

“DON'T LET ANYBODY  
TELL YOU  
ONLY ONE STYLE OF  
TRANSLATION  
IS LEGITIMATE.  
WE ARE A  
RICH AND BLESSED  
PEOPLE TO HAVE  
SO MANY  
EXCELLENT ENGLISH  
TRANSLATIONS  
TO CHOOSE FROM.”

— FROM MARK TAYLOR



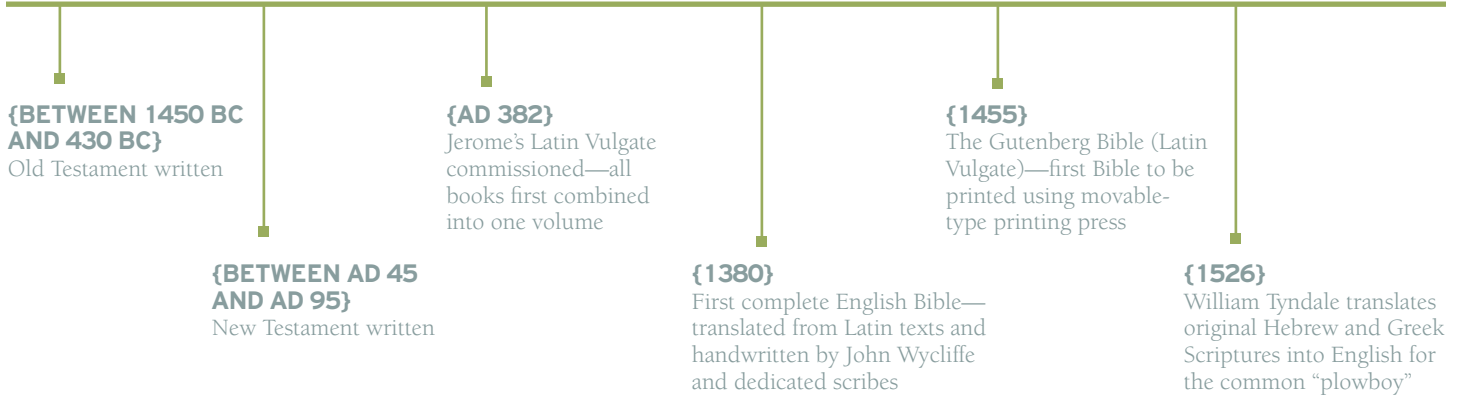
# BIBLE TRANSLATION

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## HISTORY OF TRANSLATION



## WHAT IS TRANSLATION?

Translation involves communicating a message from one language to another.

## WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF A BIBLE TRANSLATION?

**ANSWER 1:** A Bible translation seeks to reproduce the meaning from the original language texts of Scripture into another language, and to elicit the intended response of the original texts from readers and listeners of the new language.

**ANSWER 2:** It depends on the intended use of the translation: contrast a translation intended for young children versus one intended for use in a college hermeneutics course versus one intended for public reading in church services. The purposes of various translations will call for differing approaches to translation.

## DEFINITIONS:

- » **FORMAL EQUIVALENCE** (also known as word-for-word translation): This style of translation seeks to translate each word, while preserving original word order and sentence structure as much as possible. Popular “Formal Equivalence” Bibles: KJV/NKJV, RSV/NRSV/ESV, and NASB.
- » **DYNAMIC EQUIVALENCE** (also known as thought-for-thought translation): This style of translation seeks to translate each phrase or thought of the original text into natural English, conveying the same meaning to the modern reader that the original text conveyed to the ancient reader. Popular “Dynamic Equivalence” Bibles: NIV and NLT.
- » **PARAPHRASE** (a retelling of Scripture): Most paraphrases are created by one individual rather than a team of Bible scholars, emphasizing freshness in style and taking more liberty in translation. The emphasis is on communicating the message of the text in a contemporary context. Popular examples: *The Message* (by Eugene Peterson) and *The Living Bible* (by Kenneth Taylor).

## TRANSLATION EXERCISES:

### HEBREW

Can you flesh out the verse below that is a word-for-word translation from the Hebrew? HINT: Hebrew doesn't include punctuation marks.

