

QUESTIONS WE WANT ANSWERED

75 Which Version of the Bible Is the Best for Me?

Scripture: II Timothy 3:14-17; I Thessalonians 2:13;

Our subject has to do with the many versions and translations of the Bible which are available today. The times in which we live are unique as no people in history have witnessed the multiplication of translations of the Scripture that we have. One cannot help but feel that with this great diversity comes a responsibility to understand and communicate the whole counsel of God as we have come to understand it more fully. However, the person who desires to read and study the Bible is now faced with the problem of which version to choose. All kinds of questions come to mind. Which version comes closest to the original writings? Which one is the easiest to read and understand? Which translation will be the most helpful for devotional or witnessing purposes? With these things in mind I would like to think with you about this matter of translation and to, speak of some of the versions we are familiar with.

I. LET US DEFINE OUR TERMS:

If we are going to talk intelligently about versions and translations of the Bible it is necessary for us to first qualify the terms we are using. The word “translation” means the rendering of a literary work from one language to another. Any rendering of the Bible from the original Hebrew and Greek into Latin or from Latin into English is a translation. The New English Bible is a translation. (NEB 1961, 1970) Another word we should be familiar with is the word “transliteration.” This happens when the letters of one language correspond to the letters of another language. For instance, the words “angel,” “evangel,” and “baptize” emerge in English directly from the original Greek. Sometimes we hear the words “literal translation.” This means that the translator has endeavored to follow the precise meaning of the original text, word for word. **Young's Literal Translation Of The Bible** (1898) is an example of this. Some of the vigor of the original is restored in such a translation which is lost in the concise work. It calls for a faithful rendering of the Greek verb tenses which is very useful. Wm. B. Erdmans published a work entitled, **The Gospels: An Expanded Translation** by Kenneth Wuest in 1956, is another example of literal translation.

Now, let us consider the words version, revision, revised version and recension. A “version” is a translation from the original language into another language. The New English Bible is a version in this use of the word. Interestingly enough, the King James Version is not technically a version having been a fifth revision of Tyndale’s version. The Revised Version, The American Standard Version (1901) and the Revised Standard Version (1946, 1952) are all versions as they have been taken from the original languages. A revision, or revised version, describes versions taken from the original languages which have been scrutinized to the point of correcting errors or other adjustments deemed helpful. The King James Version is an example of this revision although not a version in the technical sense. A recension is the systematic revision of a text. The most familiar is the New American Standard Bible (1963, 1971).

Perhaps the best example of the critical and systematic revision of a translation is that of the Authorized King James Version, which is a result of Tyndale’s version. In 1483, the year after the birth of Luther, and a hundred years after the death of Wycliffe, William Tyndale was born. He grew up a thoughtful and studious youth, and at an early age won for himself a scholarship at Oxford. Soon afterward he moved to Cambridge, where he met Erasmus, the finest Greek Scholar of the day, who had just completed his Greek Testament from a comparison of some ancient manuscripts. Tyndale was soon impressed to make himself familiar with this wonderful book. Tyndale’s FIRST New Testament was published in 1525 and revised by himself in 1534, and again in 1535. In Matthew’s Bible it appeared more improved in 1537. The Great Bible (1539) was the result of a further revision, which was repeated again in the Genevan Bible (1560), the Bishop’s (1568), and still more thoroughly in the Authorized Version of 1611. This is an example of the fact that the history of our English Bible is one of improvement by means of revision.

While we are still defining terms, let us think of the words “paraphrase” and “commentary.” A paraphrase is an attempt to translate an idea rather than a certain word meaning. It is more of an interpretation than a translation. The American Bible Society’s **GOOD NEWS FOR MODERN MAN** and Kenneth Taylor’s **THE LIVING BIBLE** (1971), J. B. Philips **NEW TESTAMENT IN MODERN ENGLISH** are examples of the paraphrase. A commentary is an explanation of Scripture. **THE AMPLIFIED BIBLE** (1965) is an example with its brackets, parentheses, and italicized words. It is well for us to be familiar with these

forgoing terms (translation, transliteration, version, revision recension, paraphrase, and commentary) which are used in-popular discussion.

II. THERE ARE NO PERFECT TRANSLATIONS:

The purpose of a translation or revision is to determine the most accurate meaning of words and to bring that meaning over to their nearest equivalent in English. Though translators are honest people very often the words in one language do not have exactly the same meaning in another language. Therefore, there are virtues and imperfections in every translation. It is important to note however, that all translations embrace the very Word of God and in any translation a person may find Christ and salvation, and be lifted by the promises. We may be confident that God speaks through all of the versions, in spite of the fact that no translation is perfect. The Holy Spirit does not inspire translators although He does give spiritual understanding about the truth that the Word of God contains. When we speak of flaws in a translation they are so few as to be insignificant against the overall message. Not all of the translations bring the truth at every point, but they do all bring the message of redemption in Christ. This is the genius of God's Word in spite of man's inability to preserve the inerrancy of the original writings, and we do believe that the Bible was without error or contradiction in the original languages.

Generally there is not a great deal of difference between translations. We must recognize that a translators theological bias is going to color the choice of words with the result that his translation will be a poor one in another's eyes. The fact that a person does not believe in the doctrine of inspiration, or the deity of Christ will quite obviously effect the writing of certain passages, Rather than spend time denouncing the translators, we should simply recognize the work as weak or strong and go on to recognize that if any version is read prayerfully and carefully, it will convict of sin, point to Christ and bless lives.

