

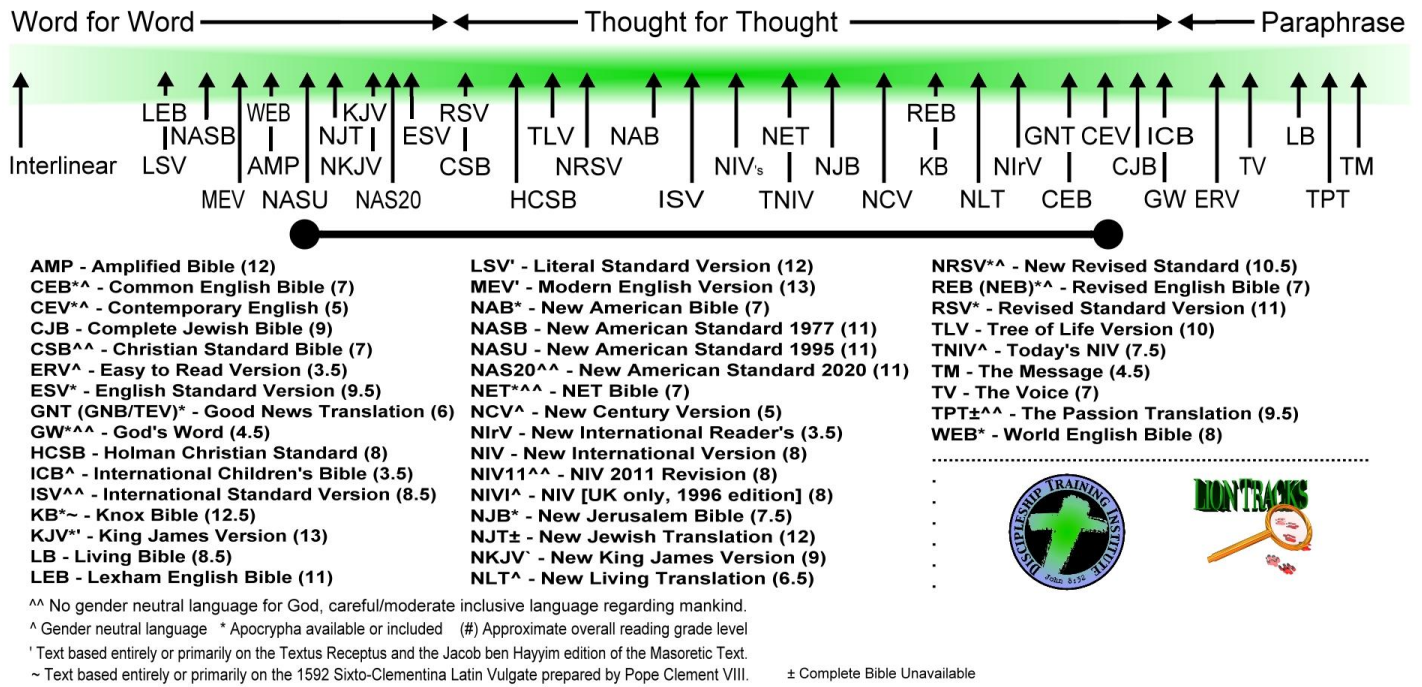
The Bible in English

Introduction

Translation is not an easy task because languages don't have an exact one-to-one correspondence between each other. You may have heard the common expression, "something lost in translation", the goal of a good translation is to minimize any loss. This involves a series of trade-offs that must be made to avoid misunderstandings while preserving readability. Consider a very literal translation of John 3:16:

John 3:16 (YLT) 16 for God did so love the world, that His Son -- the only begotten -- He gave, that every one who is believing in him may not perish, but may have life age-during.

English Bible Translation Comparison



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Approaches to Translation

- **Interlinear** - tries to avoid translation by listing the Greek text and then above or below it listing an equivalent English word. You may also see something similar called a "Reverse Interlinear" which takes an English translation and lists above or below the original Greek that caused each word.
- **Formal Equivalence (Word for Word)** - looks at each word to find an equivalent word in English. This may include syntactical correspondence where the grammar format is also kept the same. The risk of formal equivalence is that it risks an on-the-surface rendering (I know what it says, tell me what it means).
- **Dynamic Equivalence (Thought for Thought)** - translates each thought into equivalent English words which increases the risk of subjective bias. (I know what you mean, tell me what it says)

Luke 3:6 (NKJV) And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.' ”

Luke 3:6 (HCSB) and everyone will see the salvation of God

- **Paraphrase** - restatement of the idea in modern terms which has an even greater risk of subjective bias.

An example of a restating in units of measure.

Luke 24:13 (KJV) 13 And, behold, two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about threescore furlongs.

