

# Principles and Practices of Bible Translation

By John F. Brug

[This paper was delivered at a conference of the Michigan District in Monroe, Michigan on January 16, 2011. Minor editing has been done.]

The purpose of this paper is to suggest and illustrate some principles or “rules” to guide translators as they carry the Word of God from the original languages into modern versions in different languages. These principles can also guide us in evaluating existing Bible translations.

Understanding the principles and the difficulties of Bible translation is important to the church at any time, but we would probably not be discussing this topic today if our church body was not wrestling with the decision of whether to continue to use the NIV in its new form, to turn to some other translation, or to undertake a translation or revision of our own. Our purpose today is not to evaluate one specific translation, but to discuss criteria by which we can judge translations. We, of course, cannot do this without referring to specific examples of translation which illustrate the principles positively or negatively. The two main versions that we will use for purposes of illustration are three generations of the NIV (the translation we have been using) and the ESV (a revision of the RSV, recently adopted by the Missouri Synod). These will be compared with a number of other translations in a variety of styles.

The Bible does not prescribe any specific theory or rules for Bible translation. There are, however, some biblical principles and precedents which will shape our theories about translation, such as:

- 1) Every word of Scripture is inspired by God.
- 2) The essence (*forma*) of the Word is the divinely inspired meaning, not the outward form or sound of the letters or words (*materia*).
- 3) The words and idioms of the original languages have a unique relation to the divinely intended meaning (*forma externa*, external essence).
- 4) God wants people of every nation and tribe to be able to hear the wonderful works of God in their own language.
- 5) God spoke through human authors who used three languages and a wide variety of literary styles and levels of speech.
- 6) Translation of the Bible had begun before the New Testament era, and the New Testament incorporates translations from the Old Testament in a variety of translation styles, from quite literal to interpretive.<sup>1</sup>

We will begin with some general theses about Bible translation, which will then be illustrated with more specific corollaries and examples.

Thesis 1: The duty of a translator is to convey all the meaning (or ambiguity), all the beauty (or the ugliness), all the style (high or low), and all the emotional impact of the original into the translation.

Thesis 2: Thesis 1 is impossible.

Thesis 3: Thesis 2 is not entirely correct.

Thesis 4: In small bits and pieces a translator can come close achieving the aims of thesis 1.

*Tetelestai* > It is finished. The only major thing wrong with this translation is that it has too many words. Were it not for the weight of tradition, we could probably improve the translation by reducing it to a single word, “Finished!”

---

<sup>1</sup> For a comprehensive survey of examples see Archer and Chiricigno, *Old Testament Quotations in the New Testament: A Complete Survey*, Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1983. On the method of the Septuagint see Jobes and Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2000, esp. p 86-102, 105-118.

If these theses are true, what percentage of success at meeting these goals do we expect a translation to achieve in order to gain a grade of excellent, good, or acceptable? Do we expect translators to achieve a percentage of success equal to the performance we expect from airplanes at getting us to our destination without crashing? Are we satisfied with the standard of success achieved by an NFL team that makes it to the Super Bowl with a mediocre 10-6 record during the regular season? Is the standard that of a baseball batter who is “acceptable” if he succeeds 25% of the time and “excellent” if he succeeds 33% of the time? How many strikeouts are enough to send a translation to the bench? Or, looking at it from another direction, how many homeruns keep the strike-out king off the bench? Or if you prefer biblical imagery, “How many dead flies give perfume a bad smell?” (Ec 10:1) This is one question we have to answer in choosing a translation

What are some criteria or “rules” that should guide us in producing and evaluating Bible translations? In the rest of this paper I will suggest some “rules” and offer illustrations. I am operating with the assumption that we are speaking here of a translation for general use in the church, rather than a niche translation such as a children’s Bible or a Bible for people with limited reading ability. God inspired only one Bible for the use of the church—there were not different Bibles for different uses or for different groups in the church. One Bible served the need for public reading (Je 36:6,15,23; Ne 8:1-3; Josh 8:34) and private study (Da 9:2, Ac 8:27; Co 4:16).<sup>2</sup> We can certainly make all kinds of derivative works to meet special needs, but our concern here is a general, all-purpose Bible.

### **Some Principles and Guidelines**

1. Although any skilled linguist who is fluent in the source language and the receiving language can do an acceptable job of rendering the literal sense of the words of Scripture, the most important qualities of a Bible translator are a thorough knowledge of the whole message of Scripture, connected with the aptitude to let Scripture interpret Scripture, and a humble willingness to submit to everything which Scripture says. It was this aptitude, more than the depth of his knowledge of the original languages that made Luther such a great translator.
2. When a choice must be made, accuracy in conveying the divinely intended meaning of the text takes priority over literary beauty or rendering the text into common, contemporary English.
3. The translation must be free of doctrinal errors whether inadvertent or deliberate. It must not falsify the Word of God. This is reflected in two principles adopted by WELS TEC: We expect that a translation will understand itself as a “direct quotation” of an ancient document, rather than merely supplying the “gist” of the original’s meaning in a contemporizing paraphrase. We expect, with Luther, that when theologically necessary a translation will adhere closely to the exact wording of the original.
4. The translator should not be too locked in to one theory of translation whether “dynamic equivalence” or “literal translation” because:
  - a. Literal (that is, literalistic) translations sometimes give the wrong meaning or they do not communicate clearly in the receiving language.

---

<sup>2</sup> Horizontal translation within a generation was most often by oral reading since there were few copies of the text. Vertical translation from generation to generation of leaders was by the written text. The transmission of the pronunciation had to be transmitted to the student from the teacher since the text was unpointed, and the pronunciation was always changing. Successions of scribes were in effect “translating” the text for their successors.

- b. Dynamic equivalence, though a worthy goal, is not fully possible. We would be happy with any translation that was dynamic and equivalent, but too often translations labeled “dynamic equivalent” are either not equivalent or not dynamic.
  - c. The translator will have to weigh whether a more dynamic or more literal approach best conveys the divinely intended meaning on a case-by-case basis.
5. It is useful for a translation to have a set of rules and rubrics<sup>3</sup> to guide the translators, but the relationship between two languages is so complex, that it is hard to image a rule or rubric which can be applied without exception.
  6. The translator should adhere to the principle that Scripture interprets Scripture. This is especially true in regard to doctrinal statements. One passage of Scripture cannot be set against another. New Testament interpretations of Old Testament passages should be accepted.
  7. The translator should not specify one level of language and usage to be used uniformly throughout the Bible because the level of language in the Bible itself varies greatly from book to book and from passage to passage. In many Bible passages the original language was neither “common” nor “contemporary.”
  8. The translator should not drain the color and variety of expressions from passages and level the language by downgrading the imagery.
  9. The goal of a translator is not so much to make Judeans sound like 21<sup>st</sup> century Americans but to make them sound like Judeans who speak English.
  10. Though “one Hebrew word=one English word” is not a viable standard for a translator to apply consistently, the translator should strive to be consistent rather than casual in his renderings of specific words.
  11. The translator will try to be euphemistic where the original is euphemistic and blunt or coarse where the text is blunt.
  12. Capitalization of divine names and pronouns is not a feature of the original text, and therefore it falls into the category of interpretation rather than translation. The practice is best avoided. English style, however, requires titles and proper names be capitalized regardless of whether or not they are a reference to deity.
  13. Good translation should preserve the authors’ co-ordination and subordination of thought units.
  14. Translators should be wary of importing their own stylistic preferences into the text against the preference of the author, unless such changes are necessary for clear communication.
  15. Where possible, when the text, on the basis of Scripture, is open to two equally valid understandings, the translator should attempt to preserve both options. When this is not possible, one of the options can be preserved in a footnote.
  16. In using “gender-accurate language” the translator will strive to be inclusive where the original is inclusive and exclusive where the original is exclusive.
  17. The translator will recognize and preserve direct prophecy where the immediate context or other testimony of Scripture indicates direct prophecy.
  18. Though this is not strictly speaking a translation issue, a key decision by a translator is which text he is going to translate. A translation project will need to choose a base text and a set of principles to guide translators in evaluating variants.

This list is by no means designed to be complete. It is intended to be a representative sample of some of the more important principles. We will now illustrate the principles with examples.

---

<sup>3</sup> Here “rule” means a general guideline such as those we are listing here. A “rubric” is a more specific guideline such as “we will translate the Tetragrammaton LORD.”

## Illustrations of the Principles and Guidelines

1. While any skilled linguist who is fluent in the source language and the receiving language can do an acceptable job of rendering the literal sense of the words, the most important qualities of a translator are a thorough knowledge of the whole message of Scripture, connected with the aptitude to let Scripture interpret Scripture, and a humble willingness submit to everything which Scripture says. It was this aptitude, more than the depth of his knowledge of the original languages that made Luther such a great translator.

Any competent linguist, whether Calvinist or Zwinglian, can correctly translate the words “this is my body.” Many Zwinglians and Calvinists, however, cannot keep their reason from tampering with the meaning of key passages on the Lord’s Supper.

Literal: 1 Corinthians 10:16 The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a communion (*koinonia*) of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a communion of the body of Christ.

NIV: 1 Corinthians 10:16 Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?

ESV: 1 Corinthians 10:16 The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?

Amplified Bible: 1 Corinthians 10:16 The cup of blessing [of wine at the Lord's Supper] upon which we ask [God's] blessing, does it not mean [that in drinking it] we participate in and share a fellowship (a communion) in the blood of Christ (the Messiah)? The bread which we break, does it not mean [that in eating it] we participate in and share a fellowship (a communion) in the body of Christ?

The Message: 1 Corinthians 10:16 When we drink the cup of blessing, aren't we taking into ourselves the blood, the very life, of Christ? And isn't it the same with the loaf of bread we break and eat? Don't we take into ourselves the body, the very life, of Christ?

Living Bible: 1 Corinthians 10:16 When we ask the Lord’s blessing upon our drinking from the cup of wine at the Lord’s Table, this means, doesn’t it, that all who drink it are sharing together the blessings of Christ’s blood? And when we break off pieces of bread from the loaf to eat there together, this shows that we are sharing together in the benefits of his body.

Evaluate the translations “communion,” “participation,” and “fellowship.”<sup>4</sup>

Whatever evaluation we may place on individual renderings by Luther in which he departs from a strictly literal rendering of the original, the purpose and effect of his non-literal renderings are the opposite of those above—Luther’s expansions of the text affirm what Scripture says rather than deny

---

<sup>4</sup> Chrysostom on *koinonia*: Why did [Paul in 1 Co 10:16] not say “participation” (*metalepsis* or *metoche*)? Because he intended to express something more and to point out how close the union (*henosis*) was. We communicate not only by participating and partaking, but also by being united. For as that body is united with Christ, so we are also united with him by this bread” (*A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. XII, p 139.) D. Kuske, WLQ, Fall 2004, p 284-286.

it. The most famous example is his adding the word *alone* to Paul's statement in Romans 3: "we are justified by faith *alone*."

On the one hand, Luther was not willing to have his translation judged by the papists who had no understanding of Scripture. (This quotation also illustrates the timeless principle that translators can be sensitive about criticism of their work.)

I will not allow the papists to judge, for their ears continue to be too long and their heehaws too weak for them to be critical of my translating. I know quite well how much skill, hard work, understanding and intelligence is needed for a good translation. They know it less than even the miller's donkey for they have never tried it.<sup>5</sup>

Those who have not ever been able to speak correctly (to say nothing of translating) have all at once become my masters and I their pupil. If I were to have asked them how to translate the first two words of Matthew *Liber Generationis* into German, not one of them would have been able to say "Quack! Quack!" And they judge all my works! Fine fellows! It was also like this for St. Jerome when he translated the Bible. Everyone was his master. He alone was entirely incompetent as people who were not good enough to clean his boots judged his works. This is why it takes a great deal of patience to do good things in public, for the world believes itself to be the Master of Knowledge, always putting the bit under the horse's tail, and not judging itself, for that is the world's nature. It can do nothing else.<sup>6</sup>

But to sincere inquirers Luther offered this defense of his translation:

For you and our people, however, I shall show why I used the word *sola* (even though in Romans 3 it wasn't *sola* I used but *solum* or *tantum*). That is how closely those asses have looked at my text! However, I have used *sola fides* in other places, and I want to use both *solum* and *sola*. I have continually tried translating in a pure and accurate German. It has happened that I have sometimes searched and inquired about a single word for three or four weeks. Sometimes I have not found it even then. I have worked Meister Philip and Aurogallus so hard in translating Job, sometimes barely translating three lines after four days. Now that it has been translated into German and completed, all can read and criticize it. One can now read three or four pages without stumbling one time—without realizing just what rocks and hindrances had once been where now one travels as if over a smoothly-cut plank. We had to sweat and toil there before we removed those rocks and hindrances, so one could go along nicely. The plowing goes nicely in a clear field. But nobody wants the task of digging out the rocks and hindrances. ...

I also know that in Romans 3, the word *solum* is not present in either Greek or Latin text—the papists did not have to teach me that—it is fact! The letters s-o-l-a are not there. And these knotheds stare at them like cows at a new gate, while at the same time they do not recognize that it conveys the sense of the text—if the translation is to be clear and accurate, it belongs there. I wanted to speak German since it was German I had spoken in

---

<sup>5</sup> To try to counter Luther's translation the papists plagiarized Luther's translation and made Catholic changes to it and then published it as if it was their own.

<sup>6</sup> *Open Letter on Translation*, Luther, Martin, *Luther's Works*, Vol. 35: Word and Sacrament I (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press p 194. A public domain version is at <http://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/luther/luther-translate.txt>

translation—not Latin or Greek. But it is the nature of our language that in speaking about two things, one which is affirmed, the other denied, we use the word “only” (*solum/allein*) along with the word “not” (*nicht*) or “no” (*kein*). For example, we say “the farmer brings only (*allein*) grain and no money”; or “No, I really have no money, but only (*allein*) grain”; “I have only eaten and not yet drunk”; “Did you write it only and not read it over?” There are a vast number of such everyday cases.<sup>7</sup>

Luther’s defense then was two-fold—his goal was good theology in good German, with the first having a higher priority.

2. When a choice must be made, accuracy in conveying the divinely intended meaning of the text takes priority over literary beauty or rendering the text into common, contemporary English.

It requires Christian judgment linked with a thorough knowledge of all of Scripture to make the tough calls of when to be more literal and when to be more free in translating. These decisions will inevitably be influenced by a translator’s theological position. Luther offered his opinion on the issue:

Yet I have not just gone ahead, ignoring the exact wording in the original. Instead, with great care, I have, along with my helpers, gone ahead and have kept literally to the original, without the slightest deviation, wherever it appeared that a passage was crucial. For instance, in John 6 Christ says: “Him has God the Father set his seal upon (*versiegelt*).” It would be more clear in German to say “Him has God the Father signified (*gezeichnet*)” or even “God the Father means him.” But rather than doing violence to the original, I have done violence to the German tongue. Ah, translating is not every one’s skill as some mad saints think. A right, devout, honest, sincere, God-fearing Christian, trained, educated, and experienced heart is required. So I hold that no false Christian or divisive spirit can be a good translator.<sup>8</sup>

Compare Luther’s handling of John 6:27 with these translations.

ESV For on him God the Father has set his seal.  
NIV For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.  
CEV God the Father has given him the right to do so.  
NCV Because on him God the Father has put his power.  
MSG He and what he does are guaranteed by God the Father to last.

Evaluate each translation.

In “Defense of the Translation of Psalms” Luther gives another example of the need to retain a literal translation at times.

Ps 68:18: “You have ascended on high; you have led captivity captive.” It would have been good German to say, “You have set the captives free.” But this is weak and does not retain the fine, rich meaning of the Hebrew which says, “You have led captivity captive.” This does not merely imply the Christ freed the captives, but also that he captured and led away captivity itself, so that it never could or would take us captive again.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> *Open Letter on Translation*, p 194.

