

The Original Bible
Revealed!



[This article is based on the book, 'Restoring the Original Bible' by Dr. Ernest L. Martin, ASK Publications, Portland, Oregon, 1994]

Our Bibles Are Different

You may be not be surprised to learn that the Bibles that the Christians use today (also in the past centuries) are not the same as the original Bible known to the Jewish world and to the early Christians. First, we use translations, not the original tongues (Hebrew and Greek); second, there are minor textual variations; and third, we do not have the original autographs.

What should surprise you (unless you have read on Bible's origin) is that the total number of books and the arrangement of books in our Bibles are different from those of the original autographs as judged by the earliest preserved copies. Actually we have not lost any Bible text, so don't think that I am talking about the 'Lost Books of the Bible'. These so-called lost books are apocryphal in nature and was never part of the Bible. However, a set of books properly called *Apocrypha* found its way to the Greek translation of the Old Testament and then into the Latin Vulgate and into some English Bibles.

Our Bibles (that do not include the *Apocrypha*) contain 66 books, distributed as 39 books in the Old Testament and 27 books in the New Testament. What I am about to reveal is that the Original Bible had contained 22 books in the Old Testament and 27 books in the New Testament. But that is not all. The arrangement of the 39 books in the OT is different from the arrangement in the 22 books, though the total text is the same.

I shall show how important the original arrangement was, and what we miss in our Bibles. I shall also show how and why the original arrangement was changed.

The Original Old Testament

If you have chance to examine a Jewish Old Testament (translations would be sufficient), you will notice that it has only 22 or 24 books. Furthermore, the books after Judges are completely rearranged. There is much evidence for the original OT having only 22 books, but late first or early second century AD two of the books were split to give a total of 24. The reason for this can be guessed (I shall mention it later).

The 22 books of the Original OT are divided into three groups: The Law (*Torah*), The Prophets, and The (Holy) Writings; this last group is sometimes referred to as the Psalms because the Psalms appear first.

The division of the books are as follows:

I. THE LAW : The Pentateuch (Five Books of Moses)

Genesis
Exodus
Leviticus
Numbers
Deuteronomy

(Note: These titles are as found in our English Bibles, adapted from the Greek Septuagint (LXX); the Hebrew titles used the first word of each book (actually a Scroll). For example, *Genesis* would be called *Bereshith* which means *(In)Beginning (of)*. The Septuagint titles emphasize the subject matter. The Jewish Bibles also use now the subject titles.)

II. THE PROPHETS

Six books are in this group:

Joshua & Judges
Samuel and Kings ('Books of the Kingdom')
Isaiah
Jeremiah
Ezekiel
The Twelve (Minor Prophets)

We might wonder about the inclusion of the first two and the omission of the book of Daniel. The reason is that these books were written by the prophets who occupied the second highest rank after the Priests. The Law was written by Moses who belonged to the Priestly class. In the organization of Bible books, proper care was given to rank of the authors. Notice that the Kings came third, hence their books are in the third group. The reason Daniel was not included was because he was 'inferior' in rank due to his being a eunuch, see Dan. 1:3,7 (eunuchs were prohibited from entering the Temple); and his interpretation of dreams of pagan kings dominated his book. However, we shall not consider Daniel as an unholy person. He led a most holy life and was beloved of God, receiving visions of great importance.

III. THE WRITINGS

This group contained 11 books known also as the 'Royal' or 'Government' group because the authors are royalty or of royal lineage, or high government officials.

Psalms
Proverbs
Job
Song of Songs
Ruth
Lamentations

Ecclesiastes
Esther
Daniel
Ezra/Nehemiah
Chronicles

The Original New Testament

Here the difference is not in the number of books, but in the arrangement of books. After Acts the Original New Testament had three divisions as for the Old Testament:

I. THE 'PENTATEUCH' : The Gospels and Acts

Matthew
Mark
Luke
John
Acts

What is the reason for the above order of books? Apostolic authority or connection and the eldership principle were followed. Matthew was a Jew, and his gospel was written under the supervision of James who was the Head of the Church (also the brother of Jesus). Mark was an assistant of Peter who was second to James in rank. Luke was an associate of Paul. John was the beloved apostle, third in rank after James and Peter in the early Church. The reason for his book appearing after Luke is perhaps due to its compilation as the last book of the NT, and also because of its philosophical theme. The first three Gospels are called *Synoptic* because of similar coverage (of the life of Jesus).

The Book of Acts covers the early history of the Church, and was written by Luke. In terms of content and appeal, the five books may be classified as Jewish, Jewish.Gentile, Gentile, Universal and Universal respectively. Note that Luke wrote his gospel to a Gentile ruler, Theophilus (Acts 1:1).

II THE CATHOLIC EPISTLES

The term 'Catholic' means 'universal', applicable for general readership. There are seven of them:

James
1 Peter
2 Peter
1 John
2 John
3 John

Jude

These books appear after the Pauline epistles in our New Testaments, but the original New Testament had them following the Book of Acts. Apostolic authority and eldership were the governing rules for this placement. Among the apostles, the ranking followed the placement: James, Peter, John and Jude (last). We read in Galatians 2:9 of the leading Pillars of the church, James, Peter and John, in the order.

III. THE PAULINE EPISTLES

This group has 14 books including Hebrews which is somewhat linked to Paul (my study has shown that Hebrews was written by Timothy, Paul's close associate, except for the last paragraph which was written by Paul who endorsed the epistle with his apostolic authority. Timothy was in prison as he was finishing his epistle, but when Paul got the manuscript, he was released). In our Bibles, these books appear before the Catholic epistles.

