

# Scriptorium – A history of the Bible

## Large group lesson

**Goal:** To assist students in understanding how the Bible was written and developed into the Book we study each week.

**Note:** This presentation was originally designed for use in the United States with English-speaking students but has been updated with additional content for the African context. Feel free to add slides with additional information about the Bible in your country and/or language as applicable.

### Supplies:

- “Scriptorium – A history of the Bible” PowerPoint presentation slides (see appendix)
- “Scriptorium – A history of the Bible” leader text (see below)
- Two animated presenters and a narrator to present this lesson to the students
- Props: Because this lesson is used regularly, we encourage each church to put together a large box or suitcase filled with props that can be used long term (suggested props are listed below with each slide; other optional props could include: a toy ship, a cross, etc.) *Note: the more props you have the better!*
- A TV or screen to show the PowerPoint
- Stage or curtain (use to rotate between presenters; one at a time, come out with your props and act out what happened for that specific topic or in that time period)
- Personalized notebooks for each student to take notes each week for the court case (you may want to keep these notebooks at church to make sure they aren't forgotten at home)

### Instructions for presenters and narrator:

Please work with your ministry leader to make sure you are thoroughly prepared. You will need to be animated as you talk through the history. Please practice in advance and be very well prepared, not only with the script and props, but also with the provided PowerPoint. This should be fun, fast, and educational. You should have over 50% of the script memorized and improvise as needed to make it engaging for the students. Timing is important; maintain a fast pace to keep students interested and the energy high.

A video (of the original English version) is provided for training purposes for those who are presenting the lesson. Please make time to consult the video before teaching this lesson: <https://bit.ly/3LN8SFW>  
*Note: You may need to copy and paste the link into your browser.*

### Alternative Presentation Options:

**Option A (with one presenter):** Inform students in advance that you will be creating a prop timeline as you talk. When you talk about a specific item, pull the prop from a “prop box” and allow a student to hold or display it (double check to make sure you have the right number of students to hold the props). The props will be used to review and to keep the students interested in the 20-minute presentation. Tell the students who are selected to hold the items that they must “freeze” like a statue after the prop is given to them (or they will be a distraction).

**Option B:** Instruct students to write down the steps of how the Bible actually came to be. Provide a numbered sheet of paper and see if they can fill in all the answers as you present. Place props on a table, so students can see a visual timeline. (If you need to motivate your students to stay on task, give out Tracker Tickets to students who write down the complete timeline.)

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# Scriptorium – A history of the Bible

Slide 1



If you were at school and the teacher said, "The Bible is just a storybook," or "The Bible is only partially true," or "The Bible is made up," what would you say? *Allow a few students to answer.*

The Bible states in John 17:17b, "God's Word is truth." So, the Bible itself tells us that the things written in it are true. But when you are trying to show someone outside of church that the Bible is true and reliable, it doesn't really work to use the Bible as evidence. You need to use **historical evidence** to prove your case.

Today we will really learn how we can know for sure that the Bible is true, so we can confidently know and tell others that God's Word is true!

Slide 2



Slide 2 – Prop: Bible

How did we get the Bible? Is this Book really accurate, considering it was written thousands of years ago?

Who wrote it, and how long did it take?

How did the Bible spread around the whole world?

These are all great questions that we will talk about today! So, get ready to listen, as we are going to cover a ton of topics in a short amount of time. Let's go!

Slide 3



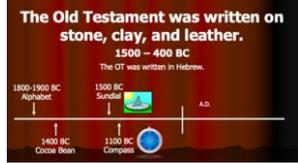
Slide 3 – Props: box of crayons, an actor dressed as a movie director with a movie clapboard

The Bible is totally amazing, and I'm excited to tell you how it came together.

First, you need to understand that this Book is the Bible, God's very words written on paper. When this Book was written, God was like the director of a movie. He knew the beginning and end before it was even written.

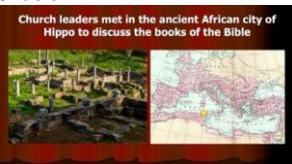
But how was it actually written? It was written by at least 40 people over about 1500 years! How many people? *Have students answer.* And how many years? *Have students answer.* God was the perfect Director who allowed everything in life to roll out just at the perfect time.