Luke 24:13(NKJV) 13 Now behold, two of them were traveling that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was seven miles from Jerusalem.

Or a simple restating to help us skipping over words we don't often use:

Matthew 6:9 (NKJV) 9 In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.

Matthew 6:9 (NLT) 9 Pray like this: Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy.

This can lead to restating that seems extreme:

Matthew 23:27 (NKJV) 27 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness.

Matthew 23:27 (TM/MSG) “You’re hopeless, you religion scholars and Pharisees! Frauds! You’re like manicured grave plots, grass clipped and the flowers bright, but six feet down it’s all rotting bones and worm-eaten flesh.

Difficulties in Translation

- **Idioms** - while clear to the original listeners may not be used in the target language.

Amos 4:6 (NKJV) “Also I gave you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, And lack of bread in all your places; Yet you have not returned to Me,” Says the Lord.

Amos 4:6 (CSB) I gave you absolutely nothing to eat in all your cities, a shortage of food in all your communities, yet you did not return to me. This is the Lord’s declaration.

- **Euphemisms** - some euphemisms used in the original text are easily missed today, if not explained.

1 Samuel 24:3 (KJV) And he came to the sheepcotes by the way, where was a cave; and Saul went in to cover his feet: and David and his men remained in the sides of the cave.

1 Samuel 24:3 (NASB) And he came to the sheepfolds on the way, where there was a cave; and Saul went in to relieve himself. Now David and his men were sitting in the inner recesses of the cave.

- **Words with shades of meaning** - Greek has several words for love, but in English we often miss this and may think Jesus' question was identical all 3 times.

John 21:15 15 So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Feed My lambs.”

- **Words change over time** - thinking the word means the same today can lead to confusion, such as pitiful.

James 5:11 (KJV) 11 Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.

James 5:11 (NKJV) 11 Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.

- **Gender neutrality varies by languages** - We are tempted to think of this as a political correctness issue (and some take it that extreme), but it is a translation accuracy issue. English doesn't have a plural gender-neutral pronoun causing special difficulties.

Acts 17:30 (KJV) And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent:

Acts 17:30 (CSB) 30 “Therefore, having overlooked the times of ignorance, God now commands all people everywhere to repent

John 8:51 (KJV) Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death.

John 8:51 (NKJV) Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death.”

Sometimes plurals are used to avoid the English pronoun issue and this can lead to mistakes. Even NT quotes of OT scriptures sometimes used plurals in the Greek restating.

Psalms 32:1 (KJV) Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

Rom 4:7 (KJV) Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.

- **Unintentional bias** - this can be reduced by using a diverse, large number of translators as a check on each other's work.
- **God's Name** - several different terms were used to refer to God in the original texts (which could be a lesson by itself). How to distinguish between these in an understandable way is a difficult translation issue.

Early English Translations

- **Aldhelm** - around 709 translated the Psalms
- **Bede** - around 735 translated the Gospel of John
- **Wycliff** - 1382 - translated the Bible from Latin to English (a translation of a translation), wanting to make the Bible available to the common man
- **Tyndale** - 1535 - created an English version from the Greek text that had been put together by Erasmus. Persecution for this forced him to leave England for Germany with copies smuggled back into England. The Catholic church condemned the effort and burned copies of it they could. Tyndale's goal was to put

the Bible in the language of the common man. In 1539, he was tricked out of his safe location, imprisoned, strangled and burned at the stake.

- **Coverdale** - 1535 - created a version based on Tyndale's that circulated without official hindrance. He used Tyndale's New Testament and the portions of the Old Testament that Tyndale had completed, but not being a deep Greek scholar translated the missing sections from a German versions.
- **Matthew's Bible** - 1537 - created by John Rogers (aka Thomas Matthew). He combined the works of Tyndale and Coverdale with small sections of his own. John Rogers was burned at the stake in 1555.
- **Great Bible** - 1537 - was essentially Coverdale's version, but specifically created and authorized to be available and read in the churches. Preachers of the day complained that people were reading the Bible instead of listening to their sermons
- **Geneva Bible** - 1560 - was the first mechanically printed mass produced Bible available in English. It was created by a number of scholars who fled England for Geneva Switzerland. It relies heavily on Tyndale's version
- **Bishops Bible** - 1568 - translated by a number of people under the direction of Matthew Parker, but shows inconsistencies as he got too busy to sufficiently oversee the effort.
- **Douay/Rheims** - 1609 - was a translation made by the Catholics from Latin Vulgate into English.

Which Translation?

Today we have many quality translations to choose from, along with a number of more questionable ones. My opinion is that there isn't one best translation. The best is of the quality ones, the one that you will actually read and study. While I can't say one is best, as we discuss them I will give opinions on strengths and weaknesses that might make some translations more appropriate in some circumstances.

