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Old Testament

Genesis 12:1-9

Context: Today we encounter one of the most important turning points in the entire Bible. In Genesis 12, God calls Abram to leave everything familiar behind and journey into an unknown future. This passage marks the beginning of God's covenant relationship with Abraham and, through him, the people of Israel.

THE CALL OF ABRAM

Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.

"I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

So, Abram went, as the Lord had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. Abram took his wife Sarai (suh-RYE) and his brother's son Lot and all the possessions that they had gathered and the persons whom they had acquired in Haran, and they set forth to go to the land of Canaan.

When they had come to the land of Canaan, Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem (SHEK-um), to the oak of Moreh (MO-reh).

At that time the Canaanites were in the land. Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land."

So, he built there an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him. From there he moved on to the hill country on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai (Eye) on the east, and there he built an altar to the Lord and invoked the name of the Lord.

And Abram journeyed on by stages toward the Negeb (NEG-ev).

OVERVIEW

Genesis 12:1-9 records God's call to Abram (later Abraham). God instructs him to leave his homeland, family, and security and travel to a land that God will reveal. In return, God promises to make Abram into a great nation, bless him, make his name great, and use him as a blessing to all peoples.

Abram responds **not** with questions or arguments, but with **obedience**. He travels from Mesopotamia to Canaan, builds altars, worships God, and continues moving forward in faith despite not knowing exactly where the journey will lead.

This passage establishes a pattern that echoes throughout Scripture:

- God calls.
- People respond in faith.
- God works through imperfect people.
- The blessing received is meant to bless others.



BIBLICAL CONTEXT

Immediately Before: Genesis 11:10-32

The preceding passage contains the genealogy of Shem leading to Abram. It introduces Abram's family and notes an important problem: his wife Sarai is unable to have children.

This creates dramatic tension. God's promise of descendants appears impossible from the start.

Genesis 11 also follows the story of the Tower of Babel. At Babel, humanity seeks to make a great name for itself. In Genesis 12, God tells Abram: "I will make your name great."

The contrast is striking:

- Babel = Humanity exalting itself.
- Abram = God exalting a faithful servant.

Immediately After: Genesis 12:10-20

Almost immediately after receiving God's promises, Abram faces famine and travels to Egypt. Fear overtakes faith. Abram deceives Pharaoh by claiming Sarai is his sister.

The Bible does not portray Abram as a perfect hero. The man chosen by God is flawed, fearful, and sometimes makes poor decisions.

This becomes a recurring biblical theme: God's plans succeed not because people are perfect, but because God is faithful.

Broader Context of Genesis

Genesis can be viewed in two major sections:

Genesis 1-11

Universal History

- Creation
- Fall
- Flood
- Babel

These chapters ask: "What has gone wrong with humanity?"

Genesis 12-50

The Patriarchs

- Abraham
- Isaac
- Jacob
- Joseph

These chapters ask: "How will God begin restoring what has been broken?"

Abram becomes God's answer.



Theologically, Genesis 12 serves as the bridge between humanity's rebellion and God's plan of redemption. Many scholars consider Genesis 12:1-3 one of the most important passages in the entire Old Testament because it introduces the covenant promises that shape the rest of Scripture.

HISTORICAL / NON-BIBLICAL / POLITICAL CONTEXT

Abram likely originated from the region of Mesopotamia, often associated with the city of Ur.

Mesopotamia was one of the most advanced civilizations of its day:

- Organized cities
- Trade networks
- Written language
- Law codes
- Religious temples

Leaving such a place was not simply moving houses.

It meant leaving:

- Family support systems
- Economic security
- Religious traditions
- Social identity

Ancient people were deeply tied to land and clan. A person without these connections was vulnerable.

God's command was therefore radical.

The Land of Canaan

Canaan was not an empty wilderness.

It contained:

- Numerous city-states
- Diverse peoples
- Competing religious traditions
- Frequent political alliances and conflicts

The text notes: "The Canaanites were then in the land."

This reminds readers that God's promise did not immediately equal possession. Abram arrives as a foreigner.

Covenant Background

Ancient Near Eastern cultures often used treaties between kings and subjects.

God's covenant with Abram resembles these arrangements but differs significantly.

