

Why So Many Bible Versions

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1. Introduction

“Why so many versions?” This is a common question people ask. For the less informed, this has provided a reason to suspect that there might be too much subjectivity in Bible translation. The labels such as, Catholic Bible, Protestant Bible, which should rather be Catholic edition Bible, and Protestant edition Bible aggravate this. I think, we Christians, have a responsibility to make sure that the true facts are communicated because it will be for the good of the body of Christ. This paper is such an attempt.

We have information that the NIV cost eight million dollars to produce. It involved 115 translators (and probably this includes the editors). The other English versions do not differ that much. KJV had 50, NEB had 46, and NAB had 55 and NKJ 119. This would give us an idea how expensive it is to produce an English translation. But the number of English versions keeps going up. What is the reason for this?

Any discussion on Bible versions usually includes a comparison of the features that each version has. But more than this, the real challenge is to look into the motives or reasons why translation teams or publishing companies decide on such features. In this paper, I would like to look into the intentions behind the development of different Bible versions in English. This will be done by first focusing on one translation, to me the most interesting to talk about, the very first one, the Septuagint. From there, I will compare the different aspects of the translation such as the events that led to the choice of features.

2. The Septuagint:

2.1. History

A story is told of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285-246 BCE) in a document of uncertain date called *Letter of Aristaeus*, that he wanted to make a collection of the world's best literature. His librarian, Demetrius of Phalerum, called his attention to the fact that the Hebrew Scriptures should have a place in the famous library. The king therefore sent emissaries to Eleazar, the Jewish High Priest at Jerusalem, giving him as well gold, jewelry and royal salutations. The king's request was for a copy of the Hebrew Scriptures to be sent together with learned men who can translate the text into Greek.

Eleazar complied, selecting six elders from the twelve tribes who were well versed with the Jewish law. Upon arrival in Alexandria, the seventy-two translators were conducted to a quiet house by the harbor of the city. From this point onwards, there has developed versions of the story. Still from the *Letter of Aristaeus*, as the translators completed several tasks, they compared their work and reached an agreement. In Philo's version of the story however, as the translators worked under divine inspiration, they all arrived at an identical translation. In both versions, the translation was done in exactly seventy-two days.

2.2. Motivation

Most scholars who have analyzed the letter think that the author was a Jew who wrote a fictitious account in order to enhance the importance of the Hebrew Scriptures by suggesting that a pagan king had recognized their value and therefore had them translated into Greek (Metzger, 2001, p. 15). Still others say that the translation rose from a liturgical and educational need of the Jewish community in Alexandria. The Jews of the Diaspora have forgotten their Hebrew and spoke only the common Greek of the Mediterranean world. Another motive could be to defend the literary activities of Alexandrian Jews against the attacks of other Jews in Palestine or elsewhere in Egypt. The LXX translation could also be a propaganda for the original Greek translation against a contemporary revision (ABD, 1992).

2.3.Textual base

The textual base is the very soul of a translation. This continues to be a burning issue in LXX studies. Paul de Lagarde (ABD, 1992) and the Gottingen school, represented as the mainstream of contemporary scholarship, believe that all manuscripts can ultimately be traced to one prototype. On the other hand, the position of Paul Kahle (ABD, 1992) is that there was never one original translation but rather several designed to meet the needs of specific communities. Furthermore, the order of the biblical books in the LXX is different from that of the Hebrew Scriptures. Job is about 1/6th shorter in the LXX and Jeremiah lacks about 1/8th of the material in the Hebrew Bible. So, will we ever know the textual base? One thing is for sure. It is not exactly the same manuscript as the extant Hebrew Bible witnessed by Codex Leningradensis. This will keep biblical scholars busy for the next hundred years.

2.4.Approach

Even as the very first translation, one already finds the two ways of translating. The books of Job, Proverbs, Isaiah, Daniel and Esther are “free” while the books of Judges, Psalms, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles are literal (Metzger, 2001, p.17). In Isaiah 6.1, the Hebrew has ‘the hem of his robe filled the temple’ but LXX has ‘the temple was full of his glory’. But, of course, with the question on textual base, one can always argue that the Hebrew in front of the translator of that particular manuscript of LXX is really “full of his glory”. Metzger (2001, p.16) adds that in the LXX, anthropomorphisms are toned down - God does not repent, is not seen, does not have a hand.

2.5.No model for the first translation

Translating the LXX was a difficult task because they had to form and invent the vocabulary to translate the Pentateuch. The LXX is not only the first translation in Greek, it was the very first translation. There is no explicit evidence that the translators possessed dictionaries or wordlists. When

attempting to determine the meaning of a word, the translators drew upon context and etymology. It is not known if there had been exegetical traditions at that time. This is so different from present day translation, which can draw upon some existing interpretation, if not to follow as a model, but can be used for the sake of comparison.

2.6. "Purification"

Because of the tradition of copying by hand, the earliest copies would soon come to differ among themselves. Eventually, the text became so unreliable that other people, such as Origen in an attempt to "purify" the text embarked on his huge work called the Hexapla, similar to what is the modern day parallel translations, of 6 different translations and versions. There were other scholars who did their own translations such as Aquila, Symmachus and Theodotion.

