

Week 4: Bible Translation

New Testament (Transmission: How can we know that the Bible we have is what was originally written?)

“As the verbally inspired Word of God, the Bible is without error in the original writings...” -EFCA Doctrinal Statement #2

We do not possess the original manuscripts, but copies of copies of copies which contain variations. The field of textual criticism seeks to compare the various manuscripts to figure out the original wording.

No doctrine of the Christian faith is put into doubt by the variations in the manuscript evidence.

- **Greek manuscripts:** over 5,856 (seanmcdowell.org)
- **Versions (Translations):** Latin, Coptic, Syriac, Ethiopic, Armenian, Georgian, and Gothic. (18,130)
- **Citations:** in the early church fathers from published sermons and books.

Most modern Bible translations in English use the Critical/Eclectic Text of the Nestle-Aland 28th Edition or United Bible Society Greek New Testament. (NASB, ESV, ASV, NIV, etc.) The KJV and NKJV use the Majority Text.

“The Majority Text differs from the modern critical text in only about 6,500 places. In other words, the two texts agree almost 98 percent of the time.” -The Majority Text and the Original Text: Are They Identical @www.bible.org.

What makes a good Bible translation?

“The single most important reason that translation invites controversy is that **it requires interpretation...Since no two languages are exactly alike**, all translators are faced with difficult choices in how they render one language into another.”

-John D. Meade & Peter J. Gurry. Scribes and Scripture (pp. 197-198).

English uses word order to determine the function of words in a sentence, but Hebrew and Greek do not follow English word order. Instead, they use different forms (think spellings) of the words to identify their function in the sentence.

For God so loved the world

Subject:

Verb:

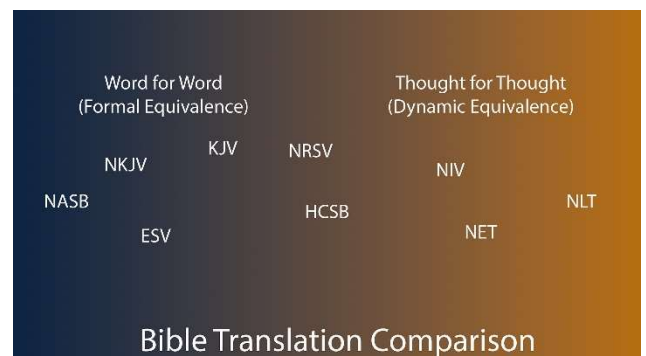
Direct Object:

Greek nouns have four primary “cases”: nominative (subject), genitive (modifier), dative (indirect object), accusative (direct object) which different case endings to the words and they change for masculine and feminine. For example, there are 18 different forms for the definite article in Greek.

Formal vs Dynamic Equivalence

There are two main translation philosophies. A translation’s primary goal is to faithfully reproduce the original meaning of the text.

1. Formal equivalence or “word for word” translation. More closely tied to the original text, but can be more difficult to read.
2. Dynamic equivalence or “thought for thought” translation. Less tied to the original text, but can be easier to read.



“This Book [is] the most valuable thing that this world affords. Here is Wisdom; this is the royal Law; these are the lively Oracles of God.” With these words the Moderator of the Church of Scotland hands a Bible to the new monarch in Britain’s coronation service. These words echo the King James Bible translators, who wrote in 1611, “God’s sacred Word ... is that inestimable treasure that excelleth all the riches of the earth.” **This assessment of the Bible is the motivating force behind the publication of the English Standard Version.** –Preface to the ESV

“To this end **each word and phrase in the ESV has been carefully weighed against the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek**, to ensure the fullest accuracy and clarity and to avoid under-translating or overlooking any nuance of the original text. The words and phrases themselves grow out of the Tyndale–King James legacy, and most recently out of the RSV, with **the 1971 RSV text providing the starting point for our work.**”

-Preface to the ESV

“The ESV is an “essentially literal” translation that seeks as far as possible to reproduce the precise wording of the original text and the personal style of each Bible writer. As such, **its emphasis is on “word-for-word” correspondence**, at the same time taking full account of differences in grammar, syntax, and idiom between current literary English and the original languages.”

-Preface to the ESV

“Every translation is at many points a trade-off between literal precision and readability...Within this framework we have sought to be “as literal as possible” while maintaining clarity of expression and literary excellence.”

-Preface to the ESV

The best Bible translations are done by teams of experts and scholars.

“**The ESV publishing team has included more than a hundred people.** The fourteen-member Translation Oversight Committee benefited from the work of more than **fifty biblical experts serving as Translation Review Scholars** and from the comments of the more than fifty members of the Advisory Council, all of which was carried out under the auspices of the Crossway Board of Directors. This hundred-plus-member team shares a common commitment to the truth of God’s Word and to historic Christian orthodoxy and is international in scope, including leaders in many denominations.”

-Preface to the ESV

Paraphrases

A third category, the paraphrase leans towards contemporary contextualization or putting things in a way that makes sense to modern readers more than faithfulness to the original text. Therefore, it has some sort of overarching agenda.

- The Message: to put the Bible in language which will draw people in to read it
- The Inclusive Bible: to get rid of “sexist and classist” forms and attitudes
- The Bible in Rhyme: to rhyme the Bible

Use a paraphrase judiciously and only as a supplement to robust translations.

Understand what it is and what it is trying to accomplish.

Pastor Seth’s Recommendation

Find a good translation not a paraphrase, done by a team of world-class scholars and theologians, from an evangelical Christian perspective as the Bible you will study and memorize. There are many wonderful translations out there.