



Dear Phil

BIBLE TRANSLATIONS

Part II in answer to the question: "Why are there so many modern English translations and which one is the best for studying the Bible?"

The New American Standard Bible (NASB), first published in 1971 by the Lockman Foundation, was translated "with the conviction that the words of Scripture, as originally penned in the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, were inspired by God. Since they are the eternal Word of God, the Holy Scriptures speak with fresh power to each generation, to give wisdom that leads to salvation so that men and women may serve Christ for the glory of God." The translators' goal was to produce a word-for-word, literal translation that was still readable in modern English.

Anyone who has studied Greek, Hebrew, or Aramaic will recognize that a completely literal, word-for-word translation would often make no sense in English. For example the first part of John 3:16 would read, "So for loved the God the world, so that the son the only begotten he gave." No modern translation is a strictly word-for-word translation.

However, the NASB comes about as close as a translation can while still being understandable. For this reason, I regard the NASB as probably the best modern version for personal Bible study. In 1995 the Lockman Foundation updated the NASB. The update removed the archaic "thee's" and "thou's" from the few places they were still used in the 1971 edition (primarily the Psalms) and generally made the NASB a smoother translation without sacrificing its literalness. If you are interested in a chart that shows where most modern translations fall in relation to the NASB, you may find one at <http://www.zondervanbibles.com/tranlations.htm>.

The New King James Version (NKJV) is another good, conservative modern English translation. Its translators were all committed to the inerrancy of the original manuscripts as well. The primary purpose of the NKJV was to update the Elizabethan English of the KJV into modern English. In general, the translators were careful to follow the lead of the KJV and thus retained its overall style and flow of thought. The Wesley Study Bible used the NKJV text and was a valuable study Bible. Unfortunately, it is now out of print, and I have been unable to find it available anywhere.

One of the primary differences between the NKJV and the NASB is the underlying Greek text preferred when translating the New Testament. The NKJV used essentially the same Greek text the KJV translators had used in 1611, whereas the NASB used a Greek text that took advantage of the tremendous amount of NT manuscripts discovered in the last nearly 400 years. This is one reason I prefer the NASB over the NKJV.

One final word on studying the Bible in English: although I have recommended the NASB as the version I personally prefer to study from, I wouldn't want anyone to think that the NASB is the only English version you should consult when studying the Bible. You should make it a habit to compare several versions. Where you find significant differences between versions, you should consult conservative commentaries for further information on the passage.

Sincerely,
Philip Brown ■

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