



UNDERSTANDING CHRISTIANITY

A monthly forum on the third *Saturday* of each month from 6:30 to 7:30 P.M. following Evening Prayer at 6

Forums with Dr. Richard T. Nolan

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Tonight's Topic

*“A Comparison of Some Major Translations of the Bible –
Are There Any Significant Differences?”*

A Prayer To Be Said In Unison (in traditional language)

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, who hast committed to thy holy Church the care and nurture of all the faithful; Enlighten with thy wisdom those who teach and those who learn, that, rejoicing in the knowledge of thy truth, they may worship thee and serve thee from generation to generation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

QUICK GUIDE TO BIBLE VERSIONS

Historic - Major Catholic, Anglican/Protestant Versions (-1800)

- Latin Vulgate (St. Jerome) c.400: the Bible of the Western Church through the middle ages; still the official Bible of the Roman Catholic Church.
- Wycliffe (& Purvey) c.1385: first translation of whole (or most of) Bible from Vulgate into vernacular, medieval English -- [n.b. complete Wycliffe Bible not published until 1850].
- Martin Luther c.1522: translation of the Greek N.T. and Hebrew O.T. into vernacular German; still the standard Bible of German Protestants [Lutheran].
- Tyndale c.1525: translation of Greek N.T. [consulting Vulgate and Luther's German translation] and parts of Hebrew O.T. -- fixed the English translation style.

- Coverdale c.1535: little change from Tyndale's, but with new translations for previously undone portions of O.T. from Vulgate and Luther's [not orig. Hebrew]; Coverdale's PSALMS still used by Anglicans and Episcopalians in Book of Common Prayer.
- Matthew c.1537: Essentially Tyndale's but a publication authorized by the king (Henry VIII); the first authorized or licensed English Bible - [though license was extended to Coverdale's later editions].
- Great Bible (Cranmer) c.1540: revision of Matthew's Bible produced in a large size; undertaken at Cromwell's suggestion and claimed the "Bible appointed to the use of the churches".
- Geneva c.1560: revision/collation of Tyndale's and the Great Bible; first English translation to use the division into verses; considered most scholarly of early English versions; commonly used for many years - especially among Puritans - and commonly brought to America.
- Bishops' c.1568: a rebuttal by the bishops to the Geneva Bible (which they didn't like); borrowed heavily from Great Bible and, actually, also from Geneva Bible - including use of verses; uneven quality but formed basis for KJV.
- Rheims/Douay c.1582/1610: the official [English] Roman Catholic Bible; translation from Vulgate [n.b. Bishop Challoner revised in mid 1700's, sometimes called "Challoner-Rheims Version"].
- King James (or Authorized) Version (KJV or AV) 1611: the standard authorized Bible of most Protestant churches for 2+ centuries; used the original Hebrew and Greek to inform comparison/revision of earlier English versions - [leaned heavily on Bishop's Bible; much of the language actually goes back to Tyndale's].

Modern - Major English Language Versions (1800-1990)

- Revised Version or English Revised Version (RV or ERV) N.T. 1881, O.T. 1884: first major revision of KJV; done by lengthy committee process including Anglican and most Protestant faiths but NOT Roman Catholics.
- American Revised Version or American Standard Version (ARV or ASV) N.T. 1900, O.T. 1901: a re-edited version of the RV, basically the same.
- Moulton (Modern Readers') Bible 1907: a rearrangement of texts rather than a significantly new version, but an early attempt to "update" the Bible.
- Moffat Bible N.T. 1913, O.T. 1924: a new translation from early Greek and Latin texts - considered flawed because of the choice of source texts and the occasional rearrangement of verses but still a major work and fairly popular in it's time.
- Smith-Goodspeed or "Chicago " Bible c.1930's: [The Bible: An American Translation (AT)] first significant attempt to make truly modern language version.
- Knox Bible N.T. 1945, O.T. 1948: a new translation of the Vulgate bible; the New Testament was officially approved by the Roman Catholic church, though not supplanting the Rheims N.T. (first translation done by a single individual).
- Revised Standard Version (RSV) 1946-1957: an attempt to improve on the language of the RV/ASV; more widely accepted, but not supplanting KJV.
- Modern Language Bible (New Berkeley) (MLB) 1959, rev. 1969: another attempt at a modernization of the language leaning especially toward an American audience and working from the Greek and Hebrew texts.
- Jerusalem Bible (JB) 1966: Catholic translation based on ancient Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic texts, but closely following the French "Bible de Jerusalem" [n.b. begun well after the NAB NT (1941) was done, but finished before the NAB OT (1970)].
- New American Standard Bible (NASB) N.T. 1963, O.T. 1970: conservative, fairly literal translation from mainly Greek texts; attempt to repeat the RV process with more contemporary language; not very well-received.

- **New English Bible (NEB) 1970:** first completely new [Protestant] translation from original Bible languages into English since Tyndale.
- **New American Bible (NAB) O.T. 1969, complete 1970 [added "Confraternity Version" N.T. of Douay]:** The first significant Catholic translation since Douay-Rheims; working from original Greek texts mainly, rather than Vulgate (Latin); O.T. also made use of Dead Sea Scrolls; original N.T. rushed and mostly from Vulgate and later (1987) greatly revised/retranslated.
- ***Living Bible* 1971:** most popular "paraphrase translation".
- **New International Version (NIV) 1973:** a conservative, evangelically oriented translation from Greek and Hebrew texts.
- ***Good News Bible* [Today's English Version] (TEV) 1966:** "common language" translation from *modern* Greek/Hebrew texts; emphasis on effective and accurate communication to the common reader.
- **New King James Version (NKJV) N.T. 1979, O.T. 1982:** a revision of KJV to improve readability of text .
- **New Jerusalem Bible (NJB) 1985:** a revision following on the changes made in the French revision of the Bible de Jerusalem (1973) reflecting some new scholarship in research of the original texts and translations.
- **New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) 1989:** the result of continuing revisions from the committee(s) who made RSV .
- **Revised English Bible (REB) 1989:** a revision of the New English Bible (1970), updating according to new scholarship in translation.

