

History of Bible Translations

Edited by Charles E. Battle CFP LutCF MDiv.

The first human author to write down the biblical record was Moses. He was commanded by God to take on this task, for Exodus 34:27 records God's words to Moses, "Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write these words, for according to the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel." [NKJV] *And what language did he use?* He wrote in his native language, called **Hebrew**.

Hebrew is one of a group of languages known as the Semitic languages which were spoken throughout that part of the world, then called Mesopotamia, located today mainly in Iraq. Their alphabet consisted of 22 letters, all consonants. (Imagine having an alphabet with no vowels! Much later they did add vowels.) During the thousand years of its composition, almost the entire **Old Testament** was written in Hebrew. But a few chapters in the prophecies of Ezra and Daniel and one verse in Jeremiah were written in a language called *Aramaic*. This language became very popular in the ancient world and actually displaced many other languages. Aramaic even became the common language spoken in Israel in Jesus' time, and it was likely the language He spoke day by day. Some Aramaic words were even used by the Gospel writers in the New Testament.

The **New Testament**, however, was written in **Greek**. This seems strange, since you might think it would be either Hebrew or Aramaic. However, Greek was the language of scholarship during the years of the composition of the New Testament from 50 to 100 AD. The fact is that many Jews could not even read Hebrew anymore, and this disturbed the Jewish leaders a lot! So, around 300 BC a translation of the Old Testament from Hebrew into Greek was undertaken, and it was completed around 200 BC. Gradually this Greek translation of the Old Testament, called the **Septuagint**, was widely accepted and was even used in many synagogues. It also became a wonderful missionary tool for the early Christians, since now the Greeks could read God's Word in their own tongue.

So the New Testament authors wrote in Greek. They did not, however, use really high-class or classical Greek, but a very common and everyday

type of Greek. For many years some scholars ridiculed the Greek of the New Testament because many of its words were strange to those who read the writings of the great Greek classical authors such as Plato and Aristotle. But later many records were uncovered of ordinary people, and amazingly there were the same common terms used in everyday speech! The ridicule dried up accordingly.

The earliest copies of parts of the Hebrew Old Testament were discovered in 1947. They are part of the famous *Dead Sea Scrolls* and actually date back to the first century BC. Even though they are at least 900 years older than any parts of the Bible we had before this, they are not the originals. They are copies. The originals have all been lost or destroyed. But we are not at all doubtful that we may not have the original text. Copying by scribes was done with great care in those days and because the text was regarded as sacred, the copyists were extremely painstaking. Today some 5000 hand-copied documents exist of all or part of the Bible, and they agree in 98% of the text! No other ancient writing has this amount of underlying support with such amazing agreement as to the text.

Yes, we do have what God wanted us to have! By way of translation, we now have His revelation in our own language and in 2300 other languages, too. Today we have the very Bible that comes to us from the three languages used in the original. Truly we can say, "God speaks my language, too!"

<https://www.biblica.com/resources/bible-faqs/in-what-language-was-the-bible-first-written/>

Two books of the Old Testament - Wisdom and II Maccabeesⁱ - were written in Greek. The rest of the Old Testament was written in the Hebrew language. The New Testament was written in Greek, with the exception of St. Matthew's Gospel which - according to the unanimous testimony of Christian antiquity - was written in Hebrew or Aramaic.

The books of the Bible were very likely written in the cursive style of writing. The cursive (or "running hand") style joins the letters of a word together as when we write today. In addition, the ancients had two other styles of writing: the *lapidary* (from the Latin word, lapis, meaning stone) and the *uncial* (from the Latin word uncia, meaning inch). The **lapidary**

style was followed in inscriptions on stone monuments and used only capital letters. The uncial style was used in fine editions of books and in elaborate Bibles and employed large disconnected letters resembling the capitals. In "**uncial**" writing there were no spaces between the words or sentences and punctuation marks were used rarely. The word "uncial" comes from St. Jerome's description of some Bibles of his time as being written in "letters an inch high."

<https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/resources/bible/introduction-to-the-bible/original-language-of-the-bible>

Northwestern, Southeastern	<p>Ernst Risch, <i>Museum Helveticum</i>(1955):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Northern Greek <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Doric</u>/North-Western Greek • <u>Aeolic</u> • <u>Pamphylian?</u> • Southern Greek <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Ionic-Arcadian-Cypriot-Mycenaean</u> 	<p>Alfred Heubeck:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Northwestern group <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Doric</u>/<u>North-Western Greek</u> • <u>Aeolic?</u> • Southeastern group <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Ionic-Attic</u> • <u>Arcadocypriot</u>
Western, Central, Eastern	<p>A. Thumb, E. Kieckers, <i>Handbuch der griechischen Dialekte</i>(1932):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Western Greek <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Doric dialects</u> • <u>dialect of Achaea</u> • dialect of <u>Elis</u> • <u>North-Western Greek</u> • Central Greek <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Aeolic</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Boiotic</u> • <u>Thessalic</u> • <u>Lesbic</u> • <u>Arcadocyprian</u> • Eastern Greek <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Ionic</u> • <u>Attic</u> 	<p>W. Porzig, <i>Die Gliederung des indogermanischen Sprachgebiets</i>(1954):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Western Greek <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>North-Western Greek</u> • <u>Doric</u> • <u>Aeolic</u> • Eastern Greek <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Ionic-Attic</u> • <u>Arcadocypriot</u>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Pamphylian</u> <p><u>C.D. Buck</u>, <i>The Greek Dialects</i> (1955):^[26]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • East Greek <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The <u>Attic-Ionic</u> Group <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attic • Ionic • East Ionic • Central Ionic • West Ionic or Euboean • The <u>Arcado-Cyprian</u> Group <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arcadian • Cyprian • <u>Pamphylian</u> • The <u>Aeolic</u> Group <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lesbian • Thessalian • Boeotian • West Greek <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The <u>North-West Greek</u> Group <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phocian (including Delphian) • Locrian • Elean • The Northwest Greek koine • The <u>Doric</u> Group <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Laconian and Heraclean • Messenian • Megarian • Corinthian • Argolic • Rhodian • Coan • Theran and Cyrenaean • Cretan • Sicilian Doric
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ⁱ These books are part of *The Apocrypha*. These writings not considered a part of the accepted canons of Scripture.