THE TRANSLATION OF THE BIBLE

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PREFACE

Thoughtful believers ask, “Which translation is the most accurate?” “Which translation is best for serious study of the Bible? “Which English translation should I use?”

Two major issues and a few other considerations need to be considered to answer the question of which English translation is best for serious Bible study. The first and foremost issue is which *Greek text* is being translated. (The second issue will be discussed later.)

There are two basic types of Greek texts. The Traditional Greek text is the type of Greek text used by the translators of the King James Version and the New King James Version. The Critical Greek text has been used to translate all other modern translations since 1881. Technically, there are several types of Traditional Greek texts today, including the *Textus Receptus*, *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text* (Hodges and Farstad), and the *Byzantine Greek New Testament* (Robinson and Pierpont). All of these are slight variations of a Traditional Text type. The same is true of the Critical Text. There have been 28 editions of the Nestle-Aland text as well as several editions of the United Bible Society text. The Nestle-Aland and United Bible Society texts are “nearly identical” (Hodges and Farstad, *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text*, p. ix).

For me, the question of which Greek text type is the best first became an issue when I was a student in college. Peter Ruckman came to town while I was a student at Tennessee Temple College in Chattanooga, Tennessee. This independent Baptist pastor proclaimed that the Traditional Greek text was the best Greek text. (He went so far as to say that the King James Version was inspired!) I reacted negatively to his ideas. In fact, in a class on New Testament Introduction, I wrote a paper on Westcott and Hort, pioneers in producing and promoting the Critical Text.

After college, I attended Dallas Theological Seminary. There, I was taught the critical theory of textual criticism. Although Zane Hodges was on the faculty and was my Greek professor for my first Greek class, I did not know his views on textual criticism at the time. (Years later, I learned that Hodges held to the Majority Text, a variation of the Traditional Text.) As a seminary student, I heard nothing challenging the Critical Text theory.

When I graduated from seminary, I was a practicing textual critic. As I studied the New Testament, I consulted the current Nestle text and applied the rules of textual criticism that I had been taught in seminary. I spent many hours trying to solve textual problems.

About five years after graduating from seminary, I bought a book entitled *The Last Twelve Verses of Mark* by John Burgon. I purchased it thinking it was a commentary on verses I knew contained textual and theological difficulties. (The last twelve verses of Mark are in the Traditional Text but not in the Critical Text). As I read it, I discovered it is not a commentary. It is a detailed defense of those verses being part of what Mark originally wrote, which meant that the Traditional Text was right in including them and the Critical Text was wrong in omitting them. Burgon’s book introduced me to ideas I had never heard. He makes a compelling and convincing case that the last twelve verses of Mark are indeed genuine Scripture.

My first reaction was a sick feeling that perhaps the whole critical theory had problems. Knowing that virtually all “educated” Christians accepted the critical theory, I did not want

to accept Burgon's position. I felt that it would put me in a small minority of people who were considered uninformed or worse.

Nevertheless, Burgon got my attention. I began to search for other books he had written. At the time, all his works, except for *The Last Verses of Mark*, which had been recently reprinted, were out of print. I finally found Burgon's works in the library of Hartford Seminary in Hartford, Connecticut. I read as much as possible during the week I was preaching in a church near Hartford. I also copied whole sections of Burgon's material.

I discovered that others had written on this subject. Among them was Edward Hills, a graduate of Yale University with a doctorate in Greek from Harvard. While preaching in a church near Des Moines, I saw him in his home in Des Moines. He was a gracious, elderly gentleman, but he was so insistent on the providential preservation of the Scriptures that every time I asked a question, he reverted to that doctrine as the answer. In the meantime, I found an article in *Bibliotheca Sacra* written by Zane Hodges, which was helpful.

For six months, I did nothing but read material, pro and con, on the theory I had rejected as a college student. I slowly concluded that the Traditional Text was superior to the Critical Text. Finally, kicking and screaming but overwhelmed with the case for the Traditional Text, I conceded. Since the early 1970s, I have been convinced that the critical theory is not accurate and that the Traditional Text is a better representation of the original text of the New Testament.

In the early 1980s, I wrote an article, "Why So Many Versions?" In it, I explained the textual issue. In the late 1980s, I spoke to several groups of pastors for Thomas Nelson Publishers about why I use the New King James Version. As part of that presentation, I summarized the textual debate.