<http://www.mtholyoke.edu/lits/library/guides/biblver.htm>

A Comparison of Some Contemporary Bible Versions

by Greg Williamson (c) 2001

Romans 11:1-3

Literal English Translation from the Original Greek *

1 I say therefore, did not put away the God the people of him? May it not be; for even I an Israelite am, of the seed of Abraham, of [the] tribe of Benjamin. **2** did not put away the God the people of him whom he foreknew. Or know ye not in Elias what says the scripture, how he supplicates the God against the Israel? **3** Lord, the prophets of thee they killed, the altars of thee they dug down, and I was left behind alone and they seek the life of me.

King James Version (KJV)

1 I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. **2** God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew. Wot ye not what the scripture saith of Elias? how he maketh intercession to God against Israel, saying, **3** Lord, they have killed thy prophets, and digged down thine altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life.

New American Standard Bible (NASB) *

1 I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. **2**

New American Standard Bible - Updated (NASU)

1 I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. **2**

God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? **3** "Lord, THEY HAVE KILLED THY PROPHETS, THEY HAVE TORN DOWN THINE ALTARS, AND I ALONE AM LEFT, AND THEY ARE SEEKING MY LIFE."

New International Version (NIV)

1 I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. **2** God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew. Don't you know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah—how he appealed to God against Israel: **3** "Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me"?

New Century Version (NCV)

1 So I ask: Did God throw out his people? No! I myself am an Israelite from the family of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. **2** God chose the Israelites to be his people before they were born, and he has not thrown his people out. Surely you know what the Scripture says about Elijah, how he prayed to God against the people of Israel. **3** "Lord," he said, "they have killed your prophets, and they have destroyed your altars. I am the only prophet left, and now they are trying to kill me, too."

New King James Version (NKVJ)

1 I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. **2** God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel, saying, **3** "Lord, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life"?

God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? **3** "Lord, THEY HAVE KILLED YOUR PROPHETS, THEY HAVE TORN DOWN YOUR ALTARS, AND I ALONE AM LEFT, AND THEY ARE SEEKING MY LIFE."

New Living Translation (NLT)

1 I ask, then, has God rejected his people, the Jews? Of course not! Remember that I myself am a Jew, a descendant of Abraham and a member of the tribe of Benjamin. **2** No, God has not rejected his own people, whom he chose from the very beginning. Do you remember what the Scriptures say about this? Elijah the prophet complained to God about the people of Israel and said, **3** "Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars. I alone am left, and now they are trying to kill me, too."

Contemporary English Version (CEV)

1 Am I saying that God has turned his back on his people? Certainly not! I am one of the people of Israel, and I myself am a descendant of Abraham from the tribe of Benjamin. **2** God did not turn his back on his chosen people. Don't you remember reading in the Scriptures how Elijah complained to God about the people of Israel? **3** He said, "Lord, they killed your prophets and destroyed your altars. I am the only one left, and now they want to kill me."

The Message

Does this mean, then, that God is so fed up with Israel that he'll have nothing more to do with them? Hardly. Remember that I, the one writing these things, am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham out of the tribe of Benjamin. You can't get much more Semitic than that! So we're not talking about repudiation. God has been too long involved with Israel, has too much invested, to simply wash his hands of them. Do you remember that time Elijah was agonizing over this same Israel and cried out in prayer? "God, they murdered your prophets, They trashed your altars; I'm the only one

Criteria for Evaluating and Choosing a Translation *

1. **Committee vs. individual.** Generally, a committee of translators is likely to produce a better translation, since individual biases will tend to be eliminated.
2. **Interdenominational vs. denominational.** Generally, a translation committee representing several denominations rather than a single church or denomination will tend to have less theological biases.
3. **High view vs. low view of Scripture.** Translators adhering to a high view of Scripture as God's word will generally be less likely to take liberties with the text than translators who regard the Bible as errant literature.
4. **Known vs. anonymous translators.** Generally, it is better to use a translation by scholars whose names and credentials are known. (The NASB was at first anonymous; the publishers later decided wisely to publish the names of the translators.)
5. **Stated and unstated purposes.** If the stated purposes of a translation are sound, the result is more likely to be sound. Read the prefatory material: Is the translation seeking to promote a particular agenda? Is this an appropriate agenda? If you can, find out more about the translators or the publishers and their agendas.
6. **Word vs. thought translation continuum.** Translations are produced using different philosophies of translation. Some seek to render each Hebrew or Greek word with an English word, word for word, as closely as possible; others seek to render phrases or whole sentences into idiomatic English, thought for thought. The more word-for-word, the fewer liberties are taken with the text; the more thought-for-thought, the more readable the result. It's a good idea to have two versions, one a strict translation and the other a "paraphrase."
7. **Readability.** Even if you want a word-for-word type translation, some are more readable than others. Translators who exhibit a feel for style in their own language are more likely to know what they are doing when translating from another language.
8. **Original text used.** Some translations are based on a slightly more reliable text of the Bible than other translations. This is, however, a more minor issue than is commonly realized.

VERSION	PASSAGE COMPARISON: JOB 36:33
AMPLIFIED	He thunders speak (awesomely) concerning Him; the cattle are told of His coming storm.
CEV Contemporary English Version	And the thunder tells of his anger against sin.
ESV English Standard Version	Its crashing declares his presence, the cattle also declare that he rises.
God's Word	The thunder announces his coming. The storm

	announces his angry wrath.
HCSB Holman Christian Standard Bible	The thunder declares his presence; the cattle also, the approaching [storm].
KJV King James Version	The noise thereof sheweth concerning it; the cattle also concerning the vapour.
LIVING Living Bible	We feel His presence in the thunder. May all sinners be warned.
NAB New American Bible	His thunder speaks for him and incites the fury of the storm.
NASB New American Standard Bible	Its' noise declare His presence; the cattle also, concerning what is coming up.
NCV/ICB New Century Version / International Children's Bible	His thunder announces that a storm is coming. Even the cattle show that a storm is coming; (ICB).
NIRV New International Reader's Version	His thunder announces that a storm is coming. Even the cattle let us know it's approaching.
NIV New International Version	His thunder announced the coming storm; even the cattle make known its approach.
NKJV New King James Version	His thunder declares it, the cattle also, concerning the rising storm.
NLT New Living Translation	His thunder announces his presence; the storm announces his indignant anger.
NRSV New Revised Standard Version	Its crashing tells about him; he is jealous with anger against iniquity.
TEV Today's English Version	Thunder announces the approaching storm, and the cattle know it is coming.
THE MESSAGE	The High God roars in the thunder, angry against evil.