Have you ever heard the word "inspired"? When we say God inspired the Bible, we mean that God used different people to write His words. It's kind of like if you draw a picture and you choose the crayons to draw. *Hold up a box of crayons.* The people who wrote God's Book, the Bible, are like the crayons that God used. God selected the people He wanted and then He worked through those people to write each part of the Bible. These were just regular people: fishermen, tentmakers,

	shepherds, and doctors!
<p><b>Slide 4</b></p> 	<p><b>Slide 4 – Props: clay, an actor dressed in clothing from the year 1300 BC (robe with belt)</b></p> <p>So, you ask, “How did the early authors record God’s Word?” Do you think they used computers back in 1300 BC? Nope, they didn’t even have paper and pencils. Over four thousand years ago, people used a method of writing called cuneiform<sup>1</sup> (kyoo-NEE-a-form). It was a code placed into clay. This form of writing is what led to the alphabet that we use today. <i>Hold up a block of clay.</i></p>
<p><b>Slide 5</b></p> 	<p><b>Slide 5 – Props: stone, leather, and a chocolate bar</b></p> <p>Could you imagine carefully copying God’s Word onto clay and then accidentally dropping it? All your hard work would be destroyed. Through time they made advancements by writing the Old Testament on stone (<i>show stone</i>) and then leather (<i>show leather</i>). Could you imagine doing your homework on stone? No need to bring a pencil to school; just bring your chisel and cart of stones. This was all happening between the years 1500-400 BC.</p> <p>During this time, cocoa beans were discovered (<i>show chocolate bar</i>). The alphabet, the compass, and an early time keeping device called a sundial were invented. <i>Point to the timeline on the PowerPoint.</i></p>
<p><b>Slides 6 &amp; 7</b></p>  	<p><b>Slides 6 &amp; 7 – Props: reed pen and ink, scroll, an actor from 80 AD dressed in NT clothing</b></p> <p>Hello, my friends! Writing on stones and leather only worked so long, and then a new and great invention called “papyrus” came to be. Yay! Papyrus is a plant that grows up to 15 feet tall along the Nile River in Egypt.<sup>2</sup> Does anyone remember an interesting fact about the Nile River? (Hint: Moses) They took these plants and turned them into a form of paper which was also called papyrus and was used in Egypt and the Roman Empire.</p> <p>If you were an author of the New Testament in the year 50-100 AD, you were blessed to write on papyrus with a reed pen and ink. <i>Show reed pen and ink.</i></p> <p>Because papyrus was flexible, people could make scrolls. <i>Show scroll.</i> This allowed information to be kept in a compact form, compared to the stones they were used to. How could life get any better than this? Well, it did. Paged books called codex</p>

<sup>1</sup> Boivin, O. (2015). Cuneiform. *Canadian Journal of Archaeology*, 39(2), 349–351. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=cookie,ip,cpid,url&custid=s7324964&db=khh&AN=111992768&site=ehost-live&scope=site>

<sup>2</sup> Papyrus. (2018). In *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Retrieved from <https://school.eb.com/levels/middle/article/papyrus/276275>

	<p>were developed around 100-200AD<sup>3</sup>. This made it much easier to read and transport the Word of God.</p>
<p><b>Slide 8</b></p> 	<p><b>Slide 8 – Props: Greek New Testament (or other Greek Bible resource), a Hebrew Bible resource, an actor dressed as Gospel writer John Mark</b></p> <p>Charein! <i>Pause for a response</i>. Oh! You don't speak Greek! Well then let me start again... Greetings! I am John Mark. I am from Cyrene, in a country you now call Libya, in North Africa.<sup>4</sup> I am here to tell you about Greek, the language of the New Testament. <i>Show Greek resource</i>.</p> <p>You probably already know that the Old Testament was written in Hebrew. <i>Show Hebrew resource</i>. Can you read this? Neither can I! When I lived, in the times of Jesus, most people who could read didn't speak Hebrew, they spoke Greek! So, for more people to be able to read the Old Testament, it was translated into Greek. Can you guess where the translation happened? In Alexandria in Egypt!<sup>5</sup></p> <p>That is also why I write my account of Jesus' life in Greek. That's right, I wrote the Gospel of Mark. But I wanted as many people as possible to be able to read what I wrote, so even though I am from Africa, I wrote my book in Greek! In fact, all the books of the New Testament were written in Greek, no matter if we came from Africa or Israel or Turkey.</p>
<p><b>Slide 9</b></p> 	<p><b>Slide 9 – Props: Books of Bible DL classroom resource rolled up like a scroll, an actor dressed as Augustine of Hippo with a cape or robe</b></p> <p>Hello! I am Augustine of Hippo. Do you know of Hippo, my hometown? Perhaps the name has changed to something else since my time... Oh yes, I remember! You call it Algeria now, on the Mediterranean coast in North Africa.</p> <p>I have just come from an important meeting. The year is 393 AD. Leaders of the church from around the world gathered in my city, Hippo, to talk about the Bible.<sup>6</sup> We were discussing the books of the Bible. We need to agree on which letters and writings are Scripture and should be included in the Bible, and make sure that no one includes books that are not God's Word. I think we will meet many more times before we have this final list that you still have today. <i>Show the scroll</i>.</p>

