



Bible Versions

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Overview

The first translation of the Bible into English was the work of the scholar and theologian John Wycliffe in the 14th century. Wycliffe completed his translation of the New Testament in 1380, and it was followed by a translation of the Old Testament, which was completed by his associates after his death in 1384.

Wycliffe's translation was significant because it made the Bible accessible to English-speaking people who did not know Latin, the language in which the Bible was commonly read at the time. This helped to spread knowledge of the Bible and its teachings among the English population, and it also played a role in the development of the English language itself.

Wycliffe's translation was not widely distributed during his lifetime, as it was considered heretical by the church authorities of the time. However, copies of the translation were smuggled into England and circulated among those who were sympathetic to Wycliffe's ideas. His translation was also influential in later English translations of the Bible, such as the King James Version, which was completed in the 17th century.

Chronology & Context

The Bible has a long history of translations across different languages and cultures. Here's a chronological order of some key translations:

Hebrew Bible (Old Testament):

Hebrew to Greek (Septuagint): Around the 3rd to 2nd centuries BCE, Jewish scholars translated the Hebrew Bible into Greek in Alexandria. The Septuagint (LXX) was the result and was widely used in the early Christian Church.

New Testament:

- a) Greek to Latin (Vulgate): St. Jerome translated the New Testament from Greek into Latin in the 4th century CE. The Vulgate became the standard Latin Bible in the Western Church for over a millennium.
- b) Translations into English:
 - 1. Old English: The earliest translations of portions of the Bible into English date back to the 7th century. The Venerable Bede translated portions into Old English.
 - 2. Middle English: John Wycliffe and his associates translated the entire Bible into Middle English in the late 14th century. This was one of the first English translations.
 - 3. Early Modern English: William Tyndale produced the first printed English New Testament in the 16th century. He translated from the original Greek text into Early Modern English.

King James Version (KJV):

- a) The KJV, also known as the Authorized Version, was published in 1611. It was a collaborative work by scholars commissioned by King James I and was a revision of previous English translations, heavily influenced by the Tyndale Bible.

Other notable translations:

- a) Reformation Translations: During the Reformation, various translations were made, including Martin Luther's German translation (1522) and the Geneva Bible (1560).
- b) Modern Translations: Numerous translations into modern English have been produced since then, including the Revised Version (1885), American Standard Version (1901), Revised Standard Version (1952), New International Version (1978), and many more, each with different translation philosophies and approaches.



Each translation was influenced by linguistic, cultural, religious, and historical contexts. Translators aimed to make the Bible accessible to the people of their time, often with varying levels of theological perspective and linguistic accuracy. Translation methods evolved with advancements in scholarship, textual criticism, and language studies.

Deeper Dive

Delving deeper into the history of Bible translation involves exploring the context, motivations, and methodologies behind significant translations.

Septuagint (LXX):

The Septuagint is an essential early translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek. It was commissioned by Ptolemy II in Alexandria, Egypt, around the 3rd to 2nd centuries BCE. According to tradition, 70 or 72 Jewish scholars worked on the translation, hence the name "Septuagint" (Latin for "seventy"). The LXX was crucial as Greek was the lingua franca of the Hellenistic world, making the Scriptures accessible to Greek-speaking Jews and later to early Christians.

Vulgate:

St. Jerome, a Christian scholar, translated the Bible into Latin in the late 4th century CE. He primarily translated the Old Testament from Hebrew and the New Testament from Greek. Jerome's translation, known as the Vulgate, aimed to provide a more accurate Latin version than existing translations. His work was highly influential in Western Christianity and remained the standard Latin Bible for centuries.

John Wycliffe's Bible:

John Wycliffe, an English theologian, and his followers produced the first complete translation of the Bible into English in the late 14th century. Their translation was from the Latin Vulgate rather than the original Hebrew and Greek texts. Wycliffe's motivation was to give ordinary people access to the Scriptures in their vernacular language, challenging the authority of the clergy as the sole interpreters of the Bible.