<sup>8</sup> *Open Letter on Translation*, p 194.

<sup>9</sup> *Luther’s Works*, Volume 35, p 217.

NIV you led captives in your train  
 ESV leading a host of captives in your train  
 NRSV leading captives in your train  
 NASB You have led captive Your captives  
 NLT you led a crowd of captives  
 MSG captives in tow  
 NKJV You have led captivity captive  
 KJV thou hast led captivity captive

Only King James follows Luther, but was it from sensitivity to imagery or loyalty to literalism?  
 As for the others, what's with the train?

3. The translation must be free of doctrinal errors whether inadvertent or deliberate. It must not falsify the Word of God. This is reflected in two principles presented by WELS TEC:

We expect that a translation will understand itself as a “direct quotation” of an ancient document, rather than merely supplying the “gist” of the original’s meaning in a contemporizing paraphrase. We expect, with Luther, that when theologically necessary a translation will adhere closely to the exact wording of the original.

An obvious issue which our church must deal with in connection with the principles expressed in this section of the paper is how much agreement in doctrine is required for working together on a reliable Bible translation. Can we entrust production and control of our Bible translation to people who do not share our confession? In general we can probably say that the more literal a translation is, the safer it is from the doctrinal presuppositions of the translators. The more interpretative a translation is, the more subject it is to the doctrinal inclinations of the translators.

An example is Mark 1:4 in which the literal translations are okay regardless of the translator’s doctrinal view of baptism. All the interpretive translations (NLT, MSG, BBE) are misleading.

NIV John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.  
 ESV John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.  
 NASB John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.  
 NRSV John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.  
 NLT This messenger was John the Baptist. He was in the wilderness and preached that people should be baptized to show that they had repented of their sins and turned to God to be forgiven.  
 MSG John the Baptizer appeared in the wild, preaching a baptism of life-change that leads to forgiveness of sins.  
 BBE John came, and gave baptism in the waste land, preaching baptism as a sign of forgiveness of sin for those whose hearts were changed.

Another good test case is whether a translation has a slant toward a Calvinistic view of predestination. Is Jesus a stone that causes men to stumble or a stone over which they stumble?

1 Peter 2:8

- NIV “A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.”  
ESV “A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.”  
NASB “A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense”  
NLT “He is the stone that makes people stumble, the rock that makes them fall.”  
MSG “It’s a stone to trip over, a boulder blocking the way.”  
NKJV “A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense.”  
NRSV “A stone that makes them stumble, and a rock that makes them fall.”

Half of these are too literal, and half are dynamic un-equivalent. Which are most Calvinistic? What would be a good dynamic equivalent?

Does God prophesy the coming of false teachers or foreordain it?

Jude 4 οι παλαι προγεγραμμενοι

- NIV For certain men whose condemnation was *written about long ago* have secretly slipped in among you.  
ESV For certain people have crept in unnoticed who *long ago were designated for* this condemnation.  
NASB For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were *long beforehand marked out* for this condemnation  
MSG What has happened is that some people have infiltrated our ranks (our *Scriptures warned us* this would happen)  
BBE For certain men have come among you secretly, *marked out before in the holy Writings* for this evil fate  
NKJV For certain men have crept in unnoticed, *who long ago were marked out for* this condemnation,  
NRSV For certain intruders have stolen in among you, people who *long ago were designated* for this condemnation as ungodly  
KJV For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were *before of old ordained* to this condemnation,

Which are most Calvinistic? Which do you like best? What would be a dynamic equivalent of οι παλαι προγεγραμμενοι?

Who makes unbelievers ready for destruction?

Romans 9:22 κατηρτισμενα εις απωλειαν

- NIV What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath— prepared for destruction?  
NASB What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?  
ESV What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction,



- NLT In the same way, even though God has the right to show his anger and his power, he is very patient with those on whom his anger falls, who are destined for destruction.
- MSG If God needs one style of pottery especially designed to show his angry displeasure
- BBE What if God, desiring to let his wrath and his power be seen, for a long time put up with the vessels of wrath which were ready for destruction:
- NKJV What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction,
- NRSV What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience the objects of wrath that are made for destruction;
- KJV [What] if God, willing to show [his] wrath, and to make his power known , endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction

Which translations do you like?

Are there any Arminian slants to current translations? The question is most often asked about passages that refer to receiving or accepting Jesus. In John 1:11-12 John uses two closely related and sometimes interchangeable words to distinguish those who do not accept Christ (*paralambano*) from those who do receive Jesus (*lambano*).<sup>10</sup> Is there a reason for the different verbs in this context?

- NIV He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—
- ESV He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,
- NET He came to what was his own, but his own people did not receive him. But to all who have received him – those who believe in his name<sup>1</sup>– he has given the right to become God’s children
- NASB He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name,
- NKJV He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:
- NLT He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God.
- MSG He came to his own people, but they didn't want him. But whoever did want him, who believed he was who he claimed and would do what he said, He made to be their true selves, their child-of-God selves.
- BBE He came to the things which were his and his people did not take him to their hearts. To all those who did so take him, however, he gave the right of becoming children of God—that is, to those who had faith in his name:

---

<sup>10</sup> For an example of the use of *lambano* as passive reception of a gift see 1 Cor 4:7. In Colossians 2:6 *paralambano* is used for receiving Christ.

NRSV He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God,

None of the so-called literal translations distinguish the two verbs. All of the more dynamic translations interpret the verbs wrongly. Why is the New RSV the best translation?

Could there be Catholic translations in Protestant Bibles?

James 2:22

- NIV You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.
- NASB You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected;
- ESV You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works;
- NLT You see, his faith and his actions worked together. His actions made his faith complete.
- MSG Isn't it obvious that faith and works are yoked partners, that faith expresses itself in works? That the works are "works of faith"?
- BBE You see that his faith was helping his works and was made complete by them;
- Beck His faith was active by works and by works faith reached its goal.
- NKJV Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?
- NRSV You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was brought to completion by the works.
- KJV Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect ?
- Luth Durch die Werke ist der Glaube vollkommen geworden

Which English translation is not Catholic? <sup>11</sup>

James 2:26

- NIV As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.
- NASB For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.
- ESV For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.
- NLT Just as the body is dead without breath, so also faith is dead without good works.
- Mess The very moment you separate body and spirit, you end up with a corpse. Separate faith and works and you get the same thing: a corpse.
- BBE For as the body without the spirit is dead even so faith without works is dead.
- Beck Just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead,
- NKJV For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

---

<sup>11</sup> It's Beck. Explain why.

NRSV For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead.

KJV For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also. {or, breath

Any Protestant translations here? <sup>12</sup>

4. The translator should not be too locked in to one theory of translation whether “dynamic equivalence” or “literal translation”<sup>13</sup> because:
  - a. Literal (that is, literalistic) translations sometimes give the wrong meaning or they do not communicate clearly.
  - b. Dynamic equivalence, though a worthy goal, is not fully possible. We would be happy with any translation that was dynamic and equivalent, but often translations labeled “dynamic equivalent” are either not equivalent or not dynamic.
  - c. The translator will have to weigh whether a more dynamic or more literal approach best conveys the divinely intended meaning on a case-by-case basis.

Luther espoused this eclectic approach: “We extolled the principle of at times retaining the words quite literally, and at times rendering only the meaning.”<sup>14</sup>

Although contemporary translations slide significantly toward one end or the other of the dynamic v literal spectrum, one of the things that became more clear to me as I worked on this paper is that there does not seem to be any translation that is consistent in applying a dynamic or a literal approach.

However, there is a noticeable difference between various translations in regard to the “best use.” Translations with the degree of freedom of the NIV are pleasant to read, but are inadequate for serious Bible study because they are too distant from the original text. A liberal Bible-rating site with an academic leaning, which loves the NRSV as the best study Bible, will rate the NIV as “unacceptable for serious Bible study” for this reason.<sup>15</sup> Several times each year in dogmatics class when we are studying a certain biblical word or concept I have to comment that the NIV is not helpful for this study because it is too free from the original. Examples would be the study of the biblical idioms concerning *nephesh* and *ruach* or the range of uses of *basar* (flesh) in the Old Testament. (NIV 2011 is actually slightly better than NIV 1984 in this respect.) On the other hand, translations like the ESV are less pleasant to read. From my perspective, the best Bible translation for all-round use would be half way between the NIV and ESV.

To give but one example of inconsistency in applying a philosophy of translation, the extreme of literal translation, namely, transliteration, is used by both dynamic equivalent translations and literal translations. For example in Psalm 16:1 translations as varied as the Jerusalem Bible, NIV, ESV, NKJV, and NASB all settle for the transliteration *miktam* as their rendering for the psalm type. (The data is skewed somewhat by the dynamic equivalent translations that solve the problem by omitting the heading.) Those versions that try for a dynamic equivalent translation of *miktam* fall into two camps: 1) golden ode, precious psalm, secret treasure, or 2) inscription, memorial, record of memorable thoughts. Another option is an undynamic equivalent: poem, song, prayer, special song, or psalm.

---

<sup>12</sup> NLT and KJV. Why?

<sup>13</sup> These terms are not really adequate, but they are widely understood as representing two basic philosophies.

<sup>14</sup> “Open Letter on Translating,” p 222–223.

<sup>15</sup> Mark Given, <http://courses.missouristate.edu/markgiven/rel102/bt.htm>

*Sheol* is another frequently transliterated word (see below).

When all else fails, transliteration is not necessarily a bad way to go. This principle comes into play with the names of musical instruments, gemstones, plants, and animals. Perhaps the translators should have followed this principle in Exodus 25:5 for *tachshim* but not for *shittim*.

NET ram skins dyed red, *fine leather*, acacia wood,  
NIV ram skins dyed red and *hides of sea cows*; acacia wood;  
TNIV ram skins dyed red and *another durable leather*; acacia wood;  
NASB rams' skins dyed red, *porpoise skins*, acacia wood,  
ESV tanned rams' skins, *goatskins*, acacia wood,  
NLT tanned ram skins and *fine goatskin leather*; acacia wood;  
MSG tanned rams' skins; *dolphin skins*; acacia wood;  
BBE sheepskins coloured red, and *leather*, and hard wood;  
NKJV ram skins dyed red, *badger skins*, and acacia wood;  
NRSV tanned rams' skins, *fine leather*, acacia wood,  
KJV rams' skins dyed red, and *badgers' skins*, and shittim wood,

Should the translator go vague or go specific? Other options: hides of dugongs or sealskins.

#### Scylla: Too Equivalent

An example of an overly literal translation which communicates the wrong meaning occurred in the KJV in Psalm 16:10:

For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell;

Neither NKJV nor ESV are an improvement:

ESV: For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol.

Jesus' soul was not in hell during the time from Good Friday evening till Easter morning. His body was in the grave. His soul was in heaven. In this passage "soul" is an emphatic, emotional way of saying "me." "Sheol" here refers to the condition of death or the grave.

NIV 1984 catches the right connotation:

because you will not abandon me to the grave <sup>a1</sup> <sup>Note a1</sup> Sheol

NIV 2011 introduces a strange note with its rendering of *sheol*:

because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead.

This carries overtones of the mythical kingdom of the shades.

Mark7:22 illustrates another hazard, "the evil eye."

πλεονεξιαι πονηριαι δολος ασελγεια, οφθαλμος πονηρος, βλασφημια υπερηφανια αφοροσυνη

NKJV covetousness wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness.

NIV greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly.

ESV coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.

NRSV avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly.

NLT greed, wickedness, deceit, lustful desires, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness.

MSG greed, depravity, deceptive dealings, carousing, mean looks, slander, arrogance, foolishness.

Everybody it seems want to avoid the connotation of the “evil eye” being a gypsy curse, but what is it? Most guess “envy”(Mt 20:15) but there is evidence for a malicious look or a malicious attitude or stinginess (Prv 23:6 Prv 28:22, Dt 15:9). The downside of dynamic equivalent translation is that before you can do it, you have to know what the literal expression means.

Literal is not always best. In the Song 5:4 the lady says of her lover:

KJV my bowels were moved for him.  
NIV my heart began to pound for him.  
NASB my feelings were aroused for him.  
ESV my heart was thrilled within me.  
NLT my heart thrilled within me.  
MSG the more excited I became.  
NKJV my heart yearned for him.  
NRSV my inmost being yearned for him.

Everyone except King James goes for dynamic equivalent.

What is the best English equivalent for “bowels” in these contexts?

Is 16:11 my bowels shall sound like an harp  
Jer 4:19 my bowels, my bowels! I am pained

Another case: the Hebrew and Greek words for “kidneys” (Hebrew *kelayoth*; Greek *nephroi*; Latin *renes*, whence the old English "reins") can often be translated “heart”, and “heart” can be translated “mind” (Job 16:13, Ps 139:13 Lam 3:13, Rev 2:23).

### Charybdis: Not Equivalent Enough

A few examples of dynamic equivalent translations which are not equivalent follow.

In 1 Samuel 25:22 an angry David says that he is going to Nabal’s place and he is going to kill everyone who *shatans* against the wall. Which translation would you pick as the dynamic equivalent which is common and contemporary?

- a. everyone who micturates against the wall
- b. everyone who urinates against the wall
- c. everyone who pisses against the wall
- d. everyone who tinkles against the wall
- e. every male or every man

Which do you choose as the dynamic equivalent?

If David had wanted to say “every male,” there were fine Hebrew ways of saying this, but he chose a more colorful expression. It is not very credible to claim, as some do, that this expression is a euphemism for “male.” It must be pejorative. In the other places where the expression occurs in the Bible it is part of a threat to kill enemies. It perhaps also carries the connotation that the men referred to are dogs. (By the way, translation c is the King James, translation e is the NIV, NKJV, and ESV. So King James seems to win the prize for the best dynamic equivalence in this instance.)

Here are some other translations from dynamic equivalent versions which are not very dynamic and not equivalent.

TNIV and NIV 2011 sometimes change “saints” to “God’s people” or something similar. “Saints” is removed about 70 times. The motive seems to be to avoid the Catholic connotation of “saint.” This change would not necessarily be bad if *hagioi* was consistently translated with an expression like “God’s holy people” as it is in Ephesians 1:1 and Philippians 1:1, but sometimes it is translated with a less precise term like “God’s people,” as it is in the passages listed below. “Saints” and “God’s people” refer to the same group of people, but the terms are not equivalent.<sup>16</sup> A bad side effect of this translation “God’s people” is that it undercuts the use of the term “saints of God” in much hymnody and literature.

This illustrates a tendency which exists already in the NIV 1984 to “homogenize” terminology and to blur the distinction of synonymous or parallel terms.

In the Old Testament *chesed* is one of the words for God’s saving grace. The NIV often simply translates it as “love” rather than the traditional “mercy”. In the Old Testament *chasidim* is the common title of God’s people, but *chasid* does not mean “holy one,” but “recipient of mercy”, or “merciful”, or more freely “faithful.” In the Old Testament of NIV and in many other more literal translations this term is often simply translated as “godly one” or some equivalent, because of the difficulty of finding an English translation that would include both “mercied” and “merciful.” In the New Testament the function of serving as the common name for God’s people is served by *hagioi*. The terms *chasidim* and *hagioi* are thus the same in function, but not in meaning. This sort of distinction between function and meaning should be preserved when possible. Blurring such distinctions homogenizes the writers’ preferences, often with the effect of making the style more prosaic.

At the heart of this problem is the confusion of *words* with *concepts*. “God’s people” is a concept. This concept can be expressed with many different words or names. The translator should not use one term to translate the concept every time it appears. The translator should preserve the variety of biblical expressions for the concept. The translator should try to keep from jumbling words and concepts.

