

## **SECTION 4**

The English Bible and Bible Translations

## The English Bible

Prior to the Norman conquest of England in 1066, sporadic attempts to translate portions of the Bible from Latin into Anglo-Saxon were carried out. These efforts did not cover large segments of the Bible and were not intended for the common person.

### *Earliest Bible in England*

Latin Vulgate

Bible of the people- Painting, carvings, stain glass windows, etc.

### *“Old English”*

CAEDMON – used poetry and songs to communicate biblical stories in the 7<sup>th</sup> century.

ALDHELM (d. 709) – translated portions of the Psalms, Lord’s Prayer, and Decalogue.

VENERABLE BEDE (d. 735) – Known as the Father of English history and the greatest name in the history of the early English church. He translated portions of the Bible from the Latin into Old English. No traces of his work are known to exist. It is believed that he may have been translating the Gospel of John at the time of his death.

## John Wycliffe – The Morning Star of the Reformation (1330-1384)

The first complete Bible translated into English (Middle English) was the Wycliffe Bible of 1382. John Wycliffe, assisted by *Nicholas of Hereford* and *John Purvey*, utilized the Latin Vulgate as the basis for their work.

Wycliffe intended his work for the common man. The Wycliffe Bible may be seen as a major impetus to later translators who shared his conviction that the Bible should be in the vernacular of the common man. The Wycliffe Bible was condemned as heretical and copies were confiscated and burned. In 1428 his body was exhumed and his bones burned. However, copies of his translation were produced and exerted much influence despite official persecution.

**The sixteenth century:** represents the most active period in the history of English translations until recently. Three significant events precipitated this remarkable era.

- A renaissance of classical learning, particularly in Greek: When Constantinople fell in 1453 Greek scholars migrated to the West and brought ancient manuscripts with them, giving impetus to the study of the Greek NT.
- Gutenberg’ printing press: The moveable type printing press that allowed the printing of both Greek and Hebrew texts.
- The Protestant Reformation (1517): When Tyndale came to Cambridge Luther was preparing to nail his 95 theses to the Wittenberg church door. The Reformation is tied closely to the many attempts to give people the Bible in the vernacular. One of the fundamental principles of the Reformation was that the Bible must be in the common language of the people.

## William Tyndale - The Father of the English Bible (1484-1536)

Tyndale went to Oxford at an early age and received the Master of Arts in 1515. After lecturing at Oxford for a year he moved to Cambridge, where he took up the study of Greek and was introduced to protestant sympathies.

Despite strong ecclesiastical opposition, he published the first printed English NT (1525/26). He also translated portions of the OT. The translations were based on Hebrew and Greek. Another edition was printed at Antwerp. In 1535 Tyndale was kidnapped from Antwerp and imprisoned in Brussels by the emperor, Charles V. In August 1536 he was convicted of heresy and condemned to death. He was strangled, tied to a stake, and burned. It is reported that his final words were a prayer: "Lord, open the King of England's eyes." What He did not know was that shortly before his death Henry VIII granted permission for an English Bible to circulate among the people – a Bible that was largely the work of Tyndale.

Several factors concerning his work are important:

- Tyndale believed deeply that the Bible must be given to the common man in the common language.
- His work was based on the original languages of the Bible, thus representing a significant difference from Wycliffe's work.
- Tyndale was so capable at the task of translation that subsequent English translators depended heavily on his work for both content and style. Several later "translations" were merely revisions of his work. It is estimated that 9/10 of the KJV of 1611 is Tyndale, and where the Authorized Version departed from Tyndale, later revisers often returned to it.
- Tyndale included marginal notes, many of which contained caustic remarks concerning the religious establishment. These marginal notes often contributed to the resistance of religious and civil authorities toward his work.

Differences between Wycliffe and Tyndale's work:

- Wycliffe's Bible is a translation of Jerome's Latin Vulgate; Tyndale's went back to the Hebrew and Greek.
- Wycliffe's Bible was still hand-copied manuscript Bible; Tyndale's was printed.
- Wycliffe translated into Middle English; Tyndale's belongs to the Modern Period.

### **The Coverdale Bible (1535)**

Miles Coverdale (1488-1569), Augustinian friar, graduate of Cambridge, and an acquaintance of Tyndale, produced the first complete English Bible of the sixteenth century. After coming under the influence of the reformation he left his order. It was while he was on the continent that he worked with Tyndale for a time.

He dedicated the work to Henry VIII. The dedication denounces the pope, who is compared to Caiphaz. He completed the translation of the Old Testament by utilizing other versions (Latin and German) because he did not know Hebrew. The New Testament is little more than a revision of Tyndale's work. What was new in Coverdale's Bible was that he was the first to remove the Apocryphal books from their position among the Old Testament books as they are in the LXX and Latin Vulgate, and place them between the Testaments. He included a note advising the reader that they are not found in the Hebrew Bible and are not the same authority as the canonical books.

Although Coverdale was not the scholar Tyndale was, he gave most of his life to giving the English a Bible in their own tongue.

