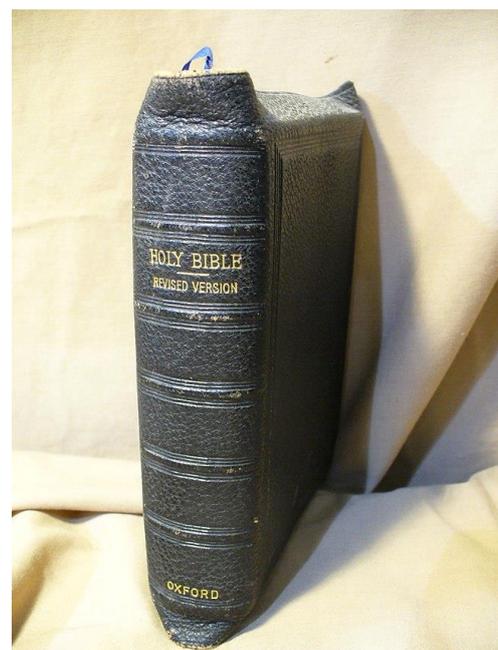


The English Bible (Part 2)



The major revision of the **King James Version** was the **English Revised Version (ERV)** in 1885 and the **American Standard Version (ASV)** in 1901. They remained the anchoring revision at the British and American bible Societies for about a hundred years until the twentieth century, which had ushered another era of 'modern' English translations, with many new versions coming into popular use in both congregational worship and personal study. Among the most widely accepted were the **Revised Standard Version (RSV)** in 1952, the **New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)** in 1959, the **New American Standard Bible**



(NASB) in 1971, and the **New International Version (NIV)** in 1978. The **New King James Version (NKJV)** which came out in 1982 has also proven a significant contribution to the contemporary development of English translations. In more recent years, the **English Standard Version (ESV)**, first published in 2001, have also attained a notable following, including the author myself..

Apparently there are 3 reasons for the increase number of new translations:

1. English has changed since the time of **William Tyndale**. Many words have fallen out of use. The vocabulary is outdated. Pronouns and verb tenses, grammar and syntax have also changed. Punctuation is also used differently. Many words and phrases such as the Lord God of Host, emerods and concupiscence are obsolete and would not be meaningful to most people today. Similarly, many other **KJV** words, such as charity, trespass, profit, cousin, and remission, have different meanings today than they did in 1611, and could be misleading to the reader. What was once a clear and 'penetrating" translation could now be difficult to understand. Wycliffe replaced the West Saxon gospels because of changes in English, and Tyndale replaced Wycliffe for the same reason. The birth of new translations periodically as language changes is a normal and healthy historical phenomenon.

2. In the 16th century when **Tyndale** first translated the New Testament into modern English, the western world was only beginning to rediscover biblical Greek. Learning Hebrew had also been controversial for much of the middle ages due to hostility toward the Jews. Over the centuries since then, much was 'discovered' about these languages that was not known before. These open the door to even more accurate translations of the Greek and Hebrew texts.

3. Since the time of **Erasmus** and his revisers, scholars have had the chance to compare more manuscripts such as those from **Alexander Souter, Wurttemberg Stuttgart** and **Eberhard Nestle** in the 19th and 20th Century. Even some of the newer Chinese Bible translations in the latter half of the last century referenced on these. There appeared a growing number of manuscripts and fragments of the New Testament much earlier than anything Tyndale or the KJV translators had made note of (first few centuries since the apostles passed, and these are obviously considered as more accurate). There have been similar discoveries in Old Testament texts, such as the **Dead Sea Scrolls** which are literally a thousand years earlier than any Hebrew text that was referenced before. These new 'data' led to the demand for fresh translations that would take all of such manuscripts into consideration.

