

Translation

In order for God's Word to reach all nations (cf. Matthew 28:19) it must be translated. God validated the work of translation by using the Greek translation (the Septuagint) of the Old Testament extensively. If the New Testament can quote the Greek translation of the Old Testament then translations of the Bible are important. If people are going to understand the Word of God, then Bible translations are essential.

A brief overview of the history of Bible translation

The multitudes in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost included many different mother tongues. People like these throughout the empire would need the Scriptures in their own language. As time progressed such translations developed.

- The *Diatessaron* is a harmony of the four Gospels by Tatian written in Syriac. It dates from around 170 and was very popular among Syriac speaking Christians.
- Several Syriac versions of the Old and New Testament can be traced from as early as the second or third century. The Syriac versions were sometimes used as the text on which other translations were based.
- The Bible was translated into several Coptic (old Egyptian) versions dating from the fourth century.
- An Ethiopic translation of the New Testament was completed by the seventh century.
- Fragments of a Gothic (Germanic) translation date from the fifth and sixth centuries.
- An old Armenian translation, probably translated from Syriac, dates to the fifth century.
- Several other minor translations were produced after the fifth century, including Georgian, Arabic, Slavonic, etc.

Without a doubt, Jerome's Latin Vulgate was the greatest and most widely used translation of the New Testament for most of church history. The Vulgate was produced in response to several factors:

- Under the Roman Empire, the Latin language did not dominate the culture until centuries had passed. Latin was mostly used in the military and business world in Italy. However, as time went on Latin became more common. By the third century Latin succeeded Greek as being the language of the Western church.
- By the third century, several Old Latin translations were in circulation. Tertullian and Cyprian used an African based Latin version; Irenaeus and Novatian used a European based Latin version; and Augustine's version of the Latin New Testament was used predominantly in Italy.

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- In addition to the significant problem of no recognized authoritative Latin text, the texts that did exist were freely copied and recopied, formally and informally. Tertullian, for example, would write one of his many treatises and sometimes quote the African Latin version and sometimes make his own on-the-spot translation of the Greek text into Latin. This only led to more confusion.
- Also, multiple heresies had arisen and many based their teaching on their own Bible translation or canon. This problem increased the need for a standard Latin text.

The variety of Old Latin versions led Damasus, the bishop of Rome (366 - 384) to commission Jerome to make a revision in 382. He began the task immediately and finished his New Testament revision of the Old Latin in 398 and his Old Testament translation in 405. He cared little about the Old Testament Apocrypha and reluctantly made a hasty translation of only portions of it before his death. His successors inserted the Old Latin version of the Apocrypha into the Vulgate.

Jerome's Old Testament translation was very controversial. His work was opposed by Augustine and the large majority of church leaders because it was translated directly from the Hebrew Old Testament. Augustine held a popular view that the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, the Septuagint, was inspired by God and should be used.

However, Jerome's translation prevailed and was pivotal in the history of Bible translation. Jerome's Old Testament translation was not simply a revision of the Old Latin (like his New Testament) but an independent translation establishing the priority of working from the original language.

At the Council of Trent (1546 - 1563) the Vulgate was declared the standard text for the church. However, a problem remained. Over time, Jerome's Vulgate was copied and recopied with a total of over eight thousand extant manuscripts. This led to significant variations due to textual errors in copying. A papal commission was unable to solve the problem. In 1590 Pope Sixtus published his own edition. A later pope, Clement VIII (1592 - 1605), recalled all copies of the Sixtine edition and in 1604 a new version appeared, known today as the "Sixto-Clementine edition."

While the Vulgate remained predominate, the invention of the printing press combined with the Protestant Reformation, of the sixteenth century produced a renewed movement toward translating the Bible into the language of the people. For example, in 1522 Martin Luther produced a German New Testament translation in an amazing ten weeks while he was under arrest.

The current state of Bible translation

The total number of languages in which the Bible is available in part or in its entirety stands at 2,233 as of the year 2000. But this is still barely more than one third of the estimated 6,500 living languages in the world.

Most of the languages have not received the Bible in any portion or form never will. Some languages are dying out as younger people are learning other languages as their primary language. A Bible translation actually protects a language from dying since it puts the language in a written form, usually for the first time.

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Translations of the Bible in some portion are being produced at a remarkable rate of around one per week. At any given time, several hundred different projects are underway to translate the Bible into a specific language.

Recent estimates by Wycliffe Bible Translators number the world's languages at 6,809. Of these languages less than one-third have any portion of the Scriptures but they number 94% of the world population. About 380 million people speak a language with no Scripture. Only 371 or 5.5% of the world's languages have the entire Bible but they constitute over 76% of the world population. Many, if not most, of these language groups are either sufficiently bilingual or are becoming extinct. Wycliffe estimates at least 925 languages still require a translation team. Wycliffe estimates 1,500 languages currently have a team working on a Bible translation.

The Greek text used for translation

One fundamental decision that must be made when translating the New Testament is "which Greek text should be used?" The decision of the Greek text will have an affect on the translation. This was addressed under the subject of the transmission of the Bible.

Nearly every modern translation holds to the belief that older Greek manuscripts are more reliable than more recent ones. This has caused them to rely on the work of Nestle-Aland and the United Bible Societies in their publication of the Greek text. Most translators will evaluate the textual decisions made by the Editorial Committee of the United Bible Societies and in some cases may choose a competing variant.

The King James Version and the recent New King James Version are the two significant translations that used a different Greek text. The King James Version used the very same philosophy of manuscript evaluation that modern translations used. The one challenge the KJV translators faced was they did not have knowledge of older and better manuscripts. Therefore they did the best job with what they had. If they would have had the knowledge that we possess today, they very likely would have produced a translation based on the older manuscripts.

