

# Pastor Phil's E-note

4/28/2009

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## English Bible Translations

*(Adapted from Bill Tammaeus' blog site, Bill's Faith Matters Webblog. Bill is the religion editor for The Kansas City Star.)*

For many years after the *King James Version* was published in 1611, it was in effect Christianity's official Bible. Even Jews relied on it. But in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, because the English used in the King James -- though often poetic -- became increasingly inaccessible, scholars recognized a need for translations into more modern language. (Some folks, however, continue to believe that the *King James* is the Bible God wants everyone to read. As a woman once told the curator of the Quayle Bible Collection at Baker University in Baldwin City, Kansas, if it was good enough for St. Peter, it's good enough for her.)

As this process of producing new translations began, it also became clear that older manuscripts were being discovered. When the King James Version was written, the oldest available manuscript was from roughly the year 1000 a.d. Now we have manuscripts -- from such sources as the Dead Sea Scrolls and other findings -- that are hundreds of years older than that. Older means closer to the original.

Each group of translators almost certainly will say that its work has produced the most accurate and readable text available, and once such people have devoted so many years of their lives to arguing over the exact meaning of a Hebrew word or a Greek phrase, it's hard to blame them for thinking they finally have it the way the original author meant it. But, in reality, some of the choices of words used in the translation represent contemporary theological positions as much as original meaning.

For instance, the New International Version generally is recognized as a Bible more in harmony with Christians who would call themselves theologically conservative, while the New Revised Standard Version is more generally accepted as having a mainline character. The New American Bible (different from the New American Standard Bible) has become a favorite among Catholics today and is the one offered on the Web site of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.



*"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."*

*(2 Timothy 3:16-17)*

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Sometimes you see theological positions in choices about whether language is gender-inclusive. The New Revised Standard Version, for instance, tends to use more inclusive language than does the New International Version. Some scholars say that the King James Version and other versions tend to use masculine language even when the original Greek and Hebrew is inclusive or at least not specifically masculine.

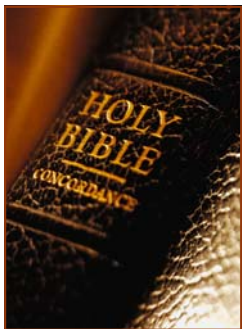
One of the newer translations I like a lot -- the New Living Translation -- has some really clear and insightful language. But I find that it tends to see things very much through a modern Christian perspective instead of reflecting the times in which the Bible first was written. For instance, when the Apostle Paul writes to people who are followers of Jesus, he often uses the term "the brothers." But the New Living Translation often translates that as "Christians," even though there weren't any followers of Jesus who were called Christians this early in church history. The first time that term was used, in fact, it had a derogatory meaning. (Acts 11:26) Only later did members of the Jesus movement appropriate the term for themselves.

There will continue to be newer translations of both the Hebrew Scriptures and the Bible that is used by Christians for many reasons. And the translations will take various approaches. Some will attempt quite literal translations while others will go for a meaning-for-meaning translation. In addition, we'll continue to get paraphrases, such as Kenneth Taylor's *The Living Bible* and Eugene Peterson's *The Message*, which I really love.

What's important to remember is that, with few exceptions, there aren't major differences in the wording of these translations (not paraphrases, but translations). Each tries to be faithful to the original. And the minor differences in no way distort or change the meaning of the major doctrinal teachings of Scripture. The disagreements come about mostly in how one reads Scripture -- whether literally or metaphorically or in some combination of the two. To suggest that the existence of dozens of translations means there are dozens of conflicting versions is simply wrong. Rather, the conflicts grow much more out of one's hermeneutics, or the approach one uses to interpret Scripture.

Your friend and pastor,

Phil



"Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus."  
*(Revelation 14:12)*