### **The Matthew Bible (1537)**

*John Rogers (1500-1555)*, a close associate of Tyndale, was responsible for this work. The Matthew Bible was the first English Bible to be licensed by King Henry VIII. Roger's work was essentially the completion of Tyndale's work. Tyndale had never completed the OT, and it was left to John Rogers, a disciple of

Tyndale. Rogers took the pen name Thomas Matthew. When England reverted to Roman Catholicism under “Bloody Mary,” Rogers was the first to be burned at the stake in 1555.

The Matthew Bible and the second edition of Coverdale’s Bible were the first English Bibles to be licensed by King Henry VIII.

### **The Great Bible (1539)**

The Great Bible received its name because of its size (161.2 by 11 inches). It was more of a revision of the Matthew Bible than a new translation. English authorities, including Henry VIII, Thomas Cromwell, and Archbishop Thomas Cranmer encouraged that a copy of this Bible be secured and displayed in every church. So popular did the reading of these Bibles become that the king had to issue a proclamation forbidding the reading of the English Bible aloud during divine services. To this day the Book of Common Prayer has the Psalms from the Great Bible. Upon Cromwell’s execution in 1640, stringent laws were enacted which controlled access to the Bible in English. Under Mary Tudor (“Bloody Mary” many reformers were martyred.

### **The Geneva Bible (1560)**

#### Political Changes

The final years of Henry VIII were turbulent:

- Parliament in 1543 made it a crime for unlicensed people to read or expound the Bible publicly and even forbid the private reading of the Bible by those belonging to the lower classes.
- Henry VII himself went further in 1546, making it illegal to “receive, have, take, or keep, Tyndale’s or Coverdale’s NT.” Bibles were again burned in London. Actually these decrees were absurd, for as long as the Great Bible was the officially accepted Bible; the readers had essentially the literary products of Tyndale and Coverdale.
- With Henry’s death in 1547 and the accession of Edward VI, the trend was reversed, and during his reign all previous translations were frequently reprinted.
- On the accession of Mary in 1553, Edward’s Reformation policies were reversed. John Rogers and Thomas Cranmer were executed and Coverdale sought asylum on the Continent. Mary, however, did not outlaw the Great Bible, and when Elizabeth I reversed Mary’s pro-Roman policies, it was still the standard English version.

#### An English Bible from Geneva

Also known as “*Shakespeare’s Bible*,” this version was produced in Geneva by scholars associated with the Reformation of John Calvin and Theodore Beza. The Geneva Bible was superior to other versions because of the solid linguistic background of its translators. This Bible became exceedingly popular among English speaking people. The Apocrypha appears as an appendix to the OT, with a note saying that they may be read for the advancement and furtherance of knowledge and for instruction in godly manners, but they are not to be expounded as Scripture.

The marginal notes are clearly Calvinistic in doctrine, yet they are not as polemical as Tyndale’s marginal notes against Rome. The Geneva Bible is divided into verses. Words that have no equivalent in the original text are printed in italics – a practice continued by the translators of the 1611 Authorized Version. The Bible was printed in Geneva in Roman rather than Gothic type making it easier to read. It immediately became the most popular Bible in England. It was the Bible of John Knox and Scotland. The Geneva Bible was the Bible of Shakespeare, the Puritans, the Bible of the Pilgrim Fathers. It is also known as the Elizabethan Bible. Next to Tyndale, the Geneva Bible had the greatest influence on the Authorized Version.

### **Bishop’s Bible (1560)**

The popularity of the Geneva Bible (and its Calvinistic notes) caused the English authorities to desire a new translation, which would replace both the Geneva Bible and the Great Bible. The result was the Bishop's Bible, but this version failed to capture the people's imagination.

### **The King James Version (1611)**

In 1603 Elizabeth I died and the crown of England passed to James I, who had already been king of Scotland for thirty-six years as James VI. At the Hampton Court conference action was taken that a new translation of the whole Bible be undertaken based on the Hebrew and Greek. The Bible was to have no marginal notes (with the exception of the explanation of Hebrew or Greek words) and was to be read in all churches of England. The Bishops' Bible was to be used as the basis for the revision/translation, but it was to be examined in the light of the Hebrew OT and the Greek NT. All the available English versions were consulted, as well as other language translations and the Latin versions. The translators/revisers were given free room and board, but did their work gratis.

The AV quickly replaced the bishops Bible as the official version for public services. However, it had a more difficult time displacing the Geneva Bible. Eventually (about half a century) the AV won out over all others because of its superior merit and its freedom from sectarian notations.

#### Noteworthy Factors:

1. This was a translation rather than a revision. The translators used the available textual evidence from all sources available to them.
2. The text underlying the New Testament is basically the Syrian (Byzantine).
3. Marginal notes of a sectarian nature were eliminated.
4. Acceptance of the King James Version initially was resisted vigorously.
5. By the mid seventeenth century the innate superiority and beauty of language of the KJV assured it would be the favored translation among English speaking people until the twentieth century.

