

MODERN ENGLISH VERSIONS OF THE BIBLE

Important Considerations in Evaluating a Bible Translation:

1. Translators in agreement with teachings of Bible?
2. Translation faithful to best available text in original languages?
3. Translation conform to good contemporary (English) usage?
4. Translation clear for audience/readership envisioned?
5. Translation have stylistic beauty?

The Authorized (King James) Version (1611)

A committee translation, with 6 committees appointed by King James 1 meeting at Westminster, Oxford, Cambridge.

Involved best scholarship of England at a time when Biblical scholarship was at its peak. All men on committee had very high opinion of Bible.

Thus KJV seems to have satisfied all 5 considerations above at time it was translated.

But with the passage of nearly 375 years, it no longer satisfies ##2,3, and the audience envisioned in #4 is long dead.

Changes in the English Language Since 1611

Verb Changes:

disappearance of "est" forms: thou knowest => you know

transformation of "eth" forms: he knoweth => he knows

Pronoun Changes:

disappearance of distinct 2nd singular forms: thou, thee, thy
(not terms of respect when KJV made)

disappearance of 2nd plural nominative: ye

replacement of above by 2nd singular/plural: you, your

replacement of relative pronoun "which" by "who" when a person is referred to

None of these changes are likely to produce serious misunderstanding of the meaning of the text, but they do give the average person the idea that the Bible is written in some pious or stilted language or that its writers were illiterate.

Vocabulary Changes:

Far more important because they hinder understanding:

Words Archaic or No Longer Used:

assuage (Job 16:5)	straightway (Mt 4:22)
ensue (1 Pet 3:11)	twain (often)
holpen (Ps 83:8)	wot (Gen 21:26)
rereward (Num 10:25)	

Words Changed in Meaning:

charity (1 Cor 13)	meat (often)
fetch a compass (2 Sam 5:23)	prevent (Ps 119:147-8)
girdle (often)	rent (often)
leasing (Ps 4:2)	tire (Isa 3:18)

But the Bible was originally written in common, everyday language and intended to be understood by each individual. To preserve God's intention and to obey His command to make His message plain, it is necessary to undertake a revision or new translation as often as there is substantial change in our language.

Textual Discoveries & Developments Since 1611

The Textual Basis of the KJV:

Ultimately based on printed edition of Greek NT prepared by Erasmus in 1516; this edition was based on only a few manuscripts, of which the oldest (10th cen) was least used. Erasmus had only a damaged manuscript of Revelation, so last 6 vv supplied from Latin; so also Acts 9:6, 1 John 5:7-8.

At time of KJV, work had just begun on collecting old manuscripts and sorting them by the kind of text they preserved.

Manuscript Discoveries:

In England in 1611, very few mss were known which were copied earlier than AD 1000. Since then, several hundred earlier mss on parchment have been found and studied, including two nearly complete ones from before AD 400.

Since about 1900, many fragmentary NT mss have been found written on more fragile papyrus & copied before AD 400, including substantial parts of several mss from about AD 200 and a small fragment of John from about AD 130.

Text Study Developments:

The known manuscripts are now seen to fall into several families, of which the most important are:

Alexandrian: early (known by AD 150), short, but seems reliable; text used for recent English versions

Western: early (known by AD 150), longer, erratic, tendency toward additions

Byzantine: later (app not before AD 300), intermediate length, often seems to combine Alex & Western readings; text used for KJV

Passages Where Difference Most Noticeable:

A fairly complete list of differences can be found in NASB and New Scofield marginal notes; here are the most striking examples:

Matt 6:13b - doxology of Lord's Prayer; prob not before 3rd or 4th cen

Mark 16:9-20 - end of Mark; most controversial; known before AD 150

John 7:53-8:11 - incident of woman caught in adultery; not in earlier mss; prob a real incident preserved elsewhere, later incorporated into some NT mss

1 John 5:7 - heavenly witnesses; not known in Greek before late medieval period, nor in Latin before 5th cen

Theological Trends Since About 1611:

Renaissance (1300-1600): revival of interest in Classical antiquity; weakened dominance of church and reintroduced many pagan ideas

Reformation (1500-1700): return to Scripture as sole authority in matters of faith; priesthood of believer led to more variety of interpretation; occultism of Renaissance suppressed

Liberalism (1700-present): antisupernatural reaction, in which scientific discoveries viewed as replacing need for miracles, God; begins to enter German church in early 1800's, US church in early 1900's

Present Situation (late 1900's): mainline denominations and their agencies dominated by a "Christianity" which rejects miraculous and thus many basic doctrines of Biblical Christianity

CHOOSING A BIBLE VERSION

Apply numbered considerations listed at beginning. For modern versions:

	PASS	FAIL
1.	NASB, NIV, Berkeley, LB	RSV, NEB, NWT
2.	most modern versions	KJII, New KJ
3.	most modern versions	Amplified
4.	LB for easiest reading	NASB hardest
5.	think NIV best	NASB somewhat weak