

What Bible Translation ???



It is a good thing that so many Christians love the Bible. It may not be

such a good thing that Christians love their Bibles. That is, debating the relative merits of this translation over that can get rather emotional, and swiftly. Please take what follows in the spirit it is intended. I am simply making some broad suggestions, not saying your conversion was false because it all started when you read Good News for Modern Man or some such thing. I'm simply trying to give guidelines, not arguing that we measure one another's piety by which Bible we use.

There are at least five distinct issues related to Bible translations. The one that receives the most press is the source manuscripts. There are two competing sets of manuscript families, an older set, and a larger set. As you might guess, those who prefer the older set argue that it must be more true to the original because it is older, whereas the other group argues that the larger set must be more faithful because it is larger. In my estimation this argument is grossly overblown, as are the distinctions between the two text families. It takes a brain much larger than mine to figure out which is better.

The biggest issue for me is the translation philosophy. There is a continuum among philosophies with a literal, word by word translation on one end, and a Bible paraphrase on the other end. I am rather strongly on the side of the former and opposed to the latter. I understand the motives that bring us The Message, or the Ebonics Bible. But it's a bad idea. The further you move away from word for word translation, the more room you leave for interpretation, rather than translation. Other issues of translation philosophy, such as gender issues, have already been addressed in a previous post. You can read about it here.

The third issue is beauty. Which translation in its form best befits its content? This too is one of the weaknesses of most paraphrases. Ironically, in trying to make the Bible more readable they make it instead more pedestrian. This is likewise a weakness the more we push toward word for word equivalency. The most "faithful" translation often will clank, artistically speaking.

The fourth issue is one of authority. The hard reality is that in our day, Bible translations are important to the long term financial health of publishing companies. Some companies, it seems, in defense of their bottom lines, have added to the already crowded alphabet

soup of Bible translations. Should the Bible be in the hands of publicly traded companies? How about para-church organizations? Some have argued that the church alone has the authority to translate the Bible.

The fifth issue is history. That is, which Bible translation fits best into the life of the church over the centuries? Is it not jarring to read, “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want?” I believe there is great value in having a translation that has inspired our hymnody. I believe there is a profound blessing for me to memorize the same words that my grandparents memorized when they were small.

Different translations might score higher than others in one category above, but lower than others in another. No one Bible gets five stars in every category. That said, it is possible, if not wise, to use different translations for different contexts. For example, the New American Standard alone earns five stars on word for word translation. But it earns no stars for beauty. If I find myself in a situation where I need a level of precision that is high, but too low to go to an inter-linear Bible, I pick up my NASB. Otherwise, it stays on my shelf.

In like manner, the King James Bible scores points on the issue of history, and on beauty. But the anachronisms in the

language are a real barrier to me. It tops the list on authority, but even there it is sketchy. An angry, and likely light in his loafers king, it seems to me, shouldn't have the ability to supplant a perfectly good Bible like the Geneva Bible.

In the end, and on balance, my favorite for most circumstances is the New King James Bible. It scores high on history, without getting me confused. It scores high on beauty, without losing fidelity to the original text. It scores high, though not the highest, on word for word translation, while still communicating the gravity of its subject. Even on the issue of competing text families it does well as it usually includes parenthetically alternate readings in the older texts. The English Standard Version runs a close second for me. Then the Geneva Bible. This is how I approach the question, but it does not, to borrow a phrase, determine the boundaries of my fellowship.

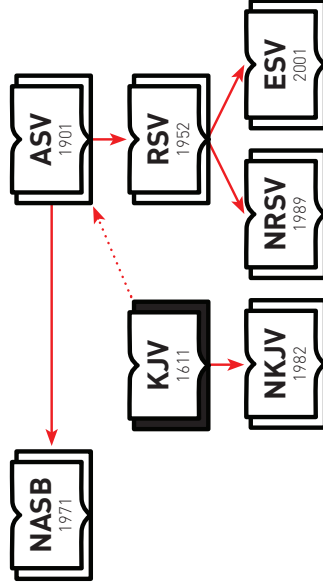
R.C. Sproul Jr.

