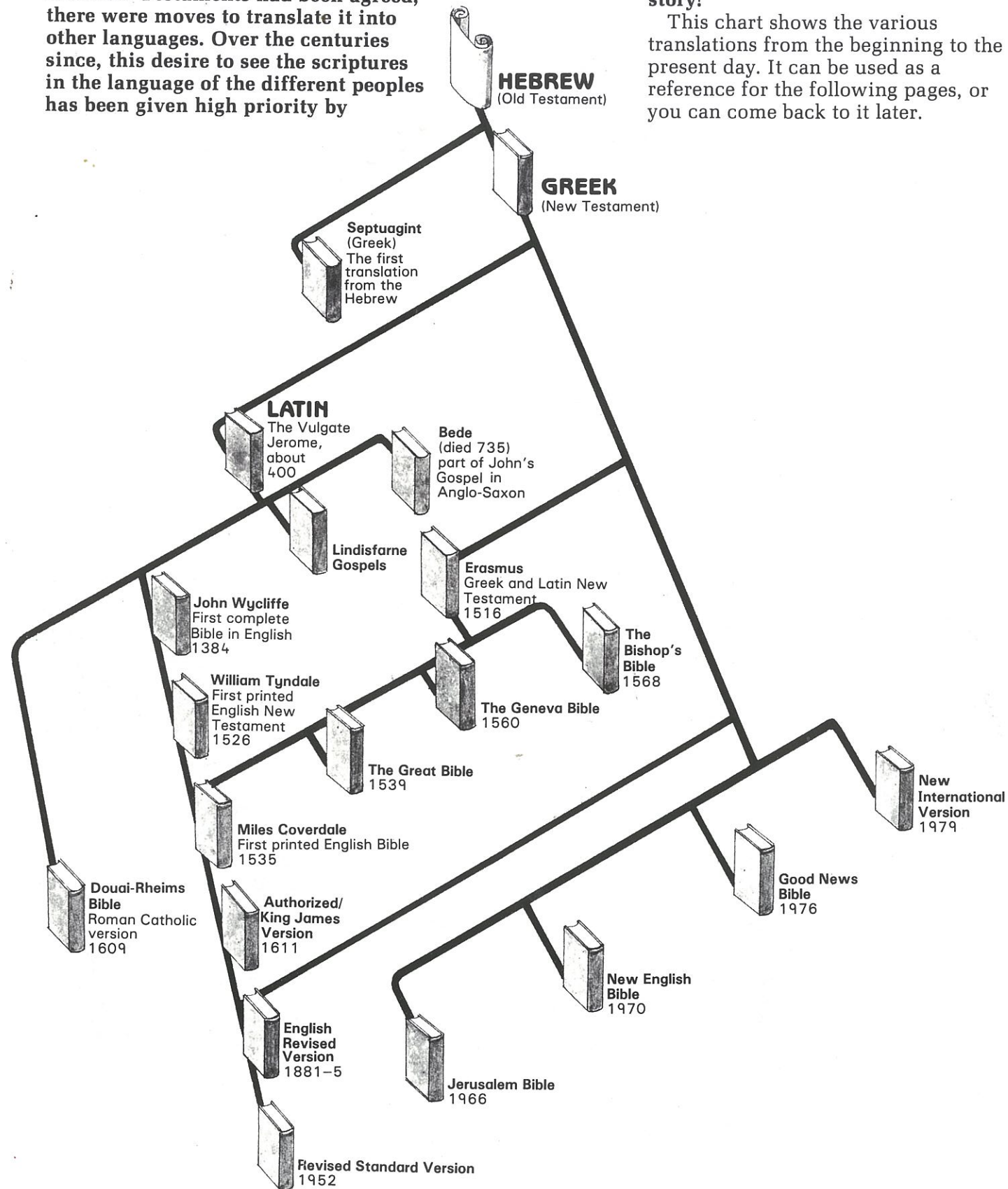


Almost before the final text of the Old and New Testaments had been agreed, there were moves to translate it into other languages. Over the centuries since, this desire to see the scriptures in the language of the different peoples has been given high priority by

Christians. It is an exciting adventure story!