The New King James Version, on the other hand, uses a different approach to the Greek manuscript evidence. The NKJV translators believed that the most numerous Greek manuscripts are more important than the oldest manuscripts. This caused them to used a Greek text very similar to the King James translators (though for different reasons). The Majority Greek Text differs from the text chosen by the KJV translators in only 287 places. Yet it differs from the text of other modern translations in over 6,500 places. This substantial number of differences causes us to consider translations that use inferior Greek texts to be less valuable.

The philosophy of translation

The last half of the twentieth century witnessed the development of a somewhat new approach to Bible translating. The traditional method of rendering in English as nearly as possible vocabulary and grammatical constructions that are comparable to those of the original languages gave way in some quarters to free translations and paraphrases. These convey the translators' understanding of the ideas of the original into English words and sentences that sometimes do not approximate the form of the source languages. Each approach has its advantages and disadvantages. Well-known translations of both types are available and we must decide our intended use of the Scripture.

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The problem at hand is this: "Should the primary loyalty of the translator be to the text or to the reader of the translation?"

There are two prevailing philosophies of translation. One type is known as a *dynamic equivalence* translation, and the other as a *formal equivalence* translation. Dynamic equivalence results in what is more popularly known as a "free translation" or a "paraphrase," while formal equivalence works are usually called "literal translation," or "word for word."

A formal equivalent translation will seek to represent the original text as nearly as possible. It is concerned primarily with accuracy or faithfulness to the original text and seeks to transport the reader back into the culture of the original. It moves from text to translation and then finally, to interpretation. Popular versions that adopt this philosophy include New American Standard, the King James Version and the New King James Version.

A dynamic equivalent translation will seek to represent the original text as understandable as possible. It is concerned primarily readability and to convey the thought of the original to the reader. It seeks to transport the text into the culture of the reader. It moves from text to interpretation and then finally, to translation. Popular versions that adopt this philosophy include the New International Version, the Living Bible and most contemporary versions.

A recent development among dynamic equivalent translations is translating the Bible without any alleged "gender bias." These have been called "gender inclusive translations so as not to supposedly exclude women.

The New Revised Standard Version in 1989 was the first major gender-neutral translation, but many of its patterns have been followed by the New Living Translation, the New Century Version, the Contemporary English Version, and the now defunct New International Version-Inclusive Language Edition. Pronouns are changed regularly in these translations, even from the singular to the plural. Words that are gender specific such as "father," "woman" and "sons" are generally avoided.

This controversial approach attempts to fix a problem that does not exist. References to man pronouns are still understood as applying to all people depending upon the context. Furthermore, this is an example to the problem of free translations, since subject reader has become more important than the objective text.

Theological biases of Bible translations

As hard as he may try, it is impossible for a translator to exclude his own theological bias from his translation. At times his choice of renderings will boil down to being influenced by his personal doctrinal system. This is the nature of changing a message from one language to another. Of course, with some publications doctrinal preferences are inserted intentionally as in the case of study Bibles. A Bible user should be aware, at least in a general way, of what theological bias or biases are built into a version before settling upon one that will be a constant companion. Otherwise, we may unknowingly buy into some teaching that is not in keeping with our own convictions.

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There are four ways in which theological bias may be detected in translation of words.

- First, the theological viewpoints of the translators may be a matter of general knowledge (i.e. the translators of the Revised Standard Version were known to be of a more liberal strain than other translators are).
- A second way of detecting theological bias is through a statement or statements made in introductory materials found in the translations themselves. Occasionally translators will disclose their viewpoints on certain doctrines in these opening comments.
- Thirdly, doctrinal perspectives in translations may be identified by notes that accompany each translation. This can be the case with study Bibles.
- A fourth type of clue for deriving information about theological prejudice is found in the text itself. The words of the translation are, after all is said and done, the heart of the issue.

It is important to note that translators are not theologians, and they cannot always foresee the nuances of meaning that are attached to various English expressions.

The style of English adopted in English translations

Possible ways of communicating a message in English is perhaps the largest field among the five categories of consideration. Different people respond favorably to different types of English. A single word choice has been the occasion of hours of discussion among translators, listeners or readers.

Very clearly preferences for Bible translations will be influenced by whether the English used suits the reader's taste or not. A surprising variety of English usage exists in different levels and types of communication among English-speaking people of the world. Bible translations have not been exempt from the effects of this great variety. Many kinds of English can be detected in translations that are currently available.

1. Varying Age Levels

The English used to address different age groups will of necessity differ if it is to be effective. This necessary variation arises from the obvious fact that in the process of a lifetime each persons vocabulary and grammatical habits change.

Children for example, have limited vocabularies. The Living Bible originated as an attempt to communicate effectively with children. Kenneth N. Taylor produced it to make the message plainer to his own children when the family was reading the Bible and praying together. Often "large print" editions of various translations are produced. These are for the elderly or anyone who experiences eyesight problems. The large print editions are a boon for the elderly age group; otherwise their use of Scripture limited.

2. Archaic vs. Contemporary Vocabulary and Style

The English language is constantly changing. Thus an eighteenth century revision of a seventeenth century translation will employ words and usage which are unfamiliar to a reader today. The contemporary reader must decide how modern he desires his Bible to be.

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Most people are opting for the NIV or a Modern English version over the archaic language of the KJV. Others however prefer the KJV due to its elegance and poetic style compared to modern versions. As time goes on, more and more people will prefer a translation that reflects a language they are familiar with. Even the most modern paraphrases will one day become archaic over time.

3. Varying Geographical Locations

The English spoken in one part of the world will vary significantly from that spoken in another part of the world. Modern translations from England have not been well received in the United States. Various attempts have been made to utilize "world-wide" English in translation, but distinctions have caused most of these attempts to fail. The New International Version is the latest and most determined effort to produce an English Bible, which will be acceptable to English-speaking people around the world.

