

The Bible emerges from obscurity.

**The History of the**

*written*

**Word of God**

**V. D & E. English Bible – 18th & 19th C**

Ronald J. Frasco

I. Introduction

II. Revelation

III. Canon

IV. Original Languages

**V. English Translations**

1. **Latin Branch**

John Wycliffe – 1388

John Purvey's Bible – 1395

1. **16 century Branch**

William Tyndale – 1526

Coverdale Bible – 1535

Matthew's Bible – 1537

Great Bible – 1538

Taverner's Bible – 1539

Jugge's Bible – 1552

Geneva Bible – 1560

Bishop's Bible – 1568

1. **17th century Branch – King James Version** – 1611

**D. 18th century Translations and Revisions**

**Cotton Mather's 'Biblia Americana: Sacred Scripture'** – 1710

Mather was one of the foremost American Puritans. He graduated from Harvard; followed in the footsteps of his father, Increase, taking the pastorate of the Second Church of Boston. He was intellectually gifted and founded Yale College. Regarding his early **revision of the King James**, one scholar noted,

'Mather's commentary functions as an encyclopedic response to the scientific, hermeneutical, and philological challenges to the authority of the Bible as Mather creates a forum for early Enlightenment scholarship to safeguard the authority of the Bible.' [[1]](#footnote-1)

**Daniel Mace's 'NT in Greek and English** – 1724

A Presbyterian minister, Mace's work was **a correction of the KJV text**. One scholar notes, 'His corrections of the Greek text were in the direction of sound scholarship; but his English version was too obvious an attempt to copy 'the humour [sic] of the age' -- the pert, colloquial style.' (CHB, p.364). Another scholar criticizes,

'Some of his alterations … were ill-founded, being capriciously chosen … or made simply upon conjecture … Mace's edition was castigated by prominent scholars.' [[2]](#footnote-2)

**John Wesley's** – 1755

Wesley's work was 'a fresh and independent study of the Greek text.' [[3]](#footnote-3) In his translation, Wesley made more than 12,000 changes to KJV text. One scholar said of his work,

'Wesley's version is **a limited revision of the King James version**, done with reference to the Greek text of [Bengel 1734](http://www.bible-researcher.com/bib-b.html#bengel1734), and with selected renderings and annotations drawn from [Bengel 1742](http://www.bible-researcher.com/bib-b.html#bengel1742) and other sources. It was widely used by Methodists, and the notes are still in print (both in abridged and unabridged editions), detached from the translation.' [[4]](#footnote-4)

**Edward Harwood's 'Liberal Translation of the Bible; being '** – 1768

Harwood's desire, as described in his preface, was 'to clothe the ideas of the Apostles with propriety and perspicuity [clarity].' Even in the Title page he states his purpose as being 'an attempt to translate the Sacred Writings with … Freedom, Spirit, and Elegance.' His translation, however, 'aroused little more than literary curiosity.' [[5]](#footnote-5)

**Phillip Doddridge's 'Family Expositor; a Paraphrase and Version of the NT'** – 1788

This godly American Pastor was one of twenty children (only two of which lived), the grandson of a prominent Puritan Pastor. On his title page, Doddridge describes his work as being 'with critical notes and a practical improvement of each section.' Spurgeon himself noted that one of his contemporaries had this high view of Doddridge's work,

The late *Dr. Barrington,* Bishop of Durham, in addressing his clergy on the choice of books, characterizes this masterly work in the following terms :—' I know no expositor who unites so many advantages as *Doddridge;* whether you regard the fidelity of his version, the fullness and perspicuity of his composition, the utility of his general and historical information, the impartiality of his doctrinal comments, or, lastly, the piety and pastoral earnestness of his moral and religious applications.' [[6]](#footnote-6)

**Gilbert Wakefield's 'Translation of the NT'** – 1791

Wakefield was a prominent **Unitarian pastor**. In translating, he **'stayed close to the King James Version**, making changes only when 'some low, obsolete or obscure word … some coarse or uncouth phrase … demanded an alteration.'' [[7]](#footnote-7)

**Nathaniel Scarlett's** -- 1798

Scarlett and his team of translators were all **Universalists**. Creatively, he 'divides the text into sections, each with a section title … also 'personifies' the text, putting the names of the speakers as in the text of a play, and assigning the narrative portions to 'Historian.' [[8]](#footnote-8)

**E. 19th century Translations**

**Noah Webster's 'The Holy Bible'** – 1833

Webster's translation was noteworthy since it **'called attention to the fact that [KJV] contains many words which have changed in meaning.'** (CHB, p.369). One historian acclaims it as **'a conservative revision of the KJV**, in which obsolete words and constructions are replaced with modern equivalents.' [[9]](#footnote-9)

From the Preface to his translation, Webster wrote,

In the lapse of two or three centuries, changes have taken place which, in particular passages, impair the beauty; in others, obscure the sense, of the original languages. Some words have fallen into disuse; and the signification of others, in current popular use, is not the same now as it was when they were introduced into the version. The effect of these changes is, that some words are not understood by common readers, who have no access to commentaries, and who will always compose a great proportion of readers; while other words, being now used in a sense different from that which they had when the translation was made, present a wrong signification or false ideas. Whenever words are understood in a sense different from that which they had when introduced, and different from that of the original languages, they do not present to the reader the Word of God. … In my own view of this subject, a version of the scriptures for popular use should consist of words expressing the sense which is most common in popular usage, so that the first ideas suggested to the reader should be the true meaning of such words, according to the original languages. That many words in the present version fail to do this is certain. My principal aim is to remedy this evil.… But all men whom I have consulted, if they have thought much on the subject, seem to be agreed in the opinion, that it is high time to have a revision of the common version of the scriptures; although no person appears to know how or by whom such revision is to be executed. In my own view, such revision is not merely a matter of expedience, but of moral duty … The Bible is the chief moral cause of all that is good, and the best corrector of all that is evil in human society; the best book for regulating the temporal concerns of men, and the only book that can serve as an infallible guide to future felicity. With this estimate of its value, I have attempted to render the English version more useful, by correcting a few obvious errors, and removing some obscurities, with objectionable words and phrases; and my earnest prayer is that my labors may not be wholly unsuccessful.'

