English versions of the Bible

Introduction

This guide gives a short account of the history of the Christian scriptures in English translation from the beginnings of English to the present day. In addition, I have included brief accounts of how translators work, and of the original documents from which modern language versions are made. I have included some sample passages from different versions as appendices, for purposes of study and comparison.

Early English versions

The Bible in English is almost as old as the English language. In fact, the scriptures are as old as written English. This is because the written form of English was produced expressly for the purpose of teaching about the Christian faith.

English developed from the languages spoken by the Germanic people (Angles, Saxons and Jutes) who settled, from the 5th century A.D., in what is now England. They did not write their languages apart from perhaps making marks on objects to serve as lucky charms or to show ownership (for this they would use the Germanic characters known as runes). The first extended written English texts were made by missionary priests, who spoke and wrote Latin. They adapted the Roman alphabet, adding the letters F (known as "ash") x ("eth") and z ("thorn") – though these letters are not used in English today (F corresponds to the vowel in ash; x and z are used interchangeably for both consonants represented by "th", as in "cloth" or "clothe"). The priests' purpose in writing was to produce English texts for a handful of educated and literate men to read aloud to the illiterate and largely pagan people whom they sought to bring into the church.

In producing the earliest English versions, the writers were faced with a task familiar to all Bible translators – how to name or describe things for which the language of translation has no equivalent term. In some cases they would introduce a word from Greek or Latin into the text, while elsewhere they would use a native English term or one compounded from English roots to serve their purpose. So Greek episkopos (literally "one who looks over" – a straight synonym for Latin "supervisor") was used as a title for a leader. Over time the plosive "p" became a "b", the initial vowel was dropped, the "sk" became a "sh" (these sounds were barely distinguished by many speakers) and the ending was lost – giving us our modern "bishop". In fact by the time that English was first written most of these changes had already happened, and the noun took the form "biscop".

From the Old English period to the work of Tyndale early in the 16th century, all English versions of the Scriptures were based, not on Hebrew and Greek originals, but the Latin version of St Jerome, known as the Vulgate. Old English is clearly the original form of the same language spoken today, and we can trace its continual change in the written records. But the changes that took place over the first thousand years of spoken English are very great. To most modern readers Old English (the general name for the language of Angles, Saxons and Jutes) is a foreign tongue. It has an unfamiliar lexicon and substantially different grammar.

Old English versions

The very earliest surviving texts from the Old English period are verse paraphrases of biblical narrative. Caedmon, a monk of Whitby in North Yorkshire, made these around A.D. 670. Aldhelm (640-709), bishop of Sherborne in Dorset, translated the Psalms, while Bede (673-735), the celebrated monk of Jarrow, translated John's Gospel. King Alfred (849-901) translated portions of Exodus and Acts, as well as some of the Psalms. Aelfric (955-1020), abbot of Eynsham in Oxfordshire, translated the books from Genesis to Judges. (These are sometimes known as the Heptateuch).

From the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries come the Anglo-Saxon Gospels. Elsewhere Latin versions, such as the Lindisfarne Gospels and the Rushworth Gospels (from the late 7th century) had Old English running translations ("glosses") between the lines – though these "interlinear" glosses were added later. The Rushworth Gloss (ca. 975) is written as continuous prose, and may be the earliest surviving example of English bible translation.

Wycliffe

John Wycliffe (or Wyclif, ca. 1330-84) is credited with the first English version of the entire Bible. Wycliffe was a reformer, who believed that knowing the Bible was essential for reform. Wycliffe and his followers first set about establishing the best Latin text, which they translated into what we now call Middle English.

There are two versions of the Bible associated with Wycliffe. The first version was largely the work of Wycliffe's follower, Nicholas of Hereford, though another person, who may (according to F.F. Bruce, in The Books and the Parchments, p. 213) have been Wycliffe himself, did much of the translation. This version was a very literal rendering of the Latin of the Vulgate. After Wycliffe's death, another follower, John Purvey, produced a more idiomatic version, which appeared in 1397. Purvey understood how a literal reading could alter the intended meaning.

In 1 Samuel 2.10 the text of the Vulgate reads: dominum formidabunt adversarii eius. The first Wycliffite version gives this as: "The Lord shulen drede the adversaries of hym". This keeps the Latin word order but overlooks the fact that Latin is an inflected language. (An inflection is a change to the form of a word, to show how it operates within the grammar of a longer structure, such as a phrase or clause.) The inflections show that "adversaries" is the subject of the verb "drede", and "the Lord" is the object of the verb. In the second Wycliffite version Purvey rightly renders this text as "Adversaries of the Lord shulen drede hym." (In contemporary English this might appear as, "God's enemies shall fear him"). In Middle English (and modern English) most subject-object distinctions are shown by word order only, because nouns are not inflected (though pronouns are). But where nouns are inflected to show object and subject case (which is what happens in Latin), their position in a sentence is not fixed.

In the "General Prologue" to the second translation Purvey notes that it is best "to translate after the sentence and not only after the words". He sees that is, that meaning is found not only in isolated lexemes, but also in structures. (King Alfred made a similar point in explaining, in the Preface to his translation of Gregory's Pastoral Care, why it is good to translate "hwilum word be worde, hwilum andgiet of andgiete" – sometimes word for word, sometimes meaning for meaning).

Literate people in 14th century England were rare – and if they could read at all, they could probably understand Latin. But the Wycliffite versions gave an English text for reading aloud. And for 150 years this was the only English Bible to be had. Early in the 16th century Murdoch Nisbet produced a version in Scots (a dialect of English). And Jerome's Vulgate was not unassailable: scholars who knew Hebrew and Greek had already begun to write commentaries to correct the saint's errors. One of these, Nicholas of Lyra, had proved especially helpful to Purvey.

In the late middle ages came the revival of learning – as scholars learned Hebrew and Greek, so they became more expert in studying the ancient manuscripts. And the invention of printing spread the new learning ever more widely. A Hebrew Bible was printed at Cremona in 1488, and Erasmus of Rotterdam published his printed Greek New Testament in 1516. In 1522 Martin Luther translated the Greek New Testament into German.

Tyndale and his successors

Tyndale

William Tyndale is known sometimes as the "Father of the English Bible". He was the first person to make an English version by translating from the original languages – Greek for the New Testament and Hebrew for the Old. His influence can be found even in modern translations that preserve his prose expressions. Wycliffe's complaint had in part been a protest about the way that the church (as an institution) had replaced the plain teaching of the Bible with its own traditions. And this quarrel persisted into the Reformation where the Pope's Canon Law was held up as an authority as much as, or more than, God's law (the Scriptures). Tyndale's boast was that, if God should spare him, he would "ere many yeares…cause a boye that dryveth the plough" to know more of the scripture than his opponents. Depending on how we interpret "ere many yeares" we can say with certainty that Tyndale fulfilled his prediction.

Tyndale was born around 1494 in Gloucestershire. He studied at Oxford, taking his M.A. in 1515, and Cambridge. He was a great enthusiast for the new learning but was unable to gain permission in England to begin translating the scriptures. He moved to the Continent, living in Wittenberg, Hamburg and Cologne, where the city senate barred him from printing his work. He moved to Worms and in 1526 Tyndale's complete English New Testament appeared. Thousands of copies were printed, but in England the translation was banned. Cuthbert Tunstall (or Tonstal) Bishop of London, bought as many as he could, burning them in public. Sir Thomas More, the Lord Chancellor, condemned the translation. Tyndale moved to Antwerp, where he began to translate the Old Testament from the Hebrew. In 1530 he published the Pentateuch (the five books of Moses from Genesis to Deuteronomy) and in 1531 Jonah. In 1535 Tyndale was arrested. He was imprisoned, tried and, in 1536, executed by strangling, and burnt at the stake.

Coverdale

In 1535, the year of Tyndale's arrest, Miles Coverdale, later Bishop of Exeter, produced a complete English Bible in print. Coverdale did not work from the original languages but used Tyndale's English and Luther's and Zwingli's German translations, along with two Latin versions.

Matthew

The first Bible to be authorized appeared in 1537, published by Richard Grafton and Edward Whitchurch, two booksellers of London. This was a folio Bible "truly and purely translated into Englysh" by one Thomas Matthew. "Thomas Matthew" was a pseudonym – John Rogers, a friend of Tyndale, edited this translation. Rogers used the printed versions of Tyndale's Pentateuch and New Testament, and Tyndale's manuscript (handwritten) translations of the books from Joshua to 2 Chronicles. For the rest of the Old Testament and the Apocrypha, Rogers used the Coverdale translation.

Taverner

Richard Taverner was a lawyer, clerk of the signet to King Henry VIII. In 1539 he published a revision of the Matthew Bible. This was the first Bible to be completely printed in England. One edition of the Taverner Bible was published in parts, so that poor people, unable to afford the whole book, could buy one or more sections. Taverner was a careful scholar and he made changes to Tyndale's work, which later versions have retained.

The Great Bible

This was a revision, by Miles Coverdale, of the Matthew Bible. Thomas Cromwell, Secretary to King Henry VIII and Vicar General commissioned this version, which was to be placed in every church in England. It was printed in Paris in 1539. Because of the size of the pages (23 x 28 cm) this version was known as the Great Bible. Subsequent editions appeared in 1540 and 1541, with a preface by Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury. These bibles, published under the archbishop's patronage, were the first to bear the words: "This is the Bible appointed to the use of the churches."

The Geneva Bible

From 1553 to 1558 Queen Mary's reign in England saw a ban on all printing of English Bibles. Protestant leaders sought refuge in Europe, where translation continued. In Geneva, William Whittingham and others produced a revised English New Testament in 1557 and a complete Bible in 1560, dedicating it to Queen Elizabeth who had now succeeded her sister.

The Geneva Bible was designed for use by ordinary people – where the Great Bible was a huge and unwieldy volume, suitable for church lecterns, the Geneva Bible was small and portable. Its Roman type was easy to read. It had the great convenience of numbered verses, each of which was set off as a fresh paragraph. It also used italic type for any word in the translation, which had no corresponding term in the original Hebrew and Greek.

This Bible quickly became the people's choice, running to more than 150 editions. This was the Bible used by Shakespeare and later by Bunyan. In 1620 it travelled to the New World with the Pilgrim Fathers. In 1579 a Scottish edition appeared, dedicated to James VI (later James I of England).

The Geneva Bible contained marginal notes and comments, partly to explain the translation and variant readings in the source manuscripts. Many of the comments were marked by hostility to the church establishment, especially to bishops.

The Bishops' Bible

The Geneva Bible gave the English church a problem – its comments represented the extreme Protestantism of Calvin, and it was outspoken in attacking bishops, monks and other leaders and dignitaries of the church. But it was so good as a translation, that it could not be ignored. Queen Elizabeth, meanwhile, had ordered that the English bible be placed in every church. This was a revision of the Great Bible, published in 1568, by a committee led by Matthew Parker, Archbishop of Canterbury. This Bible was known as the Bishops' Bible. In 1570 the Convocation of Canterbury ordered that it be placed in all cathedrals, thus making it the second Authorized Version. The Bishops' Bible used some of the interpretations found in the Geneva Bible, from which also it took the division of the text into verses. A second edition appeared in 1572, with extensive revisions to the rendering of the New Testament. The Bishops' Bible was published in twenty editions up to 1606. It did not replace the Geneva Bible as the people's choice, but in its revised form it was to be the basis of the King James Version.

The Rheims-Douai Version (NT 1582, OT 1609)

The Catholic church had persecuted Tyndale for wishing to put the Bible into the hands of the laity (people outside the priesthood). It would be many years before this view would change, but in time the church authorities saw the need for an English Bible for Roman Catholics. In the reign of Queen Elizabeth, many Roman Catholics left England, among them, William Allen of Oriel College, Oxford. He set up a college to train Catholic priests. The college was first located in Douai, in Flanders, but in 1578 moved to Rheims, returning later to Douai. Gregory Martin led a group of scholars from the college, who used the Latin Vulgate to publish an English New Testament in Rheims. This appeared in 1582. The Old Testament was published in Douai in 1609.

The Rheims-Douai Version is markedly inferior to the various Protestant and Anglican translations of the time, but did at last give English-speaking Roman Catholics a Bible to read. In places the translators preferred Latinisms to more vernacular readings. Among these are such terms as: "Azymes", "parasceve of the pasch", "the bread of proposition", "exinanited", "odible to God", "longanimitie", "archisynagogue", "commersation", "contristate", "donanes", "agnition", "superedified", "prefinition of worlds" and "scenopegia". The translators recognized the difficulty of such terms for the reader, in supplying a glossary of 58 of their Latinisms.

The King James Version

The Bible has been rendered into thousands of languages. These versions all represent some kind of compromise between the attempt to give a literal equivalence to words and phrases in the ancient manuscripts and the desire to create an intelligible text. It sometimes happens that a translator is also a gifted speaker or writer, so that the new text he or she creates has features not present in the source documents.

This is generally recognized to be the case with the King James Version of the Bible. This Bible was, for its time, a very accurate translation in respect of its scholarship. But it is also pleasing as an original work of English prose and poetry. And it remains a challenge to those who belittle the work of committees.

The King James Version became a standard, not only in terms of its popularity with English-speaking people, but also as a model for subsequent translations – the Revised Version, the American Standard Version, the Revised Standard Version and the New Revised Standard Version.

Among many considerations for would-be translators is the situation in which a text will be read. Most books today are written for private individual (usually silent) reading. This was not the case with the King James Version of the Bible. The translators knew that they were producing a text for public reading aloud. But they made much use of the work of Tyndale, whose great concern was chiefly to produce a text that ordinary people could understand.

The King James Version (1611)

The need for a new translation

In 1603 King James VI of Scotland came, as James I, to the throne of England. Reformers from within the Church of England presented him with the Millenary Petition, requesting a new English translation. The church was divided between Puritans and other Reformed groups on one side and conservative and pro-Catholic groups on the other. To resolve their differences, as he thought, James convened a conference, which was held, in February 1604, at Hampton Court.

