

# The Translation of Scripture

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[ 0 : 00 ] In other words, we have to dispel the myth that there is such a thing as a perfectly literal! Word-for-word translation.

Here's the problem. There is no such thing. And even if there was, I don't think we'd be able to read it. For example, when John Wycliffe translated the Latin Vulgate into English, and this is in the late 1300s, he attempted to follow the exact sentence structure found in Latin.

So in a modern version of the Bible, Genesis 1-1 might say, in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. But in Wycliffe's translation, it said, in the first made God of naught heaven and earth.

And that's just the first verse of the Bible. Imagine trying to read the entire Bible that way. Now, there are Bibles that are more literal than others, but there is no such thing as a literal word-for-word translation of the Bible.

Every translation has to undergo some amount of interpretation by the translators. This is why, by the way, the leaders of Islam would not allow the Quran to be translated into other languages.

[ 1 : 46 ] Now, it has been, but it's not officially sanctioned to be. They realized that translators are traitors, and any translation inevitably changes the text to some degree or another, and they simply could not allow that when it came to what they considered to be a divine text.

But that's not the case with the Bible. God has given us what I consider undeniable proof that He endorses the translation of His inspired word into other languages.

Where's the proof, you ask? It's in the New Testament of the Bible you're holding in your hand.

Now, it may not be quite so obvious in our English Bibles, but the vast majority of time when Christ or the apostles are quoting the Old Testament, they are actually quoting not the original Hebrew it was written in, but they are quoting from a Greek translation we've talked about briefly, the Greek Septuagint.

In fact, let me give you an example of where it is relatively obvious in our English Bibles. The Old Testament of most modern Bibles is translated from the Hebrew Masoretic texts.

We've talked about that as well. And in the Hebrew, here's essentially what we read in Amos 9, verses 11 through 12. In that day I will raise up the booth of David that has fallen and repair its breaches and raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old, that they may possess the remnant of Edom.

[ 3 : 30 ] And all the nations who are called by my name declares the Lord who does this. Now, if we turn over to Acts chapter 15, in verses 15 through 18, James quotes this passage.

However, he's evidently not quoting it from the Hebrew text. He's reading it or remembering it from the Greek Septuagint. And here's what he says.

After this, I will return and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen. I will rebuild its ruins and I will restore it that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord.

And all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who makes these things known from old. So as you can see, even in our English translations, there are minor textual variants or little differences here between the Hebrew and the Greek.

And yet, neither Christ nor the apostles hesitated to cite the Greek Septuagint as authoritative scripture. If that's not God endorsing translations of the Bible, I'm not sure what is.

[ 4 : 43 ] Plus, let's not forget that Christ commissioned the church to go out into the world and make disciples of all nations.

Then, as we see in the book of Revelation, Christ has redeemed a people from every tribe, every language, every people and nation.

Well, according to Romans 10, faith comes from hearing and hearing through the word of Christ. So when we put all of this together, we realize that translations of the word of Christ are necessary. They're implied in the Great Commission. So now we can understand why God would endorse the translation of his word. It's necessary to carry out the church's commission.

Now, maybe you think this is all really obvious, isn't it? I mean, of course the Bible should be translated into other languages. But that has not always been the case throughout church history.

[ 5 : 49 ] I've said that the Latin Vulgate was the primary Bible of the Roman Catholic Church for many centuries. And it was their primary Bible long after the vast majority of people sitting in the pews could actually understand Latin.

I mentioned John Wycliffe. So let's talk about him for a moment. Wycliffe has often been called the morning star of the Reformation. Now, he lived some 200 years before the Protestant Reformation actually began, but he was one of the first to argue that the church's authority does not come from the papacy.

It comes from the word of God. Well, if that's true, the church has a bit of a problem because they can't read the word of God. But it's in Latin, and most people don't speak or understand Latin.

So Wycliffe and his followers decide to defy church authority and translate the Bible into English. Of course, this was a very early form of English. But they accomplished their mission.

They translate the Bible into English. Technically, they translated from the Latin Vulgate because they lived before the recovery of Greek and Hebrew scholarship in the West.