COMPARISON OF ENGLISH BIBLE TRANSLATIONS

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FORMAL EQUIVALENCE WORD FOR WORD

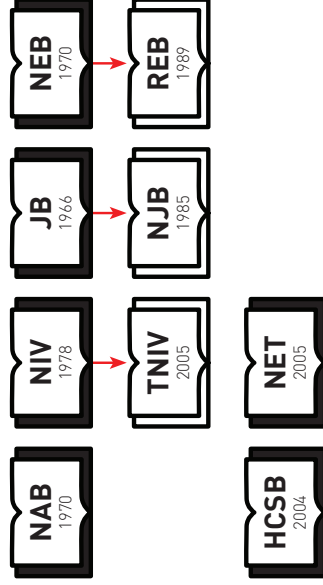
- **theory:** 'literal' or *word-for-word*
- **aim:** to retain the *form*, i.e. the words and structure, of the original text as much as possible
- **result:** an English translation that is primarily accurate, yet also comprehensible



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| ASV | = American Standard Version |
| ESV | = English Standard Version |
| KJV | = King James Version |
| NASB | = New American Standard Bible |
| NKJV | = New King James Version |
| NRSV | = New Revised Standard Version |
| RSV | = Revised Standard Version |

INTERMEDIATE

- **theory:** mediating between 'literal' and 'idiomatic'
- **aim:** to retain the *form* of the original text where possible, without compromising its *function*, i.e. to convey meaning
- **result:** an English translation that is both accurate and clear.

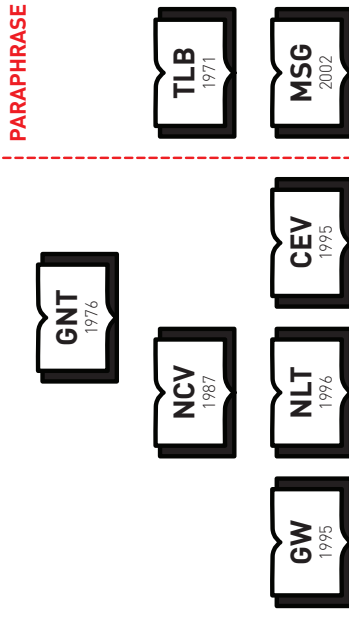


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| HCSB | = Holman Christian Standard Bible |
| JB | = Jerusalem Bible (Roman Catholic) |
| NAB | = New American Bible (Roman Catholic) |
| NEB | = New English Bible |
| NET | = New English Translation (online translation) |
| NIV | = New International Version |
| NJB | = New Jerusalem Bible (Roman Catholic) |
| TNIV | = Today's New International Version |
| REB | = Revised English Bible |

FUNCTIONAL EQUIVALENCE MEANING FOR MEANING

- **theory:** 'idiomatic' or *meaning-for-meaning*
- **aim:** to retain the *function* of the original text, i.e. to convey meaning, as much as possible
- **result:** to produce an English translation that is primarily natural and easy to understand

Paraphrase = re-wording a text in the *same* language, rather than translating it from one language to *another*.



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| CEV | = Contemporary English Version |
| GNT | = Good News Translation (Good News Bible) |
| GW | = God's Word |
| MSG | = The Message |
| NCV | = New Century Version |
| NLT | = New Living Translation |
| TLB | = The Living Bible |

PARAPHRASE

O LORD, YOUR LAW IS EVER SURE

BRIAN L. PENNEY, 2013
FROM PSALM 119

BOHEMIAN BROTHERS, 1566

1. O Lord, Your Law is ev - er sure, Set - tled in
2. Your word, O Lord, is my de - light, 'sta-blished on
3. O Lord, Your Law, like hon - ey sweet, And like a
4. Your Word, O Lord, gives peace and rest, In our af -

heav'n, it shall en - dure, Giv - ing us strength,
earth to give us light, Teach - ing our hearts
lamp shall guide our feet, Guard - ing our minds
flic - tions and dis - tress, Lead - ing to life,

keeps our way pure.
to know the right.
from sin's de - ceit.
hap - py and blest.