<sup>3</sup> Epp, E. J. (1986). The Birth of the Codex (Book). *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 105(2), 359. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=cookie,ip,cpid,url&custid=s7324964&db=hlh&AN=7126612&site=ehost-live&scope=site>

<sup>4</sup> Rowland Van Es, Jr. "Africa: In the Bible, in Christianity's Roots and Branches." *The Reformed Journal Blog*, 8 Feb. 2023, [blog.reformedjournal.com/2023/02/08/africa-in-the-bible-in-christianitys-roots-and-branches/](http://blog.reformedjournal.com/2023/02/08/africa-in-the-bible-in-christianitys-roots-and-branches/).

<sup>5</sup> Editors of *Encyclopedia Britannica*. "Septuagint." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., 13 May 2024, [www.britannica.com/topic/Septuagint](http://www.britannica.com/topic/Septuagint).

<sup>6</sup> "Biblical Canon." *Wikipedia*, The Free Encyclopedia, Wikimedia Foundation, last updated 16 May 2024, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biblical\\_canon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biblical_canon)

<p><b>Slide 10</b></p>  <p>Christians began translating the Bible into their own languages</p> <p>Sahidic – AD 200    Ge'ez – AD 400    Latin – AD 430</p>	<p><b>Slide 10 – Prop: globe or world map</b></p> <p>As the Good News of Jesus Christ spread throughout the world, people who didn't speak or read Greek began to translate the Bible into their own languages. Around AD 200, the Bible was translated into Sahidic<sup>7</sup> and a few hundred years later into Ge'ez,<sup>8</sup> which are African languages that were spoken long ago in what is now Ethiopia and Somalia. Around the same time in Europe, the Bible was translated into Latin.<sup>9</sup> <i>Point out these places on the globe or map.</i></p>
<p><b>Slide 11</b></p>  <p>Trained scribes made exact copies of God's Word. Scribes were careful to follow special rules that kept them from making any mistakes.</p>	<p><b>Slide 11 – Props: feather and ink jar, an actor dressed in a monk's robe</b></p> <p>The next part of the Bible's history depends on some very important workers—monks. The very first monks lived in Egypt and then their way of life spread to North Africa, and from there to Christian communities in the rest of the world.<sup>10</sup> Monks were priests who chose to live a separate life of service and worship. They lived in groups in monasteries and did things like serve the poor and care for the sick. One of the important acts of service monks did was copy the Bible by hand!</p> <p><i>Come out with a hood over your face to represent the dark ages. Bonjour, welcome to France. The year is 800 AD - the Dark Ages.</i></p> <p><i>Lift your hood. I am a scribe. My job and calling in life are to copy the Word of God by hand. Yes, you heard it right... copy the Word of God BY HAND. I could not order a Bible online or go to a bookstore. The only copies of Scripture were handwritten. Show feather and ink jar.</i></p> <p>Can you see why my job was so important and how valuable each copy was?</p> <p>My whole life was dedicated to this. Let me share why this was a very, very long process. I worked at a church in a special room called the scriptorium. That is an interesting word that you don't hear very often. What was the room where I worked called? <i>Have students shout, "Scriptorium!"</i> When I arrived at the scriptorium, I announced, "I am now copying the Holy Word of God." Before I wrote any word, I said that word out loud two times. Before I wrote God's name, I stood and said loudly, "I am</p>

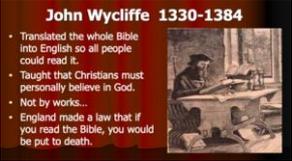
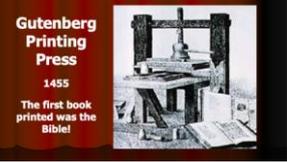
Commented [BS4]: Maybe add regions / where the translation took place?

<sup>7</sup> "Bible translations into Coptic." Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, Wikimedia Foundation, last updated 22 April 2024, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bible\\_translations\\_into\\_Coptic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bible_translations_into_Coptic).

<sup>8</sup> "Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church." Encyclopædia Britannica, Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., 3 May 2024, [www.britannica.com/topic/Ethiopian-Orthodox-Tewahedo-Church](http://www.britannica.com/topic/Ethiopian-Orthodox-Tewahedo-Church).