[ 7 : 12 ] So if they had Greek and Hebrew manuscripts available to them, they didn't feel the need to use them. They didn't use them. They simply translated the Latin Vulgate. Well, this was considered severe heresy by the medieval Catholic Church.

In fact, so much so that after Wycliffe died of natural causes and was buried, they dug up his body, burned his bones as they would any other heretic, and then threw his remains into the river as a sign of condemnation.

In short, there was a time when the need for Bible translations was not so obvious. It was outlawed, in fact, and this was still true by the time of the Reformation.

So let's talk about another important figure in English Bible history, William Tyndale. And I don't think we can underestimate the importance of Tyndale.

He is rightly considered the father of the modern English Bible. He, like Wycliffe, was determined to produce an English translation of the Bible. There's that well-known story of him having a confrontation with a Catholic clergyman who infamously said, I would rather have the Pope's laws than God's laws.

[ 8 : 39 ] And Tyndale was very quick to reply, If God spare my life ere many years, I will cause a boy that driveth the plow shall know more of the Scripture than thou dost.

In other words, Tyndale committed himself to making the Bible accessible to all people. Despite the fact that he would have to risk his life, despite the fact that he would have to flee from his home in England and never return again, he would spend the rest of his life ensuring that English-speaking people could have a copy of Scripture in their vernacular.

And that's what he did. Before his death, he translated the New Testament and parts of the Old Testament, smuggling them back into England in crates of various other things.

And he did translate the Bibles from the Bible's original languages, not from the Latin Vulgate. And he had a distinct advantage over Wycliffe because Tyndale lived in a time when he could utilize the printing press.

So it was much easier for him to make many more copies of his translation which prevented his opponents from destroying them all, which they would have loved to have done.

[ 9 : 56 ] And this work ultimately cost him his life. Even though he was working outside of England, he was eventually found. He had a bounty on him. He was betrayed.

He was captured. Church authorities had him tied to a stake. They strangled him with a rope. And then they burned him to death in 1536.

But his dying prayer was, Lord, open the King of England's eyes. And believe it or not, only a few months after his death, his prayer was answered.

King Henry VIII, the same man in charge when Tyndale was executed, licensed the Matthew Bible, the Great Bible then, which was another English translation based on Tyndale's work.

And he had that Bible placed in every church throughout England. Now, when I say we can't underestimate the importance of Tyndale, I want you to consider this.

[10:57] Between 80 and possibly 90% of the wording that would later be found in the New Testament of the King James Version was borrowed directly from Tyndale's New Testament.

Over the years, we've given a lot of credit to the King James Version for shaping the English language and providing so many well-known expressions that we still use today.

But in fact, most of those expressions actually originated with William Tyndale. And let me give you just a few examples. Behold, I stand at the door and knock in whom we live and move and have our being.

Fight the good fight in the twinkling of an eye. Judge not, lest you be judged. The signs of the times gave up the ghost.

Filthy lucre. And we could go further because William Tyndale also provided us with words that did not exist in English before he created them.

[12:05] For example, atonement, godly, unbeliever, zealous, Passover, scapegoat.

These are all words that he essentially invented to help capture what was written in the original Greek. And it was Tyndale who did that, not the King James translators.

Now, I don't want to take anything away from their contributions, but I also want to give credit where credit is due. William Tyndale laid down his life not only to give the English-speaking world a Bible in their vernacular, but he also transformed the English language itself.

God certainly used him in a mighty way. Well, following Tyndale's death, the Reformation, it continued to take root and spread its influence and other English translations of the Bible came into existence and let me briefly give you the timeline of those.

I know that's very small. So, Miles Coverdale produced the first complete English Bible in print.

[13:22] This was in 1535, so just a year before Tyndale died. However, he relied very heavily on Tyndale's translation of the New Testament. Then in 1537, John Rogers, a friend of Tyndale, used Tyndale's work along with Coverdale's work and produced a new English translation called the Matthew Bible.

And it was called the Matthew Bible because he published it under the pseudonym Thomas Matthew. It was still illegal to publish an unauthorized translation of the Bible, so Rogers, of course, used a pseudonym.

