

TRANSLATIONS ON TRIAL: Is Your Bible the Word of God?

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Chapter 1

The Inspiration of the Scriptures

Holy Bible, Book divine,
Precious treasure, thou art mine;
Mine to tell me whence I came;
Mine to teach me what I am;

Mine to chide me when I rove;
Mine to show a Saviour's love;
Mine thou art to guide and guard;
Mine to punish or reward;

Mine to comfort in distress,
Suffering in this wilderness;
Mine to show, by living faith,
Man can triumph over death;

Mine to tell of joys to come,
And the rebel sinner's doom;
O thou holy Bible divine,
Precious treasure, thou art mine.

- John Burton

In the hymn printed above, *Holy Bible, Book Divine*, one word is repeated over and over. That word is *mine*. Are you personally glad that you have a Bible?

You should be. Millions of people throughout the world today cannot sing the truth of this beautiful hymn. They do not own a Bible. They have never seen a copy of the Scriptures. In fact, they probably don't even know that the written Word of God exists. It may even be that the Bible has not been translated into their native tongue.

We believers in the English-speaking world should be extremely grateful because we have the Word of God printed in our own native language. Through publishers and bookstores, we have unlimited access to the Bible. We can buy it; we can give it to our loved ones. In many ways we have become spoiled. The Bible has been in our language for more than 500 years now. We have a heritage of Bible translations and an abundance of

versions and study helps. Millions upon millions of English Bibles have been printed and distributed. Most of us own several personal copies.

And yet, we're not thankful to God for what we possess. Many fail to read it. Others criticize it. Most disobey it. The majority treat it like any other piece of literature. It is no longer a *precious treasure*. What a shame!

We need a fresh and proper understanding of the very nature of the Scriptures.

INSPIRATION

The Bible is inspired of God. The word “inspiration” occurs only once in the New Testament. The Apostle Paul wrote: “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (II Tim. 3:16,17).

Those six words—“is given by inspiration of God”—are translated from one Greek word, *theopneustos*. Literally, it means “God-breathed.” The Scripture has been breathed out by God. What is written is just as much the Word of God as what God could speak orally.

The Bible claims for itself that what the human authors wrote was the same as the spoken word of God. In Acts 1:16 we read Peter's words to the disciples: “Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus.” How did the Holy Spirit speak? He spoke through what David said. How do we know what David said? We read what he wrote in Psalm 41:9.

Paul, addressing the Jews in Rome, said: “Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, saying, . . .” (Acts 28:25,26). How do we know what the Holy Spirit said through Isaiah? We look at what he wrote in Isaiah 6:9,10.

Technically, inspiration refers specifically to the writings themselves, not to the human authors nor to the responses of readers. All “Scripture” is inspired. The Holy Spirit superintended the process of the production of the Scriptures. Peter wrote: “For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (II Pet. 1:21). Just as the wind supplied the power to move ancient sailing ships, so the Holy Spirit constrained, burdened and guided the authors to write what they did. They were “holy” men in that God selected them and providentially prepared them for their task. They wrote exactly what God wanted them to write—adding nothing and leaving out nothing.

REVELATION

The Bible is written by divine revelation. In Jesus' prayer of intercession for His own, He said to the Father, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth” (John 17:17). God is truth and always speaks truth. So the Bible, as the breathed-out word of God, is truth. That doesn't just mean that the Bible contains truth. It *is* truth—divinely revealed and spoken.

The process by which truth in the mind of God became truth in the written Scriptures is explained by three theological words: revelation, illumination and inspiration. Paul referred to these concepts in I Corinthians 2:9-13. He wrote: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit" (vv. 9,10). No human, regardless of his intelligence, intuition or education, could have originated the truth of Scripture. It required divine revelation.

Paul recognized that, in order to receive such truth, the apostles had to be indwelt and controlled by the Holy Spirit. So he wrote: "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God" (v. 12). Such understanding required divine illumination.

The ability to transmit divinely revealed truth, either orally or in written form, also necessitated the guidance of the Spirit in the lives of the biblical authors. Paul added: "Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (v.13). Under the direction of the Spirit, the human authors could use the correct words in proper sentence structure to communicate exactly what God wanted to reveal.

PLENARY INSPIRATION

The Bible is inspired equally throughout all 66 books. This concept is known as plenary inspiration. The Old Testament is just as inspired as the New Testament. Paul's words in his epistles are just as inspired as Jesus' words recorded in the Gospels. The genealogies are just as inspired as the Ten Commandments. When Paul wrote: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God" (II Tim. 3:16), he included the entire content of Scripture.

Naturally, each section of the written Word has a different purpose and relevance. A believer today doubtless reads Romans and Ephesians more than he does Leviticus. At the same time, he should not deny the fact that the laws of sacrifices were inspired and thus profitable for the spiritual development of all believers.

VERBAL INSPIRATION

The Bible is inspired down to the very words which the authors used. This concept is known as verbal inspiration. There is a false theory of inspiration which claims that only the thoughts are inspired. But how can you communicate thoughts apart from words? The two are inseparably connected.

Inspiration thus refers to words—the choice of vocabulary and the arrangement of words in sentence structure. There is a divine reason behind the presence or absence of a definite article, the use of verb tenses and moods, the function of noun cases, and many other grammatical features.

Paul argued that Jesus Christ was the rightful heir to the covenant made with Abraham because the original Hebrew text used the singular word "seed" rather than the plural "seeds" (Gal. 3:16). The Saviour Himself said to His critics: "Think not that I come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled" (Matt. 5:17,18).

A “jot” referred to the smallest letter within both the Hebrew (*yodh*) and the Greek (*iota*) alphabets. A “tittle” was the stroke of the pen which distinguished one letter from another. Christ thus ascribed inspiration and authority to the very letters which make up words and to the guidance of the human pen in the actual spelling of those words.

Christ also asserted that “the scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35). The Scripture is a singular unit. Its parts cannot be separated from its whole. The entire canon of 66 books cannot be destroyed, and neither can its individual words and sentences.

ORIGINAL WRITINGS

The Bible is inspired, technically speaking, in only the original writings that the Spirit-directed authors wrote. These original documents are known today as the “autographa,” meaning “the writings themselves.” Thus, the original writing of Romans was technically inspired or breathed out by God, through His selected, authoritative apostle, Paul. This claim would apply equally to all 66 books produced by 40 men who were gifted and authenticated by God.

At the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy held in October 1978, more than 250 scholars signed a document presenting the evangelical position on the inspiration and inerrancy of the Scriptures. Informed ministers and laymen throughout the evangelical, fundamentalist world have wholeheartedly supported the principles of this statement of faith, containing Nineteen Articles of Affirmation and Denial. Article X says: “We affirm that inspiration, strictly speaking, applies only to the autographic text of Scripture, which in the providence of God can be ascertained from available manuscripts with great accuracy. We further affirm that copies and translations of Scripture are the Word of God to the extent that they faithfully represent the original.”

So the original documents of the 66 books of the Bible were actually and technically inspired. The unique ministry of the Holy Spirit in divine revelation, illumination and inspiration consequently was limited to the initial production of the written Word of God.

But we can also say that Spanish, French and Bengali translations are the Word of God *to the extent that they faithfully represent the original writings*. Likewise, the King James Version (KJV), the New International Version (NIV), the New American Standard Bible (NASB), and other English translations are practically and virtually inspired *to the extent that they also faithfully represent the autographa*.

This distinction between the original writings and later copies, versions and translations must be understood. There is much confusion today over the abundance of English translations, their respective worth and their fidelity to the biblical originals. Evangelical Christianity, unfortunately, has become divided over the issue of English translations and the Hebrew-Greek texts upon which they are based.

Are English translations, such as the KJV, NIV and NASB, the inspired, written Word of God? Or is there only one that qualifies? Or do none of them meet the proper prerequisites? In a technical sense, no translation is inspired. In a practical, virtual sense, they are all inspired to that extent whereby they correspond to the content of the original writings.

INERRANCY

The Bible is inerrant and infallible in all matters which it addresses. The Bible is inspired truth, not only in issues of doctrinal faith and moral living, but also in areas of history, geography and science.

The Evangelical Theological Society is an organization whose members subscribe annually to a basic doctrinal statement: "The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written, and is therefore inerrant in the autographa."

Unfortunately, a growing number of professing evangelicals cannot conscientiously sign that statement. They embrace a position of partial or limited inerrancy. They believe the Bible is inerrant and infallible on matters of faith and practice, but that, even in the original writings, it contained historical, chronological and geographical errors.

The issue of the complete inerrancy and infallibility of the total original Scriptures is the real doctrinal battleground today. Those who embrace this foundational doctrine should unite in its defense against the attacks made by both liberals and some evangelicals.

A person who uses the KJV should be committed to the full inerrancy of the Scriptures. And so should those who use the NIV or the NASB. Charges of heresy should be hurled at those who deny inerrancy, not at those who believe in it but use a different English version.

AUTHORITY

The Bible is the supreme authoritative basis of faith and practice. Ever since the Protestant Reformation, evangelicals have been firmly committed to this principle expressed by Martin Luther. Known as *sola Scriptura*, it recognizes that only the Bible can be the supreme written norm by which God can bind our consciences. Believers are often obligated to subscribe to doctrinal statements of one kind or another. Such situations are proper only to the extent that these statements honestly represent the teaching of Scripture. A person's ultimate allegiance must be to the written Word of God.

When Luther stood before the Diet of Worms in 1521, he was asked to give a plain answer to the question: "Will you recant?" His classic answer has been quoted for almost 470 years: "If the emperor desires a plain answer, I will give it to him. It is impossible for me to recant unless I am proved to be wrong by the testimony of Scripture. My conscience is bound to the Word of God. It is neither safe nor honest to act against one's conscience. Here I stand. God help me. I cannot do otherwise."

Luther's allegiance was not to a German translation of the Scriptures nor to the Hebrew and Greek texts which he possessed. His vow of commitment was to the inspired, inerrant Word of God, as originally breathed-out by God and as faithfully represented in the version before him.

We evangelicals must also tenaciously stand for the inerrancy and inspiration of the written Word without compromise. However, we must allow our fellow-soldiers of the faith to express their commitment through the use of Spanish, French, German, Bangali, Japanese and various English translations. We must not allow the use of one version to

become the standard of orthodoxy, a fundamental of the faith comparable to the virgin birth and deity of Jesus Christ.

