

English Translations

Sources

- † Kostenberger & Croteau. *Which Bible Translation Should I Use? A Comparison of 4 Major Recent Versions*. B&H Academic, 2012.
- † Metzger. *The Bible in Translation: Ancient and English Versions*. Baker Academic, 2001.
- † Rhodes. *The Complete Guide to Bible Translations*. Harvest House, 2009.
- † Wallace. "Why I Do Not Think the King James Bible Is the Best Translation Available Today." Online at www.Bible.org, 2004.

History

1. Some efforts to translate at least parts of the Bible into Old English in tenth century and before.
2. Wycliffe [1380s]: translated the Latin Vulgate into English; hand written; differences b/w Latin and Greek [e.g. no article in Latin] hurt the resulting English representation.
3. Tyndale [1526]: translated from Greek and Hebrew texts; all of NT, parts of OT; printed; in BW!; followed Luther's philosophy of trying to represent the thought of the original instead of words!
4. Coverdale [1535]: based largely on Tyndale; first full printed version
5. Matthew [Rogers; 1537]: based largely on Tyndale / Taverner [1539]: slight edit of Matthew
6. Great [1539]: revised Matthew; first "authorized" Anglican Bible
7. Geneva [1560]: Calvinistic margin notes; largely based on Great Bible, but referred to original manuscripts. Bible of Presbyterians, Shakespeare, etc.
8. Bishops [1568]: based on Great Bible; second "authorized" Bible of Anglicans
9. Rheims-Douay [~1600]: based on Latin Vulgate; Roman Catholic
10. KJV [1611]:
 - The preface stated it was a revision, not a new translation, with the hope of mediating between the Puritan and Roman Catholic translations of the day.
 - They were supposed to follow Bishops as closely as possible, but consulted other English translations and the Greek text of Erasmus/Beza for the New Testament [textus receptus] and the Masoretic text of the day for the Old Testament.
 - Note: this is in the Tyndale tradition! 90% of NT was based on Tyndale.
 - In its original preface, there were several quotations from the Bible, and they were from the Geneva Bible, not KJV! Ironic, since one purpose was to counter the influence of Geneva.
 - At first, people resisted it, preferring the language in the Geneva Bible.
 - Originally included the apocryphal books.
 - The 1611 editions had 200 English variations among them
 - The text underwent several revisions in subsequent years, incorporating over 100,000 changes!
 - NKJV [1982] modernized the English.
11. Numerous independent publications that did not remain influential
12. English Revised Version [1885]: based on KJV but with editing for greater manuscript evidence.

13. American Standard Version [1901]: based on ERV, with several hundred revisions; used Jehovah
14. RSV [1952/1971]: based on ASV
new manuscript evidence
17. NLT [1996/2007]: based on LB [1971/ASV]
new transl. fr. original lang.
dynamic equivalence
15. NASB [1971/1995]: based on ASV; NA23/26 but deviates to include some with doubtful evidence
1995: 85 changes for gender inclusive.
18. ESV [2001/2011]: based on RSV
~10% changed to be evangelical
16. NRSV [1990]: based on RSV; new manuscript evidence
gender inclusiveness
19. Phillips [1958/1972]: originally textus receptus, but new edition NA/UBS; interpretive paraphrase [note paraphrase was around in 1653!]
20. Good News/TEV [1976]: dynamic equivalent
21. NIV [1978/1984/2011]: no English dependency; own eclectic Greek text; now gender inclusive
22. NIV [1996]: NIV brought down to young elementary reading level
23. Contemporary English Version [1995]: aimed at young elementary children; original manuscripts
24. Holman Christian Standard Bible [1999-2009]: original language manuscripts
25. Peterson's Message [2000]: paraphrase
26. NET Bible [2006]: original language manuscripts; dynamic; gender inclusive; 61000 translation notes
27. There have been many more!

Translation Approach

Question for all translators and readers: What is more important, the specific words and grammar patterns or the meanings they express? If both, how do we strike a balance?