Rather than demanding loyalty in exchange for protection, God begins with grace: "I will bless you."

The relationship begins with promise before obligation.



HISTORICAL TIMELINE / BIBLICAL TIMEFRAME

Event	Approximate Date
Creation narratives (traditional chronology)	Prehistory
Flood narratives	Prehistory
Tower of Babel	Early Bronze Age setting
Abram born	c. 2100-2000 BC
Call of Abram (Genesis 12)	c. 2000-1900 BC
Isaac born	c. 1900 BC
Jacob born	c. 1850 BC
Joseph in Egypt	c. 1700 BC
Exodus (traditional dating debated)	c. 1440-1250 BC

Most scholars place the patriarchal narratives broadly within the Middle Bronze Age.

BIBLE TRANSLATION UNDERSTANDING

Original Language

Genesis was written in Biblical Hebrew.

The earliest traditions likely circulated orally for generations before reaching their final written form.

Many scholars place the final composition and editing of Genesis between the 10th and 5th centuries BC, while preserving much older traditions.

Translation Comparison

KJV (1611): “Get thee out of thy country...”

NRSVue (2021): “Go from your country...”

The NRSVue sounds simpler, but the Hebrew contains layers of meaning involving both departure and transformation. Many modern scholars emphasize that Abram is not merely changing locations; he is entering a new identity.

SCHOLARLY METAPHORICAL INTERPRETATION WITH MODERN-DAY & GRANT COUNTY CONTEXT

Many contemporary scholars see Abram’s journey as a universal metaphor for spiritual growth.

Everyone begins with familiar assumptions:

- Family beliefs
- Political identities
- Cultural habits
- Personal comfort zones

Growth often requires leaving some of these behind. Not abandoning family or community, but moving beyond inherited limitations. Abram represents the courage to walk toward an unknown future.

Grant County Application

This story resonates deeply in communities like Grant County. Many families have lived in the same area for generations. There is tremendous value in roots, tradition, and community.



Yet every generation faces moments when God may call people to:

- Start a new ministry
- Change careers
- Welcome new neighbors
- Reconsider old assumptions
- Build new partnerships

The challenge is learning when faithfulness means preserving tradition and when faithfulness means stepping beyond it.

Abram's example suggests that faith is not merely believing certain things.

Faith is trusting God enough to move when called.

HOW SHOULD WE ACT AND REACT TO THIS SCRIPTURE TODAY?

1. Listen for God's call.
 - a. God often calls ordinary people rather than extraordinary ones.
2. Accept uncertainty.
 - a. Abram did not receive a complete roadmap, and neither do we.
3. Trust God's faithfulness more than your own perfection.
 - a. Abram's failures follow almost immediately, yet God's covenant remains.
4. Build altars along the journey.
 - a. Abram repeatedly pauses to worship. Modern believers need practices that remind them of God's presence amid life's transitions.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *What would have been most difficult about Abram leaving home?*
2. *Why do you think God chose Abram?*
3. *What modern situations require faith similar to Abram's?*
4. *What does it mean to be blessed so that others can be blessed?*
5. *Why is it important that Abram is shown as imperfect immediately after this story?*
6. *How might Genesis 12 be a response to the Tower of Babel story?*
7. *What "unknown territory" might God be calling people into today?*





New Testament

Romans 4:13-21

Context: Today's scripture comes from Paul's letter to the Romans. Writing to a diverse church made up of both Jewish and Gentile believers, Paul points back to Abraham and reminds his readers that God's promises are received through faith, not earned through religious achievement. In these verses, Abraham becomes a model of trusting God even when circumstances seem impossible.

GOD'S PROMISE REALIZED THROUGH FAITH

For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith.

For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law, neither is there transgression.

For this reason the promise depends on faith, in order that it may rest on grace, so that it may be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (who is the father of all of us, as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations"), in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become "the father of many nations," according to what was said, "So shall your descendants be."

He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), and the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.

OVERVIEW

Romans 4:13-21 centers on Abraham's faith in God's promise. Paul argues that God's covenant with Abraham was not based on obedience to the Law (which had not yet been given), but on faith. Abraham trusted God's promise that he would become the father of many nations despite his old age and Sarah's barrenness.