Because of the great influence of the LXX, it became the textual base to produce other translations such as: Old Latin, Coptic, Gothic, Armenian, Georgian, Ethiopic, Christian Palestinian Aramaic and Syriac. The autographs of some of these predate considerably the oldest complete Greek manuscript such as Vaticanus, which is from the 4th CE where as Coptic and Old Latin are known to have been prepared in the 2nd and 3rd CE. It is for this reason that these early translations (although usually referred to as ancient versions) are very valuable for the text critical study of the LXX. To this day, the LXX remains to be the authoritative biblical text for the OT of the Greek Orthodox Church.

Out of the translations based on the LXX, the Syriac and Latin are considered most important because they became text bases for other translations. Latin became a dominant language of Western part of the Roman Empire, but second only to Greek on the eastern part. By the close of the 4th century, there was such a confusing diversity among Latin manuscripts. Augustine is recorded to have said that anyone who happened to gain possession of a Greek manuscript of the NT and thought he had any facility in both languages, however slight that might have been, attempted to make a translation.

In the midst of so many divergent translations, Pope Damasus in 383 CE

urged Jerome, the most learned Christian scholar of his day, to produce a dependable translation into Latin. In the case of Jerome, unlike those who translated the Scriptures before him, he had access to two translations, the Hebrew and the LXX for the OT. He had such a high regard for the Hebrew text that he foreshadowed what the reformists would do centuries later which is to distinguish between the apocryphal and the canonical books.

When finished, the Vulgate provoked both criticism and anger of many. Augustine for one preferred the LXX to be the textual base. The Vulgate became the recognized text of Scripture throughout Western Europe for almost a thousand years. Both Protestants and Roman Catholics are heirs of terminology that Jerome either coined or used with fresh significance in words such as salvation, regeneration, justification, sanctification, propitiation, reconciliation, inspiration, sacrament and many others.

Access through translations in major languages gives rise to more new translations. With many knowing Latin, it became the basis of pre-reformation vernacular Scriptures such as Wycliffe's English translation (1382), German (1466); Italian (1471), Catalan (1478), Czech (1488) and French (1530).

3.English Bibles: Pre-King James Version

3.1.A Bible to be understood

The first complete English Bible was due to the influence and activity of John Wycliffe (1330-84), an eminent Oxford theologian. He believed that the Bible is the word of God and the sole criterion of doctrine and therefore should be understandable to any ordinary English speaker. He was interested in both religious and political reform in England. He had powerful enemies who finally were able to bring him on trial for heresy.

It is not certain if he actually made the translation but it is generally accepted that it was under his inspiration that the translation was done. His pupils and colleagues produced two complete versions first in 1382, then in 1388. The basis for translation was the Latin Vulgate. The first version is said to be very literal, corresponding word for word to the Latin. The second version was more free, making use of native English idiom. Because of the

textual base used, the Wycliffe Bible included the Apocrypha.

In 1415, the Wycliffe Bible was burned and in 1428, the exhumed body of John Wycliffe was burned and his ashes cast into the river.

3.2.Era of printing

In the 15th century, the movable type of printing was invented and this brought greater awareness and access to the Scriptures in their original languages. The first printed Hebrew Bible was issued in 1488 and the first published Greek NT came out in 1516.

William Tyndale, educated at Oxford and Cambridge in Greek and Hebrew, conceived of a plan to make a better English translation that is based on the original languages. But there was strong resistance to this in England so he went to Germany. Through a lot of struggle, Tyndale finished the NT, the Pentateuch and several other books of the OT (1526). He was tried for heresy and put to death by strangling and his body burned. By then, the situation in England has started to improve. A complete English Bible based largely on the work of Tyndale, but without his name, was circulated and it could be read openly. Tyndale's translation is free, bold and idiomatic.¹⁾

The following are English Bibles subsequent to Tyndale's with their distinguishing features:

Miles Coverdale (1535)

- first complete printed Bible
- books of the Apocrypha separated
- original phraseology in Psalm 23 "Thou enoyntest my heade with oyle"
- the valley of the shadowe of death;

Matthew's Bible (1537)

- John Rogers believed to be the translator who is a friend of Tyndale. He came into possession of unpublished translations of Tyndale
- includes Prayer of Manasseh;

Taverner's Bible (1539): translated the Apocrypha that differed greatly

1) Some examples are: Gen 39.2 "the Lorde was with Joseph, and he was a luckie felowe. Exo 15.4 Pharaohs jolly captians are drowned in the Red Sea.

Exo 15.26 (God introduces himself) the Lord thy surgeon

from Coverdale and Matthew

The Great Bible (1539):

- It was called “great” because of the size
- the first “authorized” version for the use of the churches
- discontinued practice which followed Luther’s order of books : Hebrews, James, Jude and Revelation, and instead followed the order of books of Erasmus and this was followed by the principal English versions after 1539.

Geneva Bible: (1560) careful revision of the NT; with doctrinal notes Calvinist in tone.²⁾

- first English Bible with numbered verses
- contained marginal annotations and helps such as maps, tables, chapter summaries
- because of various features, superior and attractive character of the version itself, it enjoyed widespread acceptance
- said to be the Bible of Shakespeare, the Puritan pilgrims to the New World, King James himself

Bishop’s Bible (1568):

- reaction to the popularity and superiority of the Genevan Bible and so wanted to supplant Geneva Bible and other versions
- all revisors were bishops
- Great Bible used as basis
- translator’s initial at the end of the section revised to make them more accountable
- became the second authorized English version and eventually displaced the Great Bible as the Bible to be read in churches

Rheims-Douay Bible (1582)

- based on Latin Vulgate
- too literal
- strong tendency to retain technical words such as: supersubstantial bread Mt 6.11; prevaricator of the law Rom 2.25

2) One of the reasons that led King James in 1604 to agree readily to a new translation of the Scriptures was his dislike of the politics preached in the margins of the Geneva Bible.

