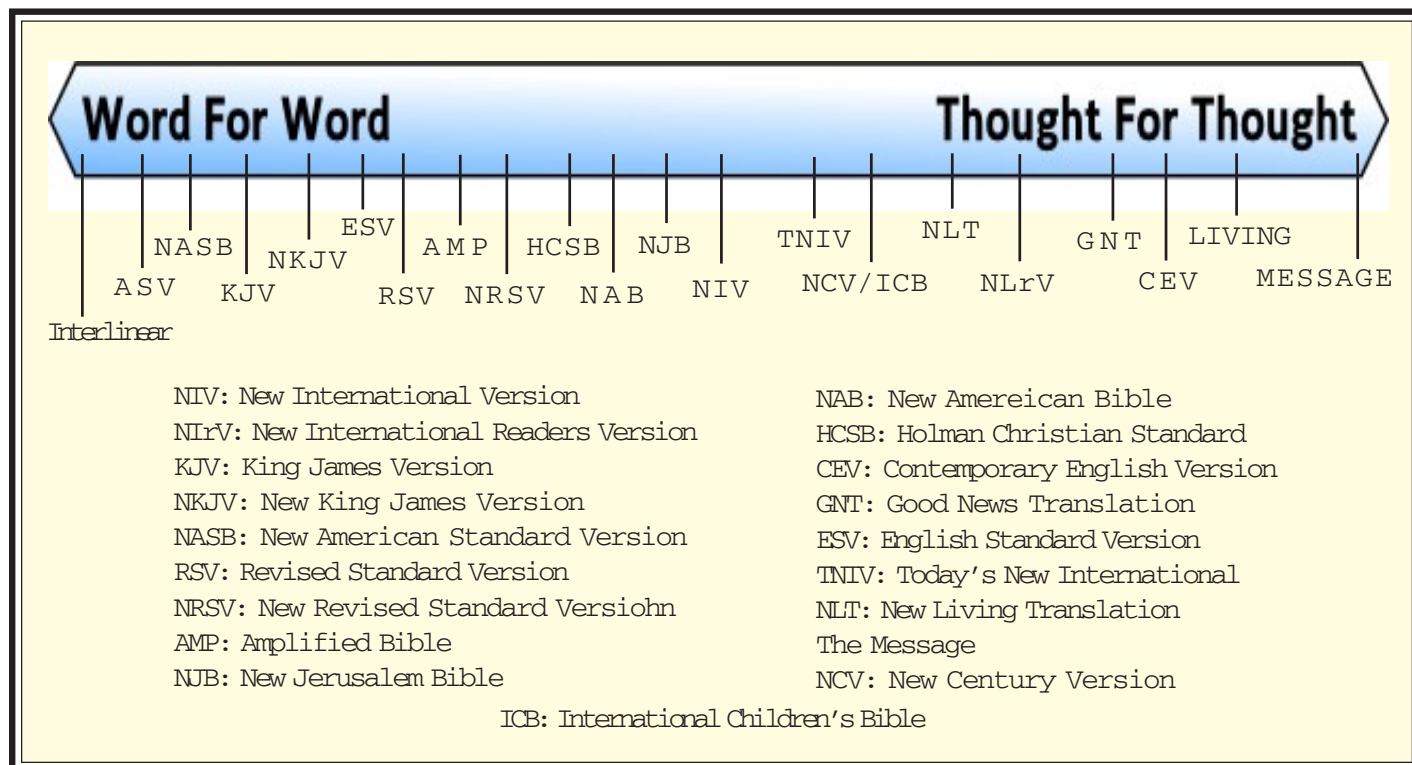


# Choosing A Translation

by Maurice Barnett



Most people have great difficulty in choosing a Bible for study. Some have no problem at all but, without any understanding of what they are doing, they pick a translation they should not have chosen. There are some translations that are as good as translations can get but some are absolutely terrible; such cannot lay claim to being a translation but rather a “commentary.”

The above chart gives us some indication of the wide range of types of translations. Making the decision on which translation can be both simple and complex, easy and yet difficult. Many people like the “easy reading” of some of those on the right hand side of the chart. However, that ease of reading comes at the cost of mistranslation and perversion of the text. Some of those are worse than others. Some have an agenda to promote, theological positions to push. The founder of Mormonism, Joseph Smith, produced what was called “The Inspired Translation.” It was an utter mess having no relationship to the text of the Bible. The New World Translation of Jehovah’s Witnesses promotes the doctrine of the Watchtower. The Catholic versions subtly contain pet words and concepts that favor their positions.