5. It is useful for a translation to have a set of rules and rubrics to guide the translators, but the relationship of two languages is so complex, that it is hard to image a rule or rubric which can be applied without exception.

For example, we usually translate and interpret an Old Testament passage according the interpretation of it in the New Testament (principle 7), but occasionally when the New Testament quotes an Old Testament passage from the Septuagint, the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew is not very good. If the poor translation does not affect the point that the author is trying to make, the New Testament does not always correct the weak translation. In such cases we can adopt a better translation in our rendering of the Old Testament. The example of Psalm 2:9 (“shepherd” v “smash”) is discussed below in point 7.

---

<sup>16</sup> Passages in which saints” (Greek *hagioi* ) become “believers” include: Acts 9:32; Acts 26:10; Rom 15:31; 16:15. Passages in which “saints” become “people” or “God’s people” include: Ro 8:27; 15:25; 16:2, 15, 1 Cor. 6:1, 2; 14:33; 16:15; 2 Cor. 8:4; 9:1; 13:13

Sometimes we are hindered in our efforts to apply good principles of translation by the weight of past tradition. The decision of the Septuagint translators to render the Hebrew term *torah* with the Greek *nomos* was not a very good choice because the range of meanings of *torah* is much wider than that of *nomos*. Following the precedent of the Septuagint, English translators adopted the convention of rendering *torah* as “law” in spite of the fact that in many contexts a word like “teaching” or “instruction” would be a more appropriate rendering for *torah*. As a result commentaries and doctrine books are filled with explanations of the diverse meanings of the word “law” in the Old Testament. Should we stick with this practice of translating *torah* as “law” or should we introduce a more diverse (and more accurate) set of renderings for *torah* in the Old Testament? (A historical question we can also ask is whether the choice of *nomos* for *torah* contributed to a legalistic understanding of *torah*, or if a legalistic understanding *torah* contributed to the translators’ choice of *nomos*. Which was the chicken and which was the egg?)

A similar situation exists with the Tetragrammaton, the four-letter (*yhvh*) proper name to the true God in the Old Testament. This name, which means “he is,” was probably pronounced Yahweh. But already during the Old Testament era, the standard Jewish practice was to avoid pronouncing this name. Instead readers either said *adonai* in Hebrew or *kurios* in Greek, both of which mean “Lord”. Most English translations have followed this practice, rendering the Tetragrammaton as LORD. Should we continue this long-established tradition or try to get back to the original Hebrew? I would opt for LORD because the tradition is so firmly established that it has even been entered into the pointing of the Hebrew text as we use it (actually, the form of the Hebrew text which we are currently using has the pointing of *Shema*, Aramaic for “the Name”, rather than the pointing of *Adonai* which produces the English form Jehovah.) This convention is also supported by the use of archaic letters for the Tetragrammaton in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in Old Testament quotations in the New Testament.

Psalm 1:2 illustrates both of these issues.

KJV	his delight is in the law of the LORD	also NASB NKJV, NRSV, ESV, NIV
GW	he delights in the teachings of the LORD	
Holman	his delight is in the LORD's instruction	
Message	you thrill to GOD's Word	
WEB	his delight is in Yahweh's law	

Another example of the binding power of tradition is the translation “angel”. Actually this is not so much a translation as a transliteration. The suggested alternative translation “messenger” is not very adequate since it is too narrow. “Representative” “envoy” and “agent” are more accurate but can any of them set aside tradition, inadequate as it is?

Other examples of this issue: should we call the ark of the covenant “the covenant box”?  
 should we call the manger a “feeding trough”?  
 should we call the tabernacle “the tent”?  
 should we call the heavenly host “the army of heaven”?

A related issue is how important is it to retain heritage terms such as “justify” “sanctify,” and “atonement”.

6. Translators should not specify one level of language and usage to be used uniformly throughout the translation because the level of language in the Bible itself varies greatly from passage to passage. In

very many Bible passages the language is neither “common” nor “contemporary.” The translator should attempt to translate “common” and colloquial” as “common” and “colloquial” and “lofty” and “literary” as “lofty” and “literary”.

The translator should attempt to retain variety. The translator’s goal is to communicate not only the informational content, but also the feelings and attitudes of the original text. The flavor and impact of the original should as much as possible be re-expressed words that express the same feeling in the receptor language.

The second most important aptitude of a translator (after a deep understanding of the doctrine of Scripture) is a feeling for the communication style of the Hebrew and Greek texts. The “feel” of the original text is what the translator is trying to produce in his own language.

### Old Testament

There is a great variety of language and style in the Old Testament. The psalms contain language from very simple (Ps 96) to agonizingly hard (Ps 68). Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song each have style and vocabulary of their own. Even in books like Genesis and Kings the literary style varies sharply from section to section of the book. The translator should try to preserve this variety.

The translator’s goal is to sound archaic only if the original sounded archaic. There appears to be some deliberate archaizing, particularly in Psalms. In Psalms 113 and 123 the psalmist places archaic construct endings (*y/i*) onto some of the words. This usage is especially surprising since some of the words with the archaic ending are not even constructs (the construct is a pre-genitive case in Hebrew). It seems unlikely therefore that these endings are real preservations of archaic forms. The grammarian Gesenius calls the *yod* ending on these unusual forms “an ornamental device of poetic style” (90m). It seems likely these endings were deliberately used to give the poem an archaic flavor. In Psalm 110 the same ending occurs in the phrase “according to the order of Melchizedek” (*al divrati malchi tzedek*). Proper names often preserve archaic endings within them, as is the case in the middle of Melchizedek. Since the psalmist had to keep the archaic ending on *malchi*, it appears he added it also to *divrat* so that the two forms would match.

The so-called vav-consecutive imperfects, which probably developed from the ancient prefixed preterite, and the imperfects ending in *ah* probably also became archaizing at some point of the development of the Old Testament.

Critical scholars often try to sort biblical texts into Early Biblical Hebrew and Late Biblical Hebrew on basis of differences of style that are thought to be chronological (the relative markers *asher* and *she* are an example), but more recently there has been a tendency to recognize that important elements of so-called EBH and LBH do not represent different chronological periods in the history of Biblical Hebrew but instead represent concurrent styles of literary Hebrew throughout the biblical period.<sup>17</sup> Authors may have chosen these styles for specific literary aims.

Because we have over a thousand years of transmission of the Old Testament (1400-300 BC) for which we have little textual evidence, it is difficult to distinguish between archaism and archaizing. “Archaisms” are readings that were contemporary when written but are now out of date (much of the language of the King James). “Archaizing” is an attempt to recreate the language of the past (prayers

---

<sup>17</sup> Young and Rezetko, *Linguistic Dating of Biblical Texts*, Equinox, 2009.



or hymns written in King Jamesese in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Most of the archaic language in the Old Testament is real archaic language.

Regardless of whether or not archaizing can be traced in the Old Testament, the idea that the Hebrew Old Testament is written in common “street language” is not plausible. It is highly unlikely that the average Old Testament reader would have recognized much of the Hebrew of the Bible as common, contemporary street Hebrew. The language for the most part has a level of formality that should be reflected in the translation. The Hebrew of the Old Testament is often poetic and lofty and can be described as a literary language—Biblical Hebrew. This language has numerous dialects.

### New Testament

There is a great range of styles and levels of language in the New Testament. Each of the evangelists has his own style. Is Paul writing letters or epistles? Why is the style of Hebrews different? John’s letter to the seven churches is quite different than his other letters. Luke should not sound like John. Hebrews should not sound like 1<sup>st</sup> John.

There is a range of Greek in the New Testament. The Greek of the New Testament is *koine* (common) in the sense that it is not classical literary Greek and that it could be understood by Greek speakers everywhere, but it is not *koine* in the sense that it was the language of the street throughout the Mediterranean. Greek-speaking readers would not have mistaken Jesus and the apostles for Greeks from their neighborhood. They would have recognized them as non-Greeks, as Jews. Though there is considerable difference between the simple style of Mark and the more elegant style of Luke, both of them reflect the Hebrew speech patterns of their characters.

Translations which retain the Semitic style of much New Testament speech may be stylistically awkward in English; but they may convey some of the style of the New Testament more accurately than translations that try to homogenize the language into common, contemporary English.

There are many examples of semiticizing style in the New Testament, especially in the gospels and Acts. The words of Jesus often preserve a Hebrew/Aramaic cast. Here we can list only a few of the chief examples.

The Hebrew style of stringing sentences together with *vav*’s is found in Mark 10:33-34, “behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and (*kai*) the Son of Man will be delivered up to the chief priests and scribes, and (*kai*) they will condemn him to death, and (*kai*) they will deliver him up to the Gentiles. And (*kai*) they will mock him and (*kai*) they will spit upon him and (*kai*) they will scourge him and (*kai*) they will kill him, and (*kai*) three days later he will rise again.” This is not impossible Greek, but more typical Greek style would have subordinated more of these clauses.

The use of *anthropos* “a man, a person” as a substitute for the indefinite pronoun *tis*, “a certain person, someone” is not impossible Greek but the frequency seems Semitic. This use of *anthropos* like the Hebrew *ish* is found most frequently in the sayings of Jesus, and most examples come from Mark’s gospel (4:26, 12:1).

Semitic usage often repeats a preposition before every noun of a series which it governs. Such a construction is not good literary Greek. This repetition occurs no less than eleven times in Mark alone (3:7-8, 6:56, 11:1). Some English translations tend to repeat the preposition each time it occurs in a series (KJV, RSV); others translate only the initial preposition, which is more in keeping with the English idiom (NIV, JB, NEB).

New Testament Greek sometimes uses prepositions in a way that reflects Hebrew idioms, for example *homologeō en* in Matthew 7:32.

“I loved Jacob, but Esau I hated,” is a Hebraic way of expressing greater and lesser love. Jesus echoes this idiom in Luke 14:26: “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.” Jesus’ disciples must place all others second to him. This understanding is confirmed by the parallel passage in Matthew 10:37, “He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.” Luke preserves the Hebrew style, Matthew is better Greek.

The use of *egeneto* followed by another verb is parallel to the Hebrew use *vayihi*, “it came to pass.” This Semitism occurs more frequently in Luke’s writings than elsewhere (1:5, 8; 2:1, 6; 5:1, 12; 3:21; 9:37). It is striking that Luke who was probably the best writer of Greek among the evangelists seems so interested in reflecting the Hebrew setting of Jesus’ life and speech.

In Hebrew a third person plural verb is often the equal of a passive. This usage occurs in New Testament Greek (Mt 7:16)—they do not pick grapes from thorns=grapes are not picked from thorns (Mt 7:16)..

The Beatitudes (Mt 5:3-11), the Magnificat (Lk 2:46-56), and the Song of Simeon (Lk 2:34-35) all reflect the Hebrew style of their speakers.

The Hebrew *lemor* is reflected in the common idiom, “Jesus answered and said” (Mt 11:25 in KJV) (“Jesus said “ in NIV).

Expressions with a genitive which reflects the pattern of the Hebrew construct are very common: mammon of unrighteousness, man of sin, son of perdition, etc. The Hebrew superlative is reflected in such expressions as king of kings and lord of lords.

In the New Testament Greek words sometimes take on Hebrew meanings. The example of *nomos/torah* was discussed above. The Greek root *hilas-* takes on overtones of Hebrew *kaphar*, which make it closer in meaning to expiation (full payment) than to propitiation (appeasement) (Ro 3:25, He 2:17, 1 Jn 2:2, 4:10). Following the KJV, however, English translations have used the less correct “propitiation”, but the English “propitiation” over the course of time took on the expiatory sense of *kaphar*. “Atoning sacrifice” is the translation of many contemporary versions.”<sup>18</sup> In the New Testament the term “generation”, like the Hebrew *dor*, is sometimes used to refer to a type of people rather than a group of contemporaries (in Luke 21:32 all the translations I consulted stick with “generation”).

---

<sup>18</sup> The word expiation begins with the prefix *ex*, which means “out of” or “from.” Expiation means to remove something. It is taking away or removing guilt by means of paying a ransom or offering an atonement. Thus, the act of expiation removes the problem by paying for it and satisfying the legal demand. Christ’s expiation of our sin means that he fully paid the penalty for it and removed it from consideration against us.

Propitiation, on the other hand, has to do with the addressee of the expiation. The prefix in this case is *pro*, which means “for.” Propitiation indicates a change in God’s attitude toward us, so that we are restored to the fellowship and favor of God. In a sense, propitiation means God is appeased (there is, of course, no real change in God).

Propitiation brings in the personal element and stresses that God is no longer angry with us. The result of Christ’s act of expiation is that God is propitiated. In earthly dealings there can be propitiation without an expiation, but a holy God cannot be propitiated without an expiation.

To compound the translator’s dilemma “at-one-ment” when it was coined meant “propitiation” or “reconciliation”. Today it means “expiation”. Translating is a hard job.

In the New Testament words are often used, not in the common sense, but in technical senses established by theological tradition.

There is a lot of debate about the degree of semiticisms in the New Testament and about the reason for those semiticisms (translation from a semitic source, the author's hybrid Greek, the existence of a Septuagint dialect, a deliberate literary style?)<sup>19</sup> The Greek of the New Testament is a literary language—not the literary language of Greek writers who tried to echo the great dramatists and philosophers of the golden age of Greek literature, but a literary language which echoed the great prophets and poets of the golden age of revelation. It is not the koine Greek of the street but a literary language best called Biblical Greek. In some respects the authors of New Testament narrative were trying to produce an effect not dissimilar to the Biblical English of those translations which try to preserve some of the flavor of the original. Since the New Testament writers were presenting the words of Jesus and the other characters in the gospels in translation, we may call their approach a precedent for a philosophy of Bible translation. The presence of these Hebraisms, which sound awkward in Greek, does not mark the language of the New Testament as “non-literary”. On the contrary, it is one of the features which give to its own literary character.

Who made up the intended audience that was expected to handle this language and style? The New Testament was addressed not so much to the man (and woman) in the street, but to the man and woman in the church. The books of the New Testament were addressed primarily to an audience which had already been gathered into churches, instructed in the basic doctrines of the Christian faith, capable of recognizing distinctly Biblical usages, and able to catch allusions to the contents of the Old Testament. Our translations should reflect the needs and abilities of this same group and the stylistic level of the originals.

(Point 9 below is also relevant to the issue of archaic language in translation.)

7. The translator should adhere to the principle that Scripture interprets Scripture. This is especially true in regard to doctrinal statements. One passage of Scripture cannot be set against another. New Testament interpretations of Old Testament passages should be accepted.

The Hebrew of Psalm 104:4 may be understood to say *either* that God makes his messengers winds and his servants flames of fire *or* that God makes winds his messengers and flames of fire his servants. Hebrews 1:7 says that it is the former and that this passage refers to angels. In Psalms 104 ESV opts for “angels who are winds” in agreement with Hebrews 1. NIV opts for “winds that are messengers”.

Psalms 4:4 רגזו ואל תחטאו : anger or fear?

NIV In your anger do not sin

TNIV Tremble and do not sin;

NASB Tremble, and do not sin'

ESV Be angry, and do not sin;

NLT Don't sin by letting anger control you.

---

<sup>19</sup> David Alan Black, "New Testament Semiticisms" (*The Bible Translator* 39/2 (April 1988), p. 215-223. Michael Marlowe, "The Semitic Style of the New Testament," <http://www.bible-researcher.com/hebraisms.html>.

MSG Complain if you must, but don't lash out  
 BBE Let there be fear in your hearts, and do no sin;  
 NKJV Be angry, and do not sin..  
 NRSV When you are disturbed, do not sin;  
 KJV Stand in awe, and sin not:

In the citation of this verse in Ephesians 4:26 all translations agree that Paul like the Septuagint applies the verse to anger. Should we be bound by this in our rendering of Psalm 4? Is Paul actually quoting the verse or just using the language?