Indeed this he says YHWH to the man of Judah and to Jerusalem break up of you unplowed ground and not you plant among thorns be circumcised yourselves to YHWH and remove foreskin of heart of you man of Judah and ones being people of Jerusalem or she will break out like fire wrath of me and she will burn and there is no one quenching because of evil of deeds of you

The verse above is Jeremiah 4:3-4. Here's how the verses appear in the ESV (English Standard Version):

<sup>3</sup> For thus says the Lord to the men of Judah and Jerusalem:

“Break up your fallow ground,  
and sow not among thorns.

<sup>4</sup> Circumcise yourselves to the Lord;  
remove the foreskins of your heart,  
O men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem;  
lest my wrath go forth like fire,  
and burn with none to quench it,  
because of the evil of your deeds.”

Publishers of the ESV describe their translation as essentially literal from Greek/Hebrew into English. The above verse represents a pretty good translation of the literal words by putting them into a readable English sequence. But the phrasing is still somewhat hard to understand.

Here is how the verses are rendered in the NLT (New Living Translation):

<sup>3</sup> This is what the Lord says to the people of Judah and Jerusalem:

“Plow up the hard ground of your hearts!  
Do not waste your good seed among thorns.

<sup>4</sup> O people of Judah and Jerusalem,  
surrender your pride and power.  
Change your hearts before the Lord,\*  
or my anger will burn like an unquenchable fire  
because of all your sins.”

*4:4 Hebrew Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away the foreskins of your heart.*

## GREEK

Can you flesh out the verse below that is a word-for-word translation from the Greek?

the mouth of us has opened toward you Corinthians the heart of us has been enlarged not you are restricted in us you are restricted but in the intestines of you the but same exchange as to children I speak be enlarged and you

The words above form 2 Corinthians 6:11-13. The verses appear in the KJV (King James Version) like this:

<sup>11</sup> O ye Corinthians, our mouth is open unto you, our heart is enlarged.

<sup>12</sup> Ye are not straitened in us, but ye are straitened in your own bowels.

<sup>13</sup> Now for a recompence in the same, (I speak as unto my children,) be ye also enlarged.

As you can see, the King James Version translation is quite literal. Italics are used in this translation (and some others, including the NKJV and NASB) to indicate where a word that does not have an exact counterpart in Greek or Hebrew has been supplied in English. Some metaphors were translated directly into English but don't make sense to readers of modern English.

The same verses appear in the ESV as follows:

<sup>11</sup> We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians; our heart is wide open. <sup>12</sup> You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted in your own affections. <sup>13</sup> In return (I speak as to children) widen your hearts also.

Although the ESV tries to be as literal as possible, here it uses a dynamic translation to describe the meaning of the Greek word for intestines (KJV, “bowels”) as “affection.”

The NLT renders 2 Corinthians 6:11-13 in this way:

<sup>11</sup> Oh, dear Corinthian friends! We have spoken honestly with you, and our hearts are open to you. <sup>12</sup> There is no lack of love on our part, but you have withheld your love from us. <sup>13</sup> I am asking you to respond as if you were my own children. Open your hearts to us!