MATTHEW 27:54

Now the centurion, and those who were with him watching Jesus, when they saw the earthquake, and the things that were done, feared exceedingly, saying, "Truly this was the Son of God." **WEB**

Now the centurion, and they that were with him watching Jesus, when they saw the earthquake, and the things that were done, feared exceedingly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God. **ASV**

Now the captain and those who were with him watching Jesus, when they saw the earth-shock and the things which were done, were in great fear and said, Truly this was a son of God. **BBE**

But the centurion, and they who were with him on guard over Jesus, seeing the earthquake and the things that took place, feared greatly, saying, Truly this man was Son of God. **DBY**

Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God. **KJV**

Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God. **WBS**

As for the Captain and the soldiers who were with Him keeping guard over Jesus, when they witnessed the earthquake and the other occurrences they were filled with terror, and exclaimed, "Assuredly he was God's Son." **WEY**

And the centurion, and those with him watching Jesus, having seen the earthquake, and the things that were done, were exceedingly afraid, saying, 'Truly this was God's Son.' **YLT**

Psalm 23, verse 1

A Psalm by David. Yahweh is my shepherd: I shall lack nothing. **WEB**

Jehovah is my shepherd; I shall not want. **ASV**

<A Psalm. Of David.> The Lord takes care of me as his sheep; I will not be without any good thing. **BBE**

{A Psalm of David.} Jehovah is my shepherd; I shall not want. **DBY**

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. **KJV**

A Psalm of David. The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. **WBS**

A Psalm of David. The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. **JPS**

A Psalm of David. Jehovah 'is' my shepherd, I do not lack, **YLT**

<http://bible.cc/>

Comparing Bible Translations

The research you do in choosing a version of the Bible can be as simple as knowing its basic orientation and looking up three or four verses, or as extensive as a massive computer analysis. What I've done here is provide a few sample verses for a large number of questions you might want answered before you decide what Bible version is best for you.

I cannot pretend to be unbiased in this area. I grew up with the King James Version, used the NIV in college, and carry the Updated NASB for most of my English Bible reading today. In studying the languages

at seminary, I've come to some fairly firm conclusions about what a translator should and should not do. But while I'll offer my own opinion on most of these questions, I hope to provide enough information that you, the reader, can make an informed decision yourself.

Following the classification of Robert L. Thomas, I've divided the questions into five basic categories. To allow you as much independence as you desire in checking out a translation, I'm listing only the questions and sample verses on this page. For those who want more, I've linked to my analysis for each question and a summary of my conclusions for each of 40-plus Bible versions. There's also a practice page that allows you to compare several versions of the same passage on your own.

Questions to Ask in Assessing a Bible Version

Issue #1: Historical Background

- ✦ **When was the translation produced?**
- ✦ **Who produced the translation?**
- ✦ **Is the translation translated directly from the original languages (Hebrew and Aramaic for OT, Greek for NT)?**
- ✦ **Does the version derive from previous translations?**
- ✦ **Has the translation itself been revised?**
- ✦ **Has the translation gained wide acceptance among Christians?**
- ✦ **Has the translation gained widespread criticism or been the subject of controversy?**

Issue #2: Textual Basis

- ✦ **Toward which manuscript tradition does the translation lean?**
 - **Presence or absence of a divine name: Matt. 19:17; 21:12; Rom. 1:16; Eph. 3:9, 14**
 - **Differences in length of a divine name: Matt. 16:20; John 6:69; Acts 16:31; 2 Cor. 4:10; 2 Tim. 4:22**
 - **Other pious expansions: Matt. 6:13; John 3:13; 9:35; 1 Cor. 7:5; 10:28**
 - **Theological clarification: Mark 10:24; Luke 2:43; Acts 4:25; 16:7; 1 Pet. 4:1**
 - **Possible marginal glosses: Mark 9:49; Luke 9:54; John 5:3-4; 1 Pet. 4:14**
 - **Story embellishments: Matt. 20:7; 28:9; Mark 7:8; John 8:59; Acts 28:16**
 - **Stylistic changes: Mark 1:31; Eph. 6:10; James 5:16; 1 John 2:7; Rev. 8:13**
 - **General deliberate changes: Rom. 11:6; 14:6; 1 Cor. 7:39; 1 John 4:19**
 - **Similarity to other passages: Matt. 5:44; Mark 11:10; Luke 11:2; 23:38; 1 Cor. 11:24**
 - **Old Testament citations: Matt. 15:8; Luke 4:4; Rom. 9:28; 10:15; Heb. 7:21**
 - **Probable copyist's errors: Luke 2:14; 1 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 3:9; 1 John 3:1**
- ✦ **How does the translation handle debatable variant readings?**
 - **Difficult Old Testament texts: Judg. 18:30; 1 Sam. 13:1, 5; 1 Kgs. 4:26; Isa. 3:24**
 - **Difficult texts in the Gospels: Matt. 8:28; 12:47; 18:15; 23:26; Mark 1:1; 3:32; 7:9; 10:2; 14:68; Luke 10:1**
 - **The "Western non-interpolations": Luke 24:3, 6, 12, 36, 40, 51-52**
 - **Other New Testament texts: 1 Thes. 2:7; Jam. 5:20; 2 Pet. 3:10; 1 John 3:21; Jude 5, 22-23**
- ✦ **How does the translation handle the larger traditional but unlikely readings?**
 - **Mark 16:9-20; Luke 23:34; John 7:53-8:11; Acts 8:37; 1 John 5:7-8; Rev. 22:19**