3.3.Overview: Pre-King James era

One will note the significant increase of English versions after the invention of printing. In 200 years, at least eight English versions were produced.

The understanding of the word of God should not be a prerogative of anyone or a chosen few but should be open to everyone. From this very noble objective of John Wycliffe, motivations for new versions became varied. For William Tyndale, the availability of the Scriptures in the original languages was a boost to translate into English. The versions that followed always included a new feature as one starts to see the competition for readership.

In featuring something new, Coverdale had a complete printed Bible. John Rogers of the Matthew's Bible used the unpublished translations of Tyndale and a different translation of the Apocrypha. The Great Bible is said to have improved the poetical section and presented a new order of the four books: Hebrews, James, Jude and Revelation to follow the order in the NT of Erasmus and not following Luther's order of books. The Geneva Bible had doctrinal notes Calvinist in tone. It is also the first English Bible to use numbered verses, marginal annotations and helps such as maps, tables and chapter summaries. The Bishops' Bible put the initials of the translator at the end of the section revised to make them more accountable. Like the Geneva Bible, it also included extensive supplementary materials. The Rheims-Douay version was a reaction to the reformist slant, especially of the Geneva Bible and so went back to the Latin Vulgate as its textual base. And because it had a tendency to use technical terms, it also provided a glossary of terms.

4.The King James Version and Post-KJV

4.1.The King James Version (1611)

King James I of England saw that the different English versions were a source of division among religious parties. So, he called for a conference where both the bishops and the puritan clergy were invited. The discussion

centered on the imperfections of the current Bibles. The conference itself did not arrive at any conclusion but it was King James who endorsed the idea of a new translation. He himself supported this plan vigorously that within a year, a committee of fifty learned men were chosen and the rules of procedure provided. The Bishops' Bible was to be a starting point and to depart from it only for a better rendering. The other English Bibles can be used as references. The old ecclesiastical terms were to be retained, *congregation* was not to be used but instead *church*, and no marginal notes were to be used unless to explain the Hebrew and the Greek.

It may seem like a political move on the part of King James to call for a new translation, but there is enough evidence that he himself was very interested in biblical studies and had a genuine intention to improve the versions being used. Because of this, it was actually a revision project although it was generally known as a new translation. It was a revision of the Bishops' Bible, which was a revision of the Great Bible.

Despite the KJV being an improvement of the earlier versions, it still had its own problems such as consistency of use of proper names. Jeremiah was sometimes Jeremias and sometimes Jeremy. Judas is also Jude. With other words (not names), however, the editors of the KJV indicate that they did not slavishly stick to terms when others were more suitable in a particular context (Rhodes, 1997, p83). The translation of the book of Job is said to be the most defective, in several places unintelligible. Psalms is said to be less musical. Not as a flaw but a result of the long span of time the KJV was used, by 1861 and then also in 1932, the orthography had to be revised.

The KJV was appointed to be read in churches because of the royal authority under which it was made but it was never authorized by ecclesiastical or legislative sanction. Nevertheless, it attained popularity as the "authorized" version, but in a sense different from the authorization of the Great Bible and the Bishops' Bible.

A new translation is not usually accepted right away. So it was for the KJV. But through time, the critical evaluation became increasingly favorable. With the publication of the KJV, the history of the English Bible closes for a long time. For one, the era was characterized also by political and social upheavals in the society in general. But the main reason for this pause was that, finality had been reached. The version of 1611 was an adequate

translation of the original languages as scholars then knew them. The language style appealed to the common people with great charm and dignity.

4.2. The New King James Version (1979)³⁾

The 1611 KJV was revised primarily to modernize its language. It was publicized to be the work of “119 scholars, editors and church leaders”. The connective “and” based on the Greek *καὶ* or the Hebrew *waw* is now translated as a conjunction or adverbial such as “now, so, thus, then” depending on its context. The pronouns referring to God are now capitalized. The NKJV continued to retain, however, the Elizabethan style of language and more serious than this is its use of the same textual base, the *Textus Receptus*, despite the availability of what many scholars believe to be more reliable manuscripts. This can be viewed as a tendency in Bible versions to improve the translation within the boundaries of its own tradition. So, in the NKJV, modernizing the language is just part of this tradition or theological predisposition.

4.3. Post-King James Version

After more than a century of use, the 1611 KJV was still the version to contend with. The succeeding versions were mostly reactions to it, namely: Edward Harwood’s NT (1768), Charles Thomson’s Bible (1808) and Noah Webster’s Bible (1833). For Harwood, the KJV style was too vulgar. For Thomson and Webster, the language of KJV had become too archaic. There was another English Bible version, one by Julia E. Smith (1876). She wanted to prove women’s intellectual capabilities in the midst of court battle her family had to fight.

After more than a century of usage, the KJV was still the Bible version that people had to contend with. All the revisions above reacted to the language. For Harwood, the KJV style was vulgar. For the rest, the language had become too archaic.