### ***Douay Version***

The Douay Version was a result of the Catholic counter- reformation. The council of Trent in 1546 decided that the Latin Vulgate was to be regarded as the authoritative text. Originally published in 1609-1610, the present Douay Version is the 1749 revision. The OT was produced in Douay, France, and the NT in Rheims, France (Rheims NT). It is based upon the Latin Vulgate and not the Hebrew and Greek manuscripts.

#### Modern Translations:

**The Revised Version (1881-1885)** - Developments in textual critical theory, new manuscripts, and a sentiment that the King James language needed to be updated led to the production of the Revised Version, essentially a British Protestant effort. This version was based on the textual critical theories of Westcott and Hort.

### **The American Standard Version (1901)**

**Revised Standard Version (RSV; 1946 NT; 1952 whole Bible)** – was intended to update the KJV and the ASV for mainline churches of the National Council of Churches. It was intended to reflect ecumenical scholarship.

#### **Selected translations of the 1960s and 1970s:**

**New American Standard (1960, 1995)** – intended as an update of the ASB. The NASB seeks to be a literal translation that facilitate Bible study and hold to a high view of Scripture. It is one of the most accurate translations of the original languages and good for Bible study. Its strengths means in one sense is its greatest weakness. Its faithfulness to the syntax of the original languages means that it is rather wooden at times in its translation. The original edition was on an eleventh grade reading level, while the newer edition is on a 9.3 reading level. (Formal Equivalence)

**New English Bible (NT: 1961; whole Bible: 1970)** – a translation intended to provide British churches with a new translation in contemporary idiom for worship and Bible study. The British style of English would be a weakness of an American English reader. The translation is quite free especially in the OT in making textual changes. The estimated reading level according to the publisher is tenth grade.

**Today's English Version (NT—Good News for Modern Man: 1966; whole Bible: 1976)** – A modern English translation that is beneficial for those with English as a second language. It is written in the popular English of the 60's. (Dynamic equivalence; 6.2)

#### **The Jerusalem Bible: 1966**

**New International Version (NT: 1973; whole Bible: 1978)** – The NIV is an evangelical/conservative translation. The translation team represented a wide range of evangelical churches. (Dynamic equivalence; 6.1)

**New Revised Standard Version (1989)** – The NRSV is an update of the RSV incorporating the latest scholarship. It is a gender-neutral translation. It does not emend the text as often as the RSV does, while maintaining something of the majestic language for worship. The gender emphasis makes the reading difficult and reflects a theological emphasis unacceptable to many evangelicals. Formal equivalence/literary English; 8.1)

**The Message (NT 1993; OT being gradually released)** – This translation is an attempt to put the Bible into the language of modern conversation. The style of language is rough, earthy, and common of everyday life. It is a good translation to catch the attention of the Biblically illiterate. Its strengths are its greatest weaknesses. Its simplicity tends to water down significant doctrinal emphases. (Paraphrase; 7.0)

**The New Living Translation (1996)** – A scholarly revision of the Living Bible based upon the original languages. It retains the dynamic readability of the living Bible but is based on the work of strong evangelical scholarship. Its limited vocabulary and simple sentence structure makes it enjoyable for reading large sections of scripture, but weak for serious Bible study. (Dynamic Equivalence; 4.0 reading level)

#### **Translation Theories:**

1. Formal equivalence – Remain as close as possible to the Hebrew and Greek syntax, word order, grammar, and vocabulary.
2. Dynamic Equivalence – Attempts to focus on modern, conversational language with sentence or paragraph, not word, as the basic unit.

# It's All Greek to Me: Clearing Up The Confusion About Bible Translations<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

In the 60's and early 70's the KJV was virtually the only Bible that anyone owned, however, in the past 30-40 years there has been a proliferation in the translations options available to people.

KJV, NKJV, NIV, NASB, RSV, NRSV, TEV, CEV, NLT, LB, NCV, The Message, TNIV, ESV, HCSB

This assortment of translations raises some important questions. Why are there so many different translations? What are the key differences between them? And finally, which translations are best for you?

## **I. Why are there so many translations?**

The Bible was not originally written in English.

- The OT was written in Hebrew and a few passages in the related language Aramaic.
- The NT was written exclusively in Greek, although in a form that differs significantly from the modern language.

For us to read the Bible in English, it has to be translated. Someone has to read it in the original language and spend some time considering how to express it in English. This process is not as simple as it sounds and this is one of the reasons why we have so many different translations.

*First*, scholars differ on how translation should be done. *Second*, the English language changes over time, leading to updates of previous versions or entirely new ones.

### **1. Different versions reflect different theories of translation.**

Many wonder why we cannot have a very literal translation that does not interpret the text. The answer is that if we were to follow the Hebrew or Greek exactly, most passage would be utterly confusing and possibly unintelligible.

- Jn 1.18: (NIV) "No one has seen God, but God the one and only, who is at the father's side, has made him known."
- Literal-interlinear translation: "God no one has seen ever: only begotten God the being into the bosom of the father that one explained."

