

APPENDIX 4: UNDERSTANDING BIBLE TRANSLATIONS

It is not necessary to know ancient Hebrew or Greek to understand the Bible. Most people can get along just fine by understanding Bible versions and how to use other tools that help to interpret the Bible.

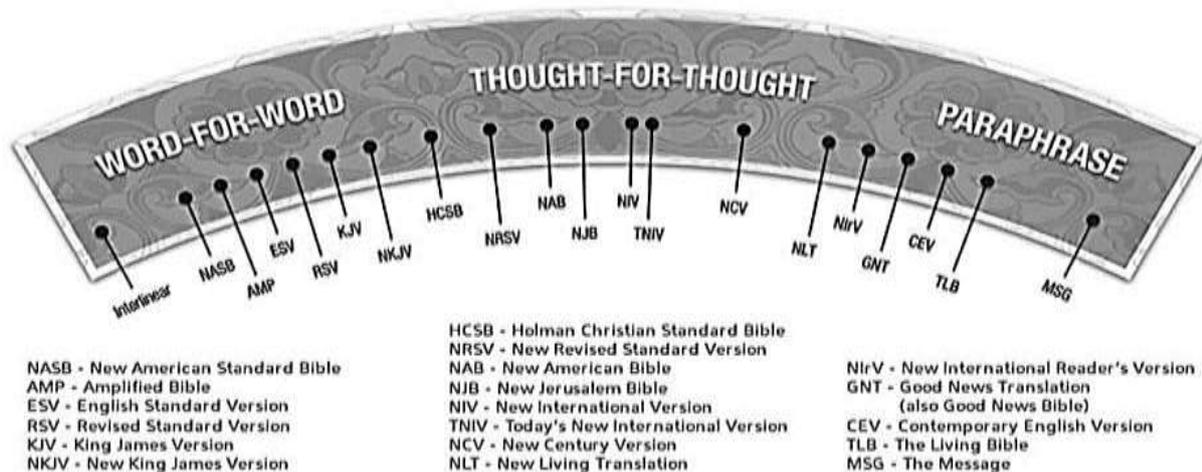
I. UNDERSTANDING BIBLE TRANSLATIONS & BIBLES

The notes for this section are from Johnathan Tate, located at the following place on the internet: <http://www.tateville.com/translations.html>.

Firstly we must understand that a perfect translation between two languages is impossible. Our English versions are translations from the original books of the Bible which were written in ancient Hebrew, Aramaic and Ancient Greek. Translations were written in the English of their day, using tools that were available to translators and based on all the evidence that was available to the translators at the time. As better tools became available (e.g. computers) and more research was done, modern interpreters developed English versions that people today can understand more easily and have tried to translate the Bible into the English language as it is understood and spoken today. We cannot agree with almost zealous support that some people have for only one version, e.g. the "King James Only" movement.

This doesn't mean that a translation is any less the word of God. God uses translations to communicate his word to all people. However I do believe that some versions are more accurate translations than others. To properly understand the Bible it is important to choose a good translation (i.e. "Version"), and also to do some extra reading where this is possible.

Types of Bible Translations



1. Bible Versions

English Translations fall into one of four categories:

a. Formal Equivalent

These translations attempt to reproduce the Greek and Hebrew as exactly as possible into English. Words, figures of speech, and sometimes even the sentence structure of the original languages are reproduced in a much more limited way in this type of Bible. These generally take a word for word approach to translation.

