

BIBLIOLOGY (55)

(Type #2) - Ancient Versions

These are early translations of manuscripts from the original language into a different language. For example, there is in existence today a copy of the Syrian Bible, known as the "Peshitta", which is a translation into the Aramaic language. This translation contains both the Old Testament and the New Testament and it was completed somewhere near the year A.D. 420. There is also in existence today a copy of the Latin Bible, known as the Vulgate. This was a translation of the Bible into Latin made by Jerome from the years AD 382-405. Another ancient version is a Coptic text, which is an Egyptian translation made in the 4th century. God has preserved every one of these translations and they may be analyzed in connection with manuscript study to determine accuracy.

(Type #3) - Writings

God has preserved many writings of the early church leaders and often these church leaders would quote extensive passages of Scripture in their writings and commentaries. Many of the early church leaders would copy the text and then write their comments on it. For example, in existence today we have available the writings Clement of Rome who lived and wrote around AD 90. We have Ignatius, the Bishop of Antioch, who lived and wrote around AD 100. We have writings of Polycarp, the Bishop of Smyrna, who lived and wrote around AD 160. As we have already learned, there are in existence today 245 lectionaries in uncial form (early church service worship books written in capital Greek letters) and 1964 lectionaries in minuscule form (early church service worship books written in small Greek letters). These lectionaries contain many passages of Scripture, making it not only possible to determine the reading of the text, but in many instances the meaning of it as well.

(Type #4) - Versions

A version is a translation made of the Bible from its original language into another language. One of the most significant translations done directly from the original language of the Bible was that of William Tyndale (AD 1492-1536). His translation, which was actually completed by Miles Coverdale, is the one called the "Protestant Bible" translation. Tyndale devoted himself to translating the Bible into English and before he finished his work, he got involved in a heated dispute with a man who claimed that English speaking people were better knowing the Pope's word rather than God's word. It was this very dispute that led Tyndale to reply in his now historically famous response - "I defy the Pope and all his laws; if God spares my life, ere many years I will cause a boy that driveth the plough shall know more of the Scriptures than thou dost." Before Tyndale could fully complete his translation of both the O.T. and the N.T., he was burned at the stake on October 6, 1536. Tyndale's assistant and proof-reader was Miles Coverdale, who finalized the translation in 1535. It was Coverdale who introduced Chapter summaries and separated the Apocrypha from the other O.T. books of the Bible, a precedent that has been followed in Protestant English Bibles ever since. In fact, "The King James Version is practically a fifth revision of Tyndale's revision..." (Geisler/Nix, p.551).

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There are versions of the Bible in existence today dating back to the 2nd century. Geisler and Nix state: "Hence, the early existence of the Ethiopic, Coptic, Sahidic, Bohairic, Gothic, Arabic, and other versions provide ample evidence of the presence of the entire Bible during the second, third and fourth centuries. These early versions of the Bible text also provide another valuable link in the work of reconstructing the original text of the Scriptures." (p.523)

(Type #5) - Translations

A translation is a writing which attempts to give the clear meaning, often times, from another writing into another language. A writing which translates one piece of literature into another language, without changing the meaning, may be truly identified as a translation. Also, a writing which translates one piece of literature into the same language, in an attempt to make the meaning clearer, may be truly identified as a translation.

Although closely related to version, **the difference between version and translation is that a translation is not necessarily based upon the original language, whereas a version is solely based upon the original language.**

For example, The New King James Version is actually a translation, not a version. This translation first appeared in 1979 and to a large part was based upon another previous English translation, not version, The King James Version. This new edition actually ended up being more of an attempt to translate one form of English into another form of English, without losing any meaning or terminology of the original form of English. In its precise classification, the New King James Version, would be better off termed, "The New King James Translation", for this is actually what it is. It is impossible to know how many versions and translations are in existence, because the Bible is continually being translated into different languages. Again, we cite Drs. Geisler & Nix, "Even a cursory glance at the seemingly endless procession of modern translations and versions of the Bible in English provides sufficient evidence to indicate that the twentieth century, as no century before it is human history, possesses the greatest profusion and proliferation of translations of the Bible. With the great diversity and multiplicity of translations...there comes to this century, as to no century before it, a greater responsibility to understand and to communicate the "whole counsel of God" contained in this inspired Book." (Ibid., p.602)

(Type #6) - Paraphrases

A paraphrase cannot strictly be classified as a translation or a version, because it is usually an attempt of an individual to put into his own words his own personal understanding of what he thinks the text means. Versions and translations do their best to stay faithful to the original document, whereas a paraphrase is more of an attempt to give one's own view and wording of the passage. A paraphrase can be very helpful, but it should not be viewed as an inspired version or translation, for it is not an accurate translation and it may or may not give the accurate meaning of the text. Caution needs to be used with paraphrases.

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A good example is Ken Taylor's "Living Bible", which was completed in 1971. Drs. Geisler & Nix say: "For the most part, it (Living Bible) is a simplified, easy-to-follow rendering in effective and idiomatic, present-day English. At times imaginative details are provided that have no textual basis, and at other times it does less than justice to what the original says. On other occasions, Taylor departs from his initial purpose when he assumes the role of a commentator and interprets or reinterprets passages in ways that may not be true to the intent of the original. Taylors 'The Living Bible' meets a genuine communication need because this paraphrase, like Norlie's translation, was extremely popular with young people and adults alike during the 1970's and since." (pp.589-590)

In all reality every one of these documents may be used to help us accurately understand God's Word and to enable us to dogmatically say that we have God's inspired Word in our hands and can truly know what it says.

One might ask, in view of all of this, "if it is only the original autographa that was inspired and since translations have been produced from copies of those original manuscripts, can we be certain that my English Bible is in fact the inspired word of God?"

We would certainly be willing to admit that there is no one translation that does not have a few weaknesses. One reason for this is because a translation is an attempt to give the clear meaning of one language in another language. Obviously, such an undertaking will have a few weaknesses, if for no other reason than a translation cannot use the same words, it must use different words in a different language. In a perfect world, there would be one language and God's word would be in that language. However, since we live in a fallen world, since Babel, we have many different languages and copies of God's word must be translated into the common language.

In my study of the original languages, I have found a few weaknesses with **every** English translation on the market. I do not ever remember finding anything that was major. I have **never** run across anything which dramatically affects key truth. We must firmly adhere to the Sovereignty of God, which the Bible certainly teaches. It is no coincidence that God has blessed us in this country with several outstanding English translations: The King James Version; The New American Standard Version; The New International Version. All of these are excellent English translations. Each one has its strong points and weak points, but collectively speaking, we, who live in the United States, are without excuse for not clearly understanding and applying the Word of God. We truly have God's word in our own language as no other nation in the world. Because of the dedication of textual scholars who have poured themselves into the tedious task of manuscript examination and translation, we can safely say that when one holds one of these versions in our hands, we are in fact holding the precious, inspired Word of God in English.

QUESTION #12 - How was it determined that a book was in fact an inspired book which belonged in God's word?

There is a word that is extremely important in answering this question, it is the word "canon."