While one might be able to make sense of this verse, it is difficult to understand and terrible English. All translations must make a number of changes and interpretative decisions to render Scripture in intelligible English

- (1) English word order must be given priority. English is locked into subject-verb-object order, whereas a Greek writer can move these elements around anywhere in the sentence. So "Go no one has seen ever" becomes "No one has ever seen God."
- (2) Many expressions must be interpreted and expressed in a different grammatical form in English. For example, a participle may need to be expressed with a finite verb and made into a relative clause, so that "the being" becomes "who is."
- (3) Words not in the Greek text, but are implied, must be added: "that one explained [him]."

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<sup>1</sup> Arnold, Clinton. *Discipleship Journal* (132:2002)

- (4) Certain words need to be interpreted: “Only begotten” (KJV, NASB) is one possible way to translate *monogenes*; a better interpretation might be unique (ESV, NRSV), or “one and only” (NIV).
- (5) Certain words may need an English translation that is closer to what the term actually meant than to the precise term itself. Although the Greek term *kolpos* indicates a person’s chest or bosom, translating it with one of these terms might confuse the English reader. Thus the NIV and ESV translate it as the “Father’s side,” and the NLT uses “near to the father’s heart.”

A lot of work is involved in getting a Greek sentence into a form of English that makes sense.

A root issue is this: Should the translation place priority on the exact form of the original text or on clarity of the English expression. If the emphasis is placed on following as closely as possible the wording of the original languages, readability suffers. If the translation stresses readability, literalness is sacrificed and much more interpretation takes place. These differences of philosophy have led to a variety of different translations.

## 2. Different versions reflect differences in the English language.

English has changed a great deal since the KJV was first published. In addition to the passing of the *thees* and *thous*, many other expressions are no longer used or they now have different meanings.

- Mk. 2.3; sick of the palsy
- Ps. 139.13: thou has possessed my reins
- Heb. 8.13; decayeth and waxeth old
- Ro. 13.3: not in chambering and wantonness
- Is. 32.7: the instruments of the churl are evil
- Gen 26.8: Isaac was sporting with his wife
- Job 41.18: by his neesings a light doth shine
- Jas. 2.3: ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing
- Acts 19.9: when divers were hardened and believed not

Our language has changed considerably. Some of the changes are passing fads; others are here to stay. The biggest shift in the past 30 years is the diminishing use of he, him, and man in a generic sense to indicate both male and females. This change has led to one of the largest controversies to face Bible translators in many years.

- Some translation committees believe that new versions need to reflect gender-neutral terminology.
- Others resist this move, believing that this change represents a capitulation to feminist interests and more importantly, unduly alters the meaning of many passages.

## II. What are the key differences between translations?

### 1. Translation philosophies

Translation philosophies cause significant differences among various Bible translations. These philosophies represent two different poles on a spectrum.

- One end of the spectrum gives priority to exactness to the original form,
- while the other end emphasizes clarity and readability in English.

Formal Equivalence – these translations attempt a word-for-word translation. The goal is to be as accurate as possible to the form of the text in the original language.



Dynamic (functional) equivalence: this philosophy is basically a thought for thought translation. Advocates of this view are seeking to be as accurate as possible, but their focus is on meaning, rather than the precise form of the original.

(NOTE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES CHART)

(NOTE THE CHART COMPARING VARIOUS TRANSLATIONS HANDLING OF ROMANS 3.23)

Paraphrase: A paraphrase is a rewording of an existing English translation rather than a fresh translation from the original languages.

*Issues that a translation committee must consider:*

**1. Audience: To whom is the translation addressed?**

There are different ways to look at this question. The first is in terms of age. Is the translation for adults or children? *Overhead*: 1 John 2.2

The age will determine the complexity of sentence structure. *Overhead*: Ephesians 1.3-14

Is the translation for believers or unbelievers? *Overhead: Romans 11.26; Luke 2.7*

**2. Will the translation focus on words or meaning?**

This is the debate between formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence. Another way to state this is will the translators focus on translating words or meaning.

Problems with Formal Equivalence:

- (1) **All translation to some degree involves interpretation.** For example, a rather literal translation of John 2.4 is, "Jesus says to her, 'What to me and to you.'" *Overhead: John 2.4; Ro. 16.1; John 5.6; 1 Cor. 6.19-10* (see Mounce's discussion of the term *malakos*, which is a term that refers to the passive member in a homosexual relationship.)
- (2) **A second difficulty is that a word-for-word translation can distort the meaning of a verse.** For example the term *polis* in reference to Nazareth can conjure up the wrong idea in someone's mind. Nazareth was more like a village than what we think of as a city.

## Problems with Dynamic Equivalence

- (1) **A failure to deal adequately at times with dependent clauses.** A dependent clause is one that cannot stand on its own; it is not a complete sentence. Usually we put our main thought in an independent clause and secondary thoughts in an independent clause. (See Mounce for two examples)
- (2) A second problem with this method is a tendency to over interpret the text for the reader. *Overhead; James 3.1;*

- (3) A third weakness is that in the attempt to make the Bible understandable it updates the Bible to the point that the ancient nature of the text, which gives it a sense of awe and longevity is sacrificed.
- (4) A fourth weakness with the dynamic equivalence is that it allows English style more sway than does formal equivalence. (*See Mounce example of 1 Tim. 2.1-6 in NIV and TNIV p. 29*).