- King James Version
- Published: 1611 (revised 1769); Reading Level: 12th Grade; Translators: Anglican
- New King James Version. Published: 1982; Reading Level: 9th Grade; Translators: Evangelical/Fundamental, conservative
Good: Close to the wording and language structure of the KJV, yet archaisms are modernized and the famous "thees and thous" are out. Language is not too idiomatic so as to be dated too quickly, and is much easier to read than the old Authorized Version. Is a modern reworking of the KJV rather than a new translation. Variant readings from other texts are placed in the margins for people to read. Many conservative churches have adopted the NKJV, seeing as the old KJV needs update but they don't want to go too far. Also, the best study Bible on the market, the New Geneva aka Reformation Study Bible is available in this translation.
The Not-So-Goods: The biggest problem with the NKJV is that -for the most part- it uses the same texts as the KJV and only utilizes the older manuscripts in the margins. On a lesser note, the NKJV has 17th century sentence structure with 20th century words, which can look funny to people every now and then.
- American Standard Version. Published: 1901; Reading Level: 12th grade; Translators: Mainline, conservative
- Revised Standard Version. Published: 1952 (revised 1971); Reading Level: 10th Grade; Translators: Mainline/Catholic, somewhat liberal

b. Dynamic Equivalent

These Bibles run on a more thought-for-thought philosophy than the Formal Equivalent translations, but do so in a much more disciplined way than paraphrases. Greek and Hebrew figures of speech are replaced with modern rough equivalents. They are more readable in a sense, though sometimes in a freer translation some passages become more interpretations than translations.

- Good News Translation (Formerly Today's English Version). Published: 1976 (revised 1992); Reading Level: 8th Grade; Translators: Evangelical moderate, Catholic
- New International Version. Published: 1978 (revised 1984); Reading Level: 8th Grade; Translators: Evangelical, conservative
The Goods: The NIV is a balance between literal (word-for-word) and paraphrase (thought-for-thought). The text is still readable enough along with the KJV-family of translations but is a much easier read. Many evangelical churches now use this translation as their official translation (including the webmaster's home church) because it uses the better, older manuscripts of the OT and NT but is eminently readable. The renderings also provide ease in memorization. One of the better study Bibles, the Zondervan Study Bible (now available in KJV and NAS as well), is originally based on this translation.
The Not-So-Goods: The NIV is somewhat too free for my taste. Sometimes it's not forceful enough in how it translates some common phrases, e.g. "This is what the LORD says" rather than "Thus says the LORD"; we also read "Let him be eternally condemned!" rather than "Let him be cursed!" or "Let him be anathema!". The phrase "the LORD of Hosts" (denoting God as leader of heaven's armies) is replaced by "The LORD Almighty", which holds something of a different meaning.
- Today's New International Version. Published: 2002 (NT Only); Reading Level: 8th Grade; Translators: Evangelical, slightly conservative

c. Paraphrases

These are not really translations, but rewordings of the Scriptures that speak in a very earthy, common tongue. Those who advocate these note that the New Testament was written in the common language of the people and not that of playwrights or philosophers. The results

can be the clearest expression of Scripture on par with the original. However, theological biases can creep in and can easily be seen. These are acceptable for devotional reading, but even the authors themselves would not suggest using them for study or as a church Bible. Some paraphrases are based on the original languages, while others on translations themselves.

- The Living Bible. Published: 1971. Reading Level: 4th Grade. Translators: Kenneth Taylor (a Baptist)
- The Message. Published: 2002 (whole Bible). Reading Level: 3rd Grade. Translators: Eugene Peterson (an evangelical Presbyterian)
The Goods: "If the Bible were written today, this is what it would sound like," or so goes the media ads for this paraphrase. Eugene Peterson decided to do this to try to reproduce the flavor of the original languages as a language that people use in everyday life. In doing so, Peterson has some renderings that might sound a bit harsh to most of those familiar with the Bible, e.g. Acts 8:20 where in the usual translation Peter says something to the effect of "Your money perish with you" (NKJV) but in the Message he says "To hell with your money - and you with it!" It may sound different or unwelcome, but it is actually similar to the way the Greek has it.
The Not-So-Goods: First of all, no verses in this one (except for the new Remix edition) makes it sometimes hard to find a specific passage. Also, the earthy language might offend those who are more used to the stately, majestic language of the King James Bible and its descendants. Dr. Peterson himself says he is uncomfortable when churches use this, that it is for the private use of the believer. Is heavily paraphrased, even moreso than the old Living Bible, and as such is unfamiliar to many.

d. Aberrational (incorrect, "dodgy") Translations

These are translations done independently by a smaller religious sect. Usually they will "translate" Scripture by twisting it to fit their theologies, rather than conforming their theologies to the Scriptures. These groups often have a person or organization which is practically considered equal in authority with the Bible, and a number of them believe that their group is the only way to salvation.