<sup>9</sup> Morgan, David. "A Brief History of Bible Translation." Wycliffe Bible Translators, 5 Sept. 2022, [wycliffe.org.uk/story/a-brief-history-of-bible-translation](http://wycliffe.org.uk/story/a-brief-history-of-bible-translation).

<sup>10</sup> Africa Study Bible, The. "The History of Christianity in Africa // Africa Study Bible." TGC Africa, 13 Nov. 2019, [africa.thegospelcoalition.org/article/history-christianity-africa/](http://africa.thegospelcoalition.org/article/history-christianity-africa/).

	<p>now writing the Holy Name of God." You can be sure that this was accurate. If one word was wrong, the three people that reviewed it would throw my work away...." <sup>11</sup></p>
<p><b>Slide 12</b></p> 	<p><b>Slide 12 – Props: ink and quill, an actor dressed as John Wycliffe with a beard and hat</b></p> <p>Welcome to England, my friends. I'm John Wycliffe. In my day, the Latin Bible was still the only Bible in use in Europe. The only problem was, nobody spoke Latin anymore! My goal was to help the average person read and study God's Word. So, I carefully translated the Bible from Latin to English by hand. <i>Show ink and quill.</i> This project was completed in the year 1382. Then thousands of people could read it, rather than just the priests who wrongly taught that good works could save you. The average person could personally believe in Jesus Christ and study the Word of God. The best part of this translation was that people could see that believing in Jesus was a free gift and it was not by works that they would be saved. (Ephesians 2:8-9)</p> <p>This did not make the priests happy. In fact, after this happened, England made a new law that if you read the Bible you were put to death! <sup>12</sup></p> <p>Despite the danger, my work sparked a new desire in the people to read the Bible for themselves! In the next 250 years, the Bible was translated into 15 more European languages!<sup>13</sup></p>
<p><b>Slides 13 &amp; 14</b></p>  	<p><b>Slides 13 &amp; 14 – Props: newspaper, an actor dressed as Mr. Gutenberg with a hat and beard</b></p> <p>Mr. Wycliffe was a great man, and no law stopped the spread of God's Word. Hi, I'm Mr. Gutenberg, a proud believer in Jesus Christ. Welcome to Germany in the year 1455. God used me to help spread God's Word rapidly by blessing me with the gifts and talents to invent something amazing. Guess what I invented? I invented the printing press. <i>Show newspaper.</i></p> <p>Do you know what my first project was on my printing press? (The Bible) Praise be to God!</p>
<p><b>Slide 15</b></p>	<p><b>Slide 15 – Props: sack of dried corn (or sack stuffed with paper with an ear of corn hanging out), an actor dressed as William Tyndale with a beard or hat</b></p> <p>Yes, praise be to God! Hi, I am William Tyndale. I worked hard</p>

<sup>11</sup> The Medieval Scribe and the Art of Writing. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://ultimatehistoryproject.com/the-medieval-scribe.html>

<sup>12</sup> Illegal English Bible. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.bl.uk/learning/timeline/item107718.htm>

<sup>13</sup> Morgan, David. "A Brief History of Bible Translation." *Wycliffe Bible Translators*, 5 Sept. 2022. [wycliffe.org.uk/story/a-brief-history-of-bible-translation](http://wycliffe.org.uk/story/a-brief-history-of-bible-translation).

**William Tyndale 1494-1536**



- Printed the complete English Bible and smuggled it into England.
- Within 10 years he was killed for his efforts.
- First used the archery term for missing the mark, "to sin." Many other familiar Bible phrases are in his translation.

to complete and print the English Bible in Germany. I also knew that the people in England needed to hear the truth, even though that awful law was in place. Let me tell you how I did it. I smuggled Bibles into England.<sup>14</sup> I took bags of corn and put the Bible in them. Then the corn was sold in England where the people found the Bibles. As I did this, I had to be careful because England even had spies looking for anyone who smuggled Bibles into their country. Praise God! Many Bibles were successfully given to the English people. After reading the truth, they often believed in the one true God.

It was my translation of the Bible that first used the archery term for missing the mark, "to sin." Other familiar English Bible words like "atonement," "land of the living," and "apple of my eye" first appeared in my translation, too!<sup>15</sup>

You will find on my tombstone that, after ten years, I was killed for my efforts.

**Slide 16**

**Samuel Ajayi Crowther 1809-1891**



- Born in Nigeria and became a Christian in Sierra Leone.
- Translated the Bible into his native language – Yoruba – at a time when most Bible translators were missionaries, not local believers.

