



into the Melting Pot

the question is more important than the answer

Sunday 09 February 2020

Gods Words? - Translations

Original text - Hebrew Bible

The Hebrew Bible was mainly written in Biblical Hebrew, with some portions (notably in Daniel and Ezra) in Biblical Aramaic. From the 6th century to the 10th century CE, Jewish scholars, today known as Masoretes, compared the text of all known biblical manuscripts in an effort to create a unified, standardized text. A series of highly similar texts eventually emerged, and any of these texts are known as Masoretic Texts.

The Masoretes also added vowel points (called niqqud) to the text, since the original text contained only consonants. This sometimes required the selection of an interpretation; since some words differ only in their vowels their meaning can vary in accordance with the vowels chosen.

Textual criticism of the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible) centres on the comparison of the manuscript versions of the Masoretic text to early witnesses such as the Septuagint, the Vulgate, the Samaritan Pentateuch, various Syriac texts, and the biblical texts of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Original text - New Testament

The New Testament was written in Koine Greek. The Greek manuscripts written by the original authors, have not survived. Scholars surmise the original Greek text from the manuscripts that do survive. The three main textual traditions of the Greek New Testament are sometimes called the Alexandrian, the Byzantine, and the Western text-type.

Most variants among the manuscripts are minor, such as alternative spelling, alternative word order, the presence or absence of an optional definite article (the), and so on.

Occasionally, a major variant happens when a portion of a text was missing or for other reasons. Examples of major variants are the different additional endings in versions of Mark, and the 'woman caught in adultery' in some versions of John and in differing locations (John 8:1-11, or after John 7:36 or John 25:25).

The discovery of older manuscripts which belong to the Alexandrian text-type, including the 4th-century Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus, led scholars to revise their view about the original Greek text.

Early manuscripts of the Pauline epistles and other New Testament writings show no punctuation whatsoever. The punctuation was added later by other editors, according to their own understanding of the text.

The New Testament has been preserved in more manuscripts than any other ancient work, creating a challenge in handling so many different texts when performing these comparisons. The King James (Authorized) Version was based on the Textus Receptus, an eclectic Greek text prepared by Erasmus based primarily on Byzantine text Greek manuscripts, which make up the majority of existing copies of the New Testament. The majority of New Testament textual critics now favour a text that is Alexandrian in complexion.

Ancient translations - Aramaic Targums

Some of the first translations of the Torah began during the Babylonian exile, when Aramaic became the common language of the Jews. With most people speaking only Aramaic and not understanding Hebrew, the Targums were created to allow the common person to understand the Torah as it was read in ancient synagogues.

Ancient translations - Greek Septuagint

During the 3rd to 2nd centuries BCE in Alexandria, Egypt, translators compiled a Koine Greek version of the Hebrew scriptures completing the task by 132 BCE. The Septuagint (LXX - traditionally written by 70 scribes), later became the accepted text of the Old Testament in the Christian church and the basis of its canon. It differs somewhat from the later standardized Hebrew Masoretic Text.

Versions of the Septuagint contain several passages and whole books not included in the Masoretic texts of the Tanakh.

The 'classic' translation error is found in Isaiah 7:14 and quoted in Matthew 1:23 from the Septuagint "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, . . ." (NRSV).

Hebrew: *almah* = young woman

Greek: *betulah* = virgin and not *parthenos* = young woman

Ancient translations - Middle Ages

When ancient scribes copied earlier books, they wrote notes on the margins of the page (*marginal glosses*) to correct their text, especially if a scribe accidentally omitted a word or line, and to comment about the text. When later scribes were copying the copy, they were sometimes uncertain if a note was intended to be included as part of the text. Over time, different regions evolved different versions, each with its own assemblage of omissions, additions, and variants.

The earliest surviving complete manuscript of the entire Bible in Latin is the Codex Amiatinus, a Latin Vulgate edition produced in 8th-century England at the monastery of Wearmouth-Jarrow.

