



The BibleKEY Correspondence Course

LESSON 4 - THE BIBLE: CHOOSING A VERSION

Lessons 2 & 3 provided a brief overview of the entire subject of Bible transmission down to the printing of the Revised Version and the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Only the manuscripts and versions of the greatest renown have been mentioned. Actually, there are today more than 700 in existence, and much more which were known to have at one time been in existence.

Since the turn of the century, numerous English versions and translations of the Bible have been made available for us. Shopping for a Bible today can be an overwhelming and almost frustrating experience for the sincere and conscientious bible student intent on making a correct choice. The big question is, which translation or version is best? Which one represents most accurately the original Word of God?

To begin with, we must sadly realize that there is no perfect English version. English is not the language in which the Bible was originally written. The "perfect" Bible would be the original manuscript written in the original language - Hebrew (Old Testament) or Greek (New Testament). Bibles in our possession today are quite removed from that, although, as we have seen, the preservation of accuracy down to our time has been generally remarkable.

HOW TO EVALUATE BIBLE VERSIONS

There are three basic criteria that must be applied in order to make an intelligent and enlightened choice:

1. The **type** of translation
2. The translator's **beliefs** - particularly **regarding inspiration**
3. The **underlying text** on which the translation is based

We will proceed in this lesson to examine these criteria one at a time so that you will be able to apply them in your personal choice of a bible version.

1. TYPE OF TRANSLATION

All English Bibles are translated according to one of four methods:

1. **Formal Correspondence method**
2. **Dynamic Equivalence method**
3. **Paraphrase method**
4. **Translational Compromise method**

Each of these methods have very distinct characteristics of translation that we need to be aware of when choosing a Bible version:

BibleKEY definition:

"MSS" = *manuscript (s)*

BibleKEY information:

PARTIAL LIST OF MODERN VERSIONS

King James Version
Revised Version
American Standard Version
Moffat Bible
Revised Standard Version
Berkeley Version
Jerusalem Bible
New King James Version
New English Bible
New American Bible
New American Standard Bible
The Living Bible
New International Version
Common Bible
New Jerusalem Bible
Revised English Bible
New Revised Standard Version
New American Study Bible
Good News Bible
New Testament in Modern Speech

BibleKEY fact:

“English is not the language in which the Bible was originally written”

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a) Characteristics of the Formal Correspondence method

- word-for-word translation (as accurately as receptor language will allow)
- closely follows the syntax of original language
- most objective type of translation
- best type for serious Bible study, when one desires to know the exact message of inspired scripture
- should also be best type for devotional purposes, since it most closely follows the original language

Examples of Bible versions based on the Formal Correspondence method:

King James Version; Revised Version; American Standard Version; Revised Standard Version; New American Study Bible; New King James Version; New Revised Standard Version

b) Characteristics of Dynamic Equivalence method

- meaning-for-meaning translation (meaning of original text is translated into what translator feels is an equivalent thought in the receptor language)
- leaves room for translator to transfer his or her own biases into the translated text
- many important inspired thoughts, teachings, terms, and phrases are lost in this process
- used extensively by the Bible Societies in non-English translations

Examples of Bible versions based on the Dynamic Equivalence method:

Good News Bible (also called Today's English Version); New English Bible

c) Characteristics of the Paraphrase method

- not a true translation, but merely putting something into different words
- paraphraser does not use the original language as a base, but paraphrases from a translation
- no systematic methodology, therefore very subjective to what paraphraser thinks and believes
- reproduces, not God's words, but what man thinks or wishes they were - e.g. John 1:1-2 (Living Bible) *"Before anything else existed, there was Christ, with God. He has always been alive and is himself God."* This is a distortion of the original phrasing of this passage. (Cp. with KJV, RSV, & NKJV)

BibleKEY definitions:

"receptor language" = *the language into which a version is being translated*

"syntax" = *the arrangement of and relationship among the words and phrases forming a sentence*