John Wycliffe (c. 1320s–1384):

- Early Life and Education:
 - Wycliffe was an English theologian, philosopher, and reformer. He was born in Yorkshire, England, and studied at Oxford University, becoming a prominent scholar.
- Translation Work:
 - Wycliffe is renowned for leading the first translation of the Bible into English. His translation, completed in the late 14th century, was a massive undertaking that aimed to make the Scriptures accessible to the common people in their native language. It was based on the Latin Vulgate.
- Reformist Views:
 - Wycliffe's beliefs challenged certain teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. He criticized clerical corruption, the wealth of the Church, and advocated for a simpler form of Christianity, closer to what he perceived as the early Church's practices.
- Legacy:
 - Wycliffe's work laid the groundwork for later English translations of the Bible. He is often regarded as a forerunner of the Protestant Reformation due to his critiques of the Church and his emphasis on the authority of Scripture.
- Lifetime:
 - c. 1320s: John Wycliffe is born in Yorkshire, England.
 - Mid-14th Century: Wycliffe studies at Oxford University and becomes a prominent scholar.



- 1370s: Wycliffe becomes a critic of the wealth and power of the Catholic Church and questions certain doctrines and practices.
- Late 14th Century: Wycliffe and his associates produce the first complete English translation of the Bible, based on the Latin Vulgate.
- Late 14th Century: Wycliffe's teachings gain followers (Lollards), and his views are condemned by the Church.
- 1384: Wycliffe dies of natural causes, but his influence continues, and his followers face persecution.

William Tyndale's Bible:

William Tyndale, an English scholar and reformer, translated the New Testament directly from Greek into English in the 16th century. He also began translating the Old Testament before his martyrdom in 1536. Tyndale's work significantly influenced subsequent English translations, including the KJV. He aimed to make the Bible accessible to the common people, facing persecution for his efforts due to challenging traditional Church teachings.

William Tyndale (c. 1494–1536):

- Early Life and Education:
 - Tyndale was an English scholar, translator, and Protestant reformer. He studied at Oxford and Cambridge and became proficient in Greek, Hebrew, Latin, and several other languages.
- Translation Work:
 - Tyndale's significant contribution was translating the Bible into English directly from its original languages (Greek and Hebrew). He completed and published the New Testament in 1526 and began translating parts of the Old Testament before his arrest.
- Impact:
 - Tyndale's translations were foundational for subsequent English versions, including the King James Version. His work helped standardize the English language and profoundly influenced English literature.
- Martyrdom:
 - Tyndale faced opposition from religious authorities due to his translations and reformist views. He was eventually betrayed, arrested, and executed for heresy in 1536.
- Lifetime:
 - c. 1494: William Tyndale is born in Gloucestershire, England.
 - Early 16th Century: Tyndale studies at Oxford and Cambridge, becoming proficient in languages, including Greek and Hebrew.
 - Early 16th Century: Tyndale becomes influenced by humanism and the ideas of the Reformation.
 - 1522: Tyndale begins translating the New Testament from Greek into English, seeking permission from the Church but facing opposition.
 - 1526: The first edition of Tyndale's New Testament is printed in Germany and smuggled into England.
 - 1530: Tyndale continues translating the Old Testament, working on books like Genesis and Deuteronomy.
 - 1534: Tyndale's English Bible is published, and he revises the New Testament.
 - 1536: Tyndale is arrested, tried for heresy, and executed by strangulation and burning in Vilvoorde, Belgium.



King James Version (KJV):

Commissioned by King James I of England in the early 17th century, the KJV was a collaborative effort involving several scholars. It was intended to be a unifying translation for the English-speaking world, incorporating earlier translations while seeking a balance between accuracy, literary quality, and religious conservatism. The KJV became highly influential in English literature and Christianity and remained the dominant English Bible for centuries.