One likely transcription error can be found in Mark 10:25, Matthew 19:24 and Luke 18:25. For many years it has been common teaching that there is a gate in Jerusalem, used after dark, called 'the Eye of the Needle' through which a camel could not pass unless it stooped and first had all its baggage removed. A lovely story and an excellent parable for preaching but unfortunately unfounded as there is no evidence for such a gate! The Greek *kamilos* ('camel') should perhaps really be *kamêlos*, meaning 'cable, rope'. Hence it is easier to thread a needle with a rope (rather than a strand of cotton) than for a rich man to enter the kingdom.

Initial translations were on a 'word-for-word' basis, the English word being written above the Greek directly in the text.

The translation of the Bible into English began in Anglo-Saxon times. In the seventh century, a poet named Caedmon translated a series of biblical stories into 'Old English' (Anglo-Saxon) verse. There were copies of parts of the Bible in Old English, the language of the common people, from as early as the eighth century CE.

The monk and scholar Bede translated the gospel of John into Old English in 735 CE, allegedly on his deathbed.

Alfred the Great had a number of passages of the Bible circulated in the vernacular in around 900 CE. These included passages from the Ten Commandments and the Pentateuch, which he prefixed to a code of laws. In approximately 990 CE, a full and freestanding version of the four Gospels in idiomatic Old English by a priest named Aelfric appeared, in the West Saxon dialect; these are called the *Wessex Gospels*.

After the arrival of the Normans in 1066 CE, new forms of the English language developed. A scribe called Eadwine translated the book of Psalms into 'Anglo-Norman', the language of the upper classes, in 1160 CE.

Pope Innocent III in 1199 CE banned unauthorized versions of the Bible as a reaction to perceived 'heresies'. The synods of Toulouse and Tarragona (1234 CE) outlawed possession of such renderings.

The hermit and writer Richard Rolle translated the Psalms into 'Middle English', the language of the common people, around 1340 CE. His writings were very popular and were widely circulated.

Many regard John Wycliffe (1320–1384) as the first to translate the entire Bible into English. In fact, he probably only translated some of it. It is likely that, under Wycliffe's oversight, the scholars Nicholas Hereford and John Trevisa translated the rest.

Wycliffe was a priest and noted scholar from Oxford University. He wanted radical reform of the Church and believed it should stay out of politics. He gathered a group of followers who were nicknamed the 'Lollards' (which in Dutch means 'babblers of nonsense').

Wycliffe's outspoken views about Church corruption and his claim that some of its teachings were unbiblical got him into hot water.

Wycliffe believed that people should consult the Bible for guidance - rather than Church leaders. For this, they would need a copy of the Bible in their own language. The Bible he inspired came out between 1380 and 1390 CE and was a literal translation of the Latin Vulgate. Shortly after his death, his secretary John Purvey produced a revision of Wycliffe's translation.

The Lollards were sent out across England to read these Bibles to people. Wycliffe hoped that his lay preachers would use them to sweep away what he saw as superstition in the Church. This did not go down well among the Church leaders. They had no time for his religious or political agenda. In 1381 CE, a Lollard preacher named John Ball stirred up the common people by referencing the Bible during the 'Peasant's Revolt' (medieval poll-tax riots). From then on, owning and reading the Bible in English became associated with religious and political unrest. This led to a clampdown by the King and the Church.

Between 1407 and 1409 CE, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Arundel, forbade people to read or own any Bible text that had not been vetted by a local bishop. Lollard Bibles, where found, were confiscated and burned.

Chapter and Verses

Cardinal Hugo de Sancto Caro is often given credit for first dividing the Latin Vulgate into chapters in the real sense, but it is the arrangement of his contemporary and fellow cardinal Stephen Langton who in 1205 created the chapter divisions which are used today. They were then inserted into Greek manuscripts of the New Testament in the 16th century. Robert Estienne (Robert Stephanus) was the first to number the verses within each chapter, his verse numbers entering printed editions in 1551 CE (New Testament) and 1571 CE (Hebrew Bible).