Paul uses Abraham as evidence that God's grace extends beyond ethnic Israel and beyond human efforts. Faith is portrayed not as wishful thinking but as trusting God's faithfulness when circumstances suggest otherwise.

The passage asks a timeless question: ***Do we trust only what we can see, or can we trust God when the outcome appears impossible?***



BIBLICAL CONTEXT

Immediately Before (Romans 4:1-12)

Paul has just argued that Abraham was declared righteous before he was circumcised. This is a crucial point because it means Abraham became right with God before performing any religious ritual.

Paul's message:

- Circumcision did not save Abraham.
- Religious identity did not save Abraham.

Faith came first.

This allows Abraham to become both:

- Father of faithful Jews
- Father of faithful Gentiles

Today's Passage (Romans 4:13-21)

Paul expands the argument. The promise was not given through the Law because the Law did not yet exist.

- Instead: Promise → Faith → Grace
- rather than: Law → Performance → Reward

Abraham trusted God's promise even when there was no visible evidence it could happen.

Immediately After (Romans 4:22-25)

Paul concludes: "Therefore his faith was reckoned to him as righteousness."

Then Paul shifts from Abraham to Christians.

Just as Abraham trusted God for an impossible birth, Christians trust God for something equally astonishing:

- Jesus was crucified.
- Jesus was raised.
- God brings life where there appears to be death.

Broader Context of Romans

Romans is Paul's most systematic explanation of the gospel.

Major themes include:

- Sin and human brokenness (Romans 1-3)
- Justification by faith (Romans 3-5)
- New life in Christ (Romans 6-8)
- God's relationship with Israel (Romans 9-11)
- Christian living (Romans 12-16)

Romans 4 serves as Paul's key example showing that salvation has always been rooted in faith, even in the Old Testament.



HISTORICAL / NON-BIBLICAL / POLITICAL CONTEXT

Paul likely wrote Romans around **A.D. 57-58** while in Corinth.

The Roman church was experiencing tension between:

- Jewish Christians
- Gentile Christians

A few years earlier, Emperor Claudius had expelled many Jews from Rome. When they returned after his death, they found Gentile Christians occupying leadership positions in some churches.

Questions emerged:

- Must Gentiles become Jewish?
- Is circumcision required?
- Must Christians follow the Law of Moses?

Paul's answer is radical:

Abraham himself was accepted before circumcision and before the Law.

This argument undermined ethnic and religious superiority claims within the church.

HISTORICAL TIMELINE / BIBLICAL TIMEFRAME

1. Around 2000-1800 B.C.
 - God calls Abraham (Genesis 12).
2. Around 1900-1800 B.C.
 - Promise given that Abraham will become father of many nations.
3. Around 1440-1250 B.C.
 - Traditional dating range for Moses and the giving of the Law.
4. Around A.D. 30
 - Death and resurrection of Jesus.
5. Around A.D. 57-58
 - Paul writes Romans.

BIBLE TRANSLATION UNDERSTANDING

Original Language

Romans was written in **Greek** around A.D. 57-58. Paul often uses legal and covenant language familiar to both Jewish and Roman audiences.

Translation History

1. Early Greek Manuscripts (1st-4th centuries)
2. Latin Vulgate Translated by Jerome around (A.D. 382-405)
3. Wycliffe Bible (1380s)
4. Tyndale Bible (1520s)
5. Geneva Bible (1560)
6. **King James Version (1611)**
7. Revised Standard Version (1952)
8. New Revised Standard Version (1989)
9. New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition (2021)



The King James Bible was translated in a Protestant nation seeking religious unity under a powerful king, in a world that largely accepted hierarchy, monarchy, and a pre-scientific understanding of reality. BUT ...

The KJV is actually closer in time to us (415 years ago) than it is to Abraham (roughly 3,600 years ago) or even Paul (about 1,550 years earlier).

That doesn't diminish the KJV's beauty or importance. In fact, its literary influence on English is hard to overstate. It simply reminds us that every generation is trying to hear an ancient voice through the language, assumptions, and questions of its own era.

That's one reason I enjoy the translation comparison charts we've been doing. They're not really about finding the "correct" translation. They're about asking: "What did the original authors mean, and how has each generation tried to express that meaning?"

