

BIBLIOLOGY 23 – WHICH TRANSLATION?

INTRODUCTION

We have concluded that the 66 books of the Bible are the Word of God. The Bible was written in its entirety through the agency of man as the Holy Spirit “breathed” through them and had them write using their own experiences and styles.

The collection of the 66 books of the Bible is the only verifiable document that is available for us to confidently read, study, and assert the nature, attributes, character, and will of God.

The Bible is the authoritative Word of God in all aspects of our lives: theological, metaphysical, ethical, and socio-political. In other words, the Bible is the single source for our worldview and principles of life.

One of the main questions people have is, 'Which translation is the best?'

RATING TRANSLATIONS

The concept of rating translations is a misnomer. The reason is that all of them are translations. All of them will (WILL) miss. What we need to do, then, is understand the difference between the translations and the philosophy or theology behind them.

In general, here are the categorical breakdowns:

- **Formal Equivalence:** Prioritize staying close to the original wording, ideal for study, but sometimes reading can be difficult.
- **Functional Equivalence:** Focus on conveying meaning in natural English, great for personal reading, but less literal.
- **Balanced Approach:** These approaches aim to strike a balance between accuracy and accessibility.
- **Paraphrase:** This is not a translation but a modern retelling.

Functional Equivalence: The most popular translations are the NLT and NET. These are easier to read (6-8 grade level) but it will not be a word for word translation. Sometimes these translations do a very good job of giving an interpretive value of a text that is difficult to read word for word. But one must understand that the translations are giving an interpretive value.

The NET tries to offset this by providing over 60,000 notes on their translations. But this does not negate the fact that the translations do include many interpretive values as translations.

The Balanced Approach: These translations include the CSB, NIV, and NRSV. Even though they claim to have a balanced approach, they also incorporate many interpretive values in their translations.

1 John 3:6 NIV - No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.

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Galatians 1:8 NIV - But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse!

Galatians 1:8 CSB - But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, a curse be on him!

Formal Equivalence: These aim for literal word-for-word translations. It is incumbent upon the student to seek to understand the text.

Category	KJV	NKJV	NASB	ESV	ISV
Notable Features	Traditional, formal, uses Jacobean English, respected for poetic beauty	Preserves KJV's style but modernizes archaic words and grammar	Highly literal, useful for detailed study, and retains traditional terms	Literally accurate, slightly formal English, popular for personal study	Uses Dead Sea Scrolls for Old Testament, translates poetry into metrical rhyme
Origin	Commissioned by King James I of England in 1604	Modernization of KJV commenced in 1975 by Thomas Nelson Publishers	1960s update of the American Standard Version for modern readers	2001 revision of Revised Standard Version, by Crossway Bibles	Developed by the ISV Foundation, first published electronically in 2011
Manuscript Tradition	Based on Textus Receptus, Masoretic Text, and Latin Vulgate	Follows Textus Receptus but consults modern texts for footnotes	Uses Biblia Hebraica and Nestle-Aland Novum Testamentum Graece	Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia and Nestle-Aland Novum Testamentum Graece, 28th edition	Uses modern critical texts, including Dead Sea Scrolls for Old Testament
Translators	Translated by a committee of 47 scholars appointed by King James	130 biblical scholars, church leaders, and lay-Christians worked on it	American scholars on the Lockman Foundation's translation committee	100 evangelical scholars and pastors on Crossway Bibles' team	Evangelical scholars, produced by the ISV Foundation

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All five translations prioritize formal equivalence, aiming for word-for-word accuracy to the original texts, ideal for study. However, their creation reflects different needs:

- KJV: Commissioned in 1611 by King James I to provide an authoritative English translation for the Church of England, using Jacobean English.
- NKJV: Developed in 1975 to modernize the KJV, updating archaic words and grammar while preserving its traditional style.
- NASB: First published in 1971 as an update to the American Standard Version, aiming for maximum literalness for scholarly study.
- ESV: Released in 2001 as a revision of the Revised Standard Version, balancing literalness with literary beauty for personal and church use.
- ISV: Developed by the ISV Foundation, first published electronically in 2011, aiming to be a "literal-idiomatic" translation that balances accuracy with readability, incorporating modern scholarship and textual evidence like the Dead Sea Scrolls. It translates biblical poetry into English metrical rhyme, a unique feature.

The ISV's creation reflects a desire for a translation that is both accurate and accessible, with unique features distinguishing it from the others.

Theological Biases and Denominational Use

Research suggests all five have evangelical or traditional Protestant theological biases:

- KJV: Traditional Protestant, Anti-Catholic slant (overuse of Church), some translations controlled by King James
- NKJV: Follows the KJV tradition but incorporates modern scholarship, Relies upon the Textus Receptus irrespective of modern scholarship.
- NASB: Has a focus on accuracy for theological precision, is often used in academic settings; has a Reformed slant.
- ESV: Popular among Presbyterian, Reformed Baptist, and other Reformed churches and scholars, seen as a modern, reliable alternative; has a strong Reformed bias.
- ISV: Produced by evangelical scholars, intended for liturgical and devotional use across denominations, potentially appealing broadly due to its modern language. Attempted to be completely neutral, removing theological bias in translations. False, they have a reformed bias.

1 John 3:4,6 ISV - Everyone who keeps living in sin also practices disobedience. In fact, sin is disobedience. ⁶ No one who remains in union with him keeps on sinning. The one who keeps on sinning hasn't seen him or known him.

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Is the KJV the English Preserved Word of God? Is it the Best Translation?

I conclude that the KJV is a valuable translation, but it is not exclusively the Word of God.

- **It is a translation:**

Recently, many have begun to call the KJV the KJB. They do this to get rid of the concept that the KJV is a translation.

- **Textual Criticism and Manuscripts:**

The KJV relies on the Textus Receptus (TR), a compilation of later Byzantine manuscripts, while modern translations incorporate older Alexandrian manuscripts, such as Codex Sinaiticus. The availability of over 25,000 manuscripts and fragments today allows for more accurate reconstructions of the original texts than were available to the KJV translators.

- **KJV Translation Issues:**

There are errors and ambiguities in the KJV, such as outdated language (e.g., words like "lust" whose meanings have changed) and less literal translations in some passages. Modern translations often clarify these ambiguities and align more closely with the original Greek and Hebrew. For instance, John 6:47, where the NASB omits "on Me" compared to the KJV, but argues such differences do not undermine core doctrines like the deity of Christ. In fact, modern translations sometimes render Christ's deity more clearly.

- **Quotes from the 1611 KJV Translators:**

Before we finish, we must address a third criticism against us for frequently revising and amending our translations. They treat us unfairly and strangely in this regard. For who, among the wise, has ever considered it a fault to review their work and improve it where necessary?

Honestly, dear Christian reader, we never intended from the start to create an entirely new translation or to turn a bad one into a good one. Our goal was to improve an already good translation or to combine several good ones into one primary, excellent translation that no one could reasonably object to. That has been our aim and effort.

Some might argue that including different possible meanings in the margins could undermine the authority of the Scriptures for our justification. But we believe their judgment is not sound on this point. ... God, in His divine providence, has included words and sentences here and there that are difficult and unclear, ... and it would be more fitting for us to avoid leaving everything in the obscurity of the text. Instead, we should seek the meaning of the Spirit in those places by comparing spiritual things with spiritual, examining related passages, and looking into the original languages.