At the Hampton Court Conference, the Puritan Dr. John Rainolds (or Reynolds) the President of Corpus Christi College, Oxford proposed that a new translation be made. To this the king readily agreed, insisting that it be "without any marginal notes". James was not objecting to textual notes, explaining difficulties in the translation, but controversial comments on the implication of the scripture. These appeared in Tyndale's version and the Geneva Bible, as well as in the Rheims-Douai Version. Here are some examples:

- Tyndale: "The Pope's bull slayeth more than Aaron's calf". Note to Exodus 32.28.

- Geneva: Jehu's command that Jezebel should be thrown down from her window was given "by the mocion of the Spirit of God, yt her blood shulde be shed, that had shed the blood of innocents, to be a spectacle and example of God's judgements to all tyrants". Note to 2 Kings 9.33.

- Rheims-Douai: "Simon Magus more religious than the Protestants". Note to Acts 8.

Readers offended by their partisan marginal notes might be unwilling to see the merits of Tyndale's and the Geneva translations.

How the translation was made

The work of translation was divided up among 54 translators, of whom 48 are named in surviving records. These were organized in six companies: two met at Oxford, two at Cambridge and two at Westminster. Of the six groups, three worked on the Old Testament, two on the New and one on the Apocrypha. They began work in 1606 and produced their first version in 1611.

Each company was to consider the work of the others. They were to resolve differences as far as possible by correspondence. Any outstanding differences were to be left to the end of the translation, and resolved by a smaller group. This was formed of six members – one representative from each of the two groups in the three centres – and spent nine months in completing the translation and editing the work. Dr. Thomas Bilson, Bishop of Winchester, and Dr. Myles Smith, Canon of Hereford (later Bishop of Gloucester) oversaw the printing. Myles Smith wrote a preface, "The Translators to the Reader". A dedication was added, "To the Most High and Mighty Prince James". This Bible has long been known as the Authorized Version, perhaps because of its royal origin. But there is no evidence that it ever was authorized by Parliament or Convocation, as the Great Bible and the Bishops' Bible had been.

In 1577 Christopher Barker became the Royal Printer. His patent gave him a monopoly on printing all Bible and Testaments in England. His son, Robert Barker, inherited this patent, and it was he who oversaw the collation, revision and printing of the King James Version, of which the first edition, in 1611, ran to some 20,000 copies.

The KJV's principles of translation

The translators agreed on a set of fifteen rules to guide them in their work. The first rule was that they would use the text of the Bishops' Bible, altering this "as little…as the truth of the original will permit" – technically the King James Version was a revision of the 1602 edition of the Bishops' Bible. But they were allowed to use other translations as they saw fit, and the fourteenth rule lists the permitted translations – Tyndale, Matthew, Coverdale, the Great Bible and the Geneva Bible.

The translators also used foreign versions, old and new translations into Latin, and Hebrew glosses – anything to help them discover the meaning of the original Hebrew and Greek text.

Another problem was how to translate terms for which there was no vernacular English equivalent. The Puritans had favoured using common lexis in a new sense, rendering "baptism" as "washing" and "Church" as "congregation". For this there is good reason – over time these terms (in being foreign and very old) had acquired an exclusive almost magical quality, whereas in the Greek New Testament, the writers had simply used the everyday language which was the common tongue of the Roman Empire. But the King James translators recognized that these "old Ecclesiastical words" were now acceptable to English ears. On the other hand they rejected the tendency of the Rheims-Douai translators to include Anglicized borrowings from the Latin versions, such as "azymes, tunike, rational, holocausts, prepuce, pasche, and a number of such like, whereof their late translation is full". (Interestingly, several of these terms are now widely used in modern English, though not necessarily in the sense in which the Rheims-Douai writers used them.)

Is it best always to render a given word or phrase in the original Hebrew or Greek by the same English equivalent? To do so tells the English reader something about the original documents, which would not otherwise appear. To do otherwise makes it easier to produce a translation that reads well in the language of translation. The translators of the King James Version took this latter course, which they justify in their Preface:

> "For is the kingdome of God become words or syllables? why should wee be in bondage to them if we may be free, vse one precisely when wee may vse another no lesse fit, as commodiously."

The translators of the Revised Version reversed this policy, in the interests of scholarly accuracy.

Tyndale's influence is massive. He had been the first to begin the work of translation, in spite of opposition from the state, which now promoted the task. Notwithstanding Tyndale's persecution, his translation had been readily used by Coverdale, and found its way into subsequent versions, especially the Bishops' Bible. According to the New Oxford Annotated Bible (article on English Versions of the Bible) some 60% of the English Bible was in its final form before the King James Version. And at least a third of the King James Version New Testament uses Tyndale's exact wording, while the rest keeps to Tyndale's underlying structure.

The style of the King James Version

The King James translators were men with great experience of public speaking. They sought to produce the best possible version for public reading – that is, they wrote for the ear, rather than for the eye. Modern students of past texts can easily overlook this, as we think that a normal society is a literate society. But until the 19th century most people in England were technically illiterate. We must not exaggerate this, either, and suppose that only a tiny handful of wealthy men could read – we can find clues in old texts which explicitly refer to this, like Shakespeare's plays (in Romeo and Juliet, Capulet's servant cannot read but his master doesn't realize this when he sends him out with a list of invitations; in A Midsummer Night's Dream, Peter Quince, a carpenter, not only reads, but writes, too.)

Professor David Crystal writes of the style:

> "The translators were consciously conservative, and frequently introduced archaism and traditional readings, especially from Tyndale and Coverdale. The resonances of the past were strong in their choices. And perhaps most important of all, they listened to final drafts of the translation being read aloud, verse by verse, in order to assess their rhythm and balance."

Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language, p. 64, The King James Bible

Perhaps they did as Professor Crystal suggests, though they may well have been able to "hear" these qualities as they would strike listeners, without having literally to read them aloud – as poets and composers have done for centuries.

Many commentators have noticed the cadences and rhythms of the King James Version. In translating Proverbs 3.17 (a verse which praises wisdom), we find in Coverdale, the Great Bible and the Bishops' Bible: "Her wayes are pleasant wayes and all her paths are peaceable". In the Geneva Bible this becomes: "Her wayes are wayes of pleasure and all her paths prosperitie." In the King James Version the verse is given as: "Her wayes are wayes of pleasantnesse, and all her paths are peace".

John Carey takes a somewhat dissenting view of the King James Version, noting that it is more literary than literal in using a "pleasant variation of roughly synonymous words":

> "When we compare it with Tyndale we frequently find that the directness of common speech in the earlier version has been replaced by a dignity which corresponds to no living medium. Tyndale's snake says to Eve, 'Tush ye shall not dye' (KJV. 'Ye shall not surely die')…'The Lorde was with Joseph', in Tyndale, 'and he was a luckie felowe' (KJV. 'a prosperous man)…The popular is made decorous in the later version, so that the sense of real life drops out of the narrative…The [King James Version's] fondness for the rotund sentiment, the polished rhythm, fills it with phrases that have become clichés."

English Poetry and Prose 1540-1674, ed. Christopher Ricks (Sphere History of Literature in the English Language, Volume 4), Chapter 12: Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century prose, p. 352.

In preferring Tyndale to the King James Version, John Carey disagrees with millions of readers over many centuries. But his description of the differences is certainly accurate. In a way, the King James Version is symptomatic of a change in English literary style (in prose, poetry and poetic drama) from the simple to the complex, from the direct to the inflated, from the vernacular to the literary. Whether, or how far, it caused this, is another question. But we see the tendency by comparing the devotional poems of Herbert or Marvell to those of Milton, or by comparing Shakespeare's plays to the reworked versions produced by Dryden and others. This change begins some time in the 16th century, but gathers momentum in the 17th and reaches its zenith some time early in the 18th century, when a reaction sets in, which leads literary writing back to a more "natural" style. (This reaction perhaps starts with Blake and various continental writers; for an explicit statement of it as regards writing in English, we should turn to the Preface to the Lyrical Ballads of Wordsworth and Coleridge in 1798.)

What are the objective features of the style of the King James Version? They are found both in the writers' vocabulary and their arrangement of sentences.

Lexicon

The writers do not use large numbers of new words, and the total number of different words is some 8,000 (Shakespeare uses more than double this number).

Grammar

Here the King James Version is conservative if not archaic. The archaic or conservative forms fall into some clear categories:

- verbs often appear in forms which were already falling out of use at the time of the translation – as digged (for "dug"), gat and gotten (for "got"), bare (for "bore") spake (for "spoke") clave (for "cleft" or cleaved) and wist (for "knew")

- finite verbs in the third person and present tense use the –(e)th rather than –s ending

- archaic forms of nouns appear – such as brethren ("brothers"), kine ("cattle") and twain ("two")

- second person plural pronouns preserve the older distinction between subjective ye and objective you (as in John 15.16, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you")

- the masculine possessive form (his) is used rather than neuter its – (as in "if the salt has lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted")

- prepositions are used in senses different from those in modern English

- the indefinite article is used in the form an before nouns which start with h ("an hundred, an helpe, an heap, an Hebrew")

- word order is often in an archaic form, with adjectives following nouns and adverbs following verbs; negatives rarely use the do form, so we find "they knew him not" for "they did not know him", but Shakespeare, twenty years earlier, uses both constructions

Revisions of the King James Version

The King James Version went through many editions. Because each of these required the printer to set up the type, it was easy for changes to appear which were not the work of the King James Revisers. Even the first edition of 1611 had faults – for example Matthew 23.24, which Tyndale and successive versions (correctly) gave as "strain out a gnat", became "strain at a gnat". The 1614 edition has some 400 differences from the original King James text.

Perhaps the most notorious of these changes was the omission in the 1631 edition of the word "not" from the seventh commandment, which led this Bible to be nicknamed the "Wicked Bible". The printers, Robert Barker and associates, were fined £300 and instructed to suppress all thousand copies of this edition. Ten years later, they made more or less the same mistake (omitting a critical word, albeit with less alarming results) in publishing the 1641 edition. This omitted "no" from Revelation 21.1, so that the verse read "And there was more sea".

The most accurate editions, in giving the text the King James revisers intended, were the Cambridge editions of 1629 and 1638. In 1701, the editors added dates in the margin, based on the chronologies of the learned Archbishop James Ussher – but these are now regarded as wildly inaccurate. In 1769 Benjamin Blayney of Oxford produced a careful and comprehensive revision, the product of four years of work.

18th century versions

Challoner (NT 1738, OT 1749)

Richard Challoner, the Roman Catholic vicar-apostolic of the London district, made a revision of the Rheims-Douai Version, publishing his New Testament in 1738, and the whole Bible in several editions from 1749 to 1752. In 1810 the Challoner revision of the Rheims-Douai Bible was authorized for use in the USA.

Wesley (1755)

The Bible of John Wesley was a revision of the King James Version for "plain unlettered men, who understand only their Mother Tongue". Wesley used a Greek text different from that used in 1611, and his version has some 12,000 variations from the King James text.

Harwood (1768)

Edward Harwood is at the opposite extreme from Wesley. Harwood wrote at a time when many educated people believed that literature should have a style markedly different from everyday speech, with its own lexicon and usages or "poetic diction". One feature of this style is a preference for Latinate or classical lexis rather than vernacular English words. Another is a liking for abstractions rather than concrete nouns. In practice, this means verbal inflation – Harwood uses several words where other versions have one.

Harwood hoped that "men of cultivated and improved minds, especially YOUTH, could be allured by the innocent stratagem of a modern style, to read a book, which is now, alas! too generally neglected and disregarded by the young and gay". He aspired to a style of "freedom, spirit and elegance".

To see this in practice, we can compare Harwood's rendering of Matthew 5.17 with that of the King James Version. The KJV has:

> Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.

Harwood gives this as:

> Do not think that the design of my coming into the world is to abrogate the law of Moses and the prophets – I am only come to supply their deficiencies, and to give mankind a more complete and perfect system of morals

Where the Lord's Prayer has the brief "give us this day our daily bread", Harwood has:

> As thou hast hitherto most mercifully supplied our wants, deny us not the necessaries and conveniencies of life, while thou art pleased to continue us in it.

In the first of these two examples, Harwood uses 42 words in place of 22, while in the second he turns 7 into 27. But the reader will see that Harwood has not merely glossed the text into more words – he adds things, which are not in the original, but which he thinks it implies, as with his gloss on fulfilling the law, which he understands as supplying deficiencies and giving "mankind a more complete and perfect system of morals".

Blayney (1769)

Benjamin Blayney was an Oxford scholar, who spent four years revising the King James Version. The Oxford Companion to the Bible claims (p. 760) that his is the "most careful and comprehensive revision" of the KJV.

Alexander (Pentateuch 1785)

Alexander Alexander was a British Jew who published one of the earliest Jewish Bibles in English.

19th century versions

Thomson (1808)

Charles Thomson was an American businessman and politician, and secretary of the Continental Congress. He spent some twenty years translating the bible from the Greek, using the Septuagint for the Old Testament. His was the first English New Testament produced in the USA

Leeser (OT 1853)

Isaac Leeser was a rabbi who produced an English translation of the Jewish Bible (the Old Testament), which has become the standard Bible for English-speaking Jews in the USA. Three years later, in 1848, Leeser and a local Episcopalian minister, Joseph Jacquette, published a masoretic (pointed) Hebrew edition of the entire Hebrew Bible, Biblia Hebraica, the first of its kind to be printed in America. In 1853, Leeser completed his English translation of the entire Hebrew Bible, known popularly as "The Leeser Bible." In 1857 he issued a second (folio-size) edition of this Bible.

Young (1862)

Robert Young was an Edinburgh bookseller, known for his Analytical Concordance to the Bible. His 1862 translation is a literal version, almost a word-for-word equivalent of the original. Young's Literal Translation, as it is known, was revised in 1887 and 1898.