At the same time, a strictly literal “word for word” translation will throw us into an interlinear that attempts to produce a single English word to correspond with a single Greek or Hebrew word. There are several problems with that—

First, grammar, though somewhat like English, Greek is still different from English and even more so is Hebrew different. For a slight example, Greek and Hebrew words have gender which English does not. Hebrew will have particular gender of some nouns where Greek will have a different gender of the like nouns. One or more modern translations have even bowed to the women’s movement and translated the masculine pronouns of the Greek text, that speak of God, with the feminine English pronouns, *she* or *her*. The fact that the word “spirit” is neuter gender has led some to suppose that the Holy Spirit is an “it” and not a person. Just the change of, say, a preposition or a pronoun, can make a great difference in understanding a verse or an entire subject.

Second, word order is different from English. Word order in Greek is more like Yoda of Star Wars in the way he spoke. For instance, here is I Corinthians 8:8-9, first from the *American Standard Version* and then a literal translation in the Greek word order—

“But food will not commend us to God: neither, if we eat not, are we the worse; nor, if we eat, are we the better. But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to the weak.”

“But meat us does not commend to God; neither for if we eat have we an advantage; neither if we eat not do we come short. But take heed lest power your this an occasion of stumbling become those being weak.”

This shows we can take literalness to an extreme and make understanding unduly difficult. Translating means putting the original text into another language as though it had been written originally in that second language.

We must also understand that a “word for word” literal translation is technically not possible. Any translation must appropriately use comparable English words to help express the proper thought. At times it takes several English words to properly express what a single word means in the Greek or Hebrew text. In most instances we can do a word for word but not always. For example, let’s take a word from I Corinthians 8:4, *eidolothuton*. It is properly translated as “things sacrificed to idols.” There is no equivalent single word in English that will convey that meaning. If you want to follow this overall subject further, I suggest *God’s Word In Man’s Language* by Eugene A. Nida. Nida is coauthor of Louw and Nida *Greek Lexicon*.

Translations certainly need updating with new versions because of the change in word meanings in society. The King James of 1611 has gone through several versions since the first edition though most people think they have a copy of the original KJV. On the last page of this article will be found a page from the original edition. It is readable but is in the English of Britain in 1611. The word “hell” is understood by us in this modern world as the place of eternal torment of the wicked. But in 1611 it meant simply an unseen place that applied even to the place where righteous went, answerable to paradise. Acts 2:31 says that Jesus when He died went to “hell” but was not left there. Based on this KJV reading Pentecostal televangelists, like Benny Hinn, insist that Jesus actually went to Hell and suffered at the hands of Satan; a whole theology is based on that position. The Greek term in the passage is *Hades* and is correctly translated as such after the KJV. Hades and Hell meant the same in 1611 but changed. Jesus went to Paradise at death, which is the part of Hades where the righteous go when they die. (See my book, *The Person of Christ*, pages 220-266). By this one can see how the misuse of a single word can spark a large area of false doctrine. At the same time, it isn’t just the *words* that must be translated but what a particular sentence *structure* means.

However, some translators take great liberties in transferring a Bible thought into English. Some translations are admitted by the translators to be not a word translation but just putting into English what the translator *thinks* the Biblical sentence is saying. For example, *The Living Bible* is the product of a single individual who took an English translation and paraphrased it. Later on, a committee of Greek linguists took *The Living Bible* and produced *The New Living Bible* but directly from the Greek text.. It is still a paraphrase of the text reflecting what the linguists thought is the meaning of the Bible text. That makes it a commentary and not a translation. *The Message* is also a paraphrase by an individual. Such productions are popular because they are “easy to understand.” Fine, but the ease of understanding is just an understanding of the opinions of the author and are not *necessarily* what the Bible is saying. You understand what the “translator” wants you to understand.

*The Contemporary English Version*, published by The American Bible Society, modifies “gender sensitive” terms and anything bordering on “anti-semitism” in the Bible. *The New International Version* falls somewhat in the middle but aims more for readability than accuracy; some verses are terribly missed. What we want is a faithful rendition of the Bible text into English and we will determine from our own study what the verse is telling us. Even slight changes in the text can have disastrous consequences.

Third, words are the vehicles of thought. We must understand that British English can be different from American English. For example, one British based translation worded Paul's statement, "Demas hath forsaken me" to "Demas left me in the lurch." That doesn't communicate to people in the U.S. Also, translators may attempt a word for word translation but choose an English word that is more familiar to a scholar than the common man and so does not convey the meaning of what God wants us to understand.