The 14 books are:

- Romans
- 1 Corinthians
- 2 Corinthians
- Galatians
- Ephesians
- Philippians
- Colossians
- 1 Thessalonians
- 2 Thessalonians
- Hebrews
- 1 Timothy
- 2 Timothy
- Titus
- Philemon

The first nine are addressed to churches; the last four are addressed to ministerial/professional leaders. Romans, Corinthians and Galatians present the ABCs of Doctrine to new believers, while Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians present the XYZs (the advanced doctrine for mature Christians). Thessalonians deal with end times. Hebrews present a millennial theme along with Temple symbolism.

IV. REVELATION

This final book covers future events and completes the story of mankind that started in Genesis.

Significance of Numbers

Biblical numbers are not there by chance. The numbers we have seen associated with the books of the Bible have special significance. Let us first look at the number 22 which denotes the OT books.

The Number 22

The Jewish people attached great importance to this number for the following reasons:

1. Adam, the last of God's Creation, was the 22nd creation in the Six Day Creation. The number 22 signified completion and perfection.
2. Jacob (Israel) was the 22nd generation from Adam.
3. The Hebrew alphabet has 22 letters

Some of the OT authors used the acrostic of the 22 letter names. Examples:

Psalms 119 has 22 sections, each with a title of the Hebrew letter in succession;

The first section of 8 verses all start with the first letter, *aleph*; the second section of 8 verses all start with the second letter *beth*, and so on.

Proverbs 31: 10-31 describes a virtuous woman. Each verse starts with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet in order. We may note that the above passages describe a perfect God and a perfect woman!

There are other places also where the acrostic is used. When imperfection is implied, as in Psalms 9 and 10 which describe chaotic conditions, the acrostic is also imperfect.

The Number 7

Throughout the Bible 7 is a sacred number and it also signifies completion. The repetition of 7s in Revelation is very obvious. Multiples of 7 such as 14 are also sacred, and imply completion.

The Number 49

49 is 7×7 , and signifies ultimate completion and perfection. If the Original Bible arrangement had been kept, we would have 49 books, and the Bible would be easily identified as God's Book.

The Number 66

6 is man's number (Adam was created on the 6th day). Multiples of 6 such as 60, 600 and 666 are found in the Bible, all associated with man. The last one, 666, is

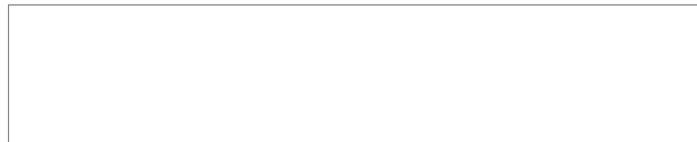
the Mark of the Beast (Rev. 13).

Our present Bibles have 66 books, and would give the impression it is a human Book, not divine. This is exactly the devil wants the world to believe. The attackers of the Bible are secular humanists!

More about numbers will be given in another article in this section. Suffice it to say that the reorganization of the Bible in the 4th century by Jerome (who translated the Bible into Latin Vulgate) was an unholy step! Later on, the Church tried to rectify this by adding 11 apocryphal books to make the total number 77, but later this number has been reduced to 66 books as we find in present day Bibles that contain the *Apocrypha*. These added books are not as divinely inspired as the canonized books, hence should not be added to the Bible to make it look divine.

Jesus, the Central Theme of the Bible

If the book order had been preserved, we should get the following array:

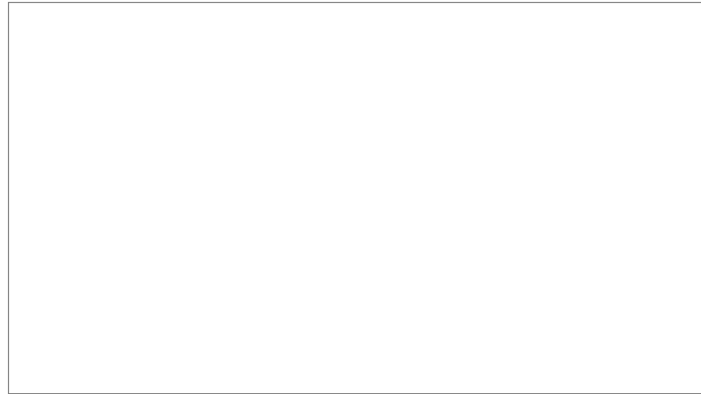


In other words, central part of the Bible would be the books covering the life of Jesus Christ and his activity in the early Church. We have lost this obvious marker as a result of the reorganization in our Bibles. The Gospel of Luke which deals with the Incarnation occupies the central position (the 25th book). The five books on Jesus may be called the New Testament Pentateuch!

More on the OT Books: The Temple Analogy

There is a remarkable parallel between the OT books and the division and items in the Jewish Temple (see drawing below).

<u>Old Testament</u>	<u>The Temple</u>
3 divisions	3 divisions
- The Law	- Holy of Holies
- The Prophets	- The Holy Place
- The Writings	- The Outer Court



The Law (Pentateuch) reveals the holy God and his Commandments; the Holy of Holies contained the Ark of the Covenant which had the books of the Law. The Holy of Holies was the earthly abode of God. The five items in this room were: Manna, Aaron's rod, the Tablets of stone, the two Cherubim and the Mercy Seat; these could be connected to the five books of Moses:

Manna, the 'hidden' food	Genesis (God was 'hidden')
Aaron's rod that budded	Exodus, the creation of Israel
Tablets of Stone	Leviticus and the Laws
Two Cherubim	Numbers (describes the Ark)
Mercy Seat, cover of the Ark	Deuteronomy, final book

The three divisions of the Temple also signified Three Heavens:

Outer Court	First heaven (atmosphere, air)
Holy Place	Second heaven (outer space with heavenly bodies)
Most Holy Place	Third heaven (God's abode)

It is significant to note that on the floor of the Holy Place had imprinted on it a Zodiac circle with the twelve signs (representing the 12 tribes). The seven lamps of the menorah represented also the seven planets. All these fitted with the symbolism of the Holy Place with the Second Heaven.