Smith (1876)

Julia Smith was an American whose translation of the Bible uses, as far as possible, the same English term for every Hebrew and Greek word. (In this she differs from the practice of the KJV translators). Very oddly she uses the future tense in English where the Hebrew has imperfect tenses, so, in Genesis 1.3, we read:

> And God will say there shall be light, and there will be light.

Spurrel (OT 1885)

Helen Spurrel began to study Hebrew after her 50th birthday. Her translation uses the consonantal text, and disregards the vowel points found in the Masoretic text.

Fenton (NT 1895, NT 1903)

Ferrar Fenton was an English businessman. He claimed of his translation, that it was "the most accurate…ever made, not only in words, but in editing, spirit and sense". Fenton's translation was very successful, a new edition appearing as late as 1944. Here is part of Fenton's own account of the translation:

> "In the year 1853 there was inspired into my mind, by what appeared a mere accident, a resolve to study the Bible absolutely in its original languages, to ascertain what its writers actually said and taught.... I at once threw myself into the stream of the suggestion and registered a vow that I would never again read the Gospels, or Christian Documents of our faith, in any language but Greek, until I had learned to think in that tongue and it had become as familiar to me as the diction of an English newspaper…

> "I am deeply convinced that, if the Sacred Scriptures are again made clearly intelligible to the whole of our race, by being translated absolutely afresh from the Hebrew and Greek into the same style and diction as our current literature, our people will again see their Divine teachings with the delight and devoted faith their forefathers did in the days of the Tudors, and from that faith, and its inspiration, will spring a harvest of genius like that which ennobled the heroic reign of Elizabeth."

The Revised Version (NT 1881, OT 1885)

Brief history of the translation

In the centuries that followed the appearance of the King James Version, biblical scholarship made huge strides forward. With the discovery and circulation of better and older manuscripts came better understanding of the ancient languages in which they were first written. Scholars also realized that there was no obviously "right" textual reading in many parts of the Bible, but found reasons to differ from the King James translators in deciding the best reading among various possibilities. Of course new discoveries may shed further light on this in the future. And it is beset by difficulties – does the translator use the most common reading, the one found in the oldest manuscript, one that seems to make the best sense or some other reading?

In 1870 the Convocation of Canterbury supported a motion from Bishop Wilberforce to revise the New Testament. The motion, amended to include both Testaments, was passed, and the work begun. Canterbury created a committee to start the work. Its first move was to invite the Province of York to share in the Revision. York rejected the invitation, and the Canterbury committee issued a report, recommending that two companies be formed, one for each of the Testaments. Although these mostly were made up of Anglicans, they included Presbyterians, Baptists, Congregationalists, Methodists and one Unitarian.

The New Testament company spent ten years on its work, issuing its revision in 1881. The Old Testament company took fourteen years, and published its revision in 1885. Ten years later, in 1895, the revised Apocrypha appeared, and in 1901 a US version was published. This was the American Standard Edition, now commonly known as the American Standard Version. The US translation removed some archaic forms from the Revised Version, along with expressions peculiar to British usage in English.

The translators' approach

In terms of its accuracy, the Revised Version (RV) is generally thought to be an improvement on the King James Version. But it has not been so well received for its literary style. In defending the Revised Version, we should note that the literary qualities of the King James Version are not present in the original Hebrew and Greek manuscripts, either. (This is a generalization: those who know classical literary Greek judge some of the books to be well written – for example, those written by Saint Luke.)

The editors of the Revised Version departed from the practice of the King James translators in using the same English word consistently to represent any term in the original manuscripts, so far as the sense would allow. They also set out poetry with appropriate line-breaks, to distinguish it from prose.

There is less consistency, perhaps, between the testaments in the Revised Version than in the King James Bible. In the RV the New Testament is regarded as an inferior and over-literal rendering, which pedantically tries to represent an exact English equivalent of the Greek original, without being always sensitive to English idiom. The RV Old Testament and Apocrypha are less pedantically exact, and retain more of the fluency of the original.

Of course, neither of these is simply better than the other as an approach. To create an English Bible for the ordinary reader, the approach of the Old Testament company is more helpful. But for the scholar who wants an English gloss from which to develop an understanding of manuscripts in ancient languages, then the method of the New Testament company is more suitable.

Assessing the RV

The Revised Version has never achieved great popularity, except perhaps among scholars. The traditionalist prefers the elegance and majesty of the King James Version. But as an attempt to render the text in contemporary English, the Revised Version did not go far enough. The 20th century saw many new translations, which combined textual accuracy with a good sense of English idiom. And the work of the Revised Version led, in the USA, to the creation of groups that have since produced what is arguably the standard for modern readers in the Revised Standard Version and its latest revision, the New Revised Standard Version.

Early 20th century versions

Weymouth (1902)

Richard Francis Weymouth (1822-1902) was a fellow of University College in London and Headmaster of Mill Hill School. His New Testament in Modern Speech was published after his death in 1902. Weymouth wanted to produce a version that ordinary people could read. Weymouth wrote for private reading, not for public worship.

Moffatt (NT 1913, OT 1924)

James Moffatt (1870-1944) was an ecclesiastical historian from Glasgow, where he was Professor of Church History at the University between 1915 and 1927. Between 1927 and 1939 he taught at Union Theological Seminary in New York. In 1901 he included a version of the New Testament in his book, The Historical New Testament, published in 1901. In 1913 he published The New Testament: a New Translation, and in 1924 his version of the Old Testament appeared. In 1935 Moffatt published a revision of his translation of the whole Bible.

Holy Scriptures according to the Masoretic text (OT 1917)

This is a Jewish Bible produced by a group of scholars under the leadership, until his death in 1901, of Marcus Jastrow. This version is known, after its publishers, as the Jewish Publication Society Bible, and was the standard Bible for English-speaking Jews in the USA until recent times.

Goodspeed (NT 1923, OT 1939) and Powis Smith (OT 1927)

Edgar Johnson Goodspeed (1871-1962) was an American scholar from Illinois, who taught at the University of Chicago. Goodspeed helped show that the New Testament was written in a non-literary variety of everyday Greek. He translated The New Testament: An American Translation (1923), and many books to explain the Bible. Goodspeed's translation was made for US readers.

J.M. Powis Smith published a translation of the Old Testament in 1927. In 1935, this was published with Goodspeed's New Testament to form The Bible, an American Translation. Goodspeed translated the Apocrypha in 1938, and in 1939 The Complete Bible: an American Translation came out.

Bible in Basic English (NT 1940, OT 1949)

This translation uses a simplified form of English – "basic" standing for "British American Scientific International Commercial". This has a reduced lexicon of 850 words, compiled by a linguist (C.K. Ogden) to be an international variety of English. This variety was used in the New Testament translation. A committee, chaired by S.H. Hooke extended this lexicon with another hundred words and fifty words for special meanings in the Bible, and this was used to produce a complete Bible in 1949.

The New Testament of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (1941)

The Roman Catholic churches of the USA revised Challoner's version of the Rheims-Douai New Testament in 1941. This work later led to the appearance, in 1970, of the New American Bible.

The Revised Standard Version

The American Standard Version of 1901 was a variant of the Revised Version, following the preferences of scholars in the USA and replacing particularly British forms. In 1928 the International Council of Religious Education acquired the copyright of the American Standard Version. This council was made up of the various boards of education and publication of the churches of North America.

This council set up a committee of scholars whose task was to decide on future revisions – whether these were desirable, and, if so, what would be the extent of such revisions. In 1937, the council authorized a revision. The scholars on the committee worked in two sections, one for each of the testaments. The Bible they produced was meant to be a standard Bible, in the King James tradition, for readers and speakers of English. Accordingly, they named it the Revised Standard Version. In dropping "American" from the title they make a claim to produce a more or less universal standard English text. This is borne out by their work – the Revised Standard Version is free of regional and national idiosyncrasies. The style is dignified but clear – and allows both for reading aloud and private study.

The Revised Standard Version (NT 1946, OT 1952)

The New Testament in the Revised Standard Version appeared first, in 1946. It was followed, six years later, by the Old Testament in 1952 and the Apocryphal and Deuterocanonical books in 1957. In including these books, the translators produced the first English version of the Bible officially authorized for use by all the principal Christian churches – Protestant, Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Anglican.

Once this task had been achieved, there remained a question as to when this version, too, should be revised and updated. In 1974, the Policies Committee of the Revised Standard Version decided to revise the RSV – and the New Revised Standard Version was published in 1990.

The new version can justly claim to be a standard Bible, because it is the fruit of the most expert scholarship, which continually makes use of new discoveries of ancient manuscripts and methods of interpreting them.

It also can claim to be a standard because of its style – not "the American idiom of the mid-twentieth century but good literary English of a quality that is acknowledged as standard on both sides of the Atlantic", according to F.F. Bruce in The Books and the Parchments (Chapter 18, "The English Bible").

Revised Standard Version Common Bible (1973)

The Revised Standard Version appeared in Catholic editions from 1965. The Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha received the imprimatur from Cardinal Cushing of Boston, in 1966. After its 1971 revision, the RSV appeared in an ecumenical edition. This was the Common Bible. Protestants, Catholics and Orthodox approved it. For this reason it can claim to be the standard Bible for all Christians.

The New Revised Standard Version (1990)

The RSV translators decided to keep their work under continuous review. In 1974, they set out to produce a major revision of the RSV with the Apocrypha. (By including these "disputed" books the translators included all the books Protestants, Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox churches consider authoritative.) The Division of Christian Education of the National Churches of Christ in the USA gave the translators four mandates, to make necessary changes in:

- Paragraph structure and punctuation
- Removing archaic forms, while keeping the character of the Tyndale-King James tradition
- Achieving accuracy, clarity and euphony
- Using inclusive language

The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) is a more literal translation than many modern versions – as a result of a deliberate policy of making it "as literal as possible, as free as necessary". The main reason

for any paraphrase was to avoid masculine pronouns. This is difficult in English, which has no common gender singular personal pronoun.

The New English Bible

The New English Bible (NEB) is a British translation that stands outside the King James tradition. It is a rival to the RSV, in that in both cases the translators have tried to create a new standard version of the Bible.

This project began life in Scotland where the churches responded enthusiastically to a request from the Presbytery of Stirling and Dunblane for a new translation. The Church of Scotland, the Church of England and other churches approved the suggestion, and in 1947 set up a joint committee of all the principal churches other than those in the Roman tradition, as well as the university presses of Oxford and Cambridge (who were to publish the new version) and two bible societies. The NEB informs the reader that it is "planned and directed by representatives of" these groups:

- the Baptist Union of Great Britain

- the Church of England and the Church of Scotland

- the Congregational Union of England and Wales

- the Council of Churches for Wales

- the London Yearly Meeting of the Society of Friends

- the Methodist Church of Great Britain

- the Presbyterian Church of England

- the United Council of Christian Churches and Religious Communions in Ireland

- the British and Foreign Bible Society, and

- the National Bible Society of Scotland

This committee, following a quite well-established practice, formed three panels of translators, for the New Testament, the Old Testament and the Apocrypha, as well as a fourth panel, for guidance on literary style. Each book of the Bible was translated by a single person, whose work was reviewed and discussed by the other translators, before revision. Next the revised draft went to the literary panel, which made suggestions for improvements to the style. The translation panel adopted those suggestions they thought appropriate, then passed the translation on to the joint committee, which finally approved the English text.

When the Revised Version appeared, in the 19th century, it was still possible to hope that a definitive text for the ancient scriptures could be established, for the use of translators. But successive discoveries of ancient manuscripts have made this hope seem vain. Meanwhile improvements in the scholars' understanding of these languages have also revealed ambiguities, and passages where the reading is disputed. The translators of the NEB, like those of the RSV, used an eclectic text – taking readings from different authorities in different contexts, using their judgement as to the most likely (or least unlikely) reading among those suggested.

The New English Bible New Testament (1961)

The NEB New Testament translators completed their work in 1958. In 1959 it was prepared for printing, and in 1960 adopted by the joint committee. It was published in March 1961, and sold four million copies in its first year. There were two editions. The Library Edition had notes and a full introduction; a smaller Popular Edition had no notes, and a shorter Introduction.

The convener of the translators' panel for the New Testament was the Director of the whole NEB project – Professor C.H. Dodd, whose initials appeared on the Introduction to the New Testament. Dodd, in a memorandum, commended to the translators a "timeless" English, free of both archaisms and topical but ephemeral modern usage; clear without being dull, and accurate without pedantry. Of course, these are aims that few would dispute – who would try to write in English already dated or doomed soon to go out of date? Harwood's translation serves as a warning to all. But what this style is in any context is quite another matter.

Dodd also commended the sentence or the clause, rather than the word, as the basic unit of meaning. This is obviously wise – in the sense that individual words or word-elements (lexemes, as David Crystal calls them) are organized differently in different languages. And meaning is often found more in syntactic structures than in individual words. To take this further, one can find texts such that a literal rendering of each word into a suitable equivalent word is perfectly possible, but the resulting structures would not yield a meaning at all close to that in the original, however one adjusts the word order.

The New English Bible Old Testament (1970)

The convener of the Old Testament panel was Sir Godfrey Driver. He prepared himself for the task of translation of the book of Job by making a special study of astronomy, while for other parts of the work he made a special study of birds – identifying names of species being a particular challenge for the translator. Though each book had its own translator, F.F. Bruce states that "any reader acquainted with…Driver's contributions to the study of the Old Testament text over the years will readily recognize his pervasive influence." Bruce suggests that Driver has a "tendency to overdo the exercise of his conjectural skill" and that this would have been "acceptable in an article written for scholars" but not in a translation for the ordinary reader. (The Books and the Parchments, Chapter 19, "The New English Bible and after").

Literary style in the NEB

The NEB translators recognized their possible limitations as stylists, and submitted their work to a literary panel for review. The text is generally elegant but has some odd quirks. Where the RSV generally does achieve a neutral style, which rarely distracts from the meaning, the NEB often reflects the writing style of the translator.

