***So Many Bibles, So Little Time!* [GM 2 Notes FOR Slides]**

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**I. Brief Historical Overview of the Manuscript Tradition of the Bible**

A. Old Testament (Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek)

Septuagint / LXX (Greek translation of Hebrew during 3-2nd century BC or BCE)

Dead Sea Scrolls (2-1st century BC or BCE)

Masoretic Text (not standardized until the 9th century AD or CE)

1. New Testament (Greek)

There are 5,196+ manuscripts from the 2nd to the 16th century. Of these, 3,032 are Greek manuscripts and 2,164 are Greek lectionaries. Of this total, only 318 items come before the 9th century A.D. and the rest thereafter. In addition to this evidence, there are numerous versions and the Church Fathers. [numbers subject to change with discoveries]

C. English Versions

Here is a chart on the history of English Bibles (also in NOTES...have handy during this lecture).

<http://tmcdaniel.palmerseminary.edu/Chart%20-%20English%20Bible%20History%20-%201.gif>

* The Bishop of Rome commissioned **Jerome to do a Latin translation** of the Bible in 382. This version was culminated at Bethlehem about **404 C.E.** The Vulgate was the Bible of the Western Church for over a thousand years and only those who knew the Latin language had access to it. Gutenberg printed Jerome’s version in **1452-56**. A Greek New Testament was not printed and distributed until Erasmus’ in March of **1516** (the Spanish *Complutensian Polyglot* was fully published in **1520**, although the NT was finished in January 1514). Erasmus (c. 1466-1536) was a scholarly Roman Catholic monk of Christian humanist persuasion who was charged by the Roman Church to provide a Greek NT for publication prior to the Spanish. He reportedly did so with less than a dozen Greek manuscripts. His cache of manuscripts was severely limited (he claims to have consulted the Vulgate in some places, see Aland, *The Text of the NT*, pp. 3ff. and <http://confessionalbibliology.com/2016/06/08/erasmian-myths-revelation-back-translated-from-the-vulgate/> ). The “race” to be the first to publish a GNT caused Erasmus to say, “thrown together rather than edited” (Aland, 4). **Erasmus’ Greek NT became the base for the KJV in 1611.** The KJV translators also used Beza’s work of the late 1500s, which mostly represented Byzantine material.[See Kurt and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*. Second Edition. Eerdmans, 1989.; Metzger, *The Text of the NT.* Second Edition, Oxford, 1968, 95ff.]
* John Wyclif (1329-1384) at Oxford resisted the Roman Church ban on translating the Bible into the vernacular (only Latin Vulgate was sanctioned). Wyclif and his associates provided a too literal translation of the Vulgate. This virtually “underground” rendition was strongly resisted by Rome, so much so that the Council of Constance in 1414 ordered Wyclif’s body disinterred and burned.
* William Tyndale (1526) printed the NT in 1525 but was executed (1536) before finishing the OT. Religious intrigue was the modus operandi until Tyndale’s death. Afterward, politics changed and England became a hotbed for translating the Bible into the vernacular
* Coverdale (1535)
* The Great Bible (1539)
* **Geneva Bible (1560)**
* Bishops’ Bible (1568)
* **King James Version (1611)** The KJV is an English translation based on Erasmus’s Greek text which was produced from less than 12 Greek manuscripts (remember, we have over 5,000 manuscripts today!). This version began about 1604 with about 54 translators involved (only 47 names preserved). The KJV was as controversial as any new translation (it was banned from the new American colonies and the Geneva Bible was mandated for the new world), but it managed to dominate the English world until a new revision was commissioned in 1870. See the American Bible Society Chart. In terms of English speaking culture, the KJV has been the most influencial translation over the longest period of time.

Because of a continuing pocket of naïve individuals who think that “if the KJV was good enough for Paul, its good enough for me!”, a few comments are appropriate.

* The KJV is an important historic translation and worthy of respect for what it is (which means that one must understand exactly what it is historically).
* The KJV is just one translation in the stream of English Bibles in the Western world.
* The KJV that we read, even the Trinitarian Bible Society version, is in no way the same as the original KJV. The difference is illustrated by comparing 1600s Shakespearian speech to today.
* The KJV is the first of a long line of “formal equivalent” translations (e.g. ASV, RSV, NASB, NKJV, NRSV, ESV). The line of versions that revised the English of the KJV did so as Western culture required changes in the felicity and level of language so that the current culture can understand the Bible.