Issue #3: Translation Philosophy

- ✦ How literal or free is the translation?
- ✦ Does the translator seek to fill a perceived void among English translations by presenting an improved translation philosophy?
- ✦ Are sentences broken up, condensed, or restructured for easier reading?
 - Gen. 2:4; Deut. 21:15; 1 Sam. 18:4; Psa. 19:7-9; Ezek. 29:11; Rom. 1:16; Eph. 1:3-14; 2:1-10; 1 Pet. 1:3-9
- ✦ How far does the translator go in interpreting certain texts?
 - Luke 16:9; John 3:18; 1 Corinthians 7:1, 36
- ✦ To what extent is the sense of the verb communicated?
 - Attention to verb tense: Matt. 16:19; 26:40; Mark 9:31; 11:24, 27; John 4:30; 5:2, 16; Rom. 5:1; 1 Cor. 15:4; Heb. 2:18; 1 John 5:1; Rev. 10:7
 - First-class conditions: 1 Thes. 4:14; 1 Pet. 1:17; 1 John 4:11
 - Other verb issues: Acts 22:16; 1 Cor. 7:36; Eph. 4:26; 1 Pet. 3:14; Rev. 5:5
- ✦ Does the translator tend to overtranslate or undertranslate nuances and connotations?
 - 1 Sam. 20:30; Isa. 10:30; Mic. 5:1; Matt. 9:37; John 10:28; Rom. 4:8; Rom. 10:15; Titus 2:1, 6, 9; Heb. 13:5; 1 John 3:1
- ✦ How does the translator handle idioms and hyperbole?
 - Deut. 21:15; Josh. 8:17; 1 Kgs. 1:40; Matt. 5:29; 28:9; Luke 9:44; Gal. 5:12
- ✦ Are technical or specialized terms translated with proper distinctions?
- ✦ Does the translation perpetuate mistranslations that have appeared in other versions?
 - Exod. 20:13; Isa. 14:12; Zech. 1:8; Luke 23:33; Acts 12:4; 17:22; 1 Cor. 15:4; 2 Cor. 10:2; Heb. 4:8
- ✦ What of cases where punctuation is debated?
 - John 1:3-4; 3:13-21; 3:30-36; 1 Cor. 6:12; 7:1; Eph. 1:4-5
- ✦ Does the translation distinguish between the singular and plural forms of second person pronouns?

Issue #4: Theological Orientation

- ✦ For what stated theological purpose was the translation or revision made, if any?
- ✦ With what denominations are the primary translators affiliated?
- ✦ What theological statements appear in the translation's introduction?
- ✦ Are nuances of gender and/or number frequently muted or altered in the text?
 - Hebrew *'ish* and Greek *aner*:
 - ⊖ Acts 17:22; 20:30; 1 Cor. 13:11; Jam. 1:12
 - Words for mankind:
 - ⊖ Gen. 1:27; 5:2; Psa. 90:3; Luke 4:4; 9:44; John 1:4; 2:25-3:1
 - Words for fathers, sons, and brothers:
 - ⊖ Gen. 48:21; Exod. 19:6; Mark 11:10; Luke 17:3; Rom. 9:5; Gal. 4:7; Heb. 2:17; 12:7
 - "Generic *he*":
 - ⊖ Matt. 16:24; John 14:23; Gal. 6:7; Jam. 5:14; Rev. 3:20; 22:19

- Texts with Messianic import:
 - ☞ Psa. 8:4; 34:20; Dan. 7:13; 1 Cor. 15:21; 1 Tim. 2:5
- ✦ Are passages rewritten to support a particular ideology or doctrine?
- ✦ How does the translator treat texts relevant to the identity of Christ?
 - Jesus as God: Psa. 45:6; John 1:1, 18; 20:28; Acts 20:28; Rom. 9:5; Phil. 2:6; Titus 2:13; Heb. 1:8; 2 Pet. 1:1
 - Messianic prophecy: Psa. 2:2, 12; 110:1
 - worship of Jesus: Matt. 28:9; John 9:38
- ✦ How does the translator treat texts relevant to the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament?
 - Psa. 51:11; Isa. 61:1; 63:10
- ✦ How does the translator treat texts relevant to the truthfulness of the Bible?
 - Psa. 12:6; 2 Tim. 3:16
- ✦ How does the translator treat texts relevant to salvation?
 - Matt. 25:46; John 3:36; Acts 13:48; Rom. 3:25; 9:22; Gal. 3:23-24; Eph. 1:11-12; 2:8-9; Heb. 2:17; 1 Pet. 2:8; 1 John 4:10
- ✦ How does the translator treat other frequently debated texts?
 - Gen. 6:2; Exod. 21:22; Mal. 2:16; Mark 3:21; Acts 16:34; 19:2; Rom. 16:1, 7; 1 Cor. 14:2; Gal. 6:16; Eph. 3:5; 1 Tim. 3:11; Rev. 20:4

Issue #5: English Style

- ✦ Is the language contemporary, older, or a combination?
 - 1 Sam. 17:6; 18:4; Amos 9:10; Matt. 19:14; John 17:2; Acts 17:5; 2 Thes. 2:7; Heb. 12:3; Jam. 1:21; 1 Pet. 2:12
- ✦ Does the translation contain regionalisms, slang, or considerable informalities?
 - Gen. 36:6; 1 Sam. 20:30; Matt. 13:57; 23:24; Luke 4:22; 6:35; 7:34; 1 Cor. 16:8; 1 Pet. 2:12
- ✦ What is the reading level and range of vocabulary for the translation?
- ✦ Is the translation pleasant to read?
- ✦ Does the translator capitalize pronouns referring to deity?
- ✦ What does the translator do with the name of God?
- ✦ Does the translator show an effort to translate the same word consistently where appropriate?
 - righteous: Luke 5:32; 14:14, with 12:57
 - abide: John 1:32-33; 38-39; 3:36; 6:27; 14:10, 16
 - love: 1 Cor. 4:21; 13:1; 1 Thes. 3:6
- ✦ Has the King James Version influenced word order and word choice in familiar passages?
 - Matt. 6:9; Luke 2:12-13; 1 Cor. 13:1
- ✦ Are words supplied by the translator differentiated from the text itself?
- ✦ Is prose text presented in paragraph format, or does each verse begin on a new line?
- ✦ Are prose, poetry, and other forms rendered as such in the format of the text?
 - Gen. 4:23; Dan. 7:9-14; Matt. 27:37; 1 Pet. 2:21-25; Rev. 7:5-8
- ✦ Does the translation provide footnotes for explanations and alternate readings or renderings?