4. Varying Styles of Communication

For many generations most of the personal contact people had with the Bible was hearing it read aloud. Therefore, translators made deliberate efforts to produce a version, which could be easily understood when read aloud. Most of the older translations are not as easy to read, but are easier to memorize because they were translated with being read aloud in mind. The more modern translations are written in a similar manner as reading a book. NIV and the Living Bible are more of a book type translation than the NASB or KJV.

5. Text Format

The formatting of the text of the translation includes considerations of punctuation, capitalization, text arrangement, and print styles.

- Punctuation. Perhaps the biggest punctuation difference between twentieth century translations and those done before this century is the addition of quotation marks to the text. These were not used in versions up to and including the American Standard Version of 1901. Since then, most versions have incorporated them into their texts. One of the difficulties in regards to quotations is interpretive in nature. In some texts it is necessary to draw an interpretive conclusion before quotation marks can be placed. A well-known case of this is an issue in John 3, whether to end Jesus' words in verse 15 and understand verses 16-21 as the commentary of the writer John or to continue Jesus' words through verse 21.
- Capitalization. English versions traditionally have not capitalized the first letters of pronouns referring to deity. Because of the custom in some forms of modern writing to capitalize these, however, several versions have done so including the Modern Language Bible and the New American Standard Bible. A difficulty in the procedure of capitalizing pronouns referring to God is encountered in messianic prophecies of the Old Testament. This policy is difficult to implement with consistency. The NASB capitalizes them in Psalms 2:7-9 and 45:1-7, but in Genesis 3:15 "him" refers to Messiah and is not capitalized. Such challenges have prompted many twentieth century versions not to follow the policy of capitalizing pronouns.

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- Text Arrangement. A long-standing debate concerns whether to print the Bible with the beginning of each verse on a new line or with the material arranged thematically in paragraphs. The latter mode is the format of all other English literature. Also, the verse divisions and even the chapter divisions are not always accurately made. Yet some Bible readers prefer each new verse on its own line. This is probably due to the fact that this was the pattern established by the KJV and a long-standing habit is hard to break. Beyond this, however, is the ease with which a verse can be located when the verse numbers are always in the left margin, as they are in the separate verse format.
- Print Styles. "Print styles" refers to the use of italic letters in some Bibles to point out words, which do not translate a specific Hebrew, or Greek word. The NASB is alone among recent major versions in retaining the use of Italics for words not specifically supported by the original. The disadvantage of this use of italic letters is that it is contrary to the usual significance of Italics. In modern practice they normally indicate emphasis, but this use for words unexpressed in the original signifies a de-emphasis. The advantage of using Italics, on the other hand, lies in the provision of a means for the English reader to appreciate more fully the details of the original text behind the translation.

A short list of important English Bible translations

No language has had the Bible translated into it nearly as many times as the English Language. In the 1800s alone, over 100 Bible translations were published and in the twentieth century there were far more translations of the entire Bible completed. If we include publications of separate translations of part of the Bible, such as The New Testament or the Gospels, there was an estimated one thousand English translations published of all or part of the Bible over the past two hundred years.

Since it would be difficult to list all the English Bible translations, the translations below include only the most significant works.

1. Old English Bibles

- The Book of Armagh: Armagh was founded by Patrick, the missionary, in the fifth century as the center for the Irish Church. The Book of Armagh (c. 600) was the only complete copy of the New Testament produced by the Irish Church, partly in Latin and partly in Irish.
- Translations by Bede (c. 672 - 735): Bede wrote his historical works in Latin, but he translated the Gospels into Anglo-Saxon. On the day of his death he was dictating a translation of John's Gospel. These translations did not survive to today.
- Aldhelm (d. 709) translated the Psalms but this does not survive either.
- King Alfred the Great (c. 849 - c. 901) included a translation of the Ten Commandments at the beginning of his famous code of laws for Britishers.

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- The Lindisfarne Gospels were originally translated into Irish around 700. An Anglo-Saxon translation was added around 950. Other versions of the Gospels soon appeared, the Rushworth Gospels and the Wessex Gospels. Due to language changes, these became obsolete by 1300.

2. The Wycliffe Bible (1388)

Although versions and paraphrases of the Psalms and most of the New Testament existed by 1300, the first complete Bible in English was the Wycliffe Version. John Wycliffe (1330 - 1384) was a dissident who brought a desire among the people to read the Bible in their own language. The first edition of the New Testament appeared about 1380 and of the Old Testament around 1388. Both were extremely literal translations from poor manuscripts of the Latin Vulgate.

Wycliffe probably did little of the actual translation work himself. His exact role in the translation is uncertain, but it is likely he supervised the work to some degree. Nicholas of Hereford did the majority after his death.

A later revision of the Wycliffe Version appeared by 1395, produced by Wycliffe's secretary, John Purvey. Because of Purvey's association with the Lollard movement, the version was opposed by the Church.

In 1408 the Council of Constantinople forbade the production or use of the English Scriptures without the permission of a bishop or council. The spread of the Wycliffe Bible was slowed by the lack of movable type printing and by Wycliffe being perceived as a heretic.

The following events prepared the world for many mass produced versions translated from Greek:

- The fall of Constantinople in 1453 caused many Greek scholars to move west with their Greek manuscripts.
- The first book with printed type, the Gutenberg Bible, appeared in 1456.
- Erasmus published a Greek New Testament in 1516.
- The Protestant Reformation in 1517 championed the use of the Scriptures as man's authority.

3. The Tyndale Bible (1526)

Because the Wycliffe Version was banned, because it was not yet in printed text and because it was translated from Latin rather than Greek, William Tyndale (1494 - 1536) sought to publish a new version. He approached the Bishop of London about the project but was denied. He resolved to undertake his translation in Germany, leaving in 1524 and never returning to England.

He completed his New Testament translation rapidly and by 1525 he was ready to go to print. His first attempt at printing was at Cologne but he was forced to flee to

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Worms to finish the task. His first complete New Testament was printed in 1526 and of the 6,000 copies, only two survive today.

