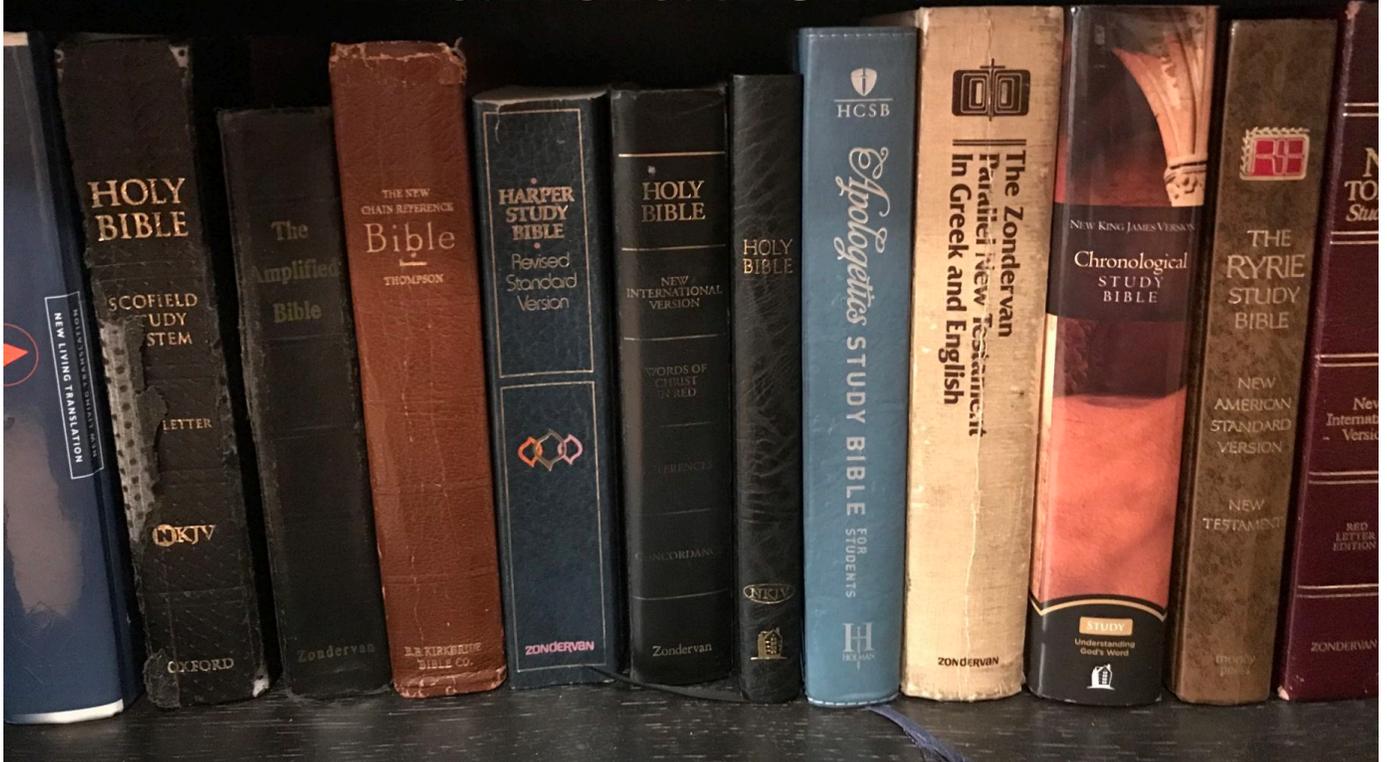


Can I Trust My Bible Translation?



By

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Part One

Many years ago we wrote a series titled *Can I Trust The Bible?* and published the 30-part series in six eBooks. You'll find them listed at the top of our [Free Apologetics eBooks](#) webpage.

Our conclusion to the question, *Can I Trust The Bible?*, is a resounding YES! However, that **yes** is based on the particular view of the Holy Bible as containing 66 Books in two divisions: Old and New Testaments. We did not find that the apocryphal books passed the test of Inspiration by the Holy Spirit. You can read [Part 4 of our study](#) to see more about why we reached that conclusion.

What we would like to do now is ask and answer another important question: *Can I Trust My Bible Translation?* We will be looking specifically at English translations in this series and some of the more popular paraphrases.

How Many English Translations?

The American Bible Society estimates “the number of printed English translations and paraphrases of the Bible, whether complete or not, is about 900.” (ABS, 2009) I’ve seen other estimates that are half that number (approx. 450), but we get the point. There are a lot of English translations and paraphrases of the Bible.

What’s the difference between a translation and a paraphrase?

Translation

A ‘translation’ is “the activity or process of changing the words of one language into the words in another language that have the same meaning.” (Cambridge Dictionary)

The word ‘changing’ should give us some pause as we consider translating the Bible from its three original languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek) into English – or any other language for that matter. How can we know that when we read an English translation of the Bible we are getting a true understanding of the original language? How can we be sure that we’re ‘reading’ the same thing in English that the original readers thousands of years ago read in Hebrew, Aramaic or Greek?

