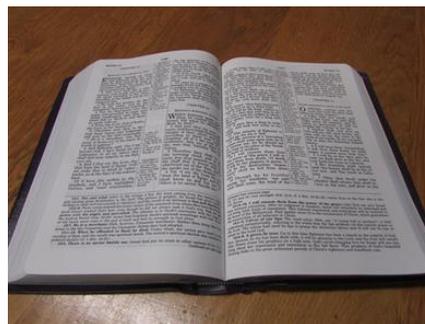


Belgic Confession article 3: The Word of God

We confess that this Word of God did not come by the will of man, but that *men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit*, as the apostle Peter says (2 Pet 1:21). Thereafter, in his special care for us and our salvation, God commanded his servants, the prophets and apostles, to commit his revealed Word to writing and he himself wrote with his own finger the two tables of the law. Therefore we call such writings holy and divine Scriptures.



The Word of God spoken by men, moved by the Holy Spirit

2 Pet. 1:21:

God does not speak to us directly from heaven, but He did it through the service of men, who spoke His Word.

Deut. 18:18-22:

In the Old Testament, God sent His prophets. In the New Testament Jesus Christ Himself came and revealed God's Word. He chose the apostles to speak in His Name.

Acts 17:10-12:

Nothing in the Bible contradicts other parts of the Bible. All that Paul preached (and which we have received in his letters) has its basis in the Old Testament. By comparing Scripture with Scripture, we can test whether something is true or not. All the books of the Bible are in agreement with each other. Many apocryphal books however, go against parts of the Bible.

2 Peter 1:21

for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

Deuteronomy 18:18-22

I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him. 19 And it shall be that whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require it of him. 20 But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.' 21 And if you say in your heart, 'How shall we know the word which the Lord has not spoken?'— 22 when a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.

Acts 17:10-12

Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. 11 These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. 12 Therefore many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men.

God's Word committed to writing.

There are many more books which present themselves as gospels or books of prophets and apostles. How do we know which books are from God and belong to the Bible and which not?

1. The Holy Spirit guided the Church, so that the Church accepted these 66 books as the Word of God.
 2. The contents of these books: they all speak about God's way of salvation. The other books speak about a lot of different things (history of Israel, heroes of the Jews, etc.) but their focus is not the history of salvation.
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Bible: Text and translation

The Bible was not written in English. The Old Testament is written in Hebrew (and some parts Aramaic) and the New Testament in Greek.

We don't have the original documents anymore. Why not?

בְּרֵאשִׁית בְּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת
הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ:

(Genesis 1:1)

Hebrew was the language of the Jews. The Jews meticulously copied the Bible and wanted to make sure that no mistakes were made.

The Old Testament was already complete in the time of the Lord Jesus on earth. He refers to the Old Testament often and calls it 'Moses and the prophets'

or 'The Law and the prophets'. In the third and second century before Christ the Old Testament was translated in Greek. This translation is called the Septuagint, which means '70'. This translation was known in the time of the apostles and they and the evangelists used this Greek translation of the Old Testament when they quoted from the Old Testament in their writings.

Greek, the language of the New Testament, was the world-language in those days. Something like English in our time. The Greeks conquered large part of the Middle East. They were defeated by the Romans, who then in turn conquered the entire Middle East and the area around the Mediterranean Sea. They however took over the Greek language and that was the language commonly spoken in those days, besides the local languages.

Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος
ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ
λόγος

(John 1:1)

Different Text Editions

The Bible in the original languages was copied over and over again. There were no printing presses, so a copy of the Bible was very valuable. A lot of time went into copying the Bible. Not every house had their own Bible. The Jews systematically read through the entire Old Testament in the synagogues. Every Sabbath Day a part was read. The Jews put a lot of emphasis on memorizing. Jewish children were taught reading and writing by using the Torah (the five books of Moses).

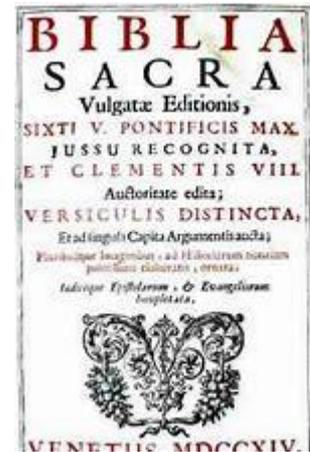
When the evangelists and apostles wrote the books of the New Testament, these manuscripts were also copied, multiple times. That is how they spread over the entire Roman Empire and beyond.

However, while copying, mistakes were made. Often minor mistakes. And these documents, including the mistakes, were copied over and over again. In the end, after many centuries, we can find groups of documents which make the same mistake. These manuscripts are grouped together, because it is very likely that they come from the same document centuries before.

By comparing all the manuscripts which are now available, we can try to come as close to the original text of the Bible as possible. We call this ‘Text Criticism’.

Translations

Christ sent out His apostles (and the church) to preach the gospel to all nations. On the day of Pentecost, many in Jerusalem heard the Word being preached to them in their own language (Acts 2). In the first centuries the Greek text of the Bible was sufficient (Greek New Testament and the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint). Later, the people especially in the western part of the Roman Empire, weren’t able to read Greek and the Bible was translated in the language of the people, which was Latin. This translation is called the ‘Vulgate’, which means: of the people.