DIVINE-HUMAN CHARACTER

The Bible is a divine-human book. In one sense, the production of the written Word can be compared to the incarnation of Jesus Christ, the living Word. God the Son, possessing the divine nature, took to Himself a perfect and complete human nature through Mary. She was able to pass on to Him a human nature apart from a sin nature. Evangelicals confess that Jesus Christ is a divine-human person, one person with both divine and a human nature, but with no human flaws.

Apart from the superintendence of the Holy Spirit, the authors of Scripture were ordinary men—shepherds, farmers, kings, fishermen, physicians, politicians and tax collectors. They wrote narrative history, poetry, proverbs and letters to individuals and groups. Under natural circumstances, they could have incorporated errors into their writings. But the composition of Scripture was no ordinary event.

These were “holy men,” set apart and superintended by the Spirit of God. They did speak and write. They were used and used what were theirs. But throughout the process of inspiration, they were prevented from passing on errors, either intentional or unintentional into the texts of the original writings.

Chapter 2

The Transmission of the Text

Most people do not know how the text of the Bible was passed along from the time of the original manuscripts to the invention of the printing press by Gutenberg in about 1450. After that time, an established text could be printed over and over. Before that historic event, however, the Scriptures had to be copied by hand.

This chapter will survey God’s providential preservation of the text of the original biblical writings without essential loss.

THE ORIGINAL WRITINGS

Moses wrote the first five books of the Old Testament (the Pentateuch) about 1500 B.C. The last historical book—Nehemiah—was written approximately 400 B.C. Thus, the 39 books of the Old Testament were composed over a lengthy period of time. If the book of Job was actually written during the time of the Hebrew patriarchs, about 2000 B.C., then the time of composition would cover a span of 1600 years.

On the other hand, the 27 books of the New Testament were penned during a relatively short period of time. James wrote the first book in A.D. 45, and John wrote the last one, the Book of Revelation, in A.D. 95—a span of only 50 years.

The actual autographa (original writings) do not exist today. They have not been found by archaeologists. And the Bible itself gives no clues as to their location and preservation even during the period of their writing.

We might ask why God allowed them to disappear? He breathed out His word through the prophets and apostles, superintended by the Holy Spirit. Those inerrant, infallible writings formed the only authoritative basis of faith and practice, and yet they are gone. So much care was given to their creation, yet they have vanished. Why?

The Bible doesn't answer this question directly. But two reasons are suggested. The first is natural: Ancient, original writings of any type rarely survive. Written on perishable materials such as papyrus or animal skins, they deteriorate and decompose as they are exposed to sunlight, air and humidity.

The second reason is spiritual. Mankind is disposed toward a reverence of ancient religious relics. In our own day, people take pilgrimages to view and to kiss such items as the alleged burial shroud of Christ or pieces of wood from the cross. We can assume that God in His wisdom knew that sinful man would eventually worship the autograph for their intrinsic sacred worth.

There is even a biblical illustration of man's sinfulness in worshiping a relic. When God punished the Israelites by sending fiery serpents to bite them, God told Moses to make a serpent of brass and to place it on a pole in the midst of the people. Whenever an afflicted person looked at it in faith, he was healed (Num. 21:4-9). That brass serpent was preserved for the next 700-750 years. But then, the Bible tell us that Hezekiah, a godly king of Judah, "brake in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Nehushtan" (II Kings 18:4).

We should worship God, not the Bible. Bibliolatry, a false worship of the Bible itself, is just as evil as idolatry. Even the beloved Apostle John had a human tendency to worship the revealed truth itself and the channel of that revelation (Rev. 19:10). He had to be corrected for it.

If the original writings had survived to our present day, there would be no debate over the correct text of the Scriptures. Since they are not accessible to us, the text of the original writings must be determined by studying the available copies.

THE COPIES

God exercised direct control in the production of original scriptural writings so that the text was absolutely inerrant. There were no spelling or grammatical errors in the books penned by the biblical authors.

But God didn't provide this same miraculous superintendence over those who made copies or translations of the original text. The original authors were "moved" by the Holy Spirit as their pens hit the paper (II Peter 1:21), but this supernatural ministry did not extend to the future generations of scribes, copyists and translators.

Inerrancy should—and can—be argued *only* for the original writings. As soon as a person decided to make a copy or translation, the possibility of variations in the transcript surfaced. A copy is a word-for-word manuscript, done by hand in the same language as the original. A translation is a manuscript that transfers the language of the original into a different language; for example, from Greek into German.

All extant (existing) copies and translations of the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament have transcriptional variations. Some have called these variant readings “errors,” but that term connotes something far worse than what the textual variant actually is. The word “errors” suggests doctrinal, moral and historical inaccuracies in the original biblical writings. That is a false, but popular, concept passed along by an uninformed secular media to an unsuspecting, gullible public. Unfortunately, because of such allegations, even some who profess allegiance to the Bible as the written Word of God have begun to doubt the inerrancy of the autographa, or original writings.

In order to determine the original text that was contained in the autographa, scholars must study ancient hand-copied manuscripts of the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament. This was and is a difficult task undertaken by men with the competence and patience needed to accomplish it.

Their investigation reveals that no two manuscripts containing a major portion of the Bible are exactly alike. There are about 200,000 variant readings in the available manuscripts. That number shocks a lot of people, but it isn’t as bad as it seems. For example, if a single word is misspelled in the same way in 3000 separate manuscripts, it is counted as 3000 variant readings. Actually, it is only one. And such variant readings involve no doctrinal or moral teaching of the Bible.

Most of these variant readings were originated unintentionally. Some were errors of the eye—changes made when a copyist misread the divisions of words, omitted letters and words, repeated a letter, or transposed the position of two letters within a word. For a contemporary personal illustration, my students constantly misspell my name (Gromacki) in multiple ways even though it is in print right before them.

There were also errors of the ear. Sometimes one person would read from a manuscript, and several would make simultaneous copies as they listened and wrote. Such oral pronunciation could cause two persons to write two different words. For example, the difference between the possessive “your” (*hemon*) and “our” (*humon*) in the Greek is very slight and could easily be confused.

There were errors of memory. A copyist would read a manuscript and then write, depending upon his short recall of memory. All of us have written wrong telephone numbers and names. It is easy to do.

Some changes were intentional. A copyist may have concluded that his source manuscript contained grammatical, historical or doctrinal errors. With all good intention, he may have introduced changes into his copy.

The science that attempts to reconstruct the original text by analyzing and evaluating the available manuscripts is called textual criticism. Textual critics generally follow these guidelines: The preferred reading is usually the older reading, the more difficult reading, the shorter reading, the reading which best explains the rise of variations, the reading with the widest geographical acceptance, the reading which conforms to the literary style of the author, and the reading which agrees doctrinally with the rest of Scripture.

THE HEBREW TEXT OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

The text of the current edition of the Hebrew Bible, known as Kittel’s *Biblia Hebraica*, is based on four hand-copied manuscripts and primarily on only one of them, the

Leningrad Codex. This key manuscript, written about A.D. 1008, is the largest and only complete manuscript of the entire Old Testament. It is written on vellum, a material prepared from calf or antelope skin. The Masoretes were Jewish textual scribes who lived from the fifth through the ninth centuries A.D. They standardized the Hebrew text of the Old Testament, which then came to be known as the Masoretic Text. The actual number of Old Testament manuscripts from the Masoretic period is very few.

There may be several reasons why there are so few Old Testament manuscripts prior to the invention of the printing press. First, the factor of age or antiquity makes preserving such ancient manuscripts impossible. Second, the vellum or parchment writing materials were very perishable. Third, the Jewish people were under constant persecution. The city of Jerusalem, the temple, and synagogues throughout the world were destroyed. Fourth, the Jewish textual scribes followed a tradition of carefully destroying manuscripts which contained faulty copying and others which were too aged for practical use.

Although few Masoretic manuscripts are available for study, the text they contain is very good, with few variant readings. These copyists had a reverence for the text of the Scriptures; therefore they were very precise in their work. They counted the lines and the letters within each line; they had rules for the spacing of words; they could not write from memory; they specified the size of columns; and they specified the ink and writing material to be used.

The accuracy of the textual work by the Masoretes can be verified in several ways: by archaeological discoveries; by the similarity of duplicating passages found in different books; and by the substantial agreement with the textual readings of the Samaritan Pentateuch, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the Septuagint (a Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament made in the third century B.C.).

The collection and study of hand-copied Hebrew Old Testament manuscripts has been an ongoing process. Benjamin Kennicott (1776-1780) has been credited with the first collection. Published at Oxford in England, his lists included readings from 615 manuscripts and 52 printed editions. Later Giovanni de Rossi (784-1788) listed citations from 731 manuscripts and 300 printed editions. In 1890, many fragments of Jewish writings were found in an ancient synagogue in Cairo, Egypt. These Cairo Geniza fragments (dated from the sixth to the ninth centuries A.D.) include more than 120 biblical manuscripts.

The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls from 1947 through 1956 provided an exciting and fresh impetus to the study of the Hebrew text of the Old Testament. Thousands of manuscript fragments, which once constituted 400 books within the library of the Jewish sect of the Essenes, were found in 11 caves. These Essenes had established a monastic community near Qumran, immediately west of the Dead Sea. The manuscripts discovered there had been copied between 100 B.C. and A.D. 200, with a few exceptions.

Before these scrolls were found, the earliest hand-copied manuscript of the Hebrew Old Testament dated from about A.D. 900. The Dead Sea Scrolls included a complete manuscript of Isaiah, dated about 100 B.C.—1000 years older than any previously known copy. Comparing the two manuscripts, separated by 1000 years, shows a remarkable similarity.

The Dead Sea Scroll of Isaiah was 95 percent identical, word-for-word, with the standard Masoretic text. The five percent variation was in incidental matters, such as

spelling differences or obvious slips in penmanship. The Dead Sea Scrolls demonstrated that the Jewish scribes were very exact in the transmission of the Old Testament text, especially at a time when there was no established temple worship and priesthood.

THE GREEK TEXT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

Textual critics of the Greek New Testament have access to three major areas of evidence in order to determine the actual text of the original writings. These are the Greek manuscripts, the versions, and the writings of the church fathers.