Although we would say that translators should be guided by the interpretation of an Old Testament passage given to that passage elsewhere in the Bible, we would not say that every Septuagint rendering quoted in the New Testament determines the best translation for Old Testament passages. In many cases the New Testament may be just citing the familiar version without making a point in favor of a specific rendering. In Psalm 2:9, for example, the Hebrew text has a verb form that means “break” or “smash” (תִּרְעַם is qal imperfect, 2nd singular of רָעַע, a rare word). The Septuagint reads ποιμανεῖς. This apparently is a translation of a variant vocalization, תִּרְעַם, the qal imperfect, 2nd singular of the common verb רָעַע, “you shepherd them.” The NIV translation in Psalm 2:7, “you rule them,” is a paraphrase of the reading of the Septuagint, “shepherd”. This reading “shepherd” is also reflected in the allusions to this passage in Revelation 2:27, 12:5, and 19:15. The fact that Revelation follows the Septuagint reading does not necessarily mean that the Septuagint has a better understanding of the Hebrew than the Masoretic Text, but simply that the Septuagint was the Old Testament regularly used by the first readers of Revelation. The point of Christ’s rule over the nations is the same in either case.

8. The translator should not drain the color and variety of expressions from passages or level the language by downgrading the imagery.

The rendering of David’s colorful expression “Everyone who *shatans* against the wall” as “every male” is an example of this flaw (See the discussion under Principle 4).

“I proclaim the greatness of the Lord” is not the same as “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord” (Lk 1:46-47). When God says, “My soul hates the wicked,” this is more intense than saying, “I hate the wicked.”

Isaiah 1:14

NIV 84 Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates  
 ESV Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates  
 NIV11 Your New Moon feasts and your appointed festivals I hate with all my being  
 NASB I hate your new moon festivals and your appointed feasts  
 WPV Meetings for this, meetings for that. I hate them!  
 BBE Your new moons and your regular feasts are a grief to my soul  
 NKJV Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates  
 NRSV Your new moons and your appointed festivals my soul hates;

Which translation do you like? See also Psalm 11:5.

Should a translator assume that his readers can figure out some imagery, or does he have to explain everything? Solomon explains why he needs wisdom in these words:

ESV I am but a little child. I do not know how to go out or come in. KJV, NASB, RSV  
NIV I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties.  
NLT I am like a little child who doesn't know his way around.  
MSG I'm too young for this, a mere child! I don't know the ropes,  
hardly know the 'ins' and 'outs' of this job.

9. The goal of a translator is not so much to make Judeans sound like 21<sup>st</sup> century Americans but to make them sound like Judeans who speak English.

No Judean reading the book of Job would think that Job and his friends were contemporary Judeans, and when David writes a psalm that is a reflection on the themes of Job (Ps 139), his vocabulary and style are Joban.

“Alas” and “woe” are not contemporary English, but would we want to render these terms with a contemporary expression? How would a contemporary American say, “Alas, I hit my finger with the hammer?” Striving for contemporaneity can become “too much of a good thing.”

In 1 Sam. 20:30 Saul calls Jonathan “Thou son of a perverse rebellious woman” (KJV; NIV and ESV follow suit). The Living Bible’s, “You son of a bitch” is certainly dynamic and is probably roughly equivalent. It is common and contemporary American English, but perhaps too much so.

Contemporary Americans might miss the point of Ecclesiastes’ lament that “the caperberry fails” (12:5), but “the Viagra and Cialis fail” is too contemporary. How would you rate these efforts?

NIV	desire no longer is stirred
ESV & NKJV	desire fails
NASB	the caperberry is ineffective
NLT	the caperberry no longer inspires sexual desire

In Matthew 10:9 do the apostles keep their money in their girdle, their belt, their money belt, their purse, or their wallet? Is an “ephod” an apron, a vest, a priestly garment, or an ephod?

The translator’s goal is to present faithfully the original historical and cultural context as best he can. Sheep remain sheep. Slaves do not become employees. Wives still call their husband “my lord.”

What measurements should be used, ancient or modern?

Genesis 6:15  
NIV 1984 The ark is to be 450 feet long, 75 feet wide and 45 feet high.  
ESV The length of the ark 300 cubits, its breadth 50 cubits, and its height 30 cubits.  
NIV 2011 The ark is to be three hundred cubits long, fifty cubits wide and thirty cubits high.

It would seem that for most common objects readers would best be served by measurements in a system they understand, so at first glance that we might give the palm to NIV 1984. So why would NIV 2011 revert to ancient cubits? One problem is that we do not know the precise value of some of the ancient measures so conversion may be only an estimate. Also if we convert to the modern

system, should we round off the conversions so that the text is not cluttered with fractions and decimal points? And the biggest problem—if we use modern measurements, what about cases in which the measurements in the original have symbolic value, such as the measurements of the temple and land in Ezekiel 40-48 and in Revelation 22? The symbolic value of 12,000 stadia is lost if we translate into miles. And finally, do we need two versions, one metric and one American? So the translator has three choices: 1) ancient measurement in the text, modern approximation in the footnote; 2) modern conversion in the text, ancient measurement in the footnote; 3) modern measurement in the text except when the numbers have a symbolic value. All three systems have been used in contemporary translations.

Is the amount of flour in Matthew 13:33 “three sata,” “three measures,” “a large amount” (NIV), “three pecks” (NASB),<sup>20</sup> or “dozens of loaves” (MSG)?

What about monetary units? Should the debtor stay in prison until he has paid the last penny or the last mite or the last farthing or the last *lepton*? (Lk 12:59) And how do we translate talents and darics to dollars or euros?

Another problem is that the more contemporary a translation sounds, the more quickly it becomes dated. This can happen very quickly. After movies like *ET* some translators claimed that the word “aliens” would make readers think of extraterrestrials. Now after a decade or two, “aliens” is very common and contemporary as a term for non-citizens living in a land. “Resident aliens” would be very understandable as a term for non-Israelites who were living and working in Israel.

10. Though “one Hebrew word=one English word” is not a viable standard for a translator to apply consistently, the translator should strive to be consistent rather than casual in his renderings of specific words.

One of the best illustrations of the principle that one-for-one correspondence does not work is the Hebrew word *nephesh*, glossed as “soul.” The NIV lists more than 150 renderings for this word (many are variants of the same word, like “I” or “me”), but even KJV which makes more effort for a one-for-one renderings has more than 30 renderings. Most of the renderings cluster around the meanings soul, life, living creature, strong feeling, or self. The most striking rendering of *nephesh* is the NIV’s “dead body”, the opposite of any meaning we could reasonably expect. How did this happen? In the book of Numbers there are a number of examples of the expression a “dead *nephesh*”. This can hardly mean a dead life or a dead soul. In Numbers 6:6 the Nazirite is warned that he must not touch a dead *nephesh* while he is fulfilling his vow. *Nephesh* here has the connotation of a living being or in this case, a once-living being.

NIV he must not go near a dead body.  
ESV he shall not go near a dead body.  
NRSV they shall not go near a corpse.  
NASB he shall not go near to a dead person.

Do you see any practical difference in these renderings?

---

<sup>20</sup> Three *sata* is more like five pecks.

In spite of the fact that one-for-one does not always work, the translator should strive for a degree of consistency which preserves the identity of things that reoccur in the text. He should not jumble words and concepts. (See the discussion of “saints” and “God’s people” above.)

There are two musical instruments that accompanied the music of the psalms. The *kinnor*, the instrument played by David, was probably a small lyre. The *nebel* was probably a big lyre. (Lyres have four sides, harps have three.) Since *nebel* is the big instrument the NIV appropriately translates *nebel* as “harp” in Psalm 150:3 and several other passages. “Harp” may not be technically correct for *nebel*, but it is a pretty good dynamic equivalent since it is a large stringed instrument. A 10-stringed *nebel* is mentioned in Psalms 33:2, 92:3, 144:9. Unfortunately the NIV has translated *nebel* as “lyre” and *kinnor* as “harp” in these three passages, the exact opposite of its better translations in Psalm 150:3. Thus, the NIV fails to distinguish these two instruments consistently.

They are two types of “trumpets” in Psalms. The *shofar* is made from an animal horn. The *hatzotzerah* is a metal tube. *Shophar* is sometimes translated “trumpet” by the NIV (Psalm 150:3), but at other times it is more correctly translated “ram’s horn” (1 Chronicles 15:28, Psalm 98:6). There is no reason not to be consistent in such situations.

The Hebrew word *saphir* is very likely not our sapphire, but since few people know what the technically more correct *lapis lazuli* is, sapphire is a pretty good dynamic equivalent. Similar kinds of issues occur with other gem stones, trees, and birds of prey. None of these will affect doctrine, but a translator who respects the text will try to do a careful job of rendering the text also in technical details. If he cannot be sure of his identification, it is still good to be consistent. In this case the rule for baseball umpires applies: it is better to be consistently wrong about the strike zone than to be erratic and all over the place.

A more serious example of the tendency to over-interpret is the decision of NIV 1984 to regularly interpret the Hebrew and Greek words for “flesh,” rather than to translate more literally so that the reader can become familiar with the idioms and the word play of the biblical text. This approach often forces the translator to interpret *basar* as either “body” or “sinful nature” when the original “flesh” is open to either or both. In many passages this destroys word-play. Translators should not assume that modern readers cannot learn biblical idioms. Here are two passages that illustrate the problem.

Genesis 6:3

ESV “My Spirit shall not abide in man forever, for he is flesh”

NIV 2011 “My Spirit will not contend with humans forever, for they are mortal<sup>[b]</sup>  
<sup>[b]</sup> or corrupt

1 Peter 1:24

ESV All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass.

NIV 84 All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field

NIV 11 All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field

NLT People are like grass; their beauty is like a flower in the field.

MSG The old life is a grass life, its beauty as short-lived as wildflowers

---

A greater effect on the interpretation is present in the following.

Romans 8:3-4

For God has done what the law, weakened by the *flesh*, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful *flesh* and for sin, he condemned sin in the *flesh*,<sup>4</sup> in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the *flesh* but according to the Spirit. ESV

For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the *sinful nature*, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of *sinful man* to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in *sinful man*,<sup>4</sup> in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the *sinful nature* but according to the Spirit. NIV 1984

For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the *flesh*, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful *flesh* to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the *flesh*,<sup>4</sup> in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the *flesh* but according to the Spirit. NIV 2011

1 Peter 3:18

NIV He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit

ESV being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit

Note: in a few passages “flesh” and “spirit” refer to Jesus’ humiliation and exaltation: being put to death in a lowly condition, but made alive in a glorious condition.

Another example is the frequent translation of *hesed* simply as “love”, blurring the distinction from *ahavah*, the generic Hebrew word for love. Another idiom removed over 200 times is “house” as a term for family, clan, or tribe. In Exodus 17:14 where the text says the “memory of Amalek” is to be blotted out, the word “name” is substituted for “memory.” Other examples are the homogenizing the variant names of kings in the Old Testament or of Peter and Cephas in Galatians 2. Another example is the removal of the term “Lord of hosts.” If “hosts” is believed to be too archaic, “Lord of Armies” could be substituted. Though the more interpretive “Lord Almighty” has precedent in the ancient versions, a rendering more true to the Hebrew would be preferable.

More consistency in preserving the distinction of biblical terms would be an improvement to the NIV and other dynamic equivalent translations. We should give attention not only to the authors’ general thoughts but to their words.

11. The translator should try to be euphemistic where the original is euphemistic and blunt or course where the original text is blunt.

This principle is easy to enunciate. Putting it into practice is more difficult. We already touched on this issue above in the case of the men who *shatan* against the wall. It hardly is possible that this expression is euphemistic, but do we know enough about the nuances of colloquial Hebrew to know which is the best equivalent of *shatan*?

Text is euphemistic

There are instances where the text is clearly euphemistic, so in those cases we should be euphemistic too (overall the Bible is more inclined toward euphemism, so if in doubt, euphemize).

Genesis 4:1

KJV ESV Adam knew Eve his wife

NIV 1984 Adam lay with his wife Eve

NIV 2011 Adam made love to his wife Eve



MSG Adam slept with Eve his wife.  
NLT Adam had sexual relations with his wife

Evaluate each translation. Any suggestions?

This text is clearly euphemistic. Since the result of Adam knowing his wife was that she became pregnant and gave birth, an adult reader of average intelligence can probably figure out the meaning of this euphemism. Some years ago there was a movie "Carnal Knowledge." The marketers apparently thought the audience could figure out what it means "to know someone in the biblical sense."

Does the euphemism in Luke 1:34 need to be explained as many translations do?

NIV "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"  
NASB Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?"  
ESV Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"  
NLT Mary asked the angel, "But how can this happen? I am a virgin."  
MSG Mary said to the angel, "But how? I've never slept with a man."  
BBE Mary said to the angel, How may this be, because I have had no knowledge of a man?  
NKJV Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?"  
NRSV Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?"  
KJV Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?

In the following example does the euphemism need explanation? Which explanation is better?

Exodus 22:16  
ESV If a man seduces a virgin who is not betrothed and lies with her  
NIV If a man seduces a virgin who is not pledged to be married and sleeps with her  
Holman When a man seduces a virgin who was not promised in marriage, and he has sexual relations with her

What if we are not sure whether or not the expression in the text is a euphemism?

Ezekiel 7:17  
Literal: All knees run water  
ESV All hands are feeble, and all knees turn to water  
NIV 1984 Every hand will go limp, and every knee will become as weak as water  
NIV 2011 Every hand will go limp; every leg will be wet with urine <sup>21</sup>

Text not euphemistic

In some cases it is clear that the text is intending to describe ugly things with ugly words. Examples of this type are most prevalent in Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 16:25-26—literal: you spread your feet ...your neighbors great of flesh

---

<sup>21</sup> Other texts to consider include: Dt 25:11,

At every street corner you built your lofty shrines and degraded your beauty, *spreading your legs* with increasing promiscuity to anyone who passed by.<sup>26</sup> You engaged in prostitution with the Egyptians, your neighbors with *large genitals*, and aroused my anger with your increasing promiscuity. NIV 2011

At the head of every street you built your lofty shrines and degraded your beauty, *offering your body* with increasing promiscuity to anyone who passed by.<sup>26</sup> You engaged in prostitution with the Egyptians, your *lustful neighbors*, and provoked me to anger with your increasing promiscuity. NIV 1984

At the head of every street you built your lofty place and made your beauty an abomination, *offering yourself* to any passerby and multiplying your whoring.<sup>26</sup> You also played the whore with the Egyptians, your *lustful neighbors*, multiplying your whoring, to provoke me to anger. ESV

If there is any doubt that this passage is blunt, it is removed by the parallel in Ezekiel 23:20, which refers to flesh and emissions like horses and donkeys. “Offering your body” and “spreading your legs” are not dynamic equivalents. “Large flesh” in this context does not mean a large sinful nature.