King James I of England (1566–1625):

- **Early Life:** Born in Scotland, James Stuart became King James VI of Scotland in 1567 and later became King James I of England in 1603 after the death of Queen Elizabeth I. He was the first monarch to rule both England and Scotland.
- **Commissioning the King James Version (KJV):** King James I initiated the translation of the Bible that resulted in the KJV, prompted by concerns about the various English translations in use at the time and seeking a unified version.
- **Role in the Translation:** James appointed teams of scholars to work on the translation, ensuring it reflected the best scholarship and diverse theological perspectives of the time. He gave instructions to the translators to ensure accuracy and consistency.
- **Legacy:** The KJV, published in 1611, became a monumental work in English literature and Christianity. It was widely used for centuries and had a profound impact on the English language, contributing numerous phrases and expressions still in use today.

These figures played crucial roles in shaping the landscape of English translations of the Bible, advocating for accessibility to Scripture in the vernacular language, and contributing significantly to religious reform and the development of the English language.

Modern Translations:

Since the KJV, various modern translations emerged, each with distinct methodologies (literal, dynamic equivalence, or a blend) and goals (accuracy, readability, theological perspective). For instance, the Revised Standard Version aimed at updating the KJV's language, while the New International Version focused on contemporary language and readability.

These translations reflect changes in linguistic understanding, textual discoveries, and evolving approaches to translation theory, making the Bible accessible and comprehensible to diverse audiences across time and culture.

Several modern translations of the Bible are widely used and respected for their different approaches to translation philosophy, language style, and intended audience. Here are some key modern versions:

New International Version (NIV):

- a. **Published:** 1978 (with revisions)
- b. **Translation Philosophy:** A balance between word-for-word and thought-for-thought translation (dynamic equivalence). Aims for accuracy, readability, and clarity in contemporary English.
- c. **Audience:** Widely used in various Christian denominations for both study and devotional purposes.

English Standard Version (ESV):

- d. **Published:** 2001 (with subsequent revisions)
- e. **Translation Philosophy:** More towards a word-for-word translation (formal equivalence), striving for accuracy and literary excellence while maintaining readability.



- f. Audience: Popular among conservative Protestants, scholars, and those looking for a more literal translation.

New Living Translation (NLT):

- g. Published: 1996 (with revisions)
- h. Translation Philosophy: Emphasizes thought-for-thought translation (dynamic equivalence), aiming for readability and clarity in modern English.
- i. Audience: Often used for devotional reading, youth outreach, and by those seeking a more accessible understanding of the text.

Christian Standard Bible (CSB):

- j. Published: 2017 (based on the Holman Christian Standard Bible, 2004)
- k. Translation Philosophy: A mix of formal and dynamic equivalence, seeking accuracy and readability while maintaining faithfulness to the original languages.
- l. Audience: Targeted at a broad Christian audience, including churches, study groups, and individuals.

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV):

- m. Published: 1989 (based on the Revised Standard Version, 1952)
- n. Translation Philosophy: A scholarly translation aiming for accuracy and faithfulness to the original languages while using gender-inclusive language where appropriate.
- o. Audience: Widely used in academic settings, mainline Protestant churches, and by scholars due to its scholarly approach and inclusivity.

The Message:

- p. Published: 2002 (New Testament); 2002–2018 (complete Bible)
- q. Translation Philosophy: A contemporary paraphrase by Eugene Peterson, focusing on conveying the Bible's message in modern, everyday language.
- r. Audience: Often used for casual reading, personal reflection, and as a supplementary text for better understanding of complex passages.

These modern translations differ in their translation philosophies, readability, and target audiences. People often choose a translation based on their personal preferences, study needs, and the context in which they intend to use the Bible—whether for scholarly research, personal study, devotional reading, or public worship.

Translation Scholarship

The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) is often regarded as a scholarly translation due to its rigorous approach to scholarship and its commitment to providing an accurate and faithful rendering of the original biblical languages. Here's a brief overview of the scholarly nature of the NRSV and a comparison with the King James Version (KJV) and the New International Version (NIV):

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV):

- Translation Philosophy: The NRSV is a revision of the Revised Standard Version (RSV) and is known for its commitment to both accuracy and inclusivity. It seeks to balance a literal (formal equivalence) translation with sensitivity to contemporary language and inclusivity in its use of gender-neutral language where applicable.
- Scholarly Input: The NRSV involves input from a diverse group of scholars and aims to incorporate the latest scholarship in biblical studies, textual criticism, and linguistics. It is often used in academic settings, including seminaries and universities.