3) Whenever there is an existing revision of a Bible translation included in this study, a comparison will immediately be provided.

4.4.Revisions of the KJV

A few years after the KJV was published, more superior manuscripts of the Greek text started to be discovered. First was Codex Alexandrinus (5th BCE) which was given to the king of England as a gift from the patriarch of Constantinople in 1627. Then in 1830 came the codices Sinaiticus, discovered by Constantine Tischendorf and Vaticanus both from the fourth century. Such discoveries greatly stimulated interest in the field of textual criticism in an attempt to recover the original Greek text as free as possible from errors and additions. With these evidences, it was shown how the newly discovered manuscripts were superior to those used as basis for the KJV which was based on some twelve manuscripts of much later date. The Westcott-Hort Greek text of 1881 became an alternative.

It was not surprising that from the middle of the 19th century, proposals for the revision of the KJV in keeping with the new knowledge of the Greek text were both advocated and opposed. Ultimately, a decision was made in England to do the revision. Just as the Bishops' Bible had been the basis of the KJV, the 1611 KJV was to be the starting point for its revision. The policy was to introduce as few alterations as possible. The changes were to be approved by a 2/3 majority vote from its revisers. Later on, a resolution was passed to involve Americans. During the years of work, the British proposals were sent to America, then returned with suggestions made by the American committee. For the sake of harmony, the differences of reading and rendering of the American committee will be stated either in the Preface of the Revised Version (to be published first) or in the appendix to the volume during a term of fourteen years from the date of publication.

The **English Revised Version** was published in 1885 after which the British committee disbanded. The American committee continued to function, waiting for the expiration of the 14-year period. In 1901, the **American Standard Version** was published. The most significant difference in the ASV is its use of Jehovah for Lord and God wherever the Tetragrammaton occurs in the Hebrew text. Other changes are: Holy Spirit for Holy Ghost; Sheol for the grave, pit and hell; titles of the gospels do not include 'saint'; the title of the epistle to the Hebrews no longer attributes it to Paul the Apostle. The

English style is said to have been improved in the ASV compared to the Revised Version, which was woodenly literal.

Despite the efforts of the British and American committees, their revisions did not succeed to supplant the KJV. This could be because the archaic flavor of the KJV was still there.

4.5.Reaction to the formal translations

The KJV and then followed by the English Revised Version and then the American Standard Version, all formal translations, dominated the field of Bible translation in English for at least two centuries. At the turn of the 19th century, a large number of Greek papyri from Egypt were discovered and help shed light on every aspect of life of the Greek speaking people of the ancient world. One revelation was that the NT documents were written in plain, simple style to meet the needs of ordinary men and women. This led to endeavors to translate the Bible in modern day ordinary speech. Worthy of mention are the: Twentieth Century New Testament (1901-1904) and Weymouth's New Testament in Modern Speech (1903). The initial motivation to translate in easy understandable style was in consideration of an included audience, children. Mofatt's Translation of the Bible (1913, 1925) and Smith and Goodspeed's American Translation (1923, 1927) describe their use of language as free style.

If one wants to write reflecting the way people speak, the style inevitably becomes "free". Even in some books of the LXX can be described as "free", the use of this style as a consistent approach in translation became established with the English versions mentioned above. These will be forerunners of the meaning-based translations of the 60's and following.

5.New Motives?

From 1952 - 1990 when the RSV was first published and then NRSV respectively, 27 English versions of the OT were issued, and 28 for the NT alone. I selected only those, which would significant in our study of motivations for new versions.

5.1. Revised Standard Version (1952)

- a revision of the ASV which is excessively literal but stay as close as possible within the KJV tradition
- 2nd edition (1971) used the UBS Greek text, 3rd edition
- start of controversy of specific verses such as Col 1.14 which was rendered in the KJV ‘in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins’ because RSV does not include ‘through his blood’ and this is because the more ancient manuscripts do not have ‘through his blood’
- Truly ecumenical because it included the expanded Apocrypha, with 3 and 4 Maccabees, Psalm 151 to serve Roman Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox churches

New Revised Standard Version (1990)

The main motivation to revise the RSV is the new developments in biblical studies in the light of the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Changes were to be made to attain greater accuracy, clarity and euphony; eliminate archaisms and to eliminate masculine-oriented language reflecting the ancient patriarchal culture and society.

Material equivalent to three or four verses is added at the end of 1 Sam 10 on the testimony of a newly edited Qumran manuscript and also supported by Josephus.⁴⁾

4) The following are some examples of changes from RSV to NRSV:

Improved clarity: Exodus 11.8

(RSV) And he (Moses) went out from Pharaoh in hot anger.

(NRSV) And in hot anger he left Pharaoh.

More natural English: Deut 29.5

(RSV) Your sandals have not worn off your feet.

(NRSV) The sandals on your feet have not worn out.

Avoidance of ambiguity: Psa 122.5

(RSV) There thrones for judgment were set.

(NRSV) For there the thrones for judgment were set up.

Elimination of man or men when neither occurs in the text

Rom 16.7

(RSV) [Adronicus and Junias] are men of note among the apostles.

(NRSV) [Andronicus and Junia] are prominent among the apostles.

