

Historical Profiles of Bible Translators & Interpreters

Paula (347–404)

Devoted Disciple and Founder of Monasteries

Paula and her daughter Eustochium devoted their lives to Christian service and study after the death of her husband, a Roman senator. They traveled with Jerome to Palestine and Egypt, and were tutored in the knowledge of Scripture and monastic living. Paula and Eustochium became fluent in Greek and Hebrew during these pilgrimages. They eventually settled in Bethlehem, where they founded four monasteries and assisted Jerome as he worked on the Latin Vulgate. The Vulgate was the first translation of the Bible from the original Greek and Hebrew, which were no longer spoken by many Christians, into the language of the common people.

Luther (1483–1546)

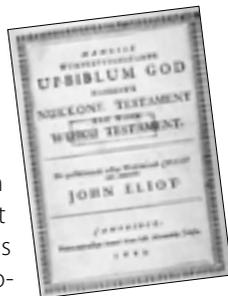
Church Reformer

Although Martin Luther had never read the Bible before age 20, by the time of his death at age 63 he had published many Bible commentaries and multiple editions of the first translation of the Bible in German. Luther insisted that to translate the Bible into clear and understandable language, “one must ask the mother at home, the children in the alley, and the common man in the market place about it, and translate accordingly.” He also believed that translating required “a truly devout, faithful, diligent, Christian, learned, experienced, and practiced heart.” The increased access to Scripture that resulted from Luther and other reformers’ translations paved the way for abolishing unbiblical beliefs and practices in the Church during the Reformation.

John Eliot (1604–1690)

Puritan Missionary to the Massachusetts Bay Indians

The first full Bible printed in the Western Hemisphere was in a dialect of the Algonquin Indians. Puritan missionary John Eliot translated the Bible from the original languages into the Massachusetts Bay Indians’ language, Massachusset. Massachusset had never been written before, so Eliot also created the first written form of the language. The Bible was finished in 1663 and a new edition was published in 1685.



Samuel Crowther (1809–92)

From Freed Slave to First African Bishop



Samuel Crowther was born in Nigeria in 1809. He was captured as a slave when he was only 13. Fortunately, the British intercepted the slave ship at Sierra Leone and Crowther was freed. There, he became a Christian and was educated by the Christian Missionary Society. Eventually Crowther went to London to study theology. Before returning to Africa he was ordained, and in 1864, Samuel Crowther became the first African Bishop of the Anglican Church. After becoming Bishop, he translated the New Testament into Yoruba, his native language.

Pandita Ramabai Saraswati (1858–1922)

Sanskrit Scholar and Social Reformer



Pandita Ramabai’s parents believed in education for women, which was very unusual for Indian families in the 1800s. Pandita excelled in her studies, and was especially renowned for her skills in Sanskrit. After converting to Christianity, Pandita learned Greek and Hebrew in order to translate the entire Bible into Marathi, her native language. In 1889, she founded a school called Sh̄rādā Sadan (“Home of Wisdom” in Marathi), where Indian girls received care and education, and her Bible was translated and published. Pandita Ramabai’s Bible is one of the only—if not the only—translations of the Bible done completely by a woman.

Katharine Bushnell (1856–1946)

Biblical Scholar and Advocate for Equality

Katharine C. Bushnell (1856–1946) was a passionate advocate for the oppressed. Her ministry included serving as a medical doctor in the United States and China, working for social reform with Francis Willard and the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, and founding a mission for homeless women in Chicago. She ministered in places like brothels, opium dens, and lumber camps. Throughout her journeys, she was a diligent student of the Bible in its original languages and published ground-breaking Bible studies on the equality of men and women in the church, home, and world.