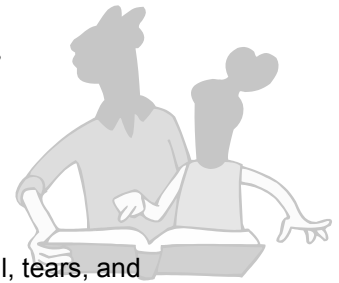


How to Read the Bible for All its Worth

Lesson 2: The Basic Tool: A Good Translation



Why are there so many versions of the Bible?

The Bibles that we have in front of us today are the result of years and years of toil, tears, and even blood. Many men and women have lost their lives so that we might have an accurate translation of God's Word to read from. The original autographs written by the men that were divinely inspired by God have long since passed from existence. The Old Testament was written in the Hebrew language with a little bit of Aramaic (a local language similar to Hebrew). The New Testament was entirely written in Greek. The oldest manuscripts we now possess are copies of copies of copies...

Obviously, for the normal man or woman in America to read the Word, we need a translation into our language, English. Different versions arise from differing opinions on which old manuscripts should be used (called Textual Criticism) and how you will translate them to English (called Translation Theory). The trouble with only having one translation is that you are committed to their translation choices, for better or for worse.

I do want to note that the writers of our text are VERY partial to the New International Version (NIV) and the Dynamic Equivalence translation technique. I do not agree with all the statements the authors make in this chapter. Also, I want to throw in the following chart to help out with understanding the various acronyms for a few of the English versions.

KJV	King James Version (Authorized Version) 1611	NIV	New International Version 1973	PHILLIPS	Phillips Bible
NKJV	New King James Version 1982	NEB	New English Bible 1961	GNB	Good News Bible (Today's English Version) 1976
NAB	New American Bible 1970	RSV	Revised Standard Version 1952	LB	Living Bible 1971
NASB	New American Standard Bible 1960	NRSV	New Revised Standard Version 1991	JB	Jerusalem Bible 1966

Textual Criticism

Textual Criticism is the method by which we determine what the original manuscripts actually said. The copies passed down from generation to generation do contain some errors that we must discern and distinguish so that we can make sure our text is reliable as possible. Before we get started with this discussion, I want to highlight two quotes from reliable sources:

"Few of these mistakes – and we must note that there are many of them – make any difference to us doctrinally, but they often do make a difference in the meaning of certain specific texts." – How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth (pg. 34)

"...that the verbal agreement between various New Testament manuscripts is closer than between many English translations of the New Testament and that the actual number of variants in the New Testament is small (approximately 10 percent), none of which affect any matter of doctrine. The greatest number of variants are differences or errors in spelling." – The Journey from Text to Translation (pg. 213)

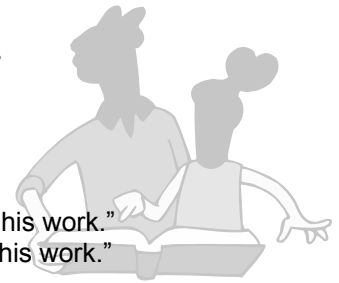
Where do these mistakes come from? Let's set out three common reasons and look at some examples:

1. **Transcription errors (spelling or punctuation)**

Most of these errors are obvious and can be corrected without causing any confusion at all. However, some misspellings can imply a different word that might cause a difference in the text. See the following example:

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1 Samuel 8:16

KJV – "...and your goodliest young men, and your asses, and put them to his work."

NASB – "...and your best young men and your donkeys and use them for his work."

NIV – "...the best of your cattle and donkeys he will take for his own use."

LB – "...finest of your youth and will use your animals for his personal gain"

Comments: "The word *bachuwreeykem*, between the slaves (men-servants and maid-servants) and the asses, is very striking and altogether unsuitable; and in all probability it is only an ancient copyist's error for *biq^areeykem*, your oxen. The servants and maids, oxen and asses, answer in that case to one another; whilst the young men are included among the sons in vs. 11, 12. In this way the king would make all the people into his servants or slaves. This is the meaning of the second clause of v. 17; for the whole are evidently summed up in conclusion in the expression, "and ye shall be his servants."¹

2. "Corrections" by the transcriber

Occasionally, transcribers would come across something in the text they felt that they could "improve" on. Below is an example of such a phenomena:

Mark 1:2

KJV – "As it is written in the prophets..."

NASB – "As it is written in Isaiah the prophet: ..."

NIV – "It is written in Isaiah the prophet: ..."

LB – "In the book written by the prophet Isaiah ..."

Comments: "Rather, As it is written by Isaiah the prophet. I think this reading should be adopted, instead of that in the common text. It is the reading of the Codex Bezae Vatican, and several other MSS. of great repute. It is found also in the Syriac, Persic, Coptic, Armenian, Gothic, Vulgate, and Itala versions, and in several of the fathers. As this prophecy is found both in Isaiah and Malachi, probably the reading was changed"²

3. Attempts to prove *doctrinal* points

Some versions of the Bible have been written for the express purpose of backing up some sort of doctrinal belief. There is one example of this type of error slipping into one of our common versions. See below:

John 5:7-8

KJV – "For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth, the spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one."

