

## Why so many translations?

As we have seen, there are literally thousands of translations of the Bible. There are several reasons for the numerous translations of the Bible. The main reason for numerous translations of the Bible is most people do not read biblical Hebrew or Greek or have access to the original texts. Since language is constantly changing, it is necessary to use modern punctuation, formation, and vocabulary. Word meanings and new words are constantly being added. Archaeological discoveries and analysis of ancient manuscripts have provided additional advancement in biblical research in the last two decades into the meaning of ancient words and customs. Some translations of the Bible are revisions from previous works while others are taking advantage of the ancient manuscripts that have recently been discovered.

Several terms found in the Hebrew and Greek text have had an uncertain meanings. In those cases, the translator had to guess at what was being said and sometimes they were incorrect.

1 Samuel 13:21 KJV Yet they had a file for the mattocks, and for the coulter, and for the forks, and for the axes, and to sharpen the goads.

The word for “file” is “*pim*.” It was thought that it referred to a tool to sharpen tools.

Translators discovered that “*pim*” refers to the amount a blacksmith charged to sharpen tools.

1 Samuel 13:21 NRSV The charge was two-thirds of a shekel for the plowshares and for the mattocks, and one-third of a shekel for sharpening the axes and for setting the goads.

Several factors make it advantageous to have additional translations.

*How can we know if we have a correct representation of what the original text was saying? Since different translations use different words, how can we be sure about the original meaning?*

A careful study of various translations leaves us with very little doubt about what the original texts were saying, but to achieve the most accurate understanding, we should learn Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek and Latin and read the original manuscripts. At the same time, we should learn the idioms, culture and history of the era in which the original text was inspired. This is not an option for most people. A second and much easier option is to get several reliable translations of the Bible and compare the texts. Now we come to the crux of the matter.

*What translations are best?*

This leads us to our study. There are three common methods of Biblical translation.

These three methods are used in varying degrees in translating the Bible.

**Formal, Dynamic, and Optimal Equivalence**

*Formal Equivalence or Literal*

Most people think that a “*faithful*” or accurate translation of the Bible means a “*word-for-word*” or “*literal*” translation. If the original has a noun, they expect a noun in the translation. If the original has sixteen words, they don't want to see seventeen words in the translation. This type of translation is “*formal equivalence*.” A *literal translation* of the original language is possible only to the degree that the English language has an exact equivalent for each word

and grammatical pattern of the original text. This type of translation may result in a misunderstanding of the ancient language.

### *Dynamic Equivalence*

At the other end of the spectrum is a "*phrase-for-phrase*" or "*thought-for-thought*" translation. This is known as a *dynamic equivalence translation*. It is not as concerned about the grammatical "*form*" of the original language as it is with the "*meaning*" of the original. The "*thought-for-thought*" translation is easier to understand because it is designed to interpret what was said. Sometimes this type of translation overlooks less prominent elements of the original texts and can impact an in-depth study and accuracy.

Translations are seldom fully "*word-for-word*" or "*phrase-for-phrase*" although they may prefer one method over another.

### *Optimal Equivalence*

Optimal equivalence starts with an exhaustive analysis of the text at every level — word, phrase, clause, sentence, and discourse — in the original language. The goal is to determine the original meaning and purpose. Then using the latest and best language tools and experts, translators convey as much information and intention of the original text with as much clarity and readability as possible. The goal is to assure a maximum translation of both the words and thoughts from the original. Anyone who has ever learned a second language knows that a *word-for-word* translation is *impossible* most of the time.

### *Idioms*

Idioms are a group of words that have a meaning that is not understood from the individual words. These idioms in one language need to be paraphrased. Most of us have heard "It's raining cats and dogs." Literally one is saying it is raining very hard.

In Deuteronomy 29:27-28 NKJV "the anger of the Lord was aroused against this land... And the Lord uprooted them from their land in anger, in wrath, and in great indignation..."

Literally the text says, "his nose burned hot against this land... In anger [‘ap / nose, nostrils] wrath [chemah / heat, rage, wrath] and in great anger [qetseph / anger, broken twig, foam] the Lord uprooted them..."

In Galatians 6:14, the King James reads, "God forbid!" But the original has neither "God" nor "*forbid*." It literally, it says, "*May it never be!*" or "*Far be it from me...*" In Romans 9:14 it says, "*God forbid.*" Literally it means, "*Certainly not.*"

In Mark 10:14 the KJV says, "*Suffer the little children to come unto me.*" The meaning of the word *suffer* was *allow*. Many modern day readers misinterpret what that means.

*When we speak of faithfulness in translation, we need to clarify the question.*

Do we mean *faithfulness to form* or *faithfulness to meaning*? Sometimes faithfulness to one form of translation involves lack of commitment to the other. There can be problems with each of these and some attempts to remain true to form have rendered passages difficult or impossible to understand. The goal of every translation is to aim at accuracy and readability.

The NIV 2011 changed gender-related issues and words, rendering God to be either male or female, but not gender specific. When these things occur the translators are neither faithful to the *form* or the *meaning* and have *perverted* the Word of God.

