

## HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE



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### English Versions of the Bible and the Science of Translation – Study #4

We are wealthy people. While some around the world do not have the Bible in their own language, we enjoy over 450 translations in English!

#### A (Very) Brief History

An English version of the entire Bible was produced by John Wycliffe between 1380 and 1382. He translated from Latin to English. But by now the Vulgate had nearly a thousand-year tradition in the West. His translation was condemned, and its copies burned. In 1525, William Tyndale completed a translation of the New Testament, this time working from Greek. This version, too, ran afoul of Church authorities. It was suppressed and its translator put to death.

Yet an English translation was an idea whose time had come. As the English Church was being reorganized at the time of King Henry VIII, Sir Thomas Cromwell officially approved the English translation made by Miles Coverdale, which was based on the work of Tyndale.

On February 10, 1604, King James I of England ordered that a new and better translation of the Bible be made, and a group of scholars was named to begin the work.

This "new" Bible was to be translated directly from the Hebrew and Greek. The result was the most influential English translation used by Protestants and Anglicans, the King James Version of 1611.

#### Translation Philosophy

There are 3 basic theories of translation. This is the degree in which one is willing to bridge the gap between the two languages. (i.e. historical distance)

1. Literal (Word for Word). The attempt to translate by keeping as close as possible to the exact words and phrasing of the original language, while trying to make sense in English. (historical distance: far)
2. Free (Paraphrase). The attempt to translate the *ideas* from one language to another with less concern about exact wording to the original. (historical distance: near).

3. Dynamic Equivalent (Thought for Thought). The attempt to translate words, idioms, and grammatical constructions of the original language into precise equivalents in English. (historical distance: far, but “updates” language, grammar, style).

#### Bible Comparisons

Literal		Dyn. Equivalence		Free	
KJV	RSV	NRSV	NIV	GNB	Phillips
NASB	ESV		NAB	JB	LB
NKJV			NEB		Mssg
			NLT		

NOTE: The vast majority of Scholars, Translators and Grammarians endorse the Dynamic Equivalent to Bible translating.

Some Examples..... using NLT (1996), NIV (1984), KJV (1769), LB (1984)

<sup>NLT</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:16 *So we have stopped evaluating others by what the world thinks about them. Once I mistakenly thought of Christ that way, as though he were merely a human being. How differently I think about him now!*

<sup>NIV</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:16 *So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer.*

<sup>KJV</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:16 *Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more.*

<sup>LB</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:16 *So stop evaluating Christians by what the world thinks about them or by what they seem to be on the outside. Once I mistakenly thought of Christ that way, merely as a human being like myself. How differently I feel now!*

The problem of weights, measures, and money.....

<sup>NLT</sup> Matthew 20:2 *He agreed to pay the normal daily wage and sent them out to work.*

<sup>NIV</sup> Matthew 20:2 He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard.

<sup>KJV</sup> Matthew 20:2 And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard.

<sup>LB</sup> Matthew 20:2 He agreed to pay them \$20.00 a day and sent them out to work.

See also Isaiah 5:10, Matthew 18:24, 28

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What about euphemisms? Almost all languages have euphemisms for matters of sex and toilet. A translator has 3 options on these matters

1. Translate literally, which can leave the reader guessing
2. Literal equivalent, which can offend and shock
3. Use an equivalent euphemism, likely the best option

<sup>NLT</sup> 1 Samuel 25:22 May God deal with me severely if even one man of his household is still alive tomorrow morning!"

<sup>NIV</sup> 1 Samuel 25:22 May God deal with David, be it ever so severely, if by morning I leave alive one male of all who belong to him!"

<sup>KJV</sup> 1 Samuel 25:22 So and more also do God unto the enemies of David, if I leave of all that pertain to him by the morning light any that pisseth against the wall.

<sup>LB</sup> 1 Samuel 25:22 May God curse me if even one of his men remains alive by tomorrow morning!

See also Gen 22:3, 2 Samuel 13:14, 2 Kings 6:25, John 12:15

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### Other Related Writings

1. The Septuagint – The Greek translation of the Old Testament, also known as the LXX. Completed 3<sup>rd</sup> Century BC and estimated to have been translated by 70-72 scholars.
2. Apocrypha – Comes from the Greek for ‘hidden/secret’ and includes a number of extra-biblical writings that were included in various early versions as supplemental reading. These have doubtful and questionable origins and even endorse doctrines

incompatible with the Bible (eg. payment for atonement, praying for the dead). Jerome and the council of Jamnia (AD 90) determined they were outside the biblical canon.

3. Pseudepigrapha – Assorted writings primarily between 300 BC to 300 AD and are falsely attributed to authors or a well-known figure of the past (hence the name which comes from the Greek for ‘false title/ascription’). Some examples are the Book of Enoch, The Assumption of Moses (both mentioned in Book of Jude), The Life of Adam and Eve.
4. Dead Sea Scrolls – Initially discovered in 1946-47 and contain a number of biblical and non-biblical (Community Rule etc.) documents. It has become a treasure trove of biblical insight (Isaiah scroll) and to further helping us understand the cultural milieu.

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Some final comments.....

- Translators have to deal with two issues: the actual wording of the original Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic. The 2nd has to do with the theory of translation.
- Textual criticism is a science with careful controls which means that the evangelical world can be assured of the doctrinal integrity of translations
- Enjoy the version that encourages you to read!