- ✦ Does the translation mark Old Testament citations in the New Testament?

<http://faith.propadeutic.com/questions.html>

FROM "VERSIONS" IN *THE ANCHOR BIBLE DICTIONARY*

E. Bible Translation Process

Before considering the organization of Bible translators for their work, and the means of getting translations on paper, we will discuss various factors affecting the translation process: languages with written forms vs. those with no writing, translation aims, intended readership, language and dialect groups, kinds of language, types of rendering, and new translation vs. revision. At times decisions regarding such matters were made deliberately, in other cases they were not consciously made, but were always important in determining process and results.

1. **Written and Unwritten Languages.** As Bible translators began to reach out into areas where the Bible had not been translated before, they encountered a wide diversity of languages and writing systems. In the case of many languages, there was not only a well-established written form ready for use, but a well-developed literature. In some cases this literature either included religious expression, or was predominantly religious in character. This meant that translators had to take the literature into account, sometimes using its vocabulary and forms of expression to advantage, but in others avoiding some terminology in order not to compromise the biblical message. An example was Arabic, with its great religious classic, the Quran. Some languages are written in more than one script; the selection of writing system may be related to social or religious factors. Translators of Scripture in such languages must select the writing system to be employed. In some instances translations of Scripture have been published in more than one script.

Scores of languages did not employ any writing system. In such cases, translators of Scripture have often developed a script in which to write the language.

2. **Effects of Translation Aims.** The aims of the translators (and their sponsors) often had a marked effect on the way a translation was done, and upon the results. Let us look first at the effect of the intended function or functions of a version, and then at that of the intended readership.

a. **Intended Function.** Typically, when a new translation, or a revision, was undertaken, the translators and their sponsors had in mind certain kinds of usefulness that they hoped the version would serve: evangelism, Christian nurture, public worship and liturgy, personal study, private devotion, and so on. The aim at times focused on one or more of these purposes, but sometimes embraced all of them. The intended function governed several aspects of the translation process. For example, if the primary purpose was evangelism, this helped to govern what was translated and published first in a new language: it was usually a gospel, though in some instances (as in Thailand) Genesis might be regarded as crucial for laying the groundwork for evangelization. If the purpose was mainly Christian nurture, then vocabulary that had become traditional in the life of the church for which the translation was made needed to be considered. The first translation in Asia that was made primarily for an established church, rather than for evangelistic purposes, was in Malayalam, which was spoken by members of the Malayalam-speaking Syrian Church in Travancore (completed in 1841). Versions used for the liturgy took into account the way passages deemed important for public worship sounded when read aloud.

b. **Intended Readership.** Many matters important for the translation process, such as choice of vocabulary, interpretation, the use (or non-use) of explanatory notes, and so on, were effected by the intended readership of a version.

There is first of all the intention with regard to the religious constituencies translators have had in mind, such as Roman Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Eastern Orthodox, or, more broadly, interfaith readership in some combination or other. Obviously, if a version was intended for one or another of these communities, decisions regarding the above matters were affected.

Further, within a religious communion, there have often been special groups for which particular versions were intended. In English, for example, as an answer to the RSV, which some conservatives regard as being too “liberal,” the NIV was prepared to appeal to conservative Protestants. On the other hand, interfaith versions have attempted to appeal to readers of various persuasions by an approach to language and interpretation that is more inclusive.

The ways in which translations were made was influenced in many cases by the social or cultural groups that translators had in mind as they worked. For example, some versions have been done for children (e.g., the American Bible Society *A Book about Jesus*), others for new readers in various languages, still others primarily for scholars (e.g., the Anchor Bible), one for people in the southern part of the U.S.A. (the Cottonpatch Version). Such intended readership has affected not only the vocabulary used, but also interpretation of the text, the format, the use of illustrations or pictures, and so on.

c. **Language Groups.** In addition to the translation of the Bible into major, primary languages, there has been much attention in our period to translation into various dialects of those, or of lesser languages. Also, in cases where it was feasible, there has often been the attempt, at least, to prepare translations in “union” languages, that might be useable among peoples who speak closely related dialects. In three cases, there have been translations into constructed languages, such as Esperanto.

3. **Kinds or Levels of Language.** Bible translation has often involved the choice of the kind or level of language to be used for a particular version. Should it be literary, reflecting established literary norms? Or colloquial, to meet the needs of people who do not know or have a literature? Should “common” language be used, so that the version will be intelligible to all users of the language? For a few versions the question has been asked, to what extent can translators or revisers of a version of the Bible use gender-inclusive language. Such language has been used in a few versions to the extent that sound exegesis will permit (e.g., NJB, and the rev. NT of the NAB).

4. **Types of Rendering.** There is a wide range of types of rendering that have been used in the modern era. The summary here is based on de Waard and Nida (1986: 40–42). Basically there have been five main types, with some versions marked by more than one type. The five kinds of translation are: (1) interlinear, word-for-word translations, usually of special interest to linguists or philologists; (2) literal renderings, that conform as much as possible to the form of the source language, while at the same time being grammatically possible, though often stylistically awkward, and sometimes misleading; (3) renderings that provide the “closest natural equivalence,” whether on a literary level, or the level of “common” language; (4) adapted renderings, with some special accompanying code in mind, such as verse form; or adaptation governed by a theological stance (e.g., the Living Bible, with its harmonization, deletions, additions, explanations, and “corrections”); (5) Culturally reinterpreted renderings (such as Clarence Jordan’s Cottonpatch Version of most of the NT).

