

## THE BIBLE IN TRANSLATION

**TRANSLATION:** Whether the translation is more **Functional** or **Formal** in its equivalence to the original text, the task of the translator has always been to **strike the balance of communicating the message of the original language clearly** while allowing the target reader to follow literary devices through the text, **an important goal to ensure that the written Word of God is able to speak clearly to cultures around the world.**

### SUMMARY

- \* As the group of documents that comprise the written Word of God to all peoples, the Bible has been translated into over \_\_\_\_\_ **different languages.**
- \* Two different philosophies characterize the specifics of biblical translations:
  - \* **Formal** Equivalence: Which seeks to follow the form of the original text as much as possible (**Word-for-Word**).
  - \* **Functional** Equivalence: Which seeks to most accurately reproduce the *meaning* of the original text.
    - \* Not so much concerned about the grammatical form of the original language as it is the thought or meaning of the original language.
- \* The King James Version (KJV) leans more towards the “**Formal**” equivalence.
- \* There have been an increasing number of “**Functional**” equivalence translations in the English language, including the NIV (The most used English translation in the world)
- \* As Christians we are people of the Bible.
  - \* We believe that God has spoken and speaks to us through his Word.
  - \* We believe that Christian faith and practice are not to be based **ultimately** on church authorities, councils or creeds, but on the written Word of God.
- \* Yet the great majority of Bible readers access God’s Word not in its original languages (Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic) but through a translation into their native tongue.
  - \* Hearing God’s voice in Scripture requires the accurate rendering of God’s Word into the diverse languages of the world.

### Translation Philosophies: Formal or Functional?

- \* The goal of translation is to reproduce the meaning of a text in one language (source / donor language) into another (target / receptor language).
  - \* What’s the best method to accomplish this?
    - \* Do we translate according to the **form** of a text or according to its meaning (**function**)?
- \* **Formal Equivalence** Seeks to follow the form of the original text as much as possible as it relates to **words** and to **grammatical** structures.
  - \* Ex: The Greek word *logos* is most commonly translated as “**word**.”
    - \* A formal equivalent version will seek to consistently render it this way.
  - \* In terms of **grammar**, a formal equivalent version will seek to replicate the grammatical forms of the original.
    - \* Ex: The Greek prepositional phrase *en tē oikia* would be translated as a prepositional phrase in English, “in the house”; and the Greek infinitive *elthein* as an English infinitive, “to come.”
- \* While formal versions seek to stay consistent, **no translation is consistently literal in reality since languages are different**, both in terms of word meanings and grammatical structures.
  - \* Ex: Even a very literal translation, like the New American Standard Bible (NASB), translates *logos* in a wide variety of ways: word, statement, saying, account, story, news, thing, matter, exhortation, etc.
  - \* The same is also true of grammatical forms.