What are some factors that would lead you to be less graphic than the original? What if the receiving culture is so reticent in speaking about such matters that the frank language in the Bible will turn them off to the Bible? This is not a new problem. The rabbis and masorettes already wrestled with it. In a number of cases they used the *qere* to substitute euphemisms for expressions which they considered to be too indelicate or offensive to read. These *qere* must have originated when Hebrew was still enough of a living language so that certain terms for sexual relations or bodily functions could be rated as too offensive to use in a public reading. During the years in which Hebrew was a living language certain terms which were proper enough to be included in the earlier books of the Old Testament had become too vulgar to be used in public reading, at least in the opinion of the masorettes. The same thing has happened in English, in which some terms which were used in the King James Version (piss, ass) would make some people uncomfortable if used in public services today. An example of such copyists’ euphemizing occurs in 2 Kg 18:27 and Is 36:12 where is Assyrian army’s intimidator tells the people of Jerusalem what they will eat and drink during the siege. In the *qere*, “water of the feet” is substituted for the *ketiv*, *shenim* “piss.” In the same verses, “what comes out” is substituted for *chere*, which means “dung” or perhaps a more crude word than that. The copyists found the vulgar threat of the Assyrian envoy too crude to be read aloud, so they substituted euphemisms in the margin, but left the cruder terms in the text. Isaiah does not seem to have been troubled by the crude words. We cannot determine with certainty if the words were “proper” when Isaiah recorded them and became crude later, or if they were vulgar even when the Assyrian spoke them but Isaiah used them to honestly portray the vulgarity of the Assyrian envoy. The latter seems most likely. It is unlikely that the Assyrian army guy got his trash-talking vocabulary from Mr. Rogers.<sup>22</sup>

The rabbis were somewhat conflicted on this issue. On the one hand, they taught, “Whenever a text is written indelicately, we read it delicately.” This is the opposite of the principle I suggested above: “if the text is indelicate, we translate it indelicately.” The rabbis, however, hedged a bit on their prudery. R. Nahman said, “All obscenity is forbidden except obscenity at idolatry.” R. Huna b. Manoah said,

<sup>22</sup> Other examples: men forcefully or lustfully *shagal* women; the scribes suggest “lie with” (Dt 28:30, Is 13:16, Ze 14:2, Je 3:2); the besieged have to eat *cheri*; the scribes suggest we read: “decayed leaves” (2 Kg 6:25) Others: Dt 28:27, 1 Sa 5:6,9,12, 6:4,5—hemorrhoids; 2 Kg 18:27, Is 36:12—what comes out and waters of your feet”; 2 Kg 10:27—latrine; Dt 25:11—private parts.

“It is permitted to an Israelite to say to a Cuthean [a Samaritan] ‘Take your idol and stick it in your *shintav*.’”

So is there any good reason to elaborate on this topic besides to try to hold your attention as we head into the home stretch of this paper? Actually there is. There is probably no translation issue that reveals more about a translator’s tendency to let the text speak for itself or to “improve” the text to fit in with his sensibilities and the sensibilities of his readers. If a translator does not mess with the text here, he will probably not mess with the text anywhere.

In spite of the discomfort it may cause so readers, we should stick with the principle “if the text is delicate, we should be delicate. If it is not delicate, we should not be.” Not all biblical texts are intended for the pulpit or the Sunday school, but all are written for our learning.

A good test case is provided by Song of Songs. A key image in the Song is the lady’s plea, “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth.” In certain cultures this would sound like the words of a grossly immoral woman since kissing is not a suitable expression of love between adults of either the same or the opposite sex. But kissing is so interwoven into the imagery and interpretation of the Song that it is impossible to remove it without undercutting the imagery and meaning of the Song. Two ways to drain the Song of its impact are to euphemize or to allegorize its sensuality. The opposite extreme is the tendency of some modern translators and interpreters to read the Song with what Michael Fox has called a “genital focus.” If there is any sexual intercourse between the couple in the Song, it takes place off stage, behind the curtain. The Song is sensual but not overtly sexual, and a translator should try to preserve this balance.

A very interesting and difficult example is found in Genesis 19:5. The Sodomites come to seize Lot’s guests. They demand:

- ESV Bring them out to us, that we may know them.
- NIV Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them.
- NASB Bring them out to us that we may have relations with them."
- NLT Bring them out to us so we can have sex with them!"
- MSG Bring them out so we can have our sport with them!
- BBE Send them out to us, so that we may take our pleasure with them.
- NKJV Bring them out to us that we may know them carnally.
- NRSV Bring them out to us, so that we may know them.
- KJV Bring them out unto us, that we may know them.

Here the reality that the translator must deal with is that Moses, though could have used an ugly or a neutral word for sex to express the Sodomite rapists’ demand, he puts a euphemism into their mouths. The translators seem baffled about what to do. The choices seem to be: stay literal, add an awkward explanation to the literal, or use an undynamic equivalent.

Which translation is best? Can you do better?

12. Capitalization of divine names and pronouns is not a feature of the original text, and therefore it falls into the category of interpretation rather than translation.

English requires titles and proper names be capitalized.

These two principles are in tension. To reproduce the Bible literalistically a translator would have to use no capitalization, but English conventions require the capitalization of proper names and of many titles. Elvis is the King not the king. LeBron James is the king, not the King.

The main problem under this category is caused by the word “spirit” (*ruach, pneuma*). In many passages it is not certain if the reference is to the Holy Spirit or to some aspect of the human spirit. Our principle 15 would say that the translator should keep both options open, but in this case it is impossible. The best the translator can do is put one option in the text and the other in a note.

Galatians 5:17

ESV For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit,  
and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh.

NIV 2011 For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit,  
and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh.

NIV 1984 For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit,  
and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature.

GW What your corrupt nature wants is contrary to what your spiritual nature wants,  
and what your spiritual nature wants is contrary to what your corrupt nature wants.

Capitalization is not inherently an issue of deity v. non-deity or of Messianic v. non-messianic. It is often simply an issue of a title or proper name versus a common noun: the Antichrist, an antichrist (1 Jh 2:18); the Evil One, an evil one or evil (Lord’s Prayer); the Church or the church. A writer may use the temple or the Temple to indicate whether he is thinking primarily of the type of building that this structure is or he is emphasizing that this is the unique Temple of Yahweh. But all of these distinctions are foreign to the biblical text, so it is unwise to adopt capitalization as a device for marking Messianic prophecy or for distinguishing direct from typical prophecy. (This will be discussed more under the point on prophecy.)

Another issue of interpretation which the translator cannot avoid is quotation marks and other punctuation marks which are not in the original text. Though an element of interpretation is involved when one adds quotation marks, inserting them cannot be avoided in English.

13. Good translation should preserve the authors’ co-ordination and subordination of thought units.

- Biblical Hebrew likes stringing many statements together with the word “and”.
- Biblical Greek, especially in some of the epistles, likes stringing a lot of coordinated and subordinated clauses.
- Contemporary English likes short sentences. Semi-colons seem to be almost a dead form in contemporary English; and it now seems acceptable to begin sentences with “But” and “And”, so that we can call them short sentences.

It seems relatively easy to break up the long Hebrew strings of co-ordination in the Old Testament (compare the example from Mark above in point 6). It is not so simple to break up the long subordinations and co-ordinations in the New Testament without blurring relationships which the author made explicit. We have some devices in English which can assist in this such as paragraphing and dashes, but preserving the author’s connection of thoughts should take priority over too rigid an enforcement of short sentences.<sup>23</sup> Clarity of connections is a greater priority.

---

<sup>23</sup> Another example of language to language variability is word order. Because of the limitation on word order that is demanded by English grammar, English cannot produce the effect of special word order in Hebrew, but it can reproduce the effect in some other way. For example, if the Hebrew word order is emphatic, the emphasis can be produced by some other device in English.

In the ESV, as in the Greek, Romans 1:1-7 is one sentence of 130 words. In the NIV it is four sentences of which the longest is 70 words.

1 *Paul*, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God— 2 the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures 3 regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life<sup>[a]</sup> was a descendant of David, 4 and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power<sup>[b]</sup> by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord. |||| 5 Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from<sup>[c]</sup> faith for his name's sake. |||| 6 And you also are among those Gentiles who are called to belong to Jesus Christ. |||| 7 *To all in Rome* who are loved by God and called to be his holy people: *Grace and peace* to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is hard to see what has been gained here. The hardest part of the chain (v 1-4) is left intact. Furthermore, the first sentence (v 1-4) is not a sentence; it is a fragment. Verse 6 is a simple independent sentence starting with “And”. And verse 7 needs the first word of verse one yield its complete sense. Is the ESV with its one sentence harder to understand? If there is a perceived need for manageable bites, the guys who put the verse numbers in already provided that.

1 *Paul*, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, 2 which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, 3 concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh 4 and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, 5 through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, 6 including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, 7 *To all those in Rome* who are loved by God and called to be saints: *Grace to you and peace* from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

A similar situation exists in Ephesians 1:15-21. ESV has one sentence of 166 words. NIV has four sentences with the longest having 58 words.

Many contemporary translations are very concerned about short sentences. More important are the clarity and emotional impact of the sentences. “Jesus wept” is a powerful sentence. In the novel *Absalom, Absalom* William Faulkner strung together a famous sentence of 1287 words.<sup>24</sup> Faulkner didn't write the way he did because he lacked understanding of the craft of writing. He used long sentences and elaborate *style* as an element of *meaning*. In describing decadent life in the post-civil-war southern America, he used a decadent style. The purpose of a sentence is to inform, to captivate, and occasionally delight. If a sentence does this, it does not matter if it is short or long, simple or complex, co-ordinate cumulative, sub-ordinate cumulative, or mixed cumulative.

Another extraneous element which introduces divisions into the biblical text is the chapter and verse divisions. The translator will have to decide on the role of the verses in determining the paragraphing of the translation. Is each verse a paragraph or should they be grouped by thought?

---

<sup>24</sup> I took Guinness's word on this.

14. Translators should be wary of importing their stylistic preferences into the text against the preference of the author, where such changes are not necessary for clear communication.

In Jonah 3:3 Nineveh is called “a great city to God.” Some claim this simply means a really great city. But if the author simply wanted to say Nineveh was “great city” or even “a really big city” there were simple Hebrew words to do this. He, in fact, had done that in verse 2. Moreover, the most important single point of the book of Jonah is the contrast between God’s love for the city and Jonah’s disdain. Young’s Literal Translation stands almost alone here in rendering “Nineveh hath been a great city before God”, but is there really any need here to homogenize the idiom and relegate God to the footnote?

Other similar decisions may have a more widespread effect. In NIV 2011 in the New Testament “Christ” is changed to “Messiah” about 60 times when the translators believe that the Greek *christos* functions as a title:

So where the term is clearly used to designate the God-sent deliverer of Jewish expectations (primarily in the Gospels and Acts), it was judged more appropriate to use “Messiah (Mt 16:15). However, “where this sense seems less prominent (primarily in the Epistles), the transliteration of the Greek word (“Christ”) has been retained.”

Perhaps this sounds natural in some cases in the gospel narratives in which Jews are speaking, but in 1 John 5:1, John says to his primarily Gentile readers, “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Messiah is born of God” (TNIV only). Romans 9:5 refers to “the human ancestry of the Messiah, who is God over all.” See also Revelation 11:15, 12:10. The translators’ decision to make this change into a general rule of translation seems to be dubious, because a stylistic decision made by the TNIV translators was allowed to overrule the stylistic decision made by the New Testament writers. If the New Testament writers had wanted to retain a Hebrew/Aramaic expression in their Greek writings, they could easily have done so, as John does in John 4:25, where he places “Messiah” and “Christ” side by side, or in the instances where the writers retain such terms as *abba*, *talitha qum*, *rabboni*, and *maranatha*.

A good example of the case for keeping Hebrew terms when the Greek of the New Testament retains them is Jesus’ solemn *amen, amen* in John 8:34.

NET Jesus answered them, “I tell you the solemn truth”  
NIV Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth”  
NASB Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you”  
ESV Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you”  
NLT Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth”  
MSG Jesus said, “I tell you most solemnly”  
BBE This was the answer Jesus gave them: Truly I say to you  
NKJV Jesus answered them, “Most assuredly, I say to you”  
NRSV Jesus answered them, “Very truly, I tell you”  
KJV Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you

Not one of the cited translations keeps Jesus’ Amen. One would think “amen, amen” would be a good evangelical idiom.

A variation of this neglect of the Scripture's style is the TNIV's decision in Psalms to relegate *selah* to the notes. The explanation given is: "Although *selah*, used mainly in the Psalms, is probably a musical term, its meaning is uncertain. Since it may interrupt reading and distract the reader, this word has not been kept in the English text, but every occurrence has been signaled by a footnote." I don't know whether or not David said *selah* when he sang or recited the psalms to the Levites (I think he probably did not), but why prefer the translators' stylistic feelings over more than 2000 years of textual tradition? Isn't the very point of *selah* to serve as an interruption for reflection?

A more drastic form of this error is relegating the headings of the psalms to footnotes as Good News Bible does or arbitrarily omitting them as NEB does.

15. Where possible, when the text, on the basis of Scripture, is open to two equally valid understandings, the translator should attempt to preserve both options. When this is not possible, one of the options can be preserved in a footnote.<sup>25</sup>

Two examples of this problem have already been discussed above:

flesh as sinful nature or mortal nature (pt 10)

spirit v. Spirit (pt 12)

Are νεκρῶν ἐργῶν in Hebrews 6:1 "dead works" or "works that lead to death" (NIV)? Can a translation include both options or is a note needed?

An interesting example of this problem is found in Hosea 6:7: "they have broken the covenant

כִּאֲדָם—like Adam, like mankind, or at Adam?

NIV Like Adam, they have broken the covenant

ESV Like Adam they transgressed the covenant

NASB Like Adam they have transgressed the covenant

BBE Like a man, they have gone against the agreement

NKJV Like men they transgressed the covenant

NET At Adam they broke the covenant

NRSV At Adam they transgressed the covenant;

there they dealt faithlessly with me.

"Like Adam" presupposes that Hosea was familiar with Genesis. The third option "at Adam" assumes a change from *b* to *k*. This change is justified by the appearance of the word "there" in the second clause. However, we know of no special act of treachery at Adam on Jordan. Here one must choose one interpretation and put the others in a footnote.

An example that touches on messianic interpretation is Haggai 2:7. Does this refer to Christ coming to the nations or the nations coming to Christ?

NIV 84 I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come,

TNIV I will shake all nations, and what is desired by all nations will come,

---

<sup>25</sup> In general, translators' should not use footnotes when they can't make up their mind which translation they like best. Footnotes should be reserved for significant differences or significant variants.

ESV	I will shake all nations, so that the treasures of all nations shall come in
NASB	I will shake all the nations; and they will come with the wealth of all nations,
NET	I will also shake up all the nations, and they will offer their treasures
MSG	I'll shake down all the godless nations. They'll bring bushels of wealth
NRSV	I will shake all the nations, so that the treasure of all nations shall come
KJV	I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come
NKJV	I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations

---

Do any of the renderings keep both possibilities?

---

A minor example that illustrates the principle is found in Ezekiel 1:1.

NIV1984	In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month on the fifth day, while I was among the exiles by the Kebar River, the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God.
ESV	In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month
NASB	Now it came about in the thirtieth year, on the fifth day of the fourth month
NIV 2011	In my thirtieth year, in the fourth month on the fifth day
NLT	On July 31 of my thirtieth year
MSG	When I was thirty years of age

“My thirtieth year” may very well be correct, but it provides information Ezekiel chose not to provide.

The difficulty of applying this principle is illustrated by Nehemiah 5:7 where Nehemiah forbids “charging interest,” “exacting usury,” or “seizing collateral”? Is there an English translation that can cover all of these?

16. In trying to produce gender accurate language the translator will strive to be inclusive where the original is inclusive and exclusive where the original is exclusive.

This is the most controversial issue in Bible translation right now. It is at the heart of the conflict between supporters of NRSV, TNIV, and NIV 2011 on the one end and supporters of ESV and Holman in the middle, and King James and NKJV at the other end. Some of the main points of the controversy include whether “man” can still be used in a generic sense to refer to “human beings” and whether singulars can be changed to plurals to avoid masculine pronouns. In this paper we cannot do more than outline the issues and suggest topics for study.

Giving principles for Bible translation is much like giving principles for investing. It is very easy to state good principles. The investing principle I follow is “Buy the stocks that are going to go up. Do not buy the stocks that are going to go down.” I believe this is a great principle that needs little explanation. The problem is not in stating the principle. The problem is in applying the principle to specific cases, as we shall see.