**Slide 16 – Props: globe or world map, model boat to show missionaries traveling the world, long scroll with list of Bible translations or languages of the world.**

After William Tyndale, Bible translation slowed down, and for a long time, many people still didn't have the Bible in their own language. But God's desire is for all people and all nations to know His Good News of Salvation in Jesus Christ! *Show the globe.*

After about 200 years, missionaries in Africa, India, and other parts of the world, helped continue the work of Bible translation. The Word of God began to spread again! *Move the model boat around the globe to different parts of the world.* I'd like to tell you about two men whose translation work brought the Bible to many people in Africa.

In 1817, Robert Moffat, a Scottish missionary to South Africa, began translating the Bible into Tswana. He completed this translation in 1857, and this Bible was the first full-Bible translation in a South African language.<sup>16</sup>

In 1880, Samuel Ajayi Crowther, a bishop in West Africa, began translating the Bible into Yoruba, his native language. He completed the translation in just four years!<sup>17</sup>

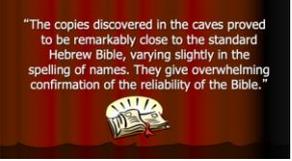
Today, the Bible has been translated into nearly 700 languages!

<sup>14</sup> Illegal English Bible. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.bl.uk/learning/timeline/item107718.html>

<sup>15</sup> Morgan, David. "A Brief History of Bible Translation." *Wycliffe Bible Translators*, 5 Sept. 2022, [wycliffe.org.uk/story/a-brief-history-of-bible-translation](https://www.wycliffe.org.uk/story/a-brief-history-of-bible-translation).

<sup>16</sup> "Seswana Bible Translation." *Bible Society of South Africa*, <https://www.biblesociety.co.za/index.php/resources/the-bible/38-resources/the-bible/115-setswana-bible-translation>.

<sup>17</sup> Morgan, David. "Samuel Ajayi Crowther." *Wycliffe Bible Translators*, 29 July 2022, <https://www.wycliffe.org.uk/story/a-brief-history-of-bible-translation>.

	<p>Praise God! Translators around the world are working on thousands more!<sup>18</sup> <i>Unroll the scroll and explain it.</i></p>
<p><b>Slides 17, 18, &amp; 19</b></p>   	<p><b>Slides 17, 18, &amp; 19 – Props: clay jar, an actor dressed as Professor Sukenik with thick glasses, a white dress shirt, and a wide necktie</b></p> <p>There you go...that is how the Bible was passed down to us. But wait; how do you know that everything stayed accurate through aaaaalll this time? That they didn't make mistakes or just decide to write something different?</p> <p>Well, let me introduce myself, I'm Professor Sukenik. In 1947, just after WWII ended, a shepherd boy found something really unique by the Dead Sea. Guess what it was. He found a clay jar. <i>Show clay jar.</i></p> <p>Inside the jar was an incredible treasure! Parts of the OT from between 100 BC and 100 AD were found! And the meaning of the words was the same as in our modern Bibles – it hadn't changed! Hundreds of Biblical scrolls were found in this location. These scrolls became well known as the "Dead Sea Scrolls" and can be seen in museums today.</p> <p><i>Read from PowerPoint slide 19:</i> "The copies discovered in the caves proved to be remarkably close to the standard Hebrew Bible, varying slightly in the spelling of names. They give overwhelming confirmation of the reliability of the Bible." Amazing...simply amazing!</p>
<p><b>Slide 20</b></p> 	<p><b>Slide 20 – Props: an actor dressed as an archaeologist with a shovel</b></p> <p>Each year, archaeological discoveries help us better understand the Bible and affirm its details about people, events, and culture. In 2016, the ancient city gate that King Hezekiah destroyed in 2 Kings 18 was discovered by a group of archaeologists. The archaeologists were from the United Kingdom and Tel Aviv University. Ze'ev Elkin, the Minister of Jerusalem Affairs, Heritage, and Environmental Protections, said that the dig showed how "... biblical tales that are known to us become historical and archaeological stories" as research progresses.<sup>19</sup></p>

<sup>18</sup> Morgan, David. "A Brief History of Bible Translation." *Wycliffe Bible Translators*, 5 Sept. 2022, [wycliffe.org.uk/story/a-brief-history-of-bible-translation](http://wycliffe.org.uk/story/a-brief-history-of-bible-translation).

<sup>19</sup> Geggel, L. (2016, September 28). Ancient City Gate and Shrine from Hebrew Bible Uncovered. Retrieved from <https://www.livescience.com/56300-gate-shrine-excavated-in-israel.html>

**Slide 21**



**Slide 21**

Students, when you study the Bible, know that what you learn will never change or go away! It's a fact!

*Isaiah 40:8 – "The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the Word of our God stands forever."*

***Pray and thank God for the Bible!***

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5/27/2024