SCHOLARLY METAPHORICAL INTERPRETATION WITH MODERN-DAY & GRANT COUNTY CONTEXT
Many scholars view Abraham as representing humanity's journey into the unknown.

Abraham stands at a crossroads:

- Reality says one thing.
- Promise says another.

He chooses promise.

Metaphorically, Abraham becomes the person who keeps moving forward despite uncertainty.

Modern-Day Application

We all face situations where evidence suggests failure:

- illness
- addiction
- broken relationships
- community decline
- economic hardship

Faith does not require denying reality.

Abraham fully acknowledged reality:

- He was old.
- Sarah was barren.

Faith meant refusing to let reality have the final word.

Grant County Context

Many people in Grant County have watched:

- factories close
- jobs disappear
- neighborhoods struggle
- churches shrink



It can become easy to believe decline is inevitable.

Abraham's story suggests another possibility:

- Faith is not pretending problems don't exist.
- Faith is believing God can still create something new despite them.
- A community garden starts with barren soil.
- A Meals on Wheels volunteer serves someone who feels forgotten.
- A church continues serving despite fewer people in the pews.

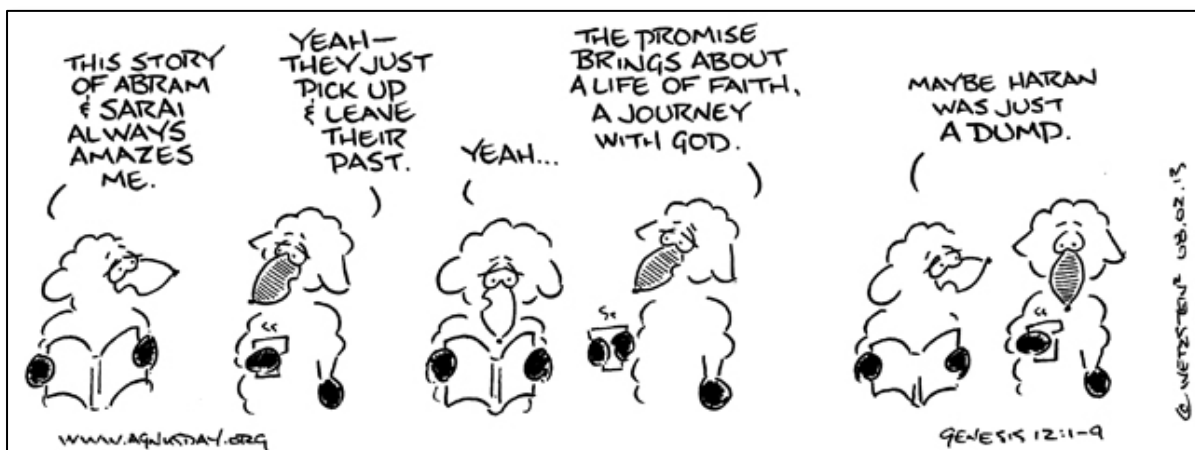
Those are all small acts of "hoping against hope."

HOW SHOULD WE ACT AND REACT TO THIS SCRIPTURE TODAY?

1. **Trust Beyond Circumstances:** Faith begins where certainty ends.
2. **Avoid Spiritual Scorekeeping:** Paul reminds us that God's grace cannot be earned. Faith is a relationship, not a performance review.
3. **Refuse Cynicism:** Abraham saw obstacles without surrendering to despair. Christians are called to realism without hopelessness.
4. **Keep Planting Seeds:** Even when results are not immediately visible. Faith often looks like continuing the work before seeing the harvest.
5. **Remember God's History:** Abraham trusted because he believed God had been faithful before. Looking back often strengthens faith moving forward.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *Why do you think Paul spends so much time talking about Abraham?*
2. *What is the difference between faith and wishful thinking?*
3. *What does "hoping against hope" mean to you?*
4. *Can you think of a time when something seemed impossible but eventually worked out?*
5. *What promises of God are hardest for modern Christians to trust?*
6. *How do we balance realism and faith?*
7. *What might "hoping against hope" look like in Grant County today?*





Addendum

The Ethiopian Bible

The **Ethiopian Bible** usually refers to the biblical canon used by the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church. It is notable because it contains **more books than most other Christian Bibles**.

How is it different?