I must point out that the Temple layout and its contents have a Messianic message because Jesus Christ is symbolized everywhere - as our sacrifice, atonement, and High Priest who has made it possible for all believers to approach God the Holy Father. The reader can find books on this topic to get more understanding.

The Prophets and the Holy Place

There were six pieces of furniture in the Holy Place. These are placed in relation to the six books of the Prophets group:

Golden altar of incense (Holy of Holies and the Holy Place)	Joshua & Judges (connecting link to the Law and the Prophets)
The Menorah (7-branched Lamp)	The Kingdom Books (describing the kings: of Judea: Saul, David, Solomon, Hezekiah, Josiah and Jehoachin)
The Laver (wash basin)	Isaiah (who called for cleansing the sins.)
Altar of burnt offerings	Jeremiah (Judgement scenes)
The Slaughter place	Ezekiel (foresaw massive slaughter)
Table of Shewbread with 12 loaves of bread	The 12 Minor prophets

Of course, the Temple furniture have more profound meanings attached to them, especially in relation to the Messiah which we shall not cover here.

The Writings

The Outer Court was for the public, and had sections for men and women. The Writings were considered less holy than the other two groups, and some of these books (actually scrolls) were not kept in the Temple, e.g. Ezra/Nehemiah, Chronicles because of the public records they contained.

Reasons for Changing the Original Bible

The following reasons can be given for the arrangement of books in our Bibles.

1. Pagan influence in the Greek Translation: It was a King of Egypt of the Ptolemy period that ordered the translation known as the Septuagint. In the third century B.C. The Greek mind preferred subject-wise division and therefore abandoned the divine order.
2. The Influence of Rome: by the fourth century AD, Rome had become the center of Christianity; it was also the emperor's capital city. The Jewish epistles took a second place, and the gentile epistles (written by Paul) took the first place; the Book of Romans was the first of these Pauline epistles. Is it any wonder why the book of Romans appear after the Book of Acts? Jerome who knew the Original Bible boldly changed the order of NT books. Our present day Bible publishers do not want to change the order because they find no support from the Church for it. The Church does not want to return to the biblical order of 'Jew first, Gentile second'.
3. This change is in relation to the change from 22 books to 24 books by Jewish

editors.

Why would they want to change the 'perfect' number 22 to 24? The only answer is that when the Christians added the 27 NT books, the total was 49 books, and claimed the complete Bible should have both the OT and NT books. The Jews who did not accept Jesus and Messiah did not like that, so by increasing the number to 24 books, the divine '49' would vanish, at the expense of making the OT less than perfect.

Conclusion

It should now be obvious to the reader that our present Bible is the result of deliberate alteration by people with special interests. As a result of the changes they made, we have lost the divine message transmitted *through the order and number of books* in the Original Bible. It is unlikely that Bible publishers will go back to the original format because such a change could be quite confusing to most Bible readers.

UPDATE: December 7, 2005: The Original New Testament now available

The Original New Testament in English was published a year ago by York Publishing Company in California. This is a monumental work undertaken by Fred R. Coulter, a Bible scholar, who faithfully translated the Stephanus 1550 Greek New Testament, but in the original order of the 27 books as explained in my article. In addition to the 352 page text in full size paper, a voluminous 528 page commentary section is included. At this time there is no word on the Original Old Testament under preparation. The book is available from Amazon.com under the title, 'The New Testament In Its Original Order'. The cover page is shown at right.

April 30, 2005

Original Bible Project Overview

Filed under: [Project Information](#) — James Tabor @ 6:05 pm

The Original Bible Project (OBP) is a long-term effort to produce an entirely new and independent English translation of both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament known as the Transparent English Bible (TEB). Despite the plethora of recent high quality scholarly Bible translations on the market serving the widest range of tastes and interests the TEB is distinctively and refreshingly different in that it allows the English reader to peer through to the original Hebrew and Greek texts. Its unique concept and special features will strongly appeal to a wide and diverse audience including general readers life-long Bible students and professional academics.

Translation Theory

There is an ancient Jewish adage regarding translating the Scriptures, “One who translates a verse literally is misrepresenting the text, but one who adds anything of his own is a blasphemer.” Modern translators of the Bible continue to echo, in more sophisticated debate, the dilemma of this ancient bit of wisdom. The literal method of translation seeks to convey an exact sense of the words *and* the structure of the original language, while the paraphrase, or “dynamic equivalent” method, purposely recasts the essential “thought” of the original into the natural idiom and flow of the second language. The problem is that an overly naïve literalism easily becomes nonsense, while “recasting thought” can end up obscuring or even altering the richness of the original text. The *Transparent English Bible* is decidedly on the “literal” side of this spectrum, although the concept of *transparency* better conveys its theory and method. The basic idea of transparency is that one should be able to “peer through” the English translation, and, to whatever extent possible, *see, hear, and even feel*, the dynamics of the original text. This includes alliteration, puns and word plays, idioms, rhythms, redundancies, and even obscurities—allowing the English reader an entrance into the complex world of the host languages, that all too often is the privileged domain of the specialist. Here are a few examples: Genesis 1:11 (TEB) reads: And ELOHIM said, “Let the land sprout the sprout, a plant seeding seed, a fruit tree making fruit, according to its type, its seed, within it, upon the land.” Here the play between noun and verb, reflecting the flow and rhythm of the Hebrew, is preserved. In contrast, the NIV has: “Then God said, “Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds,” and the NRSV reads: Then God said, “Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.” All three translations are roughly equivalent in meaning, and the NIV and NRSV surely convey the Hebrew in good contemporary English, but they are opaque, rather than transparent, vis-à-vis the original text. The verbs “bring forth,” “produce,” “yield,” and “bear,” are fine in English, but “sprouting sprouts,” “seeding seed,” and even “making” fruit,