And again, this would become the first officially authorized English translation of the Bible. Now, I know that we often think of the King James Version as the authorized version, but technically, the Matthew Bible or the Great Bible as it became known after some changes was the first authorized Bible.

Then in 1560, the Geneva Bible was produced by English exiles in Switzerland, and there was a couple of things that made this particular Bible unique.

It was the first English Bible to use verse numbers. It also became probably most famous for its extensive use of margin notes.

[14:49] It was essentially a study Bible, and it was a study Bible from a Reformed perspective.

Then in 1568, the Church of England commissioned the translation of a new Bible that would become known as the Bishop's Bible.

Basically, this was the church's official response to the Geneva Bible that had become so popular, but it never really did compete with Geneva.

It just lacked some of the innovative features that the Geneva Bible had, and it wasn't nearly as affordable as the Geneva Bible. So, what often happened was in the church, people were using the Bishop's Bible, but then when they went home, they were using the Geneva Bible.

Well, that brings us to the year 1604. King James I. He was not the biggest fan of the Geneva Bible because some of the margin notes were seen as politically subversive.

They just didn't bolster the divine right of kings as he really thought they should. However, most people loved the Geneva Bible, and he was well aware of this too.

[16:02] So, he thought that maybe he could just bring everyone together with a new translation to replace both the unauthorized Geneva Bible and the authorized Bishop's Bible.

In fact, he instructs the committee to produce what was essentially a revision of the Bishop's Bible staying as close to the wording as the original languages would allow.

And this would be a good time to point out that most translations of the Bible, particularly in English, are revisions of previous versions.

Very few Bible translators have started from scratch. Yes, they go back to the original languages of the Bible and consider the manuscript evidence and so on and so forth, but with very few exceptions, they almost always work from a previous English translation.

translation. And this is why we can often group various Bible translations into families, if you will.

One Bible is descendant of another and so on. So, King James, he commissions the translation of a new English Bible that would, of course, become known as the King James Version.

[17:17] And one of the things that made this translation truly unique for its time was that nearly 50 scholars were involved in it. Prior to the KJV, we saw how most translations were done by individuals or very small groups, not by large committees.

And working by committee is typically a very good thing because it provides a system of checks and balances. When you have only one person doing the translation, you have really no one to check him for accuracy or possible bias throughout the translation.

So, having an entire committee of scholars was a big step forward. However, these committees were spread out across at least three cities in England and they largely worked independently of one another.

So, this is why we find nothing serious but minor inconsistencies throughout the King James Version. Again, I'm not talking about anything major, but you'll have one committee who translates a word one way while another committee translates that same word a different way.

And for whatever reason, some of these little inconsistencies were never reconciled before their Bible was published in 1611. Now, as you probably know, no one, I shouldn't say no one, but almost no one, uses the 1611 King James Bible anymore.

[18:47] I mean, even your staunchest King James-only advocate does not use the 1611 edition. And that's because the King James Version underwent several revisions over the course of the next about 150 years.

These revisions included both minor corrections to printing errors as well as scholarly changes, that is, changes to the text for the sake of both consistency and accuracy.

So for the vast majority of people reading the King James Version today, if you were going to a store and you were to pick up a copy for yourself, likely you would be buying the Benjamin Blaney edition of 1769.

Now, I don't think I have to tell anyone what kind of incredible influence the King James Version has had over the last more than 400 years now.

I mean, it remains the best-selling English Bible in the world to this very day. Year after year, it is still the best-selling English Bible.

[19:57] And I checked. That is true even as of last year. Even so, the King James Version is not without flaws.

Now, before anyone gasps and says, how can you possibly say that about the venerable King James Bible, let me give you something to consider. When the King James Version was first published, it was published with a preface.

It was the translator's letter to the readers. And in that letter, they explained very clearly that they had not created a perfect translation. Their goal was simply to take good translations that already existed and make them a little better.

And if you were to read their letter, you would have no doubts at all that they would have fully supported further revisions to their work, brand new translations, and even modern scholarship. They did the best they could with what they had, as they admit, and they produced a beautiful, beautiful, faithful translation of the Bible.

[21:10] But even they were well aware that their work could be improved upon, and they anticipated as much. Specifically, there are two areas where their work could be and has been improved upon.