The division of the Bible into chapters and verses has received criticism from some traditionalists and modern scholars. Critics state that the text is often divided in an incoherent way, or at inappropriate rhetorical points, and that it encourages citing passages out of context. Nevertheless, the chapter and verse numbers have become indispensable as technical references for Bible study

Reformation and Early Modern period

The first printed Bible was in Latin. It became available between 1450 and 1456 CE in Germany. It was printed by Johannes Gutenberg, who invented a process for printing from movable type. The first printed copy of the Bible in English was William Tyndale's New Testament.

The English reformer William Tyndale (1494-1536 CE) was the first person to translate the New Testament directly from Greek to English. Tyndale was a priest and distinguished Oxford scholar who strongly believed that everyone should be able to read the Bible. In 1523 CE, he asked the Bishop of London, for permission to translate and print a new English Bible. But the Bishop viewed Tyndale as a troublemaker, and said no. However, Tyndale pressed ahead anyway, with the support of some merchant friends. He moved to

Europe and in 1525 CE, he produced a translation of the New Testament. Six thousand copies of this translation were printed and smuggled into England.

His version of the New Testament angered the Bishop and the then Lord Chancellor of England, Thomas More. They disagreed with the way Tyndale had translated certain biblical words believing that he had changed the Bible as he attempted to translate it and were unhappy with his footnotes, seen as criticism of the Catholic Church. Copies of Tyndale's translation were systematically collected and then publicly burned. The reigning king, Henry VIII, at the time, was opposed to Bibles in English. Tyndale began to translate the Old Testament, but never managed to finish it. In 1536 CE, he was arrested and executed for heresy.

After his death, Miles Coverdale (1488-1569 CE) finished off Tyndale's project by producing an English translation in 1535 CE published under a pseudonym to create the 'Matthew Bible', the first complete English translation. He based it largely on Tyndale's version, but also on Latin and German translations. Coverdale cleverly dedicated it to King Henry VIII, who by this time had warmed to the idea of the Bible in English. Henry therefore gave his permission for Coverdale's translation to be circulated across England. This made it the first complete Bible to be printed in English with official approval. It was also the first English Bible to separate the Old Testament Apocrypha by placing them in an appendix. Coverdale's Bible contained certain controversial teachings in its notes and chapter headings. Some church leaders had issues with these and in 1538 CE, Coverdale edited and printed a new translation, minus the controversial notes. This version, which was widely used in parish churches, became known as the Great Bible, the first 'authorised' English Bible. There followed the Bishops' Bible of 1568 CE, and the Authorized King James Version of 1611 CE, the last of which would become a standard for English speaking Christians for several centuries.

Types of Bible Translations

As Hebrew and Greek, the original languages of the Bible, like all languages, have some idioms and concepts not easily translated, there is in some cases an ongoing critical tension about whether it is better to give a word for word translation or to give a translation that gives a parallel idiom in the target language.

The further away one gets from word for word translation, the easier the text becomes to read while relying more on the theological, linguistic or cultural understanding of the translator, which one would not normally expect a lay reader to require. On the other hand, as one gets closer to a word for word translation, the text becomes more literal but still relies on similar problems of meaningful translation at the word level and makes it difficult for lay readers to interpret due to their unfamiliarity with ancient idioms and other historical and cultural contexts.

A variety of linguistic, philological and ideological approaches to translation have been used. Inside the Bible-translation community, these are commonly categorized as

- Formal equivalence, or literal (word for word) translation
- Dynamic equivalence translation
- Functional equivalence, or paraphrase (thought for thought) translation.

A literal translation tries to remain as close to the original text as possible, without adding the translators' ideas and thoughts into the translation. Thus, the argument goes, the more literal the translation is, the less danger there is of corrupting the original message. The problem with this 'word-for-word' form of translation is that it assumes a moderate degree of familiarity with the subject matter on the part of the reader.