1Vulgate

This translation became the official translation of the Church during the Middle Ages. Even though the language of the people changed,



2Septuagint

the translation remained the same. It was in the time of the Reformation that again the Bible was being translated in the language of the people. Luther translated the Bible in German. In England Wycliffe translated the Bible in English and later King James commissioned an official translation of the Bible into English which became known as the ‘King James Bible’ or ‘King James Version’.

In following centuries, the Bible was translated over and over again. It is important to have the Bible in a language which the readers can understand. It is God’s will that the Bible is being preached in the language of the people and the people must be able to read the Bible in their own language.

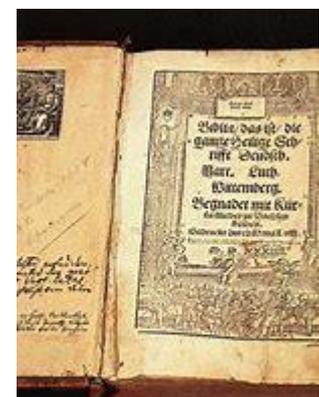
However, a translation is always less than the original text. Therefore, especially for those who have the task to explain the Bible, it is important that they can read the Bible in the original languages.

Different Text Editions, Different Translations

Some well known translations are:

- King James Version
- New King James Version
- English Standard Version
- New International Version

When you compare different translations, you will notice differences. The one translation wants to stay closer to the original text, which makes it harder to read. The other translation wants to present the message in proper and beautiful English, but as a result cannot



3Luther Bible

always follow the original text very closely. While translating, choices have to be made about how to translate certain words and certain sentences.

Another matter that is important here is the text edition (in the original language of the Bible) which you use. The New King James Version makes use of different Greek and Hebrew manuscripts than the New International Version and English Standard Version. The main reason is that after the King James Version was finished, many more manuscripts of the Bible were discovered. In 1948 the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered, which became world famous, but that is not the only discovery of manuscripts. The manuscripts used in the time of the Reformation were mainly part of one specific group of manuscripts (as explained before). As a result of all these discoveries in later centuries, and comparing all these manuscripts, scientists have come to the conclusion that the original text of the Bible was probably in some instances a bit different than the manuscripts used for the King James Version. That also causes some differences in more modern translations compared to the (New) King James Version.

It is remarkable, despite the Bible being copied over and over again for many centuries and we don't have the original manuscripts, that the differences in all the manuscripts are only minimal and do not affect the message of the Bible. Here we see God's providence Who protected the text of the Bible so that the Church will always have a reliable version of the Bible.

Inspiration

2 Timothy 3:16-17:

If the Bible is indeed God-breathed (inspired by God, the Holy Spirit), what does that say about the authority of the Bible for us?

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

Inspiration or Illumination

The Bible writers are inspired by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit spoke through the prophets, He worked in those who put the Word of God to writing. Because of that we consider it the Word of God Himself, because He spoke through them.

Can we say that a minister who preaches the Word of God, is inspired by the Holy Spirit? No. The Holy Spirit inspired the apostles and prophets, so that they spoke the Word of God, which came as a new revelation or an addition to existing revelation.

A minister and others who explain the Bible, don't get a new revelation, but they receive wisdom to read and understand the Bible as the revelation which God gave through the apostles and prophets. They don't add to the Bible.

The Roman Catholic Church about the Bible:

The Pope, as the successor of the apostle Peter, has the right and the task to explain the Bible and add to the Bible, if necessary.



What he says is considered to have authority and is infallible, as the First Vatican Council decided in 1870.

We, adhering faithfully to the tradition received from the beginning of the Christian faith, to the glory of God, our Saviour, the elevation of the Catholic religion and the salvation of Christian peoples, with the approbation of the sacred Council, teach and explain that the dogma has been divinely revealed: that the Roman Pontiff, when he speaks ex cathedra, that is, when carrying out the duty of the pastor and teacher of all Christians by his supreme apostolic authority he defines a doctrine of faith or morals to be held by the universal Church, through the divine assistance promised him in blessed Peter, operates with that infallibility with which the divine Redeemer wished that His church be instructed in defining doctrine on faith and morals; and so such definitions of the Roman Pontiff from himself, but not from the consensus of the Church, are unalterable. But if anyone presumes to contradict this definition of Ours, which may God forbid: let him be anathema.

(First Vatican Council, 18 July 1870).

The Charismatic Movement about the Bible:

The Holy Spirit works special revelations. He can work apart from the Bible.

In the charismatic movement the gifts of the Spirit are important. Emotions, experiences, and dreams are very important in this movement. They often defend opinions and actions which are contrary to the Bible as coming from the Holy Spirit.



'Modern' theologians about the Bible:

'The Word of God is in the Bible' instead of 'The Bible is God's Word'. We must discover what the Word of God is for our time.

The Bible is a collection of books from people who experienced God in their own way. We must learn from them and now in turn we must experience God in our own way.

The Confession about the Bible:

Belgic Confession Article 3: The Word of God

We confess that this Word of God did not come by the will of man, but that *men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit*, as the apostle Peter says (2 Pet 1:21). Thereafter, in his special care for us and our salvation, God commanded his servants, the prophets and apostles, to commit his revealed Word to writing and he himself wrote with his own finger the two tables of the law. Therefore we call such writings holy and divine Scriptures.