- New World Translation. Published: 1961 (revised 1984)
- Translators: The Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society (aka Jehovah's Witnesses)
The Goods: Well, since I guess I need to say something good about this one, here it goes... They do distinguish between the singular and plural second person (you for singular and YOU for plural) and this could be helpful for other translations to adopt, but this is the proverbial gold ring in a pig's snout.
The Not-So-Goods: Where do I start? They insert the name "Jehovah" into the NT, and while some could argue that there are places where this (or Yahweh) might possibly be warranted occasionally, the JW's do it only where "Lord" refers to the Father or the Godhead, but never the Son. Yahweh and Adonai are both rendered as Kyrios (Lord) in the Greek and are undistinguished, so the way the JW's do it is they try to get away from the clear fact that Jesus is Yahweh God. The Holy Spirit is referred to as an "it" rather than as a "He" and is written as "holy spirit" to reflect their view that He is not a Person but a force. The references in the NT to Jesus being divine are further mistranslated by renderings such as John 1:1 ("The word was a god" instead of "The Word was God"), Hebrews 1:8 ("God is your throne" rather than "Your throne, O God"), and II Peter 1:1 ("Our God and [the] Savior Jesus Christ", where the bracketed word is clearly there just to hide the fact that Christ is Almighty God). This "translation" was done by people who were not scholars of the original languages and who did this with an agenda to promote what has always been seen as false views of God and of Christianity.

- God's Name: Jehovah. Deity Pronouns: Not capitalized. Deity of Christ: Absent, excepting John 20.28
- Dr. William Barclay concluded that "the deliberate distortion of truth by this sect is seen in their New Testament translation. It is abundantly clear that a sect which can translate the New Testament like that is intellectually dishonest." In an investigation to the NWT translation's team, four of the five men in the JW's translation committee had no Hebrew or Greek training whatsoever (they had only a high school education). The Fifth, Fred W. Franz, claimed to know Hebrew and Greek, but upon examination under oath in a court of law in Edinburg Scotland he failed a simple Hebrew test.

Spot the differences:

- ❑ "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god."
– John 1:1 NWT
 - ❑ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
John 1:1 NIV
- He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; because by means of him all other things were created in the heavens and on the earth, the things visible and the things invisible, whether they are thrones or lordships or governments or authorities. All other things have been created through him and for him. - Colossians 1:15-16 NWT
 - He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things were created through him and for him. - Colossians 1:15-16 NIV
 - The word 'other' is not found in the original Greek. The JW's put it there dishonestly and illegitimately to 'prove' that God created Jesus first, and then Jesus created the other things.

Compare the different Translations of 1 John 2:6

1. He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked. **KJV**
2. Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did. **NIV**
3. Those who say that they live in him must live the same way he lived. **GWV**
4. whoever says he lives in Christ [that is, whoever says he has accepted Him as God and Savior] ought [as a moral obligation] to walk and conduct himself just as He walked and conducted Himself. – **Amplified Bible**
5. Anyone who claims to be intimate with God ought to live the same kind of life Jesus lived. **The Message**

Compare the different Translations of Genesis 4:1

1. And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the LORD. **KJV**
2. Adam lay with his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, "With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man." **NIV**
3. Adam made love to his wife Eve. She became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, "I have gotten the man that the LORD promised." **GWV**
4. Now the man [a]Adam knew Eve as his wife, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain, and she said, "I have obtained a man (baby boy, son) with the help of the Lord." **Amplified Bible**
5. Adam slept with Eve his wife. She conceived and had Cain. She said, "I've gotten a man, with God's help!" **The Message**