The first was simply vernacular. the English language has changed since 1611, and even since 1769. And I don't hesitate to say that it should be updated.

That was the goal of the King James translators. They would agree with this. Again, if you were to read their preface, they make it clear that part of their goal was to read, to create, excuse me, an easy-to-read, very accessible Bible translation into English.

English. I believe the word they used was vulgar, meaning common. They wanted their translation to be in the English used by common, everyday people.

The plowboy, if you will. And the second area of improvement relates to the textual basis for the translation, and let me show you what I mean.

[ 22 : 16 ] translation. Now, most of this is redundant. But we've already talked about this some. Every translation into English has to be translated from something else, of course.

And in the case of the King James Bible, the Old Testament was translated from the traditional Hebrew Masoretic text. text. text. text. And the New Testament was translated from what is known as the textus receptus, or the received text.

text. Now, pretty much every English Bible today relies on the Masoretic text for the Old Testament, just like the King James did. The only difference is that modern translators will also consult the Greek Septuagint.

They'll also consult the Dead Sea Scrolls and whatever other manuscript evidence is available. And why not? As we've seen, the more evidence we have, the better we are able to reconstruct the autographs and produce the better translations.

Now, the New Testament is a different story, and this is where most of the debate between the King James Version and modern versions stems from. This is what produces those so-called missing verses from modern versions.

[ 23 : 41 ] So, you may remember from last time that the Catholic scholar Erasmus produced a new Greek New Testament in the early 1500s.

He compared and he compiled a handful of those later Byzantine manuscripts, and where he didn't have the full text of the New Testament, he filled it in by back-translating the Latin Vulgate, and then he revised his New Testament several times.

Then a couple of other men came along, namely Stephanus and Theodore Beza, and they revised his New Testament a bit further, and this became the text used by William Tyndale and later the King James translators.

And after the KJV was published, this text was published under the name Textus Receptus. So, the King James New Testament is translated from this Textus Receptus, Erasmus' text, and this is also true for the New King James Version, which was first commissioned back in 1975, and this is the primary thing that distinguishes the New King James Version from other modern translations.

You see, most modern translations, the New Testament anyhow, are translated from what I will simply call a critical text, usually utilizing more than one.

[ 25 : 07 ] Now, a critical text is essentially the same thing as the Textus Receptus. This is where scholars take all of the available manuscript evidence, and they compare and they combine those manuscripts into a single edition of the New Testament in Greek with extensive notes to explain where their decisions were made, what the evidence actually showed, and so on.

They're doing the same thing that Erasmus once did. They're working through all of the textual variants to try and understand what the autographs likely said. The only difference is that modern scholars have a much bigger pool of manuscripts than Erasmus had.

He had only a handful of those later Byzantine manuscripts, while modern scholars are able to utilize those older Alexandrian manuscripts and western manuscripts. Very early translations of the New Testament, the writings of early Christians are factored in, we've talked about all of that.

So this gives them a distinct advantage. And the New Testaments they produced are often called critical texts. In fact, if you look at the first few pages of your Bible, you will often see a reference to one or more critical text that the translators actually used in the translation process.

So the textual basis is one aspect of translation. What text is this Bible translated from? The other aspect is translation philosophy or method.

[ 26 : 48 ] Does this translation attempt to bring the reader into the world of the Bible or attempt to bring the Bible into the world of the reader?

So when we're comparing, say, the ESV with the NIV, and we're noticing some differences between them, this is the primary reason. They may share the exact same textual basis.

They're translated from the same text, but their translation philosophies are different. And let me show you that. You may have seen charts like this before, graphs like this before.

Now you'll notice that I didn't group these various versions of the Bible into nice, neat columns, and that's because translations don't work that way.

It's not as though you have word-for-word literal translations and then you have dynamic thought-for-thought or phrase-for-phrase translations. No, it's more like a spectrum.

[ 27 : 50 ] And each version of the Bible is going to land somewhere on that spectrum, and this is somewhat subjective, keep in mind. No Bible is going to be perfectly literal, but you will have some Bibles that are more literal than others and some that are more what we call dynamic.