More than 5000 *Greek manuscripts* are available for study. They are subdivided into four categories. First, the papyri are very old, written on an ancient paper made from the pith of the papyrus plant, usually grown in Egyptian marches. They are dated usually from the third through the eighth centuries, with a few from about A.D. 200. They contain portions of various books of the New Testament, but no papyrus manuscript has the entire content of all 27 books. Less than 100 papyri manuscripts have been found. The writing material is very perishable.

Second, there are about 300 *uncial* manuscripts, also known as majuscules. These uncials were written in a formal style, using large letters similar in size to capital letters. They were composed during the fourth through the tenth centuries.

Third, there are about 2700 *minuscule* manuscripts. They were written in smaller letters in a cursive or free-flowing hand. They are dated late, in the period covering the ninth through the sixteenth centuries.

Fourth, there are about 2000 *lectionaries*. These are church service books containing selected readings from the Gospels, the Acts and the Epistles. They were produced mainly between the ninth and the fifteenth centuries.

The *Versions* are the second major area of New Testament textual evidence. They are translations from Greek into another language. Produced during the first seven centuries of the Christian era were: Itala or Old Latin, Latin Vulgate, Old Syriac, Peshitta and Later Syriac, Coptic, Gothic, Armenian, Ethiopic, and Georgian. The most significant version was the Latin Vulgate. In 382, the Bishop of Rome commissioned Jerome to revise the Old Latin text. Jerome's New Testament was a direct translation of the Hebrew. He reluctantly included the Apocrypha in his translation, which has come to be known as the Vulgate.

The *writings of the church fathers* provide the third major source of research materials. These men of the church often quoted the New Testament in their ecclesiastical letters and commentaries. In fact, their quotations are so numerous that the text of the New Testament could almost be reproduced through them.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Textual critics have classified the Greek manuscripts into four text-types or families. The Western text-type is very old, shows the most textual variation, and manifests extreme scribal freedom. The Caesarean text-type is identified chiefly in the Gospel of Mark, but not in the rest of the New Testament.

The next two families are the most important and form the basis for debate over the preferred text. The Byzantine text-type was the Greek text used in the Byzantine period (312-1453). The Greek scholar, Dean Burgon, called it the Traditional Text; Cambridge professors Westcott and Hort named it the Syrian Text. We know it today as the Textus Receptus, or the Received Text. Between 80 and 90 percent of the manuscripts contain a text which closely resembles the Byzantine Text. No extant Greek manuscript from the fourth century or earlier has this kind of text, although there are some individual readings which correspond to it. Advocates of this text-type believe that the absence of early manuscripts is due to their widespread use and destruction. This text-type was the basis of the King James or Authorized Version (1611).

The Alexandrian text-type has fewer manuscripts than the Byzantine. The oldest existing manuscripts, including the papyri, are Alexandrian. The dry climate of Egypt doubtless contributed to their preservation. All liberals and most evangelicals accept this text-type as the oldest and the best. These manuscripts make up the basic text found in the Critical Text of the Greek New Testament. They were discovered after the publication of the King James Version.

Today's scholars, translators, and serious Bible students have access to three major types of the Greek New Testament. The Trinitarian Bible Society publishes *He Kaine Diatheke: The New Testament*. It has the Greek text underlying the English Authorized Version of 1611.

Thomas Nelson Publishers has printed *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text*. It contains the text found in most of the Greek manuscripts. It differs from the Received Text in passages where the manuscripts used by the editor of 16th-century Greek editions deviated from the consensus of the majority of manuscripts. The Majority Text, however, stands closer to the Received Text than to the Critical Text.

No modern translation is based upon the Majority Text. But *The New King James Version*, also published by Thomas Nelson, does indicate in the footnotes where the Majority Text has a different reading than the traditional text of the original King James Version.

The Critical Text of the New Testament can be found in either the 26th edition of the Nestle-Aland *Greek New Testament* or the third edition of the *Greek New Testament*, published by the United Bible Societies. This text is based upon the earlier work of Westcott and Hort who published *The New Testament in the Original Greek* in the 19th century (1881-1882). This text has become the basis of modern English versions such as the New American Standard Bible and the New International Version.

CONCLUSIONS OF TEXTUAL CRITICISM

The study of the textual critics leads us to five significant conclusions about the Bible. First, it is the most attested document to come to us from ancient times. For example, New Testament critics have more than 5000 manuscripts which they can study and compare. In contrast, only 643 manuscripts of Homer's *Iliad* had survived before mechanical printing was invented. Only eight copies of *The Peloponnesian War* by the Greek historian Thucydides exist. There are ten extant manuscripts of Caesar's *Gallic Wars* and just 20 copies of Livy's *History of Rome*. Only two hand-copied works of Tacitus have endured. There are no original writings of any acknowledged piece of ancient literature within any museum. All have perished. And yet, there are academic departments

of history, literature and philosophy that affirm the integrity of these ancient works, even though there is little manuscript evidence. In addition, it would be very plausible to believe that the transmission of these ancient texts must have suffered essential loss.

Second, the gap of time between the original biblical writings and the extant copies is very narrow. Some Old Testament manuscripts come from the period before Christ. Some New Testament papyri were composed within 100-150 years of the originals. In contrast, the first copies of Caesar's *Gallic Wars* are dated 900 years after the original. The copies of the works of Tacitus come from a period eight to ten centuries later. The first copies of the literature of both Thucydides and Herodotus were made 1300 years after those men lived.

Third, the original text of the Scriptures can be rendered as 99 percent certain. Scholars are sure that they know what the biblical authors wrote. In the other one percent, they have a choice between two viable options; they know that the proper reading is either *this* or *that*. In this small percentage of passages, no doctrinal concept is at stake. For example, with the opening of the first four seal judgements in the Book of Revelation, a command was issued each time. In the Received Text the command reads: "Come and see" (Rev. 6:1,3,5,7). In the Critical Text the command simply reads: "Come." In both cases, the command could be issued to John the Apostle. Or the single-word command ("come") could have been directed toward the riders of the four horses described in those passages. In that case, the injunction would show God's sovereign control over future world events. The minor difference in the variant readings actually enhances the science of biblical interpretation. Regardless of the variation, no doctrine is in dispute.

Fourth, the differences between the families or text-types (Alexandrian vs. Byzantine) are not as great as one might suppose. The Preface to the New King James Version (pp. vi-vii) gives this perceptive analysis:

Other manuscript differences, regarding the omission or inclusion of a word or a clause and two paragraphs in the gospels, should not overshadow the overwhelming degree of agreement which exists among the ancient records. Bible readers may be assured that the most important differences in the English New Testament of today are due, not to manuscript divergence, but to the way in which translators view the task of translation: How literally should the text be rendered? How does the translator view the matter of biblical inspiration? Does the translator adopt a paraphrase when a literal rendering would be quite clear and more to the point?

Fifth, the Gospel of Jesus Christ is clearly presented in all the Greek text-types. Both the Person and redemptive work of Christ are positively set forth. There are no denials of fundamental doctrines of evangelical Christianity found within these text-types which are the basis of translations.

EDITIONS OF THE GREEK NEW TESTAMENT

Cardinal Francisco Ximenes de Cisneros (1437-1517) developed a plan for the first printing of the Greek New Testament in 1502. It was to be a part of a multi-lingual Bible, known as the Complutensian Polyglot, incorporating Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek and Latin texts. The New Testament was printed in 1514 and the Old Testament in 1517. However, it did not receive the pope's official sanction for publication and distribution until 1520.

Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536) edited the first Greek New Testament to actually be published. His task was finished in 1516. He could not find a manuscript that contained the entire New Testament, so he consulted, compared and used several manuscripts in order to complete the text that he wanted to print. Unfortunately, his first edition contained many printing errors. He published a second edition in 1519 and a third in 1522. His fourth edition (1527) included several readings from the Complutensian Polyglot, which had just been published. Erasmus' fourth edition later became the basis of the Textus Receptus. A fifth edition followed in 1535.

Shortly after the death of Erasmus, Robert Estienne (also known as Stephanus) published a series of four editions of the Greek New Testament (1546, 1549, 1550, 1551). From a family of printers, Stephanus was once the royal printer of Paris. In his third edition (1550), he varied from the main text. This comparison of variant readings was based upon 15 manuscripts, including the Complutensian Polyglot and works of Erasmus. His printed text was based mainly on the fourth and fifth editions of Erasmus. It also became the basis of the Textus Receptus.

Theodore de Beze, known as Beza (1519-1605), was John Calvin's successor at Geneva. From 1565 to 1604, Beza published nine editions of the Greek New Testament. There was even a posthumous edition in 1611. His printed text was in general agreement with the 1550 edition of Stephanus. The translators of the King James Version used Beza's 1588-89 edition extensively.

Publishers Bonventure and Abraham Elzevir of Leiden, Holland, printed seven editions of the Greek New Testament which became very popular in Europe. Their 1624 edition depended upon Beza's 1565 edition. Their second edition text (1633) was gleaned from the editions of Ximenes, Beza and Stephanus. In fact, the name "Textus Receptus" comes from this second edition. The preface, written in Latin, informed the reader that he had the "text [*textum*] now received [*receptum*] by all." So it became known as the Textus Receptus, or the Received Text. The phrase was the publisher's designation, not an official endorsement of the text by an authoritative church body.

The original Hebrew and Greek Scriptures did not have chapter and verse divisions. Where did they come from?

Stephen Langton, a professor at the University of Paris (and later the Archbishop of Canterbury), arbitrarily divided the hand-copied manuscripts into smaller units, namely chapters, in about 1227. The Wycliff Bible (1382) used these same chapter divisions. The Latin Vulgate New Testament printed by Gutenberg in 1456—also known as the Mazarin Bible—followed Langton's chapter divisions. When Erasmus edited his Greek New Testament, published in 1516, he also used the same chapter divisions.

Verse divisions first appeared in the fourth edition of the Greek New Testament published by Robert Stephanus in 1551. He later used the same verse divisions in his publication of the Latin Vulgate in 1555. William Whittingham of Oxford, England, subsequently put them into the English New Testament in 1557. The first English Bible to use modern chapter and verse divisions was the Geneva Bible, printed in 1560.

Chapter 3

The Development of English Translations

Christianity entered the British Isles possibly as early as the late first or early second century. Little historical information about its development is known. However, when a church council was convened at Arles in 314, Britain sent three bishops as representatives. Later, the British theologian Pelagius (c. 370-450) fathered the doctrine known as Pelagianism and opposed the famous Augustine. The well-known Patrick (c. 389-461) carried on his ministry in the fifth century. Patrick is identified as a son of a Celtic Christian Church deacon and a grandson of a priest.