In 2004, Mark McPeak from Thomas Nelson contacted me. At his request, I made several trips to Nashville to discuss this issue. On one trip, my presentation was recorded (see the Conclusion at (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QzdBtZllKK8&t=61s or another portion at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TRSUt2pNDmk).

The purpose of this presentation is to clarify this complex subject.

I owe Teresa Rogers a big "thank you" for proofreading this material.

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PS Since I wrote this article, I have written a book covering all aspects of this subject, especially the Greek text issue. It is entitled *The Greek Text Issue* and is available on my website insightsfromtheword.com at a discount and at Amazon and Barnes & Noble.

INTRODUCTION

Buying a Bible can be baffling. There are as many different options for purchasing a Bible as there are channels on cable television. Many people today, including pastors, switch from one Bible to another, like men channel surfing with a TV remote.

Perhaps there is a time when it is appropriate to use several different translations of the Bible, but beyond that, the question is, "Which translation should be my basic Bible?" Which translation should be my primary Bible for serious Bible study? Which translation should pastors use when they want to explain exactly what the Bible says?

The Major Issues

The Hebrew and Greek Text To answer those questions, two major issues and a few other considerations should be addressed. The first major issue is which Hebrew and Greek text is to be translated.

None of the original manuscripts exist today. There are, however, copies of copies of copies. A handwritten copy is referred to as a manuscript. (A printed copy that is based on more than one manuscript is called a "text.") The problem is that these copies do not always agree with each other. The textual issue, called textual criticism, attempts to determine which copies are the closest to what was originally written.

Except for a few verses, the Traditional Text, the Masoretic text of the Old Testament, is unchallenged. In the Old Testament, the text is not the issue. It is the issue in the New Testament.

There are over 6000 manuscripts of the Greek New Testament and there are a large number of differences between them. The vast majority of those differences are minor. For example, some Greek manuscripts contain the words, "For this you know," at the beginning of Ephesians 5:5. Other Greek manuscripts have the words, "For know this." Now, obviously, that is not a major threat to Christianity. On the other hand, those two "readings," as they are called, have two different meanings. One says the original readers knew, and the other suggests they are being informed. To a careful student of the Word or to a Bible teacher wanting to be as accurate as possible, that difference makes a difference in understanding and/or explaining the passage.

It is important to note that no cardinal doctrine of the Christian faith is affected by the differences in Greek manuscripts, but there are differences. Different Greek manuscripts not only contain different *words*, but they also contain different *phrases* (see the previous paragraph) and different *sentences*. For example, the Traditional Greek text has a doxology at the end of the Lord's Prayer. It says, "For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen" (Mt. 6:13). That doxology is not in some manuscripts of the New Testament. Which manuscripts are correct? When the Lord originally spoke the Sermon on the Mount, did He include the doxology? When Matthew originally wrote his Gospel, did he include the doxology? In some cases, whole *verses* are omitted or added (depending on your point of view). There are even a few instances where whole *passages* are in some Greek manuscripts and absent in others, namely the last twelve verses of Mark (Mk. 16:9-20) and the story of the woman taken in adultery (Jn. 7:53-8:11). Those passages are not

in some manuscripts. Hence, some versions add a note that says they are not in the "best" manuscripts.

The textual issue for the New Testament is the most complex. Therefore, that issue will be given more attention than any other.

Translation Theory The second major issue is translation. Translation can be tricky. Should a translation be as literal as possible? How much liberty should the translators take to convey what they think is the meaning of the passage?

Other Considerations

Several relatively minor issues should also be considered. These are not essential, but they are helpful.

Textual Notes Where Greek manuscripts differ, it is helpful to know which manuscripts contain what reading. In most translations, this is usually done by saying something such as "not in the best manuscripts," which is a theoretical interpretation. More specific details would be helpful.

The Use of Italics All translations add words to the translation that are not in the original language. This is necessary to produce a smooth, readable English translation. A good translation will put those words in italics, alerting the reader that those words are not in the original; they have been added.

Summary: When determining which English translation to use for serious Bible study, the text being translated and the translation theory being used, as well as several other issues, should be considered.

THEORIES OF THE TEXTS

The original Hebrew Old Testament and Greek New Testament manuscripts no longer exist. Copies of copies of copies do exist. The question is, which of these copies is closest to the original?