The purpose of a translator should be to “accurately render the meaning of biblical texts from their original languages—Hebrew and Aramaic for the Old Testament, and Greek for the New Testament—into a ‘receptor language.’ Scholars and committees of scholars use the latest knowledge of ancient manuscripts to express accurately what the original authors of Scripture meant.” (*What About Bible Translations?* BibleGateway.com)

Some translators do that through a ‘word-for-word’ process (Formal Equivalence). Other translators do that through a ‘thought-for-thought’ process (Dynamic Equivalence). More on that in a few minutes.

Paraphrase

A ‘paraphrase’ is “to repeat something written or spoken using different words, esp. in a shorter and simpler form to make the meaning clearer.” (*Cambridge Dictionary*)

Again we see the idea of changing the original words to a ‘shorter and simpler form.’ That should also give us pause since we’re talking about someone shortening and simplifying the Bible to supposedly ‘make the meaning clearer.’

Says who? Who are these ‘translators’ and ‘paraphrasers’? Can we trust them to be accurate and unbiased in their work?

Translators

Every ‘translation’ of the Bible (or portions of the Bible) has at least one ‘translator.’

For example, Martin Luther translated the Bible from Hebrew and Greek into German. Luther used Erasmus’ 1519 edition of the Greek New Testament (*Textus Receptus*) for his translation of the New Testament. That was somewhat novel since the Church had used the Latin version of the Bible for centuries prior to Luther’s Bible. Even the German version of the Bible used during that time had come from the Latin version. However, Latin was not one of the original languages of the Bible, so Luther wisely used Greek for the New Testament and Hebrew for the Old Testament.

Luther established a ‘committee’ of theologians to help him translate the Old Testament from Hebrew. He even consulted Jewish rabbis to make sure of the accuracy of his German translation.

Paraphrasers

Every ‘paraphrase’ of the Bible (or portions of the Bible) has at least one ‘paraphraser.’

One example is *The Living Bible* paraphrase by Kenneth Taylor. It was published the same year I became a Christian (1971). Instead of using the original languages to ‘translate’ the Bible, Taylor used an English translation (1901 American Standard Version) to ‘paraphrase’ God’s Word. Taylor said

the paraphrase came from answering his children's questions about Bible verses. He paraphrased the Bible to help them understand the meaning and thought that would be something to share with other families.

Taylor later worked with a team of Hebrew and Greek scholars to revise *The Living Bible* and turn the former 'paraphrase' into a 'translation.' (1996, Holy Bible, *New Living Translation*)

Translation Types

Translators use two primary methods when translating the Bible –

1. Formal Equivalence
2. Dynamic Equivalence

Formal Equivalence

This is a word-for-word translation and is sometimes called a 'literal' translation. Translators look for a word in English that communicates the same idea as the Hebrew, Aramaic or Greek. *The English Standard Version* (ESV) is an example of a recent 'word-for-word' translation.

Dynamic Equivalence

This is a thought-for-thought translation and is sometimes called ‘functional’ equivalence. Translators attempt to capture the ‘meaning’ of the original language. *The New International Version* (NIV) is an example of a somewhat recent ‘thought-for-thought’ translation.

Optimal Equivalence

One other option for translators is to try to balance between word-for-word and thought-for-thought. *The Holman Christian Standard Bible* (HCSB) is an example of that type of translation.

Early English Translations

Translations of portions of the Bible into Old English began as early as the 7th century AD. Some of the earliest names of Old English translators include Venerable Bede, Caedmon, Aldhelm, and King Alfred the Great.

Translations of portions of the Bible into Middle English began as early as the 11th century AD. Some of the earliest names of Middle English translators include Orm of Lincolnshire, Richard Rolle, and John Wycliffe.

Wycliffe's Bible

Wycliffe translated the Bible from the Latin Vulgate into Middle English during the latter part of the 14th century AD. It is believed that Wycliffe did some of the translation for the New Testament and oversaw other translators for the rest of the Bible. Though a great thing for English-speaking people, the Catholic Church opposed Wycliffe's translation.

A Roman Catholic Synod at Oxford banned Wycliffe's Bible in 1408 AD and issued an edict against any unauthorized translation of the Bible into English. The Council of Constance (1415 AD) declared Wycliffe to be a heretic. The Church did its best to destroy all of the copies of Wycliffe's Bible, but more than 200 copies or revisions are believed to have survived. Most are in museums and libraries.

One of Wycliffe's primary beliefs after studying and teaching the Bible was that the Bible is the ultimate authority for Christians and not the Pope. Pope Martin V ordered Wycliffe's body exhumed and burned in 1428 AD. Wycliffe's opposition to papal authority explains why.