The Roman Catholic Pope Gregory the Great (590-604) sent a mission team of 40 monks to Britain under the leadership of Augustine (not the earlier mentioned Augustine) in 597. During this sixth century, Canterbury Cathedral was founded, and Augustine became its first archbishop.

So Christendom had permeated the British Isles by 600. Many monasteries had sprung up and a body of religious literature started to appear. But there was no formal attempt to translate the Bible into English. Several reasons have been suggested for this deliberate refusal to do so. First, Latin was the official religious language of the Roman Catholic Church. Second, the clergy didn't want the common people to have the Bible in their own everyday language. Third, the English of that period was actually a poor, unsuitable language.

The English language has progressed through three major periods of development. The Old English or Old Saxon period dominated the British Isles from 450 to 1100. It was based on the language of the native Angles, Saxons and Jutes in their various dialects. The presence of Roman armies and churchmen injected some Latinisms into the language. Scandinavian settlers in the land had their impact on the language as well.

The Middle English period (1100-1500) resulted from the Norman invasion of the land and their conquest at Hastings in 1066. The Normans were from Scandinavia and Denmark. Their dominance and occupation of the land influenced changes in the language. During this period Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1340-1400) wrote his *Canterbury Tales* and John Wycliffe (c. 1330-1384) translated the Bible into English.

The Modern English period began shortly after Gutenberg invented mechanical printing (1456), although it is not related to that event. A shift in vowel sounds that occurred in the 15th century led to a change in pronunciation. Linguists are aware of this fact, but they don't know its exact cause. Regardless, the stress on vowel sounds came at a strategic time. Now the English language could be communicated in an easier fashion, both orally and in writing.

EARLY EFFORTS

In the Old English period, the clergy tried to communicate the message of the Church and the Scriptures to the illiterate inhabitants through pictures and forceful preaching. There were some attempts to produce in local dialects paraphrased translations of some Scripture passages based upon the Old Latin text and the Latin Vulgate.

Caedmon (c. 680), a worker at a Northumbrian monastery composed some poems and paraphrases based upon Biblical events (e.g. the history of Genesis; the Exodus; and the birth, crucifixion, and resurrection of Christ). His works became very popular as songs among the common people. Soon others began the same practice.

Aldhelm (640-709), a bishop in southern England, translated the Psalms directly into English, the first direct translation of any Bible portion into English.

Egbert (c. 700), an archbishop of York, became the first to translate the Gospels directly into English.

One of the greatest scholars in Europe is known as the Venerable Bede (674-735). Working out of Northumbria, he wrote a well-regarded ecclesiastical history and an English translation of the Gospel of John.

Alfred the Great (849-901) was a famous English king and an outstanding man of literature. He translated Bede's history from Latin into Anglo-Saxon. He also translated the Ten Commandments and some isolated biblical passages.

Aelfric (c. 1000), an abbot in Wessex, translated some sections of the first seven books of the Old Testament from Latin into Saxon.

None of the translations from the Old English period has survived. Their existence is known only by their mention in historical records.

In the Middle English period, the Norman-French influence upon the language replaced Saxon domination. When King Edward the Confessor died, a dispute between his eldest son, Harold, and his cousin, William, the Duke of Normandy, surfaced. William defeated Harold at the Battle of Hastings (1066), and that event forever changed the history and language of the British Isles. That change in language became known as Middle English.

Orm (c. 1200) produced a poetical paraphrase of the Gospels and Acts. William of Shoreham (c. 1320) is credited for the first prose translation of a Bible passage into a southern English dialect. Richard Rolle (c. 1320-1340) produced a literal translation of the Psalms into a northern English dialect from the Latin Vulgate.

JOHN WYCLIFFE'S TRANSLATION

There were no complete Bibles in the English language before the 14th century. John Wycliffe (c. 1320-1384) was mainly responsible for the first such English Bible. Wycliffe became a chaplain to the King of England in 1366 and was sent as a royal emissary to France in 1374 with political and religious responsibilities. He later taught at Oxford and then retired to a pastorate at Lutterworth.

Although Wycliffe, called the "Morning Star of the Reformation," remained in the church during his lifetime, he opposed the lack of spirituality within the clergy and infallibility of the pope. He attempted religious reform, but was eventually forced to leave his teaching position at Oxford.

Wycliffe had a heart for the spiritual needs of the English people. He began to preach in their common language, rather than in Latin. His influence spread through the Lollards, a group of itinerant preachers who proclaimed Wycliffe's teachings in English using an English Bible.

Wycliffe completed his English translation of the New Testament in 1380. Based upon the Latin Vulgate, it was a word-for-word rendering of the Latin, following the style

of a modern interlinear Bible. In so doing, he did not put the meaning into good English idiom.

The Old Testament in English was finished by Nicholas of Hereford in 1388 after Wycliffe's death.

John Purvey (c. 354-1428), a secretary to Wycliffe, revised the Wycliffe Bible in 1395, removing some of the Latinisms and replacing them with English idiom.

For about 150 years, the Wycliffe Bible was the only complete English translation in use. All copies were produced by hand. The government and the church regarded Wycliffe's work with grave suspicion. And in 1408, the Convocation of the Province of Canterbury at Oxford resolved that no one should translate any text of Scripture into English and that no such translation should be read publicly or privately until approved by ecclesiastical authority, on the pain of excommunication. This edict led to a great persecution, but many manuscripts of Wycliffe's translation continued to be circulated.

The church meanwhile excommunicated John Hus of Bohemia (c. 1369-1415) and burned him at the stake. In the eyes of the church, Hus and Wycliffe were both heretics. So Wycliffe's body was exhumed and burned in 1428, and his ashes were scattered on the River Swift.

WILLIAM TYNDALES'S TRANSLATION

The invention of the printing press in 1450 occurred between the lifetimes of John Wycliffe and William Tyndale. That discovery by Gutenberg changed the course of academic study and biblical scholarship. The Mazarin Bible (Latin Vulgate) was published in 1456. The first Greek grammar was printed in 1476 and the first Greek lexicon in 1492. The first Hebrew Bible appeared in print in 1488, followed by a Hebrew grammar (1503), and a Hebrew lexicon (1506).

God raised up Tyndale (c. 1492-1536) in a unique time in the history of England and of the world. He was born about the time Columbus discovered American. He was a contemporary of Martin Luther, who, with his famous 95 theses, set in motion the events which led to the Protestant Reformation.

Tyndale was proficient in Hebrew and Greek and adept at making a translation into good English idiom. He also had moral and spiritual courage to stand up for his convictions. When he began translating the Scriptures, he faced much opposition and ridicule. One opponent claimed that the common people of England were "better without God's law than without the Pope's." Tyndale replied with this now famous statement: "I defy the Pope and all his laws, if God spares my life, ere many years I will cause a boy that driveth the plow shall know more of the Scriptures than thou dost."

In 1530, prior to his break with the pope and the Catholic Church, King Henry VIII issued a proclamation forbidding the translation and distribution of the Scriptures in the English language. He affirmed that the people must "have the holy scripture expounded to them, by preachers in their sermons, according as it hath been of old time...that the same books [namely those of Tyndale] and all other books of heresy,...be clearly exterminated and exiled out of this realm of England forever" (*Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol. 1, p. 237).

Tyndale was forced into exile on the European continent in 1521. His translation work thus was printed outside of the British Isles and smuggled into his homeland. He translated the New Testament directly from Greek into English, printing the first edition in 1526 in Germany. He then began translating the Old Testament from Hebrew into English. The Pentateuch was published in 1530, and Jonah was printed in 1531. Tyndale thus came out with the first printed edition of any portion of the English Bible.

As his translations appeared in England, they were confiscated and burned by authorities. Nevertheless, more and more printed copies came into the land, and the Word of God prevailed.

In 1534, Tyndale began a revision of Genesis and of the New Testament. However, he was betrayed by a supposed friend, was kidnapped, was strangled to death at a stake, and his body was burned (1536).

Tyndale's legacy marked future translations of the Bible into English. Subsequent revision committees (1611, 1881, 1885, 1901) consulted and used his work.

How did the translations of Wycliffe and Tyndale differ? Why was Wycliffe's work not printed and distributed? Why did Tyndale want to make a new English translation? Two basic answers can be given to these questions. First, Wycliffe translated from the Latin Vulgate into English, thus his product was two language steps away from the original. Tyndale translated directly from the Greek text, although he consulted the Vulgate and Luther's German translation. Second, Wycliffe's translation was in the language of the Middle English period, whereas Tyndale lived at the beginning of the Modern English period. The English language had changed so much that Wycliffe's work was practically obsolete in Tyndale's lifetime.

MILES COVERDALE'S TRANSLATION

Miles Coverdale (1488-1569) was a close friend and translation assistant to Tyndale. Just before Tyndale's martyrdom, Coverdale printed the first complete version of the Bible in English (1535). Rather than translating directly from the Hebrew and Greek, he used Tyndale's work as his foundation and also employed the Latin and German versions.

Coverdale's translation was reprinted twice in 1537, again in 1550, and later in 1533. He separated the Apocrypha from the Old Testament. This distinction has been followed by Protestants ever since, limiting the canon to the 39 books of the Old Testament and the 27 books of the New Testament.

About this time, King Henry VIII of England had broken off relations with the Catholic pope and the king of France. Coverdale did his work with apparent approval of the king and under the patronage of Thomas Cromwell, adviser to Henry VIII.

MATTHEWS'S BIBLE

John Rogers (c. 1550-1555), an assistant to William Tyndale, produced a new version by combining the Tyndale and Coverdale editions of the Old Testament with the 1535 revision of Tyndale's New Testament. He included extensive notes and references within this edition, which offended many conservatives in the Church.

Since Rogers did no original translation work, he did not want his name to be associated with the new edition. Thus he assumed the pen name of Thomas Matthew. Thereafter, this work has been known as “Matthew’s Bible.”

Richard Taverner (1505-1575), a layman proficient in Greek, revised Matthew’s Bible in 1539. But it had little popularity because the Great Bible was published at the same time.

THE GREAT BIBLE

In 1538, royal injunctions banned printing and distributing English Bibles with additional notes not authorized by the king. So Matthew’s Bible created a delicate, tense situation.