## Other issues that cause a difference between formal and dynamic equivalence

3. *How will the translators deal with ambiguity in the text?* 2 Cor. 5.14; Ro. 9.5; Acts 1.48;
4. *Will the translation make explicit what is only implicit in the text?*
5. *Will the translation “fill out the story?”*
6. *How will the translation committee deal with possible misunderstandings in the translation?*
7. *How will the translators handle “sensitive” issues or euphemisms?*
8. *How will the committee’s theological assumptions affect the translation*
9. *How will the committee handle the inclusive language debate?*

Examples where a freer translation is helpful: Overhead – Isaiah 5.10; Matt. 18.24-28

### 2. Manuscript Base

Another difference between versions is the manuscript base for the translation. The KJV of 1611 (as well as the NKV) was based on Erasmus’ edition of the Greek text, which was itself based on about six Greek manuscripts. These were part of a grouping of manuscripts known as the Byzantine form of the text.

However, many new manuscripts have been discovered since the publication of the KJV. All other modern versions make use of an extensive manuscript collection of more than 5000 Greek manuscripts and 10,000 Latin manuscripts, as well as numerous manuscripts in ancient versions (such as Coptic, Syriac, Gothic, Armenian, Georgian, Ethiopic, and others).

Although the majority of differences between these two manuscript bases are exceedingly minor and do not result in variations in the meaning of the text, there are some that are important. One such example is *Jn. 1.18*:

*KJV*: No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.

*NASB*: No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.

While it would be going to far afield right now to go into the details of textual criticism now and the complex reasons why the revisers of the KJV and the creators of the NKJV did not expand there textual basis; it is important to note here that these Bibles are based on a different collection of manuscripts from other English versions.

### ***III. Which are the best translations for you?***

- 1. Personal Bible Reading**
- 2. Careful Bible Study**
- 3. Public Scripture Reading**
- 4. All-around Bibles**

# WHAT ARE TRANSLATIONS

Introduction – Communication is not as easy as it appears.

- What about communicating in the same language in the same country?
- What about communicating in the same language but in a different country?
- What about speaking in a different language but living in the same century?
- What happens when you get all the way down the progression and you have different languages from different countries separated by centuries, which is the position we are in with the Bible.

For example, Acts 20.37 says in a word for word translation: “They fell on his neck.” What does that mean? They were embracing and kissing him, but how do you get that from that translation?

*THE POINT IS THAT COMMUNICATION IS NOT SIMPLE. IF THERE IS MISCOMMUNICATION BETWEEN TWO PEOPLE SPEAKING THE SAME LANGUAGE, LIVING IN THE SAME CULTURE, LOOKING DIRECTLY AT EACH OTHER AND BEING ABLE TO SEE BODY LANGUAGE AND ALL THE OTHER CLUES WE USE IN COMMUNICATION, THEN HOW MUCH MORE DIFFICULT IT IS TO UNDERSTAND COMMUNICATION COMING FROM TWO THOUSAND YEARS AG, THROUGH DIFFERENT A LANGUAGE, STEMMING FROM AS DIFFERENT CULTURE.*

The reason this is so important is that it is the meaning conveyed by the words of scripture that is so crucial to us, but to get to that meaning we have to go through words and grammar. And because many of you do not know Greek and Hebrew you must rely on the translators’ understanding of the words and grammar as they attempt to convey the passage’s meaning. But why are the translations so different if they are working with the same words and grammar?

Key questions that each translation committee must answer:

1. Audience: To whom am I writing? Who is my audience?

- To whom am I writing? Age, Are they believers? Is the translation for public or private reading?

2. Words or Meaning – Am I going to translate words or meaning?

- Caveat – the meaning of the word literal
- Two approaches – “Formal equivalence” and “Dynamic equivalence”
- Problems with formal equivalence: (1) It is interpretive. (2) Word for word translations can lose or distort meaning.
- Problems with dynamic equivalence: (1) They generally do not view the structure of the language as having much connection with meaning, therefore they often exercise great freedom in translating. (2)

3. Ambiguity – What am I going to do with ambiguity?

4. Move implicit to explicit – Will the translation make explicit what is only implicit in the Greek or Hebrew text?
5. Fill out the story – Will a translation “fill out the story?”
6. Possible Misunderstanding – How will the translation committee deal with possible misunderstandings in their translation?
7. Sensitivity and Euphemism – How do the translators handle “sensitive” issues?
8. Theological biases – How do a committee’s theological assumptions affect the translation?
9. Inclusive language – What will the translators handle inclusive language?