Tyndale's Bible

William Tyndale was born at the end of the 15th century (beginning of Early Modern English period) and trained in both Greek and Hebrew. He wanted to translate the Bible into English, but the 1408 edict was still in force. He traveled to Germany and learned Hebrew from Jewish rabbis. It was in Germany that Tyndale translated the Bible into English from Hebrew and

Greek. He completed the New Testament translation in 1525 AD. He later revised the translation using Erasmus' third edition of the Greek New Testament. It became the first English New Testament version translated from the Greek.

The Coverdale Bible

Myles Coverdale was an assistant of William Tyndale. He used Tyndale's Old Testament (what Tyndale finished before his death), Martin Luther's German Bible, and some Latin texts to complete the entire Bible in English. The Coverdale Bible became the first complete Bible to be printed in English (1535 AD). King Henry VIII gave Coverdale permission to translate and print.

Coverdale also moved the Apocryphal books from being 'inside' the Old Testament to being in an 'appendix' position at the end of the Old Testament.

Matthew's Bible

Matthew's Bible (written by John Rogers whose pen name was Thomas Matthew) was first seen in 1537 AD. Matthew combined Tyndale's New Testament with Tyndale's and Coverdale's Old Testament. Matthew also added about two-thousand notes to the Bible.

The Great Bible

King Henry VIII wanted a Bible that would be larger than Matthew's Bible and used in every church in England. Myles Coverdale, at the request of Lord Cromwell, prepared what became known as The Great Bible (based on its physical size). Coverdale included much from Matthew's Bible, except for Matthew's notes. Coverdale also finished translating the Old Testament.

The Geneva Bible

Mary Tudor became Queen of England in 1553 and returned the country to Catholicism. English Bibles were burned and many Protestants were persecuted and killed. Some scholars fled to Geneva, Switzerland and produced an English translation of the New Testament from Greek in 1557 (using Stephanus' fourth edition of the Greek NT). The Old Testament translation from Hebrew along with a revised New Testament was published in 1560 as *The Geneva Bible*. It was the Bible used by Shakespeare and the Puritans.

The Bishop's Bible

The Bishop's Bible of 1568 was a revision of Tyndale's Bible, produced by bishops. It was not very popular (final printing in 1606 AD), but it became the primary Bible the King James translators were directed to use in their translation.

Part Two

Early Modern English Translations

We looked at the earliest English translations of the Bible and portions of the Bible in the [first part of our series](#). That included Old English, Middle English and Early Modern English translations. Some of the translations came from the Latin Vulgate. Other translations came from Greek and Hebrew copies of Scripture.

The Early Modern English period began in the late 15th century AD and continued until the early 18th century. It coincides with the Tudor and Stuart dynasties in England.

We've already looked at Wycliffe's Bible, Tyndale's Bible, The Coverdale Bible, Matthew's Bible, The Great Bible, The Geneva Bible and The Bishop's Bible. We turn next to what may be the greatest of the Early Modern English Bibles, the King James Bible.

The King James Bible

James Charles Stuart was born in 1566 to Mary, Queen of Scots. He was also the great-great-grandson of Henry VII, King of England and Lord of Ireland. James succeeded to the Scottish throne when he was just 13-months old and gained control of his government in 1583 (several regents governed for James while he was a child). He succeeded Queen Elizabeth I, the last of the Tudors, since she died childless. That gave King James rule over Scotland, England and Ireland until his death in 1625.

King James met with a conference of church leaders in 1604 AD and asked that the English Bible be revised because some of the existing translations “were corrupt and not answerable to the truth of the original.” (Britannica.com) James approved a list of 54 ‘revisers’ who were organized into six groups. The archbishop of Canterbury oversaw the translation process. They published the new Bible in 1611 AD.

The groups used extant English-language translations along with a partial Tyndale translation and Jewish commentaries to help them in translating Old and New Testament. The Greek text they used is known as ‘Textus Receptus’ (Latin for ‘received text’). The translators relied on three Greek scholars in making the New Testament translation: Desiderius Erasmus, Theodore Beza and Robert Estienne (Latin name – Stephanus). Each man used a small number of available Greek manuscripts to build their copy of the Greek New Testament, which the King James Bible translators used as sources for their work.

[You can read the translators introduction to the 1611 version by [clicking here.](#)]

The King James Bible included the Apocrypha in the 1611 printing in a special section between the Old and New Testament. Several apocryphal books were part of the King James Bible until 1885 AD (almost 275 years). The King James Bible has also gone through many spelling, punctuation and wording changes since the original 1611 version.

The King James Bible, also called the King James Version (KJV) and Authorized Version (AV) became the standard English Bible from the middle of the 17th century to the early part of the 20th century. It continues to be the choice of many English-speaking Christians to this day.

The KJV is a Formal Equivalence translation (word-for-word).

Late Modern English Translations

The term ‘Late Modern English’ (also known as ‘Modern English’) is believed to have come about because of the Industrial Revolution and the rise of the British Empire in the 18th and 19th centuries. Colonialism had a huge impact on the English language as did the ‘New World’ that became the United States of America. Thomas Jefferson is quoted as writing this in a letter in 1813 – “The new circumstances under which we are placed call for new words, new phrases, and for the transfer of old words to new objects. An American dialect will therefore be formed”. ([The History of English](#))

The transition from Early Modern English to Late Modern English also had an impact on Bible translations.

