

A Comparison of Translations Ephesians 1–3

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It is not our purpose to present side by side the entire translation of these three chapters in the various versions that were compared. We shall rather select a number of passages in them to compare translations and to comment on their merits.

In 1:1 the “saints” of the King James Version (hereafter KJV) has been variously rendered. *The New Testament in the Language of Today* by W. F. Beck (hereafter Beck) has “the people who are holy.” *The New Testament in Modern English* by J. B. Phillips (hereafter Phillips) has “Christians.” *The New English Bible* (hereafter NEB) has “God’s people.” So does *Good News for Modern Man, the New Testament in Today’s English Version* (hereafter TEV). “The people who are holy” does justice to the Greek, the others in an attempt to be modern lose much of the fullness of either “saints” or “the people who are holy:” the horrid lack of holiness of natural man, the being made sin for us of Him who knew no sin that we might be cleansed from sin, the creation of faith in the heart of sinners by which the holiness won for them becomes their own, their resultant state as God’s people (the only feature which remains in the other translations referred to), their striving for holiness of living. One wonders whether less explanation is required to make clear who are the people who are holy than to interpret the word “saints.” The fact is that translation alone won’t make every concept clear; explanation will still have to be given.

KJV has “to the saints which are at Ephesus.” In the Nestle¹ text *en Epheso* is enclosed in brackets to indicate that there are variants that omit the words. Of the translations reviewed *The Jerusalem Bible* (hereafter Jerusalem), Beck, and the *Revised Standard Version* (hereafter RSV) omit “in Ephesus,” while Phillips makes a concession to the encyclical theory by adding to “at Ephesus” “(and other places where this letter is read).” The encyclical theory supposes that the destination was left blank and that Tychius (6:21) entered the name of each congregation to which he delivered a copy of the letter, and that because of the importance of Ephesus, copies with the insertion “in Ephesus” predominated. There are three ancient manuscripts that do not have the phrase. According to their bias textual critics take the position either that the three manuscripts which lack the phrase outrank all others by so much that they must be decisive, or that *only* three manuscripts do not have it while all the rest do and that therefore it must be considered part of the original text. To us it seems to smack of pedantry to omit the phrase since in itself it is not that important and since by its omission those who are accustomed to it are apt to be confused.

KJV translates the latter part of verse 4 and the first part of verse 5: “... that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us ...” At this point the translator will have to decide for himself the exegetical problem whether the words “in love” are to be placed where KJV has them, or whether the colon ought to be shifted to after “him” so that the words “in love” are read with “having predestinated us.” Since there was no punctuation in the older manuscripts, the sense of a section will have to determine where punctuation marks are to be placed in a translation. Where there are two possibilities, the translator will have to decide by weighing the arguments pro and con. To that extent there will be an element of subjectivity in any translation. In the present case Jerusalem (“to live through love in his presence”) and NEB (“to be full of love”) follow KJV. On the other hand the *New American Standard Bible* (hereafter NASB) (“In love he predestined us”), Beck (“He who loved us appointed us”), RSV (“He destined us in love”), Phillips (“He planned, in his purpose of love”) and TEV (“Because of his love, God had already decided”) chose the alternative, which, incidentally, I favor, Luther’s “dass wir sollten sein heilig und unstraeflich vor ihm in der Liebe” to the contrary notwithstanding.

In 1:6 KJV has it that our predestination was “to the praise of the glory of his grace.” This is an exact translation of the original and leaves it to the commentator to determine whether what the Lord made of believers serves to reveal and magnify how wonderful His grace is, or whether He made them what they are in

¹ *Novum Testamentum Graece edidit Eberhard Nestle* (Stuttgart: Privileg. Wuertert. Bibelanstalt, 1953).

order that they might praise His glorious grace. The same expression occurs in abbreviated form in 1:12 and 1:14. If the first mentioned interpretation is adopted, it is supported by 2:7: “That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness toward us, through Christ Jesus.” A similar thought is expressed with reference to the Lord’s wisdom in 3:10: “To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God.” Jerusalem favors the second interpretation of 1:6: “to make us praise the glory of his grace.” In 1:12, however, it shifts to the first interpretation: “for his greater glory,” while in 1:14 it remains neutral: “to make his glory praised.” NASB follows KJV in restricting itself to translation. Beck favors the second interpretation. 1:16: “He chose us to be holy and blameless before Him *in order to praise the glory* of the love He gave us.” 1:12: “that we ... should live to praise His glory.” 1:14: “to praise His glory.” RSV in 1:6 and 1:14 is close to KJV, but in 1:12 favors the second interpretation: “we ... have been appointed ... to live for the praise of his glory.” Phillips favors the second interpretation in 1:6: “that we might learn to praise that glorious generosity,” and in 1:12 “that we ... may bring praise to his glory.” But in 1:14 he is neutral: “that will again be to the praise of his glory.” NEB in 1:6 definitely favors the first interpretation: “that the glory of his gracious gift ... might redound to his praise.” 1:12 might be neutral: “that we ... should cause his glory to be praised;” 1:14 definitely is: “to his praise and glory.” TEV favors the second interpretation in all three instances: 1:6: “Let us praise God for his glorious grace;” 1:12: “Let us ... praise God’s glory;” 1:14: “Let us praise his glory!”