In a few notorious cases, the literary panel seem to have overlooked infelicities. In 1 Corinthians 5.9 St. Paul warns his readers: "have nothing to do with loose livers". The sense intended is "those who live loose or immoral lives", but the ambiguity has escaped their scrutiny. The RSV refers to "immoral men", but NRSV tidies this up as "sexually immoral persons", which is less elegant but conveys a clearer sense that it is specifically sexual immorality that is intended.

Later in the same letter (16.8) Paul says that he will stay in Ephesus until "Whitsuntide", which seems peculiarly English (RV, RSV and NRSV all give "Pentecost").

In Matthew 13.25, Jesus's parable about weeds sown among wheat refers to "darnel". This will puzzle many readers, and not only those from outside Britain. RV gives "tares", certainly archaic, though known to many because of this and other scriptural contexts. RSV and NRSV sensibly use "weeds" – perhaps Jesus originally did specify a particular plant that would threaten a crop of wheat, but "weeds" conveys the idea of an unwelcome plant without indicating the species, which would be meaningless to many readers.

In the Cambridge Bible Commentary on this gospel, A.W. Argyle writes (p. 105):

> "The weed mentioned is the poisonous bearded darnel (lolium temulentum) which grows to about the same height as wheat."

This statement appears without any qualification. It may be that the best text here indeed employs a Greek noun that is now believed to correspond to the plant species named. But names of plants are not necessarily unchanging in Greek. And the Greek may or may not be accurate in recording the meaning of what Jesus said, in Aramaic, many years before.

Meaning

Sometimes the NEB translation obscures the meaning of a passage. For example, the Lord's Prayer contains the phrase "And do not bring us to the test". F.F. Bruce suggests that a better reading would be "Grant that we may not fail in the test" – which is more than the NEB text implies. What is this "test", and is it something we wish to avoid altogether, or something that we ought to take, but not fail?

Changing the text

In some places the NEB moves verses from their traditional settings. Another change substitutes "javelin" for "hyssop", as the implement used to hold up the sponge soaked in vinegar, from which Jesus drank on the cross. The translators justify this change on the strength of one mediaeval manuscript. F.F. Bruce calls this "a conjectural emendation and (despite its plausibility) probably wrong".

The standing of the NEB

The NEB does not express any obvious bias of sect or denomination. But Roman Catholic scholars did not take part in the work, and it has not achieved the wide acceptance of the RSV. Father Thomas Corbishley, while admitting its lack of bias, also noted that it would have to be changed in some places, to be acceptable to Roman Catholics.

Revision of the NEB

In 1989 a revision of the NEB appeared. This is more conservative than the first version, especially so in the Old Testament. It is closer to the text of the King James Version than was the first edition of the NEB. And the language of this revision is less inclusive than that in the NRSV.

Other modern Bible versions

Knox (NT 1945, OT 1949, approved 1955)

Monsignor Ronald Knox was a Catholic priest. In 1945 he published a translation of the New Testament. This was from the Vulgate but independent of the Rheims and Challoner versions. Knox added the Old Testament in 1949, and the Roman Catholic authorities in England and Wales approved this complete Bible in 1955.

Williams (1952)

C.K. Williams wrote The New Testament in Plain English, using a reduced lexicon (half as large again as that of the Basic Bible).

E.V. Rieu (Gospels 1952)

E.V. Rieu was a classical scholar and editor of the Penguin Classics series, for which he made a translation of the gospels (The Four Gospels), published in 1952.

Schonfield (1955)

Hugh J. Schonfield published his Authentic New Testament in 1955, reissuing it, with few changes, in 1985, under the title Original New Testament. Schonfield claims that his is the first New Testament translation into English made by a Jew. His version has extensive and informative footnotes for the reader.

Phillips (NT 1958, Four Prophets 1963)

J.B. Phillips has produced one of the most popular and accessible modern English versions of the New Testament. This began life as Letters to Young Churches (1947). In 1952 came The Gospels, in 1955, The Young Church in Action and in 1957, The Book of Revelation. These were all put together in 1958 to form the complete testament. Phillips has also translated four prophetic books from the Old Testament (Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Micah). These appeared in 1963 with the title Four Prophets.

Wuest (NT 1959)

Kenneth S. Wuest produced an Expanded Translation of the New Testament – his object being to expand on the text and reveal philosophical and theological meaning.

C.H. Rieu (Acts 1957)

C.H. Rieu was the son of E.V. Rieu. He translated the Acts of the Apostles for the Penguin Classics library edited by his father.

New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures (1961)

This version was published by the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of the Jehovah's Witnesses. It reflects the Witnesses' Unitarian outlook. For example, John 1.1 appears as "and the Word was a god".

Beck (NT 1963, OT 1976)

William F. Beck, a Lutheran, translated the New Testament in 1963. He began to translate the Old Testament. On his death, other Lutherans completed the work, and the complete Bible appeared in 1976. Beck's version renders the Bible into mid-American English.

New American Standard Version (NT 1963, OT 1971)

This should not be confused with the New American Bible, which appeared at the same time. The American Standard Version of 1901 was a revision of the Revised Version. This version was again revised in the 1960s and 1970s by a group of scholars sponsored by the Lockman Foundation from California. This new version is extremely literal, and does not always use the most authoritative text for the original manuscripts. The use of "standard" in the title was reasonable in 1901, but the conservatism of the new version and its use of marginal readings make it not at all a "standard" Bible for modern times.

Amplified Bible (1965)

The Amplified Bible shows a variety of interpretations of a given word or phrase, while leaving the reader to choose among them.

Jerusalem (1966)

The Jerusalem Bible (JB) is the first English translation from the original languages, made by Roman Catholic scholars. It began life as a translation into French, and was rendered into English in 1966, by a committee headed by Alexander Jones, of Christ's College, in Liverpool. The French edition was revised in 1973, and this work was used to produce a revised version in English, which appeared in 1985.

Barclay (NT 1969)

William Barclay's translation of the New Testament came out in two volumes (1968 and 1969). Though published later than J.B. Phillips' version, it is more traditional in its language.

New American Bible (1970)

Between 1952 and 1969 Roman Catholics in the USA translated the Old Testament as a companion to the New Testament of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Earlier they had translated the New Testament from the Latin Vulgate, but in 1942, Roman Catholics were permitted (by the encyclical Divino afflante spiritu) to make vernacular translations from the original languages. Rather than have an inferior New Testament, they translated this again, using the Greek original. The complete new translation was published in 1970 as the New American Bible.

In 1989 a revision of the New Testament appeared, intended to be more inclusive in its language. This revision uses formal equivalence rather than dynamic equivalence (word for word, rather than meaning for meaning), and has some archaic lexis, such as "behold".

Good News Bible (NT 1966, OT 1976)

In 1966 the American Bible Society published Good News for Modern Man (the New Testament in Today's English). The society's aim was to use a "common" or demotic English, accessible to anyone able to read the language. This translation seeks to convey the essential meanings and ideas in the original, but not to make an English equivalent of every word or phrase. The New Testament translation was done by Robert Bratcher, with the help of various specialists. A committee of seven translators produced the Old Testament – and the complete Good News Bible appeared in 1976. In 1979 the Apocryphal and Deuterocanonical books were added to this version.

The Good News Bible is sometimes known as Today's English Version (TEV). It is not as elegant as the Revised Standard Version, but is very easy for anyone to read. It appeals to those readers who want to get at the "story" or the content of the text, rather than those who want to know what the original documents say in any exact sense.

The Living Bible (1971)

In 1962 Kenneth N. Taylor translated a simple paraphrase of the epistles in the New Testament, under the title Living Letters. The book was well received, and Taylor gradually added other books until he had translated the complete Bible, which was published in 1971. Dr. Taylor's work has inspired a project, "Living Bible International", for producing similarly simple paraphrases in other languages.

Byington (1972)

Steven Byington's translation uses "Jehovah" as the proper name of God. The Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society published this version posthumously.

The Translators' New Testament (1973)

The British and Foreign Bible Society published the Translators' New Testament in 1973. This version was produced for re-translation into other languages, by those who cannot work from the original Greek. For those who can work from the Greek, the United Bible Societies produced a Greek New Testament in 1966 (3rd edition 1975). The Translators' New Testament is based on this version.

New International Version (NT 1973, OT 1978)

English is an international language, and the translators of this version come from many English-speaking countries. Their version has achieved a wide readership, because it is the Bible the Gideons International have chosen, to place in hotel rooms, schools and elsewhere.

This version began as a collaboration, which was greatly helped by the sponsorship of the New York Bible Society, starting in 1967. The first part to appear, in 1969, was John's Gospel under the title, A Contemporary Translation. The New Testament was published in 1973, and revised for the publication, in 1978, of the complete Bible.

The New International Version (NIV) is a wholly new translation from the original languages. It is far closer to the RSV than to the NEB. The NIV does not reflect the views of any particular denomination or church.

New King James Bible (NT 1979, OT 1982)

Is it possible to modernize an old text selectively, updating what is archaic and conserving what is timeless? This is what the translators of the New King James Version have sought to do. This Bible was the work of some 130 scholars, theologians and others. The New Testament was published in 1979, and the complete Bible three years later, in the USA. A British edition, with slight differences, followed the US version, bearing the title The Revised Authorised Version.

Critics of this Bible note that while the translators used the most recent text of the Old Testament, they used, for translating the New Testament, the Greek Textus Receptus (Received Text), which is widely believed to contain many copyists' errors. Whether this Bible preserves the best features of the King James Version, it certainly, therefore, conserves one of its few failings.

Opinions differ about the quality of this translation. For F.F. Bruce "there is much that is first rate…simply because there is so much of the Authorized Version in it". But Robert Bratcher (in the Oxford Companion to the Bible) sees it as aiming to "maintain the supremacy of the KJV as the Bible of conservative Protestants".

The lexis of this Bible shows the translators' sense of purpose. Verb endings are changed from "-th" forms to end in "-s", so "says" replaces "saith". The familiar or intimate form of the second personal pronoun "thou" (and related words, "thee", "thy" and "thine") have been replaced by "you" ("your" and "yours"), in all contexts.

Many archaic forms disappear, thus:

- "we packed" replaces "we took up our carriages" (Acts 21.15)

- "precede" replaces "prevent" (1 Thessalonians 4.15)

- "he who now restrains" replaces "he who now letteth" (2 Thessalonians 2.7)

But this modernizing does not happen consistently with theological terms. "Reconciliation" replaces "atonement" in Romans 5.11, but "propitiation" remains in Romans 3.25, Hebrews 2.17 and 1 John 2.2.

This version has some distinctive features of typography:

- quotation marks enclose direct speech

- each verse starts on a new line

- new paragraphs have a heading in bold type

- poetical passages are set as poetry

- in the US (but not the British) edition pronouns referring to divine persons are in capital letters

None of these corresponds to anything in the original manuscripts. Quotation marks are a convention of modern print texts in English (they are not universal in print texts from other languages). Using a new line for a new verse preserves the useful but artificial verse divisions that were added by translators. Use of poetic lines also reflects English print conventions. The use of capitals for divine pronouns may be meant to show respect. Headings imply some kind of comment on or interpretation of the paragraph they introduce.

Lattimore (1982)

Richmond Lattimore produced his translation in 1982. He tried to provide a simple, literal rendering in which the syntax and order of the Greek dictate the character of the English style. Lattimore placed Mark's gospel first of the four, as most opinion places it first in time. The rest of the books are in the traditional order. Lattimore uses Westcott's and Hort's Greek text. He also consulted The Pelican Gospel Commentaries and A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature. At the back Lattimore placed notes, which explain his translations or give alternate interpretations.

New Jerusalem Bible (1985)

The appearance in 1973 of a new French version of the Bible de Jérusalem led to work on a new English revision of the JB, under the supervision of Dom Henry Wansbrough. This was a direct translation from Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic. The translators used paraphrasing less than in the first version of the JB. They also sought to use more inclusive language, especially by avoiding masculine pronouns.

New Jewish Version/Tanakh (1985)

Marcus Jastrow's Jewish Publication Society Bible became a standard for English-speaking Jews on its appearance in 1917. The New Jewish Version was translated in stages. Harry Orlinksy headed the committee that published the Torah in 1961. The final part of the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament) to appear in this version was the Writings (1981). The whole Hebrew Bible in this version appeared in one volume 1985 under the title of Tanakh.

Revised New American Bible (NT 1989)

This is the first part of the revision of the New American Bible of 1970. It sets out to be more inclusive, though it retains the word "brothers" in contexts that do not require a gender-specific noun. It uses formal equivalence in translation and is more literal than the 1970 version.

Cassirer (1989)

Heinz W. Cassirer was a Jewish philosopher who had not read any part of the Bible before he was forty-nine years old. When he found these texts he was so impressed that he spent the next twenty-one years studying them. He strove to make a clear translation, showing the meaning of the New Testament.

He started work on the letters of Paul in 1957 and in 1972 began to translate the New Testament in its entirety. Cassirer believed that John's Gospel had been misrepresented in the past for anti-Semitic reasons, but that it was not essentially hostile to Judaism.

In Cassirer Old Testament quotations are in bolder typeface. References are at the bottom of pages. Many of these were found in the Greek New Testament texts and Old Testament texts that he used. It was Cassirer's wish that his translation be published only after his death. For a sample of his style, here is John 1.1-3:

> It was the Word that was at the very beginning; and the Word was by the side of God, and the Word was the very same as God. It was he who at the beginning was by the side of God. All things came into being through him, and there was nothing that came into being apart from him.

Principles of translation

Different languages

Translation is never a simple matter. The facility with which some modern linguists provide simultaneous translation for speakers may deceive us. Invented languages (whether for programming computers or for speaking, like Esperanto or Klingon) may be logical in a strict or mathematical sense but authentic languages (living and dead) are more elusive.

All human languages have a lexicon and grammar – but in no two languages are these exactly alike. (This is a truism, since we could not distinguish them apart as distinct languages without such differences. But it also reflects what scholars have found to happen – if we separate two groups of users of a common language, then over time the language will change in each community.)