English Revised Version

Translators in England attempted to revise the King James Version in the late 19th century. It was called the *English Revised Version* (ERV). Translators referenced *The New Testament in the Original Greek* by Westcott and Hort and *The Greek New Testament* by Samuel Tregelles.

The New Testament portion of the ERV was published in 1881 and titled – *The New Testament of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, Translated out of the Greek: Being the Version Set Forth A.D. 1611, Compared with the Most Ancient Authorities and Revised, A.D. 1881*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1881). The Old Testament portion of the ERV was published in 1885. The entire ERV was titled – *The Holy Bible containing the Old and New Testaments translated out of the original tongues : being the version set forth A.D. 1611 compared with the most ancient authorities and revised*. Oxford: University Press, 1885. 4 vols. The Apocrypha was added to the 1885 version.

The American Revision (also known as American Standard Version – ASV) was published in 1901 and titled – *The Holy Bible, Containing the Old and New Testaments, Translated out of the Original Tongues, Being the Version Set Forth A.D. 1611, Compared with the Most Ancient Authorities and Revised A.D. 1881-1885, Newly Edited by the American Revision*

Committee A.D. 1901, Standard Edition. New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1901.

The RSV and ASV are Formal Equivalence translations (word-for-word).

The *American Standard Version* became the basis of four later revisions:

- *Amplified Bible*, 1965
- *Revised Standard Version*, 1971
- *Recovery Version*, 1999
- *World English Bible*, 2000

The ASV was also the basis for Kenneth Taylor's 'Living Bible' paraphrase (1971).

The Amplified Bible

I became a Christian out of atheism, so my parents asked their pastor what Bible he would recommend for me to read. He recommended they get me *The Amplified Bible* and they did less than a month after I became a Christian. It was my first Bible (post-atheism) and helped me immensely as I studied to understand God and His Word.

I still use *The Amplified Bible* in my study from Greek and Hebrew. The version I have was copyrighted in 1965 and is now called *The Amplified Bible Classic Edition* (AMPC). The Lockman Foundation published *The Amplified Gospel of John* in 1954. Lockman and Zondervan published *The*

Amplified New Testament in 1958 and *The Amplified Old Testament* in two parts (1962 and 1964). *The Amplified Bible* was first published in 1965.

A committee of qualified Hebrew and Greek scholars worked together to prepare a translation that includes explanatory alternate readings and amplifications along with word-for-word emphasis. The AMPC used multiple English word equivalents to each key Hebrew and Greek word to clarify and amplify the meaning of the original text.

“The AMPC is based on the American Standard Version of 1901, Rudolph Kittel’s *Biblia Hebraica*, the Greek text of Westcott and Hort, and the 23rd edition of the Nestle Greek New Testament as well as the best Hebrew and Greek lexicons available at the time. Cognate languages, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and other Greek works were also consulted. The Septuagint and other versions were compared for interpretation of textual differences. In completing the AMPC, translators made a determined effort to keep, as far as possible, the familiar wording of the earlier versions, and especially the feeling of the ancient Book.” Lockman Foundation, Version Information

I used *The Amplified Bible* along with the *King James Version* for many years in personal reading, study and teaching. I continue to use the 1965 version along with the updated 1985 AMPC and the 2015 AMP versions when comparing word definitions and meaning with original languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, Koine Greek).

New King James Version

Thomas Nelson Publishers commissioned a large group of Bible scholars, church leaders and lay Christians to update the vocabulary and grammar of the *King James Version* (KJV). The 130 translators spent seven years translating from Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek texts –

- Hebrew – *Biblia Hebraica* (with comparisons to the Ben Hayyim edition of the Mikraot Gedolot)
- Greek – *Textus Receptus*

The *New King James Version* (NKJV) came out in three phases –

1. New Testament, 1979
2. New Testament and Psalms, 1980
3. Complete Bible, 1982

The NKJV is a Formal Equivalence translation (word-for-word). *

*[The Preface to the *New King James Version* calls it a ‘Complete’ Equivalence Translation – “This principle of complete equivalence seeks to preserve all of the information in the text, while presenting it in good literary form.”]

English Standard Version

One of the more recent Bible translations in English that is also a Formal Equivalence translation (word-for-word) is the *English Standard Version* (ESV). The publishers (Crossway) state that the ESV “stands in the classic mainstream of English Bible translations over the past half-millennium. The fountainhead of that stream was William Tyndale’s New Testament of 1526; marking its course were the *King James Version* of 1611 (KJV), the *English Revised Version* of 1885 (RV), the *American Standard Version* of 1901 (ASV), and the *Revised Standard Version* of 1952 and 1971 (RSV).”