This chart shows the various translations from the beginning to the present day. It can be used as a reference for the following pages, or you can come back to it later.



THE EARLIEST TRANSLATIONS

Jesus was born at a very remarkable time in world history. The Roman Empire had spread over a vast area around the Mediterranean, bringing political stability. Greek ('Hellenistic') culture had brought a common language to the whole region. Ideas could circulate freely. It was into this world that the early Christians began to preach and to plant churches.

Originally in Greek, the common language of the people, the New Testament was soon translated into Latin, the official language of the Roman Empire. But there were soon too many versions and Pope Damasus commissioned his secretary, Jerome, to make an authorized version. This was completed in about AD 400 and became known as the Vulgate, which means 'common' or 'popular'.

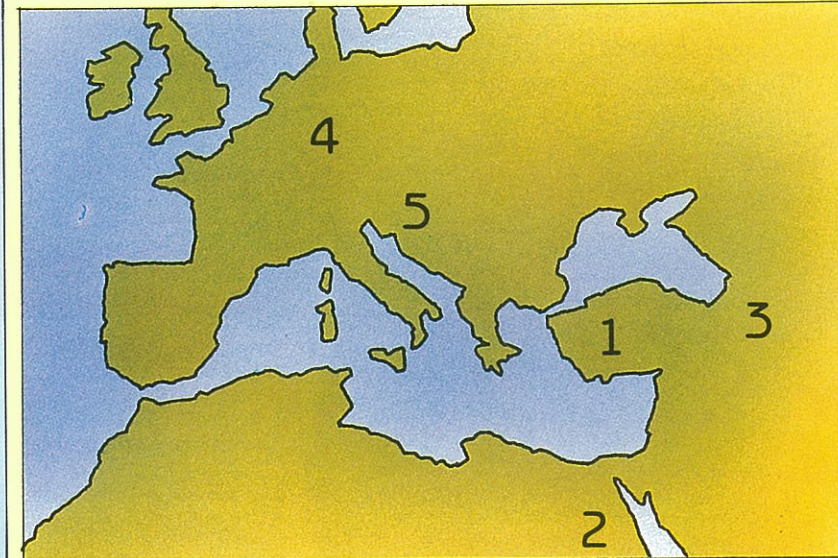


Jerome (Eusebius Hieronymus), born in Italy about AD 345, is the most famous early Bible translator. He was a brilliant linguist and instead of simply revising the Latin text, he went back to the original Greek and Hebrew (with the help of a Jewish Rabbi) to produce a brand new version. It took him twenty-one years to complete! Many people disliked the new version at first, but it became the standard Bible of the Roman Catholic church and scores of other translations have been made from it.

1

Syriac
By AD 100 the Old Testament had already been translated into Syriac, the language of the people based around Edessa in modern Turkey, and by AD 400 Bishop Rabbula of Edessa had produced the whole Bible. It was called the Peshitta or 'simple' version.

Missionaries from the Syriac church went as far afield as India and China. There is evidence of the Gospel of Matthew in Syriac being used in India in AD 180.



2

Coptic
The early Christians in Egypt spoke Coptic, a form of ancient Egyptian. The Bible was first translated into the Sahidic dialect of the south and later into other dialects of Egypt. No one speaks Coptic today but it is still used as the language of the church of Egypt.

3

Armenian and Georgian
Syriac missionaries went north into Armenia (now part of the USSR). Part of the Bible was translated into Armenian as early as the fifth century. The Armenians then evangelized the Georgians, to the north, making a translation of their own Bible into the Georgian language.

4

Germanic
The Ostrogoths of northern Europe were called 'barbarians' by the Romans, but they became Christians as early as the third century. Their Bishop, Ulfilas, made a translation of the Bible in the middle of the fourth century. A famous copy, now in Sweden, was written in silver and gold on purple vellum.

5

Old Slavonic
In the ninth century AD two brothers, Cyril and Methodius, went as missionaries to the Slavic Empire. In order to write down their Bible, the brothers invented an alphabet for the Slavs. It is called the Cyrillic alphabet, and is still used in Eastern Europe and Russia today.