

Modern Bible Translations

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Introduction

There are available today many different translations of the Bible. While there are no perfect translations, some are good, and some are not. It would surely be wise to know as much as possible about a translation of the Bible before using it.

The King James Version

The KJV continues to be the best-loved version of the Bible there is. Many love the beautiful style of its language, reminiscent of the days of Shakespeare. Concerning accuracy, it is quite literal and faithful to the texts available at the time of its publication. Certainly anyone who carefully reads and studies from the KJV will learn those things needful to be pleasing unto God.

It should be noted that the KJV translators had access to only a few late and somewhat inadequate manuscripts. Manuscripts of the Greek text had undergone several changes and contained several additions and variations by the Middle Ages. One clear example of an error/addition that ended up in the KJV is 1 John 5:7, which reads, "For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one." While such is not false teaching, it never was, however, a part of the original inspired word of God. Some have suggested that the origin of the statement was a Spanish preacher named Presilium who, in 385, uttered those words in a sermon. The sentence was picked up and somehow made its way into later Latin translations and was then inserted into the Greek text from which was translated the KJV.

The KJV was actually translated by 47 men divided into six groups; these groups did not exchange their individual work in order to confer with one another, therefore the KJV is, in truth, essentially an eight-man translation. This explains the variations in spelling, etc. throughout (Elijah-Elias; Jeremiah-Jeremias; Hosea-Osee; Timothy-Timotheus; Mark- Marcus; Silas-Silvanus; Hagar-Agar; Noah-Noe; Sarah-Sarai; Isaiah-Esaia; Luke-Lucas; also geographical locations: Tyre-Tyrus; Gaza-Azza; Phoenicia-Phenice; Sharon-Saron; Kidron-Cedron).

It must also be noted that our language has changed a great deal since the days of the KJV. There are an estimated 800 words in the KJV that have since changed meaning. A few examples are:

- Carriages (Acts 21:15) means baggage
- Scrip (Mark 6:8) means wallet/bag
- Fetched a compass (Acts 28:13) means sailed around
- Letteth (2 Thessalonians 2:7) means restrains
- Prevent (1 Thessalonians 4:15) means precede
- Charger (Mark 6:25) means platter
- Conversation (James 3:13) means conduct/way of life
- Holy Ghost (Acts 2:38) means Holy Spirit
- Superstitious (Acts 17:22) means religious

Several other words have been poorly translated:

- Hell (Acts 2:27) should be Hades
- Easter (Acts 12:4) should be Passover
- Candle (Luke 15:8) should be lamp

- Mark (Romans 16:17) should be take notice of (not brand)

Even though the KJV does have several problems, it is still basically a good translation of God's Word that has stood the test of time. Many have chosen to overlook the problems and read and study its message and thereby gain salvation. Because of that, the KJV has done a wonderful job in its effort to make known the word of God.

The American Standard Version

The ASV of 1901 was translated by about 100 men of various religious backgrounds. This translation has two great strengths. First and foremost, its translators had available better manuscripts and greater scholarship than there was in the days of the KJV. Many older manuscripts had been found by this time; therefore the translators were able to come much closer to the original text of the inspired word of God.

A second strength of the ASV is that it is extremely accurate. The translators were very consistent in their word-for-word translating, to the extent, in fact, that at times the flow of speech is not as smooth as our current usage. Such an accurate translation, though, is quite beneficial in a serious study of God's word.

Again, though, it must be pointed out that there are no perfect translations. The ASV does have a few places that could have been rendered better. One example is that of 2 Timothy 3:16, which is given, "All Scripture inspired of God is profitable..." instead of "All Scripture is inspired of God..."

It must also be noted that the ASV came into being before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls and other important archeological finds. The ASV represents the best scholarship and learning of its time, but scholarship has come a long way in this century.

Finally, as good a translation as the ASV is, it has not met with as great acceptance as other versions. Because of that, the ASV is available in relatively few editions and may be hard to find in a preferred format.

The Revised Standard Version

The RSV was translated in 1952 by only 22 men who tended to be rather liberal in their viewpoints. Such may not necessarily hinder one's ability to accurately translate from one language to another. However, it does mean that when there is something that might could be translated in different ways, such a one will generally translate according to his own beliefs.

For instance, in Romans 11:20, the RSV reads, "...you stand only through faith." The word "only" is not in the Greek and should not be in any translation; it is an indication of the translators' theology.

Another such example is found in Matthew 19:28, which is rendered in the RSV, "Jesus said to them, Truly, I say to you, in the new world...you will also sit on twelve thrones." The phrase "new world" shows the translators' beliefs of pre-millennialism. The word is more accurately translated as "regeneration."

Another problem concerning the RSV is its treatment of pronouns referring to Deity. In adjusting to contemporary language, thou and thee were altered to you, except in cases referring to Deity. In those cases, the Old English form was retained. (This is purely a matter of preference and would seem acceptable to most.) The problem lies in the fact that many times the RSV translators chose not to use this Old English form in references to Jesus, thereby perhaps stating their opinions doubting the Deity of Jesus!

