

# The Dr. Gene Scott Bible Collection

## STATION 37: GOD'S WORD THROUGH THE CENTURIES



Unlike the records of other peoples throughout the world which started as an *oral* tradition, the Bible of the early Jews clearly indicates that at least from the time of Moses, the Word of God was *written down*, and thus passed to each succeeding generation in written form rather than in the form of poetry or song (though the Bible incorporates both). Still, the Word came first - it was spoken before it was written down.

Those "books" that we acknowledge to be the Judeo-Christian Bible evolved from a large "pool" of lore, oral and written, that was considered sacred. The oldest actual written texts that survived the ravages of time and Exile are fragments that date from only a few hundred years before the Christian era; there are no "actual handwritten manuscripts" extant by Moses or Solomon or Isaiah, yet their words were written down, either on rolls of animal skins or papyrus, and copied reverently when the "originals" became too worn from use. Thus, the words that have come down to us are by their nature imperfect copies, yet are the closest to exact words of the "sources."

Though all of the early sources for our Bible were "written" (and thus could be called

"manuscripts"), let us differentiate for clarity's sake among three "baskets" of manuscripts. The first are the **"true original"** manuscripts, reflecting the oldest written texts in the original languages (Hebrew, Greek, Syriac). Some of these were re-discovered only in the last 200 years; others were brought to light during the Renaissance, and were available for some of the early attempts to bring the Bible into the language of the common people.

The second "basket" contains what some call **"versions,"** that is, old manuscripts that themselves reflected early attempts at translation or revision, and are one step removed from "originals." As Latin supplanted Greek as the language of the early Church, so did Latin manuscripts of the Bible texts. These were in turn corrected or revised over the centuries, and these "versions" became the manuscripts that were in common use at the time the first Bibles were printed.

The third "basket" contains commentaries and other religious works, some of them very ancient, that contain passages from the Bible as it was recognized in their time, and which we can occasionally use to "fill in the blanks" of other sources, or to check a specific reading.

Papyrus manuscripts (such as those shown at [Station 52](#)) predated those written on rolls of skin; these in turn predated the "Uncials," (written in CAPITALS in a rounded script without divisions between words; shown at [Station 48](#)), and were followed by manuscripts written in cursive (see the magnificent 13th century Bible at [Station 3](#)). The order in which they have been rediscovered is exactly the reverse of the order in which they were produced. If we were to start from scratch to translate the Bible today, we might be able to produce a Book that in many ways is more complete and accurate than any of the 15th or 16th Century Bibles, because important manuscripts have appeared in the intervening years, and because our understanding of the ancient languages has improved. In order to fully comprehend the importance of the English Bible in the great stream of Bible history, we must get an understanding of what texts were available at the time the Bible was translated into English, and what versions of the Word were available at the time.

The problem of continual corruption of the text manifested itself in doctrinal disputes from ancient times well into the Reformation. Thus, we can see that a book is only as good as its source material, or the "model" on which it is based. In other words, while we accept the Bible as the Word of God, we argue about His exact words - and Christians have done just that for centuries.

As long as the Bible was the exclusive domain of the clerics, popes and kings, some control could be had; as the pressure built all over Europe for Bibles accessible to the "people," the "Establishment's" fear grew that the ability of the Church to control interpretation, and thus doctrine, would be diluted. Ironically, the entrenched idea that he who held the Word held the truth came back to haunt the established church; when the people were able to hold the Word for themselves, the authority of the established church was undermined forever.

Another problem was that of languages. Some of the early manuscript versions were

written in "debased" Latin, little different from the vernacular dialect of their region. Others, discovered well after the translation of the Bible into English, were in relatively obscure tongues such as Coptic, that could only be understood by a small group of scholars.

The Dr. Gene Scott Collection presents a number of examples of the way in which God's Word was handed down in the years before printed Bibles were made. Keep in mind that two parallel streams are shown here: one is the scholarly "source material" (from the "basket" of original manuscripts) that underlies the search for an accurate rendition of God's Word; the other, from the "basket" of "versions," includes actual artifacts that were used by the people of the time. These are important for an understanding of the form in which the Bible endured the Dark Ages. This collection shows examples from both "baskets."