For more information about the KJV translators see:

McClure, Alexander W. *The Translators Revived*. New York: Board of Publication of the Reformed Dutch Church, 1855.

Opfell, Olga S. *The King James Bible Translators*. London: McFarland, 1982.

Paine, Gustavus S. *The Learned Men*. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1959 [reprinted by Baker as *The Men Behind the King James Version*].

For books that address “The King James Only” scenario:

Carson, D. A. *The King James Version Debate: A Plea for Realism*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979.

White, James R. *The King James Only Controversy: Can You Trust the Modern Translations?* Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1995.

White, James R. *King James Onlyism: A New Sect*. Singapore: Saik Wah Press, 2006.

* **English Revised Version (1881-1885)**
* **American Standard Version (ASV, 1901) My favorite paragraphed Bible.**
* **Revised Standard Version (1946-1952)**
* **New Revised Standard Version (NRSV, 1990)**

ALL of the versions above after 1611 are built on the KJV…they are revisions of it and not totally new translations. SEE American Bible Society Chart attached at end of this note package.

**II. Defining English Bible Translation Procedures (Focus on English Versions, America)**

**The historic purpose of translation is to render the Bible in the language of the people so that all have access to Scripture.** The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Bible for Jews of the second century before Christ illustrates this principle. All “versions” (versions are any translation of the “original” Bible) since that time serve the same purpose.

It is unfortunate that the modern era has become more “market oriented” than legitimate translation oriented. Consequently, **it is imperative that current Christians understand the nature of translations** available to them. With an appropriate understanding of English versions available today, one can make good use of all legitimate Bibles (“legitimate” refers to translations produced by competent scholars. There are many “personality” bibles and “understandable” bibles that do not meet this criteria. These kinds of bibles should be rejected).

**There are two prominent translation procedures (“rule of thumb”).**

A. **Formal Equivalence** (KJV, ASV, NASB, RSV, ESV)

**All but the ESV (it uses 1971 RSV) of these English translations are revisions of the KJV**. Translators did consult the growing manuscript evidence with each new version. They all follow—more or less—a formal equivalence procedure for translation. Bruce Metzger explains this by his comment in the introduction to the NRSV, “…the directive to continue in the tradition of the King James Bible, but to introduce such changes as are warranted on the basis of accuracy, clarity, euphony, and current English usage. Within the constraints set by the original texts and by the mandates of the Division, the Committee has followed the maxim, **“As literal as possible, as free as necessary.”** As a consequence, the New Revised Standard Versions (NRSV) remains essentially a literal translation.” [Introduction “To the Reader” to the NRSV. The NRSV is receiving criticism for allowing modern cultural pressure to detract from formal equivalency, e.g. gender issues.]

**A “literal translation” requires more from the reader since the translators do very little interpretive adjustments.** Furthermore, the KJV is reputed to have been written at a 12th grade level and the NIV at a 6th grade level.

B. **Dynamic or Functional Equivalence** (NIV/moderate, NLT/aggressive)

This translation procedure is well explained in the introduction to the New Living Translation Bible (a revision of The Living Bible). “A dynamic equivalence translation can also be called **a thought-for-thought translation**, as contrasted with a formal equivalence or word-for-word translation. Of course, to translate the thought of the original language **requires that the text be interpreted** accurately and then be rendered in understandable idiom.” [I would say, however, that the NLT is beyond the NIV in this regard, but this statement captures the NIV as well.]

A “dynamic / functional equivalence” translation is **more of an interpretive translation**. The “interpretive translation” is guided by the need to make the translation easier to read/understand (cf. some of the illustrations to follow). It therefore **requires less judgment from the reader since the translators have included their interpretation of texts to avoid the ambiguous nature of the English renditions.**

Since functional equivalent translators make more judgments about texts, it is useful for an English reader to be alert to such decisions by having a “control” formal equivalent version nearby in order to see the differences. Seeing the differences is the guide to knowing what needs interpretation.