5. **Revision Versus New Translation.** The approach to Bible translation has been deeply affected by whether a particular translation project is conceived as a revision of a previous version or a fresh translation. If it is a revision, then it needs to be determined what kinds of changes are to be made, and on what basis: correction of translation errors, changes in the language, better text, or new light on meaning. There has been much need for revision, sometimes often repeated, in the modern era, because the first translation in so many languages was done by non-speakers of the language.

6. **Organization of Translators.** There has been almost endless variety in the way Bible translators and their assistants have organized for their task. Many, especially in the earlier part of the period, worked

RSV Revised Standard Version
 NIV New International Version
 e.g. *exempli gratia* (for example)
 NJB New Jerusalem Bible
 NT New Testament
 NAB New American Bible

alone, or virtually so. Even these usually had some kind of help from consultants or native speakers of the languages they worked with.

In other cases where the work was done by a team, the ways of setting it up varied. Typically, there were one or more primary translators, who provided the initial draft of the translation, sometimes of an entire portion, Testament, or Bible. Again, there were often many translators who worked separately on various parts of a version to produce working drafts. Then there were one or more committees to review and correct the work of the primary translator(s). In addition, there were often consultants, who usually did not meet as a group, who read the translation drafts and provided written criticisms to be taken into account by the translators and the review committee. If the translation project was connected with a society or organization devoted to such work, there were often specialists related to these organizations who from time to time gave help with special problems, or took part in the training of translators. Often persons with a special sense of the language were brought in for stylistic review. Lastly, in the case of projects sponsored by Bible societies or church bodies, there was at times review by representatives of these groups for final approval before publication. There were, of course, many variations in the actual application of the above pattern. In connection with any particular translation project there was usually a statement of principles and procedures for the guidance of those involved.

7. **Writing Technologies.** A period of less than two hundred years saw a marked change in the ways of actually getting the text of a translation down on paper. In the early decades the mss of new translations were handwritten. In some cases, where the work was a revision rather than a new translation, the changes were simply introduced by hand into printed copies of the version being revised.

The second stage was the development of typewriters. The first practical typewriter was built by Christopher L. Sholes, an American inventor, in 1867. In 1874, the first typewriters were put on the market. The typewriter was soon adapted for use with scripts of other languages than those that used the Roman alphabet, and these became available for the use of Bible translators. For example, the first Siamese (Thai) typewriter was made by Edwin MacFarland, the son of a Presbyterian missionary to Siam in the latter part of the 19th century. More recently, sophisticated electronic typewriters have become available and been put to use.

In recent years, there has become available a still more versatile writing tool, that greatly facilitates the correction and reproduction of translated text. This is the computer, with its word processing capabilities and the capacity to generate a wide range of fonts and type styles. Word processors are now being widely used in Bible translation in numerous languages around the world.

F. Results

We have already focused attention in this survey on the remarkable increase between 1800 and 1988 in the number of languages in which the Bible or some significant part of it was translated (see B above). This is only part of the story, however. In many major languages of the world, there have been in this period numerous versions in a particular language produced for a variety of purposes. The reasons for this are mainly three: changes in the language that required either revision of previous versions, or new translation; new knowledge of the biblical text and its interpretation, that needed to be used; and the development of new aims and insights in the area of rendering. In numerically important languages where there is a developed Christian community, it has come to be recognized that at least three types of versions may be useful: “one of a traditional and conservative orientation for the majority of Bible readers, one based on critical texts and provided with helps for more sophisticated readers, e.g., students and ministers, and a ‘simple-language’ translation for the newly literate and for those who are reading an acquired language” (Bratcher 1971: 1245).

Along with the multiplication of versions, however, there have been in numerous instances of particular versions the production of more than one—often many—editions and forms to meet the needs of various kinds of readers. For instance, many recent versions have been published in basically two forms: one with

few or no aids to study and use, and another with a range of accompanying aids, such as: introductions to the Bible, Testaments, extended portions, or individual books; section headings, cross references, concordances, indexes, glossaries, chronologies, lists of weights and measures, maps, illustrations.

There has been an effusion of kinds of Bibles produced for various sorts of readers: family Bibles (one with material doubtful for children printed at the bottom of the page), Scriptures for women, youth, children, new readers, the blind (in Braille or sound recordings), the sight-impaired (large print Bibles), red-letter editions (with Jesus' words printed in red), diglots and polyglots, editions with special forms of the language (e.g., in American English and in British English), editions for scholars, editions for various religious communities or combinations of them.

G. Future of Bible Translation

The momentum of Bible translation in the last two centuries is still with us. Currently, under various auspices, there are under way over 570 Bible translation and revision projects in which the UBS is in some way involved (*World Translations Progress Report 1987*). These are of four kinds: translations into languages that have up to now had no Scripture, continuing translation to extend the scope of versions partly completed, the revision of previously published versions, and fresh translation in languages where there are older versions. In addition to the above, over 765 translation projects are reported by other groups, notably Wycliffe Bible Translators.

A most important development is the production of "common" language translations in many of the world's languages. "Common" language here means the resources of a given language common to the usage of both the educated and the uneducated. It strikes to make the version both acceptable to the former and accessible to the latter. At present the total number of such versions as recorded at the Library of the American Bible Society comes to 173, including 34 Bibles, 94 New Testaments, and 45 portions, with many more to be produced in the future. Many persons have been involved in this development, but two have had major roles in the formulation of the linguistic principles and guidelines behind it: Eugene A. Nida, formerly Translations Secretary of the American Bible Society and Translations Research Coordinator for the United Bible Societies, and William L. Wonderly, Translations Consultant for the UBS.