Most Christian traditions use:

- **Protestant Bible:** 66 books
- **Catholic Bible:** 73 books
- **Eastern Orthodox Bibles:** “generally” 76–81 books, depending on tradition

The Ethiopian Orthodox canon is often described as having **81 books**, making it one of the largest biblical canons in Christianity.

Additional books

Besides books found in Catholic and Orthodox Bibles, the Ethiopian canon includes works such as:

- 1 Enoch
- Jubilees
- 1, 2, and 3 Meqabyan (different from the Greek Books of Maccabees)
- The Book of the Covenant
- Sinodos
- Other church texts recognized within the Ethiopian tradition

Why is it unique?

The Ethiopian Church developed somewhat independently from European Christianity for many centuries. As a result, it preserved certain ancient Jewish and early Christian writings that were excluded from most Western biblical canons.

The Book of Enoch

One of the most famous differences is that the Ethiopian Bible includes 1 Enoch in full. Although 1 Enoch was highly respected by some early Christians and is even quoted in the Epistle of Jude, it is not considered canonical by most Christian denominations today.

Language

Historically, the Ethiopian Bible was written in **Ge'ez**, the classical liturgical language of Ethiopia. Modern translations also exist in Amharic and other languages.

A Common Perceptions

People sometimes say “the Ethiopian Bible has 88 books” or that there is a single, standardized “Ethiopian Bible.” In reality, the canon is complex, and scholars distinguish between a **broader** and **narrower** Ethiopian Orthodox canon. The commonly cited number is **81 books**, but the exact contents can vary depending on how certain church texts are counted.



In short, the Ethiopian Bible is the collection of sacred scriptures used by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, distinguished by its inclusion of ancient books such as Enoch and Jubilees that are not found in most other Christian Bibles.

WHAT IS THE REASON SOME BOOKS ARE NOT INCLUDED?

That's one of the most fascinating questions in biblical history, because the answer is: **there was never one moment when "all the books" were gathered together and someone simply removed some of them.** The process was much messier and took centuries.

The Short Answer

The books of the Bible were gradually recognized by different Jewish and Christian communities between roughly **500 BC and 400 AD**. Different groups preserved different collections of writings, and over time certain books became widely accepted while others remained disputed.

The Ethiopian Church preserved some books that other churches eventually did not.

Step 1: The Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament)

Before Jesus was born, Jews already had sacred writings:

- Torah (Genesis–Deuteronomy)
- Prophets
- Writings (Psalms, Proverbs, etc.)

But there was not yet a universally agreed-upon list. By about **AD 90**, many scholars believe Jewish leaders associated with the academy at Jamnia favored a narrower collection of books, generally corresponding to today's Hebrew Bible.

Several books found in the Greek Septuagint were not included, such as:

- Tobit
- Judith
- 1 Maccabees
- Wisdom of Solomon

Christians continued using many of these books.

Step 2: The New Testament

The first Christians had no New Testament.

They had:

- Hebrew Scriptures
- Letters from apostles
- Gospel accounts
- Other Christian writings
- Many other books circulated.

Accepted everywhere:

- Matthew
- Mark
- Luke



- John
- Paul's letters

Disputed:

- Hebrews
- James
- Revelation
- 2 Peter

What were the reasons for the disputes:

- Nobody knew for sure who wrote Hebrews.
- Some Christians thought that James contradicted Paul.
- Many Christians thought that Peter did not write 2 Peter.
- Revelation is a lightning rod for controversy ... love, fear, imagery.
- It didn't appear to be about "liking" a book, but "trusting" a book. It did not appear to be about doctrine.

Also, popular but eventually excluded:

- Shepherd of Hermas
- Didache
- Gospel of Thomas

What were the reasons to exclude:

- **Hermas** was excluded because it was **too late**.
- **Didache** was excluded because it was **instructional rather than scriptural**.
- **Thomas** was excluded because it was **too late and theologically suspect**.

Step 3: How Did Churches Decide?

Early Christians generally looked for three things:

1. **Apostolic Connection** - Was it written by an apostle or a close associate?
1. **Orthodox Teaching** - Did it agree with what churches already believed about Jesus?
2. **Widespread Use** - Was it being read in churches throughout the Christian world?