Miles Coverdale undertook a revision of Rogers’ revision of the Tyndale Bible (1538-1539). He had the approval of both Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556), the first Protestant archbishop of Canterbury, and Thomas Cromwell (1485-1540), the Protestant Lord Chancellor under Henry VIII. The printed edition was so large that it was called “the Great Bible.”

A second edition, appearing in 1540, had a preface by Cranmer and has sometimes been called Cranmer’s Bible. The preface includes this directive: “This is the Bible appointed to the use of the churches.” Five editions came out in 1540 and 1541.

Henry VIII died in 1547. His son, Edward VI, proclaimed that the Great Bible be placed in the churches and made available for the people to read. To assure this availability, the Bibles were often chained to a table. Two new editions were printed during Edward’s reign, in 1549 for *The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments*, put out by the Church of England in 1549 and 1552. The Great Bible also survived the short reign of the Roman Catholic queen, Mary Tudor (1553-1558). The Great Bible had been authorized by the throne for use in the churches in 1538, and Mary did not revoke that order.

THE GENEVA BIBLE

When Mary Tudor ascended to the throne of England, a persecution of Protestants began. Among the martyrs were John Rogers, producer of Matthew’s Bible, and Thomas Cranmer. Many Protestants fled to Continental Europe, including Miles Coverdale. A large group of religious exiles settled in Geneva, Switzerland.

In Geneva, John Knox led in the production of a new English Bible. William Whittingham did the bulk of the work and probably based it on Tyndale’s 1552 edition rather than on the text of the Great Bible. The New Testament was finished in 1557.

This Bible introduced some new features. Italicized words were inserted into the text where the English idiom required some extra words. Chapters were divided into verses. It employed marginal expository annotations, both doctrinal and practical. There were indications of textual variations. The additional notes were Calvinistic in doctrinal perspective.

In 1560, the Old Testament and a revision of the New Testament were completed. The finished Geneva Bible became very popular and had gone through 140 editions by 1644. Its use remained strong, even after the publication of the Bishops' Bible in 1568 and the Authorized Version in 1611.

The Geneva Bible was the first English translation printed in a handy size with numbered verse divisions based upon the plan used by Robert Stephanus in his 1551 Greek New Testament. It was also the first to be printed in Roman rather than Old English type. It was undoubtedly the most accurate English version available at that time. It was used by William Shakespeare, John Bunyan and Oliver Cromwell. The Puritans used it extensively and brought it to America on the *Mayflower*.

THE BISHOPS' BIBLE

The Geneva Bible was widely used by the common people of England. Its handy size naturally contributed to its successful acceptance. The Great Bible used in the Anglican church was extremely large and thus unavailable to the masses. Church leaders moved to remedy this situation.

Under the guidance of Archbishop Parker, a group of translators including bishops and scholars began a revision of the Great Bible. It was published in 1568 under the authority and sanction of Queen Elizabeth I. It became known as the Bishops' Bible because most of the work was done by the bishops of the Church of England.

This revision contained short annotations and the text was divided into verses. It was the main Bible found in the churches for at least 40 years (1568-1611), but the Geneva Bible was still the most read in private homes. In 1571, the Convocation at Canterbury supported the use of the Bishops' Bible, but it never overcame the early popularity and circulation of the Geneva Bible. No copies of the Bishops' Bible were printed after 1606.

THE RHEIMS-DOUAY VERSION

During the reign of the Protestant queen, Elizabeth I (1558-1603), many English Roman Catholics moved to Spanish Flanders where they established an English-speaking college at Douay (1568). They moved the college to Rheims in France in 1578, then back to Douay in 1593.

Roman Catholic scholars, led by an Oxford professor, George Martin, translated the New Testament into English in 1582 at Rheims. Based upon the Latin Vulgate, not the Greek text, the Rheims New Testament was the translation of a translation. It was republished in 1600 at Douay.

The Old Testament was printed in 1610 at Douay, just one year before the Protestant King James Version was published. The Douay version included the Apocrypha within the Old Testament.

The New Testament was reprinted in 1600, 1621 and 1633. A second edition of the Old Testament appeared in 1635. Thus, English-speaking Roman Catholics had a version of the Bible in their own native language which the church officially sanctioned.

Chapter 4

Modern English Bibles

As strange as it may seem, the era of modern English translations began in 1611 with the publication of the King James Version. That version is discussed here rather than in Chapter 3 because it is still being printed, sold and used today. In fact, it remained the best-selling English Bible in each year of this century even as late as 1983.

KING JAMES VERSION

When Queen Elizabeth died in 1603, James VI of Scotland became King James I of England (1603-1625). He was the son of the Roman Catholic Mary, Queen of Scots. James ascended to the throne of Scotland in Edinburgh when Mary was forced to abdicate. He had greater ambitions than just remaining the King of Scotland, so he aligned himself with the Protestant Queen Elizabeth. This action caused a break between him and his mother's supporters. History testifies that he accepted his mother's execution in 1587 with unusual calmness.

When James assumed power in England, he inherited a country divided by religious parties, such as the conflict between Puritans and the traditional Anglican Church. England was also marked by the use of different English Bibles: the Geneva Bible, the Great Bible and the Bishops' Bible.

In January, 1604, James I called for a conference at Hampton Court to deal with religious issues. A Puritan, John Reynolds, suggested an authorized version of the English Bible acceptable to all religious parties. Although James I was an anti-Puritan, he liked the idea and totally supported the new project. This enabled him to act as a peacemaker in his realm and to solidify his position in the eyes of the people.

A committee of 54 revisers was selected and divided into six groups. Only 47 of the men participated in the actual work. Two groups met at Westminster to revise Genesis through II Kings and Romans through Jude. Two groups met at Cambridge to revise I Chronicles through Ecclesiastes and the Apocrypha. Two groups met at Oxford to revise Isaiah through Malachi, the Gospels, Acts, and the Book of Revelation.

They based their revision on the Bishops' Bible, but they compared its text with other major English Bibles: Tyndale, Matthew, Coverdale and Geneva. They also followed the 1516 and 1522 editions of the Greek text done by Erasmus.

In a lengthy preface, entitled "The Translators to the Reader," Myles Smith stated the purpose of the translators: "Truly (good Christian Reader) we never thought from the beginning, that we should needs to make a new translation, nor yet to make a bad one a good one...but to make a good one better, or out of many good ones one principal good one, not justly to be accepted against; that hath been our endeavor, that our mark."

The original title page of the first edition read: "THE HOLY BIBLE, containing the Old Testament and the New: Newly Translated out of the Original Tongues: and with the former Translations diligently compared and revised, by his Majesty's special Commandment. Appointed to be read in Churches."

Although the King James Version was a new work, it must also be seen as part of the progressive development of English translations. It was not done in isolation from or in hostile reaction to earlier Bibles.

The translators tried to render each word in the Greek and Hebrew texts with an equivalent work in English. When they wanted to distinguish words added for the sake of natural English idiom, they indicated those supplied words in italics. Although the word was not in the original text, its sense was. In that way, the translators produced a literal translation in the English idiom of their own day. In literary style, the King James Version was a masterpiece. It was marked by a majestic rhythm, splendid cadence, and beauty of words. It was known as “a well of purest English undefiled.”

Its publication in 1611 received instant approval. Many factors contributed to its acceptance: the moral and scholarly qualifications of the revisers; the encouragement and support of the king, the religious parties, and the English people; the acknowledgement and use of earlier English translations; the good spirit of cooperation among the team members; the contemporary literary atmosphere of England; and the agreement of the publishers to stop printing the Bishops' Bible.

Still there was opposition to the King James Version. Hugh Broughton, a scholar not on the translation committee, called it an “incompetent and heretical work.” The Pilgrims brought the Geneva Bible to America because the King James Version was “too modern” for their tastes.

The translators had expected opposition. In *The Epistle Dedicatory*, they wrote: “Things of this quality have ever been subjected to the censures of illmeaning and discontented persons.” Later, they stated: “So that if, on the one side, we shall be traduced by Popish Persons at home or abroad, who therefore will malign us, because we are poor instruments to make God's holy Truth to be yet more and more known unto the people,...or if, on the other side, we shall be maligned by self conceited Brethren, who run their own ways, and give liking unto nothing, bur what is framed by themselves, and hammered on their anvil; we may rest secure, supported within by the truth and innocency of a good conscience, having walked the ways of simplicity and integrity, as before the Lord.”

The King James Version went on to become the major English Bible of Protestantism for almost 400 years. It became the foundation for the evangelical missionary effort, for the development of evangelical denominations, for the production of related literature, and for the cultivation of personal growth in holiness. God honored and used this translation for His own glory and for the blessing of His people.

Three editions of the King James Version appeared in the first year of its publication. Minor revisions were made in 1629, 1638, 1653, 1701, 1762 and 1769. In 1701, Archbishop Ussher's dates for biblical events were added. The 1769 edition, revised by Professor Blayney of Oxford, is the version still used today.

In America, this Bible is known as the King James Version, but in Great Britain, it is called the Authorized Version.

The main strengths contributing to this version's continued use today are its familiarity to several generations of believers, its proven effectiveness in proclaiming the Gospel for almost four centuries, and its literal translation of the Received Text, which

some scholars still believe is the most accurate Greek text. Its main “weakness,” or rather “complaint” voiced by many, is that young people and new converts have difficulty in reading, pronouncing and using a type of English used many years ago.

ENGLISH REVISED VERSION

The King James Version continued, uncontested for almost 300 years, as the only English Bible. These three centuries produced new advances in biblical scholarship, including the discovery of more and ancient Greek and Hebrew manuscripts and archaeological findings. English vocabulary and literary style also changed.

In 1870 a Convocation of the Province of Canterbury was called to propose a full revision of the Authorized Version. A team of 65 revisers, including some American scholars, began the work. The New Testament was finished in 1881 and the Old Testament in 1885.

Response to this English Revised Version was mostly unfavorable. Critics claimed that it was too wooden and literalistic. Charles Haddon Spurgeon stated that it was “strong in Greek, and weak in English.”

The text followed the paragraph arrangement rather than the individual verse arrangement of the King James. The common people disliked the revision because familiar words and phrases were replaced by new ones.

AMERICAN STANDARD VERSION

The American revision group didn’t like some of the readings in the English Revised Version but agreed not to publish an American edition for at least 14 years. In 1901, however, American presses published The American Standard Edition of the Revised Version, usually known as the American Standard Version (ASV).