### An Examination of Bible Translations

**King James Version** – its strength is that it continues to be the best example of the power of classic English language; easy to memorize; poetic feel. Its obvious weakness is its obsolete vocabulary and complex sentence structure, which make it difficult for modern readers, especially those without a church background. Its translation theory is formal equivalence (remain as close to the Hebrew and Greek syntax, word order, grammar, and vocabulary as possible). Publisher reading level is 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

*Ryken: Three reasons for its decline in the 20<sup>th</sup> century: (1) its language is now outdated; (2) the translators knowledge of ancient languages was less reliable than modern knowledge is; (3) and the translation uses a text that most scholars no longer consider the most reliable (Textus receptus).*

### Modern Translations:

**The Revised Version (1881-1885)** - Developments in textual critical theory, new manuscripts, and a sentiment that the King James language needed to be updated led to the production of the Revised Version, essentially a *British Protestant effort*. This version was based on the textual critical theories of Westcott and Hort. The translators were allowed to introduce only those readings that would render the Authorized Version closer to the original languages and would not modernize the English unduly. The American translation teams were not satisfied with the strict guidelines but were prohibited from making more drastic changes.

Important contributions: (1) arrangement of the content of the paragraphs, (2) improved consistency in lacing words not in the original in italics, (3) printing OT poetry in indented poetic lines (instead of as prose), (3) inclusion of marginal notes that alert the reader to variations in wording of ancient manuscripts.

**The American Standard Version (1901)** – Americans were given a role in the (English) Revised Version; however, many of their suggestions were not accepted. The American committee remained intact after the publication of the Revised Version, and when the English copyright ran out they produced a version of their own. It was a more thorough revision of the Authorized Version than its British counterpart.

**Revised Standard Version (RSV; 1946 NT; 1952 whole Bible)** – was intended to update the KJV and the ASV for mainline churches of the National Council of Churches. It was intended to reflect ecumenical scholarship. Its theological basis can be seen in its translation of Isaiah 7.14 and its readiness to emend the standard Hebrew text without basis. (Formal equivalence – 10.4)

The translation was criticized for perceived doctrinal liberalness. Most of the criticism was aimed at the translation rather than the translators. One minister burned the version with a blowtorch in the pulpit, remarking that like the devil it was hard to burn. He then sent the ashes to the chairman of the RSV committee. That, of course, is better than burning the translators, which they did in the days of Tyndale. Pamphlets appeared entitled, “The Bible of the Antichrist.” However, one woman began reading it and enjoyed it so much that she admitted she loved it “almost as much as the Bible.” *Robert Mounce*, a significant evangelical scholar in a review for *Eternity* (1974) referred to the RSV as the best translation in the English language for general use.

**New American Standard (1960, 1995)** – intended as an update of the ASB. The NASB is the work of 58 evangelical scholars and seeks to be a literal translation that facilitate Bible study and uphold to a high view of Scripture. It is one of the most accurate translations of the original languages and good for Bible study. Its strengths in one sense is its greatest weakness. Its faithfulness to the syntax of the original languages means that it is rather wooden at times in its translation making it awkward to read. The original edition was on an eleventh grade reading level, while the newer edition is on a 9.3 reading level. (Formal Equivalence)

Ryken: The NASB was the translation of choice for evangelicals until the NIV. One significant weakness was that it printed each verse as an individual unit resulting in a fragmented text, more recent editions are available in paragraph style.

**New English Bible (NT: 1961; whole Bible: 1970)** – a translation intended to provide British churches with a new translation in contemporary idiom for worship and Bible study. The British style of English would be a weakness for an American English reader. The translation is quite free especially in the OT in making textual changes. The estimated reading level according to the publisher is tenth grade.

**Today's English Version (NT—Good News for Modern Man: 1966; whole Bible: 1976)** – A modern English translation that is beneficial for those with English as a second language. It is written in the popular English of the 60's. During its first six years of existence approximately thirty-five million copies were sold worldwide and by the publication of the OT fifty million copies had been sold. (Dynamic equivalence; 6.2)

Ryken: The TEV is important because it is the first thoroughgoing outgrowth of Eugene Nida's dynamic theory of translation. In 1995 it adopted gender inclusive language and avoidance of theological terms like atonement, redemption, and righteousness.

Elimination of some technical terms:

Antichrist	enemy of Christ (1 John 2.18,22)
Elders/bishops	church leaders (Phil. 1.14; 1 Tim. 3.2)
Caesar	Emperor or Roman Emperor (Lk. 2.1; 3.1)
Deacons	Church helper (Phil. 1.1; 1 Tim. 3.8)
Centurion	Army Officer (Matt. 27.54)
Repent	Turn away from your sins (Matt. 3.2)
Justify	“put right with God” (Rom. 2.13; 5.11)

Figures of speech and Semitisms are difficult to translate into modern speech but according to DE theory they do not need to be since they are a part of the Greek and Hebrew language.

The finger of God	God's power (Lk. 11.20)
Cut to the heart	deeply troubled (Acts 2.37)
Father of glory	glorious Father (Eph. 1.17)
The Preacher	the philosopher (Ecc. 1.1)

Other adaptations due to translational philosophy: Because more weight is put on meaning than form, questions are often simplified into statements: “Don not even the tax collectors do the same?” (Matt. 5.46) becomes “Even the tax collectors do that.” Another example, “”For what can a man give in return for his life?” (Mk. 8.37 “becomes “There is nothing he can give to regain his life.”