# OVERVIEW OF ENGLISH BIBLE TRANSLATIONS FROM WILLIAM TYNDALE TO TODAY

<p><b>TYNDALE NEW TESTAMENT (1526)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» First English Bible to be printed on a printing press (75 years after Gutenberg’s invention of the printing press). William Tyndale was burned at the stake by agents of King Henry VIII since it was against the law to translate the Bible into English. Bibles were printed and smuggled into England. Tyndale was translating the Bible into English while Luther was translating it into German.</li> <li>» Much of Tyndale’s wording is retained in the King James Version.</li> </ul>
<p><b>KING JAMES VERSION (1611)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Translated from the best Hebrew and Greek texts available at that time.</li> <li>» Translated in a word-for-word style (with a lot of latitude).</li> <li>» After a slow start, the KJV became the primary English translation for the next 350 years.</li> </ul>
<p><b>AMERICAN STANDARD VERSION (1901)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Revision of the KJV.</li> <li>» Utilized newly discovered Greek manuscripts that were older and more accurate than the manuscripts used by the original KJV translators.</li> <li>» Retained the style of the KJV.</li> <li>» Did not achieve wide use, but was highly regarded for its scholarship.</li> <li>» Fairly difficult to read in English because it is so literal.</li> </ul>
<p><b>REVISED STANDARD VERSION (1952)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Revision of the ASV (including use of better NT manuscripts).</li> <li>» Language of the KJV and ASV was substantially updated.</li> <li>» Did not use <i>thee</i> and <i>thou</i> except when referring to God.</li> <li>» Sponsored by the National Council of Churches.</li> <li>» Became the standard Bible of the “mainline” denominations, but not accepted by many evangelical churches.</li> </ul>
<p><b>NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE (1971)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Another revision of the ASV (including use of better NT manuscripts).</li> <li>» Translated by evangelical scholars.</li> <li>» Gained wide acceptance in evangelical circles.</li> <li>» Like KJV and ASV, it maintained a word-for-word style of translation.</li> <li>» As a result, the English style is often not smooth and natural.</li> </ul>
<p><b>THE LIVING BIBLE (1971)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Created by Kenneth Taylor as a free-flowing paraphrase* that uses natural English. *Transferring meaning within the same language</li> <li>» Paraphrased from the ASV translation.</li> <li>» Became the best-selling book in America from 1972–74. TLB was different from everything that had been available up to that time.</li> <li>» We believe TLB launched the tidal wave of modern translations.</li> </ul>
<p><b>NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION (1978, 1984)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Entirely new translation.</li> <li>» No longer in the mode of KJV / ASV / RSV / NASB.</li> <li>» Combines elements of word-for-word philosophy and dynamic equivalence.</li> <li>» Became the #1 English translation within a few years (pushing KJV to #2).</li> </ul>

## OVERVIEW OF ENGLISH BIBLE TRANSLATIONS FROM WILLIAM TYNDALE TO TODAY CONTINUED

<p><b>NEW KING JAMES VERSION (1982)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Revision of the KJV.</li> <li>» Uses the same textual base as the KJV.</li> <li>» The NKJV stopped using <i>thee</i> and <i>thou</i>.</li> <li>» Maintains the word-for-word style of the KJV.</li> <li>» Feels very “familiar” to KJV readers.</li> <li>» Generally the #3 translation in terms of sales (after NIV and KJV).</li> </ul>
<p><b>NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION (1990)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Revision of the RSV of the early 1950s.</li> <li>» Sponsored (again) by the National Council of Churches.</li> <li>» Extensive use of Dead Sea Scrolls (ancient Hebrew manuscripts of the OT), which were discovered in 1948–early 1950s.</li> <li>» Further updates of English style.</li> <li>» Gender-inclusive language where that reflects the meaning of the original.</li> </ul>
<p><b>NEW LIVING TRANSLATION (1996, 2004)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Created by a team of 90 scholars and editors. It is a translation from Hebrew and Greek that is very readable</li> <li>» Dynamic equivalence; retains the easy-to-read style of <i>The Living Bible</i>.</li> <li>» Gender-inclusive language where that reflects the meaning of the original.</li> <li>» Second edition released in 2004 to increase the precision of the translation.</li> <li>» Generally the #4 translation in terms of sales (NIV / KJV / NKJV / NLT).</li> </ul>
<p><b>ENGLISH STANDARD VERSION (2001)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Another revision of the RSV (as was the NRSV).</li> <li>» If you compare the RSV of 1952 with the ESV, you will find much of the wording is exactly the same.</li> <li>» Maintains the RSV’s word-for-word style of translation.</li> <li>» The English style is often not smooth and natural.</li> </ul>
<p><b>HOLMAN CHRISTIAN STANDARD BIBLE (2004)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Sponsored by the Southern Baptist Convention.</li> <li>» Utilizes a balance between word-for-word and dynamic equivalence.</li> <li>» Very popular with Southern Baptist denomination.</li> </ul>
<p><b>TODAY’S NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION (2005)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Revision of the popular NIV.</li> <li>» Updates in English language and style.</li> <li>» Maintains NIV’s combination of word-for-word philosophy and dynamic equivalence.</li> <li>» Gender-inclusive language where that reflects the meaning of the original.</li> <li>» Will be phased out when the revised NIV is released in 2011.</li> </ul>