The early editions of Tyndale's New Testament were smuggled into England, where bishops sought to destroy them. The Bishop of London ceremoniously burned copies and the archbishop of Canterbury began buying copies in order to eradicate them (thus financing further editions!). Sir Thomas More described the work as, "not the New Testament at all; it was a cunning counterfeit, so perverted in the interests of heresy that it was not worthy to be called Christ's testament, but either Tyndale's own testament or the testament of his master Antichrist."

The English of Tyndale's day was not identical to our written language. For example, Romans 12:1-2 of Tyndale's version reads, "I beseeche you therefore brethren by the mercifulness of God, that ye make youre bodyes a quicke sacrificise, holy and acceptable unto God which is youre reasonable servynge off God. And fassion note youre selves lyke unto this worlde. But be ye chaunged [in youre shape] by the renuyng of youre wittes that ye may fele what thyng that good, that acceptable and perfaicte will of God is."

Tyndale continued to revise his translation and in 1530 he completed a translation of the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament. He intended to finish the Old Testament but was ambushed in Antwerp, betrayed by fellow Englishman Henry Phillips. He was imprisoned for over a year and finally strangled and burned at the stake on October 6, 1536. His last words were said to be, "Lord, open the King of England's eyes."

Large portions of the King James Version are taken from the Tyndale Bible. Estimates are as high as ninety percent of Tyndale's words are found in the King James Version and seventy-five percent in the Revised Standard Version of 1952. Tyndale can rightly be called "the father of the English Bible."

4. The Miles Coverdale Bible (1535)

Miles Coverdale (1485 - 1568), an assistant and proofreader for Tyndale, published the first complete printed Bible in the English language in October of 1535 (while Tyndale was in prison). Coverdale made no claim to being a scholar and basically took Tyndale's translation as far as it had been published and referenced Luther's German Bible and the Latin Vulgate for assistance.

Coverdale was the first English publisher to separate the Apocrypha from the Old Testament and place it as an appendix. He introduced chapter summaries as headings. He did not merely translate the Vulgate's brief headings but wrote new headings himself. The chapter divisions themselves had been introduced by Stephen Langton, Archbishop of Canterbury, in the eleventh century.

Two further editions were published in 1537, the second with the title page declaring, "Set forth with the king's most gracious licence." Indeed, the climate had

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changed in the two years since Tyndale's final prayer! Two final editions were printed in 1550 and 1553.

5. The Matthew's Bible (1537)

Also in 1537, Thomas Matthew published a Bible with the same declaration of royal approval. Thomas Matthew was a pen name for John Rogers, an assistant of Tyndale. Two-thirds of this Bible is from Tyndale and one-third from Coverdale. Within two years of Tyndale's death there were two versions freely circulating England.

The Matthew's Bible is sometimes known as the "Cranmer Bible" which derived its name from the Archbishop of Canterbury at the time, Thomas Cranmer, who wrote a preface for the 1540 and 1541 editions of the Bible. On the title page of later versions appears, "This is the Bible appointed to the use of churches." Thus it is the first officially authorized English Bible.

6. The Taverner's Bible (1539)

Richard Taverner was a lawyer with a great interest in the English Bible. His knowledge of Greek led him to revise Matthew's Bible in 1539.

Taverner was once imprisoned for reading Tyndale's New Testament and again jailed in the Tower of London because of his involvement with Bible translation and revision. However, under Queen Elizabeth I he was appointed to political office. His revision was not only minor, but its influence was small. One lasting effect was the introduction of a few English words to replace terms of Latin derivation.

7. The Great Bible (1539)

The Great Bible, published in 1539, was Miles Coverdale's revision of the Matthew's Bible. It was commissioned in 1538 in order to be placed into every parish church. The Great Bible was not reprinted after 1569 due to better translations to come.

It received the name "Great" because of its large size. Its pages measured nine inches by fifteen inches.

In 1546 King Henry VIII issued an order that "no man or woman...was to receive, have, take or keep Tyndale's or Coverdale's New Testament." Yet the Great Bible, made up of a combination of the work of Tyndale and Coverdale, was given royal approval and commanded to be placed in every church!

8. The Geneva Bible (1560)

The Geneva Bible was produced by a group of Protestant exiles in Geneva during the reign of Mary Tutor (1553 - 1558). Preliminary editions of the Psalms and New Testament were published in 1557, with a complete Bible published in 1560. A second edition appeared in 1562.

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The Geneva Bible was the first English Bible translated throughout from the original languages. It used an updated Greek text and is the most accurate translation until the King James Version in 1611.

The Geneva Bible is also known as the "Breeches Bible" from its rendering of Genesis 3:7 ("they made themselves breeches" -- KJV "aprons"). From 1560 to 1644, one hundred and fifty editions appeared. It was gradually replaced by the King James Version.

The Bible verses were printed as separate paragraphs and numbered. The verse divisions were based on the Greek New Testament of Robert Estienne, also known as Stephanus, published in 1551. The Roman type was used, consisting of 23 letters, excluding J, V and W. Words having no direct equivalent in the original text but were necessary to make the translation readable were set in italics. Also, marginal notations showed variations between Greek manuscripts included notes and comments which presented a strong Reformation perspective.

It was the most widely used English Bible for about seventy-five years. It was dedicated to Elizabeth I but never officially authorized and only gained favor with the common people. For this reason it received the designation, "The People's Book." It was the Bible used by Shakespeare, John Bunyan, Oliver Cromwell, the Puritans and was brought to America on the Mayflower.

The Geneva Bible's superiority as a translation and popularity was something of an embarrassment to the Church of England, which advocated the Great Bible. Its popularity was partially due to its more convenient size and less expensive price. Furthermore, its popular notes and comments were not always supportive of Church doctrine and hindered its authorization. Between its translation and notes, the Geneva Bible fed the developing Puritan movement in England.