Many of the great ancient manuscripts that are today the foundations of serious scholarship into the Bible text are carefully preserved in institutions - the British Museum, the Vatican, and so forth. Yet this collection affords glimpses of some of them, by means of facsimiles or reproductions. One can compare these texts with those of modern Latin or Greek Bibles, and see how different the spelling and orthography are from today's rigidly codified languages, and from each other. Note that in many manuscripts, certain words were abbreviated to fit a line (having lines placed over certain letters to symbolize what was omitted). The reproductions shown here are themselves rare books, having been printed in extremely limited editions which were instantly absorbed into the libraries of the great institutions of the world. Few if any examples come on the market, and are immediately grabbed up by bibliophiles (as well as by Bibliophiles).

You can examine examples of actual texts and devotional material that were written and used during the Dark and the Middle Ages. They exhibit the reverent craftsmanship that was required when dealing with God's Word in any form. The showpieces here and throughout the Cathedral that pre-date the Bible in English give you a context and an understanding of the many ways in which the Word survived the Dark Ages and the Middle Ages until man was ready to heed God's Word, and spread the Word of God among His people in their own languages.

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*Some of the works represented at this Station are:*

- **Fifth Century:** Coptic (Egyptian) New Testament; 1799 Clarendon Press, Oxford, edition of the Sahidic text.
- **Sixth Century:** *Codex Bezae* , two different editions, one of them 16th century.
- **Seventh Century:** The "Book of Durrow," 1960 edition of the illuminated Latin text of the four Gospels written at St. Columba's monastery in Ireland.
- **Eighth Century:** The Works of "Venerable" Bede, 1563 Swiss publication of Bede's writings, plus 1950 reproduction of the famous Irish masterpiece, the "**Book of Kells**" or *Codex Cenannensis*
- **Ninth Century:** The "Book of Armagh," the only complete Latin NT of its time and place, and the earliest document referencing the life of St. Patrick; rare 1913 reproduction printed in Dublin.

Works representing the 11th through 15th Centuries, including "picture Bibles" and original manuscripts and incunabula, complete this display. Don't miss:



- **1487 "Incunabula" Bible** - Resembling a carefully written manuscript, and printed at Basel (Switzerland) by Kessler. The decorative initials and headlines were painted by hand, as the means were not yet invented to print large initials within the text, or to place anything outside the margins of the text. As an example of *incunabula* (books from the "cradle years" of printing, 1450-1500), this volume is hard to surpass. Kessler's Bible was the first to give mnemonic verses about each of the Books, with a summary of contents (prefiguring the later inclusion of *Prologues* such as Luther's. One of only five examples of this book world-wide, and the **only** one in the USA.



1507 Pentateuch,  
Latin version with De  
Lyra's notes;  
Click on the image  
above to see an  
enlarged view!

- **1507 Pentateuch Bible** - with the Latin text completely surrounded by the copious notes of Nicholas de Lyra (ca. 1270-1340), considered by some the best-equipped Bible scholar of the Middle Ages. De Lyra was an important influence (through his notes) on Martin Luther.
- **1534 Luther Bible** - magnificent condition, and once owned by Harriet Beecher Stowe (author of "Uncle Tom's Cabin") and her husband.

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*In addition to the works shown at this Station, other early examples of God's Word through the Ages include ancient papyrus and vellum manuscripts (400 B.C. to 1000 A.D.) shown at*

*[52](#), the Third Century*

*Hexapla of Origen shown*

*at [Station 49](#), the*

*Fourth and Fifth*

*Century Uncial Codices*

*at [Stations 33](#), [34](#)*

*and [48](#), the 8th*

*Century Coptic original*

*manuscript leaf and*

*palimpsest at*

*[39](#), and the Eleventh*

*Century Ostromir*

*Gospels at*

*[Station 32](#).*

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## STATION LOCATION MAP

Below is a floor plan map of the Cathedral in 3 sections, one for each level. The first section is the Lower Level, the second is the Foyer Level, and the third is the Mezzanine Level. This station is located in the "Room of the Book" on the Lower Level at the red #37.



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