The Old Testament

Masoretic Text The Jews meticulously copied the Hebrew Old Testament and those small Aramaic portions of the Old Testament. They did things such as counting each letter on a page, copying the page, and counting the letters on the copy to ensure they had the correct number. As a result, we no doubt have a very reliable copy of the original today.

By the sixth century AD, a group of textual scholars named "Masoretes," a Hebrew word derived from the Hebrew word for "tradition," continued to preserve the Old Testament Scriptures. The text they produced became known as the Masoretic text, which became the officially recognized text of the Hebrew Bible (Farstad, *The New King James Version: In the Great Tradition*, p. 94).

Until the mid-20th century, the oldest copy of the Hebrew Old Testament was a Masoretic Text dated about AD 900. Then, the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered. Among the Dead Sea Scrolls was a copy of Isaiah, dated between 100 and 200 BC. In other words, with the discovery of the Isaiah scroll, we jumped 1000 years closer to when the original Hebrew manuscripts were written.

The differences between the Isaiah manuscript of the Masoretic Text and the Isaiah manuscript of the Dead Sea Scrolls are few and minor. In a few places, there are differences, such as the presence or absence of an article or the difference between a singular and a plural. That's incredible!

If that is true for the Isaiah manuscript, it is no doubt true of the remainder of the Masoretic Text of the Old Testament. There is little doubt that we have an accurate copy of the Hebrew Old Testament.

Other Sources There are a few problems. In some places, the text in the Old Testament is obscure. On occasion, there is a word that appears only once in all of the Old Testament. Other versions of the Old Testament exist. The Samaritans had a version of the Pentateuch, which differs from the Masoretic Text in some places. There was also a Greek translation of the Old Testament, called the Septuagint (also a.k.a. LXX), done about 250 BC.

Some modern English translations closely follow the Traditional Text of the Old Testament, that is, the Masoretic Text. Others practice emendation; that is, they alter the Masoretic Text based on other sources.

The New Testament

Unfortunately, the care taken with the Old Testament Hebrew text was not taken with the New Testament Greek text. Consequently, there are many more differences in the existing New Testament manuscripts than in the Hebrew Old Testament.

From the time of the writing of the New Testament until the invention of the printing press, Christians had to copy the New Testament by hand. Many of these handwritten documents still exist today. There are over 6,000 manuscripts (handwritten copies) of the New Testament. Some of these manuscripts contain the whole New Testament, and others contain only portions of the New Testament.

The Traditional Text Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press with movable type about 1450. The first major product of Gutenberg's press was the Bible, Jerome's Latin Vulgate. In 1488, a Hebrew Old Testament was printed. The first printed Greek text of the New Testament was published on March 1, 1516. Erasmus, a Catholic priest who taught at Cambridge University from 1509 to 1514, edited several Greek manuscripts (one authority says seven) to produce the first published printed New Testament Greek text. Between 1516 and 1535, Erasmus published five New Testament Greek text editions. Martin Luther used his second edition (1519) for his German translation of the Bible.

The third edition (1522) included 1 John 5:7, omitted in the first two editions. Erasmus had promised that if 1 John 5:7 could be found in any Greek manuscript, he would include it in his next edition. He did as he promised when it was found in a single manuscript (MS 61 from the 16th century) even though he suspected it was in Greek from Latin. Harrison says, "It got into the Latin by mistaking one of Cyprian's comments as part of the text of Scripture" (Everett Harrison, *Introduction to the New Testament*, p. 67). In 1526, Tyndale used Erasmus' third edition to translate the first complete English New Testament (Farstad, p. 11). The last two editions (1527 and 1535) included some changes from the Complutensian Polyglot (E. Harrison, p. 67).

Erasmus' work was severely criticized because it was based on only a few Greek manuscripts. In addition, with very weak support, he included 1 John 5:7. Furthermore, he only had one manuscript for the Book of Revelation and it did not contain the last six verses. So Erasmus translated the Latin Vulgate of these verses into Greek.

Robert Stephanus produced four editions of the Greek New Testament (1545, 1549, 1550, and 1551). Stephanus' third and fourth editions agreed very closely with the fourth and fifth editions of Erasmus, which were gaining wide acceptance as the text of the New Testament. Stephanus' third edition was the first time the text was divided into numbered verses.