Books that met all three criteria were more likely to become canonical.

Step 4: Major Canon Decisions

Several church councils helped formalize what many churches were already using:

- Council of Rome
- Council of Hippo
- Council of Carthage

See Addendum on the Council of Nicaea

These councils recognized the 27 books of the New Testament used today by Catholics, Protestants, and Orthodox Christians.



Why Did Ethiopia Keep Enoch?

The book of 1 Enoch was extremely popular among Jews before Jesus. Fragments were later discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls, proving it was widely respected in ancient Judaism.

The New Testament even quotes it: “Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied...” (Jude 14)

Many early Christians valued Enoch, but most churches eventually stopped treating it as Scripture. The Ethiopian Church, however, continued reading and preserving it, so it remained part of their canon.

Who had the authority to decide?

That depends on your theological perspective.

- A more traditional answer is: The Holy Spirit guided the Church to recognize the books God inspired.
- An historian might say: Christian communities gradually reached consensus over several centuries about which books best represented apostolic faith.

Notice the difference: one emphasizes divine guidance; the other emphasizes historical development. Many Christians (including many Methodists) would say both can be true.

For roughly the first three centuries after Jesus, Christians lived their faith with:

- oral teaching (not physical bibles),
- worship,
- letters,
- Gospel manuscripts,
- and local church traditions.

The Bible was not dropped from heaven as a finished book. It emerged from the life of the early Church. That realization can actually deepen appreciation for Scripture, because it reminds us that these writings survived centuries of copying, discussion, debate, persecution, and devotion before reaching us today.

ETHIOPIAN BIBLE REVISIONS

The Ethiopian Bible has gone through its own series of translations, revisions, and renditions ... just not along the same path as most Western Bibles. One misconception is that the Ethiopian Bible is a single ancient book that has remained unchanged for 2,000 years. The canon (books included) has been relatively stable within the Ethiopian Orthodox tradition, but the **language and manuscripts have evolved**.

The Language Journey

1. Ancient Sources

Many of the books originated in:

- Hebrew
- Aramaic
- Greek

Just like the books in other Christian Bibles.



2. Ge'ez Translation

Most of the Ethiopian biblical tradition was translated into **Ge'ez** between roughly the 4th and 7th centuries AD.

Ge'ez is to Ethiopian Christianity somewhat like Latin was to Roman Catholicism:

- It is no longer a common spoken language.
- It remains the liturgical language of the church.

Many ancient versions of books survive only because Ethiopian Christians preserved them in Ge'ez. For example, the complete text of 1 Enoch survived primarily in Ge'ez manuscripts for centuries after the original versions disappeared elsewhere.

3. Manuscript Variations

Like all ancient biblical traditions, Ethiopian manuscripts were hand-copied.

That means:

- spelling differences occurred
- scribal mistakes occurred
- marginal notes sometimes entered the text
- wording occasionally varied

This is not unique to Ethiopia. The same happened with Greek New Testament manuscripts, Hebrew Old Testament manuscripts, and Latin manuscripts.

4. Modern Ethiopian Translations

In the last century, the Bible has been translated into:

- Amharic
- Oromo
- Tigrinya
- English
- other Ethiopian languages

Just as English speakers moved from:

- Wycliffe
- Tyndale
- KJV
- RSV
- NIV
- NRSV

Ethiopian Christians have also sought translations into contemporary languages.

WHICH BIBLE?

In some ways, Ethiopian Christianity preserved the **older readings** than Western Christianity. For example: 1 Enoch disappeared from most Christian traditions but remained in Ethiopia. Then in the 1700s, European scholars became aware that Ethiopia had preserved the entire book.



Later discoveries among the Dead Sea Scrolls confirmed that Enoch was indeed an ancient Jewish work and not some medieval Ethiopian invention. The core sacred texts of the Ethiopian Bible have been preserved through centuries of copying and translation, while the language and manuscript traditions have continued to develop.

So, “Which Bible is closest to the original?” the honest scholarly answer is **none of our modern Bibles are the original manuscripts**. Every Bible on earth ... including Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, and Ethiopian versions ... is based on copies of copies of copies. The remarkable thing is not that variations exist; it’s how much agreement exists across thousands of manuscripts preserved over nearly two millennia. That’s one reason textual scholars are surprisingly confident about the overwhelming majority of the biblical text.

