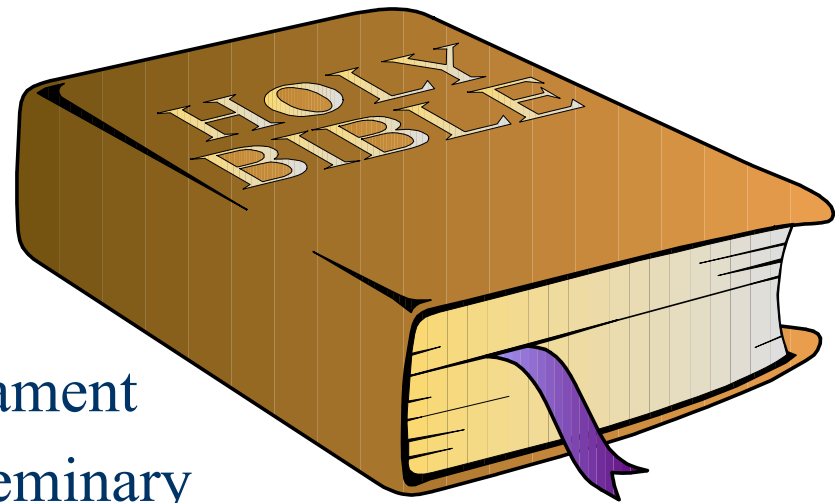


# Modern English Versions of the Bible



Robert C. Newman  
Professor of New Testament  
Biblical Theological Seminary  
Hatfield, PA, USA



# The Problem Stated

- ◆ We have a very large number of Bible versions in English today, with new ones coming out nearly every year.
- ◆ How do we tell which ones are reliable for the use of Christians and seekers in trying to understand God's message to mankind?



# Evaluating a Translation

- ◆ Are the translators in agreement with the teachings of the Bible?
- ◆ Is the translation faithful to the best available text of the Bible in the original languages?
- ◆ Is the translation clear for its intended audience?
- ◆ Does the translation conform to good contemporary English usage?
- ◆ Does the translation have stylistic beauty?

# The Authorized (King James) Version (1611)

- ◆ A committee translation, with 3 committees appointed by King James 1 and meeting at Westminster, Oxford and Cambridge
- ◆ Involved the best scholars in England at a time when biblical scholarship was at a peak
- ◆ All the committee members had a very high opinion of the Bible.
- ◆ Thus the KJV seems to have satisfied all 5 items when it was translated.
- ◆ But with the passage of almost 400 years, it no longer satisfies all these criteria.

# The KJV & the Criteria

- ◆ The KJV no longer conforms to the best available text in the original languages.
- ◆ The KJV is no longer in contemporary English.
- ◆ The original audience of the KJV is long dead.
- ◆ None of this is the fault of the original translators.



# Changes in English since 1611

- ◆ Verb changes
- ◆ Pronoun changes
- ◆ Vocabulary changes



# Verb Changes

- ◆ Disappearance of *est* forms for 2<sup>nd</sup> person singular
  - thou knowest → you know
- ◆ Transformation of *eth* forms for 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular
  - he knoweth → he knows

# Pronoun Changes

- ◆ Disappearance of distinct 2<sup>nd</sup> person singular forms ‘thou, thee, thy’
  - These were not terms of respect when the KJV was made.
- ◆ Disappearance of 2<sup>nd</sup> plural *ye*
  - Replaced by 2<sup>nd</sup> singular/plural *you, your*
- ◆ Replacement of relative pronoun *which* by *who* when a person is referred to



# Verb & Pronoun Changes

- ◆ None of these changes are likely to produce serious misunderstanding of the text.
- ◆ They do give the average person the impression either:
  - That the Bible was written in some sort of pious or stilted language
  - That its writers were illiterate
  - Neither of which is true!
- ◆ Far more important are vocabulary changes, as they hinder understanding.