wonderfully convey the flavor one gets when reading the Hebrew, while remaining easily comprehensible in English. In verse 20 the waters “swarm a swarm” of living beings, and “flyers fly” upon the earth. In Genesis 2:25 (TEB) the man and woman are “nude,” while the serpent in the next verse is “shrewd”—in Hebrew the root word is the same, so there is a consistent attempt to point out such cases of a “play on words.” In Genesis 2:7 God “shapes the *soil*-man (Adam)—dust from the *soil* (adamah).” The root words are the same, and it is fascinating to see how this comes through in the English, as God later curses the *soil*, and sends the *soil*-man forth to work the *soil*, until he returns to the *soil*, from which he was taken! Both Eve and Adam experience “distress”—hers in bringing forth children, and his in bringing forth bread from the earth (Gen 3:16-17)—but the Hebrew word is the same. The NRSV has “pain” for the woman, but “toil” for the man, interjecting a subtle but significant difference that the original text does not support.

In Genesis 6:11-13 (TEB) the earth is “ruined” through wickedness, because all flesh has “ruined” its way, thus God will “ruin them” with the great Flood. This sequence of interconnected ideas is important to bring out the narrative signals of the writer.

Genesis 2:22 (TEB) says that God “built the side that he took from the *soil*-man into a woman” in contrast to “made a woman from the rib” (NIV) or “made into a woman” (NRSV). The verb “build” here might not be our most natural English way of expression, and it clearly *means* that God “made” the woman, but the TEB allows the English reader to “see” through the English. There is a common Hebrew word for “make” (indeed God “makes” the land creatures in Gen 1:25), but the writer does *not* choose that verb in this sentence—so why should the English? The verb “build” is readily understandable, and is used throughout the Hebrew Bible in the most natural English sense, whether referring to a house, a boat, or here—a woman.

In Genesis 4:3 (TEB) we have the phrase: “And it came about, at an end of days.” This is translated “in the course of time” in both the NIV and the NRSV. Here the TEB explains in a note that the phrase in Hebrew refers to “an unspecified period,” but the literal Hebrew expression remains intact in the text, which also opens interpretive possibilities to the reader.

In Genesis 2:7 (TEB) “man became a living life-breather” which is the precise term used for the breathing animals in Genesis 1:20. The NIV and the NRSV not only lose the idiom, but, for the man they put “living being” and for the animals they put “living creatures,” injecting an interpretive notion into the English that is completely absent from the Hebrew. Older translations, such as the KJV, even have here “man became a living soul,” interjecting an unwarranted theological element. Here is a case where the loss of the idiom robs one of more than the colorful beauty of the language, it also interjects notions that one assumes are there when they are not.

In Genesis 2:16-17 (TEB) Adam is told “eating—you shall *surely* eat!”, referring to all the trees of the garden but one, but “dying—you shall *surely* die!”, if he eats the forbidden fruit. This colorful double use of the verb in Hebrew is common, and is a way of showing emphasis. The TEB retains this flavor and flow of language for the English reader. There is a refreshing “oral” quality to the text throughout.

Many times the explanation “Look!” is used in Hebrew, to draw attention to a narrative. The TEB also translates the single conjunction “vav” consistently, in all places, as “and,” rather than supplying a whole list of conjunctions common in modern translations, such as: “then,” “but,” “so,” “when,” “or,” “now,” and “that.” Although these conjunctive ideas might be implied by the context of a given phrase or sentence, there is a wonderful “disjunctive” narrative flow in the Hebrew, as one moves through the texts, with the simple repeated flow of the English “and.” (see Gen 1:1-5). One has the impression that one is listening to a story teller, moving in rapid fire fashion from one vivid scene to another, allowing the hearer to paste it all together in his or her mind. The effect is rather extraordinary.

Throughout the TEB one constantly encounters refreshing and fascinating idioms that are found in the original Hebrew. For example in Genesis 29:1 we read: “And Jacob lifted his two feet, and walked toward the land of the sons of the east “ The NRSV has: “Then Jacob went on his journey, and came to the land of the people of the east,” while the NIV has: “Then Jacob continued on his journey and came to the land of the eastern peoples.” In Genesis 12:9 the TEB reads: “And Abraham pulled up stakes, walking, and pulling up stakes toward the Negev,” The NRSV simply has: “And Abram journeyed on by stages toward the Negev,” while the NIV has “Then Abram set out and continued towards the Negev.” When you get up early in Hebrew you “cause to shoulder up” (see Gen 22:3), a reference to packing up and loading the animals for a journey. All three versions are understandable in terms of the basic meaning, but the TEB offers the English reader a glimpse into the colorful way that Hebrew actually expresses such common ideas.

There are hundreds of such examples, almost on every page, and reading the TEB makes reading the Bible itself a new experience, even for those who are intimately familiar with the standard English translations: “And the nose of Jacob burned against Rachel,” when she complains about her lack of a child (Gen 30:2); Lot bows to the mysterious visitors who come to destroy Sodom, “two nostrils toward the soil” (Gen 19:1); Vindication is called a “covering of eyes” (Gen 20:16); and when Joseph’s hostile brothers see him they declare, “Look! the lord of the dreams yonder comes!” (Gen 37:19).