### Man

Let us take the “man” issue first. Hebrew and Greek have a pair of words, *ish* and *aner*, that refer to male beings as their default meaning. They have another pair of words, *adam* and *anthropos*, which are more open to an inclusive meaning which includes males and females. Neither of these is an



absolute distinction. Context can indicate exceptions. Sometimes the word-pairs are distinct from one another; sometimes they may be used interchangeably.

*Adam* includes a person of each gender in Genesis 1:27 (see also 1:26; 5:1-2).

- NIV So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.
- TNIV So God created human beings in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.
- NIV11 So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.
- ESV So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.
- NRSV So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them

But in many places it is clear that *adam* can refer to an individual male (Ge 2:7-8, Ge 2:15-16) or to “man” rather than “woman” (Ge 2:22, 3:8, 3:20). A complicating factor is the use of *Adam* as the name of the first male. Does “sons of *adam*” merely mean “humans” or does it remind us of our descent from the man who came from the earth and will return to it? And how does one keep the connotation of “earth-man” when it is part of the picture?

*Anthropos* includes all people in 1 Timothy 2:4.

- NIV 1984 [God] wants all men to be saved
  - NIV 2011 [God] wants all people to be saved
  - ESV [God] desires all people to be saved.
- Note: here the inclusive “people” is better than “men” because it brings out the contrast with the “man” and “woman” passages that follow.

James 1:7 and 8 seems to be a case in which *anthropos* and *aner* could be interchangeable, “That person (*anthropos*) should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Such a person (*aner*) is double-minded and unstable in all they do.” Or should we say, “Such people are double-minded and unstable in all they do”?

Everyone/they

Perhaps here is the place for an aside on the singular/plural conflicts which recent translators produce in their efforts to avoid masculine pronouns. In the example above from James 1 they want to avoid “him” in the second part of the sentence but they don’t want to use “persons” in the first part of the sentence because they don’t want to be criticized for removing the more personal individual emphasis of the singular form.

There are, of course, cases in which a singular/plural shift makes sense or even is required: “Everyone liked the picnic, but they did not like the mosquitoes.”<sup>26</sup> “Everyone was in their shorts” is correct but

---

<sup>26</sup> I can’t say : “Everyone liked the picnic, but he did not like the mosquitoes.” Why not say: “All of them liked the picnic, but they did not like the mosquitoes.”

not without its unclarity.<sup>27</sup> Here is an example of a good singular/plural shift from the Bible: Everyone (πᾶς) who competes in the games goes into strict training. They (ἐκεῖνοι) do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever (1 Cor 9:25). Here the shift of number is in the Greek text. It is not manufactured by the translator.

The issue becomes more complicated when the translator starts promiscuously changing biblical singulars to plurals. In many cases there may be “no harm, no foul.” But when the principle is applied indiscriminately ambiguities and misleading renderings are created and the linguistic gymnastics at times border on the silly. Compare these three efforts.

NIV1984 If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.

TNIV If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with them, and they with me.

NIV2011 If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.

The statement about “having one’s cake and eating it” would seem apropos here. It should be possible for translators, if they wish to avoid masculine pronouns, to do so without irritating readers who have a feeling that traditional rules of agreement still apply to literary prose. Few people will be offended by good grammar. NIV 2011 has attempted to retreat from some of the excesses of TNIV, but this area still can use a lot of work.<sup>28</sup>

#### Additional Examples

An interesting test of the tendency of translations to strive for gender neutral language is provided by Hosea 9:7.

ESV	the prophet is a fool; the man of the spirit is mad
NIV 1984	the prophet is considered a fool, the inspired man a maniac
NIV 2011	the prophet is considered a fool, anyone who is inspired a maniac
NASB	the prophet is a fool, the inspired man is demented
NLT	the prophets are crazy and the inspired men are fools!
MSG	the prophet is crazy! The ‘man of the Spirit’ is nuts
BBE	the prophet is foolish, the man who has the spirit is off his head,
NKJV	the prophet is a fool, the spiritual man is insane,
NRSV	the prophet is a fool, the man of the spirit is mad!

NIV 2011 stands alone here. Even NRSV keeps “man of the Spirit”.

A parallel case is found in Amos 2:11

---

<sup>27</sup> Presumably they had more than one pair. Why not say “Everyone was wearing their own shorts “ or “everyone was wearing shorts” as the context requires.

<sup>28</sup> And we have not even touched on a couple of other factors in the problem, such as the reckless abandon with which Hebrew sometimes jumps back and forth between singular and plural and the disappearance of the distinction between singular and plural “you” in English.

- NIV84 I also raised up prophets from among your sons and Nazirites from among your young men.
- ESV I raised up some of your sons for prophets, and some of your young men for Nazirites
- NASB I raised up some of your sons to be prophets And some of your young men to be Nazirites.
- MSG I raised up some of your young men to be prophets, set aside your best youth for training in holiness.
- BBE some of your sons I made prophets, and some of your young men I made separate for myself.
- NKJV I raised up some of your sons as prophets, And some of your young men as Nazirites.
- NRSV I raised up some of your children to be prophets and some of your youths to be nazirites.
- NIV11 I also raised up prophets from among your children and Nazirites from among your youths.

The word NIV11 translates as “youth” (*bachurim*) means “young men”. It often contrasts with *betuloth*, “virgins”.

#### Women

Only rarely do the words for women create an issue (unless there is a choice between “woman” or “wife”). NIV 2011, however, creates an issue in Nahum 3:13 where it translates “women” as “weaklings”: “Look at your troops—they are all weaklings!” instead of “Look at your troops—they are all women!” (At least in this case they cannot be accused of trying to mollify feminists.) A defense of this translation would be that the point of comparison is women’s relative lack of upper body strength compared to men. The only other translation that I found that bought this approach was the Message: “Your warriors are wimps. You’re sitting ducks.” In this rendering of the Message, as well as in Isaiah 19:16, Jeremiah 50:37 and 51:30, and Isaiah 3:12, it is clear that upper body strength is not the only issue. Zeal in war is another part of the picture. Perhaps also blood-thirstiness. The intended meaning of a text is at risk when a translator takes it upon himself (or herself or themselves) to “fix” or “improve” points of the text that are an embarrassment to them.

Who was to prepare to go up Mt. Sinai at the giving of the law, all Israelites or the men?

Exodus 19:15

- NIV Then he said to the people, "Prepare yourselves for the third day. Abstain from sexual relations."
- NASB He said to the people, "Be ready for the third day; do not go near a woman."
- ESV And he said to the people, "Be ready for the third day; do not go near a woman."
- NLT He told them, "Get ready for the third day, and until then abstain from having sexual intercourse."
- MSG Then he addressed the people: "Be ready in three days. Don't sleep with a woman."
- BBE And he said to the people, Be ready by the third day: do not come near a woman.
- NKJV And he said to the people, "Be ready for the third day; do not come near your wives."
- NRSV And he said to the people, "Prepare for the third day; do not go near a woman."
- KJV And he said unto the people, Be ready against the third day: come not at [your] wives.

In the ten commandments that follow the pronouns are masculine singular. Did the Israelite women conclude that the commandments did not apply to them? Did the women think the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> commandments did not apply to them?

Another passage which raises the issue of comparison of the sexes is 1 Peter 3:7

*Greek* living together according to knowledge, as to the weaker, female vessel  
ESV showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel  
NIV treat them with respect as the weaker partner  
NASB as with someone weaker, since she is a woman  
NLT she may be weaker than you are  
MSG as women they lack some of your advantages  
BBE giving honor to the woman who is the feebler vessel  
NRSV paying honor to the woman as the weaker sex  
KJV giving honor unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel

What is the point here?

Here is one example of the woman or wife issue from 1 Corinthians 11:3:

---

NIV Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.  
NASB But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ.  
NLT But there is one thing I want you to know: The head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.  
ESV But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.  
MSG In a marriage relationship, there is authority from Christ to husband, and from husband to wife. The authority of Christ is the authority of God.

Here ESV adopts a translation that cannot be justified from the context, though it does not make as big a mess as the Message. This translation destroys the parallel between the man and woman in the following verses.

### Complications

The issue is complicated by the fact that gender issues and issues of social status become entangled. We have a good (or bad) example of this in Luke 22:56-58. The female person who confronts Peter in the courtyard is called a girl (παῖδισκη). Does this reflect her age or her status? In NIV84 Peter calls this female person “girl”. All the recent translations call her “woman” (γυναι). In contemporary informal English we could call her “lady”, but this would hardly work in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, would it? In the next confrontation Peter addresses a male person of undetermined social status as *anthrope*, which all translation render as “man”. Why did NIV84 address this female person as “girl” but NIV11 addresses her as “woman”? Why did Peter call the guy an *anthropos* rather than an *aner*? In contemporary English when is it acceptable to address a group of 30-ish female persons as “girls”? When is it not acceptable? When is it acceptable to address an African-American male as “boy”? When is it not?

A parallel issue in the Old Testament is whether some Hebrew words for “man” are more manly, whether *ish* regularly has a higher connotation than *enosh*? NIV thinks it does. I don’t.

## Humans or Men?

Sometimes boiler plate application of the inclusive language principle produces results that raise as many questions as they answer. One case of this is in Ezekiel 1:5,10, 26. Do the cherubim have a face and form like a man or like a human being?

NIV 1984 Each of the four had the face of a man  
NIV 2011 Each of the four had the face of a human being  
ESV Each had a human face

Since there is a distinction between animal and human face, it is hard to argue against “human form”, but how is the artist to draw the face: male, female, or androgynous? More to the point does the vision of God in verse 26 resemble a man, a woman, or an undifferentiated human?

## Fathers, Sons, and Brothers

Similar issues of inclusive reference apply to the Hebrew and Greek terms for fathers, sons, and brothers.

### Fathers/Parents/Ancestors

The Greek *patres* can mean “parents” but this usage is rare. An example is found in Hebrews 11:23, in which Moses is hidden by his “fathers” that is, his parents. But this may well be a Hebraism since Hebrew has no word for parents. Greek has a word that could have been used here, *goneis* (Lk 2:27, 21:16).

In NIV 2011 “fathers” is regularly changed to “ancestors” except in expressions like “God of our fathers, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob”.

### Sons/Children

The Hebrew *banim* or *bnei* “sons” can sometimes be inclusive of all children or descendants of either sex. The *bnei-Yisrael* at the beginning of Exodus 1 are specifically named and enumerated as the twelve sons of Jacob. Throughout most of the Exodus account, when the term refers to the whole nation, the standard translation has been “children of Israel.” An especially noteworthy case is 2 Corinthians 6:18 in which Paul renders the “sons” from 2 Samuel 7:14 as “sons and daughters”.

Galatians 3: 26 is an especially interesting case because of the issue of whether “sons” here has connotations of maleness or also of inheritance.

NIV84 You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus,  
NASB For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.  
ESV For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.  
NET For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith.  
BBE Because you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.  
NKJV For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.  
NLT For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus.  
MSG By faith in Christ you are in direct relationship with God.  
NRSV For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith.  
NIV11 So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith

KJV For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.

Any choices here catch your eye?

### Brothers/Sisters

More specific issues arise when translating the Greek *adelphoi* as “brothers and sisters”. The term and its Hebrew equivalent *achim* can sometimes have an inclusive sense (Dt 15:12—your brother, a Hebrew male or Hebrew female”). Here the inclusive sense is specifically indicated in the text. Problems arise, however, when this principle is too casually applied to cases in which there is no clear contextual evidence of the inclusive meaning. The results in such cases may be dubious or may even be doctrinally wrong.

The two extremes here are insisting on retention of “brothers” unless there is an explicit statement or overwhelming contextual evidence of inclusiveness *or* jumping to the inclusive “brothers and sisters” in spite of lack of evidence or even the presence of evidence to the contrary. The heart of the problem is that *adelphoi* is not strictly equivalent to the English “brothers” since it may include females and *adelphoi* is not strictly equivalent to the English “brothers and sisters” since that phrase explicitly includes females whereas *alelphoi* does not. This is a complicated issue which requires its own article. Here are a few of the issues which must be explored:

- 1) Can we jump to the conclusion that passages that use only “brothers” are intended to be inclusive? When New Testament speakers or writers wanted to make it clear that brothers and sisters were involved, they could and did use both words (Mt 13:55,56. Mt 19:29, Mk 10:29, Lk 14:26, 1 Cor 7:15, Ja 2:15, Mk 3:33 see variant). Luke 21:16 is an interesting text since it uses the inclusive word “parents” for father and mother, but then uses the more exclusive term “brothers” in what seems to be a reference to male and female siblings. See a similar pairing in Matthew 12:49-50.
- 2) Can the term “brothers” include men and women without contextual indicators?
- 3) Is there any clear case where it can clearly be demonstrated from the context that “brothers” is intended to address both the males and females who were present? (An example would be if Mary, Martha, and Lazarus were addressed as “brothers”.)
- 4) Where is the burden of proof? Do we assume “brothers” unless there is clear evidence to the contrary? Or do we assume “brothers and sisters” unless there is clear evidence to the contrary?

### Some Cases

In Philippians 1:14-15 NIV2011 renders *adelphoi* as “brothers and sisters” and describes these brothers and sisters as those who proclaim the gospel. Is this implying that men and women were pastors who preach or is it referring to the sharing of the gospel done by all Christians? Verses 15 and 16 seem to suggest that Paul is thinking of public preachers here.

An analogous case occurs in 1 Corinthians 14:39, in which “sisters” are included in the exhortation to “be eager to prophesy” shortly after the women are told to “remain silent” in church. It is true that women “prophesied” in the church at Corinth (1 Corinthians 11:5) and also elsewhere (Acts 21:9), but in this context is the addition of “sisters” a careless, unsafe assumption?

Even more dubious is Acts 1:16 in which those who are to participate in choosing a replacement for Judas are addressed as *andres adelphoi*, “men, brothers”. It is very likely women were present, but were they asked to participate in the selection of the apostle?

Is there really any reason to remove “brothers” from Deuteronomy 18:15, the prophecy of the coming prophets and Prophet?

NIV 2011 seems committed to eliminating “brothers” even when almost all others retain it.

Nehemiah 4:14

NIV 1984 fight for your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes.

NIV 2011 fight for your people, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes."

NRSV fight for your kin, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes."

---

Other passages to consider: 3 John 3, 1 John 2:9, 1 Peter 3:8, James 3:1, Hebrews 2:11, 12, 17; James 1:8-9.

The gender issue requires a paper of its own, as your arrangements committee recognized. Here we have to limit ourselves to stating the general principle, “be inclusive where the original is inclusive and exclusive where it is exclusive,” and to illustrating a few of the difficulties in applying the principle.

### Marriage Issues

An related issue for translators is the need to understand how biblical marriage customs differ from ours. We celebrate the legal marriage, the festivities, and the consummation in one day. In ancient Israel, the legal marriage usually preceded the festivities and consummation by some time. So it was possible for a considerable amount of time for a woman to be “married” and “not married” at the same time. Was the man to whom she was betrothed her husband or her fiancé?

Joel 1:8 אֵלֵי כַבְתּוּלָה חִגְרַת שֶׁק עַל בַּעַל נְעוּרֶיהָ

ESV Lament like a virgin wearing sackcloth for the bridegroom of her youth.

NIV84 Mourn like a virgin in sackcloth grieving for the husband of her youth.

NIV11 Mourn like a virgin in sackcloth grieving for the betrothed of her youth.

NASB Wail like a virgin girded with sackcloth For the bridegroom of her youth.

NET Wail like a young virgin clothed in sackcloth, lamenting the death of her husband-to-be.

NLT Weep like a bride dressed in black, mourning the death of her husband.

MSG Weep like a young virgin dressed in black, mourning the loss of her fiancé.

BBE Make sounds of grief like a virgin dressed in haircloth for the husband of her early years.