## EXAMPLE OF TRANSLATION PHILOSOPHIES

<i>Formal Equivalence</i>	<i>Combination</i>	<i>Dynamic Equivalence</i>
<p><b>Matt 25:15 (ESV)</b> And unto one he gave five <b>talents</b>, to another two, and to another one.</p>	<p><b>Matt 25:15 (NIV)</b> To one he gave five <b>talents* of money</b>, <i>* A talent was worth more than a thousand dollars.</i></p>	<p><b>Matt 25:15 (NLT)</b> He gave five <b>bags of silver*</b> to one, <i>* Greek talents; also throughout the story. A talent is equal to 75 pounds or 34 kilograms.</i></p>

## ANCIENT SOURCE TEXTS FOR OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS

### OLD TESTAMENT HEBREW TEXTS

**MASORETIC TEXT:** This text is considered to be a very reliable text of the Old Testament. All modern English translations use this as their primary OT source text. No originals exist—only copies of copies of copies, etc. The oldest existing copies date from AD 895-1000.

**THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS:** The oldest of the Dead Sea Scrolls dates back to 100 BC, predating the Masoretic Text by 1000-1100 years. There is a very high correlation between the much earlier Dead Sea Scrolls manuscripts and the Masoretic manuscripts of AD 1000, confirming the accuracy of the Masoretic Text.

**ANCIENT OLD TESTAMENT TRANSLATIONS:** In addition to the ancient Hebrew texts, early translations of the Old Testament were made, dating from a time even prior to that of the Dead Sea Scrolls. These translations were made in Greek and Syriac, allowing Jews who had been exiled to foreign lands and no longer spoke Hebrew to read the Scriptures. By comparing these early translations, scholars can find further confirmation of the accuracy of the Masoretic Text, as well as clues to the meaning of difficult Hebrew passages.

### NEW TESTAMENT GREEK TEXTS

Hundreds of manuscripts of the New Testament exist. None are fully accurate, that is, they don't all match in every detail. Many are just fragments, including just a single book, or portions of a book. The oldest manuscripts date back to about AD 200.

**TEXTUS RECEPTUS** (meaning “received text”): The Textus Receptus was a Greek text compiled by a scholar named Erasmus around 1525. He worked from several 12th-century manuscripts. His compilation was the base text that William Tyndale, Martin Luther, and the KJV translators used. It became the accepted Greek text for the next 300 years.

**OLDER MANUSCRIPTS:** Older, more reliable manuscripts of the Greek NT were found in archaeological digs starting in the mid-1800s—300 years after Erasmus had compiled his Greek text. Scholars compared these older New Testament manuscripts, allowing them to compile a text closer to the original New Testament.

**UBS GREEK TEXT:** The Greek New Testament of the United Bible Societies is based on the older manuscripts not available to Erasmus. Those older and better manuscripts had not been found or were hidden away and Erasmus was unaware that they existed.

Almost all Greek scholars today believe that the UBS text is very close to the wording of the original Greek NT. But some people insist that the KJV is the only legitimate translation because it is based on the Textus Receptus. Most Greek scholars today would say the Textus Receptus is not an accurate representation of the original Greek New Testament.

Almost all modern translations of the NT are based on the UBS Greek text. The only recent translation based on the Textus Receptus is the NKJV (because it is an update of the old KJV). However, even the NKJV recognizes in its textual footnotes where it differs from the UBS Greek text.

**NLT:** The NLT is based on the UBS Greek text.

## WRAPPING UP

- » Dynamic-equivalent translations are easier to understand.
- » Using two translations side by side will provide a deeper comprehension of Scripture.
- » Partnering with God in his work around the globe: Each sale of the New Living Translation benefits the worldwide translation work of Wycliffe Bible Translators.