The meaning of words

It is a common mistake to suppose that dictionaries define words. This may be possible for wholly logical words, such as those that represent numbers, and arguably some words that express relationships. In the case of lexical (or "content") words (those which have meanings which do not derive from their relation to other words) the best a dictionary can do is describe meanings in usage, by quoting examples. In some (few) cases, it may be that a noun allows an exact description – thus in various languages there is a name for the domestic cat (Felis catus or Felis domesticus): "cat, chat, Katze". But this is unusual. It is almost impossible to find precise and unambiguous descriptions for most verbs, adverbs, adjectives and nouns. And if these work today, then tomorrow they may not do so.

The translator has the challenge, first of understanding the meaning of a word in an ancient language. Assuming that he (or she) can do this, then he needs to find a word in the language of the translation, which corresponds to this. Can we do this for the scriptures? Clearly the people who first composed the various books (probably orally) did this in a language that they understood. Perhaps this is also true of the scribes who first wrote the books, but this is by no means clear. Even modern writers will routinely refer to things that they may not really understand (say, relativity or structuralism).

Part of the book of Daniel is written in Aramaic, an ancient Semitic language, which also appears in isolated words and phrases of the New Testament. But otherwise the Bible is written in Hebrew (Old Testament) and Greek (New Testament). F.F. Bruce tells us that:

> The languages of the Bible are not, as is sometimes imagined, dead languages. All three of them are alive and in use today…There is much less difference between modern Hebrew and Biblical Hebrew, between modern Greek and Biblical Greek, than there is between modern English and English as spoken in 1066.

The Books and the Parchments; Chapter 3 – The Hebrew Language

What is more, we have manuscripts in other languages, into which parts of the Bible were translated in ancient times. Where we can understand these languages, we can get a sense of what the writer intended to convey, and thus of how he (almost certainly never she) understood the Hebrew or Greek original. Some of these readings only add to our confusion, but in many cases they support the readings of modern translators.

From ancient times, Jewish scholars have tried to interpret their sacred writings. Although their comments may sometimes seem to amplify or embellish a plain original, again, they may give a sense of how people understood scripture close to the time when it was written down. This is not necessarily uncontroversial. Jesus attacked the tradition that claimed to explain the written law, because, he saw, at one point at least that the tradition contradicted the plain sense of the law. The tradition he condemned was that of "corban" – an offering or a gift dedicated to God, by a binding oath. The problem was that some people having made such an oath found themselves unable to revoke it, in order to use the offering to support needy parents (as required by the commandment to "honour thy father and mother"). Alternatively, they might use the oath to dedicate the money or gift, so that it could not be used to help their parents, yet without having to give it up – in this way, they could avoid their duty, and save the money for their own use later. Mark's gospel (7.9-13) represents Jesus as condemning the rabbis for allowing tradition (the oral Torah or

Law) to override the written commandment. By implication he sees the rabbinic tradition as a corruption or falling away from the perfection of the primitive written law.

Cultural contexts

Where a writer or speaker shares the culture of his or her audience, the possibility of mutual understanding is increased. A word or phrase can identify a thing which the reader or listener knows from experience. With ancient texts, we find the writer repeatedly referring to things which are unfamiliar to us, and which we can only understand at all with the help of notes or comments. These give the translator a problem: perhaps there is no equivalent English term, so the best solution is perhaps to use a classical loanword or create an unidiomatic English phrase. Some translators, in search of a readable text, will use a more familiar English word or phrase, but run the risk that the reader will understand this more or less in its modern everyday sense. Let us consider some examples.

The villain of the story of Adam and Eve is a talking snake (Genesis 3.1). In many versions, including the NRSV, the snake is called a "serpent". "Serpent" is an archaic noun in modern usage – more or less reserved for this particular context. (Its other use is to denote a mythical monster called a sea-serpent, of which the creature supposed to live in Loch Ness is the most notorious example.) Alan Richardson (Genesis 1-11: The Creation Stories and the Modern World View) suggests that, in Semitic lore, "the serpent is proverbial for cunning craftiness." The translator who uses "snake" (as in the Good News Bible) informs the reader of the kind of animal in the story, while suggesting the naivety of a narrative with talking animals. The translator who uses "serpent" keeps the narrative, for the educated reader, in the territory of ancient myth. But many readers will have no idea what a serpent is, other than the creature that talks to Eve. Until recently, people in the west may have shared the ancient dislike or fear of snakes. Now our attitude, informed by zoology, may be neutral or even approving. In other parts of the world, people may regard snakes with approval or hostility for cultural and practical reasons.

What is an ark? The Bible tells us of two very different objects with this name – Noah's ark and the Ark of the Covenant. The word is found in various forms in many Germanic languages, as well as French (OED suggests it may correspond to a Latin original), in the sense of a chest or container, usually constructed of wood. This made it a good choice for translators of the Bible, at a time when the noun was common in everyday speech. It is particularly apt for the structure Noah made, as the description that God gives, makes it clear that this was not a vessel with any means of propulsion but a giant floating container – almost a crate. As a common noun, "ark" has more or less dropped out of use in English. But it survives as the name for Noah's vessel, and this is often depicted as a simplified version of the ark described in Genesis 6.14-16. This description gives the dimensions (450 feet long, 75 feet wide and 45 feet high/deep), and other details for Noah in building it, such as the three decks, rooms, a roof, a door in the side, and the use of pitch to make it water-tight. The Good News Bible translates the word as "boat". This is intelligible to the modern reader, but may be misleading, as it suggests a vessel with some means of propulsion, and which is designed to do more than simply float.

The Ark of the Covenant was clearly a wooden box or container in which the Israelites placed the tablets on which the Law was written. The Ark acquired over time an aura of great holiness, such that, perhaps a more descriptive name, like "chest" or "box" would seem disrespectful. In the Good News Bible it becomes the Covenant Box – so while "ark" gives way to a modern synonym in this version, "covenant" remains (as opposed to, say, "agreement" or "promise").

The rituals of ancient Israel cause particular difficulty for the translator, as they describe practices that may have no modern equivalent. The modern Western reader may just understand the idea of sacrifice. That is, killing an animal as a way of satisfying or pleasing God or a god. The Old Testament records a more elaborate system, in which all sorts of offerings were made to God, including animals of many kinds, cereals, oil and wine. Different offerings were presented in differing ways – some were waved ("wave offerings") or lifted up ("heave offerings") in what was supposed to be the presence of God. Some were cooked in various ways, and partly eaten, while other parts were left for the Deity. In one kind of offering the sacrificial animal was killed, then completely burned on the altar, apart from the skin, which was given to the priest who performed the ritual. This is sometimes described as a "burnt offering" or a "whole burnt offering". The latter is a close approximation to the word used in the Septuagint, "holocaust" – from Greek holos ("whole") and caustos ("burnt"). But this noun cannot be used any longer in this sense. It has been taken over as a noun to denote the mass slaughter of people in war, especially the planned destruction of European Jews in the Nazi era.

Sometimes the translator is faced with a term for which there is no clear equivalent. In 2 Samuel 23.20 we read that Benaiah "smote two ariels of Moab". (RSV). Among alternative solutions to this are NRSV "two sons of Ariel of Moab" and TEV "two great Moabite warriors" – this is a guess, which seems plausible in the context (an account of heroic deeds), but in the next verse we learn that Benaiah killed a lion, so why might the passage not refer to an animal rather than a person?

"Messiah" is a term that is almost impossible to translate. Literally it means one who is anointed with oil. The Greek "Christos" (Christ) is a more or less literal equivalent – "chrism" is the oil for anointing. The Old Testament tells of anointing of people and objects, such as Jacob's pillar (Genesis 28.18, 31.13) the tabernacle and the altar (Exodus 29.36). In later traditions we read of the anointing of priests (Exodus 29.4-7; Leviticus 8.12). But this does not convey the popular understanding of the term in the Post-Exilic and Roman eras. Whatever term the translator chooses, it may need the support of a note to explain the idea of the Messiah as a great leader, who would unite the functions of priest and king, and deliver the Jews from foreign domination.

Theological meaning

In translating certain kinds of nouns, the translator's problem is identifying what thing or "referent" a word or phrase denotes, then selecting the nearest English equivalent. This is fairly straightforward with nouns that refer to familiar objects of everyday experience. With abstract nouns it becomes far more difficult – not least because the words are necessarily vague in meaning in any language (Socrates, as reported by Plato, shows this difficulty when he uses the dialogue to try to elicit a meaning). "Freedom" and "liberty" are conventionally regarded as synonymous – but it is easier to say this, than to say what either means. In fact, even simple analysis reveals that these are relative terms (like "big" or "cold"), not absolutes. They may have no objective independent existence.

The scriptures come from ancient societies in which people believed (perhaps uncritically) in the real or objective existence of things we might now qualify, and regard as abstract, or things of a kind that we cannot certainly know. These would include such things as spirits, angels, heaven and hell, grace, salvation and justification.

The translation of the scriptures does not simply show a process of finding modern equivalents for ancient meanings. A developing tradition of interpretation has led to the coining of new words, in Greek, Latin and modern vernaculars, to express these concepts, which can be called "theological", in the sense that they are part of a systematic account of things hitherto or otherwise mysterious. ("Theology" is literally the science or study of God – the Theos.)

This has the result that anyone can object to many things in any modern version on the ground that they do not really correspond to the wording of the original. Moreover, what may be a close translation at the time when it was made, over time becomes less satisfactory.

Spirit

"Spirit" translates words that mean (both in Hebrew and Greek) "wind" or "breath" – a meaning that English shows in such related words as "aspirate", "respire", "perspire" and "transpiration". (Terms like "aspire", "conspire" and "inspire" are derived from the same base, but have acquired metaphorical meanings.) "Spirit" is simply an Anglicized form of Latin spiritus ("breath").

From ancient times, Greek thinkers imagined man as a duality – flesh and spirit, or body and soul. Each had some independent reality, but in man the two elements were joined in ways which fascinated the philosophers, and which they would try to explain. St. Paul took his message to a world in which educated people would be familiar with this distinction. It has persisted, through the Middle Ages into modern times: educated westerners today may not literally believe it, but we understand it.

Thus when we read "spirit" in scripture, we may, wrongly, project this idea backwards, and suppose, for example that it was normal in ancient Hebrew culture. In the Old Testament it means something like life or that which is vital. Douglas Hare (Oxford Companion to the Bible, p. 231) gives the gloss "vital essence" – apparently without noticing that he has saved his reader from one confusion, at the expense of another ("essence").

Angels

Modern readers may well derive their understanding of "angel" from depictions in Renaissance art and more popular forms of these on Christmas cards or even in cartoons. The word, from Greek aggelos, means simply a messenger. The action of such messengers and intermediaries is presented inconsistently in both Testaments – but one can see at work a general tendency. Later writers have a sense of God's remoteness and transcendence – as if it is wrong for him to do things directly. So we find accounts of various orders of superhuman agents in the service of God. The writers make it clear that they are subordinate to God, and do not share his divinity. But they have powers we do not normally find in men, such as winged flight or special knowledge of the present and future.

A clear example of this tendency appears in the synoptic Gospels. St. Mark's is generally reckoned to be the earliest. Here, when Mary Magdalene and her companions enter Jesus's tomb, they see "a young man, dressed in a white robe…on the right side" (Mark 16.5-7). Their alarm, and the young man's message, that Jesus has been "raised" should be enough to signal his role as a messenger. (The narrative allows the reader to interpret the scene otherwise – the young man could be human, extraordinary only in his reading of the situation and early arrival at the tomb, though this leaves the far greater miracle of Jesus's raising from the dead.)

Luke (writing shortly after Mark) removes any ambiguity about the status of the messenger. In fact (Luke 24.4-7) he doubles the number, to two men, and now their clothes are "dazzling", and the women are "terrified". The men not only explain that Jesus "has risen" but remind the women that Jesus had foretold all this, which they now remember.

Matthew writes at about the same time as Luke. He writes (Matthew 28.2-7) of one messenger only, but states explicitly that this is an "angel of the Lord". (Recognizing for his contemporaries that "angel" on its own could signify a human messenger). In case the reader doubts this account, he relates some accompanying demonstrations of power – there is an earthquake, the angel rolls back the stone (humanly possible but not easy, as the women's comment in Mark 16.3 shows). The angel's appearance is even more exotic than in Luke's account – here he looks "like lightning", and terrifies the guards (who are not mentioned at this point in Mark's and Luke's accounts).

Heaven and Hell

In the Hebrew Bible "heaven" translates a plural word (samayim), which identifies a region, above the Earth. Beyond this is an area of water, and beyond the water, the place where God lives. The word also denotes the sky, and the highest region of all. These ideas are neither clear nor consistent. In Genesis, God is not remote, but walks in the Garden of Eden. Yet in later tradition he is so transcendent that heaven cannot hold him. In early times, God's blessings were for this life only, after which one passed at best into a shadowy existence in Sheol, the underworld. Only later does a belief arise in heaven as a place where one's spirit or soul enjoys a new kind of life after the death of the body. Christ talks of such an existence – James and John want to sit in the places of honour, and Jesus tells the penitent thief on the cross that he will be with him in Paradise. This creates perhaps a further problem – heaven is conceived as above the Earth, like the sky, or utterly remote from it. But "Paradise" translates a Persian word for a park.

"Hell" usually translates the Hebrew Sheol and the Greek Hades – a place under the ground where souls go after death. There is a difference, however. In some Greek tradition, personal identity and qualities survive in Hades, but in Sheol these are lost in a ghostly shadow existence.

Grace

Grace is a term that sometimes is used as if the meaning is known and understood, yet it evades clear description, and translates Hebrew and Greek words (hnn and charis) with slightly different meanings. Edward F. Campbell (Oxford Companion to the Bible; p. 259) admits that the noun "combines ideas in tension that point to profound mystery". It has overtones of favour, mercy and compassion, and denotes a quality which proceeds from God to man or that characterizes a relationship God initiates with man. Ultimately, it seems intelligible only as something demonstrated in particular events.