Paragraph arrangements were kept, but revised and shortened. The name “Holy Spirit” was used instead of “Holy Ghost.” Most scholars believe that the translation of the Old Testament is especially good.

OUTBREAK OF TRANSLATIONS

Solomon wrote: “Of making many books there is no end” (Eccl. 12:12). Within 20th century English-speaking Christendom that verse could be rewritten: “Of making many translations there is no end.” Since 1900 more than 75 new English translations have been produced. Most of these have been done by individuals rather than by an officially sanctioned body of translators.

Bruce Metzger, a New Testament scholar at Princeton, claims that from 1940 to 1963 at least 18 new English translations of the New Testament were printed (*Christianity Today*, Nov. 22, 1963). Here is his list:

1. Revised Standard Version (1946)
2. J.B. Phillips’ Paraphrase (1947-1958)
3. New English Bible (1961)
4. Ronald Knox’s translation of the Latin Vulgate (1944)

5. Berkeley Version by Gerrit Verkuyl (1945)
6. Erwin Stringfellow's translation of Westcott-Hort Greek text (1943-1945)
7. George Swann's translation of Westcott-Hort (1947)
8. Letchworth Version in Modern English by Thomas Ford and R.E. Ford (1948)
9. New World Translation of the Jehovah's Witnesses (1950)
10. Sacred Name Version of the New Testament of Our Messiah and Saviour Yashua (1950)
11. Authentic Version (1951)
12. Plain English rendering of C.K. Williams (1952)
13. George Albert Moore translation (1953-1954)
14. Roman Catholic translation by Kleist and Lilly
15. Authentic New Testament by Hugh Schonfield (1955)
16. Kenneth Wuest's Expanded Translation (3 vols., 1956-1959)
17. Amplified New Testament by Frances Siewart (1958)
18. New Testament in the Language of Today by William Beck (1963)

In this same period, publishers reprinted at least 18 earlier translations. These included the works of Alexander Campbell, Goodspeed, George Lamsa, James Moffatt, Helen Montgomery, James Pripe, Joseph Smith Jr., F. A. Spencer, John Wesley, Richard Weymouth, and Robert Young. Reprints of prior translations included: The Twentieth Century New Testament, King James Version, Revised Version of 1881-1885, and the American Standard Version. Several Roman Catholic versions—Rheims, Westminster and Confraternity—were also republished.

Many of these translations have appeared and disappeared. Very few gained wide circulation and popularity. However, some major translations have been produced in our generation.

REVISED STANDARD VERSION

In 1937, the National Council of Churches' International Council of Religious Education voted to authorize a revision of the American Standard Version (1901). Two major purposes were: to conserve more of the English style of the King James Version, as opposed to that of both the English Revised Version and the American Standard Version, and to use the new scholarship based upon the Critical Greek Text. Accordingly, the title page of the Revised Standard Version states: "Translated from the original tongues, being the version set forth A.D. 1611 revised A.D. 1881-1885 and A.D. 1901 compared with the most ancient authorities and revised A.D. 1952."

Two panels of translators were selected, representing many denominational bodies. Luther Weigle, dean of the Yale Divinity School, was the chairman. The New Testament panel completed its work in 1946 and the Old Testament group in 1952. The Apocrypha was finished in 1957.

This version received instantaneous praise and criticism. Some thought the revisers changed too much of the language of the King James Version. Others believed they changed too little. Some said it had an excellent English style but suggested it might be too formal for the ordinary reader.

Other critics charged that it changed the Old Testament Hebrew text too much, that it lacked modern English idiomatic expression, and that it was dull and archaic. Most evangelicals and fundamentalists criticized its liberal theological bent in translating key

passages. They saw an attack on the virgin conception and birth of Christ in the translation: "Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Isa 7:14), although the New Testament parallel passage (Matt. 1:23) maintained the traditional word "virgin." They saw an attack upon the deity of Christ in the translation: "...is the Christ. God who is over all be blessed forever. Amen" (Rom. 9:5). The King James version read: "...Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen." They saw an attack upon the substitutionary atonement of Christ in the omission of the words "through His blood" (Col. 1:14).

The Revised Standard Version gained much popularity and widespread use in churches committed to liberal and neoorthodox beliefs. It has sold well over 50 million copies. Although some evangelicals have praised and used it, the great majority of evangelicals and fundamentalists have denounced it.

A revision of the RSV is presently under way. One goal is to eliminate the "masculine" emphasis in the text. This new revision will probably be accepted only by nonconservatives.

THE NEW TESTAMENT IN MODERN ENGLISH

In 1947, J. B. Phillips published his *Letters to Young Churches*, and it became a best-seller. A paraphrase of Paul's epistles, it featured a vivid style and imaginative use of modern idiom. Phillips followed a "meaning-for-meaning" translation. He wanted a free translation so that he could expand or explain the text. He modernized ancient terms, using such words as "nickle" (Mark 12:42), "quarter" (Rev. 6:6), and "handshake" (Rom. 16:16).

He later produced *The Gospels in Modern English* (1952), *The Young Church in Action* (1955), and *The Book of Revelation* (1957). In 1958 he combined the four separate editions into a single volume, entitled *The New Testament In Modern English*.

Since the work expressed personal interpretation rather than literal translation, it could be used only in devotional reading. It could be neither a church-use Bible nor a personal study Bible.

JERUSALEM BIBLE

The Jerusalem Bible, a distinctively Roman Catholic publication, was released in 1966. Alexander Jones of Christ's College, Liverpool, England, served as editor, assisted by 27 scholars. It was translated largely from the original languages rather than from the Latin Vulgate. But it has been criticized for its dependence upon the French version *La Bible de Jerusalem* (1961).

The translation is smooth and understandable, in contemporary readable English with a system of annotated notes. It includes such distinctive features as introductions to each biblical book, notes and study aides. The notes show that Catholics accept the conclusions of liberal literary and historical criticism. They deny that Moses wrote the entire Pentateuch, opting rather for the JEDP documentary hypothesis. They believe that Daniel was composed in the Maccabean era (167 B.C.), not written by Daniel. They claim that the Book of Jonah is not historical.

NEW ENGLISH BIBLE

Because of World War II, some British scholars invited to participate in the work of the Revised Standard Version could not come to the United States. So in 1946 the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland initiated plans for a British version “in the language of the present day.”

A committee was selected in 1947, and three groups of translators were chosen: one for the Old Testament, a second for the New Testament, and a third for the Apocrypha. Professor C. E. Dodd directed the entire project. The translators were from non-Roman Catholic denominations in Great Britain and Ireland, from the two leading Bible societies, and from the Oxford and Cambridge University presses.

The goal was to produce a translation in “timeless English.” They wanted to translate concepts and whole clauses of thought, rather than individual words. They wanted short simple sentences, variety rather than repetition, and contemporary diction. They wanted a meaning-for-meaning translation. They thus produced a literary, often paraphrastic translation, but not a literal version.

They based their work on an eclectic Greek text. They considered variant Greek readings on their individual merits and selected the reading which best represented what the author wrote.

The New Testament was released in 1961, and the entire Bible in 1970. A revision was released in 1989. Most Americans have not accepted it because they find the English “too British.” Even British acceptance was less than expected. It is said that the common people have difficulty understanding it and that the translation manifests an air of aristocracy or intelligentsia.

The reader cannot trust it because it often translates the same Greek word with different English words. Thus the New English Bible cannot be seen as a serious study Bible.

NEW AMERICAN BIBLE

The New American Bible of 1970 is the first American Roman Catholic translation made from the original languages. A team of 50 scholars, mostly Roman Catholic, worked for 25 years to complete the project. They used mostly the Hebrew Masoretic Text for the Old Testament and the Critical Greek Text for the New (Nestle-Aland 25th edition and United Bible Society, 1966).

The NAB is a compilation and reworking of the sections of the Bible that appeared under the name of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (issued 1952, 1955, 1961, 1969). It is basically more faithful to the original languages than the Jerusalem Bible and is read in public Roman Catholic worship services.

Some have criticized it for inconsistencies within the translation. Also, the annotated notes are theologically very liberal. For instance, the documentary hypothesis (JEDP) for the authorship and organization of the Pentateuch is accepted. They state that Isaiah did not write the entire content of his book and that Daniel did not write the book that bears his name.

THE ANCHOR BIBLE

The Anchor Bible is a massive, 38-volume work. The translation task was led by two general editors: William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman. The team of translators included Catholics, Protestants and Jews.

The goal was “to offer the most reliable translation possible.” The translators aimed to “clarify the sense of the original.” They wanted to use “vivid, direct modern English.”

The work is too large to be used in public church services and by the ordinary lay person. Libraries and scholars will use it the most.

NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE

The New American Standard Bible, sponsored by the Lockman Foundation, was prepared by 58 anonymous scholars. It was a conscious attempt to revise the American Standard Version of 1901, although it actually turned out to be a new translation. The New Testament came out in 1963, and the entire Bible in 1970. There is no Apocrypha.

The publishers state the conviction that the Scriptures were originally inspired of God. The translation demonstrates a conservative theological position by retaining fundamental theological words such as “blood,” “propitiation” and “saint.” There seems to be a premillennial stance throughout the work.

The translators used the Critical Greek Text rather than the Received Text. They used primarily the 23rd edition of the Nestle Greek text for the New Testament and the third edition of the Kittel Bible for the Old Testament.

The NASB returned to printing each verse separately instead of following the paragraph divisions of the ASV. It uses quotation marks for conversations and prints the Old Testament poetic material in regular poetic form.

It has received mixed reviews. It is a word-for-word translation that omits none of the sentence adverbs which appear in the original Hebrew and Greek. It is excellent for serious personal study and as a teaching tool. Many claim that an English reader could depend on the NASB without consulting the original Hebrew and Greek texts. Most deem it to be a very trustworthy translation.

Its strength also appears to be its main weakness. The translation is seen as being so literal that the sentence structure is wooden or choppy. Some have accused it of being more Greek than English. It does not read well orally, and thus is probably too rigid for such public use as congregational reading in unison. In fact, some have charged that the NASB has atrocious English style.

THE LIVING BIBLE

The Living Bible grew out of the efforts of one man, Kenneth Taylor, to put the Bible into language his children could understand. It is not a translation but a true paraphrase. The Preface to the Living Bible states:

To paraphrase is to say something in different words than the author used. It is a restatement of the author's thoughts, using different words than he did....Its purpose is to say as exactly as possible what the writers of the Scriptures meant, and to say it simply, expanding where necessary for a clear understanding by the modern reader.