There are many cases, especially in the Hebrew Bible, where the text is simply unclear, uncertain, or obscure. The tendency of a translator is to provide some “solution,” or a kind of “best judgment,” as to the proper meaning. The TEB takes quite the opposite approach—where the original is uncertain or obscure, the English should reflect the same, remaining transparent for the reader, and leaving open a range of possible meanings. In Genesis 6:3 Yahweh declares (TEB) “My spirit will not contend with man for an age, in that he also is flesh—so his days are a hundred and twenty years.” The meaning remains obscure and possible variations of meaning are left for the footnotes rather than incorporated into the text. In Genesis 4:7 God says to Cain (TEB) “Is there not, if you do well, a lifting up? And if you do not do well, at the door is sin—a crouching one—and to you is his desire, but you shall rule over him.” The “lifting up,” possibly meaning forgiveness, is in contrast to Cain’s “fallen” face, in the previous verse. The noun “sin” is feminine, while the verbal form “a crouching one” is masculine—making their agreement problematic. The phrasing in Hebrew is choppy and disjointed,

with the referents unclear, but the essential possibilities are left open with variations left to the notes. One of the most engaging examples is in Genesis 29:20 where Jacob serves seven years to earn Rachel as his wife, and, according to the TEB “they were in his eyes as single days, in his love of her,” which might imply the very opposite of the standard translation “but a few days,” or “only a few days” (NRSV, NIV). Perhaps Jacob is watching the days pass one by one, painfully waiting for the period to pass. At any rate, the TEB allows the reader to at least consider other interpretive possibilities.

The Biblical texts at times can be extremely repetitious, both in narrative style and vocabulary. Often translators are tempted to “smooth things out” a bit, forcing the original languages to conform more closely to modern English usage. Genesis 2:23 reads: (TEB) “This one, this time—bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh! This one will be called woman, because from a man this one was taken.” In Hebrew the feminine demonstrative pronoun (“this one”) is repeated three times in a single sentence. Genesis 11:6 (TEB) says: “This they begin to do, and now nothing is restrained from them of all that they have planned to do.” Both the NIV and the NRSV put “nothing will be impossible for them,” which is surely the meaning, and even much smoother English, but it removes the “flavor and flow” of the Hebrew text. In Genesis 11:10 (TEB) Shem “brought forth” Arpachshad, he subsequently lived five hundred years after his “bringing forth Arpachshad,” and he “brought forth” sons and daughters. The NIV tries to offer a bit of variation: Shem “becomes the father of” Arpachshad, then he “has” other sons and daughters, even though the same verb “brought forth” is repeated three times. The TEB attempts to be as consistent with vocabulary as good Hebrew or Greek usage allows. Genesis 27:4-14 mentions the tasty food that Isaac “loves” three times, but the NRSV varies between food he “likes” and food he “loves,” although the Hebrew words are precisely the same, and either expression is fine in English. There is no good reason to translate a single word, even if it occurs a dozen times in a short context, by several different English expressions in an attempt to interject variety. Often the very redundancy of the original text conveys a certain effect that is broken and lost by less precise translations.

In general the TEB attempts to render Hebrew and Greek words, wherever they occur, in a consistent manner, based as much as possible on their root meanings. This includes tying Hebrew and Greek together, conceptually, through the Septuagint, the ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible. Obviously, there are contexts in which a word can have more than one meaning, but there is no attempt in the TEB to multiply English terms in an attempt to produce a complexity that simply does not exist in the original language. For example, in Hebrew there are seven different words for the various types of moral failure, translated in most traditional versions rather arbitrarily and inconsistently by such English terms as sin, iniquity, wickedness, evil, and trespass. The TEB tries to get at the root meaning of *each* term, whether to “miss the mark, or err,” “to rebel,” “to twist or pervert,” “to be unjust,” and so forth, and then consistently stay with that English concept so that the reader can easily distinguish between this complex of terminology. English is an incredibly rich language with dozens of words for any given concept, reflecting subtleties sometimes absent from the Hebrew, and as often as not from the Greek as well. Even though classical Greek

is quite rich in vocabulary, the Greek of the New Testament has its conceptual roots in the Hebrew Bible (as witnessed by the Septuagint vocabulary), and reflects a relatively simply spoken Greek, known as *koine*, that was common in the 1st century.

Theological and Ecclesiastical Vocabulary

Most modern translations are intended for liturgical and devotional use and incorporate a whole range of theological vocabulary that is far removed from the original historical and cultural contexts of the texts. In other words, the ancient text is made to serve our traditional assumptions and modern premises, rather than the other way around. Surprisingly, a long list of comfortably familiar theological terms, so common to all English translations, do not even occur a *single time* in the TEB—atonement, sanctification, covenant, soul, angel, Christ, church, redemption, salvation, baptism, and so forth. The word “atonement” comes from the Hebrew verb “to cover,” and whether one is burying a corpse with dirt, or symbolically “covering” sins with the pouring out of blood, the same term is used (see Gen 6:14 where Noah’s vessel is “covered” with pitch). The English word “soul” carries with it concepts of human uniqueness, and even immortality, in contrast to the Hebrew term that can refer to animals and even a human corpse (Num 6:6)! The words translated “angel” simply mean a “messenger,” and the same words, in Hebrew or Greek, are used for messengers of all types, whether they be human or from beyond this world. The word “Christ” or “Messiah,” is not a proper name, but a title or designation for an “anointed one,” and used in both Hebrew and Greek for a long string of priests and kings, sometimes in a “messianic” context, but often not. The Greek term translated “church” (*ekklesia*) throughout the New Testament, is used for an angry mob in Acts 19:32, and thus refers generically to an “assembly,” with no special connotations of “holiness.”