None of the translations which were compared follow the translation of KJV in 1:6: “grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved,” but in essence follow that of NASB: “grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.”

1:8–10 tell of another of the great blessings, which came down to us from heaven through Jesus. God revealed to us a comprehensive plan He had formed. KJV translates: “That in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ.” For “dispensation” NASB has the more contemporary term “administration.” The interpreter must decide whether “the fullness of times” refers to the entire New Testament period or to the end of time. A number of translations confuse translation with interpretation and introduce the second interpretation. Jerusalem: “the hidden plan ... to act upon when the times had run their course to the end.” Beck: “To manage everything in heaven and on earth in such a way that when the right time would come.” NEB: “to be put into effect when the time was ripe.” TEV: “God’s plan, which he will complete when the time is ripe.” Phillips favors the first alternative: “he purposes in his sovereign will that all human history shall be consummated in Christ.” NASB and RSV restrict themselves to translation, the former: “with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times;” the latter: “a plan for the fullness of time.”

In 1:23 the church according to KJV is “his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all.” The interpreter must decide whether “fullness” is passive, pointing out that the glorified Christ, who fills the universe in every way, in a special way fills His church; or active, meaning that Christ in spite of His glory is incomplete without the church, as the head is incomplete without the body, and thus must be filled by the church. Most translations let “fullness” stand without intruding comment. But TEV uses a term which has the active meaning: “Christ’s body, the completion of him who himself completes all things everywhere.” NEB is worse at the end: “which is his body and as such holds within it the fullness of him who himself receives the entire fullness of God.”

It might be interesting to see how an important proof passage like 2:8, 9 fares in various translations. NASB: “By grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast.” RSV: “By grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—not because of works, lest any man should boast.” NEB: “It is by his grace you are saved, through trusting in him; it is not your own doing. It is God’s gift, not a reward for work done. There is nothing for anyone to boast of.” Phillips: “It was nothing you could or did achieve—it was God’s gift of grace which saved you. No one can pride himself upon earning the love of God.” Here the omission of “through faith” is significant. Beck: “You are saved by a gift of love you get by faith. You didn’t do it. It is God’s gift. It isn’t because of anything you have done, or you might boast.” TEV: “It is by God’s grace that you

have been saved, through faith. It is not your own doing, but God's gift. There is nothing here to boast of, since it is not the result of your own efforts." Jerusalem: "It is by grace that you have been saved, through faith; not by anything of your own, but by a gift from God; not by anything that you have done, so that nobody can claim the credit." And this is in an officially approved Roman Catholic version!

In 2:20 "the foundation of the apostles and prophets," the exact translation, is taken to mean either that the apostles and prophets are the foundation, or that it is the foundation laid by them. KJV, RSV, NASB, Beck simply translate. Phillips and Jerusalem have the apostles and prophets as the foundation, the former: "Firmly beneath you is the foundation, God's messengers and prophets," the latter: "A building that has the apostles and prophets for its foundations." NEB, however, has "the foundation laid by the apostles and prophets."

At times the translator must decide which of two possible meanings of the word in the original Greek is to be used in translation. Thus in 2:21 KJV has "all the building;" RSV: "the whole structure;" NEB: "the whole building;" so too NASB, TEV, and Beck. On the other hand Jerusalem has: "every structure;" and Phillips: "each separate piece of building."

Phillips has hit upon a happy rendering of the clause in 3:15: "(from whom all fatherhood, earthly or heavenly, derives its name)". Here KJV has: "of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named."

3:18 has no genitive modifying the dimensions "breadth, and length, and depth, and height" (KJV). With the exception of NASB and RSV the other translations surveyed in this study supply the genitive: "of Christ." Not all commentators agree with this addition, although it is the simplest. But it leaves the field of translation and enters that of interpretation. All of which goes to show that the multiplication of translations has not eliminated, but rather intensified the need for working with the Greek text by those to whom the Lord has entrusted the privilege of transmitting His message to His people.