The NRSV also has a British edition, which makes accommodations in spelling, grammar, punctuation and changes in words to replace Americanisms. Examples of changes are from (American) grain fields to (British) cornfields (Mat 12.1); stump of Jesse to stock of Jesse (Isa 11.1).

5.2.The Jerusalem Bible (1966)

The Jerusalem Bible started as a French translation with extensive notes. This was later translated into English but the text was later compared word for word with the Hebrew and Aramaic by the general editor and amended where necessary to ensure complete conformity with the ancient text. This is the first Roman Catholic Bible in English translated from the original languages and thus breaks from Jerome's Vulgate. It is also the first to take major advantage of the Dead Sea Scrolls. The translators expressed their objectives as serving two pressing needs of the church: to keep abreast with the times and to deepen theological thought. To achieve the first, the translators rendered the ancient text "into the language we use today". And to achieve the second, they provided extensive notes that are "neither sectarian nor superficial".

With the background and production of the Jerusalem Bible, Metzger (2001) says that the level of scholarship reflected in both translation and comments is so good that the distinction between Protestant and Roman Catholic biblical scholarship has been reduced almost to the vanishing point.

The JB use of language has a contemporary ring to it. It uses Yahweh for the personal name of God. Goliath was one of the Philistine "shock-troopers" (1 Sam 17.4). Isaiah 7.14 is rendered with 'maiden' but with a footnote that says: "The Greek version reads 'the virgin' being more explicit than the Hebrew which uses *almah* meaning either a young girl or a young, recently married woman". For 1 John 5.7b-8, the spurious message is given only in the comments where it is recognized that the reference to the Trinity is probably a gloss that crept into inferior manuscripts of the Latin Vulgate.

The New Jerusalem Bible (1985)

One of the changes made in the NJB is the reduction of masculine-oriented

language in passages, which clearly refer to both men and women.

The attempt to make the language contemporary in the JB came under heavy criticism and was therefore altered in the NJB. Examples of some changes are:

Matt 5.3-11 JB happy

NJB blessed

John 16.20 (JB) I tell you most solemnly

(NJB) In all truth I tell you

5.3.The New American Bible (1970)

The beginnings of the translation were from a translation based on the Latin Vulgate. But in 1944, the direction changed when it was decided to translate from the original languages. The translation aims to use modern American idiom. In the OT, the translators departed more than a few times from the Masoretic text of 1 and 2 Samuel. Instead, the MT was corrected by a more ancient Hebrew manuscript from Cave 4 of Qumran.

Isaiah 7.14 is translated with 'virgin', with a lengthy annotation.

Revised New Testament, New American Bible (1986)

Eight years after the publication of the NAB, plans were drawn for a thorough revision of the NT. The reasons given are the recent developments in biblical studies and the changing nature of languages. The result of this found a movement to a more literal translation. The other change is in the accommodation of gender-neutral language insofar that the faithfulness to the original allows.

5.4.The New English Bible (1970)

At the time when the collaboration of the Protestant churches in Great Britain was considered for the revision of the RSV, a decision was made that they will instead begin a new translation that is not within the tradition of the 1611 KJV. The outcome was the NEB.

The aim of the translators was to cut loose from all previous renderings

and to render the original language as it is understood in the present day and put this in the natural vocabulary, constructions, rhythm of contemporary speech. One of the exceptions is the use of 'thou' in prayer addressed to God. The result can be seen in the following examples:

1 Thes 4.13 those who sleep in *death*⁵⁾

Col 1.22 in his body of flesh *and blood*

Matt 18.10 *guardian* angel

1 Cor 5.9 (Paul advises the Corinthians) you must have nothing to do with loose-livers.)

John 6.60 This is more than we can stomach.

Revised English Bible (1989)

In the preface on the intentions of the reviewers, it is explicitly mentioned that the style of English is fluent and appropriate for liturgical use, while maintaining intelligibility for worshippers of a wide range of ages and backgrounds. The 'thou' use even in prayer to God is abandoned in the revision and gender inclusive language is used when applicable.

The changes resulted in more conservative and less idiosyncratic rendering. The following changes are made:

Jos 15.18 NEB she broke wind

REB she dismounted

Eze 21.7 NEB all men's knees run with urine

REB All knees will turn to water

1Cor 5.9 NEB have nothing to do with loose-livers

REB have nothing to do with those who are sexually immoral

5.5. New International Version (1978)

After the RSV was severely criticized after its publication, the Bibles published under conservative auspices are: Amplified Bible (1965), Modern Language Bible (1969) and NASB (1971). None of these succeeded in becoming the standard Bible for the conservative Protestant as much as the

5) The words in italics are not in the original text.

NIV. It is now generally accepted as the English Bible version for the conservative in theology and politics.

The NIV is widely publicized as interdenominational. The preface lists thirteen different denominations represented. Emphasis was on the translator's high view of Scripture, the infallibility of God's word in written form.

Some inconsistencies are noted in the name of Mary Magdalene, for example. It is such, Mary Magdalene in the synoptic gospels but Mary of Magdala in John. In the reckoning of time, the form of the Greek is retained in the gospels, such as 'third hour'. But in Acts, it uses the modern way, 'nine in the morning'.