Justification

Behind the idea of justification lies the related one of righteousness, which St. Paul tries to show to be impossible under the Law. Christ's action has made it possible for men to be justified by faith. What does this mean? Vincent Taylor (quoted in the Oxford Companion to the Bible; p. 405) explains justification thus: "the gracious action of God accepting persons as righteous in consequence of faith resting upon His redemptive activity in Christ". This gives us problems. Even if we accept this unhappy effort, it leaves us relying on an understanding of other knotty terms, such as "gracious" and "righteous". But the gloss seems vague. It tells us that God has done something (an action) with a particular quality (it is gracious). The action is to accept "persons as righteous" – but it is not clear if "accept" here is meant in the sense of "receive" or in the sense of seeing or recognizing (that these people are righteous). This acceptance is the consequence of "faith" (whose, we do not learn) and this faith in turn rests upon God's "redemptive activity in Christ". Simplified, this seems to mean that God ("in Christ") did one thing ("redemptive activity") that led to another thing ("faith"), that led to a third thing (God's "accepting persons as righteous"), and that this third thing is "gracious". What it was that God really did has eluded the translator.

The meaning of structures

Meaning, in human languages, does not lie only in words. Words themselves may combine different elements (root, prefix, suffix, inflection) to create a complex or aggregated meaning. These basic elements we call morphemes ("bits of forms"). In English and some other modern European languages we can create new words, or adapt existing ones, by the use of recognizable morphemes. English is a relatively analytic language, in which the relation of one word to the others near it is partly signalled by word order. Some words (nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs) are lexical or content words – they have some basic meaning, irrespective of their surroundings. Others (prepositions, conjunctions) are grammatical words – their only function is to show the relationship between the lexical words, or longer structures (phrases and clauses) that include some lexical words.

In many European languages we organize words into phrases, to create one or more clauses, which we combine in sentences. Or, rather, this is a helpful way to explain or analyse structures in real speech or writing. (How we form sentences, as a process in our own minds, is less clear.) In writing, we use punctuation to show the internal workings of the sentence, and the point at which it ends. In speech we may mark this by a significant pause, and by some changes in tone, pitch or other verbal emphasis – but this is less explicit to us and to our hearers, than is the use of a period or full stop, to the writer and the reader.

The sentence is an invention of grammarians, and is not a normal feature in all natural languages – that is, it is a theoretical model devised to explain what we have observed to happen. (We can dispute this only if we extend its meaning and allow sentences to include many kinds of structures in all languages.) There are languages other than English where word order is also important, but in which the paradigms of word order differ from ours. There are other languages still where word order has little or no importance.

It may sometimes be possible for the translator to be confident of the meaning of all the morphemes and words in a given passage of text (though this will rarely be the case with a manuscript written in an ancient language). But the meaning of the passage may still elude the translator, because we do not understand the way the meaning of the whole derives from the arrangement of the structure.

In some modern languages it is difficult to render Hebrew poetic parallelism appropriately – a literal rendering is seen as insulting the intelligence of the hearers, as it suggests they are not clever enough to understand a passage without repetition. Some languages do not allow the rhetorical question, which must be changed into an emphatic statement. In other languages, indirect discourse must be rendered as direct discourse.

Idiom and euphemism

Any language may have quirks – features in which an apparently straightforward meaning is substituted by something related to it obliquely, metaphorically, ironically or in some other way. An Englishman says, "that's not my cup of tea", meaning that something is of no interest to him and is not a thing of the kind he can do. (There may, of course, be a situation where he really does wish to indicate which cup, among several, is his or not his.) A different culinary idiom tells us that something is a "piece of cake". In this case, we need to know that the idiom refers to the readiness we have to eat the cake, rather than the process of making it, since the phrase is used to denote something very easy to do.

Idiomatic usage may become more obscure, if it undergoes change. When someone acts independently, we sometimes use a sporting metaphor, and say that this person did it off his (or her) own bat. Evidently many hearers have understood the suggestion of autonomy, but without noticing the image by which it is expressed, since in popular modern English speech this frequently becomes "off his own back". This kind of idiom is almost completely opaque – when we meet it in an ancient text, we can only really infer its meaning from the context in which it occurs, if we can find many examples of it in use. (And this, at best, will give us only a plausible and possibly correct translation – it might denote an idea or a cultural attitude that is forever lost to us.)

Many languages have taboos that lead to euphemism – a roundabout, idiomatic or otherwise alternative form, which a speaker can substitute in a given context for a prohibited or deprecated term. If the speaker or writer and the hearer or reader both understand how the euphemism functions in the culture of the language, then all may be well, but the possibility of confusion is obvious. In 1 Samuel 24.3, we read of how Saul went into a cave. The RV reads "to cover his feet", which is what the Hebrew literally means. This seems an odd thing to do – though perhaps in an ancient culture it had a value that escapes us. But RSV, NRSV and TEV all translate the passage to mean that Saul went in "to relieve himself". We are familiar in modern English usage with euphemisms for these natural functions – we may allow a vague and decent Latinism ("ablutions") or a quasi-medical but neutral description ("emptying the bowels" or "passing water").

Language change

Translations in English are made into a living language, which is subject to change. For this reason, if for no other, any translation has a limited period of currency. At a crude level, we see this in lexis that becomes archaic – as with "slay" for "kill", "smite" for "strike" or "hit" or "harlot" for "prostitute". An older translation, such as the King James Version, thus becomes more distinct from everyday language and the common register. These old terms do not simply disappear: rather we come to see them as belonging to a special Bible lexicon, as if they never were found anywhere else. Something similar happened with New Testament Greek – which scholars once thought was a special variety of Greek, developed by the gospel writers and St. Paul. Only recently have they found other documents from the time that show how "New Testament Greek" represents the common spoken Greek of the time in which it was written down.

Much more problematic are the many words that persist in modern English, but with a changed, or slightly changed, meaning. Israel is in the KJV a "peculiar people" (for example, Deuteronomy 14.2 "and the LORD hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself"). The sense here is of a special people, marked or chosen in some way. "Peculiar", in its modern sense of "strange" or "unusual", could exist side by side with this meaning, so long as readers were to understand the different sense in this context, which the RV translators have retained. The RSV, NRSV and TEV replace it with "chosen", but NRSV recasts the whole structure to read, "it is you the Lord has chosen". This change is partly a recognition that "peculiar" would no longer be understood in its older sense. But it is partly the cause of change, because it removes the best-known example of "peculiar" in this older sense.

The King James translators understood different pronouns in the second person, as conveying a greater or less degree of familiarity. "Thee", "thou", "thy" and "thine" were used to suggest a close or intimate relation, while "you" and "your" served more to show deference and formality. The modern reader often fails to distinguish subtle changes between these forms (T and V forms, after French tu and vous). Or worse, one finds modern speakers who see the T forms as archaic, and so suppose them to be in some way more appropriate to God, as special holy language forms – the very opposite of what the translator

intended. There are many modern speakers of English who adopt these pronouns for prayer, scripted or extemporary, but who would never use them in everyday speech

Formal and dynamic equivalence

These phrases denote two contrasting approaches to translation – neither of which is ever achieved completely in practice. Formal equivalence (or equivalency) is sometimes described as a literal or word-for-word translation. Dynamic equivalence attempts to locate the original meaning as closely as possible.

Formal equivalence as an ideal perhaps arises from a misunderstanding of language. Even when scholars held up the classical languages of Greek and Latin as ideals, they knew that word order in these ancient languages differed from that in English. Today it is clear that different languages do not even have lexical systems which operate in such a way that there is always an equivalent form in Language A for anything in Language B. At best it leads to translations that use formal equivalents for things in the common lexicon, but which resort to importing a term from the language of the original text – as many Bible translators have done – for abstractions and special cultural or theological meanings. Versions using formal equivalence may have their chief use as study aids or "cribs" for students trying to understand the Hebrew and Greek originals. The Revised Version and the New King James Version are translations that represent best the method of formal equivalence. (Some Protestant Christians have maintained that formal equivalence is the surest way to safeguard the "original" meaning of Scripture against readings from the Roman tradition. Yet in doing so, they may have introduced their own special lexicon.)

The problem with dynamic equivalence is that it leads to translations which are more culturally conditioned, and likely to be affected by language and cultural change. Edward Harwood's version uses an English style well suited to the 18th century reader (mostly educated and privileged) and he hopes especially to appeal to "the young and gay". In the 20th century the Good News Bible is written very much for the everyday reader – though perhaps this will have a longer shelf-life than Harwood's, as (like Wycliffe's version) it comes from a period where demotic English is able to use a plain and direct style.

Eugene A. Nida (Oxford Companion to the Bible, page 750, article on Translations: theory and practice) identifies three complementary traditions in translation, which he characterizes as the philological, the linguistic and the communicative.

The philological approach

The philological approach is concerned with the history of the document to be translated – the background of its author, whether it has distinctive features of style and belongs to any identifiable genre. It also looks at the history of the text in transmission, and how it has been interpreted over time.

This method was successful in producing translations into mature written languages, such as Jerome's Vulgate (in Latin) and the King James Version (in English).

The linguistic approach

The linguistic approach arose partly from need. In the 20th century missionaries brought the scriptures to all parts of the world, and peoples with many different languages, some of which had no written tradition and others no system of writing at all. The missionary on the ground looked for help in such things as devising an alphabet, analysing the grammar of a language, determining meaning (relative to cultural contexts) and learning features of style in oral narratives.

In 1946 the United Bible Societies held their first international conference of Bible translators, and a year later, a learned journal The Bible Translator first appeared. In 1934, William Cameron Townsend formed a non-denominational group, the Wycliffe Bible Translators (WBT). In 1942, this was incorporated with the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL). SIL is a secular organization – it can secure entry to countries closed to Christian missionary organizations such as WBT.

Eugene Nida describes the linguistic approach in four stages:

- Analysis: this is determining, at the most explicit level, the meaning of the original biblical text.

- Transfer: this is finding an equivalent for the source language, at this explicit level, in the target language.

- Restructuring: this is adapting the transferred equivalent into the appropriate forms for the intended audience.

- Testing: by testing the readers' responses, the translator can determine the accuracy of the translation and its natural equivalence with the original.

Many western societies have cultures that are broadly continuous with the Judeo-Christian tradition in which the Bible arose. Translation of the Bible has a history here often as long as the history of the written language – and this has closed or bridged (or seemed to do so) the gap between texts from ancient Palestine, and translations into major western languages. In the developing world the cultural differences may be much greater. To put this another way, Christianity, Neo-Platonism and the scientific world-view have more or less effaced, in the west, alternative religious attitudes from mainstream and everyday thought and speech. But in other societies, the translator may be aware of powerful beliefs (ancestor worship, polytheism, spirit magic, the divinity of tribal chiefs). Should these appear in the translation? St. Francis Xavier understood this in the mid 16th century, when he began to teach Christianity to Japanese Buddhists:

> "The immediate problem with the Eastern religions concerned language, the terms used to expound Christian doctrine. The Christian teacher would be more intelligible if he used the terms parallel in the other religion, but he ran the risk of misleading his hearers by taking a word out of a non-Christian system with all its erroneous connotations. Xavier at once met the problem. In Japan he first translated God by its Buddhist equivalent Dainichi, and only after some months discovered that this was a disastrous translation and substituted the Portuguese Deus, which was orthodox, but unintelligible to the Japanese."

> Owen Chadwick: Pelican History of the Church, Volume 3, The Reformation, pp. 337-338, Penguin, 1964

The communicative approach

The communicative approach develops the linguistic approach, in the light of modern communication theory. It uses a slightly different model for translation:

- Source: Who is or are the author or authors or other originators of a text? From whom does it come?

- Message: What is the form of the text and what is its content?

- Receptors: For whom was it originally written or spoken? What is its wider audience?

- Noise: Is there anything that has altered the text in transmission from older versions to the one we have to use?

- Feedback: How have people reacted to the message?

- Setting: What was the original setting for the composition of the text? What are the contemporary circumstances in which the text is to be communicated?

The translator seeks a close natural equivalence between the original text and translated text – but there is no one paradigm for achieving this. Nida states, uncontroversially, that this equivalence "can never be an absolute or mathematical equivalence". But, he suggests, there can be a "communicative equivalence, something that is effective in obtaining an appropriate response". This seems broadly sensible, but rather glosses over what would be an "appropriate response" in differing contexts. A translator's problems might not be severe in translating a passage of narrative, where the "appropriate response" is to understand that, say, David killed a big Philistine warrior, who may have been called Goliath. Similarly, with an ethical imperative, the "appropriate response" might be to understand that coveting other people's things is wrong, perhaps added to a wish not to covet or a sense of shame at having coveted or continuing to do so. But in passages that describe the nature of God or the theology of justification, it is less clear what would be an "appropriate response".

Nida proposes a description (he calls it a "definition") of both maximal and minimal communicative equivalence in translation, adding that "Bible translation should fall somewhere between these maximal and minimal levels". The maximal, or ideal, level of equivalence would be achieved should "the readers of a translation…understand and appreciate the text in essentially the same way as the original audience understood and appreciated it". Nida concedes that this is only a "helpful theoretical goal", since no two cultures are ever identical. This rather understates the huge gulf between the various ancient and classical situations in which parts of the Bible appeared, and the various historical and modern situations in which readers experience the Bible in translation. As a counsel of perfection it may, indeed, be "helpful" in recalling to the translator the immense difficulty of his or her task.

The minimal level, according to Eugene Nida, requires that "the readers or hearers of a translation should be able to comprehend how the original readers or hearers of a text must have understood and appreciated it". This is still an exacting standard. One can show convincingly that many translations fail to reach this minimal level. In the case of the best translations, one cannot be sure that these consistently achieve it in all parts. For certain passages in the Acts of the Apostles or some of St. Paul's letters, we have an idea of the original readers, and may be able to see how they "understood and appreciated" it. With other books, even this is plainly impossible – as we do not know who these readers were, and can barely begin to "comprehend" the world view, assumptions, habits and beliefs which they brought to their hearing (in most cases) or reading of such things as the creation and flood narratives, the discourses in the Book of Job or the picaresque stories in Judges.