The New Word Translation of the Jehovah's Witness translates John 1:1 as "and the Word was a god." Every other major translation says, "and the Word was God." The NWT tailored its translation to protect the doctrine of the Jehovah's Witness.

### Which Translation Is Best?

A **formal equivalence translation** lets the reader interpret for himself. Too often, the average reader doesn't have the background or the tools to interpret accurately. The result is a misunderstanding of the text. A **dynamic equivalence translation** is usually clear and quite understandable. This form of translation relies upon the translators properly rendering the original. If they are inaccurate the translation will communicate an idea that is foreign to the biblical text. **Optimal equivalence** as a translation philosophy recognizes that form cannot be neatly separated from meaning and should not be changed.

The primary goal of translation is to convey the message of the original with as much clarity as the original text and the translation language permit. The three methods of Bible translations that have been used are either a word-for-word, phrase-for-phrase or a combination of both of these. One of the best safeguards to follow is to stay away from translations that promote a sect, particular religion or political group or those done by an individual.

Translations by individuals include Moffatt, Weymouth, J. B. Phillips, The Living Bible, Kenneth Wuest's Expanded Translation, and the Berkley New Testament. There is some merit in each of these translations; however the bias of a translation is more apparent when produced by one person.

### Which translation is best?

There is not one answer. Everyone who is serious about studying the Bible should own at least *two or three* translations. They should have at least one dynamic equivalence (phrase-for-phrase) and one formal equivalence (word-for-word) and one optimal equivalence translation. The Holman Christian Standard Bible was produced using the *optimal equivalence* method of translation.

### Literal translations

- New American Standard Bible - NASB \*\*\*\*\*
- King James II - KJV11
- King James 21 - KJV21
- King James 2000 - KJV2000
- Literal Translation - LITV
- Modern King James Version - MKJV
- Third Millennium Bible - TMB
- Revised Standard Version - RSV
- New Revised Standard Version - NRSV

- New King James Version - NKJV\*\*\*\*\*

### **Moderately literal -**

- New American Bible - NAB
- Holman Christian Standard - HCSB\*\*\*\*\*
- English Standard Version - ESV
- New International Version - NIV\*\*\*
- Today's New International Version - TNIV
- New English Translation - NET\*\*\*
- International Standard Version - ISV
- New Jerusalem Bible - NJB
- Revised English Bible - REB

### **Moderately idiomatic** (meaning-based)

- New Living Translation - NLT\*\*
- God's Word Translation - GW

### **Idiomatic** (highly meaning-based)

- Today's English Version - TEV
- New Century Version - NCV\*\*
- Contemporary English Version - CEV
- The Message - TM

Each of the listed translations are reliable although they vary in vernacular. The English of the idiomatic translations sound more natural. The literal translations retain much of the original Hebrew and Greek forms and structures. For the unchurched adult or child the CEV or the NCV is useful. Those wanting a more literary quality the NJB, REB, and NAB are good choices. The NIV or NLT have a better English form than the NASB or NKJV.

### *King James Version* \*\*\*

The King James Version is the first version authorized by Protestant churches. It was commissioned by England's King James I in 1611. It has had multiple revisions in 1613, 1629, 1638, 1653, 1701, 1762, and 1769. The last two revisions corrected spelling and removal of antique words. The 1769 revision differs in at least 75,000 details.

### *Revised Standard Version*\*\*

The RSV was completed in 1952 and was intended to be, in part, a revision of the King James. The RSV attempted to be a **word-for-word** translation where possible.

### *New Revised Standard*\*\*\*

Followed the traditions of the King James and Revised Standard Versions. It was translated with a goal of preserving the best of the older versions while incorporating modern English.

### *New American Standard* \*\*\*\*\*

The NASB (1995) is an evangelical counterpart to the RSV. It was intended to be a revision of the King James. There are three major differences between the RSV and the NASB. First, the **NASB** is *less archaic* in its wording. Second, its *translators were theologically conservative*. Third, the translators desired to adhere closely to the wording of the original, often this translation is formal and awkward. *The NASB is probably the best **word-for-word** translation available today.*

### *New English Bible \*\**

The NEB was completed in 1971, after 25 years of labor. It is a **phrase-for-phrase** translation. Sometimes the biases of the translators creep into the text.

### *Revised English Bible*

The REB follows the same pattern as the New English Bible. It has excellent English, though not always faithful to the Greek and Hebrew.

### *New International Version \*\*\*\*\**

The NIV was published in 1978. It is a **phrase-for-phrase** translation although the translators attempted a balance between word-for-word and thought-for-thought. They were more conservative than those who worked on the NEB. It is an excellent phrase-for-phrase translation. Its major flaw is in its simplicity of language.

### *New International Version 2011*

Is an update to the NIV. It has gender-related issues and has been removed from several book stores.

### *New English Translation \*\*\*\*\**

The NET was published in 2005. It is a **phrase-for phrase** translation like the NIV. It has a large number of footnotes to explain the decision behind the translation. The translators combined a word-for-word and phrase-for-phrase translation in an attempt to promote a better readability and understanding.