NKJV Lament like a virgin girded with sackcloth for the husband of her youth.

NRSV Lament like a virgin dressed in sackcloth for the husband of her youth.

KJV Lament like a virgin girded with sackcloth for the husband of her youth.

Evaluate NIV84, NIV11, and ESV.

Matthew 1:18

NIV His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit.

NASB when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit.

- ESV When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.
- NLT His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit.
- MSG His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. Before they came to the marriage bed, Joseph discovered she was pregnant. (It was by the Holy Spirit, but he didn't know that.)
- BBE When his mother Mary was going to be married to Joseph, before they came together the discovery was made that she was with child by the Holy Spirit.
- NKJV After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit.
- NRSV When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.
- KJV When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.

What are the pros and cons of “married,” “engaged” and “betrothed”?

How does social status and polygamy affect the issue? In Exodus 21:4 is the female slave whom the master gives to a male slave to have children by him that man’s “wife” or his “woman”? Was Hagar Abraham’s wife? Were Bilah and Zilpah wives?

Another example of a cultural issue that is tricky for the translator is legitimacy of birth. The *mamzer* appears only twice in Scripture (Dt 23:2, Zech 9:6) and translators struggle with it.

- NIV No-one born of a forbidden marriage nor any of his descendants may enter the assembly of the LORD, even down to the tenth generation.
- NASB No one of illegitimate birth shall enter the assembly of the LORD; none of his descendants, even to the tenth generation, shall enter the assembly of the LORD.
- ESV No one born of a forbidden union may enter the assembly of the LORD. Even to the tenth generation, none of his descendants may enter the assembly of the LORD.
- NLT If a person is illegitimate by birth, neither he nor his descendants for ten generations may be admitted to the assembly of the Lord.
- MSG No bastard is to enter the congregation of GOD, even to the tenth generation, nor any of his children.
- BBE One whose father and mother are not married may not come into the meeting of the Lord’s people, or any of his family to the tenth generation.
- NKJV One of illegitimate birth shall not enter the assembly of the LORD; even to the tenth generation none of his descendants shall enter the assembly of the LORD.
- NRSV Those born of an illicit union shall not be admitted to the assembly of the LORD. Even to the tenth generation, none of their descendants shall be admitted to the assembly of the LORD.
- KJV A bastard shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD; even to his tenth generation shall he not enter into the congregation of the LORD.



Of all of these translations it seems that only ESV and NRSV are correct. Children of unmarried Jewish parents are not illegitimate as long as those parents would be suitable subjects for marriage (so “bastard” and “illegitimate” are misleading to English readers). Only children born of the adultery of a married woman or from an incestuous marriage or relationship are *mamzer* (so the term “forbidden marriage” is too narrow). The Zechariah reference seems to include offspring from marriages or relationships with women from forbidden nations as does Deuteronomy 23:3. The translator’s problem is to understand and communicate the cultural institution in terms his reader will understand.

17. The translator will recognize and preserve direct prophecy where the immediate context or other testimony of Scripture indicates direct prophecy.

Here is another issue that needs its own paper, but we will have to limit ourselves to outlining some of the main issues as they pertain to translation.

This became a front burner issue when the RSV and other recent translations rendered “virgin” in Isaiah 7:14 as “young woman.” Another issue in the debate was whether there are Old Testament prophecies that pointed directly to Christ as their fulfillment or whether most “prophecies” originally referred to something else but they became “prophecies” when they were given a new application by the synagogue or church to a Messiah or specifically to Jesus.

We recognize three main types of messianic prophecies:

- 1) Direct prophecies that point directly to Christ, such as Isaiah 7:14 that points to the virgin birth, or Psalm 16 that points to Christ’s resurrection.
- 2) Typical prophecy in which something or someone in the prophet’s experience points to a greater fulfillment in Christ’s life. The traitor Ahithophel in David’s life foreshadows Judas in Jesus’ life.
- 3) Intermediate fulfillment in which an event or person which is still future to the prophet points to a greater fulfillment in Christ. David will have a son who will build God’s house. Solomon is an intermediate fulfillment but the great fulfillment is in Christ.

There was a controversy about this in the Missouri Synod in which one seminary (St. Louis) tended to make everything typical, while the other seminary (Springfield/Fort Wayne) tended to make everything direct. This debate had an effect on translations, commentaries, and study Bibles. The biggest weakness of the *Concordia Self-Study Bible* is that it is poor in the recognition of direct prophecy. The notes of the more recent *Lutheran Study Bible* are somewhat of an improvement. Here we will deal with this issue only as a translation issue.

We begin with Isaiah 7:14, which is the most crucial test. If a translator does not see direct prophecy here, he likely sees it nowhere.

NIV 1984	The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son
NIV 2011	The virgin* will be with child and will give birth to a son *Or young woman
ESV	The virgin shall conceive and bear a son
NASB	Behold, a virgin* will be with child and bear a son *Or maiden
NKJV	Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son
NLT	The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son

NRSV Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son  
MSG A girl who is presently a virgin will get pregnant. She'll bear a son

Evaluate NIV 2011 and MSG.

I do not recommend capitalization as a marker of direct prophecy unless a title is involved, but its presence or absence may give us information about the translators' view of prophecy. Psalm 2:2 provides an illustration.

NIV 1984 against the LORD and against his Anointed One  
NIV 2011 against the LORD and against his anointed  
NASB against the LORD and against His Anointed  
ESV against the LORD and against his anointed

Are these differences of style or differences of interpretation?

Zechariah 12:8 is another example .

NIV 84 the house of David will be like God, like the Angel of the LORD going before them.  
NIV 11 the house of David will be like God, like the angel of the LORD going before them.  
ESV the house of David shall be like God, like the angel of the LORD, going before them.  
NASB the house of David will be like God, like the angel of the LORD before them.  
NLT the royal descendants will be like God, like the angel of the Lord who goes before them!  
MSG the family of David itself will be godlike, like the Angel of GOD leading the people.  
NET the dynasty of David will be like God, like the angel of the Lord before them.<sup>1</sup>  
<sup>1</sup>This is hyperbole about the king.  
BBE the family of David will be as God, as the angel of the Lord before them.  
NKJV the house of David shall be like God, like the Angel of the LORD before them.  
NRSV the house of David shall be like God, like the angel of the LORD, at their head.  
KJV the house of David shall be as God, as the angel of the LORD before them.

Differences of style or differences of interpretation?

Even more striking is Zechariah 3:1:

NIV Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him.  
NASB Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him.  
ESV Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him.  
NLT Then the angel showed me Jeshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord. The Accuser, Satan, was there at the angel's right hand, making accusations against Jeshua.  
MSG Next the Messenger-Angel showed me the high priest Joshua. He was standing before GOD's Angel where the Accuser showed up to accuse him.  
BBE And he let me see Joshua, the high priest, in his place before the angel of the Lord, and the Satan at his right hand ready to take up a cause against him.

NKJV Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the Angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to oppose him.

NRSV Then he showed me the high priest Joshua standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him.

KJV And he shewed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him.

Why do so many capitalize *the satan* and so few capitalize *the malak Adonai*?<sup>29</sup>

Another key test is Psalm 45, in which the king or King is addressed as God.

NIV 1984 Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever;

NIV 2011 Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever;

Note: Here the king is addressed as God's representative.

ESV Your throne, O God, is forever and ever.

NASB Your throne, O God, is forever and ever;

NRSV Your throne, O God, endures forever and ever.

NLT Your throne, O God, endures forever and ever.

RSV Your divine throne endures forever and forever.

MSG Your throne is God's throne, ever and always;

The note in NIV 2011 would allow or even suggest the understanding that originally this psalm was not a prophecy but simply a hyperbole about the king of Israel. Hebrews 1:18-19 does not allow this interpretation of the passage. The NRSV backs off from the first RSV interpretation. The Message is a mess.

A similar conflict arises in connection with Psalm 8:4-6, a psalm recognized in Hebrews and in Lutheran interpretation as a prophecy of Christ.

NIV 1984 what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? <sup>5</sup>You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. <sup>6</sup>You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet:

NIV 2011 what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? <sup>5</sup>You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor. <sup>6</sup>You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet:

This passage deserves an article of its own because there are others issues besides the singular/plural and the gender neutral issues, but here we have to limit ourselves to the observation that the translation of Psalm 8 in the NIV 2011 makes it difficult, perhaps even impossible, for a reader to see the messianic interpretation in Psalm 8 as it stands. A reader might still be able to read the messianic interpretation back into the psalm from Hebrews 2, but this translation makes the NIV appear to support the view that the messianic meaning was not there originally but was read into the psalm later. I do not think this removal of the singular forms from Psalm 8 was a conscious attempt to remove prophecy (the singular form critical to the messianic interpretation was retained in Genesis

---

<sup>29</sup> This is true also of most of the other Angel of the Lord passages. See also Exodus 33:14.

3:15). It seems more likely that the focus on gender neutral language made the translators oblivious to what they were doing to the messianic import of the passage.

The fact that most of the translators of NIV 1984, TNIV, and 2011 appear to see only typical prophecy in the Old Testament<sup>30</sup> increases the reason for concern, since for some Evangelicals “typical prophecy” increasingly means post-facto prophecy. It also is a cause for concern that more capitalization is retained in later messianic prophecies such as in Zechariah, but not in the early prophecies.

Ps 8 is not the only instance where the singular to plural shift blurs recognition of messianic prophecy.

Psalm 34:20

NIV 1984 he protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken.

TNIV he protects all their bones, not one of them will be broken.

NIV 2011 he protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken.

NASB he keeps all his bones, not one of them is broken.

ESV he keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken.

TLB God even protects him from accidents.

A number of other translation issues have been raised about prophetic passages in NIV 2011 v ESV.

In Psalm 72 the Hebrew verbs are translated as a prayer (“May the king do these things”) rather than as a future reality (“The king will do these things”).

NIV1984 He will judge your people in righteousness, your afflicted ones with justice.

NIV2011 May he judge your people in righteousness, your afflicted ones with justice.

NASB May he judge Your people with righteousness And Your afflicted with justice.

ESV May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice!

Some claim that “may he” diminishes the prophetic force, but the Hebrew permits either translation, and translations that uphold prophecy adopt either option.

In Daniel 7:13 and 8:17, NIV 2011 retains “son of man” rather than “human being” but bases this more on tradition than translation principle. The footnote to 7:12 says: The phrase “son of man” is retained as a form of address here because of its traditional associations.

In Jeremiah 31:22, NIV 2011 eliminates the patristic messianic interpretation as an allusion to the virgin birth. NIV 1984 and ESV are neutral. It is not clear from the context that this is in fact a messianic prophecy.

NIV 1984 How long will you wander, O unfaithful daughter? The LORD will create a new thing on earth—a woman will surround a man.

NIV 2011 How long will you wander, O unfaithful daughter? The LORD will create a new thing on earth—a woman will return to the man. (or protect)

NASB How long will you go here and there, O faithless daughter? For the LORD has created a new thing in the earth—A woman will encompass a man.

---

<sup>30</sup> See Kenneth Barker, *The Accuracy of the NIV*, p 33, 24, 34, 41-42 for a statement. Genesis 3:16, Psalm 16:10, and Isaiah 7:14 are among the generic typological prophecies.

ESV	How long will you waver, O faithless daughter? For the LORD has created a new thing on the earth: a woman encircles a man.
NLT	How long will you wander, my wayward daughter? For the Lord will cause something new to happen— Israel will embrace her God.”
MSG	How long will you flit here and there, indecisive? How long before you make up your fickle mind? GOD will create a new thing in this land: A transformed woman will embrace the transforming GOD!”
BBE	How long will you go on turning this way and that, O wandering daughter? for the Lord has made a new thing on the earth, a woman changed into a man.

In Jeremiah 23:6 and 33:16 the NIV 2011 rendering weakens the traditional Lutheran understanding that the text refers to Christ as “the Lord our Righteousness.” ESV is not better. Again, the grammar is not decisive here.

NIV 1984	This is the name by which it will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness.
NIV 2011	This is the name by which it will be called: The LORD Our Righteous Savior.
NASB	This is the name by which she will be called: the LORD is our righteousness.'
ESV	This is the name by which it will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.'
MSG	The motto for the city will be, “GOD Has Set Things Right for Us.”
BBE	This the name which will be given to her: The Lord is our righteousness.
NKJV	This is the name by which she will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Micah 5:2 presents an interesting case that tests the line between translation and interpretation. The passage ends with this description of the Messiah:

Lit.	his goings out from before, from the days of eternity ( <i>'olam</i> )
NIV	whose origins are from of old, from ancient times
NASB	his goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity
ESV	whose origin is from of old, from ancient days
NLT	one whose origins are from the distant past
MSG	his family tree is ancient and distinguished
BBE	whose going out has been purposed from time past, from the eternal days
NKJV	whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting
NRSV	whose origin is from of old, from ancient days
KJV	whose goings forth [have been] from of old, from everlasting

The most traditional interpretation is that this is a reference to Christ’s eternal generation, but would that be a plural? Some say “majestic plural.” Many recent translations take it as a reference to his descent from the patriarchs and kings. But does the plural actually refer to his appearances as the Angel of the Lord? Compare John 1:10?

Another test case is Psalm 22:16.

NIV	they have pierced my hands and my feet
ESV	they have pierced my hands and feet
NASB	they pierced my hands and my feet
NLT	they have pierced my hands and feet
NKJV	They pierced My hands and My feet
MSG	they pin me down hand and foot
BBE	they made wounds in my hands and feet

NRSV my hands and feet have shriveled  
NET like a lion they pin my hands and feet

In this case the Masoretic text has “like a lion”, but only NET follows this.

A difficult prophecy which translators wrestle with is Genesis 49:10.

- NET The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs; the nations will obey him.
- NIV The sceptre will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his.
- NASB The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes, And to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.
- ESV The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.
- NLT The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from his descendants, until the coming of the one to whom it belongs, the one whom all nations will honor.
- MSG The scepter shall not leave Judah; he'll keep a firm grip on the command staff Until the ultimate ruler comes and the nations obey him.
- BBE The rod of authority will not be taken from Judah, and he will not be without a law-giver, till he comes who has the right to it, and the peoples will put themselves under his rule.
- NKJV The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor a lawgiver from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes; And to Him shall be the obedience of the people.
- NRSV The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and the obedience of the peoples is his.
- KJV The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him [shall] the gathering of the people [be].

Are some of these translations more messianic than others? How about Luther’s *bis dass der Held komme*?

How do translations view the nature of faith in the Messiah?

- NET the person of integrity will live because of his faithfulness.
- NIV the righteous will live by his faith—
- NASB the righteous will live by his faith.
- ESV the righteous shall live by his faith.
- NLT the righteous will live by their faithfulness to God.
- MSG the person in right standing before God through loyal and steady believing is fully alive, [really] alive.
- BBE the upright man will have life through his good faith.
- NKJV the just shall live by his faith.
- NRSV the righteous live by their faith.
- KJV the just shall live by his faith.

Compare Romans 1:16

- NET The righteous by faith will live.
- NIV The righteous will live by faith."
- NASB THE RIGHTEOUS MAN SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.

ESV	The righteous shall live by faith.
NLT	It is through faith that a righteous person has life.
MSG	The person in right standing before God by trusting him really lives.
BBE	The man who does righteousness will be living by his faith.
NKJV	The just shall live by faith.
NRSV	The one who is righteous will live by faith.
KJV	The just shall live by faith.

Any interesting translations here?

If Isaiah 7:14 is one end of the spectrum for testing Messianic references, Genesis 4:1 is the other. Only Luther and Beck see Eve's words as a Messianic reference, "I have gotten a Man, Lord." In any case this is a moot issue, because if Eve was intending to refer to the Messiah, she was wrong.