The NIV is not consistently formal neither is it consistently free or meaning based. For words and phrases that bear important theological concepts, the form of the source language is retained. Some examples are:

Mark 1.4	baptism of repentance
Matt 3.15	righteousness
Rom 4.25	justification
Rom 9.11	election

New International Reader's Version (NIRV) (1996)

This is an attempt of Zondervan, the publisher of NIV, to provide a simplified Bible version at a reading level of 3rd or 4th grade students which can serve as a transition to the level of NIV. The committee that was formed agreed to use gender-inclusive language. The complete Bible was finished in 1995.

In 1996, a simplified NIV was issued in Great Britain under the title, *New International Version Popular Edition, Inclusive Language* and in 1997 under the title NIV Inclusive Language edition (NIVI). This is not sold legally in the United States. Some of the clientele of Zondervan reacted violently. Some examples to compare the difference are given below:

Gen 1.27	
NIV	God created man in his own image.
NIVI	God created human beings in his likeness.
NIRV	God created man in his own likeness.

Prov 5.21

NIV A man's ways are in full view of the Lord.

NIVI Your ways are in full view of the Lord.

NIRV The Lord watches a man's ways.

John 11.50

NIV It is better for you that one man die for the people.

NIVI It is better for you that one person die for the people.

NIRV It is better for you if one man dies for the people.

5.6. The New American Standard Bible (1971)

The Lockman Foundation, a nonprofit Christian corporation formed in 1942 to promote Christian education, evangelism and Bible translation, launched a new translation project in 1959. By this time, the copyright on the 1901 ASV had expired. The ASV was chosen as the basis of the new translation.

The revisers reverted to the traditional format of the Geneva Bible (1560) and the KJV (1611) in which each verse begins a new paragraph. So, new paragraphs based on the thought of the discourse are signaled by the use of boldface numbers or letters. Unlike the ASV, Jehovah is not used and instead uses LORD. All pronouns referring to God are capitalized.

5.7. Jewish translations

The Holy Scriptures according to the Masoretic Text is a publication of the Jewish Publication Society of America that was published in 1917. It has close affinity to the King James Version and the Revised Version. A totally new translation called the *Tanakh* was finished in 1962. The style is highly literary. For the Tetragrammaton, LORD is used. It is interesting to note that 190 times, the translator admits that the meaning of the Hebrew is obscure.

Heinz W. Cassirer's New Testament (1989) and **David H. Stern's Complete Jewish Bible (1998)** are translations intended to show the Jewishness of the Scriptures. The two authors undertook the translation after their conversion to Christianity. Stern's translation of the OT is something between a translation and a paraphrase.

6. Meaning based versions

6.1. Basic English Bible (1949)

Basic English is a simplified form of English. It comprises a vocabulary of 850 words and the assumption is that, when used in accordance with a few simple rules, these can express the meaning of everything that can be said in English. The Basic English Bible was devised based on this principle. However, to accommodate concepts that are typical of the material, the number of vocabulary was increased to 1,000.

6.2. J.B Phillips' Version (1958)

The translation is committed to convey to the modern reader the full import of the original in an easy-to-read style. To attain this, Phillips says that the translator should be free to expand or explain the text. The only setback is that the Textus Receptus was used in numerous passages. However, following the UBS Greek Text in 1966, Phillips made adjustments accordingly. Phillips removed many conversationally worded additions such as, “as I am sure you realize” or “you must know now” and many extra words that are not found in the Greek text at all.

6.3. Good News Bible(1976) (now Good News Translation)

In 1961, the American Bible Society (ABS) received a letter inquiring about a translation that would suit the needs of new literates and foreign language groups in the United States. So, the ABS embarked on a project to prepare a common-language translation of the Scriptures in English. The main translator is Robert Bratcher. He made the initial drafts which were sent to consultants in ABS and also in British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS). The New Testament called *Good News for Modern Man* was published in 1966. With the help of many other scholars, the OT was issued in 1976 and with the Apocrypha in 1979. The 1976 edition endeavored to avoid male-oriented

language but more changes were needed to show more sensitivity to issues of gender and this was done in the 1992 edition.

The GNT adopts the principle called Dynamic Equivalence or Functional Equivalence. Customs and concepts in the Bible are expressed in terms understandable to the modern audience. Some examples are:

Ps 23.5 ...anointed my head with oil > welcomed me as an honored guest

Rom 12.20 heap coals of fire on his head > make him burn with shame

2 Sam 7.16 thy throne shall be established forever > your dynasty will never end

6.4. Contemporary English Version (1995)

This is the second English translation from the ABS using modern speech. At the start, it was planned to be a translation for the early youth and focused on the vocabulary and understanding of children in grades one through three. But now it is being promoted as a Bible for the whole family. The CEV is made from the original texts and is not a paraphrase. The main translator is Barclay Newman assisted by over a hundred members who function as translators, English language specialists and biblical scholars. The CEV is said to be more easily understood than the GNT, both when read and heard. A lot of care was put into the way the translation is heard since more people hear the Bible read to them than they themselves reading it.

Theological terms are replaced by other expressions or phrases appropriate to the context. Some examples are: parable > story; hosanna > hooray. 'grace' is never used but instead is translated in many ways such as: Acts 4.33 blessed, 18.27 God's kindness, Gal 2.21 undeserved kindness.

7. Paraphrases

7.1. The Living Bible (1971)

The *Living Bible, Paraphrased* has enjoyed phenomenal distribution in publishing history. By the mid-70's, it had captured 46% of the total sales of

the Bible in the USA. By the close of the century, it had been translated into nearly 100 languages spoken by 90% of the world's population.

