
BIBLE TALK

This week the question is: **Are all Bible translations good?**

The Bible was not originally written in the English language. The Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew and the New Testament was first written in Greek.

There were two types of Greek during the first century:

- **Classical Greek** which was a very sophisticated and refined style of Greek and
- **Koine Greek** which was simply common Greek spoken by common men.

God did not have His word written in Classical Greek – had He done that only scholars and intellectuals could have read and understood the Bible. Instead, God had His word written in Koine Greek (common Greek) so the common man could read and understand the divine message. This is an important fact to remember as we begin speaking about translations. A good translation of the Bible is a translation that puts the word of God into the common language of the people.

Because the Hebrew and Greek languages are not commonly spoken and studied in the United States, it is necessary for the Bible to be translated into English for the common man to read and to understand.

Two things are necessary to produce a good translation:

- The Hebrew and Greek must be accurately translated.
- The English used must be the kind of English spoken by the common American.

AN ACCURATE TRANSLATION

Let's begin with the first point: **The Hebrew and Greek must be accurately translated.**

God's inspired and inerrant word is written in Hebrew and Greek and when it is accurately translated we have His inspired and inerrant word in English. But, if the translation is inaccurate, it is no longer God's word, but man's opinion!

Galatians 1:8-9

8 But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.

9 As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.

Here a curse is placed upon any man that would tamper with the word of God! One way men tamper with the word of God is by producing inaccurate translations. Several men and several groups of men are guilty of altering God's word by producing inaccurate translations.

(1) The New World Translation, published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, or "Jehovah's Witnesses," as they call themselves, is a translation that is inaccurate and results in producing a "*different gospel*" than what was preached by the apostles. We have time for just a few examples:

- The New World Translation has John 1:1 saying that Jesus was "a god" – that is, He was not equal with God the father but was simply a lesser god of some sort. By rendering the passage in this manner, the Watchtower Society has stripped Jesus of His divinity and promoted the doctrine of many gods. Apparently they believe Jehovah is one God and Jesus Christ is another god of a lesser quality. An accurate translation of this passage is Jesus "was God" – that is, Jesus is equal with God.
- Because of its bias in thinking "Jehovah" is God's only name, The New World Translation continually places the name "Jehovah" into the New Testament Scriptures but this name is never to be found in the entire Greek New Testament!

Let's move on now and say a few words about The Living Bible.

(2) The Living Bible is very popular with many Americans today, but many do not realize that it is not a translation at all but a "*paraphrase*." In other words, rather than translating word for word from the Hebrew and Greek into English, the Living Bible is the result of one man rewording the American Standard Version into what he thought it meant in modern English.

The Living Bible was paraphrased by Kenneth Taylor beginning in 1954. Most of his work was done commuting back and forth to his job. He was trying to re-word the Bible so his children could understand it better. As a result, what we have in the Living Bible is not an accurate

translation, but rather one man's opinion about what he thinks the Bible means. We have time for just two examples:

- In 1 Samuel 20:30 the Living Bible has king Saul cussing at his son Jonathan and using words that one would expect in gutters of Atlanta rather than in the pages of the Bible!
- Because of its bias against baptism, the Living Bible renders 1 Peter 3:21 like this: "in baptism we show that we have been saved from death and doom by the resurrection of Christ." In other words, according to Kenneth Taylor's opinion, a person is saved before baptism and baptism merely becomes an option which people can choose to either do, or not do. But an accurate translation of 1 Peter 3:21 is that "baptism saves us now."

COMMON ENGLISH

Let's move on now to our second point: **To be a good translation the English used must be the kind of English spoken by the common American.**

In other words, if a translation is made and it is not in the common vernacular, or if it becomes so old that it is no longer understood by the common man, then the purpose of God is being defeated. The King James Version is a good translation for those who have been taught what the old English words and expressions mean. It is a good translation for those who have read it all their lives and have been taught by Christian parents what it means. But if a man did not have the privilege of being reared by Christian parents, if he has not read and been taught what the old English words mean, the King James Version becomes a bad translation because this person cannot understand God's word. The reason he cannot understand it is because the old English of the King James Version is no longer spoken, nor understood by the average American citizen.

To illustrate, go to the Library and examine the works of Shakespeare written in old English. While professors and literary critics may enjoy and gain much from the works of Shakespeare, the common man on the street cannot.

While the King James Version was an accurate and understandable translation during its time, the English language has changed dramatically since 1611 making it extremely difficult for an untrained man to understand. I will give just two examples:

- In 1 Thessalonians 4:15 the King James Version says, "we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not **prevent** them which are asleep." The word "prevent" today means to "hinder." The passage appears to say that living people will not hinder the resurrection of the dead saints. But the word "prevent" in old English meant to "precede." 1 Thessalonians 4:15 is actually teaching that living people will not "precede" those who are dead when Jesus comes again and catches His saints up into the air.
- In Acts 28:13 the King James Version says, "And from thence **we fetched a compass**, and came to Rhegium." Many skeptics and atheists have pointed to this as an example of the Bible being inaccurate. They point out that the compass was not invented until many years after the apostles. But in the year 1611 – when the King James Version was translated – the word "compass" meant "to circle around." The New King James Version accurately translates the passage to say, "From there we circled round and reached Rhegium." There is no historical inaccuracy at all. The problem is a translation issue which is clarified by a modern, accurate translation.

SUMMARY

We close this study by reminding you that no one translation is perfect because first, it is difficult to always know how to accurately translate every expression from Hebrew and Greek into English. Also, because the English language is a living and changing language, a version of the English Bible is likely to become obsolete with the passing of time.

We do not recommend any versions that are mere paraphrases, nor do we recommend a translation done by a single man or a single religious organization – like the "Jehovah's Witnesses."

Perhaps you might consider getting a parallel Bible that places two English translations side by side for comparison. The King James Version has been paralleled with the New King James Version in a single volume published by the Thomas Nelson Bible Company. The New King James version is an accurate translation into modern English and by having it paralleled with the old King James Version Bible students are more likely to arrive at the correct conclusions.