The idea here is neither to be different for the sake of being different, nor to indulge oneself in iconoclastic jabs at the religious establishment, but something much more fundamental is involved. Not only do these theological terms interject a “flavor” absent from the original languages, more often than not they carry connotations that are misleading and simply incorrect.

A Manuscript Edition

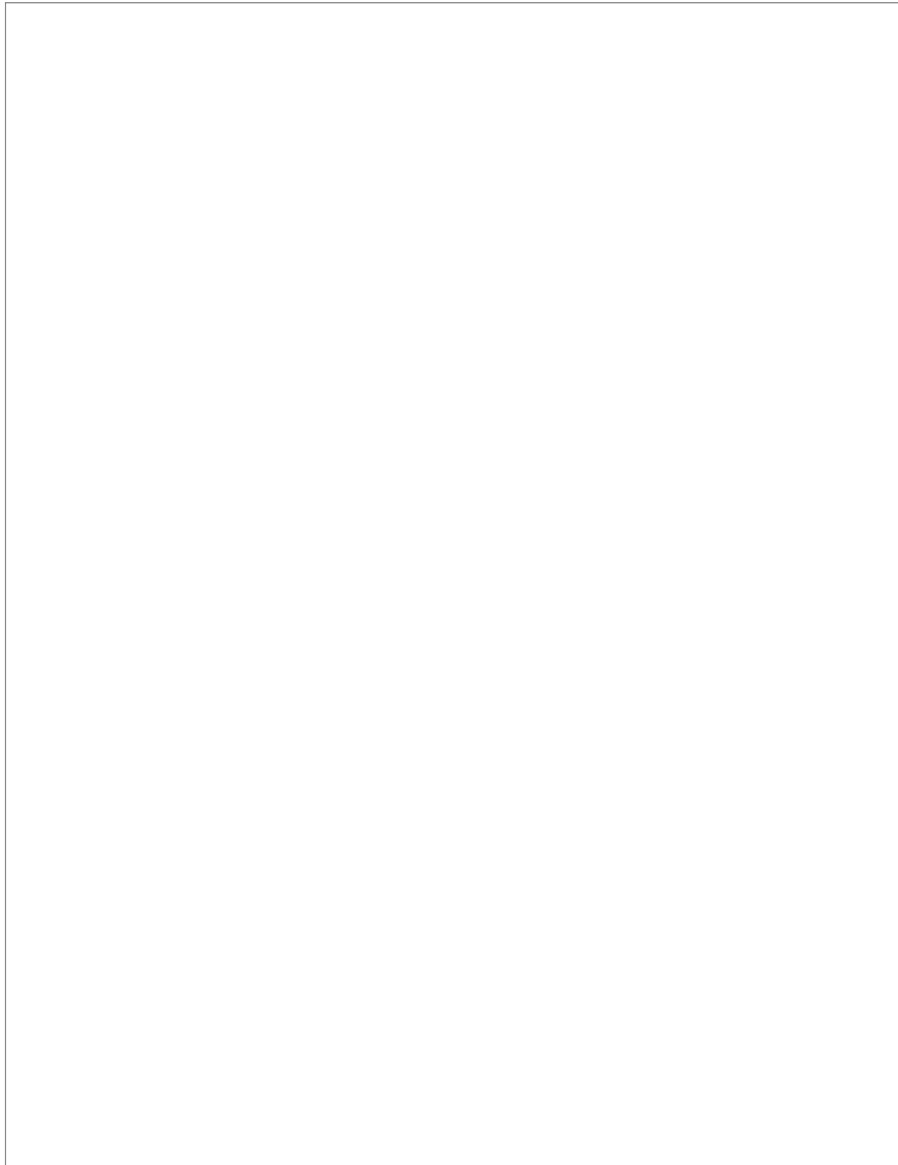
The TEB will put the books of the Hebrew Bible and the Greek New Testament in their original manuscript order. This means that the Hebrew Bible (which Christians call the Old Testament), will follow the order of the Tanakh (Jewish canon), even in editions of the OBP that contain both the Hebrew Bible and New Testament. This ancient division makes better sense, even for Christians, as it is the order known and reflected in the New Testament itself (Luke 24:44). The Hebrew Bible is divided into three divisions of 22 “books” or scrolls: Torah: Genesis through Deuteronomy; Prophets: Joshua/Judges, Samuel/Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Twelve Prophets; and Writings: Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes (Qoheleth), Esther, Daniel, Ezra/Nehemiah, Chronicles. The New Testament will contain the traditional 27 books, but in the five-fold division and order found in the oldest complete manuscripts: Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John; Acts; General Letters: James,

Peter, John, Jude; Paul's Letters: Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Hebrews, Timothy, Titus, Philemon; Revelation.

The TEB is based on the *two oldest complete manuscripts* of the Hebrew Bible and the Greek New Testament: the Leningrad Codex and Codex Sinaiticus, respectively. In other words, much like the Jewish Publication Society translation of the traditional Masoretic text, the TEB will *not* be based on an eclectic text—even when it comes to the New Testament. Obviously, for the Hebrew Bible, we have not only variants of the Masoretic tradition, but the Greek Septuagint, the Dead Sea Scrolls, plus the various versions such as the Samaritan (Pentateuch) and the Syriac. In the case of the New Testament we have the other great Codices (Vaticanus, Alexandrinus), Bezae, the so-called Textus Receptus, the thousands of papyri fragments, plus the versions (Syriac, Vulgate et al.). Rather than create an eclectic base text from these many dozens of sources, based on the principles of textual criticism, the basic English text of the TEB will be a translation of our two oldest complete manuscripts, with significant variant readings put into footnotes. The advantage of this method is that the reader *always* knows what text he or she is considering at any point (either Leningrad or Sinaiticus), and is still exposed to the rich and complex legacy of our multiple textual witnesses. Most modern translations end up being an eclectic blending of many manuscript readings in a scholarly attempt to “recover” the most original reading. The problem is that the English reader is easily lost with vague notes about the Hebrew or Greek being “uncertain,” the resulting translation labeled as “conjecture,” or references such as “other ancient authorities read” without any specifics. The TEB method is as clear as it is simple, and *all* significant variants will be cited in the notes. In fact, the TEB will be the first modern English translation to include all significant variants from the newly released Dead Sea Scrolls. Once again, the TEB offers the reader access to textual matters usually resolved by the translators, and imbedded, without sufficient explanation, in the resultant English text.