Theodore Beza, the successor of Calvin at Geneva, produced ten editions of the Greek New Testament. Nine were published during his lifetime and one after his death (only four were independent editions, those of 1565, 1582, 1588-89, 1598). Beza's text rarely departed from the fourth edition of Stephanus (one 19th-century scholar said that Beza's text only differed in 38 places from the fourth edition of Stephanus).

The King James Version (1611) relied mainly on the later editions of Beza's Greek text (1588-89, 1598), which was very close to the editions of Erasmus and Stephanus.

In 1624, Bonaventure and Abraham Elzevir, Dutch printers in the city of Leiden, published their first edition of the New Testament. The text followed Beza's editions but included readings from Erasmus and others. In the second edition, published in 1633, they wrote, "You have therefore the text now received by all in which we give nothing changed or corrupt." From that statement, the phrase *Textus Receptus* originated (*Textus Receptus* is Latin for "received text").

The *Textus Receptus* is the Traditional Text. Although the name *Textus Receptus* did not exist in 1611 when the King James Version was translated, the King James Version

translated a Greek text virtually identical to what later became known as the *Textus Receptus*.

If the handwritten manuscripts were in basic agreement with each other and the one printed Greek text, there would be no problem and no confusion. But the plot thickens! In the 19th century, other manuscripts appeared, and an entirely different edition of the Greek text was printed.

The Critical Text In 1859, Constantin von Tischendorf discovered a manuscript in St. Catherine's monastery at the base of Mt. Sinai. It was appropriately named Codex Sinaiticus. This manuscript predated any other manuscript known at the time. There was another manuscript stored in the Vatican, appropriately named Codex Vaticanus. It was first made widely available to scholars in the mid-19th century.

Some scholars consider these two manuscripts among the earliest manuscripts of the New Testament. "Simply because of their antiquity, many scholars regarded them as better copies of the original autographs and thus more authoritative than the later manuscripts on which the *Textus Receptus* was based" (Farstad, p. 107).

In 1881, two English scholars, Westcott and Hort, printed a New Testament Greek text based mainly on Vaticanus and Sinaiticus. Other Greek texts followed, including the Nestle Text and the Greek New Testament, published by the United Bible Society. These Greek texts are eclectic, that is, they combine readings from different types of text but basically follow Codex Sinaiticus, Codex Vaticanus, and a few other manuscripts. This type of text is called the "Critical Text." The Critical text relies "heavily on a relatively small number of manuscripts that derive mainly from Egypt" (Hodge and Farstad, p. ix).

Thus, today, there are more than 6,000 manuscripts (handwritten copies) and basically two types of Greek texts (printed editions) of the New Testament. Thus, there are two theories as to which Greek text is closest to the original: the traditional type of Greek text (the *Textus Receptus*, etc.) and what is called the eclectic or critical Greek text (the Westcott and Hort text, the Nestle Text, and the United Bible Society text).

The Debate As you can imagine, there is a heated debate between the proponents of these two types of Greek texts. To explain the complex problems, consider a timeline.

The vast majority of Greek manuscripts were produced from about AD 500 to AD 1200. When Erasmus chose five or seven manuscripts to produce the first printed Greek New Testament, they came from that period. On the other hand, Sinaiticus and Vaticanus are from the middle of the fourth century (AD 350). So, the whole debate comes down to this: *the many, which are considered to be late, versus the few, which are earlier*.

The question is, "Which type of text is closest to what was initially written by the authors of the New Testament? Is not the answer that earlier manuscripts are closer to the original? Not necessarily. Remember the Dead Sea Scrolls of Isaiah. The late AD 900 Masoretic Text of Isaiah proved to be amazingly close to a manuscript of Isaiah that was copied 1000 years earlier.

There are sound, solid arguments that support the Traditional Text.

1. The Traditional Text comes from the area where the autographs were originally sent. The Traditional Text has been called by various names, including the Byzantine text, the Syrian text, and the Majority text. It has been called Byzantine and Syrian because that is where it originated. The Byzantine Empire included Galatia, Ephesus, Colosse, Philippi, Thessalonica, and Corinth. Farstad points out, "As far as we know, not a single original

autograph of a Gospel or Epistle was ever sent to Egypt, the country of origin of Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus" (Farstad, p. 110).

