



Dear Phil

BIBLE TRANSLATIONS

“Why are there so many modern English translations, and which one is the best for studying the Bible?” —Robbin

Dear Robbin,

In the midst of a bewildering number of English translations, the first thing we ought to do is give God thanks that we have His Word in our own language. For hundreds of years, people had to learn Hebrew, Greek, or Latin if they wanted to read God’s Word. John Wycliffe risked his reputation and life to translate God’s Word into English for the first time in the 1380s. William Tyndale, who gave us our first printed English Bible in 1525/6, was martyred for his work of publishing the Bible in English. At that time his opponents believed that “The New Testament translated into [English] is...the fuel of sin...the protection of disobedience, the corruption of discipline, the depravity of morals...[and] the well-spring of vices...” Imagine that! We owe much to these and other men who were willing to lay down their lives so that you and I could read God’s Word in our own language.

Second, we need to understand the different purposes of different translations so we can know how to use them properly. Let me start with the New International Version. The purpose of the NIV’s translators was to produce an accurate, readable translation that was “faithful to the thought of the biblical writers” (NIV preface). The twofold result was a version: (1) that is highly readable, and (2) that is more interpretative than the KJV and some other modern versions (NASB, NKJV). Because of its readability, I recommend the NIV as a reading Bible, particularly in the Old Testament prophets. If you want to read through large portions of the Bible, getting a good overview and general understanding of the text, the NIV is a valuable translation.

Because of its interpretiveness, I don’t recommend it as a study Bible, despite the fact that the NIV study Bible is very popular. The NIV often makes interpretive decisions without letting the reader know. A good study Bible will preserve both the clarity and the ambiguity of the

original language. Admittedly this is a difficult task, but a student of God’s Word should have the opportunity to consider the interpretive options that the original languages leave open. Let me give you one example. In the NIV, James 1:14 reads, “...But each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.” The translators have interpreted the Greek word *epithumia* as “evil desire,” even though the word means only “desire.” In this case, the NIV is not only interpretive, but it is wrong. We are not enticed only by evil desires. We are most often enticed to fulfill legitimate desires in wrong ways.

Next time I’ll try to explain the purposes and values of the NASB and the NKJV.

Sincerely,
Philip Brown ■

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THE PRESIDENT’S PAGE continued

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This is no societal tug-of-war that we can settle in an afternoon contest. This will not be solved by calling together a focus group to try to understand one another. This is not a liberal versus conservative issue. It cannot simply be voted in or out. As Americans we ought to be doing everything in our power to stop and reverse this deadly assault on our country’s moral values. As Christians, we must see the deeper issue. We must go to our knees in true humility, praying, “Lord, deliver us from evil.”

We are in a life-and-death struggle between the forces of good and the forces of evil. The soul of America and the souls of her citizens are at stake. Whether America can turn back the onslaught and survive remains to be seen. However, as Christians who are a part of God’s advancing kingdom, we have the promise that “the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” So buckle on your armor and get into the fight. For in the real war, victory is inevitable! ■