

Grace OPC High School Sunday Class Teaching Notes			
Year:	1 of 4		Date: 12/07/2003
Quarter:	2 of 4	Bible Study/Survey	
Lesson Title:	Translation of the Scriptures		
Lesson Purpose:	To consider the principles of Bible translation and to trace the origins of our English language versions		

## 1. Introduction

- What did we study last week? The transmission of Scripture.
- We saw that God had miraculously preserved both the Hebrew OT and Greek NT texts
- The incredibly small number of variants introduced over time rarely have any significance for the meaning of the text
- We can be confident that our best Greek and Hebrew manuscripts are almost identical to the originals

So now we have these texts, what is the next step to get to Bible versions? Translation of the Scriptures. This is our study this week.

## 2. Why translate?

What would be the reasons to translate the Bible?

- Accessibility to the reader
- People want (need?) to read the Bible in their own language
- When the people cannot understand the language in which the Scriptures are written, there is a real danger of other men putting themselves in the position of interpreters of Scripture for the people. People cannot check to see whether they are being taught the truth or not if they do not have access to the Scriptures. This is the very situation which occurred in the Roman Catholic Church for years, when the Scriptures were only in Latin and the priests reserved sole right to interpret them. The laity were not allowed access to read the Scriptures until the 1940's.

Is there any support in the Bible for the use of translations?

- Faith comes through hearing
- The Gospel is addressed to the mind, so there must be understanding:
 

1 Corinthians 14:6-11 But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking in tongues, what will I profit you unless I speak to you either by way of revelation or of knowledge or of prophecy or of teaching? 7 Yet even lifeless things, either flute or harp, in producing a sound, if they do not produce a distinction in the tones, how will it be known what is played on the flute or on the harp? 8 For if the bugle produces an indistinct sound, who will prepare himself for battle? 9 **So also you, unless you utter by the tongue speech that is clear, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air. 10 There are, perhaps, a great many kinds of languages in the world, and no kind is without meaning. 11 If then I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be to the one who speaks a barbarian, and the one who speaks will be a barbarian to me.**
- The NT writers made free use in their writings of quotes from the Septuagint – the Greek translation from the Old Testament.

## 3. Is translation a new thing?

No – the Septuagint translation was completed in 250 B.C.

Many Scripture translations were made in different languages from early times: Coptic for Egyptians, Syriac for Aramaic speakers, Gothic for the Germanic groups, Latin for the Romans etc.

In 400 AD Jerome made a very famous translation into Latin. It is called the Vulgate (“common”)

#### **4. What are the pros and cons of a translation?**

Pro – people understand, can revise as language evolves

Con – it is a translation – not perfect or flawless like the original Hebrew and Greek texts.

A translation is the work of men and inevitably will contain flaws and weaknesses, emphases derived from the particular person or group doing the translation. In practice, it is difficult to translate without also doing some interpretation.

Con – Sometimes hard to render the exact meaning from another language – there may not be the exact equivalent word or expression.

#### **5. Different Approaches to Translation**

In any consideration of this subject, we need to understand that there are different possible approaches to translation that can be taken.

##### **5.1.1. Formal Equivalence**

This describes an attempt to give a more literal translation of the text, adhering as closely as possible to the original language, using a word-for-word approach as much as possible.

Interpretation is kept to a minimum but obtaining an easily readable result can be a challenge.

##### **5.1.2. Dynamic Equivalence**

Here, words are translated with thoughts or expressions (so “propitiation” in the KJV becomes “atoning sacrifice” in the NIV). Inevitably, this will introduce more interpretation of the text than Formal Equivalence but enables the thoughts of Biblical times to be rendered in a more readable, modern idiom or style of language.

##### **5.1.3. Paraphrase**

Use any words to attempt to convey the meaning – modern speech and idiom. This is not an attempt to translate the Bible but to “get the message across”

#### **6. Our English Translations**

We will now go on to see where our translations come from. We will pick up the story from the Greek and Hebrew texts as we saw them in the last lesson. The last page of these notes contains a historical diagram of the texts to help us to understand the origin of the main English versions of the Bible.

##### ***6.1. Translations of the Latin Vulgate***

The Early English language Scriptures were all translations from the Latin Vulgate (i.e. translations of a translation)

##### **6.1.1. Caedmon (7th Century AD)**

Caedmon was a monk from Rome who produced metrical version of parts of the OT & NT in the English language. These are probably the first English Scriptures.

##### **6.1.2. Bede (8th Century AD)**

Also a churchman, Bede translated the Gospels in English from the Vulgate.

##### **6.1.3. Alfred the Great (9th Century AD)**

King Alfred, it appears, was a true believer – more famous in England for an episode when he apparently burned some cakes!

He translated the 10 Commandments and the Psalms from the Vulgate and used 10 Commandments in his laws.

##### **6.1.4. Lindisfarne Gospels (10th Century AD)**

Originally copied from the Latin in the 7<sup>th</sup> Century but in 950 AD a monk called Aldred added an English translation between the lines.