There are several places where a rendering reflects more of an interpretation than a translation. Serious students of the word of God wish for only an accurate translation.

To its credit, the RSV translators did have access to the Dead Sea Scrolls, giving them older and better manuscripts than any translation had use of up to that time. Furthermore, it should be said that the RSV does have a good readability compared to other translations. It removed the old archaic words and phrases and thereby often makes the reading more understandable.

The New English Bible

The NEB was published in 1970; over 4 million copies were sold the first year. It is very easy to read; some have said it's just like reading a storybook. It is, in fact, what is called a free translation, meaning that the translators took numerous freedoms as they changed a Greek or Hebrew word/phrase into a contemporary English expression. While doing such makes for easy readings it inevitably takes away from its accuracy and faithfulness to the text.

There are several problem areas that must be noted. As a truly English translation it would be expected that British expressions would be found. Examples of this are: (1) Matthew 20:31, NEB reads, "the people rounded on them" which means "the people rebuked them." (2) Mark 12:15, NEB reads, trying to catch me out" which means, "why make trial of me?" (3) 1 Corinthians 16:8, NEB has "Whitsuntide" instead of "Pentecost."

Many words have been added by the translators. Furthermore, there are several errors that show total disregard for accuracy and truthfulness. In Acts 20:7, "Saturday night" is used in place of "first day of the week." Genesis 11:1 begins, "Once upon a time," which is far from faithful to the original text. The Greek word for "tongues" in 1 Corinthians 14:5,6,13,19 (which refers to actual languages existing at that time) is rendered as "ecstatic utterances," which is certainly a false interpretation and certainly not a faithful translation.

In 2 Timothy 3:16, the NEB leaves out "of God" and says only, "Every inspired scripture..." Matthew 16:18 is rendered, "You are Peter, the rock, and on this rock, I will build my church." The Greek does not read that way at all; the NEB translators have expressed Roman Catholic theology in this example.

Today's English Version

The TEV is also called Good News for Modern Man. It was first published in 1966, then again in 1967, and a third time in 1971. Like several modern versions, it is quite easy to read since it uses very simple language. But it must be stated immediately that such (just like in many modern, free translations) only serves to result in a most inaccurate version. Being a one-man translation only adds to the error of interpretation and poor translating.

Acts 20:7 again erroneously uses "Saturday night." In the same verse, "break bread" is interpreted (not translated) as "fellowship meal." The TEV chooses to translate the word "blood" as such only about one-half the time. (Surely one cannot deny the importance of blood throughout Scripture.) In several places, the word "alone" or "only" is put with the word "faith," even though it was never found in the original text. Finally, in Acts 8:20, where Peter is talking to Simon the sorcerer, instead of saying, "Your money perish with you," the TEV reads, "Go to Hell!"

The Living Bible (Paraphrased)

The LB was published in 1971; it is the work of one man: Kenneth Taylor. It has been a very popular book, having sold millions of copies, largely because it is so easy to read and understand.

It must be clarified at once that Taylor's work is not a translation of the Bible; it is a paraphrase--he states that himself in the title and says this in the preface: "To paraphrase is to say something in different words than the author used. It is a restatement of an author's thoughts, using different words than he did.... There are dangers in paraphrases, as well as values. For whenever the author's exact words are not translated from the original languages, there is a possibility that the translator, however honest, may be giving the English reader something that the original writer did not mean to say."

If you are interested in the opinions of Kenneth Taylor, then this book will serve you well. If, on the other hand, you are wishing to find a copy of the Scriptures, this is not one! It is not a translation of the Bible; it is only a commentary, and really not a good one at that. Taylor shows his pre-millennialistic viewpoint in his rendering of Isaiah 2:3, "The world will be ruled from Jerusalem."

He denies the importance of baptism when, in Mark 1:4, he changes "baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" to "baptism is a public announcement of your decision to turn your back on sin." 1 Peter 3:21 (KJV) tells us that "baptism doth also now save us," whereas Taylor tells us "in baptism we show that we have been saved from death."

Romans 4:1 (KJV) says, "What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found?" The KJV (and other versions) has most accurately rendered the original words found in the Greek. Note, however, the treatment of this verse in the LB: "Abraham was humanly speaking, the founder of our Jewish nation. What were his experiences concerning this question of being saved by faith? Was it because of his good deeds that God accepted him?" Only 2 words in this verse were taken from the original (Abraham, What); Taylor has added 31 of his own!

There are innumerable other places that are erroneously and inaccurately rendered. There are examples of vulgarity that in no wise resemble the words given or spoken originally. Certainly, Kenneth Taylor's LB is not a reliable or acceptable translation, in fact, it is not a translation at all. No individual should place his faith in the written opinions of one man, even if the word "Bible" is found on the cover.