9. The Bishops' Bible (1568)

The Bishops' Bible was produced by the Church of England to counter the popularity of the Geneva Bible. Archbishop Parker formed a committee to undertake the work and used the Great Bible as their basis. The first edition was published in 1568 and eighteen editions followed over the next forty years.

Parker presented the Bible to Queen Elizabeth and requested that the Bishops' Bible replace the Geneva Bible, describing it as "having interspersed diverse prejudicial notes, which might have been also well spared." Clearly the motivation for the Bishops' Bible was to eradicate the Geneva Bible.

The number of notes in the Bishops' Bible was far less than the notes in the Geneva Bible, primarily because the Calvinistic notes in the Geneva Bible were simply omitted from the Bishops' Bible. Some of the Geneva notes were altered and many were left intact. For example, nearly all of the notes on Galatians were left unchanged between the Geneva and Bishops' Bible.

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While this Bible was an improvement over the Great Bible, which it was designed to replace, it fell short of the Geneva Bible's scholarship. It was used in churches from 1568 to 1611, but it failed to win the hearts of the people and was given no formal recognition by Queen Elizabeth. The Bible found in the homes continued to be the Geneva Bible. Nevertheless, the Bishops' Bible was closely followed by the King James translators.

10. The Douay-Rhiems Bible (1609)

The Douay-Rhiems Bible was a Roman Catholic translation which was undertaken, according to its overseer William Allen, "with the object of healthfully counteracting the corruptions whereby the heretics have so long lamentably deluded almost the whole of our countrymen" (i.e. Protestant versions).

This Bible received its name because of the location of where it was published, the English College, founded by Roman Catholic refugees. The English College was located in Rheims when the New Testament was produced in 1582. The Old Testament was published in 1609 when the English College had returned to Douay.

The Douay-Rhiems Bible was a translation of the Latin Vulgate, because of its age, because of its freedom from discrepancies visible in Greek manuscripts and because the Council of Trent defined it as exclusively authentic. The Greek text was referred to but was not primary. The translation of Psalms was described as "a translation of a translation."

The style of this Bible was difficult, many technical and Catholic terms used. *Deacon* was translated *minister*, *elder* translated *priest*, repentance was translated *penance*, and words such as *donances*, *archsynagogue*, *sancta sanctorum*, *exinanited*, *commersation* and *Paraclete* were used.

This Bible retained the Apocrypha within the Old Testament, rather than as an appendix, in accordance with the Council of Trent. It remained the Bible for Catholics until the New American Bible was approved for translation by the Pope in 1943. The New American Bible was published in 1970, no longer using the Latin Vulgate as the text for translation.

With a Protestant monarch on the English throne, there was no threat that the Douay-Rhiems Bible would ever replace the Protestant translations in England. Actually, so few copies were reprinted that it would be difficult to attain a widespread use of this Bible.

The New Testament of the Douay-Rhiems Bible was used in the King James Version, but the Old Testament was published too late to be influential.

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11. The King James Bible (1611)

The King James Bible, or "Authorized Version" (1611) was designed to supersede all previous Bibles. It was necessary because the people used the Geneva Bible and the Church of England used the Bishops' Bible. While it was called "authorized", there is no evidence that it was ever officially recognized. This may be due to the registers from the Privy Council from 1600 to 1613 were destroyed by fire.

The King James Version received its name because it was vigorously promoted by James I. One thousand ministers sought to reform the church by presenting James with the Millenary Petition in April of 1603, while James was on his way to London to receive the English crown. James responded by convening the Hampton Court Conference in January of 1604, "for the hearing, and for the determining, things reported to be amiss in the church."

Ultimately, only one requested reform was accepted. John Reynolds, president of Corpus Christ College, Oxford, suggested to James at the conference that a new translation be undertaken. This suggestion, although opposed by the majority, was appealing to King James and he called for a version "which would embody the best in the existing versions and which could be read both in the public services of the Church and in homes and by private individuals."

Fifty-four of the greatest scholars in Britain were named to sit on committees in three locations, Oxford, Cambridge and Westminster. The forty-seven translators who actually participated in the translation were divided between the Old and New Testaments. The group at Westminster translated Genesis through 2 Kings and Romans through Jude. The group at Oxford revised Isaiah through Malachi, the four Gospels, Acts and Revelation. The group at Cambridge revised 1 Chronicles through Ecclesiastes and the Apocrypha. The work of these committees began in 1607 and was completed in 1610.

Formally, it was a revision of the 1602 edition of the Bishops' Bible, "The ordinary Bible read in the Church, commonly called the Bishops' Bible, is to be followed, and as little altered as the Truth of the original will permit." However, the translators drew on the work of all previous English translations, translations into other languages and upon the original language. In fact, it has been estimated that nearly ninety percent of the King James New Testament is found word for word in the Tyndale version of 1525.

Notations regarding controversies over church or doctrinal issues were not included, which greatly facilitated the acceptance of the version. The many marginal notes included 765 in the New Testament indicating variant or alternative renderings. By the 1760's thirty thousand marginal references had been added.

Soon after the 1611 publication, three revised editions quickly appeared in the same year. As early as 1613, the translation showed over three hundred differences from the original 1611!

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Later editions included:

- The "Wicked Bible" in 1631, named so because of the word "not" being omitted from the seventh of the Ten Commandments.
- The "Vinegar Bible" in 1717, named so because of the chapter heading in Luke 20, which read "vinegar" instead of "vineyard."
- The "Murderers' Bible" in 1795, named so because of the word "filled" in Mark 7:27 being misspelled as "killed."

The King James Version gradually gained ascendancy over the Bishops' Bible in the Church and later the Geneva Bible in practice. This transition took more than a generation to complete.

Revisions of the King James Version have been made over time but the core problem was not the failure of the translators but with the text upon which it was based. The Greek text used was the 1550 edition of Estienne (Stephanus), who used the 1516 and 1522 Greek texts of Erasmus. The text used was based on only fifteen manuscripts of the twelfth to fifteenth centuries.