Another important development that will have a considerable effect upon Bible translation in the years to come is the production of interconfessional translations of the Bible. By the end of 1987 there had been reported no less than 292 interconfessional projects undertaken to date, with a substantial number of them having produced versions in the publication stage, while others are yet to be completed.

If all goes as expected, the 1990's should see the Bible, or some substantial part of it, published in over 2,000 of the world's languages and dialects, with a total number of versions and editions of the Bible, or parts of it, far greater than this.

English Translations of the Bible

by Felix Just, S.J., Ph.D.

http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/English_Translations.htm

An excellent resource!

Introduction: The Bible was *not* written in English -- not even "King James English"! Most of the books of the Old Testament were originally composed in *Hebrew* (with a few portions in *Aramaic*), while the entire New Testament was originally written in *Greek* (although some books may also incorporate *Aramaic* sources). Thus, what most people today read are *not* the original texts, but other people's *translations* of the biblical books.

But why are there so many different English translations of the Bible? And why can't churches or scholars agree on just one translation?

- ✦ *No original manuscript of any biblical book has survived!* All of the texts written by the biblical authors themselves have been lost or destroyed over the centuries. All we have are copies of copies of copies, most of them copied hundreds of years after the original texts were written.
- ✦ *The extant manuscripts contain numerous textual variations!* There are literally thousands of differences in the surviving biblical manuscripts, many of them minor (spelling variations, synonyms, different word orders), but some of them major (whole sections missing or added).
- ✦ *Important old manuscripts were found in the last 200 years!* Recent discoveries of older manuscripts (esp. the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Codex Sinaiticus) have helped scholars get *closer* to the original text of the Bible, so that modern translations can be more accurate than medieval ones.
- ✦ *The meanings of some biblical texts are unknown or uncertain!* Some Hebrew or Greek words occur only once in the Bible, but nowhere else in ancient literature, so their exact meanings are unknown; and some biblical phrases are ambiguous, with more than one possible meaning.
- ✦ *Ancient languages are very different from modern languages!* Not only do Ancient Hebrew and Greek use completely different alphabets and vocabularies, but their grammatical rules and structures (word order, prepositions, conjugations of verbs, etc.) are very different from modern English.
- ✦ *Every "translation" is already inevitably an "interpretation"!* Anyone who knows more than one modern language realizes that "translations" often have meanings that are slightly different from the original, and that different people inevitably translate the same texts in slightly different ways.
- ✦ *All living languages continually change and develop over time!* Not only is "Modern English" very different from 16th century English, but the language used in Great Britain, America, Australia, and other countries are slightly different from each other (in spelling, grammar, idioms, word meanings, etc.).
- ✦ *Cultural developments require new sensitivities in language!* Recent awareness of the evils of racism, sexism, anti-Semitism, and other forms of discrimination have shown that certain language is slanted or biased, with corresponding efforts to develop more "inclusive" language alternatives.

Thus, *no translation is "perfect"* (none of them can be completely "literal" or 100% identical to the original texts) and *there is no "best" translation* (all of them have some advantages and some drawbacks). *In general*, however, the most recent translations (1980's or 1990's) are better than the older ones (esp. the KJV or the Douay-Rheims, both about 400 years old), not only since the English language has changed significantly over the centuries, but more importantly because of the ancient biblical manuscripts that have been discovered in the last 50 to 150 years which are much older (and thus closer to the originals) than the manuscripts that were available to the translators of previous centuries.

Translation Philosophies:

There are two basic philosophies or styles of *translation*, "formal correspondence" and "dynamic equivalence." Other popular versions of the Bible in English are *not* really "translations" but are "paraphrases" instead.

- ✦ "Formal Correspondence Translations" try to stick as closely as possible to the original wording and word-order of the Hebrew and Greek texts. Thus they may seem more accurate or "literal," but often require detailed explanations in footnotes to avoid being misinterpreted by modern readers. They are good for in-depth academic study of the Bible, but may be less suited for public proclamation, since they can be difficult to understand when heard or read aloud.
- ✦ "Dynamic Equivalence Translations" try to put the sense of the original text into the best modern English, remaining close to the ideas expressed but not always following the exact wording or word-order of the Hebrew or Greek originals. Thus they may seem less "literal" than the formal

correspondence translations, but can be just as "faithful" to the original text, and are therefore generally better suited for public proclamation or liturgical use.

- "Biblical Paraphrases" are *not* (and do not even claim to be) accurate translations, although they are usually still called "Bibles." These popular books (esp. those intended for children or teenagers, or the "Living Bible" of 1971) not only condense and/or omit much of the material, but they freely change the wording of the original texts to make the stories easier to understand and/or more "relevant" for their intended readers.

For example, the system of measuring time in ancient Israel was very different from our own. They counted twelve hours from sunrise to sundown, and subdivided the night into three (or sometimes four) "watches." Thus the same time that is called "the eleventh hour" in a formal correspondence translation would be translated "five o'clock in the afternoon" in a dynamic equivalence version (and might simply say "in the late afternoon" in a biblical paraphrase).

For more explanation of the difference between "formal correspondence" and "dynamic equivalence" translations of the Bible, see chapter 3, "Translations," in Daniel J. Harrington, *Interpreting the New Testament*. Many of the translations discussed by Harrington have been revised since his book was published, so the following chart gives some updated information:

Older Translations:	Updated Translations:
Douay-Rheims (no abbrev. - 1582 NT; 1609-10 OT)	(some revisions 1749 and 1941, but no recent revision)
King James Version (KJV - 1611)	New King James Version (NKJV - 1979-82)
Revised Standard Version (RSV - 1946 NT; 1952 OT)	New Revised Standard Version (NRSV - 1989)
Amplified Bible (AB - 1958 NT; 1964-65 OT)	(combined edition reprinted in 1987, but not revised)
New English Bible (NEB - 1961)	Revised English Bible (REB - 1992)
Today's English Version (TEV - 1966)	Contemporary English Version (CEV - 1996)
Jerusalem Bible (JB - 1966)	New Jerusalem Bible (NJB - 1985)
New American Bible (NAB - 1970)	(only the NT & Psalms revised so far - 1987)
New International Version (NIV - 1973 NT; 1978 OT)	(not yet revised)

Since there are over 500 different English translations of the Bible, the above chart lists only a few of the most popular or important ones. For more information about these and many other English translations, see the webpage [About the Bible](#), from the Canadian Bible Society; or the series of articles, "[The History of the English Bible](#)," from Bible.org.