Some translations try to convey the idea of a passage, without worrying about individual words or phrases; these are called a paraphrase.

- An example is The Message.
- Positive: These are the easiest translations to read and understand.
- Negative: They are not trying to convey the very words of God.
- Negative: They are very interpretive, and usually the view of just one or a few scholars.
- Negative: They are weak for study purposes.

Some translations translate each word carefully, while trying to stick as closely as possible to the word order and grammar of the ancient language; these use formal equivalence.

- Examples are NASB, NKJV, NRSV.
- No translation always sticks with the Greek or Hebrew word order, because it would make no sense in English: word order is fairly standardized in English [subject – verb – direct object –

indirect object, for example], but in ancient Greek and Hebrew words could be moved around for emphasis.

- No translation can always make a one-to-one correspondence between the original language words and English words. The Hebrews and Greeks used words differently than we do, so there always is some interpretative work in a translation, even in formal equivalence.
 - For example, the Greek word παρά can mean “from, near, with, beside, in the presence of, alongside of, in comparison to, beyond, in the judgment of,” all depending on the context.
- Positive: They allow us to sometimes convey the emphasis lost in other translations
 - Ephesians 2.8: NASB: For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.” NLT: “God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God.” Nothing wrong with NLT, but which shows the Greek emphasis on grace?
- Positive: more likely to retain biblical terminology which is rich in meaning: terms like justification, sanctification, propitiation.
 - Romans 3.23-25: NASB: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. NLT: For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. Yet God, with undeserved kindness, declares that we are righteous. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood. This sacrifice shows that God was being fair when he held back and did not punish those who sinned in times past...
- Positive: minimal interpretation in translation, leaving the reader to be illuminated; maximum effort to keep word type, verb tense, word order, etc.
 - 1 Peter 2.9: ESV: “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” NLT: “But you are not like that, for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light.”
- Negative: They often have stilted English or even sentences which are hard to comprehend.
 - For example, in 1 Peter 5.6-7, the NASB tries to follow Greek word order, but this ends up confusing the sentence: “Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.” This makes casting your anxiety on God look to be related to God exalting you. NET clears this up, putting casting your cares on God together with being humble: “And God will exalt you in due time, if you humble yourselves under his mighty hand by casting all your cares on him because he cares for you.”
- Negative: They sometimes do not convey the full meaning of a word or phrase if that would require more English words.
- Negative: The use of unexplained biblical terminology leaves new believers confused.

Some translations take a middle ground, trying to translate the meaning of each phrase or sentence as clearly in English as is possible; these are called dynamic equivalence.

- Examples include NIV, NET, NLT.
- Within this group, there are a variety of styles, with some being closer to formal equivalence [NIV] and others being closer to a paraphrase [NLT].

Formal _____ Dynamic

NASB NKJV ESV HCSB NIV NET NLT

- Many in this category use formal equivalence whenever it makes sense, but loosen to dynamic equivalence when clarity requires it. The ESV mostly is a direct copy of the RSV, which uses formal equivalence, but about 10% was edited using dynamic equivalence. NIV, HCSB, NET all say they try to be formal when it makes sense, but dynamic when necessary.
- Positive: They can convey the biblical phrase both accurately and clearly, especially when a single Greek or Hebrew word requires more than one English word for complete translation.
 - Example: 1 Peter 5.9: ESV: “Resist him, firm in your faith...” NET: “Resist him, standing firm in the faith...” NET interprets the adjective to help convey the idea that would have come to the Greek contemporary reader.
- Positive: They allow the translators to interpret hints in the original language.
 - For example, the Greek participle [-ing verb forms in English] usually does not have helper words as they do in English, so in formal equivalence we just get the participle itself [“knowing” in 1 Peter 5.9 NASB], but in dynamic equivalence the translators use the syntax to help translate the fuller meaning of the Greek [“because you know” in NIV].
- Positive: They tend to explain biblical terms and be more meaning driven.
 - For example, Romans 3.21: NASB says, “But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets” whereas the NLT can make this more clear: “But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law, as was promised in the writings of Moses and the prophets long ago.”
- Negative: Allowing the translators to interpret these things takes it out of the reader’s hands
 - Consider the NLT for 1 Peter 5.9, which starts a new sentence, thus breaking the connection between resisting Satan and knowing others are in the same boat.
 - Consider John 6.27. The ESV stays literal, “For on him God the Father has set his seal.” Revised English Bible: “seal of his authority.” NLT: “seal of his approval.” CEV: “God the Father has given him the right to do so.”
- Negative: The loss of biblical vocabulary hurts the church over time as theological meaning is lost and the rich verbal heritage is lost.
 - Phrases like “And it came to pass,” or “truly, truly, I say to you” shaped our language, but now we are rejecting them to impose modern language.
 - Romans 5.1: NASB: “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”; NLT: “Therefore, since we have been made right in God's

sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us.” Nothing wrong with NLT here, but lose fullness of justification terminology [legal declaration by God; imputed righteousness of Christ] while gaining clarity for this context.

Sometimes translations are inconsistent.

- KJV is considered defective in Job and several prophetic books; in Romans and 1-2 Corinthians, it has numerous minor inaccuracies.
 - In Hebrews 4.8, KJV reads, “For if Jesus had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day.” The NKJV recognizes that this is Joshua, not Jesus.
- NET is inconsistent in how it approaches the OT books, sometimes very formal, sometimes very dynamic, sometimes in between.
- ESV copies RSV 90% of the time, making it formal, but freely edits the other 10%.

All translations fail to perfectly render the full meaning of the original language text.

- For example, some words in Greek signal things which have no equivalent in English. We sometimes translate Greek $\delta\epsilon$ as “but, and, now, then, etc.” but what it really does for a Greek speaker is signal that there is a new thought starting which is related to the previous one.
- Similarly, Hebrew sentence structure in narrative will change to signify what is narrative plot and what is explanatory background or to focus the reader on a particularly important detail, as if guiding the cameraman to the right shot. This significance is missed in any English translation.

Readability

Each translation is written to a target reading level.

- Some are at an elementary school level
 - CEV; NCV; NIRV
- Some are at a middle school level.
 - NIV; NLT
- Some are at a high school level.
 - NASB; NRSV; ESV
 - NKJV usually gets ranked at a middle school level, but it uses big theological terms, which many middle school students would not know.

Each translation also makes decisions about the style of English it will use.

- The KJV, even though it has experienced thousands of changes over the years, still largely relies on a style and word usage that are not common today. Over 300 words in the KJV no longer have the same meaning today as they did in the seventeenth century.
 - If you did not grow up with the KJV, you could not understand it well [and many who did grow up with it and think they do understand it are making mistakes as they interpret the ancient English words!].

- For example, when we see “pitiful” we think it means “deplorable” or “pathetic,” but the KJV uses it to mean one who takes pity on others: James 5.11 “...the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.”
- In Philippians 4.6, the KJV says, “Be careful for nothing.” The NKJV updates this to say, “Be anxious for nothing.”
- In 2 Timothy 2.15, KJV says, “Study to shew thyself approved unto God,” but the correct meaning of the Greek word in today’s English is not study, but “be zealous,” or “make every effort.”
- Most modern translations are up to date with word usage and sentence style.
 - But there still is a great variety: the more dynamic the translation, the closer they can get to how people talk today, but perhaps the more they move away from considering the best translation of each Greek or Hebrew word.
- Another factor is how a translation handles idioms.
 - If the Hebrew says in 1 Samuel 24.3, “Saul went in to cover his feet,” translators can literally translate those words, like KJV does; they could translate with an equivalent modern idiom, such as “Saul went in to relieve himself,” like most modern translations say, or they could explain the idiom with something like “Saul went in to urinate.”
 - Compare the literal “gird up the loins of your minds” [KJV] with “get your minds ready for action” [NET] for 1 Peter 1.13. Without study of customary usage in the first century, how are you to know what “girding up your loins” means, let alone “girding up the loins of your minds”?
 - Even the KJV sometimes simplified the idiom: John 10.24 literally says “How long will you take up our souls?”; the KJV translates the idiom and the words: “How long dost thou make us to doubt?” A better understanding today renders it like the NET: “How long will you keep us in suspense?”
 - Another example is Numbers 22.22: the literal Hebrew reading is “God’s nose [or nostrils] became hot,” but the KJV interprets this to say, “God’s anger was kindled.”
- The same situation exists for interpreting actions.
 - In Genesis 37.29, most English translations are literal in saying that Reuben “tore his clothes,” but the NLT explains it by saying, “he tore his clothes in grief.”
- The original NT was written in the common Greek of its day, so that everyone could easily understand it. The KJV was written in a way that could be understood by the common people of its day. Should we not seek to offer the same advantage to English speakers today?
 - Should we not have one translation easy enough for children like NIV and one for teens and newer believers still getting used to the Bible like NLT and then one more for everyday use like NIV?