Ethiopian Bible Translation Comparisons

The Bible has always been translated, revised, and updated. The KJV isn’t the “original Bible” any more than the NIV is. It’s simply one point in a very long history.

Does the Ethiopian Bible have translation changes like our Bibles?

Yes, but not nearly as many English translations.

For centuries, Ethiopian Christians primarily used **Ge'ez** manuscripts. Later translations appeared in: Amharic, Oromo, Tigrinya, English

Just as we can compare KJV, RSV, NIV, and NRSV, Ethiopian scholars can compare Ge'ez manuscripts with modern Amharic translations.

Genesis 1:1–3 Comparison Across Traditions

Translation	Genesis 1:1	Genesis 1:2	Genesis 1:3
King James Version (1611)	In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.	And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep.	And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.
Revised Standard Version (1952)	In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.	The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep.	And God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light.
New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition (2021)	When God began to create the heavens and the earth,	the earth was complete chaos, and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.	Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light.
Traditional Ge'ez Ethiopian Text (4th–7th Century Translation Tradition)	In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.	And the earth was formless and empty, and darkness covered the deep.	And God said, “Let light come into being,” and light came into being.
Modern Amharic Ethiopian Bible (20th Century)	In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.	The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep.	And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.



If I was sitting in church in 1955, what Bible would I have heard?

Many people think the progression was: **1611 KJV → 1978 NIV → Today**

But there were many stops in between.

Before the KJV

- 1382 - Wycliffe Bible
- 1526 - Tyndale New Testament
- 1535 - Coverdale Bible
- 1560 - Geneva Bible
- 1568 - Bishops' Bible
- 1611 - King James Version

The KJV actually borrowed heavily from Tyndale. Scholars estimate that much of the famous KJV wording originated with William Tyndale nearly a century earlier. The KJV dominated English-speaking Christianity for about 300 years. But it wasn't alone.

- **English Revised Version (1881-1885):** Scholars gained access to older Greek manuscripts than those available in 1611.
- **American Standard Version (1901):** Very popular among scholars and many mainline churches.
- **Revised Standard Version (1952):** This is probably the Bible many educated Protestants encountered in the 1950s and 1960s.

There was controversy because it modernized some KJV language.

For example:

- KJV: “Behold, a virgin shall conceive...”
- RSV: “Behold, a young woman shall conceive...”

That one translation choice sparked national debates.

What might you have heard in the 1950s?

Church	Likely Bible
Conservative Baptist	KJV
Methodist	KJV or RSV
Presbyterian	RSV
Episcopal	RSV
Catholic	Douay-Rheims or Confraternity versions



Here's that Genesis comparison we talked about:

- 1611 KJV: In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.
- 1952 RSV: In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.
- 1989 NRSV: In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth...
- 2021 NRSVue: When God began to create the heavens and the earth...

That's not theology changing. It's scholarship improving its understanding of ancient Hebrew grammar. The surprising thing is not how much has changed. The surprising thing is how much has remained recognizable across 400 years of English translation and nearly 2,000 years of manuscript transmission.

That's one reason biblical scholars often say the real story isn't that the text *changed* over time ... it's that it *survived* over time. And that survival becomes even more impressive when you realize traditions as far apart as Ethiopian Christianity, Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Protestantism still share the overwhelming majority of the biblical narrative despite being separated for centuries.

The funny thing is that once people start pulling on the thread of "Which Bible?" they often discover that the real story is even more interesting than the simple version they grew up with.

HOW DID WE GET OUR BIBLE?

Some folks may hear "translation changes" and immediately think, "Someone is changing God's Word."

The message is ancient. The translation is modern. The Bible itself didn't suddenly change in 2021. Our understanding of ancient Hebrew and Greek improved, and translators tried to express that understanding in today's English.

The biggest question on the Ethiopian Bible isn't, "Why wasn't Enoch included in my Bible?"

The bigger question is, "Why was Enoch included in Ethiopia's Bible for nearly 2,000 years?"

So, my answer to "Which one you should read?" The one you'll actually read. Compare a couple of translations when something seems confusing.

After all, as Dave brought up last week: Why the KJV says "firmament" and the NRSVue says "dome."