Genesis contains many narratives that reflect primitive beliefs – that God walks in a garden or shuts up the ark when Noah and his family have entered it, or that heaven has windows, which open to cause a flood. It also reflects beliefs which once seemed primitive but which modern science broadly supports – such as the idea that a single language gave rise to different languages. But what it cannot possibly tell us is whether the "original readers or hearers" believed these things, or knew them (rather as we do) as conventional but mythical or symbolic elements in traditional stories. Modern western culture abounds in narratives that express or reflect ideas in which many of us do not believe at all – stories about aliens, monsters or idealized romantic love. We would rightly object should people in the far-distant future dismiss us as "primitive" for "believing" in aliens who create crop circles, teenage vampire hunters in urban North America or in indestructible cartoon animals.

Establishing the text

Historical scholarship has shown convincingly that two extreme attitudes to the text of the Bible are no longer tenable. The first is the view that there is, for the whole of scripture, an agreed text, without variants at any point (this view is sometimes extended to include the belief that God has miraculously endorsed this text and secured its transmission through the ages). The second is the contention that the text is largely, or in part, the invention of more recent times.

The reverence paid to their holy books by Jews in antiquity meant that old or damaged scrolls were replaced regularly by fresh copies. The frequency of the copying might make it seem likely that errors would multiply over time, but acting against this was the extreme caution with which the scribe worked. (For example, the Hebrew Masoretic scribes devised numerical measurements to safeguard against any change – counting various features of the text: the number of times each letter occurs, identifying the middle letter of the Pentateuch and so on.) How can we know this? Once we might have had to take it on trust – but today we have manuscripts from the fourth and fifth centuries, as well as examples from many later periods. When we compare them, we find few changes, mostly in matters we think trivial. We have fragments of manuscripts from much earlier, going back to the New Testament and Hellenistic periods – these show no great change from our more complete later manuscripts. The great accuracy of the parts we do have gives us confidence in the rest.

Textual scholarship is a highly specialized branch of study. As well as using ancient manuscripts in Hebrew and Greek, scholars use translations into other languages, such as Syriac, made in antiquity, to find clues to the correct form of a passage which is unclear, or for which there are plausible variant readings, in the original language.

Scholars may still approve a reading that is not found in most manuscripts, if its appearances are in the oldest manuscripts and supported by other versions.

A potential problem comes in the way Hebrew was written in ancient times. It was first written down as a consonantal text. It seems obvious to us that we should write using symbols for consonants, vowels and other things, like the pauses and emphases we mark with punctuation. But this is because we suppose the reader not to know what we are writing. Where the text is familiar to the reader we might still wish to write it down for reference, to prevent change and to help a reader recall the whole of a long structure. Presumably the scribes who wrote the consonantal text did so in the conviction that their readers would be other scribes – the only literate people who would, in any case, be allowed to see the holy books. And these other scribes would know what vowels were required. Later Hebrew scholars called Masoretes did add vowel points to secure the text by about AD 900.

This explains the origin of the name Jehovah as a title for God. In the Hebrew Bible four letters (the Tetragrammaton) were used to represent the divine name of God – in the Roman alphabet these correspond to ywwh. This name was considered sacred, and the scribes had elaborate rules for writing it down (such as making sure their hands were clean and not interrupting the writing to dip the quill in ink). When the text was read aloud, the divine name was replaced by a descriptive phrase, such as "My Lord" – which in Hebrew is Adonai. When the Masoretes added vowels to the consonantal text, they showed the vowel points for Adonai – as this was what the reader was to pronounce. The Renaissance translators, not understanding this, used the consonants of the Tetragrammaton and the vowels of Adonai, to create the novel and artificial form Jehovah, which appears in Tyndale and the King James Version. The RSV replaces this with "the LORD". Some modern translators have attempted to render the divine name as "Yahweh" – which may be the closest approximation we can manage.

We may wish today that ancient peoples had been more careful in transmitting their sacred texts to posterity. Modern technology allows us to produce multiple copies of any document very rapidly. But the people among whom the Bible grew up would not have foreseen modern people's inability to pass on an oral tradition with more or less perfect accuracy. When they came to write things down, they were amazingly careful to avoid mistakes. And they did their best to produce many copies. Moreover, the Masoretic scholars, having established what they believed was the most authoritative text of the Hebrew Bible, deliberately removed earlier copies from circulation, to avoid the reintroduction of past errors.

Nowadays we are used to the methods of scientific history, which studies the culture and artifacts of the past, as far as possible. In earlier times, historians would not necessarily think of looking for these, which, in most cases were not to be had, and conserving them. Scholars began to be interested in comparatively modern times in finding old manuscripts of the Bible. In the case of the Old Testament, the Hebrew Bible of the Jewish Masoretes was believed to preserve the ancient text accurately – but earlier translations would show how far this claim was true.

In 1628 Cyril Lucaris, Patriarch of Constantinople, sent a manuscript (handwritten) Greek Bible to Charles I of England. Experts soon showed, from the style of the writing, that this Bible came from Alexandria and was written in the fifth century AD. This Bible, called the Codex Alexandrinus from its place of origin, is one of three great ancient Bibles that survive to this day. It inspired scholars to look for other ancient manuscripts.

An even earlier manuscript Bible from Alexandria found its way to Constantinople. When the city fell to the Turks in 1453 it came to Rome – no one quite knows how. Dated about AD 350, it is called the Codex Vaticanus, after the Vatican, where it is kept.

Another fourth century manuscript was discovered as late as the mid nineteenth century, at St. Catherine's monastery in the Sinai Peninsula. The monks presented it to the Tsar of Russia. In 1933 the Soviet government sold the manuscript to the British Museum, where it is kept today, along with the Codex Alexandrinus. After its place of discovery, this manuscript is called the Codex Sinaiticus.

In 1892 Mrs. Agnes Lewis discovered, again in St. Catherine's monastery, a palimpsest – this is a manuscript that has been written on twice. Usually the scholar is interested in the older writing which is hidden, but which can be revived by chemical treatment. Underneath the later surface writing Mrs. Lewis discovered a copy of the Gospels in Syriac – a translation from a Greek text of the second century.

Five years later, in 1897, B.P. Grenfell and A.S. Hunt made excavations in Egypt, near to Oxyrhyncus. Here they found a huge collection of ancient papyri, including a fragment of the Gospel of Matthew. Later Grenfell and Hunt discovered a fragment containing some verses of John 18, which has been dated to the early years of the second century AD. An even older fragment, from an Old Testament book, Deuteronomy, was found in a mummy case – and dated to the second century BC.

In 1947 a shepherd boy discovered a cave, one of a series, in the Qumrân plateau above the Dead Sea. In the caves were jars containing ancient scrolls. Excavations at Qumrân have revealed the traces of a community, which may well be that, described by Josephus as the Essenes – a devout sect of a kind we might now call Fundamentalist. The documents found in the caves have been known, since 1949, when the story broke, as the Dead Sea Scrolls. Many are fragments, and the collection has perhaps not matched scholars' initial expectations. Nevertheless, the finds included a scroll, in Hebrew, containing practically the entire book of Isaiah, which dates from about 100 B.C. This makes it the oldest known Hebrew Bible manuscript, and the oldest existing Bible manuscript in any language.

These ancient documents do not absolutely prove that later Bible versions have not undergone ANY change from the form in which they were first written down – but at every point where they can throw light on the manuscript tradition they show how faithful it has been. Popular notions of "Chinese whispers" and steady alteration over time are contradicted by the extreme accuracy of copyists – where modern readers might suppose that handwritten copying could never match the reliability offered by modern print and word-processing technology, we should recognize the astonishing practical utility of the Masoretes' methods of revising and securing the best text. There is no other ancient text that comes even close to the Bible in the number, antiquity and consistency of the manuscript documents that are available to modern scholars. Attacks on the historicity of Jesus, of the kind made by Karl Marx, stem from the Enlightenment and a desire at all costs to explain away the supernatural. Already in the 19th century these "Rationalists" were not being rational, in the face of the evidence. Nowadays, we can dismiss, as a flat-earth view, the notion that any part of the Bible is a post-Christian fabrication.

The canon

What is a canon?

"Canon" comes into English from Latin, which in turn imports it from Greek, but its origin is in a Semitic word for a reed – which was sometimes, in antiquity, used as a measuring rod. (It is related to the modern English "cane", too.) It has come to mean an established standard or rule. The standard or rule of faith is identified with Scripture. But what is Scripture? In endorsing a list of books, which it declares to be the "true" Scripture, and thereby excluding others or reducing them, however meritorious, to a lesser status, the church has created a canon in another sense – that of a list or index of (approved) books.

What this list is has been more or less universally accepted by the catholic (in the inclusive sense) church. But in part this is a circular argument, since those who dispute the canon have mostly been branded as heretics and therefore placed outside the church. Nevertheless the historical record shows that most biblical books have always been found in the canon – there was agreement at an early time as to what this was, and the disputes have been about a small number of books. For each of the testaments, of necessity, the canon was formed some time after, but perhaps not long after, the writing of the latest document to be included.

The Old Testament canon was more or less settled by the time of Jesus who, in Luke 24.44, for example, refers to the threefold division of the Hebrew Scriptures into Law, Prophets and Writings (in Luke's account Jesus call this Psalms – by far the longest book of the Writings). In AD 70, at Jamnia, Rabbi ben Zakkai initiated a debate about the books in the Hebrew Bible – whether to exclude dubious texts like Ecclesiastes, Proverbs, the Song of Solomon and Esther, and whether to include worthy books like Ecclesiasticus. The result of this Council was to confirm the status quo – it gave its endorsement to a selection of books that the council already knew, in a way, to be the canon.

In creating a New Testament, the Christian church recognized the impossibility of adding to the canon, now fixed, of the Hebrew Bible. The Christians' faith claimed to supersede, but not to invalidate, Judaism. So a new collection of books, to reveal the New Covenant, was a natural development. The first Christian teachers spread the Good News of Jesus, so it was also natural that the core of the New Testament would be the written versions of the Good News or Gospel, which had come to be known as the gospels in the familiar four books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. There were other "gospels" in circulation from early times onwards, but these were excluded because of their provenance – and perhaps because of their contents. The rest of the New Testament, apart from two special books, is taken up with letters sent by St. Paul and other leaders to young churches throughout the Roman Empire. (Of twenty-one letters, fourteen are traditionally attributed to Paul, and seven to other writers). The two special books are the Acts of the Apostles and the Revelation of St. John.

Acts, as it is sometimes known, is an account of the growth of the church from Christ's leaving his apostles to St. Paul's imprisonment in Rome. The author is certainly St. Luke, and much of the book narrates events of which he was an immediate witness. At the start of Acts there are no Christians – only followers of Christ, awaiting some instruction. At the end of the book, the church is an established reality, with what we would now call an infrastructure, in fast-growing communities throughout the eastern half of the empire. Luke narrates some miraculous events, but the tone of the account is sober and restrained – it is a very accessible book for the modern reader.

Revelation is quite different. It is an Apocalypse – a literary genre which is opaque to the modern reader, and which is to be seen more as a coded text, which uses aliases and symbols to reveal things to those who have the key. It is the product of a persecuting society, and the author uses indirect communication to express disapproved or illicit views, to lessen the risk of punishment. This is achieved through a narrative of a vision – in which strange beasts and spirits fight each other across time and space. Revelation is attributed to an author called John, traditionally thought to be the Apostle of this name, brother of James, and son of Zebedee, though few modern scholars would support this attribution.

The challenge with the New Testament has not been to defend what is in it, but to prevent the addition of heretical books.

A standard bible

Ever since there has been a church, it has been active in attempting to produce standard and authoritative statements of its teachings and its grounds for holding these. This is partly bound up with the continuing history of the church as a human organization. But it is also partly to do with its sacred writings or Scripture.

In forming the Canon, the church decided which books were in, which were relegated to the fringes (as "apocryphal" or "deuterocanonical" – edifying but not essential), and which were certainly outside of Holy Writ. The rise of Alexander's empire established Greek as a common language, so it was not surprising that, in the reign of Ptolemy II in Egypt (285-246 BC), scholars translated the Hebrew Bible for Jews in Egypt for whom Greek was a more familiar tongue. It was natural that the books of the New Testament would be composed in Greek – which was the common language of the Roman Empire, and the only real choice for documents that were written to appeal throughout the Roman world. The inability of some of the authors to write Greek was not a problem, since most books were written by a scribe or amanuensis, who could cope with an oral original in Aramaic or some other language.

Greek was the common tongue or lingua franca of Rome, but it was not the language of government. And when Christianity ceased to be an illegal and proscribed impiety, the church became established at the heart of the empire. So it was necessary to produce a Bible in Latin. The first translations had been made from the Greek Septuagint, for the Old Testament, though Origen had revised some of the books. But in AD 393, Jerome went back to the Hebrew Bible, to produce his Latin Vulgate – meaning "common" or "standard". Jerome's version did not win acceptance quickly, as so many readers were used to the Old Latin version, but in time the superiority of the Vulgate became clear. Jerome might not have been pleased at the conservatism that secured his labours against the very kind of revision, informed by scholarship, which he favoured. Until recent times, the Roman Catholic Church has treated the Vulgate as a standard bible, to the extent of using it as the source for modern vernacular translations – like the Rheims-Douai version and that of Mgr Knox. The importance of the Jerusalem Bible is that at last the Roman church has recognized that the Vulgate is not at all points the best translation of the Hebrew and Greek original texts.

The translators of the Reformation (Luther, Calvin, Tyndale, Coverdale, and the KJV translators among them) were mostly trying to produce a bible for one or both of two things – domestic devotions and public worship. The King James Version became, though replacing the Geneva bible only gradually, the standard version for English – and for some people remains so.