The ESV publishing team was made up of more than 100 people, including 14 members of a translation oversight committee, more than 50 translation review scholars, and more than 50 members of an advisory committee. The ESV translation is based on the Masoretic text found in *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* for the Old Testament and on the UBS/Nestle-Aland 28th edition for the New Testament.

You can read the Preface to the *English Standard Version* by [clicking here](#).

Part Three

Which translation or paraphrase of the Bible do you use most often? Can you trust it? Can you trust that the words you read are accurate to the words and meaning from the original languages of the Bible?

That is the question we are asking in this series of studies and it is an important question. Satan tested Jesus in the wilderness and said, “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.” Jesus responded by saying, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’” (Matthew 4:3-4)

Jesus quoted Moses from Deuteronomy 8:3 –

“So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord.”

If God wants us to ‘live’ by His ‘every’ Word, then we must be sure that what we’re calling God’s Word is accurate to the original texts. Much is at stake for us and the people we influence.

Dynamic Equivalence Translations

In the last part of our study, we looked at the history of Modern English versions of the Bible that are Formal Equivalence translations (word-for-word). We will look at Dynamic Equivalence translations (thought-for-thought) in this part of our series.

Dynamic Equivalence is sometimes called ‘functional equivalence’. Translators attempt to capture the ‘meaning’ of the original language. The New International Version (NIV) is one example of a somewhat recent ‘thought-for-thought’ translation.

New International Version

The idea for the new translation of the Bible began with Howard Long, an engineer from Seattle. He loved the King James Version but found using it to share the Gospel with people difficult because of the difference in English words from the 17th to 20th centuries. That led to a ten-year quest on his part for a new Bible translation. Long’s denomination, the Christian Reformed Church, and the National Association of Evangelicals supported Long’s vision and the process began in 1965.

The New York Bible Society sponsored the project. Scores of scholars from a variety of Christian denominations worked in groups for several years to translate the Bible from the original languages. The New Testament was published in 1973 and the full Bible in 1978. Revisions were published in 1984 and 2011.

“The first concern of the translators has been the accuracy of the translation and its fidelity to the thought of the Biblical writers. They have weighed the significance of the lexical and grammatical details of the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts. At the same time, they have striven for more than a word-for-word translation. Because thought patterns and syntax differ from language to language, faithful communication of the meaning of the writers of the Bible demands frequent modifications in sentence structure and constant regard for the contextual meaning of words.” Preface to the New International Version, 1984

New Living Translation

The New Living Translation began as an effort to revise The Living Bible paraphrase, but evolved into a new English translation from the original languages. The first edition was published in 1996 with revisions in 2004, 2007, 2013 and 2015.

“The translators of the New Living Translation set out to render the message of the original texts of Scripture into clear, contemporary English. As they did so, they kept the concerns of both formal-equivalence and dynamic-equivalence in mind. On the one hand, they translated as simply and literally as possible when that approach yielded an accurate, clear, and natural English text. Many words and phrases were rendered literally and consistently into English, preserving essential literary and rhetorical devices, ancient metaphors, and word choices that give structure to the text and provide echoes of meaning from one passage to the next.

On the other hand, the translators rendered the message more dynamically when the literal rendering was hard to understand, was misleading, or yielded archaic or foreign wording. They clarified difficult metaphors and terms to aid in the reader's understanding. The translators first struggled with the meaning of the words and phrases in the ancient context; then they rendered the message into clear, natural English. Their goal was to be both faithful to the ancient texts and eminently readable. The result is a translation that is both exegetically accurate and idiomatically powerful." New Living Translation, Tyndale

Other Bible translations that would be considered Dynamic Equivalence are

—

- Amplified Bible (1965)
- Confraternity Bible (1969)
- Good News Bible (1966, 2001)
- Modern Language Bible (1969)
- New American Bible (1970)
- New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures (1961)
- Today's New International Version (2005)

Optimal Equivalence

Optimal Equivalence is a blending of both Formal Equivalence and Dynamic Equivalence. One example is the Holman Christian Standard Bible.

“The CSB follows a translation philosophy called ‘optimal equivalence.’ The term conveys a commitment to both “formal equivalence” (which recognizes the importance of the form of the original language text—that is, the words used and the grammatical and rhetorical structures) and ‘functional equivalence’ (which recognizes the importance of conveying the original message and intent in natural English readily understood by modern readers).” Christian Standard Bible, Holman Bible Publishers

Comparing Translations

One of the best ways to compare translations is by selecting Scripture portions from the different types. We'll compare the NKJV (Formal Equivalence) with the NIV (Dynamic Equivalence) and CSB (Optimal Equivalence) to see how each one translates well-known Bible verses.

John 3:16

NKJV – “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

NIV – “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

CSB – “For God loved the world in this way: He gave His One and Only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.”

Psalm 23:1

NKJV – “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.”

NIV – “The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.”

CSB – “The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I lack.”

John 1:1-5

NKJV – “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.”

