

The Bible

Biblical English

I think the King James Bible did something that nobody else had done ... and that is increase the idiomatic range of the language. [David Crystal](#)

The Bible has had an enormous influence on the evolution of the English language. It not only expanded vocabulary but introduced new ways of expressing complex ideas. Until recently most educated English-speaking people had at least some knowledge of the Bible. Many words, phrases and idioms have entered the language.

The translation with the greatest influence on modern English is the what is the translation authorized by [King James in 1611](#). This became the version used in Anglican (protestant) churches in England. It is widely admired for the beauty of its language.

History

The (Catholic) Church opposed translations into local languages. Only priests, religious scholars and monks had direct access to the sacred text. So early English-speaking Christians knew the Bible through Latin translations of the original Greek and Hebrew.

Early Christian missionaries did introduce some ecclesiastical (religious) words into the English language via Latin (see [here](#)). But most English speakers experienced the Bible as a foreign language

Opposition to Church control of the Bible slowly emerged in Europe. In Britain, the

leader of this opposition was an Oxford University professor called John Wycliffe. In the 1380s Wycliffe produced hand-written translations of a Latin version available to him.

The Wycliffe translations caused fury in the Church. 44 years after Wycliffe's death, the Pope ordered that his body be disinterred (removed from its grave). His remaining bones were crushed and thrown into a local river.

The struggle between the Church and those who wanted local language Bibles was at the centre of the reformation (more details and a timeline [here](#)). The publication of the King James Bible in 1611 played a key role in shaping the evolution of the English language.

Old Testament

The first part of the Bible was written between long before the birth of Jesus. It is referred to by what are called the three Abrahamic religions: Christianity, Judaism and Islam.

Many of these words and phrases from the Old Testament can be found in languages associated with all the Abrahamic traditions:

- to escape by the skin of your teeth - Job 19:19-20
- scapegoat - Lev 16:9-10
- the sweat of your brow - Gen 3:17,19
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- David and Goliath (1 Samuel 17)
- money is the root of all evil - 1Tim 6:10
- a little bird told me - Eccl 10:20
- armageddon - Rev 16:16

Psalms

- pride goes before a fall - Prov 16:18
- bite the dust (Psalm 72:9)
- at his wit's end (Psalm 107:27)
- the apple of my eye - Psalm 17:8

New Testament

The New Testament is the part of the Bible dealing with the life of Jesus. It is the key text for Christians.

At the heart of the New Testament are the four Gospels (or tellings) of the Christian story: Matthew, Mark, and John. They differ considerably in literary style as well as content.

Here are some examples:

Matthew

- the salt of the earth - 5:13
- seek and you shall find - 7:7
- den of thieves (21:13)
- out of the mouth of babes (21:16)
- render... unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's (22:21)
- thirty pieces of silver (26:15)
- wolf in sheep's clothing 7:15

Luke

- eat, drink and be merry - 12:19
- prodigal son - 15:11
- Good Samaritan 10:30

John

- doubting Thomas - 20:27

Letters

The letters of St Paul also produced some heavily used phrases including the following

- the powers that be (Romans 13:1)
- thorn in my flesh (2 Corinthians 12:7)
- suffer fools gladly (2 Corinthians 11:19)
- a multitude of sins (Peter 4:8)

Activities

Meaning of these phrases

The meanings of the phrases/idioms above are not always obvious.

1. Write down the phrases you are not sure of
2. Write what you think they might mean.
3. Check your answers here:

<http://tinyurl.com/y97nhyd>

Quiz & other learning activities

You can find quizzes, crosswords & other learning activities:

<http://tinyurl.com/yzjk8u7>

More about the English Language

At <http://englishlanguage.eslreading.org> you will find fun facts about the English language and activities to help you improve the way you use it.