In the end, probably no translation is absolutely perfect. Even the most literal word to word translation has faults. Perhaps the most glaring failure is in an addition of the definite article and capitalization of the word "Spirit" when neither belongs there. By doing this, they leave the distinct impression that it refers to the Holy Spirit when it actually does not. This is repeated time and again in all translations. There are some fourteen meanings of the word "spirit" (*pneuma*) in the New Testament. By making the word mean the Holy Spirit when the passage is not talking about God the Holy Spirit, one is led into a dangerous error on the one hand and misses an important teaching of Scripture on the other. That's a double tragedy.

The lesson from all of this is that we are responsible for study beyond just a casual reading. That is the meaning of milk versus meat in the Bible text, Hebrews 5:11-14. Resolutions to any question about a text and its meaning can be found by putting effort into finding the answers. That takes time and energy, investigation. There are several books written on the subject of how to study the Bible which are helpful as there are common rules for understanding all language. The Bible is written in a human language and all rules of language apply.

If people read the Bible at all, too many times they want something that is *just easy to read*, because they are lazy. I studied with a man one time, attempting to get him to think, to reason on a Bible subject. He responded, "I don't want to go through all that, just tell me what I am supposed to believe."

However, the beginning point of our studies is a Bible version that faithfully gives us a translation of the text and not one that is a commentary composed of theological bias of the translators. By that, we are well ahead in our effort to understand what God wants us to know. But, any translation requires our attention and study to see if what we read is true, Acts 17:10-11.

For information about each translation you find, including those on the chart on the previous page, type the name of that translation in the browser of your computer. From the list that pops up, go to the *Wikipedia Encyclopedia* link. It will give you background information about that particular translation. If you are reading this from our website, please note other links to translations. If you are reading this as a printed handout, go to [www.westsidechurchofchristphoenix.com](http://www.westsidechurchofchristphoenix.com). Click on the Bible Authority link.



THE EPISTLE OF PAVL THE Apostle to the Romanes.

CHAP. I.

1 Paul comendeth his calling to the Romanes, 9 and his desire to come to them. 16 What his Gospel is, and the righteousness which it sheweth. 18 God is angry with all manner of sin. 21 What were the sins of the Gentiles.

\* Act. 13. 1.



ALL a seruant of Iesus Christ, called to bee an Apostle, \* separated vnto the Gospel of God,

2 (which he had promised afoze by his Propheies in the holy Scriptures)

3 Concerning his Sonne Iesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh,

\* Cr. determined.

4 And declared to be the Sonne of God, with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.

|| Or, in the ordinance of faith.

5 By whom we haue received grace and Apostleship || for obedience to the faith among all nations for his Name,

6 Among whom are yee also the called of Iesus.

7 To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be Saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Iesus Christ.

8 First I thanke my God through Iesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.

|| Or, in my spirit.

9 For God is my Witnesse, whom I serue || with my spirit in the Gospel of his Sonne, that without ceasing I make mention of you, alwayes in my prayers.

10 Making request, if by any meanes

now at length I might haue a prosperous iourney by the will of God) to come vnto you.

11 For I long to see you, that I may impart vnto you some spirituall gift, to the end you may be established,

12 That is, that I may be comforted together || with you, by the mutual faith both of you and me.

|| Or, in y<sup>e</sup> u

13 Now I would not haue you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come vnto you, (but was let hitherto) that I might haue some fruit || among you also, euen as among other Gentiles.

|| Or, in y<sup>e</sup> u.

14 I am debter both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians, both to the wise, and to the vniwise.

15 So, as much as in mee is, I am ready to preach the Gospel to you that are at Rome also.

16 For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God vnto saluation, to euery one that beleueth, to the Jew first, and also to the Greeke.

17 For therein is the righteousness of God reueiled from faith to faith: as it is written, \* The iust shall liue by faith.

\* Abse. 1. 4.

18 For the wrath of God is reueiled from heauen against all vngodlinesse, and vnrighthousnesse of men, who hold the trueth in vnrighthousnesse.

19 Because that which may bee knowne of God, is manifest || in them, for God hath shewed it vnto them.

|| Or, to them.

20 For the inuisible things of him from the Creation of the world, are clearly scene, being vnderstood by the things that are made, euen his eternall power and Godhead, || so that they are without excuse:

|| Or, that they may be.

21 Because that when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankfull, but became vaine

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