Borland says, "Practically the entire corpus of NT autographs were sent originally to Asia Minor and Europe—e.g., Rome, Corinth, Thessalonica, Philippi, Ephesus, Colossae, Crete, Asia, Cappadocia, Pontus, Galatia, etc. The earliest generations of copies would have been made in the same areas. It is perhaps fortunate that the great majority of our extant MSS come to us from these very areas" (James A. Borland, "Re-examining the Textual-Critical Principles and Practices Used to Negate Inerrancy," The *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, vol. 25, December 1982, p. 506).

Sinaiticus and Vaticanus are from Egypt. It has been suggested that they "represent a local text which never had any significant currency except in that part of the ancient world. By contrast, most manuscripts were widely diffuse, and their ancestral roots must have reached back to the autographs themselves (Hodges and Farstad, p. x).

2. The Traditional Text is the text type of 80 to 95 percent of all Greek manuscripts (Farstad, p. 109). Erasmus was criticized for using only five or seven manuscripts of the New Testament. The reality is that if any seven manuscripts were selected out of a majority of manuscripts, the result would be virtually the same type of text.

The question is, how does one explain the fact that the vast majority of manuscripts support the majority text type? Westcott and Hort explained away the majority by claiming that conflated readings (combining words or phrases from two manuscripts into one) indicated an official revision in the fourth century. They also claimed that the authors before the fourth century did not use the Traditional Text, which they called the Syrian text. Therefore, they concluded that the Traditional Text was a later revision about 400 years after Christ. They went so far as to suggest that Lucian did the work.

The problem with their theory is that they only had eight conflated readings in two books of the New Testament. Not many have been found since. Moreover, there is not so much as a hint in church history of revising the Greek text in the fourth century. If such a thing had happened, we would know about it. Jerome did that very thing with the Latin translation, and history recorded it. You can be sure that if it had been done with the Greek text, history would have recorded that. As for no earlier writer quoting the Syrian text, that is simply not true. For example, the *Didache*, a document many say was written before AD 100, contains Matthew 6:13, a Traditional text type.

Later theories claim that the Traditional text type evolved slowly over a long time. Isn't a better explanation that this text type was closer to the original and, therefore, there was more time to produce more copies?

The Declaration of Independence was written in 1776. Suppose there was no printing press at that time and people began to copy the Declaration of Independence by hand. Then, imagine that around 1820, someone made a copy that contained changes that began to be copied. All things being equal, which document would produce the most manuscripts today: the original 1776 document or the copy that was changed in 1820?

3. The Traditional Text contains a remarkable unity. In fact, the majority of Greek manuscripts display more uniformity than the Vulgate, an official fourth-century edition of the Latin manuscripts by Jerome. That's incredible! The majority of Greek manuscripts consist of a smooth Greek text with no grammatical, historical, or geographical errors. "The very smoothness and completeness of the text led these scholars (Westcott and Hort) to

believe it (the Syrian text type) was late, edited, and hence corrupt" (Farstad, p. 108). Sinaiticus and Vaticanus do not have such uniformity and contain mistakes.

In Matthew 1, in the genealogy of Christ, Vaticanus and Sinaiticus list two non-existent kings! They list "Asaph" instead of "Asa" (Mt. 1:7) and "Amos" instead of Amon" (Mt. 1:10). In the Old Testament, there was a prophet named Amos and a musician named Asaph, but they were not kings in the Messianic line (Farstad, p. 115; Borland, pp. 499-506).

In Luke 23:45, Sinaiticus and Vaticanus have a scientific mistake. Sinaiticus, Vaticanus, and a handful of Egyptian manuscripts say that the sun was eclipsed, but that is impossible because Christ died at Passover when the moon was full. The sun cannot be eclipsed during a full moon (Farstad, p. 115; see Borland's article mentioned above).

4. The Traditional Text has been used throughout the centuries. Everyone agrees that it was used in the fourth century and throughout the Middle Ages. It was the text of the Protestant Reformation. Luther used it to translate the New Testament into German. Tyndale used it to translate the New Testament into English. It was the text used to translate the King James Version and New King James Version. It was the text used during the Wesleyan Revivals, the Great Awakening, and the modern missions movement. Is it not interesting and impressive that throughout history, until the latter part of the nineteenth century, the church used the Traditional Text?