NIV – “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”

CSB – “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. All things were created through him, and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. That light shines in the darkness, and yet the darkness did not overcome it.”

Isaiah 53:1-3

NKJV – “Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, And as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; And when we see Him, There is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.”

NIV – “Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.”

CSB – “Who has believed what we have heard? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? He grew up before him like a young plant and like a root out of dry ground. He didn’t have an impressive form or majesty that we should look at him, no appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of suffering who knew what sickness was. He was like someone people turned away from; he was despised, and we didn’t value him.

Romans 8:37-39

NKJV – “Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

NIV – “No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

CSB – “No, in all these things we are more than victorious through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that not even death or life, angels or rulers, things present or things to come, hostile powers, height or depth, or any other created thing will have the power to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord!”

Revelation 21:1-2

NKJV – “Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

NIV – “Then I saw ‘a new heaven and a new earth,’ for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.”

CSB – “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea no longer existed. I also saw the Holy City, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared like a bride adorned for her husband.”

Personal Preference

My personal preference is to read the Bible from a Formal Equivalence version (e.g. KJV, NKJV, ESV). I like to study from the Hebrew and Greek, then compare the original languages to both Formal and Dynamic versions to see how they read.

Remember that versions like KJV, NKJV, NASB and ESV are 'word-for-word' translations. Versions like NIV, CSB, GNB and NLT are 'thought-for-thought'.

If you would like to learn more about Bible Study methods, [please click here](#).

Part Four

Can you trust your Bible translation? That is the question we're answering in this special Bible study series. If we can't trust a Bible translation, we can't trust the observations and applications we make to our beliefs and practices.

We have looked at Bible translations in previous parts of this series, so we now want to look at Bible paraphrases.

Bible Paraphrases

Can we trust that what we read in paraphrases of the Bible is accurate to the original text of the Bible? Let's begin answering that question by defining what we mean by 'paraphrase.'

“a restatement of a text, passage, or work giving the meaning in another form” Merriam-Webster Dictionary

“to state something written or spoken in different words, esp. in a shorter and simpler form to make the meaning clearer” Cambridge English Dictionary

We can think of a paraphrase of a Bible verse being like a short commentary on that verse. The ‘paraphraser’ tells you what they think the verse means. It’s their ‘take’ on what the verse means. They might be right .. they might be wrong. That is one of the challenges with trusting a paraphrase of the Bible.

One of the first English paraphrases was *A Paraphrase and Annotations upon all the Books of the New Testament* by Henry Hammond in the 17th century AD. More recent paraphrases include –

- *The New Testament in Modern English* by J.B. Phillips (also known as the *J.B. Phillips New Testament*)
- *The Letters of Paul: An Expanded Paraphrase* by F.F. Bruce
- *An Expanded Translation of the Greek New Testament* by Kenneth Wuest
- *The Living Bible* by Kenneth Taylor
- *The Message* by Eugene Peterson
- *The Passion Translation* by Brian Simmons **

[** Though *The Passion Translation* is called a translation, Simmons also adds many of his own perspectives to a passage translated from the Hebrew and Greek. That’s why I included *The Passion Translation* in our section about paraphrases. It is one paraphrase we recommend Christians not use for reasons explained in the reference information at the end of this eBook.]

Who Wrote It?

So, how do you determine whether a Bible paraphrase is good to use for personal reading/study or for group or church reading/study? Ask and answer a basic question – who wrote it?

A modern English Bible translation is usually done by a group of scholars. You can look at who they're affiliated with (e.g. denominations), what texts they use for Hebrew and Greek, and their process for translation.

A modern paraphrase is often written by one person. You can look at who they are, who they're affiliated with, what texts they use for Hebrew and Greek (if they use original languages) or what English versions of the Bible they use, and their process for paraphrasing.

Also ask questions about the paraphraser's theological background. Are they theologically conservative, moderate, liberal? Do they have any strong connections with groups or movements that might cause concern about how they might paraphrase the Bible?

Comparing Paraphrases

Let's compare some of the paraphrases using well-known Bible verses. We'll first show you the verse or verses from the *New King James Version* (Formal Equivalence translation – word-for-word), then show examples of two or three paraphrases. Look for where the 'paraphraser' changed words, meaning of words, and added words to the word-for-word translation.

Psalm 18:1 –

New King James Version – “I will love You, O Lord, my strength.”

The Message – “I love you, God—you make me strong. God is bedrock under my feet, the castle in which I live, my rescuing knight. My God—the high crag where I run for dear life, hiding behind the boulders, safe in the granite hideout.

The Passion Translation – “Lord, I passionately love you and I'm bonded to you, for now you've become my power!”

Luke 1:37

New King James Version – “For with God nothing will be impossible.”

The Message – “Nothing, you see, is impossible with God.”

The Passion Translation – “For no promise of God can fail to be fulfilled.”

J.B. Phillips New Testament – “For no promise of God can fail to be fulfilled.”

Psalm 19:1-2

New King James Version – “The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, And night unto night reveals knowledge.”