**The Jerusalem Bible: 1966** – The JB was the first complete Catholic Bible translated into English from the original languages. Prior to the JB all Catholic translations were based on the Latin Vulgate. J. R. Tolkien, of Lord of the Rings fame, was one of the notable translators. The translation is over two thousand pages long due to the significant numbers of footnotes (some of which would be offensive to Protestants). The Apocrypha is found in the same place they stand in the Septuagint and Vulgate. The translation is of such a high quality that many Protestants profitably use it.

**Living Bible (1971)** – A paraphrase (based on the ASV) intended originally by the author as an aid in helping his children understand the Bible. His translation was so popular that he established his own publishing company, which he called Tyndale House after William Tyndale. The LB was the best selling book in the U.S. in 1972.

**New International Version (NT: 1973; whole Bible: 1978)** – The NIV is an evangelical/conservative translation. The translation team represented a wide range of evangelical churches. Several significant commentary series are based on this translation. (Dynamic equivalence; 6.1)

**New Revised Standard Version (1989)** – The NRSV is an update of the RSV incorporating the latest scholarship. It is a gender-neutral translation. It does not emend the text as often as the RSV does, while maintaining something of the majestic language for worship. The gender emphasis makes the reading difficult and reflects a theological emphasis unacceptable to many evangelicals. (Formal equivalence/literary English; 8.1)

**The Message (NT 1993; OT being gradually released)** – This translation/paraphrase is an attempt to put the Bible into the language of modern conversation. Eugene Peterson, professor emeritus of spiritual theology at Regent College, Vancouver, is doing the translation work. The style of language is rough, earthy, and common of everyday life. It is a good translation to catch the attention of the Biblically illiterate. Its strengths are its greatest weaknesses. Its simplicity tends to water down significant doctrinal emphases. (Paraphrase; 7.0) The Christian Book sellers association reported that it ranked sixth among the best selling Bibles in 1999.

Matt. 6.9-13: “Our Father in heaven/Reveal who you are/Set the world right/Do what’s best – as above, so below/Keep us alive with three square meals/Keep us forgiven with you and forgiving others/Keep us safe from ourselves and the Devil/You’re in charge/You can do anything you want/You’re ablaze in beauty/Yes. Yes. Yes.

**The New Living Translation (1996)** – A scholarly revision of the Living Bible based upon the original languages. It retains the dynamic readability of the Living Bible but is based on the work of strong evangelical scholarship. Its limited vocabulary and simple sentence structure makes it enjoyable for reading large sections of scripture, but weak for serious Bible study. (Dynamic Equivalence; 4.0 reading level)

Two major differences with the LB are: (1) it is not a paraphrase but follows a Dynamic Equivalent approach to Translation. (2) The NLT is translated from the original languages and thus vastly improves its accuracy over the LB.

## **An Example of the Difficulties in Translation**

### **1 Cor. 7.36**

*KJV* – “if a man think that he behaveth himself uncomely toward his virgin. . .”

*NASB* – “If a man think he is acting unbecomingly toward his virgin daughter. . .”

*NIV* – “If anyone thinks he is acting improperly toward the virgin he is engage to . . .”

*NEB* – “If a man has a partner in celibacy and feels that he is not behaving properly toward her . . .”

#### **Translation principles:**

This has to do with how far one is willing to go in order to bridge the gap between two languages – one ancient and the other modern. For example, should lamp be translated flashlight or torch in cultures where these serve the same purpose a lamp once did? Or should one translate it lamp and let the reader bridge the gap himself? Should “holy kiss” be translated “the handshake of Christian love” in a culture where public kissing is offensive?

**1. The problem – Language is a part of culture and no two cultures are the same.**



- Ask for an example of trying to translate an idea from one language to another language.

## 2. Qualities of a Good Translation

### *2.1 – Should be based on the best Hebrew and Greek manuscripts*

A translation is no better than its Greek and Hebrew manuscripts.

In 1516, Erasmus Greek NT was based on 4 Greek manuscripts. 2 dated from the 12<sup>th</sup> century and 2 were later than that. He had no Greek manuscript of the last six verse of Revelation, so he took the Latin Vulgate and translated back into Greek. His edition became known as the Textus Receptus. Since that time over 5000 Greek manuscripts or portions of manuscripts have been discovered.

**1 John 5.7** – KJV/NIV – Every modern translation omits it. Only four Greek manuscripts in the world have this material. One from the 12<sup>th</sup> century, however, it is not in the text but in the margin. One manuscript from the 11<sup>th</sup> century, but it is not in the text but in the margin. One manuscript from the 14/15<sup>th</sup> century has it, but only in the margin. Erasmus said he would include it if he had one manuscript that has it in the body of the text. One was produced but is to be dated in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

The doctrine of the trinity does not stand or fall on this text. If it is removed the doctrine of the trinity is not weakened at all. The early church hammered out the doctrine of the trinity between the second - fourth centuries.