**R. Dickenson's 'New and Corrected Version'** – 1833

'The author condemns the 'quaint monotony and affected solemnity' of the King James Version, with its frequently rude and occasionally barbarous attire; and he declares his purpose to adorn the Scriptures with 'a splendid and sweetly flowing diction.'' [[10]](#footnote-10) Historically, Dickenson's version was not well received. One scholar harshly labeled it 'a foppish [foolish] translation by an Episcopal rector.' [[11]](#footnote-11) Based on Greishbach's Greek Text.

**L.A. Sawyer's 'The New Testament** – 1858

'A modern version, based on the Greek Tischendorf 1850 text, retaining 'thou' only in prayers; an innovative system of text divisions based on sense units.' [[12]](#footnote-12)

**Robert Young's 'Literal Translation of the Bible'** – 1863

Young's work, **based on Estienne's Greek Text**, was **a revision of the KJV** the goal of which was 'to put the English reader as far as possible on a level with the reader of the Hebrew and Greek texts.' [[13]](#footnote-13) Another scholar critically describes that Young 'reproduces Hebrew and Greek idioms by an exceedingly literal translation.' [[14]](#footnote-14)

From His preface, Young declares,

THE following Translation of the New Testament is based upon the belief that every word of the original is "God-breathed." … This inspiration extends only to the original text, as it came from the pens of the writers, not to any translations ever made by man, however aged, venerable, or good; and only in so far as any of these adhere to the original--neither adding to nor omitting from it one particle--are they of any real value, for, to the extent that they vary from the original, the doctrine of verbal inspiration is lost, so far as that version is concerned.… A strictly literal rendering may not be so pleasant to the ear as one where the apparent sense is chiefly aimed at, yet it is not euphony but truth that ought to be sought, and where in such a version as the one commonly in use in this country, there are scarcely two consecutive verses where there is not some departure from the original such as those indicated …'

**Henry Alford** – 1869

Alford, the eminent scholar and one time Dean of Canterbury, produced **a revision of the KJV** based on his thorough revision of the Greek Text. Intended only to be the 'interim report' until a thorough revision of the KJV was accomplished (See ERV).

**Coneybeare & Howson Epistles of Paul** – 1864, 1877

Proof of what one historian encouraged, there is 'much excellent Bible translation is to be found … embedded in commentaries' [[15]](#footnote-15)

**Darby, JN, Holy Scriptures** -- 1871, 1890

This Plymouth Brethren founder, scholar, and pastor provided readers with the 'first critical apparatus of variant readings.' [[16]](#footnote-16) Regarding the translation itself one scholar criticized, it 'falls short in regard to English style.' [[17]](#footnote-17)

One scholar defines the purposes for his translation,

'Darby did not feel such a need for a new translation in English, because he considered the King James Version to be adequate for most purposes … But, he decided to produce a highly literal English version of the New Testament for study purposes … The version is exceedingly literal, based upon modern critical editions of the Greek text … The annotations are by far the most comprehensive and detailed to be found in an English version.' [[18]](#footnote-18)

**J.B. Rotherham's 'Emphasized Bible'** – 1872, 1902

This pastor produced **a very literal rendering based on Westcott & Hort's Greek Text**.

‘… the first [translation] to render the ineffable name of God in the Old Testament [**יהוה**] as Yahweh.’ G&N, p.584-585

**English Revised Version** – 1881

A combination of tremendous scholarship, as well as significant shifts in the English language, Greek scholars began to seek to produce a translation that would replace the nearly 250 year old King James Version. Notable **scholars such as Alford, Ellicott, Lightfoot**, et al participated in this monumental effort. **Westcott and Hort's Greek Text was the basis** for this 'meticulous word-for-word reproduction' -- **a revision of the Authorized Version**. The occasion for such an effort is detailed by one historian,

'The desire for a full revision of the KJV (AV) was so widespread among Protestant scholars after the mid-nineteenth century that a Convocation of the Province of Canterbury was called in 1870 for the proposal of a revision of the text where the Hebrew and Greek texts have been inaccurately or wrongly translated.' [[19]](#footnote-19)

Another scholar describes the method used and its result,

"… leaving no Greek word without translation … following the order of the Greek words … attempting to translate the articles and the tenses" 'broke the hold of the Greek textus receptus …' [[20]](#footnote-20)

1. Reiner Smolinski and Jan Silverman, *Cotton Mather and Biblia Americana – America's First Bible Commentary* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Marlowe, Michael D., *The English Versions of Scripture* (EVS) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Cambridge History of the Bible* (CHB), p.368 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. EVS, Marlowe [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. CHB, p.365 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Spurgeon, C.H., *Commenting and Commentaries,* #914 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. CHB, p.365 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. ibid, p.366 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. EVS, Marlowe [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. CHB, p.365 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. EVS, Marlowe [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Geisler and Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible* (GIB), p.584 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. EVS, Marlowe [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Bruce, F.F., *The English Bible: A History of Translations* (TEB), p.134 [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. GIB, p.584 [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. TEB, p.132 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. EVS, Marlowe [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. GIB, p.570 [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. CHB, pp.371-372 [↑](#footnote-ref-20)