Special Features of the Hebrew Bible

You can print out your own copy of the [Reader's Guide](#) that will illustrate the features described below from an actual sample page of the TEB:



Names of Deity

Most modern translations, in keeping with traditional prohibitions against pronouncing the name of God, have adopted a complicated and confusing system of translating the names and designations for Deity in the Hebrew Bible. The Tetragrammaton (Yahweh) is thus translated LORD in all capital letters. The problem with this practice is that it then creates confusion with the Hebrew term “Adonai,” which does mean “Lord.” Accordingly most modern translations distinguish this without the capital letters. This is fine until you have the terms used together: YHVH Adonai—which would then become the nonsensical “LORD Lord.” To address this redundancy the translators, in such cases, opt for GOD (all caps) for YHVH. But here another problem is created—the normal terms for God (El, Eloah, and Elohim) are also rendered “God” throughout, with no distinction, so that you can end up with GOD being redundant with “God,” if Adonai is also used. The simple solution is to reflect, in every case, the Hebrew terms actually used, without attempting translations that only further confuse. So in the TEB you will find, written in all CAPS, these special names or terms for Deity:

YHVH (Yahweh or Yehovah)
YAH (shortened form of YHVH)
ADON (“Master” or “Lord”)
ADONAI (plural of ADON)
EL, ELOAH, and its plural ELOHIM (the terms for “God”)
ELYON (“Most High”)
SHADDAI (“Breasts” or “Protector/Destroyer”)

The TEB has also included notes on the 134 places where it is said that the scribes (Sopherim) removed the name YHVH for theological reasons, altering it to ADONAI, in the standard Masoretic text (MT). For example, in Genesis 18:3, 27, 30, and 32, where Abraham is speaking to Yahweh, the traditional text has “Adonai” or “Lord,” to avoid what was considered an extreme anthropomorphism. The TEB notes the 18 emendations of the Sopherim, for example, see Genesis 18:22.

White Spaces

The TEB is not divided according to standard chapters and paragraph divisions common in all major English translations. Hebrew manuscripts contain special “gaps” or “white spaces” in the text. They are found in every book of the Hebrew Bible except the Psalms. Such divisions are very ancient, and are also found in the Dead Sea Scrolls (**dating** from 200 B.C.E.). These are of two types: the **major breaks**, called *Petuchot* (“Open”), are much like our paragraph breaks, and are indicated in the TEB with a full space and new flush paragraph; and the **minor breaks**, called *Setumot* (“Closed”), that are indicated with fifteen unbreakable spaces. The smaller divisions are perhaps the most fascinating, as they seem to suddenly appear to block off or emphasize portions of the text—sometimes even a single verse. For example, in Genesis 3:16, this single verse is separated from the text by these minor spaces before and after. Although these are well known and discussed by the ancient rabbis, they do not appear in modern translations of the Bible, including the Jewish Publication Society’s *Tanakh*. Apparently the temptation is quite strong to divide and section the Hebrew text according to a modern Western sense of breaks and transitions. This is unfortunate, since the divisions in the Hebrew manuscripts often strike one as wholly removed from our assumptions about how a text should be divided. For example, there is no chapter division in the Hebrew text between Genesis 2 and 3, while there is a major division between verses 21 and 22 of chapter 3, and then only a minor break as you begin chapter 4. Often even new chapters have no break, for example, 41-44:17, which is a single extended section, through four chapters, then suddenly a major break after verse 17. This shows how important verse 18, which follows, is to the narrative flow of the original manuscript. It is interesting that modern authors, such as Beckett and Pinter make use of such breaks, pauses, and “silences” to draw attention to key elements of their narratives. (see the Reader’s Guide). The TEB is the first major translation to reflect in its page appearance the actual “white space” divisions of the ancient Hebrew manuscripts. Just thumbing through its pages offers the reader a new and unique experience; to be able to “peer through” the English to the original Hebrew text. Rather than following the official divisions established by Maimonides (*Hilkhot Sefer Torah* 8:4), and found in all “Rabbinic Bibles,” the TEB faithfully reproduces the *actual divisions* of the most

ancient Hebrew manuscript—the Leningrad Codex. The differences between this manuscript and the Rabbinic tradition are not that great, and a list will appear in the preface of the published versions of the TEV, however they certainly are significant and worth preserving in this translation. For example, the Leningrad Codex sets off the unique account of the “disappearance” of Enoch with full paragraph breaks (Gen 5:21-24), while the Rabbinic tradition simply puts the minor breaks at this point. The TEB is the first English translation to reflect these unique and ancient breaks, based upon the Leningrad Codex.