King James Version (KJV):

- Translation Philosophy: The King James Version, published in 1611, is a more traditional translation with a formal equivalence approach. It is characterized by its majestic and poetic language, and it has had a profound influence on English literature.
- Scholarly Significance: While the KJV is not informed by modern linguistic and textual scholarship (as it predates much of it), it is recognized for its literary and historical significance. The KJV remains a classic translation, but its language can be archaic for contemporary readers.

New International Version (NIV):

- Translation Philosophy: The New International Version is a dynamic equivalence translation that seeks to balance readability and accuracy. It aims to convey the meaning of the original texts in clear and contemporary English.
- Scholarly Input: The NIV was produced by a committee of scholars from various denominations, and it benefited from advances in biblical scholarship. It is widely used across a broad spectrum of Christian denominations for both devotional and academic purposes.

Comparison:

- The NRSV is often chosen for academic study due to its scholarly approach, sensitivity to gender-inclusive language, and commitment to accuracy.
- The KJV, while not as directly informed by modern scholarship, is appreciated for its historical significance, literary excellence, and its influence on the English language.
- The NIV, with its dynamic equivalence philosophy, strikes a balance between readability and accuracy. It is popular for both devotional and study purposes.

The choice between these translations often depends on individual preferences, denominational affiliations, and the intended use (academic study, devotional reading, public worship, etc.). Each translation has its strengths and considerations based on its translation philosophy and the goals of its translators.

How are "modern" translators chosen to do the translating?

The selection process for modern translators of the Bible can vary significantly based on the translating organization, the translation goals, and the specific version being produced. However, several common factors and considerations are typically involved in choosing modern translators:

Expertise and Qualifications:

Scholarly Background: Translators are often chosen based on their academic qualifications, especially in biblical languages (Hebrew, Greek, and sometimes Aramaic), as well as in relevant fields such as ancient Near Eastern studies, linguistics, or theology.

Translation Experience: Experience in translation work, particularly in biblical studies or related fields, is highly valued. This experience can involve prior translation projects, scholarly articles or books, and expertise in the source languages.

Theological Background and Affiliation:

Denominational or Theological Affiliation: Translators might be chosen based on their theological background, often aligning with the theological perspective or doctrinal beliefs of the translating organization. This ensures that the translation reflects specific theological viewpoints.

Broad Representation: Efforts are made to include a diverse range of theological perspectives among the translating team, especially in collaborative translation projects, to maintain balance and accuracy.



Translation Philosophy:

Understanding of Translation Principles: Translators are selected based on their familiarity with various translation methodologies, such as formal equivalence (literal translation) or dynamic equivalence (thought-for-thought translation), depending on the goals of the translation project.

Ability to Maintain Faithfulness: Translators should demonstrate an understanding of the original languages and a commitment to maintaining accuracy and faithfulness to the source texts while making the translation accessible in the target language.

Collaborative Efforts and Review Process:

Team Collaboration: Many modern translations involve teams of scholars, linguists, theologians, and experts in specific areas of biblical studies. Translators are chosen for their ability to work collaboratively within these teams.

Peer Review and Oversight: Translation teams often undergo rigorous peer review and oversight by committees or advisory boards to ensure accuracy, consistency, and faithfulness to the translation goals.

Past Contributions and Reputation:

Previous Works or Contributions: Translators with prior reputable works in biblical studies, scholarly publications, or known contributions to translation projects are often considered for new translation endeavors.

Reputation in the Field: A translator's standing within the academic and religious communities, including their reputation for scholarly integrity and accuracy, is an important factor.

The process of choosing modern translators involves a careful selection of individuals with a combination of linguistic expertise, scholarly credentials, theological alignment, and experience in translation, ensuring that the resulting translation meets the goals and standards set by the translating organization or committee.

Who has the final choice in choosing those translators?