Kenneth Taylor, himself, did not know or use the Hebrew and Greek texts. Rather, he paraphrased the English text of the American Standard Version. His work thus must be seen as a modern interpretation or commentary upon the text. It lacked the checks and balances ordinarily supplied by a translation committee.

The Living Bible is the result of 16 years of work. Taylor published it section by section from 1962 to 1970. In 1971, the complete work was published as one volume by Tyndale House in the United States and by Coverdale House in England. The New Testament has also been published as the Reach Out Version (1969) and the entire Bible as The Way (1972).

Billy Graham endorsed the work, and sales thereafter soared. More than 25 million copies have been distributed.

THE GOOD NEWS BIBLE

The Good News Bible, also known as Today's English Version, is sponsored by the American Bible Society.

Robert Bratcher, a Southern Baptist, translated the New Testament within three years. It was published in 1966; the complete Bible was published in 1976 under the guidance of a seven-man committee. By 1983, more than 15 million Bibles and 65 million New Testaments had been released.

The Old Testament is based upon the third edition of Kittel's Hebrew Bible and the New Testament is based primarily upon the second edition of the Critical Greek Text put out by the United Bible Societies.

The purpose of the work was to emphasize communication with the modern reader in a common language rather than to pursue literary excellence. There was no effort to maintain the sentence structure or grammatical features of the original Greek and Hebrew texts.

It is a "dynamic equivalence" translation. The translation asked the question: What does the text mean? Then they tried to find an equivalent meaning in modern English. For example, they translated the fourth beatitude: "Happy are those whose greatest desire is to do what God requires; God will satisfy them fully!" (Matt. 5:6). The dynamic equivalence method is the pattern for most vernacular translations made on mission fields. It is less paraphrastic than the Living Bible or the work of Phillips.

The Good News Bible should not be seen as a serious personal study Bible or as a Bible or as a Bible to be used for preaching and congregational reading.

To enhance distribution, the publishers used an innovative cover design on the New Testament, called Good News for Modern Man. The cover uses mastheads of leading newspapers to give the impression that the Bible is as easy to read as a newspaper. It also contains 500 line drawings done by the Swiss artist, Annie Vollotton.

NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION

In 1965, after several years of exploratory study by committees from the Christian Reformed Church and the National Association of Evangelicals, a group of scholars met and agreed that a new translation in contemporary English was needed. The responsibility for completing the task was given to a committee of 15 who for the most part came from colleges, universities and seminaries.

Zondervan Publishing House agreed to publish it. In 1967, the New York Bible Society (now the International Bible Society) agreed to sponsor it.

A team of 115, from 34 different religious groups, worked on the project for more than seven years. The IBS therefore claims that the result was protected from “sectarian bias” because so many denominations were represented in the process.

The New Testament was printed in 1973 and the complete Bible in 1978. The Preface to the NIV states that it is “...a completely new translation of the Holy Bible made by over a hundred scholars working directly from the best available Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek texts.”

The Old Testament was based upon the Masoretic Text in the latest edition of the Biblia Hebraica, except where the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Septuagint, and internal evidences led to corrections in the Masoretic Text. The New Testament was based upon the Critical Greek Text. Notes call attention to variant readings.

The translation goals were: an accurate translation; clarity; literary quality; and a text suitable for public and private reading, teaching, preaching, memorizing and liturgical use. The translators wanted a clear and natural English, idiomatic but not idiosyncratic, contemporary but not dated. The translators were committed to the authority and infallibility of the Bible as God’s written Word. Their evangelical persuasion is seen in the conclusion of the version’s preface:

We offer this version of the Bible to him in whose name and for whose glory it has been made. We pray that it will lead many into a better understanding of the Holy Scriptures and a fuller knowledge of Jesus Christ the incarnate Word, of whom the Scriptures so faithfully testify.

The New International Version is a thought-for-thought translation. It is not as literal as the New American Standard Bible. It is consistent with contemporary language idioms and is very readable, smooth flowing and easy to memorize. James Montgomery Boice, senior pastor of Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, has commented: “I have not found anything of any serious note to disagree with.”

The NIV has been adopted by several evangelical denominations, by Sunday school publishers, and by the Navigators for use in their Bible memorization programs. Many evangelicals think that the NIV will be *the* Bible of future generations.

There has been some criticism, however. Some see it as too free a translation, quite interpretive, and not textually trustworthy. Others are dissatisfied with it as they compare it with the Hebrew and Greek. They would not trust the NIV rendering of a word or phrase without first consulting the original languages. They are unhappy with the NIV because it presents the main point of a sentence but misses the force of a connecting conjunction. It fails to translate a prepositional phrase correctly because the resulting English would sound awkward. It does not use the technical theological word “propitiation” because the term might not be understood by the modern English reader.

The NIV uses the paragraph format and quotation marks for direct quotes. The use of traditional pronouns (“thee” and “thou”) with reference to God has been abandoned.

READER’S DIGEST BIBLE

The publishers of the well-known *Reader’s Digest* released the Reader’s Digest Bible in 1982. It claims to be “the only true condensation of the Bible.”

They used the same method employed by the *Digest* in the condensation of other books. They shortened the Bible by about 40 percent by eliminating words, phrases, verses and short blocks of text deemed extraneous. The Old Testament has been shortened by one-half, and the New Testament by one-fourth. The Revised Standard Version was the basic text used.

The RDB states that it was not intended for the person who is already reading the Bible. Rather, it was designed for the individual “who has little or no knowledge of the Bible...the person who reads the Bible...only selectively...[and] young readers who have never read the Bible.” Its aim was to supplement, not replace, the regular Bible. Some have compared it to a children’s story Bible.

Each book of the Bible is preceded by an introduction. Evangelicals would object to the liberal theological slant of these remarks. They claim, for instance, that Moses did not write the entire book of Genesis; that Solomon did not compose the books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon; that Isaiah did not write his entire book; and that Daniel did not pen the book which bears his name. For those reasons, the Reader’s Digest Bible is actually a dangerous book for those who do not know the major differences between liberal and evangelical theology. In addition, the RDB seems to be place itself under the judgment of God for omitting or adding to the text of the original inspired Scriptures (Rev. 22:18,19).

NEW KING JAMES VERSION

In 1982, Thomas Nelson Publishers released the New King James Version after seven years of preparation. The British edition is known as the Revised Authorized Version. Thomas Nelson Publishers owns the copyrights for both. In its first three years, the NKJV set publication records, selling more than four million copies.

An interdenominational team of 119 scholars did the work. Each participant acknowledged his commitment to the verbal plenary inspiration of the original Scriptures.

The NKJV’s goals were to update the language of the King James Version and to preserve both the majesty and rhythm of the KJV. It calls itself the fifth major edition of the KJV since 1611.

What are some of the differences between the King James Version and the New King James Version? First, pronouns have been updated (“thou” to “you”, “thy” to “your”). Second, quotation marks are used for direct conversation. Third, modern punctuation style has replaced the old system. Fourth, unfamiliar words have been updated (“sith” to “since”; “anon” to “immediately”). Fifth, pronouns referring to God have been capitalized. Sixth, changes have been made in the rendering of some verbal tenses (“were all dead” to “all died”, II Cor. 5:14). Seventh, poetic passages are arranged in distinctive verse form. Eighth, footnotes identify variant readings. The editors had a preference for the Majority Greek Text over the Received Text or the Critical Text. Ninth, they retained familiar words for ancient objects (e.g. chariot, phylactery). Tenth, they kept key evangelical theological terms (e.g. propitiation, justification, sanctification). Eleventh, verbs ending in –eth or –est were modernized. Twelfth, subject headings were put in italics. Thirteenth, the words of Jesus were printed in red. Fourteenth, they no longer use italics for words supplied by the KJB of 1611.

Criticisms are varied. Some believe that not enough changes were made to make it a true modern translation and thus acceptable to a contemporary reader. Some adherents of the KJB think that too many changes were instituted. For example, more than 200 changes can be found in John 3, including quotation marks, punctuation and pronouns. In pure essence, the NKJV is neither the KJV nor a revision into current English.

Liberals and many evangelicals criticize the NKJV because it is still based on the Received Greek Text with corrections cited by the Majority Text. The above groups prefer the Critical Greek Text.

Chapter 5

A Proper Understanding of Translations

Most English-speaking Christians own at least one copy of the Scriptures. But many non-English believers do not possess a Bible in their own language. There are numerous English translations available to believers, but many language groups have only one version in their native tongue. Some tribal groups have never seen the Bible translated into their common language.

The multiple English versions, their abundance, their availability and their low cost should cause great rejoicing. And many do thank God for them. But, unfortunately, a cloud of suspicion and distrust hangs over the world of English Christendom because a person’s loyalty to God, to Christ and to the Scriptures is determined today by his choice of one English version over another. Much confusion and harm to the cause of Christ have resulted. There is a real need to speak the truth today, and to do it in love (Eph. 4:15). Truth and love must be guiding principles for a proper understanding of translations.

THE WORK OF TRANSLATORS

Translation is no simple task. It is difficult to translate the meaning of the peculiar character and grammatical structure of one language into that of another. Linguistic scholars and translators are a rare breed.

Translators desire good translations. They want their work to express the true meaning of the source text. They want it to be clear to the average reader. They don't want to produce a misleading translation. They want their renderings to be simple and easy, their work to be natural.

Translators must choose and follow accepted principles of translation. There are basically two translation methods. Each will lead to a different result. A translator must choose between formal equivalence or dynamic equivalence.

In formal equivalence, attention is focused on the actual text—on its form and content—what the text is. The translator tries to reproduce that form and content into a second language, seeking a literal word-for-word translation. The King James Version and the New King James Version are formal equivalent translations of the Received Greek Text and Hebrew text. The New American Standard Bible is a formal equivalent translation of the Critical Greek Text and Hebrew text. The New International Version follows the NASB but is not quite as literal. In dynamic equivalence, attention is focused on the meaning of the text to the reader—what the text means. The translator tries to reproduce the meaning of the source language into the second language. In so doing, the words of the text may be changed to avoid confusing the reader. The translator seeks a meaning-for-meaning translation. Paraphrases, such as the work of Phillips and Taylor's *The Living Bible*, illustrate this type. And many translations made on the mission field follow the dynamic equivalence method, using principles developed by Eugene Nida and Kenneth Pike of Wycliffe Bible Translators.