And I'll explain what I mean by dynamic in just a second. So as you can see here, the New American Standard Bible, the English Standard Version, the King James Version, the New King James Version, they all fall on the more literal side of the spectrum.

And then you have Bibles such as the New International Version, the New Living translation, more on the dynamic side of the spectrum. And kind of toward the middle there, you have the Christian Standard Bible.

That's a Bible that I personally enjoy reading, and it's often marketed, again, this is just, keep in mind, this is just marketing language, but it's often marketed as optimal equivalence.

They're just boasting about the fact that they got somewhere toward the middle. So what's the difference between these? With a formal, so-called literal Bible, the translators attempt to follow the word order in the original language as closely as possible, while keeping all of the text's expressions and idioms, while, you know, and that's whether modern readers will understand them or not.

[ 29 : 22 ] In other words, they're trying to bring the reader into the world of the Bible. Now, on the opposite side, we have dynamic, phrase-for-phrase Bibles.

They don't necessarily attempt to follow the original word order because that can sound very clunky in English, and they will update expressions and idioms so that the modern reader will actually understand them.

In other words, they're trying to bring the Bible into the reader's world. So let me give you a couple of examples of this. Here's one from Luke 9, verse 44.

The NASB's more formal translation of the verse says, let these words sink into your ears. Now, we can probably understand what is meant by that, right?

But that's not really an expression we use. Nobody ever says that. So the NIV's more dynamic translation of the verse says, listen carefully to what I am about to tell you.

[ 30 : 29 ] Now, technically, these two translations are very different from one another. Different words. However, they mean the exact same thing.

Again, one attempts to bring the Bible into the reader's world, and the other attempts to bring the reader into the Bible's world. Now, to be clear, I'll say again that every translation falls somewhere on the spectrum.

You will find dynamic translations within versions of the Bible that are considered to be formal translations. The Bible as a whole, that is.

And you will find formal translations within versions of the Bible that are supposed to be dynamic translations. And I'll give you an example of that. So, Psalm 17, 8.

A literal rendering would say something like, keep me as a little man of a daughter of an eye. Well, no one, no one would understand what that means.

[ 31 : 36 ] So, even your more formal translations, such as the NASB or the ESV, will translate the phrase, keep me as the apple of your eye. Now, I'd love to give you more examples of this, but for the sake of time, let's move on and simply ask the question, which is better?

Is it better to have a formal translation that is more literal or a dynamic translation that is perhaps less literal? Well, my answer to that question is, we're asking the wrong question.

I don't think that we can say one is better than the other. Instead, we should ask, what are the advantages of a formal translation, and what are the advantages of a dynamic translation?

You see, they both have something very valuable to offer us as modern readers in English. So, rather than thinking of these two types of translation, and I'm afraid this is all too common, instead of thinking of these two types of translations as somehow competing with one another, we should use both of them side by side and see what they both have to offer.

You see, by comparing multiple translations, I argue that we walk away with a fuller understanding of what the text is trying to convey. It can be a great help in our Bible study.

[ 33 : 12 ] By the way, this is something that even the King James translators understood. When they originally published their Bible in 1611, and it's very interesting, if you can ever get your hands

on a copy of one, it contained thousands of margin notes.

And the vast majority of those notes contained alternate readings. In other words, they were very open and honest about the fact that there is more than one way to translate a text.

And when they felt that it would benefit readers to see some of these other potential readings, they supplied them in the margin notes. Now, briefly, let's go back to this chart with translation philosophies, the spectrum.

As I said, there's a great benefit to reading multiple translations across the spectrum, but there's also a danger in relying solely on a translation that is either too far one way or the other.

If the only Bible we're reading is too far on the literal side, and there aren't too many of those that exist, you probably aren't going to find those too often in the bookstore, well, we would run the risk of misunderstanding the text.

[ 34 : 34 ] It will be very clunky. Many of the expressions will be very, very hard to understand. And if the only Bible we're reading is too far on the dynamic side, then we run into cases where the Bibles are not really translations anymore.

They're paraphrases of the text. And while every translation requires a certain amount of interpretation, relying exclusively on a paraphrased Bible is like relying on someone's interpretation, whoever paraphrased it, rather than Scripture itself.