18. Though this is not strictly speaking a translation issue, a key decision by a translator is which text he is going to translate. A translation project will need a set of principles to guide translators in evaluating variants. I did not make a fresh study of this for this paper, but will make a couple of observations about the textual principles of various versions

The textual basis for the ESV and NIV are similar, with the NIV showing somewhat greater preference for shorter readings and for the Alexandrian text family in choosing which variants to adopt. The NIV also exhibits more readiness to resort to readings from the secondary sources. The King James and New King James use the *Textus Receptus*, which provides a much fuller text. A variety of this text is called the *Majority Text*. Because a study of this issue is beyond the scope of our assignment here, I have placed a summary of the textual basis of these translations in an appendix.

Here I will comment briefly on just three test cases. The most notorious is the famous or infamous *Comma Johanneum* in 1 John 5:17.

"For there are three that bear record *in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth, the spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.*"

Of the nine translations I monitored only the KJV and NKJV have the words: "in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one. And there are three that testify on earth." There is almost no Greek evidence to support this verse, so this verse is the litmus test of whether a translation will follow the so-called majority text wherever it leads. (I have attached an appendix on this topic.)

Another interesting test verse is John 3:13. Only KJV and NKJV have the words in italics.

No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man *who is in heaven*.

Here the case for omission is not very strong. On the contrary the case for inclusion is strong. Most witnesses, including some "important ones" have "who is in heaven." A few others have variations on this phrase, such as "who was in heaven" or "the one who is from heaven". The witnesses normally considered the best by many modern translations do not have the phrase. If

we consider both the manuscript evidence and the reading which best explains the others, the evidence is for inclusion. (See the note in the appendices.)

Our final example, Romans 11:6, another case of King James against the world:

- NIV And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace. ‘
- ESV But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.
- NASB But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace.
- NRSV But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace would no longer be grace.
- NKJV And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work.
- KJV And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. *But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.*

The reading has some early support, but the UBS textual commentary dismisses it as an artificial addition.

What would I prefer as a guideline? I would prefer a fuller text, which includes any reading with substantial support and notes its absence from some manuscripts with a note, rather than the bias toward a shorter text that seems to be preferred today. For starters I would say: In the Old Testament stick with the Masoretic Text unless there are cogent reasons to depart from it. In the New Testament start with the latest Nestle/Aland text and restore significant deletions which have substantial textual support. If a group is doing a revision rather than a fresh translation, use the text of the version you are revising, unless you find compelling reason to alter it.

### Conclusions

- 1) Translating is hard work, especially when a foreign language is involved.<sup>31</sup>
- 2) Translation is not an exact science that can be governed by a rigid set of rules.
- 3) A translation needs to be guided by a set of principles and rubrics.
- 4) No translation will please everyone. In fact, no translation will totally please the translator for more than a day or two.
- 5) Not one *i* or one dot of an *i* of God’s Word will pass away, but every translation passes away.
- 6) The day of one (or even two or three) translations that will serve the whole English-speaking church is gone, at least for the foreseeable future.
- 7) The translator’s greatest responsibility is to carry over the meaning of the text.
- 8) The translator’s greatest attribute is understanding and acceptance of all the doctrines of Scripture.
- 9) A translator cannot always preserve all the nuances of the text.
- 10) The translator’s second responsibility is to carry over the emotional impact of the text.

---

<sup>31</sup> We are, of course, constantly translating and interpreting words and texts in our own language every day.



- 11) The translator should try to preserve the literary flavor of the text. The original texts vary greatly in level of language and literary style, and translations should reflect this.
- 12) The translator's second greatest attribute is a feeling for the language and communication style of the original texts.
- 13) In short, the translator's goal is to produce a text that is as much like the original text as he can possibly make it.

## Appendix A: the Textual Basis of NIV, ESV, and KJV

These are basically the versions' own statement of their textual basis.

The ESV is based on the Masoretic text of the Hebrew Bible as found in *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (2nd ed., 1983), and on the Greek text in the 1993 editions of the *Greek New Testament* (4th corrected ed.), published by the United Bible Societies (UBS), and *Novum Testamentum Graece* (27th ed.), edited by Nestle and Aland. The currently renewed respect among Old Testament scholars for the Masoretic text is reflected in the ESV's attempt, wherever possible, to translate difficult Hebrew passages as they stand in the Masoretic text rather than resorting to emendations or to finding an alternative reading in the ancient versions. In exceptional, difficult cases, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Septuagint, the Samaritan Pentateuch, the Syriac Peshitta, the Latin Vulgate, and other sources were consulted to shed possible light on the text, or, if necessary, to support a divergence from the Masoretic text. Similarly, in a few difficult cases in the New Testament, the ESV has followed a Greek text different from the text given preference in the UBS/Nestle-Aland 27th edition.

For the NIV, in the Old Testament the standard Hebrew text, the Masoretic Text as published in the latest editions of *Biblia Hebraica*, was used throughout. The Dead Sea Scrolls... were consulted, as were the Samaritan Pentateuch and the ancient scribal traditions relating to textual changes. Sometimes a variant Hebrew reading in the margin of the Masoretic Text was followed instead of the text itself. Such instances, being variants within the Masoretic tradition, are not specified by footnotes. In rare cases, words in the consonantal text were divided differently from the way they appear in the Masoretic Text. Footnotes indicate this. The translators also consulted the more important early versions - the Septuagint; Aquila, Symmachus and Theodotion; the Vulgate; the Syriac Peshitta; the Targums; and for the Psalms the *Juxta Hebraica* of Jerome. The manuscript base of the NIV New Testament was the Koine Greek language editions of the United Bible Societies and of Nestle-Aland

According to the preface of the New King James Version (p. v-vi), the NKJV uses the 1967/1977 Stuttgart edition of the *Biblia Hebraica* for the Old Testament, with frequent comparisons made to the Ben Hayyim edition of the Mikraot Gedolot published by Bomberg in 1524–25, which was used for the King James Version. Both the Old Testament text of the NKJV and that of the KJV come from the ben Asher tradition (known as the Masoretic Text). However, the 1967/1977 Stuttgart edition of the *Biblia Hebraica* used by the NKJV uses an earlier manuscript (the Leningrad Manuscript B19a) than that of the KJV.

The New King James Version uses the *Textus Receptus* ("Received Text") for the New Testament, just as the original King James Version had used. *Textus Receptus* (Latin: "received text") is the name subsequently given to the succession of printed Greek texts of the New Testament which constituted the translation base for the original German Luther Bible and the King James Version. The series originated with the first printed Greek New Testament to be published; a work undertaken by the Dutch Catholic scholar and humanist Desiderius Erasmus in 1516, on the basis of some six manuscripts, containing between them not quite the whole of the New Testament. The lacking text was translated from Vulgate. Although based mainly on late manuscripts of the Byzantine text-type, Erasmus's edition differed markedly from the classic form of that text. Erasmus adjusted the text in many places to correspond with readings found in the Vulgate, or as quoted in the church fathers. Consequently, although the *Textus Receptus* is classified by scholars as a late Byzantine text, it differs in nearly two thousand readings from the standard form of that text-type, as represented by the "Majority Text" of Hodges and Farstad. In other words, there is no invariable "majority text."

## Appendix B: 1 John 5:7

“For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth, the spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.”

The infamous *Comma Johanneum*, has been known in the English-speaking world through the King James translation. Before τὸ πνεῦμα καὶ τὸ ὕδωρ καὶ τὸ αἷμα the *Textus Receptus* (*TR*) reads ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, ὁ πατήρ, ὁ λόγος, καὶ τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα, καὶ οὗτοι οἱ τρεῖς ἓν εἰσι. καὶ τρεῖς εἰσιν οἱ μαρτυροῦντες ἐν τῇ γῆ (“in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one. And there are three that testify on earth”). However, the evidence – both external and internal – is decidedly against its authenticity. For a detailed discussion, see *TCGNT* 647-49. Our discussion will briefly address the external evidence. This longer reading is found only in nine late mss, four of which have the words in a marginal note. Most of these mss (221 2318 [18th century] {2473 [dated 1634]} and [with minor variations] 61 88 429 629 636 918) originate from the 16th century; the earliest ms, codex 221 (10th century) includes the reading in a marginal note, added sometime after the original composition. The oldest ms with the *Comma* in its *text* is from the 14th century (629), but the wording here departs from all the other mss in several places. The next oldest mss on behalf of the *Comma*, 88 (12th century) 429 (14th) 636 (15th), also have the reading only as a marginal note (*v.l.*). The remaining mss are from the 16th to 18th centuries. Thus, there is no sure evidence of this reading in any Greek ms until the 14th century (629), and that ms deviates from all others in its wording; the wording that matches what is found in the *TR* was apparently composed after Erasmus’ Greek NT was published in 1516. Indeed, the *Comma* appears in no Greek witness of any kind (either ms, patristic, or Greek translation of some other version) until a.d. 1215 (in a Greek translation of the Acts of the Lateran Council, a work originally written in Latin).

This is all the more significant since many a Greek Father would have loved such a reading, for it so succinctly affirms the doctrine of the Trinity. The reading seems to have arisen in a 4th century Latin homily in which the text was allegorized to refer to members of the Trinity. From there, it made its way into copies of the Latin Vulgate, the text used by the Roman Catholic Church. The Trinitarian formula (known as the *Comma Johanneum*) made its way into the third edition of Erasmus’ Greek NT (1522) because of pressure from the Catholic Church. After his first edition appeared, there arose such a furor over the absence of the *Comma* that Erasmus needed to defend himself. He argued that he did not put in the *Comma* because he found no Greek mss that included it. Once one was produced (codex 61, written in ca. 1520), Erasmus apparently felt obliged to include the reading. He became aware of this ms sometime between May of 1520 and September of 1521. In his annotations to his third edition he does not protest the rendering now in his text, as though it were made to order; but he does defend himself from the charge of indolence, noting that he had taken care to find whatever mss he could for the production of his text. In the final analysis, Erasmus probably altered the text because of politico-theologico-economic concerns: He did not want his reputation ruined, nor his *Novum Instrumentum* to go unsold.

Modern advocates of the *TR* and KJV generally argue for the inclusion of the *Comma Johanneum* on the basis of heretical motivation by scribes who did not include it. But these same scribes elsewhere include thoroughly orthodox readings – even in places where the *TR*/Byzantine mss lack them. Further, these advocates argue theologically from the position of divine preservation: Since this verse is in the *TR*, it must be original. (Of course, this approach is circular, presupposing as it does that the *TR* = the original text.) In reality, the issue is history, not heresy: How can one argue that the *Comma Johanneum* goes back to the original text yet does not appear until the 14th century in any Greek mss (and that form is significantly different from what is printed in the *TR*; the wording of the *TR* is not found in any Greek

mss until the 16th century)? Such a stance does not do justice to the gospel: Faith must be rooted in history.

Significantly, the German translation of Luther was based on Erasmus' second edition (1519) and lacked the Comma. But the KJV translators, basing their work principally on Theodore Beza's 10th edition of the Greek NT (1598), a work which itself was fundamentally based on Erasmus' third and later editions (and Stephanus' editions), popularized the Comma for the English-speaking world. Thus, the Comma Johanneum has been a battleground for English-speaking Christians more than for others.

*Based on the extensive textual note of NET*

#### Luther on the *Comma*

In Luther's Table Talk (No. 7101) Luther comments on the *Comma*:

I and others believe that it is sort of added, that it is added by some ignoramus. We do not want, however, to translate it because of the word "testimony," because in heaven there will be no need for a testimony. . . as it is written: "we will see God face to face. " There, the Trinity will declare Himself. WA 48: 688,15-20 (NO.7101).

From his comments on 1 John:

This verse seems to have been inserted by the Catholics because of the Arians, yet not aptly. LW 30: 316.

Luther did not include this verse in his Bible. It was included after his death over the protests of Bugenhagen. See *CTQ* October, 1985, p 245-252/

## Appendix C: John 3:13

Most witnesses, including some classified as "important ones" (A<sup>[\*]</sup> Θ Ψ 050 Æ<sup>1,13</sup> İ latt sy<sup>c,p,h</sup>), have at the end of this verse "the one who is in heaven" (ὁ ὢν ἐν τοῦ οὐρανό). A few others have variations on this phrase, such as "who was in heaven" (e sy<sup>c</sup>), or "the one who is from heaven" (0141 pc sy<sup>s</sup>). The witnesses normally considered to be the best by many modern text critics do not have the verse (I<sup>66,75</sup> κB L T W<sup>s</sup> 083 086 33 1241 pc co). On the one hand, if the reading ὁ ὢν ἐν τοῦ οὐρανό is authentic it may suggest that while Jesus was speaking to Nicodemus he spoke of himself as in heaven even while he was on earth. If that is the case, one could see why variations from this hard saying arose: "who *was* in heaven," "the one who is *from* heaven," and omission of the clause. At the same time, such a saying could be interpreted (though with difficulty) as part of the narrator's comments rather than Jesus' statement to Nicodemus, alleviating the problem. And if v. 13 was viewed in early times as the evangelist's statement, "the one who is in heaven" could have crept into the text through a marginal note. Other internal evidence suggests that this saying may be authentic. The adjectival participle, ὁ ὢν, is used in the Fourth Gospel more than any other NT book (though the Apocalypse comes in a close second), and frequently with reference to Jesus (1:18; 6:46; 8:47). It may be looking back to the LXX of Exod 3:14 (ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὢν). Especially since this exact construction is not necessary to communicate the location of the Son of Man, its presence in many witnesses here may suggest authenticity. Further, John uses the singular of οὐρανός ("heaven") in all 18 instances of the word in this Gospel, and all but twice with the article (only 1:32 and 6:58 are anarthrous, and even in the latter there is significant testimony to the article). At the same time, many critics claim that the witnesses that lack this clause are very weighty and must not be discounted.

Generally speaking, if other factors are equal, the reading of such mss should be preferred. And internally, it could be argued that ὁ ὢν is the most concise way to speak of the Son of Man in heaven *at that time* (without the participle the point would be more ambiguous). Further, the articular singular οὐρανός is already used twice in this verse, thus sufficiently prompting scribes to add the same in the longer reading. ~~This combination of factors suggests that ὁ ὢν ἐν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ is not a genuine Johannism.~~ Further intrinsic evidence against the longer reading relates to the evangelist's purposes: If he intended v. 13 to be his own comments rather than Jesus' statement, his switch back to Jesus' words in v. 14 (for the lifting up of the Son of Man is still seen as in the future) seems inexplicable. ~~The reading "who is in heaven" thus seems to be too hard. All things considered, as intriguing as the longer reading is, it seems almost surely to have been a marginal gloss added inadvertently to the text in the process of transmission.~~ (Based on the note of the NET modified by JB)

*For an argument in favor of the longer reading, see David Alan Black, "The Text of John 3:13," GTJ 6 (1985): 49-66 and John Brug, WLQ, Spring, 1996, p 140-141.*

## Appendix D: Rubrics for Translators

A sample of the kind of rubrics a translation committee needs to develop.

1. LORD for the Tetragrammaton. Lord for Adonai. Lord God for Adonai Elohim.
2. Normally avoid contractions.
3. Prefer vocative alone, rather than O God, etc.
4. Have a uniform translation for names of animals, trees, gems, musical instruments, etc.
5. Use ancient monetary measurements except in idioms like "pay the last penny."
6. Use feet, pounds, gallons, etc except when the ancient measure is necessary to the imagery.
7. In the OT law, servants or slaves? Church workers servants or slaves of God?
8. Keep Ark of the Covenant, Tabernacle and Temple.
9. Distinguish temple sanctuary from temple complex.
10. Preserve heritage terms like sanctify, justify, and saints, but not to the exclusive and make holy, declare righteous, etc.
11. Should we keep the term "womb"? If not, what will we substitute?