The LB is the result of a father's effort to make the Bible more understandable to his family for their daily family devotions. So, on his way to work, he occupied his 45-minute train ride by paraphrasing the ASV. This man is Kenneth Taylor. He acknowledges his work to be a paraphrase of the Bible, taking a rigid evangelical position. Examples of such terms reflecting this are: Rom 3.21 righteousness of God > way to heaven; Rom 5.16 justification > glorious life; Mark 10.17 the richness of eternal life > get to heaven; Mark 1.1 gospel > wonderful story.

One example that gives reason to call it a paraphrase, and not a translation, is Amos 1.1.

NRSV

The words of Amos, who was among the shepherds of Tekoa,

LB

Amos was a herdsman living in the village of Tekoa. All day long he sat on the hillsides watching the sheep, keeping them from

New Living Translation (1996)

This is a revision of the Living Bible but no longer as a paraphrase but as a translation from the original languages using dynamic equivalence. The translation is aimed at the reading level of a junior-high student. It also uses gender inclusive language. One example is chosen here to show the shift from the paraphrase to a translation:

Matt 7.2

LB For others will treat you as you treat them.

NLT For others will treat you as you treat them. Whatever measure you use in judging others, it will be used to measure how you are judged.

7.2.The Message (NT 1993)

Eugene Peterson's *The Message: The New Testament in Contemporary Language* attempts to do for the 1990's what Kenneth Taylor's *Living Bible* did in the 1970's. In the introduction, Peterson states his goal to convert the tone, the rhythm, the events, the ideas of the Greek NT into the way people of today actually think and speak. It is not particularly important to use

simple words but rather to forcefully convey the meaning to the reader. However, the danger of a paraphrase is to go beyond the bounds of legitimate translation as in the following example:

Matt 5.41

RSV and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile.

NLT If someone takes unfair advantage of you, use the occasion to practice the servant life. No more tit-for-tat. Live generously.

The biblical culture is completely lost where Roman soldiers had the right to require Jews to carry their packs.

8. Bible Versions with Doctrinal comment

8.1. The New World Translation (1961)

The New World Translation is the version used by the Jehovah's Witnesses. Its doctrines are reflected in the translation. The word "Jehovah" is used in the New Testament 237 times. It is quite arbitrary how they substitute it for κυριος Lord . And example is

Acts 19.20

NWT Thus in a mighty way the word of Jehovah kept growing and prevailing...

NRSV So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed.

John 1.1

NWT In the beginning the Word was, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god.

NRSV In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

8.2. Christian Community Bible (1988)

The introduction says that the Christian Community Bible was translated from the Hebrew and Greek texts. The doctrinal content is not found in the text itself but rather in the notes. For example, for Matthew 16.13-20, the

notes include reference to the Pope as the successor of Peter.

9.Synthesis

So, why are there so many versions?

The decision to produce a certain version is situated in a particular milieu. It is therefore necessary to see the intention only in a certain context, then the execution of the intention through a version with all its characteristics and features. The intention or motivation can only be appreciated in the light of its milieu or context.

9.1.Need motive

The context relevant to the production of the LXX was that the Greek speaking Jews did not have the Scriptures in their language. The Jews did not abandon their Jewish customs and beliefs but they have adopted the Greek language in their new home in the Mediterranean. It was only natural to desire to have a copy of the Scriptures in the language that they spoke. The story in the Letter of Aristeas gives the reason that the Egyptian king wanted to complete his library and therefore wanted also a copy of the Hebrew Scriptures in Greek. But as mentioned earlier, scholars now believe that the real reason must have been the need for a copy of the Scriptures in the language the people understood.

The Hebrew Scriptures became available to another group of people when it was translated into Old Latin, by way of the Greek translation. The Old Latin translation became a daughter translation of the LXX. This was the start of secondary text bases for the translation into other languages. The more widespread the secondary text base is, such as Latin which was a dominant language in the Roman Empire, the more access it gave to other languages. The Old Latin translation of the LXX became the basis of translations in English (Wycliffe), German, Italian, Catalan, Czech and French.

There was no translation of the Scriptures into English that's why John Wycliffe made his first English translation. It was important to Wycliffe that every individual understand the Bible, which is the sole criterion of doctrine.

Through the centuries, this need motive changed considerably. What started as a need for a translation in a language that did not have one, and this was for a whole population, need became specific for a sector of the population, differentiated by religious faith (Jewish, Roman Catholic) or religious orientation (NIV), mode of contact with the text (CEV). This tendency to publish for specific segments of society is most evident in special editions of Bibles now such as Bible for pastors, for women, for the student, for the colored man, etc. Although the same biblical text is used, it is the features that make them appeal to these different segments of society.

9.2. Textual base

Why so many versions? The choice of different textual bases generates new versions. The LXX was based on the Hebrew Scriptures but the LXX also became a textual base for other translations such as Old Latin. However, Jerome's Vulgate was based on the Hebrew text. Although an English translation was already available during the time of Tyndale, he nevertheless wanted to make a better translation based on the Hebrew text.