Each translation differs in how consistently they translate.

- KJV sometimes uses more than twenty English words to translate one Hebrew or Greek word.
- KJV sometimes uses one English word to translate dozens of different Hebrew or Greek words.

Manuscript Basis

We do not have any original copies of the Hebrew [and Aramaic] Old Testament or the Greek New Testament, but we have a great deal of manuscript evidence for what they said.

All the popular modern English translations are based on the same Hebrew/Aramaic manuscript, called the Leningrad Codex.

- This copy of the Old Testament dates to the year AD1008.
- There are over three thousand hand-written Hebrew copies of the Old Testament, but almost all of them were copied after the Leningrad Codex.
- Most importantly, Old Testament copies among the Dead Sea Scrolls, which date to around the time of Jesus, largely agree with the Leningrad Codex.
- Old Testament translators start with the Leningrad Codex, and then consider any variations in the other [especially earlier] manuscripts as they translate.
- KJV was based on a version of the Masoretic Text, which might have differed slightly from this codex.

We have almost six thousand ancient Greek New Testament manuscripts, dating back to the first century. We also have thousands of early translations into other languages and thousands of quotations of Scripture in the writings of the early church.

Most translators believe in analyzing this manuscript evidence and tracing any variations as they occurred through time, to determine what the earliest and most original wording must have been.

- This process results in a “critical” or “eclectic” Greek text, which gets translated into English.
- Most modern translations rely on the critical text known as the Nestle-Aland. This text gets updated from time to time, as new manuscripts are discovered. NA28 is the current version.

Some scholars prefer to rely on what is known as the “majority text” which uses a different method of determining the Greek text when there are differences in the manuscripts, relying on which variant occurs the most often.

- The problem with this is that it is biased toward a group of writings that were “mass produced” and produced later in time in the Byzantine Empire and so better preserved, but which are thought by most scholars to contain the most errors.

The KJV was based on a Greek text put together by Roman Catholic priest Erasmus and edited by Beza [called the “received text” or “textus receptus” by KJV advocates].

- Erasmus’ text of the NT was highly inaccurate, relying on only a handful of manuscripts [6-14], most of them now known to be relatively inaccurate copies; earliest was 6th century and most were from 10th or later. It also had numerous typographical errors of its own.
 - Erasmus had no Greek text containing the last six verses of Revelation, so he translated the Latin Vulgate back into Greek, and created seventeen new and unique variants!
 - An example of a problem is 1 John 5.7-8, which Erasmus originally had correct to show “the Spirit and the water and the blood,” which is not only the best reading but also the majority text reading. In fact, Erasmus knew of no Greek text which contained the reading preferred

by the Latin, “The Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit,” but when someone contrived a new Greek manuscript with that reading, Erasmus switched his text, and this is what made its way into the KJV and NKJV. The earliest manuscript to have this reading, to our knowledge, dates from the sixteenth century.

