How We Got the Bible

Translation

Translation Necessary

> But how shall men meditate in that, which they cannot understand? How shall they understand that which is kept close in an unknown tongue? as it is written, *Except I know the power of the voice, I shall be to him that speaketh, a Barbarian, and he that speaketh, shall be a Barbarian to me*. [1 Cor 14] The Apostle excepteth no tongue; not Hebrew the ancientest, not Greek the most copious, (plentiful) not Latin the finest. Nature taught a natural man to confess, that all of us in those tongues which we do not understand, are plainly deaf; we may turn the deaf ear unto them... so lest the Church be driven to the like exigent, (requirement) it is necessary to have translations in a readiness. Translation it is that openeth the window, to let in the light; that breaketh the shell, that we may eat the kernel; that putteth aside the curtain, that we may look into the most Holy place; that removeth the cover of the well, that we may come by the water, even as Jacob rolled away the stone from the mouth of the well, by which means the flocks of Laban were watered [Gen 29:10]. Indeed without translation into the vulgar (common) tongue, the unlearned are but like children at Jacob's well (which was deep) [John 4:11] without a bucket or something to draw with; or as that person mentioned by Isaiah, to whom when a sealed book was delivered, with this motion, *Read this, I pray thee,* he was fain to make this answer, *I cannot, for it is sealed.* [Isa 29:11]
>
> (From the King James 1611 Translator's to the Reader)

Necessity of translation

1. Translation is necessary because of the change in language. (Genesis 11:6-7.) The OT was written in Hebrew, the NT was written in Greek. To fulfill the great commission the Bible needs to be translated into the languages of different people groups. [Historical setting: Jews begin to leave Babylonian captivity in 539 BC. Malachi the prophet writes his book around 440 BC. During the time we call the "silent years", until God speaks through the Gospel writers in the first century AD, Alexander the Great conquers a vast area of the known world between 323 to 31 BC. During this time Greek became a common language along with Aramaic. Hebrew was mainly used in religious, scholarly, and some legal contexts. In fact the word 'synagogue' is a Greek word. Many Jews could not read their scriptures in Hebrew.]

2. The Apostolic explanation of the necessity. ICor. 14:3-5, 12, 17. The point of any spiritual gift is *edification* i.e. profitable, be known, meaning, understanding. Nobody is edified by what he doesn't understand. *Understanding requires intelligibility.*
3. The example within the Word of God itself.
   Ma 1:23; Mk 5:41; 15:22, 34; Jn 1:38; Jn 1:41; Ac 4:36
   Septuagint (LXX)

4. Translation is done because of new manuscript discovery and changes in the English language.

The Septuagint

The first and most important translation of the Hebrew Bible is the Greek version known as the Septuagint, probably beginning to be translated around 284-247 BC. The name "Septuagint" comes from the Latin *septuaginta,* meaning "seventy," a rounded-off reference to the legend that seventy-two scholars translated the work in seventy-two days. The Septuagint is commonly abbreviated "LXX."

Translator's Goals

Historical and Cultural Accuracy. A translation that represents the historical or cultural meaning intended by the author. (Ro 16:16)

Capturing as Much of the Meaning as Possible. Accuracy can also be compromised by simplifying or generalizing the text to the point that significant meaning is lost. (Ro 3:21-22; compare with LB)

Loss of Accuracy Through Obscurity. Innaccuracy can occur from translating too formally. (Esther 1:14)

Readability as Comprehension. In other words, it is understandable but not clear. (Ps 12:2)

Readability as Clarity. Is the meaning readily apparent? (Is 6:10)

Readability as Natural Language. This is more subtle. The language may be clear but it is not how you would say it. (Ps 23:1)

Translator considerations

- Revision or new translation.
- Formal Equivalence, Dynamic Equivalence, Optimal Equivalence?

- What manuscripts should be followed?
- Challenges of translating idioms, metaphors, euphemisms, and other figures of speech.
- Challenges of translating weight, measures, money, and time.
- Considering audience and reading level.

Formal equivalence: aka word-for-word, literal, or direct translation. Seeks to reproduce the *form* of the source text as much as possible.