#### **Mk. 1.2:**

KJV – “As it is written in the prophets . . .”

NIV – “It is written

#### **1 Sam. 8.16** – (Fee p. 32)

KJV – “your goodliest young men and your donkeys.

NIV – “the best of your cattle and donkeys”

The text of the NIV (“your cattle”) comes from the LXX, the usually reliable Greek translation of the OT made in Egypt around 250-150 B.C. The KJV follows the medieval Hebrew text, reading “young men,” a rather unlikely term to be used to parallel “donkeys.” The origin of the miscopy in the Hebrew text, which the KJV followed, is easy to understand. The word for “your young men” in Hebrew is bhrykm, while “your cattle was bqrykm. The incorrect copying of a single letter by a scribe resulted in the change of meaning.

### *2.2 – Should be based on the latest knowledge of language and culture*

- Mt. 1.18-20 – the concept of “bethroal”

### *2.3 – Should be accurate (accurate may not mean readable)*

When the KJV was translated they knew nothing of Hebrew poetry.

### *2.4 – Should be understandable (understandable may not mean accurate)*

The Living Bible is an example of a translation that is almost always understandable but at times is not accurate.

### *2.5 – Should be contemporary (rapid changes in English language require constant revision)*

- See examples in Wegner

*2.6 – Should be dignified (not using crude language simply for shock effect)*

- 1 Sam 21 in an early edition of the Living Bible has Saul called an SOB. Clarence Jordan in the Cotton patch version translates Ro. 6.1,15 as “Hell no!”

*2.8 – Should avoid theological bias*

- Jerusalem Bible in Mt. 1.25 stretches the idea beyond reasonable grounds.

## Three Major Approaches to Bible Translation

**Literal Translation** – An attempt to reflect the sentence structure, verbal nuances, and idioms of the original language in order to assure accuracy in emphasis and style. This is the primary logic behind placing words in italics that are not a part of the original text but are needed to make sense in English. The attempt to translate by keeping as close as possible to the exact words and phrasing in the original language, yet still make sense in the receptor language. A literal translation will keep the historical distance intact at all points.

**Dynamic Equivalence** – Another approach does not believe that it is crucial to carry over the style, structure, and idioms of the original biblical languages. Thus, there is an attempt to choose English idioms that most closely mirror the original intent of the Hebrew or Greek idioms. Such a translation keeps historical distance on all historical and most factual matters, but updates matters of language, grammar, and style.

**Paraphrase** – The attempt to translate the ideas from one language to another, with less concern about using the exact words of the original. A paraphrase seeks to eliminate as much of the historical distance as possible.

<u>literal</u>		<u>dynamic equivalent</u>	<u>paraphrase</u>	
KJV	RSV	NIV	NLB	LB
NAS				

Translators can go to far in either direction: Clarence Jordan translates Paul’s letter to Rome as to Washington. On the other extreme the literal translation by Robert Young of 1 Cor. 5.1: “Whoredom is actually heard among you, and such whoredom as is not even named among the nations – as that one hath the wife of the father”

This is a major problem with a paraphrase. Examples from the Living Bible:

Some may find this acceptable but it obscures what the Bible said and the ancientness of the text.

- Flashlights (Ps. 119.105)
- Handshake (1 Peter 5.15)
- Pancakes (Gen. 18.6)

These seem to go to far:

- Translating charismata (“spiritual gifts”) as special abilities in 1 Cor. 12-14)
- 1 Peter 5.13 – he places Rome instead of cryptic reference to Babylon.

## **Choosing A Translation**

1. Choose a translation that uses modern English.

The whole purpose of making a translation is to move the message of the original language into a language you can understand.

2. Choose a translation that is based on the best Hebrew and Greek text.

The standard text for the OT is the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (BHS)* and the latest standard text for the NT is reflected in the UBS Greek New testament or Nestle-Aland's *Novum Testamentum Graece*.

3. Give preference to a translation that is done by a committee rather than an individual.
4. Select a translation that is suited for your purpose at that time.

There are times when our choice will be determined by our purpose in reading. When reading devotionally we may choose a translation like The Message, or if we are reading rather large portions of the OT we may prefer the New Living Translation, or when preparing a sermon the NASB or the NIV.

## **Reading the Scripture**

1. Regularity of Habit
2. Flexibility of schedule
3. Variety in method
4. Meditatively in Spirit

Howard Hendricks (Living By the Book) Aspects of Good Bible reading.

1. Read Thoughtfully – put on your thinking cap when you read the Scriptures (Proverbs 2.4)
2. Read Repeatedly
3. Read patiently – work with one book for a period of time
4. Read Selectively – Ask specific questions from a text
5. Read Prayerfully – pray what you discover back to God
6. Read Imaginatively – read different translations and paraphrases; seek to read it as you would a novel
7. Read Meditatively – contemplate and think about something you find interesting (Joshua 1; Psalm 1)
8. Read Purposefully – search for the author's meaning as you read.