"objective" = *without prejudice*

"biases" = *prejudices (traditional viewpoints, beliefs)*

"subjective" = *resulting from personal feelings & opinions*

BibleKEY fact:

“*Formal correspondence method...best type for serious Bible study, when one desires to know the exact message of inspired scripture*”

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Examples of Bible versions based on the Paraphrase method:

New Testament in Modern Speech; Living Bible

d) Characteristics of the Translational Compromise method

- compromise between Formal Correspondence method and Dynamic Equivalence method
- resulting versions are very literal in their translations in some places, but in other places are very much paraphrased (from the original text)
- very difficult for the Bible student to discern when a rendering is literal and when it is not
 - e.g. Phil 2:8 - (NIV) "*Who, being in very nature God...*" - is a paraphrase; "*...did not consider equality with God something to be grasped...*" - is a literal translation (i.e. ***there is no consistency of method***)

Examples of Bible versions based on the Translational Compromise method:

New International Version; New Jerusalem Bible; Revised English Bible

2. TRANSLATOR'S BELIEFS

Another element which can seriously affect the accuracy of a version is the beliefs of the translators regarding the doctrine of inspiration. ***If translators do not firmly believe that ALL the Bible was given by Divine inspiration, the door is opened for them to be influenced by "higher criticism" - which can result in passages or sections of the Bible being left out.*** There may also be tendencies in the translation to *undermine* the doctrine of inspiration, or a tendency to include spurious readings which contradict other parts of the Bible.

Translators may also have other personal biases. ***Certainly a concerted effort was made to keep such biases, of whatever type they may be, from influencing the outcome of the text; but we must be aware of the possibility that the presence of biases in the mind of the translators could be a factor in influencing a decision between two or three possible renderings in a passage.*** Some versions include in the preface a statement with regard to the beliefs of the translator; most, however, do not. It is helpful to have such information, because if we are aware of the religious background of the translators of a text, we will be better prepared to look out for and identify places where translators may have been influenced by a religious bias...

There has been, in certain versions, an obvious trend towards "***liberalism***"; that is, ***expressing scriptural concepts and principles in much more liberal a manner than in the original language.***

BibleKEY definitions:

"spurious" = *not genuine, false*

"higher criticism" = *the analysis of Bible authenticity by so-called learned scholars, resulting in many varied theories and opinions - usually leaving out divine inspiration as a factor in the origin and authority of scripture*

"liberalism" = *expressing scriptural concepts and principles in much more liberal a manner than in the original language*

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The latest trend in some modern Bible translations is called "inclusive gender", which effectively changes the gender of the original to include women in roles that the original language had clearly indicated for men. (e.g. 1 Tim. 3:2,12 NRSV) In none of the original languages is there licence to do this.

3. UNDERLYING TEXT

The source text from which a version is translated should ideally be the most original, pure, and accurate that is possible to obtain. Not always is this principle followed with the translation of some modern versions. In certain cases the source used is that of a modern Greek and/or Hebrew manuscript.

It is therefore important to understand what is the underlying source text for whatever version you select for study or even casual reading. Look for the phrase "Textus Receptus" or "Received Text" in the introductory notes of a Bible. If it is indicated that the translation has used this text as its source, you can rest assured that the translation was derived from the best possible source.

Recommended Choices (listed in order of preference):

1. *King James Version (for serious study)**
2. *New King James Version**
3. *Revised Standard Version*
4. *Revised Version*
5. *New American Standard Bible*

**1 & 2 are about even as to recommendation, each having individual advantages and disadvantages as discussed below. The final choice in selecting between these two versions will ultimately have to come down to personal preference.*

Other suggestions and advice

- look for a Bible with marginal notes or footnotes giving various readings where applicable. A wide margin or interleaved Bible is desirable if you want to make personal study notes.
- the *King James Version* continues to be widely used for serious study purposes because almost all of the major Scripture reference books such as Strong's Concordance, Englishman's Hebrew and Greek Concordance, Thayer's Lexicon, Vine's Expository Dictionary, etc., are based on the text of the King James Version.
- the *New King James Version* is simply the King James Version in current English, and with most of the obvious textual errors corrected. Because of the changes, however, it may be more difficult to use some of the concordances and