C. Other Procedures (paraphrase, amplified, renditions often from English to English! Gender inclusive translations)

D. Recommendations

1. Choose Bibles that use a paragraph format. The older “every verse

in the left-hand column” type of Bible leads to a proof text mentality rather than an understanding of context. A paragraph is a unit of thought and determines how the sentences in the paragraph should be interpreted.

2. Choose a continuum of Bibles for study (KJV or ESV, NRSV, NIV, NLT). Watch how the dynamic equivalent versions interpret your formal equivalent control Bible. The Zondervan four versions parallel Bible (KJV, NASB, NIV, NLT) is a good choice to have four key versions in view.

3. Be careful with “Study” Bibles. Study Bibles tend to frame the Bible after the purposes of the study in view. They may ignore correct structure for outline/thematic purposes.

4. Avoid the expanded translation kinds of Bibles (e.g. any Bible called a “paraphrase”, The Message, etcetera). Be a solid Bible reader, not faddish. These kinds of Bible can be used like a commentary.

5. Be a student of the Bible. This is every Christian’s responsibility.

**III. Engaging English Bible Versions and Translation Procedures**

If you procure and use the Zondervan four version Bible, you can continue to make your own comparisons. **IF the Zondervan Bible is not available there may be online help. For example…**

Go to: [www.biblegateway.com/passage/](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/) where you will find a program to help you put various versions in parallel columns. [This site can also be a concordance if you need it.]

1. Choose the passage you need to view.

2. Select the versions *in this order:* FORMAL to FUNCTIONAL to PARAPHRASE

[\*\***READ THE INTRODUCTIONS, ESPECIALLY TO THE NRSV AND NLT.** Avoid “paraphrases” and individually produced Bibles...the market is flooded with “personality or subject agenda” versions...AVOID THESE]

3. Block both footnotes and cross-references with a check mark.

4. Compare from left (formal) to right (functional/dynamic) to see how your text is translated.

As you move from the left (formal) to the right (dynamic) the changes, expansions, etc. you observe are part of the translator’s “trying” to make the Bible understandable. It is often “their” interpretive opinions put into the translation.

**BIBLE VERSIONS CONTINUUM** (Sample listing of best known)

**FORMAL EQUIVALENT FUNCTIONAL/DYNAMIC PARAPHRASE**

**EQUIVALENT**

“…as literal as possible, as “a thought-for-thought translation, [READ their introduction]

free as necessary…” (RSV as contrasted with a formal equivalence

introduction) or word-for-word translation”

KJV (1611) NIV (1984) NLT (1997) Phillips (1958)

NKJV (1979) NIV (2011) LB (Living Bible 1971)

ERV (1885) The Message (1992)

ASV (1901) JB (Jerusalem Bible 1966)

NASB (1963)

LEGACYSB (2022)

RSV (1946)

NRSV (1990)

ESV (2001)

Your **first task** is to choose a “CONTROL BIBLE.” This should come from the Formal Equivalent column. You can choose two if you like (I do). For example, KJV + NRSV, or ASV + NRSV…

**Then choose** some Functional versions (the more the merrier here since these will alert you to “interpretive translation”). You will notice the NLT (New Living Translation is farther right in this column. This is because it is nearly a paraphrase in my opinion).

Zondervan no longer publishes the *Today’s Parallel Bible*, but you might find it in a used book store.

You can also include some farther out versions if you like (e.g. some real favorite of yours). But when you get beyond the first two columns, you are on some thin ice. Paraphrases are a bit wild at times. Some are even a “famous person” doing a paraphrase of their English Bible!! This is not material for Bible interpretation, especially since such persons seldom have adequate credentials to make translation judgments…they just have popularity and sell-ability.