The reasons for the gradual but overwhelming success of the Authorized Version are as follows:

- The personal qualifications of the revisers, who were upstanding men and the best linguists of their day.
- The clear belief that this translation was a national effort, fully supported by the King and the Church.
- The results of nearly a century of translation work by men who sought to make a good translation better. This was an attempt to make better translations the best.
- The organized system of cooperative work which followed the precedent of the Geneva translators.
- The lofty style of the translators followed the literary climate of the day.

For centuries King James Version, also known as the Authorized Version, was virtually the only English Bible used by the Protestant world. Even the Roman Catholic revisions of the Douay-Rheims Bible between 1749 and 1772 brought its style in line with the Authorized Version.

During the reign of Charles I (1625 - 1649) the British Parliament formed a commission to study revising the Authorized Version or producing a new translation, but it was never followed through. Minor revisions of spelling, etc. were done periodically, culminating in 1769 with Dr. Blayney of Oxford. The differences between the 1611 edition and this 1769 edition total at least 75,000. Blayney's edition has remained the standard form of the version.

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The Authorized Version put to rest all controversy over the best rendering until the end of the nineteenth century. It gradually became so accepted that most people saw no distinction between the version and the original texts. People came to believe in the literal inspiration of the very words of the translation itself. Therefore, another translation was not readily accepted.

12. The Revised Version

Over time, the English language changed in its usage, new archaeological discoveries were made uncovering older New Testament manuscripts and much more became known about the Hebrew language of the Old Testament. In 1870 a committee was formed of fifty-four of the finest British scholars to revise the King James Version. Their intent was "to introduce as few alterations as possible into the Text of the Authorized Version consistently with faithfulness."

On May 17, 1881 the *English Revised Version of the New Testament* was published. In less than one year nearly three million copies were sold in England and America. On May 22, 1881 the entire New Testament was published in the *Chicago Times* and the *Chicago Tribune*. In 1885 the Old Testament was published and the entire Bible was published in 1898, including the Apocrypha.

The Revised Version was clearly a more accurate translation, particularly because of the use of older and better Greek New Testament manuscripts. The Authorized Version was based on much earlier printed editions of the Greek New Testament which were based substantially on late manuscripts. The discovery of the Sinaitic manuscript (c. 340) in 1844 and the greater accessibility of Codex Vaticanus (c. 325 - 350) in Rome added to the improved Greek text. The basic Greek text used was largely that of B. F. Westcott and F. J. A. Hort, published in 1881.

While the version was well circulated, it was not well received. While the committee sought to retain the Authorized Version as much as possible, many old familiar phrases were replaced with new phrases. It would take several generations before changes in wording would be widely accepted.

13. The American Standard Version

The American Standard Edition of the Revised Version was published in 1901 as a counterpart to the Revised Version. It included renderings that were particularly favored by the American revision committee of the Revised Version. It replaced some antiquated terms, such as "Holy Ghost" with "Holy Spirit," and shortened paragraph structures. It slowly gain influence in American churches and even in English churches.

Unlike the Revised Version, the American Standard Version did not include the Apocrypha. The version was updated in 1971 as the *New American Standard Bible*.

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14. The Revised Standard Version

In 1937 the International Council of Religious Education expressed a desire to revise the Revised Version based on additional manuscript discoveries and the change in literary style of English. A committee was formed to produce the *Revised Standard Version*, which would "embody the best results of modern scholarship as to the meaning of the Scriptures, and express this meaning in English diction which is designed for use in public and private worship and preserves those qualities which have given to the King James Version a supreme place in English literature."

The Revised Standard Version: The New Testament was published in 1946, with the Old Testament published in 1952 and Apocrypha in 1957, sponsored by the National Council of Churches in the USA. Its publication was well marketed and well criticized. In particular, the version was criticized for blurring the traditional Messianic passages, such as the substitution of "young woman" for the traditional "virgin" of Isaiah 7:14.

Yet it is particularly noteworthy because it was the first widely accepted translation after the Authorized Version and opened the door to other more conservative translations to be broadly accepted. In 1989 the *New Revised Standard Version Bible* was published to update the RSV.

15. Roman Catholic Versions

After the work of Richard Challoner in revising the Catholic Douay-Rheims Bible from 1749 to 1772, the attitude of publishing the Scriptures for laymen was far from enthusiastic. Nevertheless many unofficial translations appeared in the nineteenth century for Catholics. Few of these translations were widespread or notable.

The first published translation designed to replace the Douay-Rheims Bible was *The Jerusalem Bible* published in 1966 with extensive notes taken directly from a French version from 1961. These notes represent the liberal wing of Catholic scholarship. The Jerusalem Bible was the first Catholic translation in English to rely extensively on the original language manuscripts.

The first American Catholic edition of the New Testament was the Confraternity edition, published in 1941. The Confraternity edition was thoroughly revised under the new title, *The New American Bible*, in 1970. The translation of the New American Bible was authorized by the pope in 1943 and was the product of twenty-six years of work by over fifty Catholic, Protestant and Jewish scholars.

