

TRANSLATIONS AND INTERPRETATION:

1. The Biblical (original) Languages:

A. **Hebrew:** A Semitic language. Biblical Hebrew ceased to be a spoken language around 350 BC and was written without vowels until around 500 to 600 AD. The Biblical literature spans 1,000 years and includes various types of literature. "Hebrew is a simple language ... irregularities are few, inflection is elementary, vocabulary is limited and syntax nothing when compared with, say, Biblical Greek" (J. Barton Payne). The vocabulary is rich in color and word order has some significance for meaning. The verbal system has only two tenses which indicate action as completed or not completed rather than time, a rudimentary participle and seven "stems" which have no counterpart in English. There is inflection in both verbs and nouns, and only four prepositions. Word meaning is often a matter of context. Cognate languages include Ugaritic (Canaanite) and Phoenician, Aramaic, Arabic, and other ancient middle eastern tongues have some significance too. Hebrew studies have been richly augmented by discoveries like the Mari tablets (1887), the Dead Sea Scrolls (1940's), the Tell 'L Amarna letters, the Ugaritic tablets, and most recently the Ebla library.

B. **Aramaic** is very similar to Hebrew, the chief differences being vocabulary and pronunciation and only slight differences in grammar. It is perhaps most significant as being the Lord's language and the NT quotations of Jesus' words are translations of Aramaic into Greek.

C. **Greek (Koine)** The world language in New Testament times, Koine Greek is an Indo-European language. A very precise inflected language in which word order is not important, except for purposes of emphasis, it has a verb structure more extensive than English with 7 tenses indicating both completed and uncompleted action in past, present and future time and a highly developed participle as well. A language with a rich history in poetry and philosophy, it has a vocabulary that is both precise and has many prepositions and compound words which give many shades of meaning. Vocabulary is supplemented by numerous papyri and inscriptions, classical Greek and the writings of the early church fathers. Less formal than Classical Greek, it is also different from modern Greek as well.

2. Problems in translation.

Because languages differ in form and structure, an exact word for word and grammatical correspondence is not possible. Because languages are always in a process of gradual change, shifts in meaning must be dealt with. For example, the Elizabethan English of the King James Version is not the English we speak today - many words have changed in meaning, some now mean the opposite of their earlier usage. A word in one language may not have the same range of meanings as its corresponding word in the other. It may have meanings not in the original word, not have meanings in the original word and both may have individual meanings not shared with the other. Similarly the syntax not having exact correspondence requires often stilted and wordy efforts to convey the precise meaning.

One solution is to try to translate the meaning rather than the word for word. To translate thought for thought instead is called paraphrasing. This requires a careful determination of the meaning in the original and a careful restatement of this meaning in the language of the translation. However, the richness and nuances of vocabulary and syntax are lost in doing this.

Most modern English translations are a compromise between these poles; a literal word for word, grammatical translation and a translation of meaning. Most try to strike a balance- sacrificing literalness for meaning and visa versa. Bible Translations vary from a "Word for Word" to a "Thought for Thought" philosophy and may either be more formal or more functional in expression.

3. Classification of modern versions:

The place to begin in examining English versions is to read the pages of introduction or preface. Most will explain their approach and method. Versions that try to use a one-for-one equivalency and convey the grammar accurately include the **American Standard version of 1901 (ASV)** ("The Rock of Biblical honesty") and to a slightly lesser degree the **New American Standard Version (NASV)**.

Versions that try to work out the compromise between literal translation and readability include: the **King James Version (KJV)** (which may use a variety of words to translate a word - check any good concordance; and which like Luther's version in German, had tremendous impact upon the language of its readers.) Many still love the **King James Version** for its beauty of speech and **The New King James Version (NKJV)** has been revised by some modern scholars to correct the changed and obsolete language and still keep the basic King James English. The **New International Version (NIV)** is one of the most popular translations and as readable as a newspaper. (Please see preface - "fidelity to thought of Biblical writers ... clear and natural English ... idiomatic, not idiosyncratic ... contemporary, but not dated.... avoiding obvious Americanisms and Anglicisms") The **English Standard Version** is an "essentially literal" translation that seeks as far as possible to capture the precise wording of the original text and the personal style of each Bible writer. As such, its emphasis is on "word-for-word" correspondence, at the same time taking into account differences of grammar, syntax, and idiom between current literary English and the original languages.

The **Revised Standard Version (RSV)** and its earlier counterpart the **Revised Version (RV)**, and The **New English Bible (NEB)** are versions that try to paraphrase thought for thought instead of word for word. Paraphrases should be treated like commentaries. Other paraphrases are **The Living Bible** (based on **ASV, 1901** rather than the original texts), The **Today's English Bible (aka Good News for Modern Man) (TEB)**, **The Message**, and **The Phillips New Testament**.