Superscripts

One unique and fascinating feature of the TEB allows the reader at significant places in the text, to know whether a key word is masculine, feminine, singular, or plural, or whether a noun is definite or indefinite, with tiny superscript letters ^m ^f ^s ^p ^d placed at the end of the word. There are many times where this can make a crucial difference in interpretation, or expose the reader to an aspect of the original text that would otherwise be completely lost in English. For example, in Gen 4:7 quoted above, the “sin” at the door is feminine, while the one crouching is masculine—indicating the one is not a modifier of the other: “And if you do not do well, at the door is sin^f—a crouching one^m—and to you is his desire, but you shall rule over him.” How to make sense of this difficult text remains open, but the reader is at least provided with the grammatical facts available to someone able to read the Hebrew text. There are even passages where the masculine Yahweh is nonetheless spoken of with feminine pronouns or verbs, ignored by all modern translations as some kind of absurdity or corruption of the text. There are other cases where the plural word for God, ELOHIM, which usually takes a singular verb, does indeed have a plural verb (see Gen 31:54). The English reader of the TEB will at least be able to recognize such cases, and draw his or her own conclusions. Although the use of definite and indefinite nouns in Hebrew is not precisely the same as English, it can be of both interest and importance. Once again, the reader of the TEB can see this at a glance.

Supplied Words

The TEB makes use of the feature pioneered by the King James Version, and still included by the very successful New American Standard Bible, as well as the New King James Version. Words that are *supplied* by the translators, in order to produce a smooth English style, are nonetheless, in the interest of meticulous “transparency,” indicated by a special *italic type*. Often this is as simple a matter as supplying an intransitive verb or a definite article when none is needed in Hebrew, but sometimes it is more interesting than that, reflecting the rhythm and flow of the Hebrew or Greek. This translation can easily be read aloud *without* these terms and the reader begins to hear the flow of the language, with its frequently staccato edge.

Bold Italics

In normal Hebrew usage the verb contains within its structure the pronoun subject, whether 1st, 2nd, or 3rd person, and singular or plural. In other words, one does not have to specifically express the pronoun. For example, in Gen 3:16 God says “I will surely multiply your hardship,” but the pronoun “I” does not

appear in the Hebrew text, since the verb itself is put in a grammatical form that indicates 1st person singular (see the Reader's Guide). However, there are many places where the pronoun does in fact appear anyway. What this tends to do is add emphasis. We find just such a case in this same verse in Genesis. In the concluding phrase "and *he* will rule over you," the pronoun "he" is understood from the verb, and thus is not necessary, but here it does occur. In this translation such words are placed in *bold italics* to indicate the increased emphasis.

Footnotes

Every page of the TEB contains a rich supply of notes. However, these notes are exclusively related to linguistic matters, intended to clarify the translation itself, or indicating textual variants. In other words, the notes are intended to supply the reader with enough information to make an informed judgment regarding the *translation*, but not necessarily the interpretation of the text—certainly not in any theological manner. The notes contain a few simple abbreviations: Lit (Literal meaning); Heb (transliteration of the Hebrew text); MT (Masoretic Text); DSS (a reading from the Dead Sea Scrolls); LXX (a reading from the Greek Septuagint); i.e. (further explanation of meaning).

Production

All of the major translations of the Bible over the past few decades have been produced by committees of scholars. Various books and sections of the Bible are assigned to teams, with these parts merged into a final editorial product. The challenge that this method presents is the difficulty of drawing together the parts into a consistent whole. No matter how closely the principles of translation are set forth, or how carefully the various teams go over one another's work in an effort to harmonize things, the process is never wholly successful. The quality and consistency varies from book to book, and section to section, and often remarkably so. The TEB has taken a wholly different editorial path. One person, Prof. James D. Tabor, was appointed overall editor with the mammoth task of producing a *draft version* of the whole, based on a tight set of overall translation methods and principles. The project has been funded by contributions to a non-profit organization of the same name—The Original Bible Project. Many of the supporters of the Project are life-long students of the Bible, non-specialists for the most part, but with an avid interest in the concept and approach of this translation. One advantage of this unique production method is that the translation has been exposed to a highly committed group of "readers" who function as a constant "Beta-testing" market, long before it even approaches a final stage. The hundreds of comments that interested readers have sent in are all carefully considered. It is often the case that what the experts might miss, the mass of readers tend to catch or notice. Translation samples will be available as downloadable PDF files beginning in early 2007. It is this preliminary edition, first released here on the Web, that will also be subject to formal academic and scholarly review. The entire draft of the Hebrew Bible and the Greek New Testament will be reviewed by two general editors, one of the Hebrew Bible and other of the New Testament. Each book of the Bible will be evaluated, in addition, by two qualified scholars with special expertise in a given section of the Bible. Prof. James Tabor, General Editor, in consultation with the Board, will then have

the final say on all decisions, in keeping with the overall plan of the Project. The next stage of the OBP is full trade publication, in several editions, including the Hebrew Bible and the Greek New Testament together, as well as separately. Because of the non-theological nature of this enterprise, the two Testaments can be separated and stand alone, or combined and fit together quite well, since the central translation method is historical and critical rather than theological.

Audience

The unique aspect of the Original Bible Project is its ability to appeal at once to the academic market, as well as to the non-specialist general reader. Anyone who has taught Bible in an academic setting, whether secular or parochial, has lamented that *none* of the current translations, including the more scholarly NRSV, NAB, or JPS, really provide what is needed for a careful, *historical* reading of the text by the English student. Teachers who know the original languages find themselves constantly correcting these translations and telling the students, "Well, this is actually not what the original says...." Then there are the millions of devoted students of the Bible, who, without training in Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek, are constantly comparing a half-dozen or more modern English translations, consulting concordances, and poring over various reference works. Through great effort these dedicated Bible students seek to painstakingly arrive at what they will get at a glance with the TEB. These are people who want to make their own judgments as to interpretation, but need first to have the accurate linguistic and historical tools with which to approach their Biblical issues. In between there is a huge market of more general readers (Jewish, Christian, and secular), who will find this translation endlessly fascinating for its unique and refreshing, non-theological literary quality.

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