Did God hide the "best manuscripts" on the back shelf of the Vatican (Vaticanus) and in St. Catherine's monastery at the foot of Mt. Sinai (Sinaiticus) until 1881? Are we to believe those two manuscripts are the best because they predate the majority by a few years? It is significant that both Sinaiticus and Vaticanus have numerous mistakes in them and differ widely from the majority and each other.

Did God preserve His Word through the centuries? If He did, then the Traditional Text must be closer to the original because it was preserved. This argument will not appeal to everyone. It will only appeal to men who believe in the inspiration and the preservation of the Word of God. But as one Greek professor said, "To what better kind of man would you want to appeal?"

What Difference does it make? Is all of this really important? Or is it much ado about unimportant technical details? What practical difference does it make?

It is often said that no majority doctrine is affected by the differences in the Greek Manuscripts. That is true. Both types of New Testament Greek text teach the Trinity, the Deity, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and justification by faith.

On the other hand, if you are a serious student of the Word, you will discover that differences make a difference in the explanation of passage after passage. Here are a few examples.

1. Mark 16:9-20. The last twelve verses of Mark are in every extant manuscript of Mark (1400 of them, Farstad, p, 113), except two: Vaticanus and Sinaiticus. Furthermore, in Vaticanus, there is a blank space for it, the only blank space in the whole manuscript! Apparently, the scribe who was copying Vaticanus knew about the passage. Perhaps the manuscript he was copying did not have the last page of Mark (Farstad, p. 112).

The Vulgate contains the last twelve verses of Mark. About 382, Jerome (ca. 345-420) was commissioned by (Pope) Damasus in Rome to improve the "old Latin" translation of the Bible. As a result, he produced the Vulgate Bible, which became "the standard Bible of the Roman Catholic Church." He finished the New Testament before 391 and the Old

Testament around 404 or 405. "Apparently, those two copies which lack this passage (Vaticanus and Sinaiticus) were not representative in their own time" (Farstad, p. 113).

If the book of Mark ends at Mark 16:8, in the Greek text, it ends with the Greek word *gar* (for), which is usually the second word in a sentence. "To end a book on this word seems most unlikely" (Farstad, p. 113). Moreover, if Mark ends his book in verse 8, it ends with "for they were afraid" (Mk. 16:8). Can you imagine Mark doing that?

2. John 7:53-8:11. The story of the woman taken in adultery is in the vast majority of manuscripts, but because it is not in Vaticanus, Sinaiticus, and a few other manuscripts, some say it should not be in the text.

John 7:53-8:11 is genuine. It is in over a thousand manuscripts of the Gospel of John (Farstad, *The New King James Version: In the Great Tradition* p. 113). Suppose the seventh chapter of the Gospel of John stops at verse 52. In that case, the text of John reads, "They answered and said to him, 'Are you also from Galilee? Search and look, for no prophet has arisen out of Galilee'" (Jn. 7:52). "Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, 'I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life'" (Jn. 8:12). Such a construction of the text has Jesus addressing the meeting of Nicodemus and the Sanhedrin, but Jesus was not in that meeting! (Farstad, p. 114). Augustine wrote that it was omitted for fear it would promote immorality (Farstad, p. 113).

For a defense of the inclusion of this passage, see Zane C. Hodges, "The Woman Taken in Adultery (John 7:53-8:11): The Text." (*Bibliotheca Sacra*, vol. 136, October-December, 1979, pp. 318-332 and Zane C. Hodges "The Woman Taken in Adultery (John 7:53-8:11): Exposition." by (*Bibliotheca Sacra*, vol. 137, January-March, 1980, pp. 41-53, see also *The New Testament According to the Majority Text*, pages xxiii-xxxii).

3. Matthew 6:13. The doxology at the end of the Lord's Prayer, "For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen" (Mt. 6:13b), is in the vast majority of the surviving manuscripts of Matthew, but it is not in Vaticanus, Sinaiticus and a few other manuscripts. It is in the *Didache*, a document many say was written before AD 100. Without the doxology, the prayer ends with the word "evil" or "evil one," which seems odd, especially in light of the fact that it is traditional to end a Jewish prayer with God (Farstad, p. 115). Farstad suggests that when this prayer fell from the lips of the Lord, it was "perfectly complete—and completely perfect" (Farstad, pp. 115-116).