And that's problematic. And let me give you a quick example from a paraphrased Bible. This one comes from Genesis 1-1 in the New English Bible.

So, while most translations say something like, the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters, the New English Bible says, a mighty wind swept over the surface of the water.

And I think you can readily detect how that particular paraphrase or interpretation is a problem.

[ 35 : 46 ] Now, there can be some advantages in seeing a paraphrase as you're studying the text in other Bibles. But if that's the only Bible you're reading, well, you've just missed something really vital in the text.

Now, with everything we've seen regarding the Bible's transmission and translation, where does that leave the doctrine of inerrancy?

If all the words of Scripture are, in fact, God-breathed, then the nature of those words must necessarily reflect the nature of God who uttered them.

And the Bible repeatedly affirms that God is a God of truth. He cannot lie. He cannot speak falsely. Therefore, for the words of the Bible to be the words of God, they must be completely true and completely void of error.

And that is precisely what we profess as Christians. We believe the Bible to be the inerrant word of God. However, a vital distinction needs to be made here.

[ 37 : 04 ] The doctrine of inerrancy is defined as the conviction that Scripture in the original autographs is without error.

That is, the text that God actually breathed is without error. But in the original manuscripts, or in the subsequent manuscripts, transmitted throughout history, God, let me phrase it this way.

God inspired the biblical authors perfectly through a unique act of special providence, ensuring that the words they wrote were exactly the words he wanted them to write.

However, he did not extend the same guarantee of inerrancy to every scribe, or every translator, or every printer who would later handle that text.

As we've seen, the history of the Bible is a very human history, involving mistakes made by scribes, involving a multitude of errors along the way, and yet, these human fingerprints on the Bible do not negate the divine origin of the text.

[ 38 : 30 ] Instead, they highlight the difference between the perfection of the original inspiration of Scripture and the sufficiency of its transmission.

We should believe in the preservation of Scripture, but we should also understand that God did not preserve His Word through a perfect line of manuscripts and translations.

Instead, as we've seen, He preserved His Word through a multitude of imperfect manuscripts and translations. And even with a multitude of imperfections, over 99% of the text has remained the same.

And of that 1%, no essential Christian doctrine has been altered in the least. And that is the true and remarkable story of God's preservation of Scripture.

So even after thousands of years of human beings making mistakes and miscopying what was the inerrant words of Scripture, we are still able to reconstruct the text where it's necessary and have great confidence that what we're reading are those inspired, inerrant words of God.

[ 39 : 52 ] Now, very quickly, let me address some of the, of those passages of the Bible that seem to suggest that God's words would never change.

And let me go straight to a passage that is most often cited to defend the view that preservation necessarily requires that God preserved a perfect line of manuscripts without any errors.

And this is found in Matthew chapter 5. In verses 17 and 18, Jesus says, Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets.

I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished.

Or to quote from the New Living Translation, Jesus says, I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not even the smallest detail of God's law will disappear until its purpose is achieved.

[ 41 : 05 ] Does this mean that Jesus was promising that a scribe's pen would never slip or that his eyes would never overlook a phrase or a word as he was copying a manuscript of the Bible?

No. What he is saying here is that God's law and its requirements would remain valid until all of it was fulfilled in Christ.

And that's why he says, I have not come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them. It is true that God's word stands firm.

His promises are sure. Scripture cannot be broken, as Jesus said. But the passages that teach these things do not actually show any specific method of God's preservation of the Bible.

Frankly, the Bible never tells us how God intends to preserve his word throughout the centuries. But as we look back over history, we can see it.

[ 42 : 19 ] We can say, wow, look at the wisdom of God. Look how he did it. By his providence, somehow, he kept his word through centuries of human fallibility.

As he has always done, he accomplished his purpose despite the sinful messiness of this world. Better yet, he accomplished his purpose through the sinful messiness of this world.

Well, I'm a little over my time. So, we'll end here. Now, I did tell you that I have some recommended books if you want to study this matter further. Maybe we can leave those up for just a few minutes in case anyone wants to snap a photo or write them down.

And if you're confused about any of this or you have any questions at all about anything we've discussed over the course of this series, please don't hesitate to come and ask me.

We're dismissed.