The Council of Nicaea

This may be the biggest misconceptions in church history. Many people have heard of the **Council of Nicaea** and assume: *That's where they decided which books went into the Bible.*

Actually, **they didn't**.

The council was primarily called by Constantine the Great to settle a dispute about the nature of Jesus.

A priest named Arius was teaching: *Jesus was created by God.* (You've possibly heard of a fight that ensued in the council chambers.)

In other words:

- God the Father = eternal
- Jesus = not eternal



Many church leaders believed this threatened the core Christian understanding of Christ. Was Jesus: Fully God? Or, a created being? That was the crisis! So, the bishops produced what became the foundation of the: Nicene Creed which was directly aimed at Arius.

THE NICAEAN CREED

*We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.*

*We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father.
Through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven:
by the power of the Holy Spirit
he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,
and was made man.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.*

*We believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.
With the Father and the Son
he is worshiped and glorified.
He has spoken through the Prophets.
We believe in one holy universal and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism
for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come.
Amen.*



NICAEA DID NOT:

- Choose Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John
- Throw out the Gospel of Thomas
- Create the Bible
- Decide the New Testament canon

WHY DO PEOPLE THINK IT DID?

Partly because of novels, documentaries, and internet memes. Especially after The DaVinci Code became popular.

A common claim became: “Constantine picked the books of the Bible at Nicaea.”

Historians across the theological spectrum generally agree: That didn’t happen.

The books of the New Testament were already widely recognized long before Nicaea.

WHY DO ROME, HIPPO, AND CARTHAGE MATTER?

Because those councils dealt more directly with: Which books are recognized as Scripture?

- **Rome (382):** Produced an early list matching today's Catholic New Testament.
- **Hippo (393):** Confirmed a similar list.
- **Carthage (397):** Reaffirmed it.

These are the councils most often associated with formal canon recognition.

A Quick Timeline

Year	Event
AD 50–100	New Testament books written
AD 150–300	Churches debate and use various writings
AD 325	Council of Nicaea (Who is Jesus?)
AD 367	Athanasius of Alexandria lists the 27 New Testament books we use today
AD 382	Council of Rome
AD 393	Council of Hippo
AD 397	Council of Carthage

Notice that Nicaea comes before the major canon discussions.

The Council of Nicaea was so important that people tend to attach every major event in early Christianity to it. When you start tracing these stories back to original sources, you discover that many things “everyone knows” turn out not to be true.

That’s not a church problem. That’s a human problem. It’s the same reason to remind readers: “Don't stop at the headline. Read the article.” Church history is full of headlines. The fun begins when you read the article.



THE DAN BROWN SYNDROME

The funny thing about Dan Brown is that he did what great novelists do: he mixed **just enough real history** with fiction to make readers wonder where one ended and the other began.

For example, in *The DaVinci Code*:

Real

- Constantine existed.
- The Council of Nicaea happened in AD 325.
- There were early Christian disagreements about Jesus.
- There were non-canonical gospels.

Fiction (or heavily dramatized)

- Nicaea voted Jesus into divinity.
- Constantine created the Bible.
- The council chose the four gospels from hundreds of equally valid alternatives.
- Secret documents proved a completely different Christianity.

When historians read the book, many were pulling their hair out. But to Brown's credit, he got millions of people interested in church history who otherwise never would have thought about it.

I suspect Dan Brown has probably generated more Sunday School questions than many seminary professors.

The problem wasn't that people read *The DaVinci Code*.

The problem was that many people stopped at *The DaVinci Code*.

One of my favorite examples is the Gospel of Thomas. After reading Brown, many people assume: "Thomas was suppressed because it told the real story of Jesus."

But if you actually read it, you'll discover it doesn't read like Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John at all.

It reads more like: 114 sayings of Jesus, some familiar, some cryptic, some downright strange.

A lot of readers come away saying: "Oh. That's not what I expected." Which is exactly why many historians always say: Read the source if you can.

The actual history of Christianity is not a story of certainty.

It's a story of:

- debates,
- councils,
- disagreements,
- translations,
- politics,
- faith,
- personalities,
- and ordinary people trying to understand God.

Faith isn't the absence of questions.

Faith is often what survives after we've asked them.