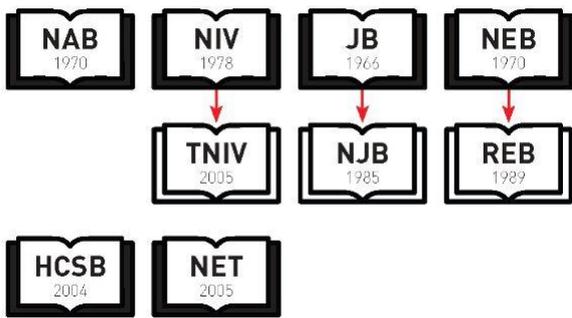
Miles Coverdale, the associate of William Tyndale who translated both the Coverdale and **Great Bibles**, who also was involved in the committee for the **Geneva Bible**, argued that, far from obscuring or confusing the text, multiple translations help the reader to better understand the text through diligent comparison. They serve, in a sense, as commentaries on one another to help explain the meaning of passages that may be difficult. We are also doing this now with parallel text Bibles. Most contemporary English-speaking Christians and scholars are not dogmatically committed to only one particular translation, but often read from several. Indeed, modern translations have not even utterly supplanted the classic KJV, which is still widely read and quoted today in Bible scholarship.

The different types of Bibles translations

Basically Bible translations could be divided into

- a) Formal Equivalence
- b) Functional or Dynamic equivalence
- c) Those in between (Intermediate)

<p>The 'Mother' of this group of translations is the KJV giving rise to the ASV in America and the NASB. Eventually coming out was the NRSV and the ESV .</p> <p>Mark Barry Bible Charts 2010.</p>	<p>FORMAL EQUIVALENCE: [WORD for WORD]</p> <p>An English translation that is <u>primarily accurate, yet also comprehensible.</u></p> <p>'Literal': meaning to retain the form, i.e. the words and structure of the original text as much as possible.</p> <p>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</p>
<p>The commonly used NIV and some of the Catholic Bibles would belong to this group.</p>	<p>INTERMEDIATE</p> <p>Mediating between 'Literal' and</p>

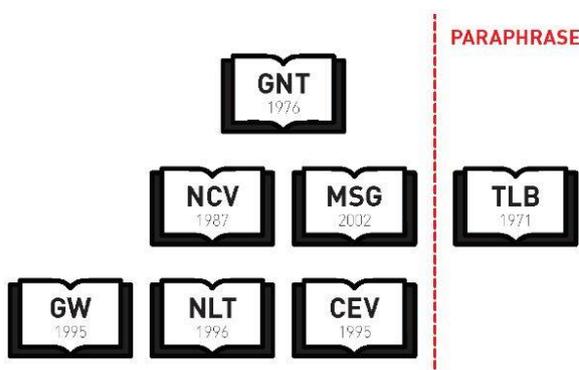


'Idiomatic': to retain the form of the original text where possible, without compromising its function, i.e. to convey meaning.

An English translation that is both accurate and clear. The NIV is a good and popular example in this category.

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

Basically not very popular as Bible readers often want a very accurate translations from the Hebrew and Greek. Examples include the TLB and the MSG. Note that personal interpretation and paraphrasing might insert ideas into the translation.



FUNCTIONAL or Dynamic EQUIVALENCE [MEANING for MEANING/ THOUGHT for THOUGHT]

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

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

- CEV = Contemporary English Version
- GNT = Good News Translation
- GW = God's Word
- MSG = The Message

	CV = New Century Version NLT = New Living Translation TLB = The Living Bible
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People often ask the question, "If I want to read the most faithful translation of the original manuscripts, which translation should I chose?"

Indeed no translation is perfect. It is often impossible to fully and perfectly reflect the exact nature of the original text, no matter what translation method was used by the scholar or a team of scholars, no matter how competent and "spiritual" they are. We must not always evaluate translations in terms of 'perfect' vs. 'imperfect' as all translations are, in fact, 'imperfect', but rather in terms of 'less accurate' vs. 'more accurate'.

Look at here **Matthew 5:9** "Sermon on the Mount" :

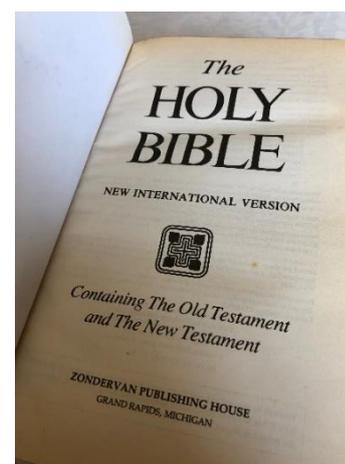
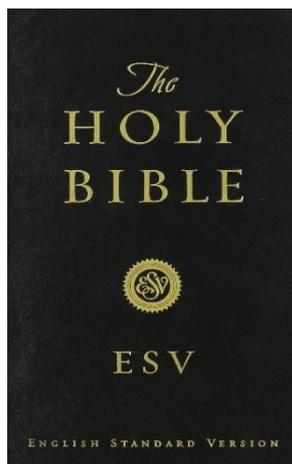
"Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God " (KJV).
"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God " (NIV).
"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God " (ESV).
"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God "(NASB).
"Happy are those who strive for peace - they shall be called the sons of God " (TLB).