### *Holman Christian Standard Bible \*\*\*\*\**

The HCSB comes from the New King James Version. It was published by LifeWay Christian Resources and the Southern Baptist Convention in 2003. The translators attempted to strike a balance between the word-for-word and phrase-for-phrase translation. The translators call this an “*optimal equivalence.*”

### *English Standard Version \*\*\*\*\**

The English Standard Version is a translation in contemporary English. It was published in 2001 by Crossway, the ESV was created by a team of more than 100 leading evangelical scholars and pastors. The ESV relies on a recently published critical edition of the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts.

### *New Living Translation*

Using modern English, the translators focused on clarity in meaning rather than a literal or word-for-word equivalence. Their goal was to make the translation readable while remaining true to the original texts.

### *The Message Bible*

The Message Bible is a paraphrase from the original languages written by Eugene H. Peterson.

### *The Amplified Bible 2015*

The Amplified Bible is an amplification of the Bible to enhance clarity and understanding. It is based on the American Standard Version of 1901, Rudolph Kittel’s Biblia Hebraica, the Nestle Greek New Testament, The Septuagint, Cognate languages, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and other Greek works. Published by The Lockman Foundation.

### *New World Translation (Not recommended)*

The *New World Translation* by the Jehovah's Witnesses has a sectarian bias of the group. It lacks genuine biblical scholarship. The New World Translation is by far the worst translation in English. It purports to be **word-for-word**, but The Jehovah's Witnesses twist the text to their bias.



## Diferences in Translations

Several other modern translations do not have some phrases or verses that are in the KJV or NKJV. The reason for this is the modern translators have used original manuscripts that have been found since the KJV was revised in 1611.

When the KJV was written a committee of 50 scholars drew from the best resources available at that time. They relied heavily on the William Tyndale New Testament and manuscripts that included information that the scribe either added because it was common knowledge or it was not clear in their manuscript.

Most of the newer translations have attempted to stay true to the essential Christian teachings and have not changed any of the essential doctrines of the Bible. The vast majority of the Bible's text is the same regardless of manuscript discoveries.

These differences are one of the many reasons I use several versions of the Bible when doing research or reading. It helps me to gain a better understanding of what was being said and implied in the original manuscripts.

Following is a list of verses that are not included in some of the modern translations.

### Matthew

- Matthew 17:21 - entire verse omitted
- Matthew 18:11 - entire verse omitted
- Matthew 19:9 - half of the verse is omitted
- Matthew 23:14 - entire verse omitted

### Mark

- Mark 6:11 - half of the verse is omitted
- Mark 7:16 - entire verse omitted
- Mark 9:44 - entire verse omitted
- Mark 9:46 - entire verse omitted
- Mark 11:26 - entire verse omitted
- Mark 15:28 - entire verse omitted
- Mark 16:9-20 - entire passage is questioned by a footnote that says, "The most reliable early manuscripts conclude the Gospel of Mark at verse 8"

### Luke

- Luke 4:8 - "get thee behind me Satan" is omitted
- Luke 17:36 - entire verse omitted
- Luke 23:17 - entire verse omitted

### John

- John 3:13 - "which is in heaven" is omitted
- John 5:4 - entire verse omitted
- John 7:53 - 8:11 - entire passage is questioned in a note which says, "The most ancient Greek manuscripts do not include John 7:53 - 8:11"

### Acts

- Acts 8:37 - entire verse omitted
- Acts 28:29 - entire verse omitted

## Romans

- Romans 16:24 - entire verse omitted

## 1 Timothy

- 1 Timothy 6:5 - "from such withdraw thyself" is omitted

## 1 Peter

- 1 Peter 4:14 - half of the verse is omitted

## 1 John

- 1 John 5:7
- 1 John 5:13 - half of the verse is omitted

## Revelation

- Revelation 1:11 - first half of the verse is omitted

### Samples of Older Translations

**The Wycliffe Bible (1395) John 3:16** For God louede so the world, that he yaf his `oon bigetun sone, that ech man that bileueth in him perische not, but haue euerlastyng lijf.

**Tyndale New Testament (1526) John 3:16** For God so loveth the worlde yt he hath geven his only sonne that none that beleve in him shuld perisshe: but shuld have everlastyng lyfe.

**Miles Coverdale Bible (1535) John 3:16** For God so loued the worlde, that he gaue his onely sonne, that who so euer beleueth in hi, shulde not perishe, but haue euerlastyng life.

**The Bishop's Bible (1568) John 3:16** For God so loued the worlde, that he gaue his only begotten sonne, that whosoeuer beleueth in hym, shoulde not perishe, but haue euerlastyng lyfe.

**The Geneva Bible (1587) John 3:16** For God so loued the worlde, that hee hath giuen his onely begotten Sonne, that whosoeuer beleueeth in him, should not perish, but haue euerlasting life.

**The King James Version (1611) John 3:16** For God so loued ye world, that he gaue his only begotten Sonne: that whosoeuer beleueeth in him, should not perish, but haue euerlasting life.

**Daniel Mace New Testament (1729) John 3:16** for God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have eternal life.

**Wesley's New Testament (1755) John 3:16** For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him, may not perish, but have everlasting life.

**King James (1900) 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.