Today we see why there can never be one standard – but rather a range of standard versions, for different purposes. So, for purposes of translation into other languages, for those who know no Greek, the Translators' New Testament may be a standard text. For the private reader a standard text might be an unhelpful idea – versions like TEV will only continue to work as their translators intended if they are regularly revised and updated. If not, they will go the way of Edward Harwood's baroque monument.

Some versions are standard in a different sense – that is they are in some way endorsed by particular churches, or used for readings in the worship of a particular church. So the Roman Catholic Church in the UK may have favoured the Jerusalem Bible, while the Church of England and many denominations in the UK other than Roman Catholics may have favoured the NEB. In the USA there may be potential for greater diversity, as there is no established church – but in fact the opposite seems to be happening. The RSV and NRSV have show themselves to be worthy heirs of the KJV tradition by combining sound scholarship, and avoidance of controversial, radical and fashionable departures from consensus with a sense of style which is timeless rather than topical.

Further reading

I am not an expert but the writers I have used, as sources of information mostly deserve this description. Of course, there are other places you can go, but you may find these helpful:

Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan (editors), The Oxford Companion to the Bible (1993), Oxford University Press; ISBN 0195046455

Bruce M. Metzger and Roland E. Murphy (editors), The New Oxford Annotated Bible New Revised Standard Version (1989), Oxford University Press; ISBN 0195283562

F.F. Bruce, The Books and the Parchments (1991), Marshall Pickering; ISBN 0551022787

Luc H. Grollenberg, Shorter Atlas of the Bible (1959), Thomas Nelson. Out of print but most recently published as the Penguin Shorter Atlas to the Bible (1978), Penguin-Viking, ISBN 0140510567

Alice Parmelee, A Guidebook to the Bible (1951), English Universities Press Ltd. Now published as A Guide to the Old Testament and Apocrypha (1979), Morehouse Publishing, ISBN 0819212547 and A Guide to the New Testament (1979), Morehouse-Barlow Company Incorporated, ISBN 0819212555

Appendix: Old English renderings

West-Saxon Gospels (MS. Corpus Christi College, Cambridge 140)

Matthew 7. 24-27

Ælc Þara Þe Þas min word gehierÞ, and Þa wyrcÞ, biÞ gelic Þæm wisan were, se his hus ofer stan getimbrode. þa com Þær regen and micel flod, and Þær bleowan windas, and ahruron on Þæt hus, and hit na ne feoll: soÞlice hit wæs ofer stan getimbrod.

And ælc Þara Þe gehierÞ Þas min word, and Þa ne wyrcÞ, se biÞ gelic Þæm dysigan menn, Þe getimbrode his hus ofer sand-ceosol. þa rinde hit, and Þær common flod, and bleowon windas, and a-hruron on Þæt hus, and Þæt hus feoll; and his hryre was micel.

Matthew 8. 24-30

Heofona rice is geworden Þæm menn gelic Þe seow god sæd on his æcere. SoÞlice, Þa Þa menn sleopan, Þa com his feonda sum, and oferseow hit mid coccele onmiddan Þæm hwæte, and ferde Þanon. SoÞlice, Þa seo wyrt weox, and Þone wæstm brohte, Þa ætiewde se coccel hine. þa eodon Þæs hlafordes Þeowas and cwædon: "Hlaford, hu, ne seowe Þu god sæd on Þinum æcere? Hwanon hæfde he coccel?" þa cwæÞ he: "Þæt dyde unhold mann." Þa cwædon Þa Þeowas: "Wilt Þu, we gaÞ and gadriaÞ hie?" þa cwæÞ he: "Nese: Þylæs ge Þone hwæte awyrtwalien, Þonne ge Þone coccel gadriaÞ. LætaÞ ægÞer weaxan oÞ riptiman; and on Þæm riptiman ic secge Þæm riperum: 'GadriaÞ ærest Þone coccel, and bindaÞ sceaf-mælum to forbærnenne; and gadriaÞ Þone hwæte into mimum berne.' "

Matthew 18.12-14

Gif hwelc mann hæfÞ hund sceapa, and him losaÞ an of Þæm, hu, ne forlætt he Þa nigon and hundnigontic on Þæm muntum, and gæÞ, and secÞ Þæt an Þe forwearÞ? And gif hit gelimpÞ Þæt he hit fint, soÞlice ic eow secge Þæt he swiÞor geblissaÞ for Þæm anum Þonne ofer Þa nigon and hundnigontig Þe ne losodon.

Matthew 25.1-13

þonne biÞ heofona rice gelic Þæm tien fæmnum, Þe Þa leohtfatu namon, and ferdon ongean Þone bryd-guman and Þa bryd. Hiera fif wæron dysige, and fif gleawe. Ac Þa fif dysigan namon leohtfatu, and ne namon nanne ele mid him; Þa gleawan namon ele on hiere fatum mid Þæm leohtfatum. þa se brydguma ielde , Þa hnappodon hie ealle, and slepon. Witodlice to midre nihte man hriemde, and cwæÞ: "Nu se brydguma cymÞ, faraÞ him togeanes." þa arison ealle Þa fæmnan, and glengdon hiera leohtfatu. þa cwædon Þa dysigan to Þæm wisum: "SellaÞ us of eowrum ele, for Þæm ure leohtfatu sind a cwenctu." þa andswardon Þa gleawan, and cwædon: "Nese; Þylæs Þe we and ge næbben genog. GaÞ to Þæm ciependum, and bycgaÞ eow ele." Witodlice, Þa hie ferdon, and woldon bycgan, Þa com se brydguma; and Þa Þe gearwe wæron eodon inn mid him to Þæm gieftum; and seo duru wæs belocen. þa æt niehstan common Þa oÞre fæmnan, and cwædon: "Dryhten, dryhten, læt us inn." þa andswarode he him, and cwæÞ: "SoÞ ic eow secge, ne cann ic eow." Witodlice, waciaÞ, for Þæm Þe ge nyton ne Þone dæg ne Þa tid.

From Ælfric's translation of the Heptateuch (MS. Cotton Claudius B, iv)

Genesis 12

God wolde Þa fandian Abrahames gehiersumnesse, and clipode his naman, and cwæÞ him Þus to: "Nim Þinne an-cennedan sunu Isaac, Þe Þu lufast, and far to Þæm lande Visionis hraÞe, and geoffra hine Þær uppan anre dune."

Abraham Þa aras on Þære ilcan nihte, and ferde mid twæm cnapum to Þæm fierlenan lande, and Isaac samod, on assum ridende. þa hie Þa dune gesawon, Þær Þær hie to scoldon to ofsleanne Isaac, Þa cwæÞ Abraham to Þæm twæm cnapum Þus: "AndbildiaÞ eow her mid Þæm assum sum hwile! Ic and Þæt cild gaÞ unc to gebiddenne, and wit siÞÞan cumaÞ sona eft to eow."

Abraham Þa het Isaac beran Þone wudu to Þære stowe, and he self bær his sweord and fyr. Isaac Þa ascode Abraham his fæder: "Fæder min, ic ascige hwær seo offrung sie; her is wudu and fyr." Him andwyrde se fæder: "God foresceawaÞ, min sunu, him self Þa offrunge."

Hie common Þa to Þære stowe Þe him gesweotolode God; and he Þær weofod arærde on Þa ealdan wisan, and Þone wudu gelogode swa swa he hit wolde habban to his suna bærnette, siÞÞan he ofslaegen wurde. He geband Þa his sunu, and his sweord ateah, Þæt he hine geoffrode on Þa ealdan wisan.

Mid Þæm Þe he wolde Þæt weorc beginnan, Þa clipode Godes engel arodlice of heofonum: "Abraham!" He andwyrde sona. Se engel him cwæÞ to: "Ne acwele Þu Þæt cild, ne Þine hand ne astrece ofer his sweoran! Nu ic oncneow soÞlice Þæt Þu swiÞe ondrætst God, nu Þu Þinne ancennedan sunu ofslean woldest for him."

þa beseah Abraham sona under bæc, and geseah Þær anne ramm betwixt Þæm bremlum be Þæm hornum gehæft; and he ahefde Þone ramm to Þære offrunge, and hine Þær ofsnaÞ God to lace for his sunu Isaac. He het Þa Þa stowe Dominus uidet, Þæt is, "God gesiehÞ", and giet is gesægd swa, In monte Dominus uidebit, Þæt is, "God gesiehÞ on dune."

Eft clipode se engel Abraham, and cwæÞ: "Ic swerige Þurh me selfne, saegde se Ælmihtiga, nu Þu noldest arian Þinum ancennedan suna, ac Þe wæs min ege mare Þonne his lif, ic Þe nu bletsige, and Þinne ofspring gemanig-fielde swa swa steorran on heofonum, and swa swa sand-ceosol on sæ; Þin offspring sceal agan hiera feonda gatu. And on Þinum sæde beoÞ ealle Þeoda gebletsode, for Þæm Þe Þu gehiersumodest minre hæse Þus."

Abraham Þa gecierde sona to his cnapum, and ferde him ham swa mid heofonlice blesunge.

Appendix: sample passage for comparison

Matthew 25.24-30

Note that chapter and verse divisions are a comparatively modern convenience. They were first introduced by Robert Stephanus (Estienne) in his 1551 New Testament, and for a complete bible in his 1555 Latin Vulgate, published in Geneva.

West Saxon gospel (late 10th century)

Ða com se Þe Þæt an pund underfeng, and cwæð, Hlaford, ic wat Þæt ðu eart heard mann; Þu ripst Þær ðu ne seowe, and gaderast Þær ðu ne sprengdest:

and ic ferde ofdræd, and behydde Þin pund on eorÞan; her Þu hæfst Þæt ðin ys.

Ða andswarode hys hlaford him and cwæÞ, þu yfela ðeow and slawa, ðu wistest Þæt ic rype Þær ic ne sawe, and ic gaderige Þær ic ne stredde;

hyt gebyrede Þæt Þu befæstest min feoh mynyterum; and ic name, Þænne ic come, Þæt min ys mid Þam gafole.

AnymaÞ Þæt pund æt hym, and syllað Þam Þe me ða tyn pund brohte.

Witodlice ælcon Þæra Þe hæfð man sylÞ, and he hæfð genoh; ðam Þe næfð, Þæt hym Þincð Þæt he hæbbe, Þæt hym byð ætbrodyn.

And wurpað Þone unnyttan Þeowan on Þa uttran Þystru; Þær byð wop and toÞa gristbitung.

Later Wycliffite (Purvey's) version (1397)

But he that hadde takun o besaunt, cam, and seide, Lord, Y woot that thou art an hard man; thou repist where thou hast not sowe, and thou gederist togidere where thou hast not spread abrood; and Y dredynge wente, and hidde thi besaunt in the erthe; lo! thou hast that is thin. His lord asweride, and seide to hym, Yuel servant and slow, witist thou that Y repe where Y sewe not and gadir to gidere where Y spredde not abrood? Therfor it bihofte thee to bitake my money to chaungeris, that whanne Y cam, Y schulde resseyue that that is myn with vsuris. Therfor take awei fro hym the besaunt, and ȝyve ȝe to hym that hath ten besauntis. For to euery man that hath me schal ȝyve, and he schal encreese; but fro hym that hath not, also that that hym semeth to haue, schal be taken awey from him. And caste ȝe out the vnprofitable seruaunt in to vtmer derknessis; ther schal be wepynge, and gryntyng of teeth.

Rheims version (1582)

And he also that had receiued the one talent, came forth and said, Lord, I know that thou art a hard man, thou reapest where thou didst not sow: and gatherest where thou strawedst not: and being afraid I went, and hid thy talent in the earth: behold loe here thou hast that which thine is. And his lord answering, said to him: Naughtie and sloughtful seruant, thou didst know that I reape where I sow not, & gather where I strawed not: thou oughtest therefore to haue committed my money to the bankers, and coming I might haue receiued mine owne with vsurie.

Take ye away therefore the talent from him, and giue it him that hath ten talents. For to euery one that hath shal be giuen, and he shal abound: but from him that hath not, that also which he seemeth to haue, shal be taken away from him.

And the vnprofitable seruant cast ye out into the vtter darknesse. There shal be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

King James version (1611)

Then he which had receiued the one talent, came & said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sowen, & gathering where thou hast not strawed:

And I was afraid, and went and hidde thy talent in the earth: loe, there thou hast that is thine.

His lord answered and said vnto him, Thou wicked and slouthfull seruant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed:

Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my comming I should have received mine owne with vsurie.

Take therefore the talent from him, and giue it vnto him which hath ten talents.

For vnto every one that hath shall be giuen, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away euen that which he hath.

And cast yee the vnprofitable seruant into outer darkenesse, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

New English Bible (1961)

Then the man who had been given one bag came and said, "Master, I knew you to be a hard man: you reap where you have not sown, you gather where you have not scattered; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your gold in the ground. Here it is – you have what belongs to you." "You lazy rascal!" said the master. "You knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered? Then you ought to have put my money on deposit, and on my return I should have got it back with interest. Take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one with ten bags. For the man who has will always be given more, till he has enough and to spare; and the man who has not will forfeit even what he has. Fling the useless servant out into the dark, the place of wailing and grinding of teeth!"

Appendix: Challoner's revision of the Rheims-Douai Version

Ephesians 3: 8-11

Rheims New Testament (1582)

To me the least of al the sainctes is giuen this grace, among the Gentils to euangelize the vnsearcheable riches of Christ, and to illuminate al men what is the dispensation of the sacrament hidden from worlds in God, who created al things: that the manifold wisedom of God may be notified to the Princes and Potestats in the celestials by the Church, according to the prefinition of worlds, which he made in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Challoner New Testament (1749)

To me, the least of all the saints, is given this grace, to preach among the gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to enlighten all men that they may see what is the dispensation of the mystery which hath been hidden from eternity in God, who created all things: that the manifold wisdom of God may be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly *places* through the church, according to the eternal purpose which he made in Christ Jesus our Lord.