The final authority or decision-making power regarding the selection of translators for a Bible translation project often rests with the overseeing body or organization responsible for the project. This can vary based on the structure and nature of the translating entity. Several key entities or groups might be involved in making these decisions:

Translating Organization or Committee:

Leadership or Governing Body: In the case of a specific translating organization, there might be a leadership team, board of directors, or governing body responsible for overseeing the translation project. This group could have the final say in choosing translators based on recommendations, evaluations, and discussions.

Advisory Boards or Committees:

Translation Committees: Many Bible translation projects involve committees composed of scholars, linguists, theologians, and experts in biblical studies. These committees might have decision-making authority or provide recommendations to the overseeing body regarding the selection of translators.

Translating Teams:

Translation Teams: Within a translation project, there might be smaller translating teams responsible for different sections or books of the Bible. The lead scholars or coordinators within these teams might have input or a say in selecting translators for their respective portions.



Collaborative Input:

Collaborative Process: The process might involve collaboration and discussions among various stakeholders, including scholars, linguistic experts, theologians, and representatives from denominational or religious organizations. This collaborative effort often informs the final decision.

Specific Criteria and Guidelines:

Established Criteria: The translating organization or overseeing body might have specific criteria, guidelines, or prerequisites for selecting translators. These criteria could include linguistic proficiency, scholarly credentials, theological alignment, and prior translation experience.

Funding Entities or Sponsors:

Financial Contributors or Sponsors: In some cases, financial contributors or sponsors of the translation project might have a level of influence or input in the selection of translators, especially if they have specific preferences or requirements.

The final choice in selecting translators for a Bible translation project is usually made after careful consideration, evaluation of qualifications, discussions among experts, adherence to established guidelines, and alignment with the translation goals and philosophies of the overseeing entity. Collaboration and consensus-building among relevant stakeholders often play a significant role in this decision-making process.

Denomination Specific Translations

Various denominations or religious groups can and often do undertake translation activities to create Bible versions that align with their doctrinal beliefs, theological perspectives, or linguistic preferences. Here are some key points about denominational translations:

Denominational Bible Translations:

1. **Doctrinal Alignment:** Different denominations may have unique theological interpretations or doctrinal emphases. As a result, they might initiate Bible translation projects to produce versions that reflect their specific doctrinal perspectives or emphasize particular theological nuances.
2. **Language and Style Preferences:** Some denominations might prefer translations that use specific language styles or terminology consistent with their worship practices, theological teachings, or the linguistic preferences of their congregants.
3. **Cultural Context:** Translations by denominations often aim to resonate with their cultural context, addressing the needs and understanding of their specific congregations or communities.
4. **Collaborative Efforts:** Denominational translations might involve a team of scholars, theologians, linguists, and experts from within that denomination. These teams work collectively to ensure that the translation meets the doctrinal and linguistic requirements of their faith community.
5. **Distribution and Usage:** These translations are often distributed and used within the specific denomination or religious community for worship, study, and teaching purposes.

Examples of Denominational Translations:

Different denominations often have preferred Bible translations that are commonly used or recommended within their respective traditions. Here are some examples of Bible translations associated with specific denominations:

Lutheran Church:

Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS): The LCMS often uses the English Standard Version (ESV) and the New International Version (NIV) in worship, study, and teaching.



United Methodist Church:

United Methodist Church (UMC): The UMC often uses the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), Common English Bible (CEB), Revised Standard Version (RSV), and the New International Version (NIV) for study, preaching, and liturgical purposes.

Presbyterian Church (USA):

Presbyterian Church (USA): The PC(USA) commonly uses the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) and the New International Version (NIV) in worship, study, and preaching. The English Standard Version (ESV) is also used in some congregations.

Anglican Communion:

Book of Common Prayer (BCP): The Anglican Communion often uses translations such as the King James Version (KJV), the Revised Standard Version (RSV), the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), and the New International Version (NIV) in worship services, depending on the region and local preferences.

Catholic Church:

New American Bible (NAB): The New American Bible is the official English translation used in liturgy, study, and teaching within the Catholic Church in the United States.

Revised Standard Version–Catholic Edition (RSV-CE): The RSV with modifications to include deuterocanonical books is also used by some Catholics.