- The differences in approach explains why the KJV and NKJV have some verses or parts of verses that other translations lack: when we trace the manuscript evidence through time, we see that scribes tended to add to the text; sometimes this was to purposefully clarify something, other times it was inadvertent copying of a margin note into the text, and at other times they would include information from two or more variants rather than choose between them. Because the KJV and NKJV are based on later manuscripts, they contain many of these additions which do not appear in earlier manuscripts.
 - For example, Matthew 6.13, the NKJV adds “For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.” but the best manuscripts do not include this.
- We also have advanced in our analysis of textual evidence, resulting in serious questions about the KJV textual quality.
 - Despite centuries of improvements in our manuscript evidence and understanding of that evidence, NKJV is based on the same manuscript basis as KJV.

Date of Translation

Previously lost Greek manuscripts of the New Testament are found every year. An older translation cannot consider that evidence.

Also, our understanding of Greek and Hebrew continues to develop, especially the form of Greek used in Bible times, called κοινή [koy-NAY] Greek or common Greek.

- This is because we have only in the last few decades found and studied thousands of every-day documents which were preserved in the desert, and which help us understand word usage in this form of Greek.
- Older translations usually will have more mistakes in translating specific words, because they cannot take advantage of recent developments in our understanding.
 - For example, in passages like John 1.14; 3.16; 3.18 we used to think μονογενής [mah-nah-geh-NACE] meant “only begotten,” but now we know it means “one and only.” This development happened just in the last twenty years.
 - Similarly, we now know that the plural of the word for “brother” in Greek, ἀδελφοί [uh-del-FOY], can mean “brothers and sisters”; this disturbs some traditionalists, but it should not, since we know the word also can mean “associates” or “fellow members,” which could include women as well.

Gender Inclusiveness Issue

This is not a new issue, just made more contentious lately.

- Note: KJV translated “sons of Israel” 644 times as “children of Israel”! Translated Hebrew word for son 35% of the time as child or children.

As our understanding of the Greek of this era has grown, and as English usage has changed, it sometimes makes perfect sense to shift our English translations from masculine only to gender inclusive.

- ἄνθρωπος: means man, but also means person. Matthew 4.4: NET: “Man does not live by bread alone”; NRSV: “One does not live by bread alone”; NLT: “People do not live by bread alone.” The Greek can be man, person, one... This is quoting a Hebrew OT scripture, Deuteronomy 8.3, so we have to look there. The Hebrew word can mean a man but more often it means mankind! And in the context, it probably meant all people, since Moses was reminding all the people of what they had learned.
- ἀδελφοί: 2 Peter 1.10: NASB: “Therefore, brethren...” NET: Therefore, brothers and sisters... ἀδελφός means “brother,” but the plural ἀδελφοί can mean “brothers,” “brothers and sisters,” or even “associates” or “fellow members.” Context has to dictate whether the original meant to include women. Peter appears to be writing to all believers, so it would be correct to include women in this example.
- ὁ + adjectival participle: 1 Peter 3.10: NKJV: “For he who.” NET: “For the one who.” NIV: “For whoever.” Any of these is correct for this type of Greek construction, so if the context is not exclusive of women, then it is appropriate to change the masculine “he who” to a neutral “the one who” or “whoever.”
- Τίς: this means someone. In 1 John 4.20: KJV: “If a man say”; NET: “If anyone says”; NIV: “Whoever claims”; NLT: “If someone says.”
- ὁ ἄνθρωπος means person or man. Psalm 1.1: ESV: “Blessed is the man”; NIV: “Blessed is the one”;

Even when gender inclusiveness makes sense contextually, figuring out how to render it well can be difficult.

- Psalm 1.1: NASB: “How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked...” NRSV’s “Happy are those” turns singular into plural, losing some of the intimacy implied between God and the individual.
- Anyone becomes them instead of him: 2 John 1.10: NKJV: “If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him. NIV: “If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take them into your house or welcome them.” The pronouns definitely are masculine: “him.” But in the context, anyone could include women, so the NIV tries to accommodate that fact by switching to the neutral “them,” because we do not have a gender neutral single pronoun other than “it,” which would not be appropriate. But now the single becomes plural.
- Luke 14.27: NET: “Whoever does not carry his own cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.” NIV: “And whoever does not carry their cross...” NLT: “And if you do not carry your own cross...”