- \* A consistently formal version of *John 3:16* might read: “*Thusly for loved the God the world, so the son the unique gave, in order that all the believing in him not to be destroyed, but have life eternal.*”
- \* The words and grammatical constructions of Hebrew and Greek do not function in the same way as those in English. Even the most literal versions default to idiomatic renderings.
- \* **Functional Equivalence**, also known as dynamic equivalence, idiomatic, or meaning-based translation, seeks to reproduce the **meaning** of the text.
  - \* Form should only be retained if it accomplishes this goal.
  - \* Since no two languages are the same, it is necessary to change the form in order to capture the meaning.
  - \* Anyone who has learned a second language soon recognizes this.
    - \* The Spanish phrase *¿Cómo se llama?* would be translated “literally” as “How yourself call?” (modal adverb + reflexive pronoun + verb) but is better rendered, “*What’s your name?*” (interrogative pronoun + copulative verb + possessive pronoun + noun).
      - \* The form must be changed to capture the meaning.
    - \* The German sentence *Ich habe Hunger* would be formally translated, “*I have hunger*” (pronoun + verb + noun), but in English we would say, “*I am hungry*” (pronoun + copulative verb + adjective).
- \* Translating from Hebrew or Greek to English is no different.
  - \* *Matt 1:18* in the Greek says that Mary was *en gastri echousa*, literally, “*having in belly.*”
    - \* This Greek phrase means she was “pregnant.”
  - \* Translating literally would make a text that was clear and natural to its Greek readers into one that is strange and obscure to English ears.
- \* Short List of Bible Translations
  - \* LSB: Legacy Standard Bible (2021)
  - \* KJV: King James Version (1611)
  - \* NKJV: New King James Version (1983)
  - \* NASB: New American Standard Bible (1971)
  - \* ESV: English Standard Version (2001)
  - \* RV: Revised Version (1885) [British Revision of the KJV]
  - \* ASV: American Standard Version (1901)
  - \* CEB: Common English Bible (2011)
  - \* CEV: Contemporary English Version (1995)
  - \* CSB: Christian Standard Bible (2017)
  - \* JB: Jerusalem Bible (1966)
  - \* GNT: Good News Translation (1966)
  - \* GW: God’s Word (1995)
  - \* NJB: New Jerusalem Bible (1985)
  - \* LB: Living Bible (1971 – Paraphrased)
    - \* **Translations** attempt to tell the reader what the original text says
    - \* **Paraphrase** attempts to tell the reader what the passage means – it is more of a commentary on the text of Scripture than it is an accurate rendering of what the text actually says.
  - \* LSV: Literal Standard Version (2020)
  - \* M: The Message (2002 – Paraphrased)
  - \* NRSV: New Revised Standard Version (1989)
  - \* NCV: New Century Version (1987 – Children’s Version)
  - \* NEB: New English Bible (1961)
  - \* NET: New English Translation (2001)
  - \* NIV: New International Version (1973)
  - \* NLT: New Living Translation (1996)
  - \* NAB: New American Bible (1970) [Revised Addition]
  - \* PME: Phillips Modern English (1958)

- \* RSV: Revised Standard Version (NT: 1946, OT: 1952)
- \* REB: Revised English Bible (1989)

\* Compare the following biblical idioms translated both **Formally** and **Functional**:

\* Josh 10:6

- \* RSV (**Formal**) *Do not relax your hand from your servants*
- \* NIV (**Functional**) *Do not abandon your servants*

\* 2 Sam 18:25

- \* NRSV (**Formal**) *The king said, “If he is alone, there are tidings in his mouth.”*
- \* NET (**Functional**) *The king said, “If he is by himself, he brings good news.”*

\* Amos 4:6

- \* NKJV (**Formal**) *“Also I gave you cleanness of teeth in all your cities”*
- \* NLT (**Functional**) *“I brought hunger to every city”*

\* Mark 1:2

- \* ESV (**Formal**) *Behold, I send my messenger before your face...*
- \* CSB (**Functional**) *See, I am sending My messenger ahead of you...*

\* The form must be changed to capture the meaning. Since the ultimate goal of translation is to transfer the *meaning*, Functional Equivalence often represents the best translation method.

\* As you can see, both Formal and Functional versions have strengths and weaknesses.

\* By mechanically reproducing forms, formal equivalent versions risk miscommunicating the original meaning.  
 \* Yet they can be helpful tools for tracing formal features of the text, such as recurrent words and verbal allusions.

\* While **Functional versions** more clearly communicate the meaning of text, they **are more interpretive and so have a greater risk of misinterpretation.**

\* Students should be encouraged to use a variety of versions from across the translation spectrum. The following chart represents the approximate location of the most popular English versions.

*Continuum of Translations*

<b>Formal</b>		<b>Mediating</b>					<b>Functional</b>				
ASV	RV	NKJV	KJV	NRSV	NAB	NIV	JB	NEB	GNT	CEV	
Youngs		RSV	ESV		HCSB	CEB	NJB	REB	NLT		LB
		NASB			NET				NCV		PME
					CSB				GW		M

- \* Where did all these versions come from?
- \* A brief history of Bible translation will help to put these various versions in context.

**Translations from Antiquity**

- \* We can't cover the all translations into the 3,350 languages - Instead, we'll note
  - 1) 2 great translations from antiquity followed by a very brief history of ...
  - 2) The Bible in English and ...
  - 3) A survey of contemporary English versions.