In her book *By the Word: The Priority and Process of Bible Translation*, missionary nurse and linguist Lynn Livernale explains that language has two levels: surface structure or form and deep structure or meaning. The more basic and important part of a message is its meaning. Forms change from language to language, but the meaning in good translation should not. Since no two languages have the same surface structure (form), the translator faces a double task to interpret and to translate. Livernale argues that adjustments in form are required when a literal, word-for-word translation would result in: wrong meanings, no meaning, ambiguous meaning when the original is clear, wrong grammar, and poor literary style. Livernale was directly involved in the translation of the Bengali Common Language New Testament in Bangladesh.

Form and meaning were inspired and perfectly paired together in the original biblical writings. In translating Scriptures from Hebrew and Greek into other languages, including English, translators must seek to keep form and meaning as close together as possible.

Translators must be committed to the inspiration and inerrancy of the biblical text. The Bible is in and of itself objective, written revealed truth from God. What God meant to say to man he said in words within the grammatical structure and terms peculiar to the Hebrew and Greek languages. These words and their relationships within the language system must be honored as they appear in the original text. What the text is thus is extremely important. The translator should try to reproduce that essence into another language as closely as possible.

What the text *means* involves interpretation. Translators who are not regenerated believers guided by the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit will not be able to reproduce accurately the meaning of the text into another language.

Even as a linguist-interpreter, the translator must recognize that he or she cannot do for the reader what only the Spirit of God can do. The Spirit illumines the heart and mind of the believer to understand and to apply scriptural truth (I Cor. 2:9-16).

A translator who believes that the personal response to written revelation takes precedence over the objective nature of that revelation is in danger of encouraging an existential experience. In existential thought, truth is not truth in and of itself; it becomes truth when it is appropriated, understood and lived. There is a heretical position within Christendom which states that the Bible is not itself the Word of God; rather it becomes the Word of God when a person meets God through it.

Earl Radmacher, president of Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, warns: "The tendency for people to choose a translation because it 'inspires' them or they 'like the way it reads,' rather than because of its faithfulness to the original writings, is creating a deterioration of confidence in the inerrancy of God's Word and in the necessity of holding to the doctrine of inerrancy." Radmacher's analysis is correct.

The issue in selecting a personal or church-use Bible should be how accurately the translation reproduces the form and meaning of the original languages. For Christians committed to the inerrancy and inspiration of Scripture, these considerations should take absolute precedence over personal tastes.

ATTITUDE TOWARD TRANSLATIONS

The evangelical Christian has access to many English translations. However, only four can be considered for serious use as a personal study Bible or as a pulpit-pew Bible for congregational use. They are: the King James Version (KJV), the New King James Version (NKJV), the New American Standard Bible (NASB) and the New International Version (NIV). Here are some proper attitudes toward these translations.

First, we should be thankful that we can use all of these versions for our personal edification. Paul criticized the Corinthians for their carnality. He wrote: "For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?" (I Cor. 3:4). The Corinthians subdivided themselves by giving allegiance to one teacher and ignoring another (1:12; 4:6). Paul's answer to their carnality was this classic remark: "For all things are yours. Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas...all are yours; and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's" (3:21-23). The solution was to recognize that God had given them all the gifted teachers for their edification.

Some believers today have given their allegiance to one English version of the Scriptures and have either ignored or criticized the others. In effect, some Christians are saying: "I am of the KJV; I am of the NASB; I am of the NIV." In so doing, they demonstrate carnality. Instead, they should rejoice that these translations have been made. In fact, they should purchase a copy of each version, read and study each one, and compare them under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. They should receive the full benefit that each version can offer them. By limiting themselves to just one version, they have actually diminished themselves.

Second, we should not permit the use of a particular version to become the basis of personal and ecclesiastical fellowship. Christian fellowship should be built upon the fundamentals of the faith: the inspiration and inerrancy of the Scriptures, the virgin birth

and deity of Jesus Christ, the substitutionary atonement and physical resurrection of Christ, and His visible second coming.

God hates those who “[sow] discord among brethren” (Prov. 6:19). Rather, he instructs us “to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3). If a person who uses only the KJV declares as heretical a believer who chooses to use the NIV or the NASB, then that first person is disrupting spiritual unity. The opposite scenario, of course, would also be true.

Loyalty to Christ and to the inspired Word of God should not be measured by a believer’s choice of versions to read or to use in public ministry.

Third, we can have confidence that the four main versions protect and propagate the evangelical Christian faith. In those Articles of Affirmation and Denial adopted by the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, Article X stated: “We further affirm that copies and translations of Scripture are the Word of God to the extent that they faithfully represent the original.” So it can be said that the KJV, NKJV, NASB and NIV are the Word of God to the extent that they faithfully represent the original text.

R. C. Sproul (Explaining Inerrancy; p. 51) gave this analysis of translations:

Similarly, no translation is or can be perfect, and all translations are an additional step away from the autographa. Yet the verdict of linguistic science is that English-speaking Christians, at least, are exceedingly well served in these days with a host of excellent translations and have no cause for hesitating to conclude that the true Word of God is within their reach. Indeed, in view of the frequent repetition in Scripture of the main matters with which it deals and also of the Holy Spirit’s constant witness to and through the Word, no serious translation of Holy Scripture will so destroy its meaning as to render it unable to make its reader ‘wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus’ (II Tim. 3:15).

All four versions forthrightly present the deity of Christ. In fact, all four translate John 1:1 in the same way: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

In John 1:18, there is a variant reading in the Critical Text which is manifested in the two translations based upon it (NASB and NIV). The KJV reads: “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.” The phrase “the only begotten Son” appears as “God the One and Only” in the NIV and as “the only begotten God” in the NASB. The Critical Text reads “God” whereas the Received Text has “Son.” The Son, of course, is God, and God is the Son. Actually, in this passage the NIV and the NASB give a stronger proof for the deity of Christ than the KJV.

The same comparisons can be made in salvation passages, such as John 3:16. All versions equally present that only faith in Jesus Christ saves the trusting sinner.

Fourth, we must understand why there are differences in various translations. It is actually unfair to compare the KJV or NKJV against the NASB or NIV. The first two are

translations of the Received Greek Text whereas the last two are translations of the Critical Greek Text.

The difference in the English translations simply reflect the differences in the two Greek texts. The main differences between the KJV-NKJV and the NASB-NIV can be seen in the omission of these verses, parts of verses, and short passages:

1. The phrase in the Lord's Prayer: "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever" (Matt. 6:13). Placed in brackets in NASB.
2. The ending of Mark (16:9-20). In brackets in NASB; set off with remarks in NIV.
3. The troubled water at the Pool of Bethesda (John 5:3,4).
4. The encounter with the woman taken in the act of adultery (John 7:53-8:11). In brackets in NASB; set off with remarks in NIV.
5. The conversation between Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:37).
6. The phrase "through his blood" (Col. 1:14).
7. The reference to the Trinity (I John 5:7).

No basic evangelical doctrine is damaged or weakened by these omissions. No evangelical theologian ever proves the doctrine of the Trinity from I John 5:7. The omission of blood redemption (Col. 1:14) has bothered some Bible readers, but the NASB and NIV both contain those words in a parallel passage (Eph. 1:7). There was no deliberate attempt by the NASB or NIV translators to discredit Christ's blood sacrifice on the cross. They were simply being consistent in their translation of the Critical Text which do not contain those words.

It is best neither to prove nor disprove any doctrinal positions using passages with disputed variant readings. Serious Bible students should use passages where there are no disputed textual variations for presenting or negating a view.

USE OF TRANSLATIONS

Here are some suggestions for the proper use of English translations.

First, read prayerfully and carefully. No matter what translation you use, you will never be able to understand the meaning of God's revealed word unless you depend totally upon the Holy Spirit's teaching ministry. The secret in knowing God's Word is not in finding a better translation but in spending more time in worshipful study and humble submission.

Second, read from several versions. Rotate your devotional reading by using a different version each month. The change in style and vocabulary will help you maintain interest. Using various translations will bring a freshness to your quiet time. If you have read only the KJV, read the NIV and the NASB. If you have read only the modern versions, read the KJV and see why God has used it greatly for the past 350 years.

In your serious study, consult all of the versions. The various shades of translation readings will assist you much like commentaries.

Third, select a Bible based upon your background. What is your religious heritage, your educational level, your purpose? If you want a literal translation, you would be unhappy with a paraphrase. If you are a new convert, unfamiliar with the Scriptures, the

NIV would be very suitable. If you are from a traditional religious background, the KJV or the NKJV would please you. If you want a serious study Bible, select the KJV or the NASB with annotated notes.

With most people this issue is not reading multiple translations as opposed to reading only one. It is that many read *none*.

Because of my age and background, I grew up with the King James Version. My first Bible was the KJV. I read it, studied it and memorized from it. When I went to Bible college and seminary, the KJV was the primary classroom text. In my ministry of teaching, preaching and writing, I have always used the KJV. It is my pulpit Bible and my first private study and devotional Bible. However, in preparing messages and articles, I do read other versions, such as the NIV and the NASB.

Fourth, a church should select one version to be used by the pastor in the pulpit, by the congregation in public Scripture reading and by the various branches of the church education program. The church is suffering today because the pastor preaches from one version while the people are looking at several different translations. This is poor teaching procedure. The people cannot follow the exposition of the passage with complete understanding. It is practically impossible to have public responsive reading or unison reading if not everyone has the same version.

These problems can be corrected. Some churches have conducted surveys to determine which version would be adopted for pulpit-pew usage. I participated in a survey of 40 scholars for the Wooddale Church in Eden Prairie, Minnesota. They considered four possible versions: RSV, NASB, NIV and NKJV. The NASB was identified as the most accurate rendering of the original text. The NIV, however, was regarded as the best in these categories: most readable, best scholarship among the translators, best grammatically, best paragraphing, best concordances and supplemental aides, best for children, and best overall rating. The church thus adopted the NIV.

When a church has adopted a pulpit-pew Bible, it should let guest speakers know what version the people will have with them. It might be good for the church to supply some of these Bibles in the hymnal racks.

Regardless of the version used in church worship, people should have the liberty to use any version in their private study. The congregational selection of a pulpit-pew Bible should be accepted with loving compliance and an understanding of the complexities of the situation.

In conclusion, may I “commend you [the reader] to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified” (Acts 20:32).