<u>More Formal</u>				<u>More Functionable</u>					
KJV	NASV	RSV	NRSV	NAB	NIV	NJB	NCV	GNB	The Message
ASV	NKJV	HCSB	NET		TNIV	REB	NLT	CEV	.

The **Amplified Bible** should be mentioned separately - it tries to give a variety of words to "flesh out the nuances" of the original words - a "words-for-word approach". The brackets, parentheses, footnotes, italics, and references thus help overcome the "gap" of translation at the expense of being extremely wordy and very hard to read. And giving every possible meaning for a word every place it is used is misleading as well.

The theological bias of the translators must be considered. Do they adhere to inspiration and inerrancy? Are they liberal or conservative? Is a doctrinal bias going to effect the translation at certain points? Is it the work of one man, or a committee (which is better)? How is modern scholarly criticism used? The Translators of the **NASV, ASV, The Amplified, KJV, NIV** are all committed to inspiration. The Translators of the **RV, NEB, and Jerusalem Bibles** are not. Laird Harris points out for example: "It is a curious study to check the **Revised Standard Version of the Bible**, a monument of higher critical scholarship, and note how every important Old Testament passage purporting to predict directly the coming of Christ has been altered so as to remove this possibility." The **TEB** notably has purged the blood atonement from its pages; the **Living** displays the theological bias of Ken Taylor and The **Jerusalem Bible** shows its Roman Catholic roots.

The use of these various versions is not to be discouraged, but rather encouraged. With a careful study of where they come from and stand, of what they intent to accomplish, and by using several to compliment and correct each other the English Bible student can close considerably the gap left by translation. Thus it is recommended that one use several - a version aimed at word-for-word and grammatical accuracy (especially in concordance study and best for study Bible purposes too); a version that tries to strike the balance for reading and meditation and a paraphrase to help us grasp the thoughts. and the Amplified for helping us recover the nuances. In our study we should endeavor to write our own paraphrases. What is important is not that the Bible is translated into English, but into our hearts and lives and becomes a part of us. Translations are an indispensable means to that end.

4. The Translation in Scripture: Old Testament quotations in the New and in Jesus' teaching.

A problem apparent to many is that the New Testament quotations of the old often do not appear to be exact quotes when compared with the Old Testament passage being quoted. The use of the **Septuagint** by the New Testament writers is important here. The **Septuagint** is the translation of the Old Testament from Hebrew-Aramaic into Greek done by dispersed Jews in Egypt between 250 and 150 BC. The Septuagint was the Bible of the New Testament Church. The majority of the OT quotations in the NT are of the Septuagint including 51 of Paul's 93 quotations. The **Septuagint** has some errors, and is not inspired as the Hebrew. At times the NT writers did their own translations, at times they just quoted the accepted "translation." We can be assured that, as the **Septuagint** was used with confidence by the NT church, we can use our translations as well with confidence, recognizing that it is the originals that are inspired. Then too, though lower criticism, the determining of the text of the originals is not within the scope of our study, it is very possible that in places the Septuagint is based on better manuscripts than the Massoretic texts our Hebrew Bibles rely on the most.

The words of Jesus are given to us through the writers of the Gospels. Jesus doubtless was bilingual, but most likely taught in Aramaic most of the time. Perhaps where the Gospels differ over the wording of a saying of Jesus, it can be attributed in part to the fact each has done an independent translation, as well as the possibility that the quotations were edited and not necessarily intended to convey all that He said. The inspired words of the New Testament are in fact a translation of the words of God's Son. We can rest confidently in the assurance our translations are adequate and sufficient to convey God's truth to us.

5. Lower Criticism and the Preservation of the text:

The Printing press was not invented until many centuries after Christ, and in the intervening centuries scribal errors and variant readings crept into the manuscripts. Lower Criticism is the means by which the various manuscripts are examined and compared and the original text "recovered". It is significant to note how well preserved the text is. The Oldest manuscript of Isaiah is the one found in the Qumran Scrolls and it is remarkably like the Massoretic texts on which the English Bible has been based. F.F. Bruce says "In regard to their manuscript attestation the books of the Old and New Testaments are unparalleled among the literature that has come down to us from classical antiquity. Both in the abundance of this attestation and in the relatively short interval separating the earliest manuscripts from the original date of composition, the Bible is incomparably better served. If the multiplicity of Biblical manuscripts increases the sum total of scribal errors, it also increases the evidence by which these can be corrected and removed, and gives us all the confidence we could desire that the text of Holy Scripture has been preserved in its integrity from beginning to end." No major doctrine is threatened in any way by the variant readings, nor our confidence in any book or passage with the exceptions of part of John 8, I John 5:7,8 and part of Mark 16. Most variants are matters of spelling, word order and slight changes in words.