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16. Other Protestant Versions

As might be expected, Protestants have produced the vast majority of the hundreds of English translations (of all or part of the Bible) published. Below is a list of the most noteworthy of these translations:

- John Wesley published a revision of the Authorized Version in 1755, with around 12,000 changes.
- Robert Young, known for his analytical concordance, published *The Literal Translation of the Bible* in 1862 "to put the English reader as far as possible on a level with the reader of the Hebrew and Greek texts."
- John Nelson Darby, leader of the Plymouth Brethren, published his *New Translation of the Bible* (1871, 1890), equipped with a full apparatus of variant textual readings.
- Joseph Bryant Rotherham's *The Emphasized Bible* (1902) was one of the first to translate the name of God in the Old Testament as Yahweh.
- *The Twentieth Century New Testament* (1902) sought to "mediate the word of God in a plainer English idiom." This translation was from twenty laymen and pastors who remained anonymous until 1955. Their motivation for a common speech translation was based the realization that the New Testament was written in the colloquial language of the first century.
- Ferris Fenton's *The Holy Bible in Modern English* (1903) included the following pronouncement in the preface of his 1910 edition: "I contend that I am the only man who has ever applied real mental and literary criticism to the Sacred Scriptures." The order of Fenton's Old Testament followed the Hebrew Bible and the Gospel of John was placed at the first of the New Testament.
- James Moffatt published *A New Translation of the Bible* (1913, 1924) as a free paraphrase that while not always faithful to the original text, was very popular in Britain.
- *The Concordant Version of the Sacred Scriptures* (1926, 1957) was based on the principle that "every word in the original should have its English equivalent." This resulted in a very wooden and mechanical translation.
- *The Basic English Bible* (1949) was produced by S. H. Hooke with a committee. It used primarily 850 of the most basic English words. To these 850 primary vocabulary words, fifty special Bible words and one hundred others special words were added. Its purpose was to communicate to an international audience and for use as an aid in learning English.
- C. K. Williams' *The New Testament: A New Translation in Plain English* (1952) emphasized a simple vocabulary.

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- One of the most popular of all modern translations has been J. B. Phillips' *New Testament in Modern English* (1958). Phillips claimed it was a translation but it was more truly a meaning-for-meaning paraphrase. It is uniquely fresh and insightful and still attempts to be faithful to the original text.
- Gerrit Verkuyl and other scholars produced the *Berkeley Version* (1945, 1959), compiled in Berkeley, California and is also known as the *Modern Language Bible*. It has been widely distributed by the Gideons International.
- *The New World Translation* (1955, 1961), published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, Inc. was the Jehovah's Witnesses' theologically slanted work. It sought to defend its heretical denial of the deity of Christ by overtly changing several key texts to fit their theology.
- Kenneth S. Wuest's *Expanded Translation of the New Testament* (1959) attempted to indicate the precise Greek philological nuances of each part of speech. Not only did this make for difficult reading but for a tendency to interpret as well.
- *The Amplified Bible* (1965) added to the possible meanings of important words through parentheses, brackets, dashes and italics. It tried to give a full expression of the various shades of thought and meaning in the original text. An example is John 3:16: "For God so greatly loved *and* dearly prized the world that He [even] gave up His only-begotten ("unique") Son, so that whoever believes in (trusts, clings to, relies on) Him shall not perish--come to destruction, be lost--but have eternal (everlasting) life."
- *The Cotton Patch Version* (1968 - 1973) translated most of the New Testament based on the southern dialect. Clarence Jordan went so far as to replace Biblical place names with local ones (for example, the temple in Jerusalem becomes the First Baptist Church of Atlanta) to "help the modern reader have the same sense of participation in them [the Scriptures] which the early Christians must have had."
- Not satisfied with the American work on the Revised Standard Version, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland met in 1946 to commission *The New English Bible*, finally published as a whole with Apocrypha in 1970. According to C. H. Dodd, the general director of the work, it sought to render the original texts into a "timeless" English, "avoiding equally both archaisms and transient modernisms." This version was much less literal in its translation than the Revised Standard Version.
- *The Living Bible* (1962, 1971) by Kenneth Taylor is one of the best selling versions of all time. Taylor himself admitted it is a paraphrase more than a translation but it provides readability (and a marketing strategy) that has endeared it to many.
- *The New American Standard Bible* (1963, 1971) was a revision of the American Standard Version by the Lockman Foundation. Fifty-four scholars completed the translation in eleven years. It is one of the most literal and accurate translations, though is criticized by some for its cumbersome wording.

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- Another widely circulated translation was the American Bible Society's *Today's English Version*, also known as the *Good News for Modern Man* (1966 - 1976). It brought the Bible to the level of newspaper English and was based on a Greek text prepared by a six member committee led by Richard Bratcher. Its low cost and clarity increased its popularity.
- *The New International Version* (1973, 1978) has assumed the position of the best selling and most widely used translation. It was completed by an inter-denominational and international committee that sought to balance readability with accuracy. The result was a translation significantly less literal than the King James Version or the New American Standard Bible, but much more accurate than other simpler translations.
- *The New King James Holy Bible* (1982) was a revision of the King James Version and based on the Majority Greek Text, rather than the critical text of the United Bible Society or the Nestle-Aland Greek text. This Greek text is very similar to that used by the Authorized Version and does not view older manuscripts more significantly than more recent ones.
- *The Reader's Digest Bible* (1982), translated by Bruce Metzger and others, condensed the Bible into about 60% of its original length and reflects liberal scholarship in its introduction.
- *The New Century Version* (1984, 1988), also known as the *Everyday Bible* and *The Word*, is yet another attempt at a modern language Bible.
- *New Jerusalem Bible* (1985) revised and updated the text and notes of the Jerusalem Bible of 1966. This version, translated by two Catholic scholars, is a literary rendering (perhaps the most poetic since the KJV). The notes reflect a modern, liberal perspective.
- *New Revised Standard Version* (1989) was published by the National Council of Churches and revised the Revised Standard Version of 1952. While following the literal tradition of the RSV, the NRSV eliminates much of the archaic language. One distinctive is the use of gender inclusive pronouns to replace male pronouns when the original writers meant both men and women. The NRSV does not change masculine pronouns referring to God, however.
- *Revised English Bible* (1989) was a thorough revision of the New English Bible. Like the original, it was translated by a committee of British scholars, representing all the major Christian traditions in the United Kingdom. The more archaic language was omitted and a more conservative approach was taken toward some of the difficult passages. Its use of British idioms make it less popular in the U.S.
- *Contemporary English Version* (1989, 1995) was produced by the American Bible Society to make the Bible easier to listen to and more contemporary. It was originally intended as a children's version but has been marketed to adults as well.