# Vocabulary Changes

- ◆ Some words in the KJV are archaic or no longer used in modern English:
  - Assuage (Job 16:5)
  - Ensue (1 Pet 3:11)
  - Holpen (Ps 83:8)
  - Rereward (Num 10:25)
  - Straightway (Mt 4:22)
  - Twain (often)
  - Wot (Gen 21:26)

# Vocabulary Changes

- ◆ Other words have changed meaning:
  - Charity (1 Cor 13)
  - Fetch a compass (2 Sam 5:23)
  - Girdle (often)
  - Leasing (Ps 4:2)
  - Meat (often)
  - Prevent (Ps 119:147-48)
  - Rent (often)
  - Tire (Isa 3:18)

# Vocabulary Changes

- ◆ But the Bible was originally written in common, everyday language.
- ◆ It was intended to be understood by average people.
- ◆ We need to make a revision or new translation as often as the language changes significantly:
  - To preserve God's intention
  - To make His message plain

# Textual Discoveries & Developments since 1611

- ◆ The Textual Basis of the KJV
- ◆ Manuscript Discoveries since 1611
- ◆ Developments in Textual Study



# The Textual Basis of the KJV

- ◆ NT ultimately based on the edition of the Greek NT by Erasmus in 1516.
- ◆ Erasmus' edition was based on only a few manuscripts; the oldest (10<sup>th</sup> cen) was least used.
- ◆ Erasmus had only one (incomplete) manuscript of Revelation; he supplied the last 6 verses from Latin.
- ◆ Acts 9:6 and 1 John 5:7-8 were also supplied from the Latin.



# Manuscript Discoveries

- ◆ In 1611, very few manuscripts known from before AD 1000.
- ◆ Since then, several hundred earlier mss on parchment have been found, with two nearly complete from before AD 400.
- ◆ Since 1900, many fragmentary NT mss have been found written on more fragile papyrus and copied before AD 400.
- ◆ These include substantial parts of several mss from before AD 200 and a small fragment of John from about AD 130.



# Developments in Text Study

- ◆ The known manuscripts are now seen to fall into several families, of which the most important are:
  - Alexandrian
  - Western
  - Byzantine





# Text Families

- ◆ Alexandrian
  - Early, known by AD 150
  - Short, but seems reliable
  - Text used in most recent English versions
- ◆ Western
  - Early, known by AD 150
  - Longer, erratic, tendency toward additions
- ◆ Byzantine
  - Later, apparently not before AD 300
  - Intermediate length
  - Often seems to combine Alex and West readings
  - Text used in KJV

# Some Differences

- ◆ Matthew 6:13b – doxology of Lord’s Prayer
  - Probably not before 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> century
- ◆ Mark 16:9-20 – ending of Mark
  - Most controversial
  - Known before AD 150
- ◆ John 7:53-8:11 – woman caught in adultery
  - Not in earlier mss
  - Probably a real incident preserved outside NT
- ◆ 1 John 5:7-8 – heavenly witnesses
  - Not in Greek before late medieval period
  - Not in Latin before 5<sup>th</sup> century

# Theological Trends since 1611

- ◆ Renaissance (1300-1600)
  - Revival of interest in Classical period
  - Weakened dominance of the Church
  - Reintroduced many pagan ideas
- ◆ Reformation (1500-1700)
  - Return to Scripture as sole authority in faith
  - Priesthood of believers → more variety interpreting
  - Occultism of Renaissance suppressed

# Theological Trends since 1611

- ◆ Liberalism (1700-present)
  - Antisupernatural reaction
  - Science replaces authority of Church & Bible
  - Rejection of miracles
  - Enters German churches in 1800s, US in 1900s
- ◆ Present situation (c2000)
  - Liberalism still strong in academia
  - Some resurgence of orthodoxy
  - Growing diversity in ethnic groups, with influence of other religions and new age movement

# Evaluating Translations

- ◆ Are the translators in agreement with the teachings of the Bible?
- ◆ Is the translation faithful to the best available text of the Bible in the original languages?
- ◆ Is the translation clear for its intended audience?
- ◆ Does the translation conform to good contemporary English usage?
- ◆ Does the translation have stylistic beauty?

# Evaluating Translations

- ◆ Are the translators in agreement with the teachings of the Bible?
  - Pass: NASU, NIV, NLT, ESV
  - Fail: NRSV, REB, NWT
- ◆ Is the translation faithful to the best available text of the Bible in the original languages?
  - Pass: Most modern versions
  - Fail: KJV, NKJV, etc.