Baptist Churches:

Southern Baptist Convention (SBC): The SBC often uses the New International Version (NIV), the English Standard Version (ESV), the King James Version (KJV), and the Christian Standard Bible (CSB) for study, preaching, and worship.

Jehovah's Witnesses:

New World Translation (NWT): The New World Translation is exclusively used by Jehovah's Witnesses and is the primary Bible translation for their religious literature and meetings.

These associations between denominations and Bible translations can vary across different congregations or regions within a denomination. While certain translations might be more commonly used or recommended within a particular denomination, individuals within these denominations might also choose other translations based on personal preferences, study needs, or contextual reasons.

Book of Mormon

The Book of Mormon is a foundational scripture in the religious tradition of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church) and several related groups collectively known as the Latter-day Saint movement. The Book of Mormon is considered by these faith communities to be a companion scripture to the Bible.

Position of the Book of Mormon in the Latter-day Saint Tradition:

Additional Scripture: Latter-day Saints believe that the Book of Mormon is an additional testament of Jesus Christ and contains writings of ancient prophets in the Americas. They consider it to be scripture alongside the Bible, not a replacement but an additional witness of Jesus Christ's teachings.

Relationship with the Bible:

Complementary Text: The Book of Mormon is seen as complementary to the Bible and is often used in conjunction with it for spiritual study, worship, and guidance.



Doctrinal Significance: Within the Latter-day Saint tradition, the Book of Mormon is regarded as an essential source of doctrine and guidance alongside the Bible.

Translation and Usage:

Translated Text: Joseph Smith, the founder of the LDS Church, claimed to have translated the Book of Mormon from golden plates he said were revealed to him by an angel.

Study and Worship: The Book of Mormon is used extensively in Latter-day Saint worship services, teaching materials, missionary work, and personal study by adherents of the faith.

Role Within the Latter-day Saint Movement:

Distinctive Belief: The Book of Mormon is one of the distinguishing factors of the Latter-day Saint movement and holds a central place in the faith and teachings of the LDS Church and related branches.

It's important to note that while the Book of Mormon is an essential text within the Latter-day Saint tradition, it is not considered a part of the biblical canon accepted by most mainstream Christian denominations. Instead, it stands as a distinctive religious text that plays a central role in the religious beliefs and practices of the Latter-day Saint movement.

Translation Vs Interpretation

The terms "translation" and "interpretation" have specific meanings, but in the context of rendering the Bible from its original languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek) into another language (such as English), both terms can apply in different ways:

Translation:

Literal Rendering: Translation generally refers to the process of converting text from one language into another while striving to maintain fidelity to the original words, phrases, and meaning as much as possible.

Preserving Original Content: A translator aims to convey the original intent, nuances, and concepts of the source text accurately in the target language.

Interpretation:

Understanding and Explanation: Interpretation can involve the explanation or understanding of a text's meaning, context, and significance, especially in terms of elucidating complex or ambiguous elements.

Applying Meaning: It can also refer to the application of a text's meaning or relevance to a particular context, guiding readers or listeners in understanding its significance for their lives.

Bible Translation vs. Interpretation:

- **Bible Translation:** In the context of Bible rendition from its original languages into another language, the primary goal is typically to produce an accurate, faithful, and understandable rendering of the original text without altering its intended meaning.
- **Bible Interpretation:** On the other hand, Bible interpretation involves understanding and explaining the text's meaning, delving into its historical, cultural, and theological context, and applying its teachings to personal or communal contexts.

In some cases, particularly in more interpretative or paraphrase-style translations (like "The Message"), the line between translation and interpretation may blur. These versions aim not just to convey the literal words but to elucidate the meaning in a more understandable or contemporary manner, employing interpretation alongside translation to clarify complex ideas.

However, in more formal translations like the ESV, NIV, or NASB, the emphasis is primarily on accurate translation while maintaining fidelity to the original text. While both translation and interpretation play



roles in the understanding and communication of biblical content, the specific choice of words, phrases, and approach varies among different translation philosophies and methodologies.