NASB – "For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement."

NIV – "For there are three that testify: the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement."

LB – "So we have these three witnesses: the voice of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, the voice from heaven at Christ's baptism, and the voice before he died. And they all say the same thing: that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."

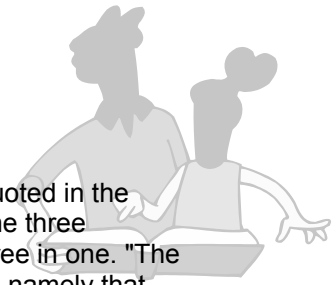
Comments: "The text of this verse should read, Because there are three that bear record. The remainder of the verse is spurious. Not a single manuscript contains the

¹ Keil & Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament: New Updated Edition, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1996 by Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.

² Adam Clarke's Commentary, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1996 by BibleSoft

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trinitarian addition before the fourteenth century, and the verse is never quoted in the controversies over the Trinity in the first 450 years of the church era. 8. The three witnesses are the spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one. "The trinity of witnesses furnish one testimony" (Plummer, *The Epistles*, p. 116) namely that Jesus Christ came in the flesh to die for sin that men might live."³

Translation Techniques

Your beliefs on translation technique will probably determine which translation of the Bible you favor. There are three basic philosophies of translation technique that we will consider. The reason that this is even an issue is because we are translating scriptures from the original language to our receptor language (English). Should we try to be as literal as possible or should we just try to get the main idea across?

Literal

Seeks to stay as close as possible to the exact words and phrases in the original language.

Pros: Very Reliable Translation (uses italics for words not in original); Word Studies are meaningful

Cons: Takes more study to understand; Sometimes has awkward wording

Free

Tries to translate general ideas into common, everyday language

Pros: Most readable; Can be insightful

Cons: Becomes a commentary; Word Studies are meaningless; Many inaccuracies

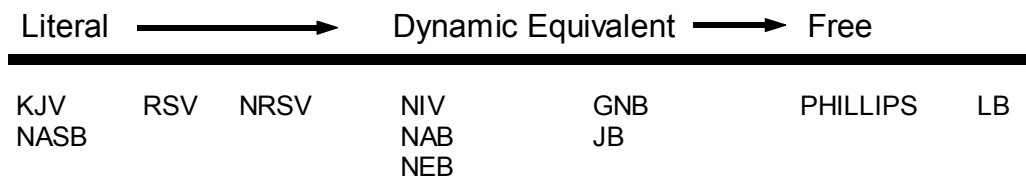
Dynamic Equivalence

Tries to translate words, idioms, and grammatical constructions from the original language to precise equivalents in the receptor language.

Pros: Tries to be literal where possible but emphasizes being readable

Cons: You never know whether you are reading a literal or paraphrased translation

The following chart shows where some popular versions fall amongst the translation techniques



The following chart demonstrates the Literal translation versus the Dynamic Equivalent and the Free translations of Romans 8:28

³ The Wycliffe Bible Commentary, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1962 by Moody Press

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Romans 8:28

Original Greek	KJV (Literal)	NIV (Dynamic Equiv)	LB (Free)
οιδαμεν δε οτι we know and that τοι αγαπωσιν to them that love τον θεον παντα to them God all things συνεργει ει works together for αγαθον τοι κατα good the according to προθεσιν κλητοι purpose called ουσιν who are	And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to <i>his</i> purpose.	And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to <i>his</i> purpose.	And we know that all that happens to us is working for our good if we love God and are fitting into his plans.

Which Translation Should I Use?

I believe that we should take advantage of all the translations we have available. Different translations should be used on different occasions.

Study / Church Use (Preaching / Teaching)

- **Literal Translation** – KJV, NASB

We must make sure what we are reading is highly accurate when we preach and teach from it! I would also recommend a literal translation for memorization!

Casual Reading or Devotional

- **Dynamic Equivalent** – NIV

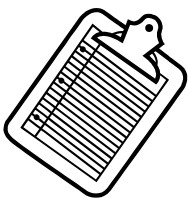
These versions are highly readable and fairly accurate. They work well at helping us to understand what is going on.

Commentary

- **Free** – LB, Phillips, Contemporary English Version

These versions can be good commentaries, but I would never trust one as my primary source

Next week's assignment:



- Read the different versions of the passages on baptism. Start out with the KJV and move through the NASB, NIV, and then the Living Bible. Be ready to discuss which version you liked the best and why. This reading will also serve as background to our next application lesson, Baptism and Church Membership.
- Continue to memorize the second 22 books of the bible (Isaiah through Acts)
- *there will be a present for memorizing all 66 books in order!*