



The
Blessing
of English Bible
Translations

In Defense of Translating Scripture

- The translation of Scripture into other languages has a long, rich, and divinely authorized history.
- Inspired prophets and the people of God have translated and used translations of the Bible for millennia (e.g., Ezra, Neh 8:1–8; Jesus, Matt 27:45–46 // Ps 22:1; apostles and prophets, Heb 10:5–7 // Ps 40:6–8).
- God tacitly affirms the legitimacy of translations to convey accurately the words (or meaning) of his word(s).

A Brief History of English Versions

- The OT was originally written in Hebrew and Aramaic, and the NT, in Greek, but translations of both were made relatively soon after their completion.
 - OT: Aramaic (Targums), Greek (Septuagint = LXX), Syriac
 - NT: Syriac, Latin, Coptic, Armenian, Aramaic, Gothic
- Eventually, the Latin Vulgate dominated “Christianity.”
- Translations of the Bible without papal permission were forbidden—sometimes on penalty of death!

A Brief History of English Versions

- The first Bible translated into (Middle) English was a translation of the Vulgate by John Wycliffe in 1382.
- The next major English translation was that of William Tyndale (d. 1536), who was the first to translate directly from Hebrew (and Aramaic) and Greek into English.
 - He was put to death as a heretic for his translation work, his final words being “Lord, open the king of England’s eyes.”
 - Within a few years, the king permitted translations of the Bible into English, and Tyndale’s translation was their basis.

A Brief History of English Versions

- Subsequent English translations included the Coverdale, Great, Geneva (“BCV”!), and Bishops’ Bibles—upon which the King James Version (KJV; 1611) was based.
- The KJV went through revisions in 1629, 1638, 1760, and 1769, the last of these being the one usually printed today today.
 - English versions of the Bible that stand in the translation legacy of the KJV include the ERV, ASV, RSV, NASB, NKJV, NRSV, ESV, etc. (Some of these differ greatly from the KJV.)
 - Independent versions include the NAB, NIV, and NET.

Excursus: KJV-Onlyism

- The doctrine of “KJV-Onlyism” affirms that the KJV is the *only* accurate English translation of the Bible.
- This is a false teaching because it demands (1) adherence to human tradition and outdated (not edifying?) English and (2) ignorance of translational and textual problems.
- For instance, see Jas 3:13 (outdated English), Acts 12:4 (translation), and 1 John 5:7–8 (text + tradition).
- Is the KJV a good translation? Yes, but not the only one.

The Unread Portion of the Bible

- How can we discover the history and philosophy of our Bible translations? By using the “unread” portion of our Bibles—the preface. (Not all prefaces are created equal!)
- Look for something akin to these items:
 - *History*. This provides a brief history of the translation, translation team (or individual), and more.
 - *Philosophy*. This describes the translation philosophy of the translators—formal equivalence (“word-for-word”; cf. 2 John 12), optimal equivalence, dynamic equivalence (“thought-for-thought”), or paraphrase. [formal = study; dynamic = reading]

The Unread Portion of the Bible

- How can we discover the history and philosophy of our Bible translations? By using the “unread” portion of our Bibles—the preface. (Not all prefaces are created equal!)
- Look for something akin to these items:
 - *Format*. This explains how the translation portrays itself (e.g., theological terms, divine (or human!) pronouns/names, headings, italics, quotations, poetry).
 - *Text*. OT = Masoretic; NT = Byzantine (e.g., *TR* = KJV) or Eclectic (e.g., *WH* = ASV, *NA/UBS* = NASB) [no Majority Text]

Choosing an English Translation

- A Christian ought to ask (at least) the following questions of his or her translation of choice:
 - Does the translation committee believe that the Bible is inspired and inerrant? (Cf. KJV and NIV prefaces!)
 - Does the translation confine itself to the canon (i.e., the “66”) or include the Apocrypha? (Cf. KJV 1611/1885.)
 - Does the translation use the *Textus Receptus* or an eclectic text? (Cf. NKJV = *TR* + footnotes for MT and NU.)
 - Does the translation use a “word-for-word” or “thought-for-thought” method? Also, is the translation understandable?

The Bottom Line

- A good translation of Scripture in English is an invaluable treasure as it grants those of us who cannot read Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek access the word of God.
 - Be thankful!
 - Trust that a good translation is an appropriate and accurate representation of Scripture!
 - Take time to know the history, philosophy, and format of your translation so that you can use it properly!
 - Read the Bible every day and share it with others!

A top-down photograph of a person's hands reading an open Bible on a light-colored wooden table. The person's left hand holds a black pen, and their right hand holds the Bible. A black leather wallet with a smartphone inside is on the left. The Bible is open to a page with dense text, and the person is wearing a black watch and a ring. The text 'The Blessing of English Bible Translations' is overlaid in the center.

The
Blessing
of English Bible
Translations