Most printings of the KJV italicize words that are implied but are not actually in the original source text, since words must sometimes be added to have valid English grammar. Thus, even a formal equivalence translation has at least *some* modification of sentence structure and regard for contextual usage of words.

One of the most literal translations in English is the aptly named Young's Literal Translation: in this version, John 3:16 reads: "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," which is very stilted and ungrammatical in English, but maintaining more of the original tense and word order of the original Greek.

A dynamic equivalence (free) translation tries to clearly convey the thoughts and ideas of the source text. A literal translation, it is argued, may obscure the intention of the original author. A free translator attempts to convey the subtleties of context and subtext in the work, so that the reader is presented with both a translation of the language and the context.

A functional equivalence, or thought-for-thought, translation goes even further and attempts to give the meaning of entire phrases, sentences, or even passages rather than individual words. While necessarily less precise, functional equivalence can be a more accurate translation method for passages containing ancient idioms that a modern reader would not pick up on. Paraphrases are typically not intended for in-depth study, but are instead intended to put the basic message of the Bible into language which could be readily understood by the typical reader without a theological or linguistic background. The Message Bible is an example of this kind of translation. The Living Bible is a paraphrase in the sense of rewording an English translation, rather than a translation using the functional equivalence method.

Bible Translations and Equivalence

Predominant use of formal equivalence

- King James Bible (1611 CE)
- Young's Literal Translation (1862 CE)
- Revised Version (1885 CE)
- American Standard Version (1901 CE)
- Revised Standard Version (1952 CE)
- Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition (1966 CE)
- New American Standard Bible (1971 CE)
- New King James Version (1982 CE)
- Green's Literal Translation (1985 CE)
- New Jewish Publication Society Tanakh (1985 CE)
- New Revised Standard Version (1989 CE)
- Orthodox Study Bible (1993 CE)
- Third Millennium Bible (1998 CE)
- Recovery Version (1999 CE)
- World English Bible (2000 CE)
- English Standard Version (2001 CE)
- Revised Standard Version Second Catholic Edition (Ignatius Bible) (2006 CE)
- Lexham English Bible (2011 CE)
- Modern English Version (2014 CE)
- Tree of Life Version (2014 CE)
- Saint Joseph New Catholic Bible (2019 CE)
- Revised New Jerusalem Bible (2019 CE)

Moderate use of both formal and dynamic equivalence (called 'optimal equivalence')

- New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures (1961, revised 1984, 2013 CE)
- Amplified Bible (1965 CE)
- Confraternity Bible (1969 CE)
- Modern Language Bible (1969 CE)
- New American Bible (1970 CE)
- New International Version (1978, revised 1984, 2011 CE)
- New International Reader's Version (1996 CE)

- New Living Translation (1996 CE)
- Holman Christian Standard Bible (2004 CE)
- Today's New International Version (2005 CE)
- New English Translation (2005 CE)
- New American Bible Revised Edition (2011 CE)
- The Voice (2012 CE)
- Christian Standard Bible (2017 CE)
- Evangelical Heritage Version (2019 CE)

Extensive use of dynamic equivalence or paraphrase or both

- The Holy Bible: Knox Version (1949 CE)
- Jerusalem Bible (1966 CE)
- New Life Version (1969 CE)
- New English Bible (1970 CE)
- Good News Bible (formerly 'Today's English Version') (1976 CE)
- New Jerusalem Bible (1985 CE)
- Christian Community Bible (1988 CE)
- Revised English Bible (1989 CE)
- God's Word Translation (1995 CE)
- Contemporary English Version (1995 CE)
- Complete Jewish Bible (1998 CE)
- CTS New Catholic Bible (2007 CE)
- New Community Bible (2008 CE)

Extensive use of paraphrase

- The Living Bible (1971 CE)
- The Message Bible (2002 CE)

Alternative approaches

Most translations make the translators' best attempt at a single rendering of the original, relying on footnotes where there might be alternative translations or textual variants. An alternative is taken by the Amplified Bible. In cases where a word or phrase admits of more than one meaning the Amplified Bible presents all the possible interpretations, allowing the reader to choose one. For example, the first two verses of the Amplified Bible read:

In the beginning God (Elohim) created [by forming from nothing] the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and void *or* a waste and emptiness, and darkness was upon the face of the deep [primeval ocean that covered the unformed earth]. The Spirit of God was moving (hovering, brooding) over the face of the waters.