In 1066, the Normans invaded England and this changed the language and the culture – Roman influence grew stronger and translation work virtually ceased until the 14<sup>th</sup> Century

#### 6.1.5. Rolle's Psalms (13<sup>th</sup> Century AD)

Translation into prose from Vulgate, mainly for benefit of priests, monks, nuns.

#### 6.1.6. Wycliffe (14<sup>th</sup> Century AD)

John Wycliffe was an eminent Oxford Theologian, born in 1324. He began to question Papal authority and like Luther after him, he criticized the sale of indulgences. He denied the doctrine of transubstantiation

During his life, he translated whole Bible into English from the Vulgate, to help people see the errors of Rome. He organized the "Poor preachers" or "Lollards", who traveled the land to teach the gospel and read the Scriptures in English

He was condemned for heresy by the Roman Church decades after death. They dug up his body, burned it and threw the ashes into a river.

### 6.2. *Translations from the original languages*

Two things happened now that changed matters entirely:

- ❑ The Renaissance led to a renewed study of the Greek and Hebrew languages
- ❑ The invention of printing

#### 6.2.1. William Tyndale, Myles Coverdale, King Henry VIII

William Tyndale was born around 1490, studied the Greek & Hebrew Scriptures and began translating them into English.

He was forced to flee England due to persecution from the Roman Church

Overseas, he completed the New Testament and began smuggling into England but he was martyred before the Old Testament was completed

Myles Coverdale took up the work and finished the entire Bible in 1537. It was dedicated to King Henry VIII, who did not see the name of Tyndale associated with it and gave permission for it to be distributed to the people! This was around the time that Henry severed ties with the Pope. He even caused copies of the Bible in English to be present in the churches!

#### 6.2.2. Matthews Bible (1537)

Matthews Bible was the work of John Rogers, a friend of Tyndale. It was based on Tyndale and Coverdale and also received the King's favor. It was revised for public use (the Great Bible) in 1538 but was generally large and expensive.

#### 6.2.3. Geneva Bible (1560)

This translation was produced for English exiles in Geneva, using Tyndale, Robert Estienne's Greek text and Beza's Latin translation. It was accompanied by notes that reflected the teaching of John Calvin.

#### 6.2.4. Bishops' Bible (1560)

Issued to improve the Great Bible, so as to compete with the Geneva Bible. Many sources, including Geneva Bible, were used in its production, but the notes were deleted!

#### 6.2.5. King James Versions (KJV, 1611)

King James I of England called together scholars to make a translation. They were told to follow the Bishops' Bible. The scholars succeeded in capturing all the preceding translations and in exceeding them. They worked from the so-called Textus Receptus (received text), which has different origins than the texts used for most modern translations.

The version was authorized by the King on its publication. Over time more learning has taken place (especially in the Hebrew) and more texts have been found. Some weaknesses in the text used for KJV have been recognized.

#### 6.2.6. English Revised Version

This was a major revision of the KJV in 1885, in which mistranslations in OT and NT were corrected. The translators decided to follow the text of Westcott and Hort, and not the Textus Receptus. Non-conservative scholars were involved in the work.

#### 6.2.7. American Standard Version

American scholars joined in the work on the Revised Version and were then allowed to publish their own version 15 years later in 1901. The result is an accurate, literal rendering of OT and NT texts.

#### 6.2.8. Revised Standard Version (1952)

There was a growing recognition that the New Testament scriptures were written in everyday Greek, or “Koine Greek”. It was therefore decided to translate them into modern everyday English. In addition, new texts had now been found (Dead Sea Scrolls, Chester Beatty Papyri) and these were used. The result is not very evangelical in emphasis and tends to water down the deity of Christ.

#### 6.2.9. New American Standard Bible (1977)

This is an evangelical translation based on the eclectic Greek and the latest Hebrew texts. The producers wanted to renew interest in the ASV. They stuck to the original texts. The result is sometimes not very readable but it is an accurate translation

#### 6.2.10. New International Version (1978)

This is a modern translation, using the principle of dynamic equivalence. It is very popular and has outsold the KJV since 1987. It is interpretive in places, sometimes helpful, sometimes not.

#### 6.2.11. New King James Version (1990)

This is a revision of the KJV. The NT is based only on the Textus Receptus and takes no account of the texts found since 1550. It does correct some of the difficulties in the KJV and modernizes the language.

## 7. Conclusions

There has been a plethora of English Language versions produced in recent years.

What is the best version? This is a question that usually generates more heat than light, with people lining up to debate the merits of their favorite version and being quite dogmatic. In reality, we should thank God we have so many to choose from – especially when many people do not even have the whole Bible in their own language.

Different Bibles can suit different purposes – whether reading or serious study. Comparing different translations can draw out different shades of meaning from the text and indicate where there is controversy over the meaning of the Hebrew or Greek. A good set to work from is the ASV, KJV, NIV and NASB, provided we are aware of the strengths and weaknesses of each. Why limit ourselves to only one?

The number of translations into the English language will surely add to the condemnation against the English speaking world which, having such ready access to the Word of God, chooses largely to ignore it.