Farstad asks, "Since most manuscripts do contain the ending, isn't it easier for Christians to believe that some manuscripts dropped off the ending simply by careless copying?" (Farstad, pp. 115-117).

4. Luke 2:14. Most Greek manuscripts have a text of Luke 2:14 that should be translated as it is in the King James Version and the New King James Version ("peace, goodwill toward men"). A few manuscripts, however, have a slightly different text, which has caused some to translate this verse as "peace to men of goodwill." Realizing that does not "suit" the passage (Louis Godet, *A Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke*), some have tried to make the text of the few manuscripts fit. For example, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased" (NASB) or "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests" (NIV). Godet calls translations such as these "singularly rude and almost barbarous."

The Greek word translated "goodwill" means "good pleasure, goodwill, satisfaction, approval." It denotes "an entirely gracious and goodwill, the initiative of which is in the subject who feels it." It does not suit the relationship of people to God, only the relationship

of God to people. Therefore, the explanation is "peace on earth to people who are the objects of divine goodwill" (Godet).

5. 1 Timothy 3:16. The Traditional text reads, "God was manifest in the flesh" (see KJV; NKJV). The Critical Text reads, "He was manifest in the flesh" (see NASB; NIV).

Summary: The traditional Hebrew text of the Old Testament and the traditional Greek text of the New Testament more accurately reflect what the original writers wrote than the Critical Text.

The King James Version and the New King James Version are based on the Traditional type of Greek text. All other modern English translations of the Bible are based on an eclectic Greek text, primarily dependent upon Sinaiticus and Vaticanus.

THEORIES OF TRANSLATION

The task of translators is to communicate the content of one written text into another language. Their goal is to translate accurately what the original author wrote. It sounds simple, but this, too, is a complex problem.

Translation Theories

On one extreme is the literal method of translation. Since no two languages are identical in the meaning of corresponding words or structure, there can be no absolute, literal translation that is readable. A purely literal translation of the Bible would read like an interlinear! On the other extreme is a loose paraphrase, which contains as much interpretation as translation, such as the *Cotton Patch Version*. One extreme focuses on the original language, while the other stresses the receiving language. Between these two extremes are many theories.

The Two Basic Theories

In the final analysis, two basic theories exist on how accuracy is best accomplished.

The "complete equivalence theory" (also called "formal equivalence") points out that written material consists of words and structure. This view contends that in an accurate translation, the elements of the translation should correspond as closely as possible to the elements of the original word for word, phrase for phrase, clause for clause, and sentence for sentence.

The "dynamic equivalence" theory (also called "impact translation") claims the issue of accuracy is determined by the response of the reader to the translation. Their concern is for the correspondence of thought and ideas—"equivalence of effect."

Thus, there are two basic philosophies of translation.

Complete	Dynamic
Equivalence	Equivalence
Formal	Impact

Observations

To say there are two basic translation theories sounds simple, but it is not quite that simple.

1. Both have some mixture. No complete equivalence translation of the Bible can preserve the precise grammatical structure of the original Hebrew and Greek texts. Accommodations must be made in English structure for clear communication. All dynamic equivalence translations must have at least some formal equivalence to the original;

otherwise, it would not qualify as a translation at all. Hence, every translation of the Scripture is a mixture of formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence.

Yet there is a difference. While it is true that no translation is completely literal or completely dynamic, at the same time, each translation was produced with one or the other theory in mind. The difference is one of kind, not degree.

2. The dynamic equivalence theory of translation has a legitimate point. Translators certainly do not want to be so slavishly tied to the structure of the original that they produce something in English that is awkward and does not communicate what the original author intended.

There is, however, a danger. The tendency and temptation of dynamic equivalence is, in the name of "equivalent effect," to explain too much. Once translators unnecessarily depart from the structure of the original, they begin to interpret instead of translate. Granted, word order must be changed to produce an intelligent English sentence. When such changes are necessary, they should be made.

The problem is that once translators adopt the dynamic equivalence theory, they almost always make changes that are not necessary. Should sentences in the original not be translated as sentences? If the original author wrote complex sentences, shouldn't complex sentences appear in the translation? If the original author was ambiguous, shouldn't the translation reflect that? Does the translator have the right to omit important words like conjunctions, which are clues to meaning? Must the translator eliminate technical terms? If translators add words, should they not alert the reader to that fact by putting the added words in italics? The issue is, "Should the translators practice dynamic equivalence to the point that they make unnecessary changes?"