Translations grouped by "Translation Philosophy":

- "Formal Correspondence" translations: Douay-Rheims, KJV/NKJV, RSV/NRSV, NAB, NIV
- "Dynamic Equivalence" translations: NEB/REB, TEV/CEV, JB/NJB
- The "Amplified Bible" is neither; it is not really a "translation" at all; rather, it "amplifies" the text by adding many extra words & phrases not found in the original Hebrew or Greek texts.

Translations sponsored/approved by various Churches:

- ✦ *"Catholic" translations:* Douay-Rheims, JB/NJB, NAB
- ✦ *"Protestant" translations:* KJV/NKJV, TEV/CEV, NIV
- ✦ *"Ecumenical" translations* (approved and used by *both* Catholics and Protestants): NEB/REB, RSV/NRSV
- ✦ There are also several good *"Jewish"* translations of the *Hebrew Bible*, but these usually do *not* contain the New Testament.
(An exception is the so-called *"Jewish New Testament,"* which is a modern Jewish translation of the New Testament).

Translations vs. Editions:

- ✦ Bible publishers not only have to choose a particular *translation* of the biblical text, but they usually also *add* various materials for academic study, group discussion, or pastoral application, such as:
 - introductions, chapter & paragraph headings, footnotes and/or endnotes, cross-references, and appendices with maps, glossaries, reflection questions, etc.
- ✦ So, be careful to distinguish between the names of the Bible *translation* and of the particular *edition* you are using;
 - for example, the *Oxford Annotated Bible* (edition) is based on the RSV (translation), the *Catholic Study Bible* uses the NAB translation, the *HarperCollins Study Bible* uses the NRSV, and so forth!
- ✦ The *same translation* of the Bible may be published in a variety of *different editions* by the same or different publishers.
 - A *"Reader's Edition"* contains a translation of the biblical text itself, with very little other material added.
 - A *"Study Edition"* not only contains a particular translation of the Bible, but adds other materials, as listed above.
 - A *"Catholic Edition"* contains the Deuterocanonical books (Tobit, Judith, 1 & 2 Macabbees, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch) intermingled with the rest of the OT books in the traditional/canonical order accepted by the Roman Catholic Church.
 - An *"Ecumenical Edition"* sometimes contains the seven deuterocanonical books (called *"The Apocrypha"* by Protestants), but in a separate section between the OT and the NT (or after the NT).
 - A *"Protestant Edition"* usually omits *"The Apocrypha"* entirely.

Additional Notes:

- ✦ The Authorized Version (AV) is another name for the KJV; the Good News Bible (GNB) is exactly the same as TEV.
- ✦ If you use other translations, try to find out *when* they were translated, by whom, and what translation philosophy was used.
- ✦ For academic study of the Bible by anyone who does not know Hebrew or Greek, it is good to *compare at least three or four different modern translations*; you'll probably find it interesting and helpful to use at least one *"dynamic equivalence"* and one *"formal correspondence"* translation.
- ✦ The following convenient editions containing multiple translations are available in most good academic and pastoral libraries:
 - *The Complete Parallel Bible*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993. - contains NRSV, REB, NAB, NJB

- *The Precise Parallel New Testament*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995. - contains the Greek NT, KJV, Douay-Rheims, AB, NIV, NRSV, NAB, NASB.

CORE ESSENTIALS OF HEBRAIC/BIBLICAL/PROPHETIC RELIGION

common to all versions (Nolan)

1. GOD OR ULTIMATE REALITY

- a. God is "Someone" characterized by purposeful acts; God is a caring intelligence whose actions include creating, self-disclosing, and empowering.
- b. Though personal, God is not confined to mortal limitations.
- c. God, whose names include Yahweh, is the only God.
- d. In the Bible God is involved in history, yet sovereign.

2. THE UNIVERSE

- a. The universe, the visible and the invisible (including time/history) is real.
- b. The universe is created good.

3. HUMAN NATURE

- a. Human nature, endowed with the capacity for intelligent, purposeful and caring acts, is fundamentally good.
- b. Certain Greek philosophical reflections view human nature as having become inherently sinful.
- c. Human beings, whether sinful inherently or by choice, are in need of radical, realigning salvation.
- d. Human nature is social or corporate, not individualistic.
- e. Persons have been/are interpreted in various ways, including as
 - i. an animated, organic unity which dies (ancient biblical).
 - ii. a being with a body and a transfigurable ego.
 - iii. a resurrectable being.
 - iv. a body and an immortal soul. [under Greek philosophical influence]
- f. Life-after-death is interpreted in various ways, including as
 - i. not expected.
 - ii. not automatic; it must be deserved.
 - iii. automatic with possibilities of:
 - a. heaven, purgatory, hell.
 - b. continued growth toward greater communion with God.
 - iv. particular (individually when death occurs) and general (corporately at the end of the world).

4. RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE

- a. Human beings can grow in their understanding of God's purposes for humanity by comprehending the meaning of the:
 - i. Hebrew Scriptures (Judaism).
 - ii. Old and New Testaments (Christianity)
- b. Continuing sources or religious knowledge vary [revelation, not introspective enlightenment]

5. CONSEQUENCES FOR LIVING

- a. The purpose of life for humanity is covenant living as God's accountable guests, as "children of God."

[understandings and applications of the covenant vary]

b. Distinctively Christian: Jesus, the Risen Lord and Christ, embodies and exemplifies God’s purpose for humanity.

chart below from

<http://www.threetwoone.org/diagrams/bible-editions-timeline.gif>

