The Bible appears in hundreds of cultures in a variety of languages, interpretations, formats, and sizes. Written originally in Hebrew, Aramaic (the Old Testament), and Greek (the New Testament), the Bible was translated into Latin around 400 CE, largely through the work of Jerome. The Roman Catholic Church used this Latin translation, called the Vulgate, for centuries. Major new translations of the Bible emerged only with the upheaval of religious thought during the Reformation. These included Erasmus’ 1516 revised Greek translation of the New Testament, Martin Luther’s 1534 German Bible, and the 1535 English Coverdale Bible.

The Catholic reign of Mary Tudor (1553–1558) in England caused Protestants to seek sanctuary on the Continent in havens such as Holland and Geneva, the center of the Reformation. To educate their families in exile, these English Protestants produced the Geneva or “Breeches” Bible in 1560. This Bible was the first to add verses to the chapters which made locating specific passages easier. In addition, each chapter contained detailed marginal notes to help the reader understand the scripture. So thorough were these notes that many scholars consider this the first “study Bible.” A printing error in Genesis 3:7, where clothing worn by Adam and Eve was translated as “breeches,” provided the Bible its nickname. The Geneva Bible became so popular with English speaking Protestants that between 1560 and 1644 at least 144 editions were published. Eventually the Geneva Bible was superceded by the King James Version, first published in 1611.

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