

How To Read, Study, and Understand The Bible

History of Translation-A Review

- The Bible has been translated into more languages than any other piece of literature
- From original languages, Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek to:
 - Greek: Hebrew Bible to Greek 3rd century BCE
 - Latin: HB & NT to Latin, 4th and 5th centuries CE

Septuagint

- LXX – 70 (3rd to 1st century BCE)
- First translation of Hebrew Bible, OT
- Translation from Hebrew to Greek for Greek-speaking Jews
- Bible for the Early Church
- Includes books from Apocrypha

Vulgate

Latin translation of the Bible

From Latin *vulgatus*, meaning “common” or
“commonly known.”

Translated by St. Jerome in 382 AD

From Greek NT manuscripts and LXX and Hebrew

Contains 17 Prologues to different books

History of Translation-A Review

- From Vulgate to English
- The Vulgate was the “official” translation of the church for 1000 years!
- Only educated clergy could read the Bible

History of Translation-A Review

- From Original Languages to English
 - The movement to translate the Bible into English was opposed by the church
 - Their concern was that if ordinary people could read the Bible, it would lead to erroneous interpretations
 - The work of translators and early translators, Wycliffe was viewed as heretical
 - Wycliffe's Bible of 1415 was condemned

- Invention of the moveable type printing press in 1455 contributed to the spread of common language translations
- After Wycliffe, came Martin Luther and William Tyndale
- Tyndale was executed for defying the church's prohibition against translations in common languages
- Tyndale's translation was influential on translations for the next 200 years.

- English Translations in the 16th and 17th centuries took place during a struggle between Protestants and Catholics
- Some translations were supported by Protestants and others by Catholics

King James Version

- People were dissatisfied with the preceding Protestant translations
- Puritans convinced King James I of a need for a new translation

King James Bible

Strengths

- Beautiful Prose
- Tremendous influence on the English speaking world
- Common Bible for English Protestants