Differences are seen in punctuations, the word "shall" and "will" and "children" and "sons". The Greek transliteration of "*huioi*" is in masculine form, but its meaning is in itself akin to the term "**offspring**". So "**sons**" or "**children**" were both deemed accurate translations and being used in the different versions. Which one would you say is more perfect? Or do you really wish to argue out the difference?

The passage also brings out another controversy in modern translation, that of the use of "gender-neutral" or "gender-inclusive" language in newer Bible revisions such

as the 2011 New International Version (NIV). The change in translation is said to be because of a change in the way English is commonly spoken, and not the result of any "gender-inclusive" inclinations or to put it in more modern language, "political-correctness".

The contemporary stance in writing is to use a gender-neutral expression ("a person," "he or she," "him or her," "they," "them") when both sexes are included. Thus, Romans 3:28 has traditionally been translated into English as "... **a man is justified by faith** ..." However, the original Greek word '*anthropos*' means "human being" and applies equally to both man and women. The NRSV and NIV have thus translated this verse as "... **a person is justified by faith** ..." to convey with conviction the inclusive nature of the original Greek text. (We will take another look of this issue in the next part of the article)



The three most popular versions used in Hong Kong, from right: the **NIV (1978)**, the **NASB (1989)** and the **ESV (2001)**.

Every translation on the other hand, is at many points a trade-off between literal precision and readability, between "formal equivalence" of expression and "functional equivalence" in communication.

The "essentially literal" translation (formal equivalence) like the **ESV** seeks as far as possible to capture the precise wording of the original text and the personal style of each Bible author. As such, its emphasis is on "word-for-word" correspondence, at the same time taking into account differences in grammar, syntax, and idioms between current literary English and the original languages. Thus it seeks to let the reader see as directly as possible the structure and meaning of the original. Within

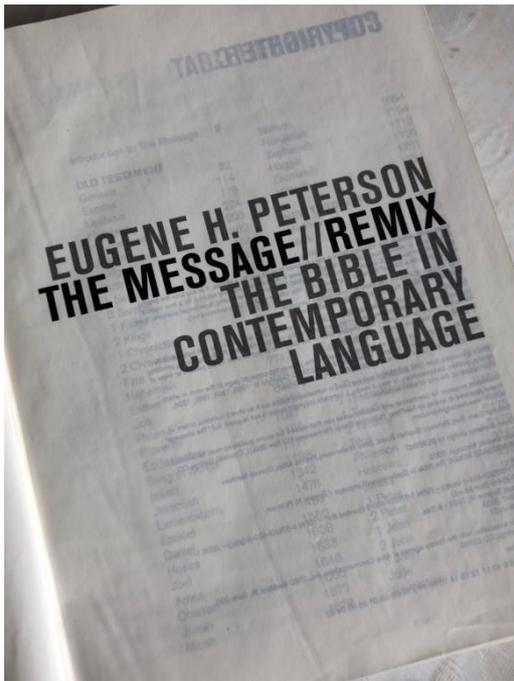
this framework, they still would sought to be "as literal as possible" and maintain clarity of expression as well as literary excellence. The same English word are used for important recurring words in the original as much as possible and, as far as grammar and syntax will allow, Old Testament passages are cited in the New Testament in ways that show their correspondence.

Apparently different translations were bounded by their own translating philosophy.

In the preface of the **ESV**, we read: *"Each word and phrase in the ESV has been carefully weighed against the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek to ensure the fullest accuracy and clarity and to avoid under-translating or overlooking any nuance of the original text. The words and phrases themselves grow out of the Tyndale-King James legacy, and most recently out of the RSV, with the 1971 RSV text providing the starting point for our work. Archaic language has been brought to current usage and significant corrections have been made in the translation of key texts. But throughout, our goal has been to retain the depth of meaning and enduring language that have made their indelible mark on the English-speaking world and have defined the life and doctrine of the church over the last four centuries."*

In contrast to the **ESV**, other Bible versions like the **NIV**, which possibly is the most popular English Bible version to date, have followed a "thought-for-thought" or "meaning-for-meaning" rather than "word-for-word" translation philosophy, emphasizing "dynamic/functional equivalence. This could 'inadvertently' brought in the interpretive acumen of the translator and the influences of contemporary culture. Interested readers too can ponder on the idea contained in the preface of this most popular Bible text.