**The Septuagint**

\* Bible translation first became necessary for the Jews following the conquests of Alexander the Great (323 BC), when Greek became the common trade language of the eastern Med region.

\* Jews living in Egypt and elsewhere had gradually lost the ability to speak and read in Hebrew and so needed a translation of the Scriptures into Greek – the result --

\* **The Septuagint:** From the Latin *septuaginta*, “seventy”; abbreviated LXX, gets its name from a legend found in the *Letter of Aristeas* (2nd c. BC), which recounts how 72 scholars, 6 from each of the 12 tribes of Israel, completed the work of translation in 72 days.

\* While the specifics of this legend are in doubt, scholars affirm that the Pentateuch was likely translated into Greek in Alexandria, Egypt in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC and the rest of the Hebrew Scriptures followed.

\* The Septuagint became the standard Bible for Greek-speaking Jews of the Diaspora (“dispersion”—Jews living outside Israel) as well as for the early Christians.

\* Most Old Testament quotes in the New Testament come from the Septuagint.

### The Vulgate

\* A second great translation from antiquity is the Latin Vulgate.

\* As a missionary religion, Christianity sought to cross cultural boundaries to take the gospel to the ends of the earth. Bible translations were therefore produced in the early centuries of the Christian era in languages such as Latin, Syriac, Coptic, Armenian, Ethiopian, Georgian, and Slavic.

\* In AD 382, Pope Damasus I commissioned the church father Jerome to produce a new translation to replace the *Vetus Latina* (“Old Latin”) version of the Gospels.

\* Jerome however went further and translated almost the entire Bible.

\* While most versions of the OT at that time were produced from the Greek Septuagint, Jerome traveled to Palestine and learned Hebrew from Jewish rabbis.

\* The result was the Latin Vulgate (*versio vulgate*, “common version”).

\* Eclipsing the Old Latin, **Vulgate** soon became the standard Bible of the Catholic Church.

### The Bible in English

\* The **first English translation of the full Bible** was **completed around 1382** under the direction of Oxford theologian **John Wycliffe**.

\* Wycliffe spent much of his career challenging the authority of the Pope and the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church.

\* His motivation for translation was his belief that the Bible was a Christian’s highest authority and that everyone should be able to read and hear God’s Word.

\* The original manuscript, mostly completed by Wycliffe’s associates, was not considered a worthy work

\* This rather wooden literal first edition was subsequently revised by Wycliffe’s associate **John Purvey** in **1388**. **Purvey’s edition became the standard Wycliffe Bible.**

\* As one would expect, Wycliffe’s fiery denunciation of church dogma resulted in strong opposition from the church hierarchy.

\* In 1408, a clergy synod at Oxford banned the production and public reading of vernacular versions of the Bible.

### William Tyndale

\* A century and a half after Wycliffe, **William Tyndale** produced the first printed English New Testament translated directly from the Greek (translated from the Latin Vulgate).

\* The ban on vernacular versions was still in force and Tyndale faced severe opposition.

\* Harassed by his enemies, he fled from England to continental Europe, where his New Testament was published in 1526 and smuggled back into England.

\* The people loved it; it was both accurate and readable.

\* Yet Tyndale’s enemies pursued him relentlessly.

\* While living in exile in Belgium, Tyndale was kidnapped, imprisoned and subsequently executed - His body was burned.

\* Tyndale’s most famous words came in response to a charge that he was opposing the Pope’s edicts - Tyndale: “I defy the pope, and all his laws - if God spares my life these many years, I would make the farm boy who drives the plough know more of the Scripture than the Pope himself”

\* **Tyndale’s vision was to give everyone access to God’s Word.**

### The King James Version (KJV)

\* Tyndale’s powerful and idiomatic translation had a profound effect on English versions that followed, including:

\* \* *Coverdale Bible* (1535)                      \* *Matthew’s Bible* (1537)                      \* *Great Bible* (1539)

\* The Authorized, or *King James Version* (KJV), the most influential English version ever.