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- *The New American Standard Bible Updated* (1995) was a revision of the New American Standard Bible. The basic changes were the words "Thy" and "Thou" were replaced by "You" and "Your" when God is addressed, and some difficult phrasings were improved.
- *God's Word* (1995) was a translation by a 75-member committee of denominationally diverse scholars who sought to emphasize meaning rather than words. It is therefore readable and interpretive.
- *The New Inclusive Translation* (1995) was the effort to replace or rephrase all gender-specific language not referring to particular historical individuals. This translation was published by Oxford University and used the New Revised Standard Version as the starting point. It only includes the New Testament and Psalms and it is an attempt to make the Bible "politically correct."
- *New Living Translation* (1996) was the product of 90 Bible scholars from around the world, from various theological backgrounds and denominations. This is a very readable translation, while remaining more faithful to the original texts than the Living Bible.
- The International Bible Society produced the *New International Reader's Version* (1996) as a children's version of the New International Version. It also is on a third-grade reading level. Both of these Children's Bibles are excellent resources for children. The NIrV comes in several study Bible formats designed especially for children.
- *The Message* (2001) is a highly marketed modern-language paraphrase. It was produced by Eugene H. Peterson and to date only the New Testament and Old Testament Wisdom Books have been completed.
- *New English Translation* (2001) is a unique effort in that it receives input from many sources via the Internet at bible.org and is a work in process. It is led by people affiliated with Dallas Theological Seminary and is disseminated freely online.
- *English Standard Version* (2001) another Bible version that makes use of modern technology. Each Bible comes with a CD with the translation text and a few other study aids. This is basically a literal translation with a broadly conservative 100 member translation committee.

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The English Bibles evaluated

The English Bible translations rank by their popularity:

| <u>The Best Selling Bibles in 1991</u> | <u>The Best Selling Bibles in 2001</u> |
|---|---|
| 1. New International Version | 1. New International Version |
| 2. King James Version | 2. King James Version |
| 3. New King James Version | 3. The Living Bible |
| 4. The Living Bible | 4. New King James Version |
| 5. New Century Version | 5. New International Readers Version |
| 6. New American Standard Bible | 6. The Message |
| 7. Today's English Version | 7. New American Standard Bible Update |
| 8. New American Bible | 8. English Standard Version |
| 9. New Revised Standard Version | 9. Interlinear/Parallel Texts |
| 10. The Amplified Bible | 10. The Amplified Bible |

The English Bible translations ranked by translation philosophy, from the most literal translation to the most paraphrased (the ranking of one version above or below the one next to it is somewhat subjective):

1. Interlinear texts
2. American Standard Version
3. New American Standard Bible
4. New American Standard Bible Update
5. King James Version

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6. New King James Version
7. New American Bible
8. Revised Standard Version
9. New Revised Standard Version
10. Modern Language Translation
11. Revised English Bible
12. New English Bible
13. Jerusalem Bible
14. New International Version
15. New English Translation
16. New International Reader's Version
17. Contemporary English Version
18. Today's English Version
19. God's Word
20. Phillips Modern English
21. New Living Translation
22. Living Bible
23. The Message

The English Bible translations ranked by their readability (English Bible translation and reading grade level):

New International Reader's Version (NIRV)...2.9

International Children's Bible (ICB)...3.9

The Message...4.8

Contemporary English Version...5.4

God's Word...5.8

New Living Translation...6.3

New American Bible (NAB)...6.6

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| | |
|---|------|
| Today's English Version (TEV/Good News)... | 7.3 |
| New International Version (NIV)... | 7.8 |
| English Standard Version... | 8.0 |
| Living Bible... | 8.3 |
| New English Bible (NEB)... | 8.5 |
| New King James Version (NKJV)... | 9.0 |
| Phillips New Testament... | 9.6 |
| Jerusalem Bible... | 10.1 |
| New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)... | 10.4 |
| Revised Standard Version (RSV)... | 10.4 |
| New American Standard Bible Update (NASBU)... | 11.0 |
| New American Standard Bible (NASB)... | 11.3 |
| American Standard Version of 1901 (ASV)... | 11.6 |
| King James Version (KJV)... | 14.0 |

Conclusion regarding English Bible translations

When choosing an English Bible translation several important factors come into consideration. These factors include how readable it is, what Greek text was chosen to use, what theological perspective its translators held, how accurate and literal its translation is and how popular the translation is.

It would be ideal if every person who used an English Bible used the same translation and if that translation was completely faithful to the original words of the text and understandable to all. Given the diverse nature of reading ability and the plethora of translations used, we seek to achieve the best we can under the present circumstances.

Since by its very nature, no translation can completely carry forth the breadth of the Scripture, it is highly recommended that we use several Bible translations for the purpose of understanding the text. However, since we will primarily use one Bible for study, memorization and reading, it behooves us to consider which translation would serve us best. We can analyze which is the best possible Bible to use by a process of elimination.

While it is granted that different tastes may lead a person toward a different conclusion, the New American Standard Bible brings the important elements of a literal translation that follows the Greek text word-for-word. It uses the best Greek

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text basis, unlike the King James Version or New King James Version. Its theological bias is conservative and evangelical with a philosophy of literal translation. Its quality has allowed it to remain a best seller in spite of its weak advertising by the Lockman Foundation. It is unfortunate that marketing has played such a large role in determining the Bible used by God's people.

The singular criticism of the New American Standard is that it is a "wooden" translation in that it attempts render each Greek word according to its corresponding English word as much as possible. The result was a somewhat more difficult natural flow to its reading. The increasing number of readers with weak English skills bolsters this criticism. However, as the NASB is read, this criticism fades. While it may be too difficult for young children to read easily, teens and adults should be able to benefit from the strengths of the NASB without suffering any loss in understanding when they simply read the text regularly.