King James Version

The King James Version was authorized by a mandate of King James in 1604, which gave specific instructions to the 6 panels of a total of 48 translators. These instructions included which prior efforts it was to be based on (the 1602 Bishops' Bible), as well as a prohibition on marginal notes (let the Bible speak without commentary). Even though a revision of the Bishops' Bible (looking also at Tyndale's, Matthew's, Coverdale's, Whitchurch's, Geneva), 80% of Tyndale's version remains in the KJV. Using these versions means it was based on the Received Text. It was completed in 1611, although several editions of corrections/revisions have been made. It is the 1769 edition that is commonly used today. It is in the public domain (with exceptions in England) and is thus freely quotable in any manner.

The advantages of the King James are familiarity. Many people that can remember quotations from the Bible will remember it from the King James translation. When studying with some people this familiarity may avoid some distractions when beginning a study. Another favorable item is that it has a majestic beauty to the wording. It does use some archaic language and is written at a 12th grade reading level which can take more time to understand. It does have a few poor translations such as Easter for Passover in Acts 12:4.

New King James Version

The New King James Version is a translation that was commissioned in 1975 by Thomas Nelson publishers and completed in 1982, using 130 translators. It is based on the King James Version (meaning it also is based on the Received Text). It also is a formal equivalence translation. It replaces thou and thine with modern English equivalents while keeping the beauty of the King James text. Much more easily read than the King James Version being at the 9th grade reading level. It is protected by copyright, but can be quoted in

situations where it makes up less than 25% of the work, less than 500 verses are quoted and doesn't contain a complete Bible book. Credit must be given when quoting it. It makes a nice, readable update from the KJV, while maintaining much that people are familiar with.

Revised Version (RV)

The Revised Version was published in 1885 as a revision done by 50 scholars to the King James Version. It was based on the then recently found Greek texts (Wescott-Hort) instead of the Received Text. The translators had a policy of using no modern English expression that wasn't in use in 1611. The resulting translation was widely regarded as literal but flat, one quote about it was "strong in Greek, but weak in English". This version is not very popular, but was the starting point for many of the translations that followed.

American Standard Version (ASV)

A revision to the Revised Version based on the recommendations that 30 American scholars had made during the completion of the Revised Version. It was completed in 1901. It is one of the most literal of the common English translations, but at the expense of readability. Until recently, it was one of the only modern English translations not covered by copyright. Because of the readability issues, it is infrequently used today, except in cases where meeting the requirements for permission to quote would be difficult.

Revised Standard Version (RSV)

The Revised Standard Version was completed in 1952 by a team of 32 translators as an update to the ASV. It used the Nestle-Aland Greek text. It dropped the archaic English pronouns, except when addressing God. In some ways it solidified the precedent for using best Greek manuscripts as they became available and revision to improve readability and understanding. It greatly improved readability over the ASV and is at a 10th grade reading level. A controversy arose upon publication because it translates Isaiah 7:14 as "young woman" instead of virgin (to match the New Testament). Permission is required to quote more than 500 verses, when it makes up more than 25% of the item, when it quotes an entire book, or for use in electronic (non-printed) media.

English Standard Version (ESV)

The ESV was an authorized revision to the RSV completed in 2001. It updated archaic language while also moving the text in a more literal direction. This was organized by Crossway books and used over 100 translators. It has an 8th grade reading level. I find that its wording is sufficiently different from the KJV that my lack of familiarity with their wording encourages thinking about the meaning of the verses. This makes it an excellent second version to have available. Permission is required to quote more than 500 verses, when it makes up more than 25% of the item, when it quotes more than 50% of an entire book.

New American Standard Version (NASB)

The NASB was another revision of the ASV, as with the controversy noted above, some believed the RSV had a liberal bias, the NASB was done to correct this. The Lockman foundation organized a group of 58 scholars to produce this translation, completed in 1971. It is the most consistently literal of the major English translations. It was revised in 1995 (NASU) to improve readability removing thee and thou. It has an 11th grade reading level. It is a good translation to use when you are studying an issue deeply because of its literal approach (less necessary now, as interlinears and other references are available to us as apps).

Christian Standard Bible (CSB)

The CSB was created by Holman Publishers using over 100 scholars as a revision to the HCSB in 2016. They describe their translation as “optimal equivalence”, meaning word for word when possible, but thought-for-thought when needed for accuracy. I find CSB to be very readable and a good choice for more casual Bible reading (some of my examples on handling idioms, etc. show how this approach can improve casual understanding). It is currently the version on my nightstand.