Single source translations

While most translations attempt to synthesize the various texts in the original languages, some translations also translate one specific textual source, generally for scholarly reasons. A single volume example for the Old Testament is *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible* by Martin Abegg, Peter Flint and Eugene Ulrich.

Gender Inclusivity

A number of recent Bible translations have taken a variety of steps to deal with current moves to prescribe changes related to gender marking in English, like the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), the New Century Version (NCV), Contemporary English Version (CEV) and Today's New International Version (TNIV).

In Jewish circles the Jewish Publication Society's translation the New Jewish Publication Society Tanakh (NJPS) is the basis for The Contemporary Torah: A Gender-Sensitive Adaptation of the JPS Translation (CJPS). Gender inclusivity is used in varying degrees by different translations.

Doctrinal differences and translation policy

In addition to linguistic concerns, theological issues also drive Bible translations. Some translations of the Bible, produced by single churches or groups of churches, may be seen as subject to a point of view by the translation committee.

For example, the New World Translation, produced by Jehovah's Witnesses, provides different renderings where verses in other Bible translations support the deity of Christ. The NWT also translates *kurios* as "Jehovah" rather than "Lord".

Other translations are distinguished by smaller but distinctive doctrinal differences. For example, the Purified Translation of the Bible, promoting the position that Christians should not drink alcohol, have New Testament references to "wine" translated as "grape juice".

Popularity

A survey in 2012 (USA) gave the most popular Bibles by sales as:

1. New International Version
2. King James Version
3. New Living Translation
4. New King James Version
5. English Standard Version

An update in 2018 gave:

1. New International Version
2. New Living Translation
3. King James Version
4. Christian Standard Bible (an update of Holman's CSB)
5. English Standard Version

Amazon UK bestsellers gave:

1. New International Version Audio
2. New International Version
3. New King James Version Audio
4. King James Version
5. English Standard Version
6. Catholic Revised Standard Version
7. King James Version Reference
8. Bible in a Year (Nicky Gumbel)
9. NIV (journal & verse mapping)
10. New King James Version

Eden Christian Books UK bestsellers:

1. New International Version Audio
2. My Little Bible (Children's)
3. International Children's Bible
4. Action Bible
5. Good News Youth
6. Desmond Tutu Children's
7. New Living Translation Economy
8. Beginner's Bible
9. NIV (journal & verse mapping)
10. King James Version (Giant print)

A study published in 2014 by The Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture at Indiana University and Purdue University found that Americans read versions of the Bible as follows:

1. King James Version (55%)
2. New International Version (19%)
3. New Revised Standard Version (7%)
4. New American Bible (6%)
5. The Living Bible (5%)
6. All other translations (8%)

Most of the material has come from multiple pages from Wikipedia, the Bible Society website, some other website pages, and some ideas from books by Geza Vermes, edited together.

Questions

1. How many versions of the Bible do you have?
2. Do you have a 'favourite' translation? What is it and why?
3. Do you like a Bible with footnotes and cross-references?
4. Do you like to use a 'Study Bible'?
5. Does the above information change your view about the Bible?
6. How confident are you about the integrity of the Bible?
7. Is the Bible true?
8. Is the Bible inspired?
9. Is the Bible truly 'Gods Word'?
10. Because of the Dead Sea Scrolls, should we be reading a modern translation of the Bible?
11. Should we be reading a gender inclusive version of the Bible?
12. Does your theological view impact your choice translation?