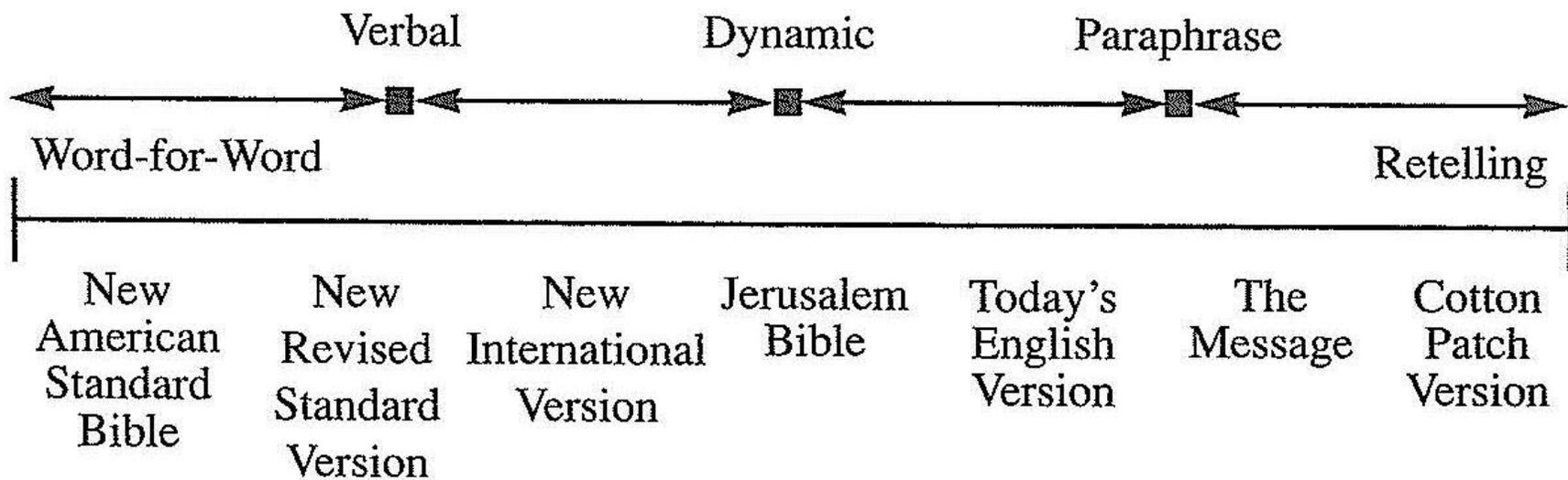
Weaknesses

- Faulty Greek and Hebrew manuscripts
- New discoveries about language, more recent manuscripts

The Art/Science of Translation

- What is the goal of the translators?
- Who are the translators?
- Who is the audience?
- What type of translation?

Figure 1: A Spectrum of Approaches to Translation



Types of Translation

- Verbal: translate the original languages into modern English *and* maintain the “integrity,” i.e. the grammar, words, rhythm and order of the original languages as much as possible
- KJV, RSV, NASB

- **Dynamic:** The primary purpose of a dynamic translation is to convey the text in fluid modern English rather than word-for-word fidelity.
- JB, NEB, REB, NLT, TEV (Good News), CEV

- Paraphrase: A paraphrase is more focused on the underlying meaning or spiritual truth of the Bible

Format

Study Bibles

Specialty Bibles

Children's and Youth Bibles

- What are the goals of the translation team?
- What is the background of the people who wrote the notes?
- Is there a diversity of voices or a singular perspective?

Sources: *Choosing a Bible* by Sheely and Nash, Jr. and *The Bible in Translation* by Bruce Metzger

To the Reader

[The following prefatory essay, "To the Reader," is part of the New Revised Standard Version Bible translation (NRSV), and is reprinted here in accordance with the requirements of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., which holds copyright to the NRSV.]

This preface is addressed to you by the Committee of translators, who wish to explain, as briefly as possible, the origin and character of our work. The publication of our revision is yet another step in the long, continual process of making the Bible available in the form of the English language that is most widely current in our day. To summarize in a single sentence: the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible is an authorized revision of the Revised Standard Version, published in 1952, which was a revision of the American Standard Version, published in 1901, which, in turn, embodied earlier revisions of the King James Version, published in 1611.

In the course of time, the King James Version came to be regarded as "the Authorized Version."

With good reason it has been termed "the noblest monument of English prose," and it has entered, as no other book has, into the making of the personal character and the public institutions of the English-speaking peoples. We owe to it an incalculable debt.

Yet the King James Version has serious defects. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the development of biblical studies and the discovery of many biblical manuscripts more ancient than those on which the King James Version was based made it apparent that these defects were so many as to call for revision. The task was begun, by authority of the Church of England, in 1870. The (British) Revised

Version of the Bible was published in 1881-1885; and the American Standard Version, its variant embodying the preferences of the American scholars associated with the work, was published, as was mentioned above, in 1901. In 1928 the copyright of the latter was acquired by the International Council of Religious Education and thus passed into the ownership of the churches of the United States and Canada that were associated in this Council through their boards of education and publication. The Council appointed a committee of scholars to have charge of the text of the American Standard Version and to undertake inquiry concerning the need for further revision. After studying the questions whether or not revision should be undertaken, and if so, what its nature and extent should be, in 1937 the Council authorized a revision. The scholars who served as members of the Committee worked in two sections, one dealing with the Old Testament and one with the New Testament. In 1946 the Revised Standard Version of the New

Testament was published. The publication of the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, containing the Old and New Testaments, took place on September 30, 1952. A translation of the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books of the Old Testament followed in 1957. In 1977 this collection was issued in an expanded edition, containing three additional texts received by Eastern Orthodox communions (3 and 4 Maccabees and Psalm 151). Thereafter the Revised Standard Version gained the distinction of being officially authorized for use by all major Christian churches: Protestant, Anglican, Roman Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox.