World English Bible (WEB)

WEB is an update to the ASV done by a large, changing group of volunteers adding some risk of less credentials for accomplishing a translation. The WEB trademark is held by ebible.org, although the text itself is explicitly put into the public domain. It was originally named ASV 1997. The goal was to produce a freely distributable modern English translation. The first pass to update the ASV was an automated process, followed by manual passes to the text. I like the idea of a freely available modern text, but have not used it enough myself to have an opinion on its accuracy.

New International Version (NIV)

The NIV was produced by the International Bible Society in 1978 using a team of 15 scholars with help from over 100 additional translators. The NIV is a thought-for-thought translation designed to be very approachable and readable. It is currently the best-selling English translation. Because it is a thought-for-thought translation it is more vulnerable to bias and more suited for casual reading than deep study.

New Living Translation (NLT)

The NLT is a thought-for-thought translation based loosely on the Living Bible paraphrase by over 90 scholars. It was written to be understood and especially to be clear when read aloud. As a thought-for-thought it is better for casual reading than deep study.

Romans 3:23 (NLT) For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard.

1 John 2:3-6 (NLT) And we can be sure that we know him if we obey his commandments. 4 If someone claims, “I know God,” but doesn’t obey God’s commandments, that person is a liar and is not living in the truth. 5 But those who obey God’s word truly show how completely they love him. That is how we know we are living in him. 6 Those who say they live in God should live their lives as Jesus did.

New English Translation (NET)

NET is a completely new translation created by twenty biblical scholars under the direction of the Biblical Studies Foundation in 2001. The translation process is very transparent with over 60,000 translation notes available alongside the text. It is protected by copyright, but the license allows free non-commercial use without needing to ask for permission. The translated text includes some thought-for-thought translations, but in those cases the notes give the word-for-word information. The translation notes can be useful, even when using other translations.

Amplified (AMP)

The Amplified version was produced jointly by Zondervan and The Lockman Foundation in 1965. The text is largely based on the ASV. It is a very unique translation in that synonyms and explanations are given within parentheses or brackets within the text. While these are obviously added and we must be careful of them, they do help in not reading-over words that aren't used commonly today.

Genesis 2:3 (AMP) 3 So God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it [as His own, that is, set it apart as holy from other days], because in it He rested from all His work which He had created and done.

Translation Comparison

Version	Created	Revisions	Basis	By (Sponsor)	Type	Reading Level	Copyright /Usage	Notes
King James Version (KJV)	1611 /1769	Tyndale	Received Text	54 Translators in 6 panels (KJ)	Word for Word	12th Grade	Public Domain	Familiar to people, archaic words, majestic
New King James Version (NKJV)	1982	KJV	Received Text	119 Translators	Word for Word	9th Grade	<500 verses, <25%, credit line, no complete book	Updated but maintain structure and beauty of KJV
American Standard Version (ASV)	1901	Revised Version	Wescott-Hort	30 American scholars	Word for Word	12th Grade	Public Domain	Very true to Greek but very formal
Revised Standard Version (RSV)	1952	ASV	Nestle-Aland	32 Translators	Word for Word	10th Grade	<500 verses, <25%, credit line, no complete book	Controversy because of OT use of "young woman"
English Standard Version (ESV)	2001	RSV	Nestle-Aland	100+ Translators (Crossway)	Word for Word	8th Grade	< 500 verses, <25%, <50% of a complete book, credit line	Readable, new wording helps make you think
New American Standard Bible (NASB)	1971 /1995	ASV	Nestle-Aland	54 Translators (Lockman)	Word for Word	11th Grade	<1000 verses, <50%, no complete book,	Generally regarded as the most literal

							credit line	
New International Version (NIV)	1978	None	UBS 1 & 2	115 Translators (NYBS)	Thought for Thought	7th Grade	<500 verses, <25%, credit line, no complete book	Most popular thought-for-thought translation.
World English Bible (WEB)	2000	ASV	ASV	Many Volunteers	Word for Word	12th Grade	Public Domain	Goal was freely available in modern English. Initially used automated process to replace archaic words
Christian Standard Bible (CSB)	2017	HCSB	UBS	100+ scholars (Holman)	Dynamic	7th Grade	<1000 verses, <50%, no complete book, credit line	Tries to balance word-for-word and thought types
New Living Translation (NLT)	1996 /2004	Living Bible	Nestle/UBS	90 Translators (Tyndale House)	Thought for Thought	6th Grade	<500 verses, <25%, credit line, no complete book	Goal to be very easy to read
New English Translation (NET)	2001	None	All	25 Translators in very transparent manner	Thought for Thought	7th Grade	Non-Commercial use allowed	Extensive translation notes giving more literal information
Amplified	1965	ASV	Wescott/Nestle	13 Translators (Lockman)	Special	11th Grade	<1000 verses, <50%, no complete book, credit line	Unique synonyms/explanations in parentheses