The Message – “God’s glory is on tour in the skies, God-craft on exhibit across the horizon. Madame Day holds classes every morning, Professor Night lectures each evening.”

The Passion Translation – “God’s splendor is a tale that is told; his testament is written in the stars. Space itself speaks his story every day through the marvels of the heavens. His truth is on tour in the starry vault of the sky, showing his skill in creation’s

craftsmanship. Each day gushes out its message to the next, night with night whispering its knowledge to all.”

Mark 1:15

New King James Version – “and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.’”

The Message – “Time’s up! God’s kingdom is here. Change your life and believe the Message.”

The Passion Translation – “His message was this: ‘At last the fulfillment of the age has come! It is time for the realm of God’s kingdom to be experienced in its fullness! Turn your lives back to God and put your trust in the hope-filled gospel!’”

J.B. Phillips New Testament – “saying, ‘The time has come at last—the kingdom of God has arrived. You must change your hearts and minds and believe the good news.’”

Matthew 6:9-13

New King James Version – “In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.”

The Message – “With a God like this loving you, you can pray very simply. Like this: Our Father in heaven, Reveal who you are. Set the world right; Do what’s best—as above, so below. Keep us alive with three square meals. Keep us forgiven with you and forgiving others. Keep us safe from ourselves and the Devil. You’re in charge! You can do anything you want! You’re ablaze in beauty! Yes. Yes. Yes.”

The Passion Translation – “Pray like this: ‘Our Father, dwelling in the heavenly realms, may the glory of your name be the center on which our lives turn. Manifest your kingdom realm, and cause your every purpose to be fulfilled on earth, just as it is fulfilled in heaven. We acknowledge you as our Provider of all we need each day. Forgive us the wrongs we have done as we ourselves release forgiveness to those who have wronged us. Rescue us every time we face tribulation and set us free from evil. For you are the King who rules with power and glory forever. Amen.’”

J.B. Phillips New Testament – “Pray then like this—‘Our Heavenly Father, may your name be honoured; May your kingdom come, and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day the bread we need, Forgive us what we owe to you, as we have also forgiven those who owe anything to us. Keep us clear of temptation, and save us from evil’.”

Galatians 2:15-21

New King James Version – “We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified. ‘But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is Christ therefore a minister of sin? Certainly not! For if I build again those things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.”

The Message – “We Jews know that we have no advantage of birth over ‘non-Jewish sinners.’ We know very well that we are not set right with God by rule-keeping but only through personal faith in Jesus Christ. How do we know? We tried it—and we had the best system of rules the world has ever seen! Convinced that no human being can please God by self-improvement, we believed in Jesus as the Messiah so that we might be set right before God by trusting in the Messiah, not by trying to be good. Have some of you noticed that we are not yet perfect? (No great surprise, right?) And are you ready to make the accusation that since people like me, who go through Christ in order to get things right with God, aren’t perfectly virtuous, Christ must therefore be an accessory to sin? The accusation is frivolous. If I was ‘trying to be good,’ I would be rebuilding the same old barn that I tore down. I would be acting as a charlatan. What actually took place is this: I tried keeping rules and working my head off to please God, and it didn’t work. So I quit being a “law man” so that I could be God’s man. Christ’s life showed me how, and enabled me to do it. I identified myself completely with him. Indeed, I have been crucified with Christ. My ego is no longer central. It is no longer important that I appear righteous before you or have your good opinion, and I am no longer driven to impress God. Christ lives in me. The life you see me living is not ‘mine,’ but it is lived by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I am not going to go back on that. Is it not clear to you that to go back to that old rule-keeping, peer-pleasing religion would be an abandonment of everything personal and free in my relationship with God? I refuse to do that, to repudiate God’s

grace. If a living relationship with God could come by rule-keeping, then Christ died unnecessarily.”

The Passion Translation – “Although we’re Jews by birth and not non-Jewish ‘sinners,’ we know full well that we don’t receive God’s perfect righteousness as a reward for keeping the law, but by the faith of Jesus, the Messiah! His faithfulness, not ours, has saved us, and we have received God’s perfect righteousness. Now we know that God accepts no one by the keeping of religious laws! ‘If we are those who desire to be saved from our sins through our union with the Anointed One, does that mean our Messiah promotes our sins if we still acknowledge that we are sinners? How absurd! For if I start over and reconstruct the old religious system that I have torn down with the message of grace, I will appear to be one who turns his back on the truth. ‘But because the Messiah lives in me, I’ve now died to the law’s dominion over me so that I can live for God. ‘My old identity has been co-crucified with Messiah and no longer lives; for the nails of his cross crucified me with him. And now the essence of this new life is no longer mine, for the Anointed One lives his life through me—we live in union as one! My new life is empowered by the faith of the Son of God who loves me so much that he gave himself for me, and dispenses his life into mine! ‘So that is why I don’t view God’s grace as something minor or peripheral. For if keeping the law could release God’s righteousness to us, the Anointed One would have died for nothing.”