Functional equivalence: aka dynamic equivalence, sense-for-sense, free, or meaning-based. Seeks to reproduce the *meaning* of the source text.

Optimal equivalence: Seeks to strike a balance between formal and functional. The Christian Standard Bible is an example of a translation that claims this translation philosophy.

1 Corinthians 15:31

Formal equivalence KJV: I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily.

Formal equivalence NASB: I affirm, brethren, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily.

Dynamic equivalence NLT: For I swear, dear brothers and sisters, that I face death daily. This is as certain as my pride in what Christ Jesus our Lord has done in you.

Optimal equivalence CSB: I face death every day, as surely as I may boast about you, brothers and sisters, in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Martin Luther (1483-1546)

"I have not only translated the Gospel of St. John in my Patmos, but the whole of the New Testament, and Philip and I are now busy correcting it, and with God's help, it will be a splendid work. Meantime we need your help, to find out proper words, therefore be ready to supply us with the common terms for some things we require, but not those used at Court, for this book is to be written in the simplest language that all may understand it. (A letter to George Spalatin on March 30, 1522)

William Tyndale (c. 1492-1536)

"I defy the Pope, and all his laws; and if God spares my life, ere many years, I will cause the boy that driveth the plow to know more of the Scriptures than thou dost!"

Estimated Number of Discoveries (Since ~1925)

- **Papyri (2nd–8th centuries)**: Around **70–90 new papyrus manuscripts** have been discovered or cataloged since the 1920s.
- **Majuscules/Uncials (4th–10th centuries)**: Roughly **100+ new uncial manuscripts** have been added.
- **Minuscules (9th century onward)**: **Several hundred minuscule manuscripts** have been cataloged.
- **Lectionaries**: Also, **many new lectionary manuscripts** (used in liturgy) have been documented.

In total, **about 800 to 1,000 newly cataloged Greek New Testament manuscripts** (across all categories) have been added to the official lists in the past century.

⍰ Context

- The **Institut für Neutestamentliche Textforschung (INTF)** in Münster, Germany maintains the official catalog of Greek New Testament manuscripts.
- As of 2025, the **total number** of Greek New Testament manuscripts known is **over 5,800**.
    - Many of these have been **discovered, re-cataloged, or re-evaluated** in the past 100 years.

⍰ Significant Discoveries Since 1925

1. **Chester Beatty Papyri (1930s)**
    a. Includes **P45**, **P46**, and **P47**—some of the earliest and most important NT papyri.
2. **Bodmer Papyri (1950s–60s)**
    a. Includes **P66**, **P72**, **P75**, etc., containing large portions of the Gospels and other NT books.
3. **New Oxyrhynchus Papyri (Ongoing)**
    a. Dozens of new papyri fragments with NT content continue to be published from the Oxyrhynchus collection in Egypt.

4. **Digital Projects and Re-Cataloging (2000s–2020s)**
    a. Manuscripts previously uncataloged or misidentified are now being digitized and officially added to the list.

In the **last 50 years (since ~1975)**, **roughly 400 to 500 new Greek New Testament manuscripts** have been **discovered, identified, or newly cataloged**.

Here's a more detailed breakdown:

? Estimate by Type (1975–2025)

Type of Manuscript	Estimated New Additions	Notes
Papyri	~30–50	Mostly small fragments; many from Egypt, especially Oxyrhynchus
Uncials (Majuscules)	~40–70	Larger manuscripts; new finds and reclassifications
Minuscules	~200–250	Many found in monastery libraries or private collections
Lectionaries	~100–150	Common in liturgical use; often discovered in Eastern churches

? How Do We Know This?

- The **Institute for New Testament Textual Research (INTF)** regularly updates its official **Kurzgefasste Liste** of all known Greek NT manuscripts.
- The **Gregory-Aland numbering system**, which INTF maintains, shows consistent growth each decade due to:
    - **New discoveries** (especially through archaeological digs).
    - **Rediscoveries** in monasteries, libraries, and private collections.
    - **Reclassification** or cataloging of previously overlooked or unidentified manuscripts.