# Evaluating Translations

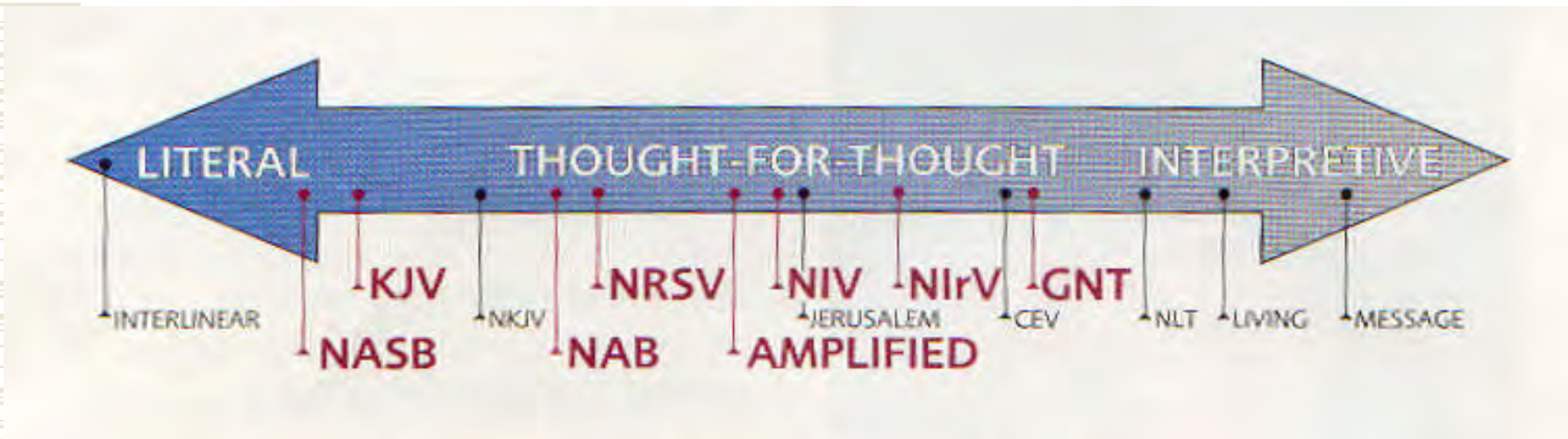
- ◆ Is the translation clear for its intended audience?
  - Not all have same intended audience.
  - NLT easiest reading
  - NASU, KJV hardest
- ◆ Does the translation conform to good contemporary English usage?
  - Pass: most modern versions
  - Fail: older versions, NASB, Amplified

# Evaluating Translations

- ◆ Does the translation have stylistic beauty?
  - Think NIV, ESV best
  - NASU, NKJV somewhat weak



# Literal vs Paraphrase



# Some Tests for Theological Soundness

- ◆ Do the translators think the apostles properly understood the Old Testament?
  - Peter – cp Acts 2:27 with Ps 16:10
  - Matthew – cp Mt 1:23 with Isa 7:14
  - Hebrews – cp Heb 1:8 with Ps 45:6
- ◆ Do the translators think the apostles believed Jesus was God?
  - John – check Jn 1:1 and 8:58
  - Paul – check Rom 9:5
  - Hebrews – check Heb 1:8

# Some Tests for Theological Soundness

- ◆ Do the translators downplay Messianic prophecy?
  - Ps 2:12 (kiss the Son?)
  - Ps 22:16 (pierced hands?)
  - Isa 9:6 (names suggest deity?)
  - Isa 53:10, 12 (dies and lives again?)
  - Dan 9:24-25 (Messiah or just anointed one?)
  - Mic 5:2 (eternally pre-existing?)
  - Zech 12:10 (look on me?)

# Some Tests for Theological Soundness

- ◆ Do the translators downplay resurrection in the Old Testament?
  - 1 Sam 2:6
  - Job 19:25-27
  - Ps 17:15
  - Ps 49:14-15



The End

Lord, help us to judge rightly!