J.B. Phillips New Testament – “And then I went on to explain that we, who are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners, know that a man is justified not by performing what the Law commands but by faith in Jesus Christ. We ourselves are justified by our faith and not by our obedience to the Law, for we have recognised that no one can achieve justification by doing the ‘works of the Law’. Now if, as we seek the real truth about justification, we find we are as much sinners as the Gentiles, does that mean that Christ makes us sinners? Of course not! But if I attempt to build again the whole structure of justification by the Law then I do, in earnest, make myself a sinner. For under the Law I ‘died’, and now I am dead to the Law’s demands so that I may live for God. As far as the Law is concerned I may consider that I died on the cross with Christ. And my present life is not that of the old ‘I’, but the living Christ within me. The bodily life I now live, I live believing in the Son of God, who loved me and sacrificed himself for me. Consequently I refuse to stultify the grace of God by reverting to the Law. For if righteousness were possible under the Law then Christ died for nothing!”

Personal Preference

I rarely use a paraphrase of the Bible unless it can add to my understanding of the original text. One exception is Dr. Kenneth Wuest's *An Expanded Translation of the Greek New Testament*. Dr. Wuest was a professor of Greek at the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago – well-known for his *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament* as well as his *Expanded Translation of the New Testament*. It is really more of a literal translation than a paraphrase, but some call it a paraphrase.

There is a disturbing trend within Christian ministry to use paraphrases in place of translations or to prefer them over translations. That is, in my opinion, a big mistake. Adding what a paraphraser wrote (if you can trust them) after reading and teaching from a good translation would be okay as long as people listening understood that the paraphrase is how one person views the meaning of a passage. The qualifications of that one person might also be explained so listeners can determine how much trust they want to place in the paraphrase.

My recommendation is for preachers and teachers not to use paraphrases in public preaching and teaching. What a preacher or teacher says or quotes from gives credibility to what or who he quotes. Leading Christians and unbelievers in an audience to think of paraphrases as on par with good translations is misleading and can be dangerous if people depend, as too many do, on paraphrases instead of translations.

For Further Reading

[Concerns About The Passion Translation](#)

[Questions About The Passion Translation](#)

[Views on the Message](#)

[Concerns About The Message](#)

[Don't Use The Passion Translation](#) (Excellent Podcast)

Part Five

I hope you have found this series about Bible translations helpful. It is not my intention to tell Christians what Bible versions they should or should not use. What I do want to do is help brothers and sisters in Christ determine for themselves which translation or translations of the Bible will be best for them to use in reading and study of God's Word.

Our Guiding Principles

“So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord.”
Deuteronomy 8:3

“Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, ‘If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.’ But He answered and said, ‘It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’” Matthew 4:3-4

“For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” Hebrews 4:12

“In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.” Ephesians 1:13-14

“... above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” Ephesians 6:16-17

- Christians should live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God
- The Word of God is living and powerful
- The Word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword and pierces even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow
- The Word of God is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart
- The Word of God is the Gospel of our salvation
- The Word of God is the sword of the Spirit

These are our guiding principles when we decide which Bible translation to trust. Its importance is of the highest value we can imagine. There is nothing more important than getting this right. We cannot mess this up; there's too much at stake.

Summary

Selecting the best Bible translation means knowing who translated it and how they did it.

- What Hebrew and Greek texts did translators use? Are those texts the best for the translation task? Are there any reasons to doubt the texts are accurate?
- Were the translators qualified to translate from Hebrew and Greek? Did they handle the translation in a professional and accurate manner? Are there any reasons to doubt the translators?
- Was there any bias toward a particular view of Scripture that would have led translators to change words and meaning in the Bible for the purpose of leading people away from the truth of God's Word? Was that bias toward a liberal view of Scripture one that would deny essential truths of Christianity?

Because of the importance of deciding the best translation for ourselves, for our family, for our small group, for our church – we need to get good answers to these questions. Selecting a Bible translation is too important not to do that.

We have seen during this series some of the differences among English translations of the Bible. Remember that some translations are word-for-word (Formal Equivalence) and some are thought-for-thought (Dynamic Equivalence).

Conclusion

English-speaking Christians have many, many translations available to them. So, how do we choose which one(s) to use? It depends on how you're going to use the translation. Is it for personal reading? To take to church to follow along with your pastor? Is it for personal Bible study? Group Bible study?

You may want to consider using a word-for-word translation as your primary Bible. While some Christians will use only the King James Version, the New King James Version and English Standard Version are examples you may want to consider as well.

You may also want to use a thought-for-thought translation during Bible study to see how translators express the meaning for each verse. The New International Version and Holman Christian Standard Bible are examples you may want to consider. You can compare how a thought-for-thought version compares to your primary word-for-word version.

If you are interested in using original languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek) in your Bible study, you will find many books and online references available. Contact us at faithandselfdefense@gmail.com for original language reference recommendations.

We don't recommend the use of paraphrases.

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