After you have your Bible Versions in place, the real fun begins ;-)

NOTE: American Church traditions and popular level theology have been strongly influenced by the way the King James Version phrases its translation. Many verses created “stereotypes” in the thinking of church people. New translations and new generations often do not have this baggage. But it is good to identify some of the baggage because you will see it in your parents and grandparents thinking ;-)

**The following charts are provided to illustrate the differences between major formal and dynamic versions. These comparisons illustrate how you can utilize “interpretive” versions as commentary on the more ambiguous renditions of formal equivalent translations. LOOK FOR DIFFERENCES and let that be your trigger for research.**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Texts** | **Formal Equivalence**  **King James (KJV)** | **Formal Equivalence**  **New Revised Standard**  **(NRSV)** | **Dynamic Equivalence 1**  **New International Version**  **(NIV 1984)** | **New International Version Revised**  **(NIV 2011)** | **Dynamic Equivalence 2**  **New Living Translation (NLT)** |
| John  3:16 | For God so loved the world, that he gave his **only begotten Son**,…. | For God so loved the world that he gave his **only Son**,…. | For God so loved the world that he gave his **one and only Son**,…. | For God so loved the world that he gave his **one and only Son**,… | For God so loved the world that he gave his **only Son**,… |
| Acts  26:28 | Then Agrippa said unto Paul, **Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian**. | Agrippa said to Paul, “**Are you so quickly persuading me to become a Christian**?” | Then Agrippa said to Paul, “**Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?**” | Then Agrippa said to Paul, **“Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?”** | Agrippa interrupted him. “**Do you think you can make me a Christian so quickly?**” |
| Gal  5:4 | Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of **you are justified by the law**; ye are fallen **from** grace. | **You who want to be justified by the law** have cut yourselves off from Christ, you have fallen **away from** grace. | **You who are trying to be justified by law** have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen **away from** grace. | **You who are trying to be justified by the law** have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen **away from** grace. | For **if you are trying to make yourselves right with God by keeping the law**, you have been cut off from Christ! You have fallen **away from** God’s grace. |
| Rom  9:3 | **For I could wish that myself were accursed** from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh | **For I could wish that I myself were accursed** and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people | **For I could wish that I myself were cursed** and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race | **For I could wish that I myself were cursed** and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race, | For my people, my Jewish brothers and sisters**. I would be willing to be forever cursed**—cut off from Christ!—if that would save them. |
| Phil  3:6 | Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the **righteousness which is in the law**, blameless. | As to zeal, a persecutor of the church; **as to righteousness under the law**, blameless. | As for zeal, persecuting the church; as for **legalistic righteousness**, faultless. | as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for **righteousness based on the law**, faultless. | And zealous? Yes, in fact, I harshly persecuted the church. And **I obeyed the Jewish law so carefully** that I was never accused of any fault. |
| Matt  19:9 | And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, **except for fornication**, and shall marry another, committeth adultery. | And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, **except for unchastity**, and marries another commits adultery. | I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, **except for marital unfaithfulness**, and marries another woman commits adultery. | I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, **except for sexual immorality**, and marries another woman commits adultery.” | And I tell you this, a man who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery—**unless his wife has been unfaithful**. |
| 1 Cor  5:5 | To deliver such an one unto Satan **for the destruction of the flesh**, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. | you are to hand this man over to Satan **for the destruction of the flesh**, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. | hand this man over to Satan, **so that the sinful nature may be destroyed** and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord. | hand this man over to Satan **for the destruction of the flesh**, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord. | Then you must cast this man out of the church and into Satan’s hands, **so that his sinful nature will be destroyed** and he himself will be saved when the Lord returns. |
| 1 Cor  7:1 | Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: **[It is] good for a man not to touch a woman**. | Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: **"It is well for a man not to touch a woman."** | Now for the matters you wrote about: **It is good for a man not to marry.** | Now for the matters you wrote about: **“It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.”** | Now about the questions you asked in your letter. **Yes, it is good to live a celibate life**. |
| 1Thess  1:3 | Remembering without ceasing your **work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope** in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father; | remembering before our God and Father your **work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope** in our Lord Jesus Christ. | We continually remember before our God and Father your **work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope** in our Lord Jesus Christ. | We remember before our God and Father your **work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope** in our Lord Jesus Christ. | As we talk to our God and Father about you, we think of your **faithful work, your loving deeds, and your continual anticipation of the return of our Lord** Jesus Christ. |
| 1 Tim  3:11 | Even so [must their] **wives** [be] grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things. | **Women**, likewise must be serious, not slanderers, but temperate, faithful in all things. | In the same way, their **wives** are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything. | In the same way, the **women** are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything. | In the same way, their **wives** must be respected and must not speak evil of others. They must exercise self-control and be faithful in everything they do. |
| 1 Tim 3:6-7 | **6** Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride **he fall into the condemnation of the devil**. **7** Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. | 6He must not be a recent convert, or he may be puffed up with conceit and **fall into the condemnation of the devil.** 7Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace and the snare of the devil. [[1]](#footnote-1) | **6** He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and **fall under the same judgment as the devil.** **7** He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil’s trap. | **6** He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceiteda and **fall under the same judgmentb as the devil.** **7** He must also have a good reputation with outsiders,a so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil’s trap.b | A church leader must not be a new believer, because he might become proud, **and the devil would cause him to fall.a** **7** Also, people outside the church must speak well of him so that he will not be disgraced and fall into the devil’s trap. |
| 1 Cor 4:4 | **4** **For I know nothing by myself**; **yet am I not hereby justified:** but he that judgeth me is the Lord. | 4**I am not aware of anything against myself**, **but I am not thereby acquitted**. It is the Lord who judges me. [[2]](#footnote-2) | **4** **My conscience is clear**, **but that does not make me innocent.** It is the Lord who judges me. | **4** **My consciencea is clear**, **but that does not make me innocent.**b It is the Lord who judges me.c | **My conscience is clear, but that doesn’t prove I’m right.** It is the Lord himself who will examine me and decide. |