III. THE NEW TRANSLATIONS:

The greatest profusion of English Bible translations has occurred in the present century. Some people have been unwilling to accept these newer translations for fear they are not as true to historic Christian beliefs as the older translations. This is not the case. When the Bible is translated today into tribal languages in far off lands, it is written in language these people are able to understand. When you stop and think about it, who would not rejoice to see all peoples of the world reading the Bible in fresh and new renderings? Furthermore, several factors

would lend themselves to timely revision of the Scripture: **(1)** We have access to a treasury of ancient manuscripts and versions which earlier scholars never dreamed of. **(2)** The science of textual criticism, which treats the value and best methods of dealing with these documents, has come into being and been perfected. **(3)** The linguistic scholars of today are much better acquainted with the delicate shades of meaning of the Biblical languages that were unknown to their predecessors. **(4)** The change in the English language itself has rendered certain words obsolete, while others have changed their meaning completely. Therefore, in many places the newer versions shine with clarity and may be closer to correctly interpreting the original Greek, Hebrew or Aramaic. In the final analysis all the versions have their strong points and their weak points and are a result of the serious attempt to interpret the original message so as to be best understood by the reader.

IV. SAFETY IN MANY COUNSELORS:

There is an interesting verse tucked away in Proverbs.11:14 which reads, *“In the multitude of counselors there is safety.”* That's just a Biblical way of saying that two heads are better' than one. I believe this principle may be applied to the various translations of Scripture. Those which are the result of a responsible and reverent group of scholars should be more reliable than one man translations. They are going to curb one another's weaknesses and personal opinions, and serve to bring a broader scholarship to the text. This is not to say that a one man translation may not be helpful, but a *“multitude of counselors”* should prove to be the wiser source.

V. THE BEST TRANSLATION:

Parts or all of the Bible are now available in more than 1200 languages, which is twice the number in 1920. The Wycliffe Bible Translators now have a staff of linguists working among 500 different tribes reducing unwritten languages to Scripture. At least 25 new versions, translations and paraphrases are on the market that did not exist 75 years ago. The best translation is what this lesson is about. Perhaps the most important translation of Scripture is the one that is known and read of all men. The Lord talks about the Bible that everyone will read in II Corinthians 3:1-3. The Scripture says, *“Ye are our epistle'...known and read of all men.”* That is the Word of God translated into character, love and service. To ingest the Word within ourselves so that it will produce a message that is believable to the worldly reader is a real living Bible. The Bible is the

world's best unread seller. Unbelievers do not care to read the Bible and they will not do so. A few will be so moved by intellectual curiosity or extreme need, but the Bible is generally neglected by the masses of people. But God has written a Bible that People do read. This reading is spontaneous and uncontrollable. It is a version that everyone understands. It is the effect of person upon person in the daily life. It is a heavy thing to wonder what kind of message our lives bring to others.

KING JAMES VERSION:

Traditional Protestant version, in literary quality it surpasses all successors, but antiquated in language. Some believe that remains the best translation we have and it will never be superseded,

REVISED STANDARD VERSION:

By far the best revision of the KJV, and may be the best translation in the English language for general use. It keeps as close to the original as fidelity to modern English idiom will permit.

NEW ENGLISH BIBLE:

Scholars say a brilliant achievement with defects that go with brilliance. Fresh, stimulating, entirely new rendition of text. It might be well to use along with the RSV or the NASV. Extremely readable.

THE LIVING BIBLE:

Paraphrase produced by one man, but checked by language scholars. Best used for devotional reading along with the regular Bible. In terms of fidelity to the Greek text, it is poor, but strongly evangelical.

NEW AMERICAN STANDARD:

Exceptionally faithful to the Greek and Hebrew text. Extremely literal and not much change from the ASV of 1901. A nine year effort by superior scholars. Good version for serious Bible study.

THE JERUSALEM BIBLE:

Finest Catholic Bible in modern English. Its model is the French edition produced by the Dominican scholars of St. Stephens School in Jerusalem, but the English version is the work of British scholars. One of the most important modern versions along with the New American Bible. Has largely non-sectarian

footnotes, and provides excellent study helps. Includes the Apocrypha. A good all purpose translation.

GOOD NEWS for MODERN MAN:

This is today's English Version. An accurate rendering into today's simple spoken English. It reflects a special study in linguistics in relation to the problems of Bible translation into the modern tongue. We should not be fooled by its juvenile format. It may be the best and most accurate English translation of the New Testament. It clears up, more than any other, the ambiguities in the text and at the same time is responsible to good exegesis. It is a real translation rather than a paraphrase on the one hand or a word-for-word transposition on the other.

J. B. PHILIPS:

This is a paraphrase by a competent Greek Scholar. Some feel it is better than the Living Bible. Some feel it is the best available version for general reading that could be placed in the hands of a person who does not have a Christian background. A one man translation with a distinctly British flavor.

THE BERKELEY VERSION:

Another one man translation by the scholar Verkuyl. concise and clear translation with a high degree of faithfulness to the Greek and Hebrew text. Excellent version for public readings as well as for understanding the message in devotional readings.

THE NEW AMERICAN BIBLE:

This also is a Catholic Bible, in the O.T. a revision of the Confraternity Version and in the N.T. a new translation from the Greek. The cooperation of Protestant scholars was secured. It is more conservative than the Jerusalem Bible or the RSV Common Bible. It is the result of 25 years of labor by 51 scholars and published by 12 different houses.

Editors Note: The above Bibles were those in existence when this study was written by Pastor Christensen in the late 1970s. Since that time, other excellent translations have been published.

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