In the preface of the **New American Standard Bible (NASB)**: *"The American counterpart of this last work (RSV) was published in 1901 as the American Standard Version. The ASV, product of both British and American scholarship, has been highly regarded for its scholarship and accuracy. Recognizing the values of the American Standard Version, The Lockman Foundation felt an urgency to preserve these and other lasting values of the ASV by incorporating recent discoveries of Hebrew and Greek textual sources and by rendering it into more current English. Therefore, in 1959 new translation project was launched, based on the time-honored principles of translation of the ASV and KJV. The result is the New American Standard Bible"*.



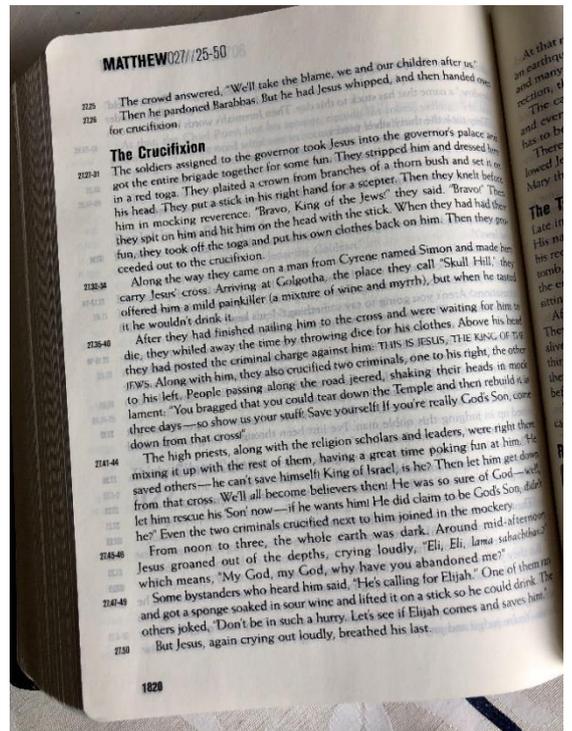
"*The Message*" by popular writer and theologian Eugene Peterson is an example of a modern-day paraphrase Bible translation. Since the full release of the *Message* in 2002, Eugene Peterson's work has certainly captured the attention and passion of many readers. The *Message* was at times quoted in academic, biblical commentary writings. Peterson says 'it's an invitation for ordinary people to *enter the Scriptures* once again'.

The *Message* is not straightly-speaking a translation and should not be used as a primary Bible. As a free paraphrase, it is

sometimes powerful and brilliant while at other times can be off the original target to acheive this. Another difficulty with such "Bibles" is that the author's ideas are often inserted into the text.

One can envisage that "the mission of a Bible translator is not in the same vein as the mission of the Holy Spirit. Peterson had probably believed that the Bible, without his interpretive skills to modernize it, is insufficient to transform lives!" (Michael Brown , 2017).

As an example, we look at the teaching on immoral sex and homosexuality in 1Corinthians 6:9-10. Paul wrote, "Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor male prostitutes, nor homosexual offenders, nor thieves, nor the greedy , nor drunkards, nor slanderers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God."