For the New Testament, English versions are sometimes differentiated based on the textual base used. The famous case, of course, is the KJV and NKJV that use the Textus Receptus. The British Revised Version (1885) and American Standard Version (1901) were planned as new translations because of the discovery of what is believed to be more reliable manuscripts, the Westcott and Hort text of 1881. And critical texts continue to be updated, the latest now being the 4th edition of the UBS GNT and the 27th edition of Nestle-Aland text.

9.3. Approach in translation

In the LXX, the two types of translation are found; one reflecting form and one reflecting meaning. A variety of approaches are also evident in the early English versions. Wycliffe's first attempt was literal but produced a version that was more free after that. Tyndale's was quite free as well. The other English versions that followed, especially the Bishops' Bible which was to be the starting point of the KJV, must have been quite literal, judging from the

preface to the KJV 1611. Though restrained by this provision, the primary concern of the KJV translators was for the word of God to be clearly understood.

The English versions following the KJV remained quite formal. But also in reaction to this, versions that were more reflective of how people spoke or wrote in more natural form started to appear. The GNT provided a faithful translation that is easy to understand, especially for those who are non-native speakers of the language.

9.4.Added New Feature

An added new feature is a motivation for a new version. So for Tyndale, it was the first to be based on the original languages. For Coverdale, it was the first complete Bible. For the Great Bible, it discontinued the practice of following Luther's order of books. The Geneva Bible included notes that were Calvinist in tone but it had features that help the reader such as maps, tables and chapter summaries.

In the expanded edition of the RSV, aside from the Apocrypha, it included the additional books: Psalm 151, 3 and 4 Maccabees that are part of the canon of Eastern Orthodox churches. Thus, it can be considered a truly common Bible because of its ecumenical nature.

9.5.Improvement of a translation or versions

The early Christian church rejected the translation of Daniel in the LXX for being deficient and used instead a translation by Theodotion done in the 2nd century CE. Jerome was commissioned by Pope Damasus to make a new translation that was more uniform and dependable, which became the Latin Vulgate, because of the then numerous divergent Latin translations. Although the KJV was used to unify the different factions in the religious community, the revision was understood to be an improvement of the Bishops' Bible.

It is inevitable that the language used in a translation lags behind the many changes in the language used in a community. At the same time, there are new developments in the field both of biblical studies and translation principles that can be used in new Bible translations. For these reasons,

revisions become necessary. If one looks at the history of Bible translation, it seems that versions are always intended to be improvements of the older versions. This has not been more pronounced than in the last 50 years in English Bible translation history. One can see the completion of the RSV, NASB, Jerusalem Bible, New American Bible, New English Bible, New International Version, Living Bible, GNT and CEV, and their respective revisions or updated editions.

9.6. Different audiences

The improvement of versions (9.5) has to be discussed together with different audiences. In the 20th century, different versions were published to meet the needs of their constituency. Different constituencies could be the conservative evangelical for the NIV, the Roman Catholic for the NAB and JB, the audience that prefers literary language for the NEB, or the one who is more likely to hear the text rather than read it for the CEV, and so on.

10. Age of Refinement

10.1. Improve comprehension, naturalness

In the last 30 years or so, there has been a revision of the complete Bible for four of these (RSV, NEB, JB and LB), and a revision of the NT for two of these. Because of these revisions, I think we have reached the age of refinement. It is an age of refinement because the revisions do not entail drastic changes such as the changes one saw in the 17th to the 19th century.⁶⁾ Many of the changes now are intended to improve the communication of the message through less than major changes.

Ps 86.11

RSV Unite my heart to fear thy name.

NRSV Give me an undivided heart to revere your name.

Gen 1.27

6) Such as from the use of LORD to Jehovah; or from a bloodless translation to one that uses blood.

NIV God created man in his own image.

NIRV God created man in his own likeness.

Differences in dialects have also resulted in different editions such as NRSV, which has an American and British edition. The GNT has also both editions, and CEV even has an Australian edition.

10.2.Sensitive to feedback

The age of refinement shows that Bible publishers or translation teams have become sensitive to feedback from Bible users. For this reason, revisions can entail a substantial change such as the shift in approach of the LB from a paraphrase to a translation in the NLT. Another significant change in the versions/revisions after 1985 is the introduction of gender inclusive language.

Because of the very essence of Bible translation, it persists to be a conservative endeavor. Revisions introduce changes showing a development from the previous version. In the REB, the revision has become more conservative compared to the NEB, and the revised NT of the NAB also became more literal. Although the GNT has not really been revised, the 1979 edition modified verses that formerly omitted blood. The 1992 edition made numerous changes relating to inclusive language.

The reasons to revise could be a combination of many reasons rather than just one.

Considering that a new translation, whether a new one or just a revision, is so expensive, sometimes one wonders if the motivation for producing new versions is still mission driven or market driven. Are there Bible translations that are sensitive to what the market wants? Is “constituency” still the appropriate term or should it be “clientele”? It scary to think motivations could become market driven because when it does, will a translation contain what the reader wants to find rather than what the text is actually saying?

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Abbreviations:

CEV Contemporary English Version
GNT Good News Translation
JB Jerusalem Bible
KJV King James Version
LB Living Bible
LXX Septuagint
NAB New American Bible
NASB New American Standard Bible
NIV New International Version
NIRV New International Reader's Version
NJB New Jerusalem Bible
NKJV New King James Version
NLT New Living Translation
NRSV New Revised Standard Version
NWT New World Translation
REB Revised English Bible
RSV Revised Standard Version