\* The KJV arose in the context of two competing versions

\* The *Bishop’s Bible* (1568), the official Bible of the Church of England

\* The *Geneva Bible* (1560), which was the favorite of the Puritans.

\* King James I, who had recently ascended to the throne of Britain, despised the *Geneva Bible* because it contained anti-monarchical notes.

\* When the Puritans proposed a new translation of the Bible—without theological notes—James enthusiastically endorsed the idea.

\* From his perspective, a new translation endorsed by both the Puritans and Anglicans would likely result in the demise of the *Geneva Bible*.

\* The KJV was **commissioned in 1604** and **produced in 7 years by 47 biblical scholars**. It was **first published in 1611**.

\* Although quickly accepted by many and destined to become the most enduring English version of all time, the KJV at first face a mixed reception.

\* Ex: The Pilgrims refused to take it on the Mayflower, preferring the Geneva Bible.

\* **Hugh Broughton**, a leading biblical scholar of his day, wrote, “**Tell His Majesty that I had rather be rent in pieces with wild horses, than any such translation by my consent should be urged upon poor churches**”

\* The KJV translators were not surprised by such criticisms, acknowledging in their preface that their work was just one link in a long chain of Bible translations and revisions:

\*\* “We never thought from the beginning that we should need to make a new translation, nor yet to make of a bad one a good one ... but to make a good one better” \*\*

\* While the KJV became the dominant English version among Protestants, the *Douai-Rheims* Version of 1582 (NT; OT from 1609) was the favorite of the Roman Catholic Church.

\* Although translated from the Latin, it’s wording is remarkably similar to the *Bishops Bible* and the *King James Version*—perhaps owing to some dependence on Tyndale’s work.

### Revising the KJV

\* The KJV remained the most popular English version for almost 400 years.

\* Yet in time a revision became necessary, both because of its archaic language and the inferiority of its Greek text.

\* In 1870, the Church of England commissioned a revision, resulting in the **Revised Version (RV) published between 1881–85**.

- \* Its American counterpart, the **American Standard Version (ASV)**, was published in 1901.
- \* Neither version, however, challenged the supremacy of the KJV. Both were overly literal and did not match the literary beauty of the KJV.
- \* The next major revision in the KJV tradition was the **Revised Standard Version (RSV; 1952)**, a revision of the **American Standard Version**.
- \* Though widely praised by many scholars and clergy, the RSV experienced severe criticism from some conservatives.
  - \* Particularly irksome to fundamentalists was the translation of “virgin” (*‘almāh*) as “young woman” in Is 7:14 and the rendering of the traditional “*propitiation*” as “*expiation*,” presumably to mute the idea of a wrathful God who needed to be appeased by sacrifice.
  - \* The RSV (like the RV and ASV) also adopted the methods of textual criticism developed by B.F. Wescott and F.J.A. Hort, which treated the older (Alexandrian) manuscripts as more reliable.
    - \* This resulted in a New Testament text with significant differences from King James Version, drawing opposition from those who viewed the KJV as the only “real Bible.”
- \* In 1989 the RSV was revised again by the National Council of Churches as the **New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)**.
  - \* The NRSV, which is especially popular in academic circles, was the first Bible to consistently utilize gender-inclusive language.
  - \* Other revisions in the KJV line were produced in more conservative circles.
- \* The **New American Standard Bible (NASB; 1971; rev. 1995)**, funded by the Lockman Foundation, was another revision of the ASV.
  - \* It is perhaps the most literal of recent versions.
- \* The **New King James Version (NKJV; 1982)** was a direct revision of the KJV.
  - \* The NKJV is unique among modern versions in that it follows the *Textus Receptus*, the Greek text that lies behind the *King James Version*.
    - \* Since the vast majority of scholars consider this Greek text to be late and inferior, the NKJV provides in its footnotes variant readings from the Critical Text.
      - \* The Critical Text is the Greek text achieved by following the rules and methods of textual criticism.
      - \* There are two main editions of the Critical Text, the Nestle-Aland (28<sup>th</sup> ed.) and the United Bible Societies (UBS; 5<sup>th</sup> ed.).
- \* Finally, the **English Standard Version (ESV; 2001)** is an evangelical revision of the RSV. It is especially popular in Reformed circles - ☺.