The Revised Standard Version Bible Committee is a continuing body, comprising about thirty members, both men and women. Ecumenical in representation, it includes scholars affiliated with various Protestant denominations, as well as several Roman Catholic members, an Eastern Orthodox member, and a Jewish member who serves in the Old Testament section. For a period of time the Committee included several members from Canada and from England.

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

... read the Bible as though it were something entirely unfamiliar, as though it had not been set before you ready-made Face the book with a new attitude as something new Let whatever may happen occur between yourself and it. You do not know which of its sayings and images will overwhelm and mold you But hold yourself open. Do not believe anything a priori; do not disbelieve anything a priori. Read aloud the words written in the book in front of you; hear the word you utter and let it reach you.

-adapted from a lecture of Martin Buber, 1926

THE PURPOSE OF THIS WORK IS TO DRAW THE READER INTO THE WORLD OF THE Hebrew Bible through the power of its language. While this sounds simple enough, it is not usually possible in translation. Indeed, the premise of almost all Bible translations, past and present, is that the "meaning" of the text should be conveyed in as clear and comfortable a manner as possible in one's own language. Yet the truth is that the Bible was not written in English in the twentieth or even the seventeenth century; it is ancient, sometimes obscure, and speaks in a way quite different from ours. Accordingly, I have sought here primarily to echo the style of the original, believing that the Bible is best approached, at least at the beginning, on its own terms. So I have presented the text in English dress but with a Hebraic voice.

The result looks and sounds very different from what we are accustomed to encountering as the Bible, whether in the much-loved grandeur of the King James Version or the clarity and easy fluency of the many recent attempts. There are no old friends here; Eve will not, as in old paintings, give Adam an apple (nor will she be called "Eve"), nor will Moses speak of himself as "a stranger in a strange land," as beautiful as that sounds. Instead, the reader will encounter a text which challenges him or her to rethink what these ancient books are and what they mean, and will hopefully be encouraged to become an active listener rather than a passive receiver.

This translation is guided by the principle that the Hebrew Bible, like much of the literature of antiquity, was meant to be read aloud, and that consequently it must be translated with careful attention to rhythm and sound. The translation therefore tries to mimic the particular rhetoric of the Hebrew whenever possible, preserving such devices as repetition, allusion, alliteration, and wordplay.

Preface to the CEB

The King James Version of the Bible was published in 1611. For two centuries the KJV competed for readership with the Geneva Bible. However, by the nineteenth century in America, the KJV would be described as the "common English Bible," because it was the most widely used translation of Christian scripture. Numerous translations have appeared since that time. However, it has proved difficult to combine concern for accuracy and accessibility in one translation that the typical reader or worshipper would be able to understand. Therefore, readers in the twenty-first century, four hundred years after the creation of the KJV, need and deserve a new translation that is suitable for personal devotion, for communal worship, and for classroom study.

The Common English Bible (CEB), completed in 2011, is a fresh translation of the Bible. Some editions include the books of the Apocrypha that are used in Anglican, Orthodox, and Catholic congregations. The translation is sponsored by the Common English Bible Committee, which is an alliance of denominational publishers, including Presbyterian (USA), Episcopalian, United Methodist, Disciples of Christ, and United Church of Christ representatives.

One hundred twenty biblical scholars from twenty-two faith traditions worked as translators for the CEB. In addition, members of seventy-seven reading groups from congregations throughout North America reviewed and responded to early drafts of the translation. As a result, more than five hundred individuals were integrally involved in the preparation of the CEB. These individuals represent the sorts of diversity that permit this new translation to speak to people of various religious convictions and different social locations.

The translators, reviewers, and editors represent the following faith communities: African Methodist Episcopal Church, American Baptist, Anglican, Baptist, Baptist General Conference, Church of the Nazarene, Disciples of Christ, Episcopal Church, Evangelical Free Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church, Free Methodist, Mennonite, Moravian, National Baptist, Presbyterian (USA), Progressive National Baptist, Quaker, Reformed Church in America, Reform Judaism, Roman Catholic Church, Seventh-day Adventist, United Churches of Christ, and United Methodist. The CEB is truly a Bible created by churches and for the Church.