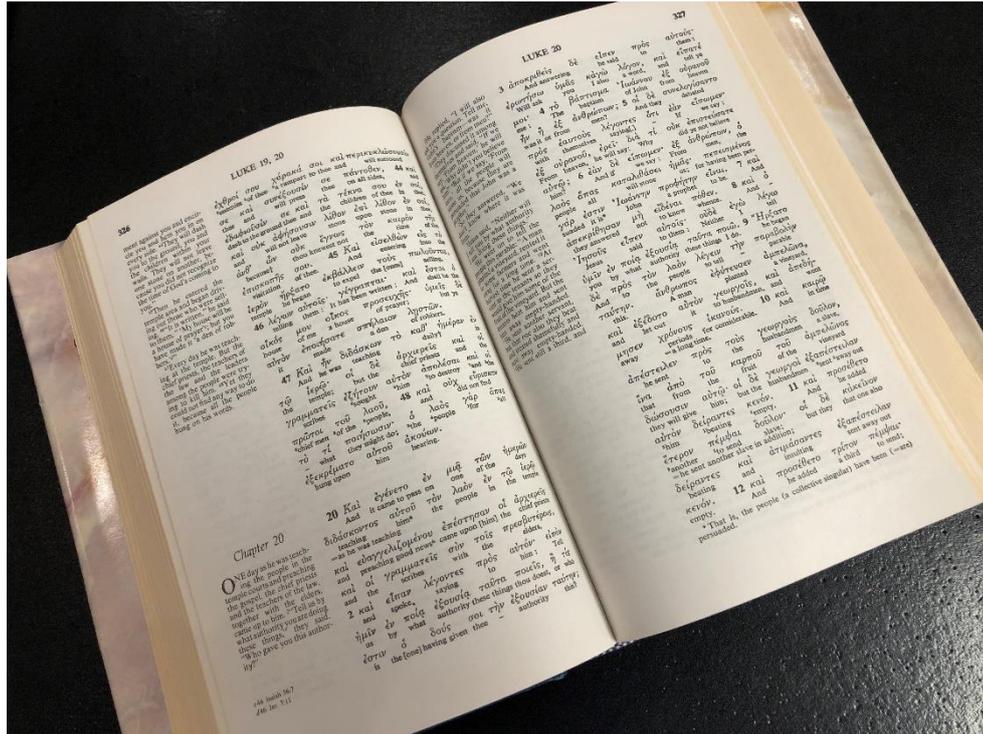


In the *Message* this becomes, "Don't you realize that this is not the way to live?"

Unjust people who does not care about God will not be joining in his kingdom. Those who use and abuse each other, use and abuse sex, use and abuse the earth and everything in it, don't qualify as citizens in God's kingdom." The *Message* does speak about those who "use and abuse each other, use and abuse sex," but such can have different interpretations.

If one reads the **NIV** (or **ESV** or most other translations for that matter) and you are committing adultery or practicing homosexuality, Paul's words will hit you hard: "Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality . . . will inherit the kingdom of God." But If you are reading The *Message*, it might not border you as much: "Those who use and abuse each other, use and abuse sex, use and abuse the earth and everything in it, don't qualify as citizens in God's kingdom." You can turn to your partner as you read the verses together and say, "That doesn't describe us! We love each other, and we're not using or abusing each other"! Has the apostle Paul written anything specifically about "use and abuse the earth and everything in it"? (Michael Brown , 2017). The *Message* is perhaps helpful at group Bible studies if the meaning of certain verses or paragraphs appear difficult, but one need to use it with a certain amount of caution.

On another note, a serious Bible reader or study leader may not necessarily delegate his or her own responsibility for the study of the original texts to the scholarly class. Instead he or she can take responsibility to double-check from, and ponder upon the meaning of the words translated from the original language. **Interlinear Greek-English New Testaments** for example are not expensive, easily accessible and a very useful study tools.



Interlinear Greek-English New Testaments

Strong's	Hebrew	English	Morphology
559 [e]	וַיֹּאמֶר way-yō-mer	and said	Conj-w V-Qal-ConseclImperf-3ms
430 [e]	אֱלֹהִים 'ē-lō-him	God	N-mp
413 [e]	אֶל- 'el-	to	Prep
4872 [e]	מֹשֶׁה mō-šeh,	Moses	N-proper-ms
1961 [e]	אֱהִיָּה 'eh-yeh	I AM	V-Qal-Imperf-1cs
834 [e]	אֲשֶׁר 'ā-ser	who	Pro-r
1961 [e]	אֱהִיָּה 'eh-yeh;	I AM	V-Qal-Imperf-1cs

The online **Biblehub.com** (**Biblos.com**), which cross-references each Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic meaning of a word, is another very useful aid in serious Bible study. An understanding of the basic use of tenses, syntax and grammar in these languages is not only essential but can also be very interesting and thought provoking.

*“For the **word of God** is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart”. (Hebrews 4:12)*

In Part 3 of the article we will take a look at only one of the many translations, the "controversial" **《NIV》** .