## 20<sup>th</sup> Century Versions

- \* In addition to revisions in the KJV line, there are many new versions produced directly from the Hebrew and Greek.
- \* At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century a number of common language versions began to appear.
- \* The majority of these were produced by individual scholars:
  - \* *The New Testament in Modern Speech* (R.F. Weymouth; 1903)
  - \* *The New Testament: A New Translation* (James Moffatt; 1913)
  - \* *The New Testament: An American Translation* (E.J. Goodspeed; 1923)
  - \* *The Twentieth Century New Testament* (1901) - Produced by a committee of laypeople

## Functional Equivalent Versions

- \* The production of common language (or Functional Equivalent) versions continued throughout the 20th and into the 21st centuries.
- \* The hugely popular *Living Bible* (1971), produced by Kenneth Taylor, was a paraphrase (or simplification) of the *American Standard Version*.
  - \* Its revision, the *New Living Translation* (NLT; 1996; rev. 2004) was a committee work and is the best-selling of the functional equivalent versions.
- \* The *New Century Version* (NCV) and the *International Children's Bible* (ICB; 1986)—two names for the same translation—were a simple-language revision of a Bible originally designed for the deaf.
- \* *God's Word* (1995), another common language version, was produced by an organization associated with the Missouri Synod of the Lutheran Church.
- \* Other common language versions of the late 20th century arose in the context of the groundbreaking work of Eugene Nida and other international Bible translators, who brought principles of linguistics to bear on the translation process.
  - \* The *Good News Translation* (GNT; also called *Today's English Version* and the *Good News Bible*; 1976; rev. 1992)
  - \* The *Contemporary English Version* (CEV; 1995)

### Mediating Versions

- \* A number of translations have been produced that occupy a middle ground between formal and function versions.
  - \* These include Roman Catholic versions, such as the *Jerusalem Bible* (1966), the *New Jerusalem Bible* (1985), and the *New American Bible* (1970; rev. 1991)
  - \* Versions produced especially for the British public, the *New English Bible* (1970) and its revision the *Revised English Bible* (1989).
- \* The most popular English version in the world today is the *New International Version* (NIV; 1978; rev. 1984; 2011).
  - \* The NIV was a new translation (not a revision), the result of a trans-denominational effort by approximately 100 scholars, sponsored by the New York Bible Society.
  - \* Two factors were the likely reason for the NIV's popularity
    - 1) Its **balance between formal and functional equivalence**, resulting in a **Bible that was readable but also sounded like the "real Bible"** (= the KJV).
    - 2) Because of its conservative credentials and scholarly foundations the NIV was welcomed by a wide range of evangelical leaders from across the theological spectrum.
- \* A number of other mediating versions have appeared in recent years.
  - \* The *New English Translation* (NET; 2005) is distinctive for its extensive notes (60,000+), providing interpretive insights, alternative renderings, and textual variants.
  - \* The *Holman Christian Standard Bible* (2004) was produced by the Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and intended as an alternative to the NIV for Southern Baptist curriculum and ministry.
    - \* It was recently revised as the *Christian Standard Bible* (2017) with a multi-denominational revision committee and a more diverse audience in view.
  - \* The *Common English Bible* (CEB; 2011) is another NIV-like version, produced by 120 scholars from 24 different denominations and geared toward a more ecumenical audience.

\* Legacy Standard Bible (LSB) was completed by a team of scholars from The Master's Seminary and University. **Working directly from the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek** to update the text of the NASB '95.

### **Conclusion**

- \* The task of translation is never finished.
  - \* Languages change over time with constant advances in biblical scholarship.
  - \* The imprecision and ambiguity of language itself means there is always room to improve a translation in terms of its accuracy, precision and clarity.
- \* The English-speaking world has been spoiled by the wealth of translations available.
- \* When it comes to Translations - A worthy goal would be to pour our resources into finishing the task of translating God's Word into every language of the world.