The New American Standard Bible

The NASB was published in 1971 (and revised further in 1995); it was translated by a group of 58 men who held "the conviction that the words of Scripture as originally penned in the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek were inspired of God." It was their desire to follow in the tradition of the ASV of 1901 by translating from the best available texts as accurately and literally as possible.

Since the time of the ASV, the Dead Sea Scrolls and other ancient manuscripts had been found. The translators of the NASB thus used all available scholarship to arrive at a more accurate work than was possible before.

As with most translations, there are some added words (in italics) that were believed to be helpful in understanding the intent of the writer. And, as also with most translations, some of these added words may not have been truly inherent in the original languages and intentions of the writers. But none seem so serious as to do great harm to the text.

Finally, this translation is known for its exacting literalness, a trait that will be appreciated by serious Bible students. Some, however, have suggested that this makes it somewhat more difficult to read than other translations. Nevertheless, most adult readers would agree that it is still clearly understandable, and most would approve of the dignified, contemporary language.

The New International Version

The NIV was completed in 1978, having been translated by a group of over 100 men of various religious groups. They (like those of the NASB) "are all committed to the full authority and complete trustworthiness of the Scriptures which they believe to be God's Word in written form."

The manner of its translation should be noted. According to Jack Lewis, one of its translators, "The NIV has attempted to steer a middle course between the excessive literalness of the NASB on the one hand and the excessive paraphrases of Phillips, the NEB, and Taylor on the other. Loyalty to the text has been defined in terms of a compromise between the Dynamic Equivalence principle and literalness, rather than in terms of Lightfoot's translation rule which stated, "the same English words to represent the same Greek words" and "as far as possible in the same order."

In other words, the NIV is a relatively free translation, attempting to take a Greek/Hebrew phrase and render it in English similar to the way we would say it today. Keep in mind that a translation cannot be both literal/extremely accurate to the original text and excessively smooth and easy to read in modern English. The NIV is attempting, as best as it can, to be somewhere in the middle. As such, their final result is true to their intent.

There are some problem areas that should be mentioned. In its attempt at smooth and pleasant reading, many Hebrew or Greek words are translated in several different ways. One example of its inconsistency is in its treatment of the Greek word *sarx*, which means flesh. In the NIV, *sarx* is rendered flesh only 30 times out of the 138 times it is found in the Greek. The most frequent translation of the word is sinful nature, which is more of an interpretation than a strict translation. (Some feel that such is also an indication of the doctrine of original sin.)

In Ephesians 1:13, the NIV states, "And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation." This rendering contradicts the teaching of Galatians 3:27 that we are in Christ at the point of baptism. Romans 10:10 in the NIV says we believe and are justified and we confess and are saved. The original Greek makes it clear that in each instance (belief and confession) there is a looking forward to justification and salvation, not a reception of them.

The New King James Version

The NKJV, published in 1982, is the work of 130 translators from several different religious groups and countries. All participating scholars signed a petition stating their belief in the plenary and verbal inspiration of the original autograph texts. Their purpose was to maintain the tradition of the KJV while updating many of the problems contained therein. It has, in fact, done a commendable job in doing just that; numerous archaic and obsolete expressions have been replaced by more modern terms.

The NKJV seeks to be as literal as possible in its faithfulness to the original texts. The main criticism of this version, though, is in its choice of texts from which to translate. The translators of the NKJV chose to use the same manuscripts as those used by the King James translators in the early 1600's. As has already been established, numerous discoveries have since been made that have enabled scholars to come closer than ever before to the original inspired text of the Bible. It seems irresponsible to maintain allegiance to a set of manuscripts that are proven to contain scribal changes and additions, especially when better, more accurate manuscripts are now available.

The English Standard Version

According to esv.org, "The English Standard Version (ESV) is an "essentially literal" translation of the Bible in contemporary English. Created by a team of more than 100 leading evangelical scholars and pastors, the ESV Bible emphasizes "word-for-word" accuracy, literary excellence, and depth of meaning. Suited for personal reading, public worship, in-depth study, and Scripture memorization, the ESV is available in more than 200 print editions on Crossway.org and free digitally via mobile apps or online through ESV.org. Since its publication in 2001, the ESV Bible has gained wide acceptance and is used by church leaders, numerous denominations and organizations, and millions of individuals around the world."

Conclusion

Again it must be said, no translation is perfect, but we are fortunate in that there are several good translations of the Bible. Translations like the KJV, ASV, NASB, NIV, and NKJV are all reliable versions, and they all are surely satisfactory in conveying the necessary truth to those who diligently search for such.

The great problem we have today is not the variety of translations that are available but rather the fact that they are available but few people take the time to read and study the Bible. Our problem today is the same as it has been for a long time: a lack of knowledge of the word of God. God gave us His written word so that we might learn from it the way of life through His Son.

May we be committed not only to studying Scripture, but may we also be committed to living according to its principles.