Accuracy and clarity. The CEB translators balance rigorous accuracy in the rendition of ancient texts with an equally passionate commitment to clarity of expression in the target language. Translators create sentences and choose vocabulary that will be readily understood when the biblical text is read aloud. Two examples illustrate this concern for accuracy and clarity.

First, ben 'adam (Hebrew) and huios tau anthr6pau (Greek) are best translated as "human being" (rather than "son of man") except in cases of direct address, where CEB renders "human one" (instead of "son of man" or "mortal"; e.g., Ezek 2:1). When ho huios tau anthropou is used as a title for Jesus, the CEB refers to Jesus as "the Human One." People who have grown accustomed to hearing Jesus refer to himself in the Gospels as "the Son of Man" may find this jarring. Why "Human One"? Jesus's primary language would have been Aramaic, so he would have used the Aramaic phrase bar enosha. This phrase has the sense of "a human" or "a human such as I." This phrase was taken over into Greek in a phrase that might be translated woodenly as "son of humanity." However, Greek usage often refers to "a son of x" in the sense of "one who has the character of x." For example, Luke 10:6 refers in Greek to "a son of peace," a phrase that has the sense

How to Read the Bible

Read

1. To examine and grasp the meaning of a (written or printed characters, words or sentences).
2. To utter or render aloud (written or printed material).
3. To have the ability to examine and grasp the meaning of (written or printed material in a given language or notation)

4. To examine and grasp the meaning of...
5. To discern and interpret the nature or significance through close examination or sensitive observation
6. To determine the intent or mood

7. To attribute a certain interpretation or meaning to:
read my words differently
8. To foretell or predict the future
9. To receive and comprehend (a radio message)
10. To study or make study of

11. To learn or get knowledge of from something written or printed
12. To proofread
13. To have or use as a preferred reading in a particular passage: *for change read charge*

14. To indicate register or show

15. To obtain information from a storage medium
(computer science)

The American Heritage Dictionary

Reading a Text Together...

An Inductive Method

The text...

- From ancient, oral sources
- From ancient, dead languages
- Collected from sources over time and edited into a final form
- Canonized

- Represents other cultures, times, perspectives and even climate
- Different world view
- Variety of theological perspectives
- Complex, sometimes appears to be contradictory, and ...

INSPIRED

- God-breathed
- Spirit-filled
- Authoritative
- Contains all things necessary for salvation
- This text matters

Which means...

- The most important thing about the text isn't on the page, but what happens when you read/interact with it.

Tools for Study

- A Study Bible (we'll talk about other resources later)
- An open and curious mind
- A willing spirit
- A prayerful heart

On either side of the text

Scripture's Context

- Historical, social, political
- Literary: genre, surrounding material
- Theological traditions around the text

Reader's Context

- Demographics: race, gender, age, class
- History with the text
- Immediate Situation
- Expectations

Genesis 29:15-35

A love story?

Text

- Read the text aloud (more than 1x, in different translations)
- Are there any words you don't understand?
- What kind of material is this/genre?
- What happens in the narrative?
- Who are the characters?

Context

- What precedes the story and what follows it (immediate literary context)?
- Where does the story fit in the larger narrative (larger literary context)?
- What is the historical context?

My Context

- What is my own social location?
- What is my history with and current relationship with the Bible?
- What do I expect to find from this text?

- What strikes you about the passage?
- What questions do you have about the passage?
- Do you observe repetition, are there phrases that get your attention?
- Does this text make me uncomfortable?
- Do I find the text reassuring?

- What is the overall movement of the text?
- How does the story resonate with my experience?
- Do I identify with a particular character or moment in the text? Why?
- Where is God in the story?

Observations

- God is present in the story of....

Observations about the method...