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BibleKEY fact:

“ A wide margin or interleaved Bible is desirable if you want to make personal study notes. ”

BibleKEY information:

BIBLE LANGUAGE STUDY AIDS

Strong's Concordance
Englishman's Hebrew and Greek Concordance
Thayer's Lexicon
Nelson's Expository Dictionary (OT)
Vine's Expository Dictionary (NT)
Gesenius Hebrew Lexicon to the OT

NOTE: *Most of the above study aids can be found in public libraries.*

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lexicons based upon the older text of the KJV. Some of these concordances and lexicons have been revised for use with the NKJV. Try to obtain these if you feel more comfortable using the NKJV version.

- the **New International Version** is showing signs of fast becoming the most popular version almost to the exclusion of the King James Version. While this is unfortunate, it is not hopeless; *it simply means that the serious Bible student will have to become familiar with the shortcomings of the NIV and understand and mark those passages where the renderings are questionable.* Also, the recent publishing of the standard dictionaries and lexicons for use with the NIV will be of great assistance.
- in addition to a Bible based upon the Formal Correspondence method of translation (e.g. the **King James Version**), it is a good idea to have one of the less literal versions for comparative purposes, but not for serious study. Alternatively one might obtain a version that has alternate renderings in footnotes or in the margins.
- do not rely heavily on "study Bibles" except perhaps for reference purposes. The "study" is accomplished by professional clergymen and heavily slanted toward the ideas of orthodox religion. It is "canned" study, and as such tends to discourage personal study.
- just as one must compare scripture with scripture to arrive at the correct meaning of a passage, one must also be prepared to compare version with version to arrive at a correct conclusion as to the best Bible to suit our needs.

More intensive study of this subject is recommended to those who are so inclined. Such study has been made easier by the numerous works and writings of very capable and learned men; and the student will be benefited by acquiring the knowledge necessary to make the best use of the many scripture sources available to us.

To summarize all that has been discussed on this subject, it is interesting to observe a quote from the former director of the British museum which contains several of the most important ancient MSS; *"The Christian can take the whole Bible in his hand and say without fear or hesitation that he holds in it the true word of God, handed down without essential loss from generation to generation throughout the centuries."*

BibleKEY fact:

“ The increasing popularity of the New International Version means that the serious Bible student will have to become familiar with the shortcomings of the NIV and understand and mark those passages where the renderings are questionable ”

BibleKEY fact:

“ Just as one must compare scripture with scripture to arrive at the correct meaning of a passage, one must also be prepared to compare version with version to arrive at a correct conclusion as to the best Bible to suit our needs ”

NEXT LESSON: "PRINCIPLES OF BIBLE INTERPRETION "

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Name Mr/Mrs/Miss

Address Postal Code

* You may need an additional sheet for your answers if there is not enough space below. Your answers to the following questions will help you - and us - to determine how much you have discovered about your Bible. Please return this form in the envelope provided even if you are unable to answer all the questions. On receipt of it we will forward a further study, as well as some

1. What are the three basic criteria that must be applied when selecting a Bible Version?
 - a)
 - b)
 - c)

2. List the four methods of Bible Translation:
 - a)
 - b)
 - c)
 - d)

3. Which method results in a Bible version which is considered the best for serious Bible study?

4. Which method should be considered the least desirable? Why?

5. How might the beliefs of translators regarding inspiration of scripture affect the outcome of a translation?

6. What should we look for as the basic characteristics of the underlying text of a version?

7. Which versions are considered in this lesson to be "recommended choices"?

8. If circumstances dictate that the range of choices are restricted to the New International Version, what should one be prepared to do?

9. Why is it desirable for the Bible student not to rely heavily on "study Bibles"?