Consider Neh 8:8 cf. Ezra 4:7 and Varner’s note below; Eph. 4:27; Acts 9:36; Hosea 9:7 “man of the spirit”; 1 Tim. 1:4; 2:5; 3:2 marriage issue; Phil. 3:6; James 2:2; John 8:58

**NIV CHANGES from original version of 1984 to 2011 revision**. For nearly 30 years, the NIV remained essentially as it was released in 1984. This is true in spite of a number of scholarly criticisms of particular translations. In 2011, the first major revision was released and there were massive changes that usually reflected the criticisms that had accumulated. You will notice how my criticisms of a very small sample of passages in the original NIV were almost all emended back to more formal renditions of the text.

If you want to review this part of our study, go to <http://biblicalelearning.org/new-testament/1-corinthians-meadors/> I have this lecture online, but the handout there is not as new as the one here but you can download the notes at the beginning screen. The basic content is the same.

William Varner, a member of the Legacy translation committee, observes on the Neh/Ezra text and the Legacy Bible:

“Maybe this will not contain as much potential controversy as some of my recent posts. Or will it?

“They read from the book, from the law of God, explaining and giving insight, and they provided understanding of the reading” (Nehemiah 8:8).

The verb in this verse is פֹרָ֑שׁ which means “explain” or “give understanding.” Here the LSB chose to differ from the NASB tradition which renders the verb as “translate,” as also does the CSB. Thus this chapter has been viewed as an example of the Levites translating the Biblical Hebrew into the popular Aramaic language so the common people could understand the meaning. But there is another verb that occurs in Ezra 4:7 (מְתֻרְגָּ֥ם ) which means to “translate” and there it refers to a letter translated from Aramaic into Persian. The later “Targum,” the translation of the Hebrew Bible into Aramaic, is derived from that verb.

It should also be noted that the two ancient translations of the Hebrew Bible, the Septuagint and the Vulgate, also render the verb as “explain” and not as “translate.” They understood the difference between translation and explanation. There is also a note in the NET Bible defending the words as describing an explanation, not a translation.

So this scene in Nehemiah 8 is a beautiful example of Biblical texts being publicly read and then explained to the hearers. There are examples of the public reading of the Torah in earlier texts such as Exodus 24, Deuteronomy 32, and Joshua 24.

This chapter, however, is the first clear example of a Torah reading accompanied by an explanation. Thus it appears to be the first example in the Bible of what today we call ‘expository preaching.’”

1. [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*](https://ref.ly/logosres/nrsv?ref=BibleNRSV.1Ti3.6&off=0&ctx=re+of+God%E2%80%99s+church%3f+~6%C2%A0He+must+not+be+a+r) (1 Ti 3:6–7). (1989). Thomas Nelson Publishers. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*](https://ref.ly/logosres/nrsv?ref=BibleNRSV.1Co4.4&off=0&ctx=+even+judge+myself.+~4%C2%A0%E2%80%A2I+am+not+aware+of) (1 Co 4:4). (1989). Thomas Nelson Publishers. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)