
QUESTION: Bible Translations...

There are often questions as to which translation of the Bible is best. English speakers or better stated readers are fortunate to have many good quality translations at their disposal. The predominant translation used at RCCC is the New International Version (NIV), due to its readability. The translators of the NIV have chosen to be quite conservative on their translation work. At times one may find some omitted sections which are those not consistent with the earlier manuscripts we currently use for translation work. A translation such as the KJV, which is certainly a valid translation, did their translation work based on the Textus Receptus (TR). This is an inferior text. We now have more and more accurate manuscripts of the Greek text with which to establish a better original. Some parts of the TR are not what the original authors wrote.

The real question one should ask is, "Which translation is best for me and my purposes?" To answer this question one must ask two questions. (1) What is my primary purpose or usage of the translation (i.e. personal study or public reading?) Then, (2) "Did the translators strive for 'formal equivalency' or 'dynamic equivalency?'" Formal equivalency seeks to remain as true to the original wording as possible, even if it makes for a harder to understand modern translation (i.e. NAS). Dynamic equivalency seeks to translate what the author has written as if they had been speaking our language (i.e. NIV). It must be noted that both are considered valid and acceptable translation methods. This is where most differences occur. If your purpose is personal study a version like the New American Standard (NAS) may be your choice. If your purpose is readability the New International Version (NIV) may be your choice.

I will not spend much time writing on the potential errors of any specific translation I would humbly reply that in my studies I have disagreed with a particular translation with the NIV, NAS, KJV, as well as the NLT and others. I have found scholars who support my opposition at these points, but I must admit there are those scholars who would defend the texts as well. Something is always lost in translation, but that does not mean that our translations are not good and since we do not have a complete collection of "true" originals we are at the mercy of our translators. I would use as an example the NIV as to the careful work engaged in compiling the translation. The NIV had a committee of distinguished Bible scholars from Canada, England, Australia, and the U.S. It certainly is an "international" version. Also, I personally know one of the translators of Acts for the NLT. I have also met many individuals who do translation work for other languages which currently do not have the Bible is their native tongue. One truth I believe stands clear, among all reputable translations and translators, all seem to do their job with the utmost respect to the original meaning and with the task of making it clear to modern readers.

In short, the question is always asked, "What version of the Bible is best?" There is no simple answer to this question. No English version of the Bible may rightly be considered final or absolute. This in no way marginalizes their being more than capable of presenting the words of life leading to salvation as well as that which is necessary to grow in our intimacy in Christ, community with other Believers, and influence on those who are yet to believe.

Again, let me reiterate, when choosing a translation the key question is what purpose is this translation going to be used to serve. Is the version for children or adults? Is a version desired for careful exegetical study or public reading? Is it for non-Christians or committed Christians? Almost every translation contains an introduction that, among other things, states the objective the translator or translators had in mind on the same basis. For instance, the NIV and NLT are both intended for public reading, where a translation like the KJV is commonly understood by scholars to not be a good choice for this purpose. The NAS is a great translation for study purposes. It is among the highest accepted by scholars today, but it would not be as suitable to public reading as the NIV and NLT.

I have mentioned that we here at RCCC as a majority use the NIV, but many other translations are used as well. In fact, in any given message various translations may be referred to in the hope of using the clearest translation to convey biblical truth. We do not typically use paraphrases, such as The Message, as our speaking text, but do find them helpful at times in offering a fresh "perspective" from a particular individual or paraphrasing team.

Let me encourage you to find a translation that works for you and dig into it often. After all, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16-17).