Summary: Translators should adopt a complete equivalence approach to translating the New Testament. They should give the reader what the original author said and the way it was said as much as possible.

The New King James does that. A scholar who worked on the New King James Version said, "We want a Bible that gives us what the text *says*, not what some scholar thinks it means!" (Farstad, p. 7).

A dynamic equivalence translation has a place. It can be profitable to get the sweep of the content. On the other hand, a dynamic equivalence translation is not accurate enough for a careful explanation of a passage, doctrinal studies, or standard church use in public reading or memorization (Farstad, p. 121).

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Besides the major considerations (which text to translate and which translation theory to use), several other minor issues should be considered.

Textual Notes

Where the Greek manuscripts differ, modern translations often include a note that says something such as "not in the best manuscripts," which is a matter of opinion. The NKJV identifies these differences without evaluating them as "best" or "most reliable."

The textual notes at the bottom of the page in the NKJV give the readings of the Critical Text and the Majority Text. "NU" in the NKJV notes stands for the Critical Text. The "N" stands for the Nestle-Aland text, and the "U" for the United Bible Society Text. (These two texts are "virtually identical.") The "M" stands for the Majority Text.

In his book, *The New King James Version: In the Great Tradition*, Arthur L. Farstad says, "Actually, the NKJV textual policy in the New Testament is more objective and that in any modern version of which we are aware. Translators of most contemporary versions assume that the currently popular view is correct, and they often label those readings supporting that theory and as 'of the best manuscripts.' Also, manuscripts supporting the KJV-type readings are largely ignored. Since these latter readings always reflect the readings of 80% of the extant manuscripts, and very frequently close to 95% of the manuscripts, this labeling policy seems a bit unbalanced" (Farstad, p. 111).

The Use of Italics

Complete equivalence is the translation method that renders the original into English, word for word, as much as possible. There are times, however, when it is necessary to add a word or two for the English sentence to make sense. When done in the King James Version, the added words were italicized so the reader would know those words were not in the original text. The New King James Version follows that practice.

Readability

The name, The New King James Version, might give the impression that this version might be more difficult to read. An average daily newspaper in a US metropolitan area has a reading level from 11th grade to college. The instructions for how to prepare a TV dinner are written at the eighth-grade level. By comparison, the reading level of the New King James Versio*n* is high seventh to low eighth-grade level (Farstad, p. 3).

Summary: Textual notes, italics, and readability should be considered when selecting an English translation.

CONCLUSION

In determining which English translation should be selected as one's primary Bible, two major issues need to be considered: which Greek text is translated and which translation theory is employed.

The Traditional Hebrew Text of the Old Testament and the Traditional Greek Text of the New Testament are closest to what was initially written. Overall, there are only minor differences among manuscripts. No major doctrine is affected.

In the case of the New Testament, there are two types of Greek texts: Traditional and Critical. The Critical Text contains many differences within the few manuscripts that make up that text type. The differences within the Traditional Text type are relatively few compared to those within the Critical type. There are many differences between the Traditional text type and the Critical text type.

Because the Traditional text type originated from the very places the Gospels and the epistles were sent, because the vast majority of manuscripts are of the Traditional text type, and because of the unity within the Traditional text type, the Traditional text type is superior to the Critical text type. Besides, if God preserved His Word, the Traditional text type would be clearly superior because it has been used for hundreds and hundreds of years. In contrast, the Critical text type did not even exist until 1881!

Furthermore, to hold an English translation of the Traditional type of Greek text is to have a translation that is a reflection of many manuscripts, but to have an English translation of the Critical type of Greek text is to have a translation that has no Greek text even close to it, because the Critical Text is eclectic.

The type of translation theory that best represents the original is a complete equivalence translation.

Summary: Since the New King James Version is a complete equivalence translation of the Traditional Text that gives the differences in the Greek text in the footnotes, puts added words in italics, and is readable, it should be the English translation of choice for the careful student of the Word.

The New King James Version is a Bible on which you can build with confidence.

You can build your life on it.
You can build your ministry on it.
You can build your church on it.