locke and David Hume who developed the empirical method (observation = experiment = fact), Galileo, Immanuel Kant (reasoning rather than revelation), Thomas Jefferson, Shakespeare
- Publication of King James Version Bible: 1611 (King James I)
- French Revolution 1789
- Darwin: “Origin of Species” 1859
- Deism, skepticism, and unbelief pervade even the church
- Scientific Biblical Criticism arose – the end-product of the “Age of Reason” and the new philosophies
- Higher Criticism deals with contents and authorship
- Lower Criticism deals with determining of the text of the Bible
- Westcott and Hort Theory of Biblical Criticism – late 1800’s
- Creationism (taught in Scripture) belittled
- Scientific Evolution pervades education
- Moral relativism – situational ethics – Occultism – materialism – New Age movement etc. The “Humanist Manifesto” of 1973 stated: “No deity will save us, we will save ourselves!” (Isaac Asimov is the president of this organization today)

SOME FAMILIAR REVISED BIBLES:

(Wescott and Hort were on the revision committee)
ASV – The American Standard Version 1901 - basically the American equivalent to the English RV
Knox Version – 1945 Roman Catholic from Latin Vulgate
Amplified – 1958 (based on Westcott /Hort)
LB - Living Bible 1962, 1971 Paraphrase
NEB - The New English Bible, 1961 and 1970 – completely new translation, scholars from Protestant denominations
JB - Jerusalem Bible - Roman Catholic (New Jerusalem 1985)
NKJB – New King James Bible - 1982 (based on Majority Text)
NRSV - New Revised Standard Version 1990 (Eclectic)

(As of 1995, Pastor Sargent printed 32 pages of new English translations of the Bible since 1611!)