Sometimes gender inclusiveness does not make sense contextually.

- 1 Corinthians 15.21: NET: “For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead also came through a man.” NRSV: “For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being.” There probably is significance that Adam and Jesus were men, not just people.
- Proverbs 1.8 is a father talking to his son, but several translations [NET; NLT; NRSV] change this to “my child.” Compare NASB: “Hear, my son, your father's instruction...”
- 1 Timothy 3.2: NET has “The overseer then must be above reproach, the husband of one wife” but NRSV has “be above reproach, married only once,” thereby removing the requirement to be male.

The Best

There is no best Bible for all purposes, all people, or all verses.

If your desire is to read a little each day, then find a modern translation which you can enjoy reading and understand easily [recommended: NLT; NIV2011].

- You might consider one with study notes if you are new to Bible study [e.g., the NIV comes packaged as the NIV Life Application Bible by Tyndale or the NIV Study Bible by Zondervan].

If you want to study deeply, and you use other tools such as commentaries and Bible dictionaries, you should have at least two translations, preferably one that is formal equivalence [recommended: NASB; ESV] and one that is dynamic equivalence [recommended: NIV2011; NLT], so you can compare how they translate each phrase.

- You also can compare many translations at websites such as net.bible.org, www.biblegateway.com/versions, or www.biblestudytools.com.

Translation	Approach	Reading Level Now	Style	Gender Incl.	Date & Basis	Manuscripts
KJV [revised 1769]	Word for word	12 th Grade Old English	100s of words out of date; some literal idioms; biblical terms	100s in OT; not in NT	1611 / 1769 Revise Bishops'	Non-standard OT Erasmus' NT based on few, errant, Byzantine
NKJV	Word for word	8 th Grade [higher vocabulary?]	Some literal idioms Biblical terminology	100s in OT; not in NT	1982 Revise KJV	Leningrad Codex/KJV Still Erasmus' NT
NASB [revised 1995]	Word for word	11 th Grade	Some literal idioms; biblical terminology	No	1971 / 1995 Revise ASV	Leningrad Codex OT NA26 NT but deviates
NRSV	Word for word	10 th Grade	Some literal idioms; biblical terminology	Yes, more than others	1989 Revise RSV	Leningrad Codex OT NA26 NT
ESV [revised 2007]	Mostly word for word [b/w NASB & NIV]	9 th Grade	Some literal idioms keeps biblical terms	Yes, less than others	2001 /2007 Revise RSV [90% RSV]	Leningrad Codex OT NA26 NT
HCSB	Mixed	8 th Grade	Some literal idioms Keeps biblical terms	Minimal	2004	Leningrad Codex OT NA26 NT w. notes from majority text
NIV [revised 2011]	Mixed	7 th Grade	Removes most biblical terminology	Yes	1984 / 2011 New translation	Leningrad Codex OT NA27 but deviates
NET	Mostly thought for thought; inconsistent [b/w NIV/NLT]	8 th Grade	Translates idioms Some biblical terms	Yes	2005 New Translation	Leningrad Codex OT NA27 but deviates 60,000 trans. notes
NLT [revised 2007]	Thought for thought	6 th Grade	Translates idioms & biblical terms	Yes	1996 / 2007 Revise LB from ASV But new transl.	Leningrad Codex OT NA26 NT
NCV	Thought for thought	5 th Grade	Translates idioms & biblical terms	Yes	1992	Leningrad Codex OT NA26 NT
NirV [revised 1998]	Mixed	3 rd Grade	Translates idioms & biblical terms	No	1996 / 1998 Make NIV for children	NIV1984 [NA26 NT / Leningrad Codex OT]