

# Give Me the Bible

## Lesson 4

### WHICH BIBLE VERSION SHOULD I USE?

*“And Philip ran to him, and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some one shall guide me? And he besought Philip to come up and sit with him ” (Acts 8:30-31)*

#### I. INTRODUCTION.

##### A. Give Me the Bible.

1. Revelation – What is the Bible? The Bible is God’s revelation (Lesson 1).
2. Inspiration – Can I Trust the Bible? Yes, the Bible can be trusted (Lesson 2).
3. Formation – How Did We Get the Bible? There is a “chain” link between God and man (Lesson 3).
4. Translation – Which Bible Version Should I Use?

##### B. Use of Bible Versions.

1. I remember a time years ago when many brethren used either the KJV or the ASV. Today, there are over 500 different English versions of the (NT) Bible in print (over 160 versions since 1900) and you will often hear someone say, “My Bible doesn’t read like yours”, or, “Your Bible doesn’t read like the KJV”.
2. Which Bible version should I use? Is this a simple question to answer? No. There are several factors that must be considered when choosing a Bible version or critiquing one. Be careful about uninformed and unjustified criticism of a particular version. Also, be careful about selecting a (newer) version without learning about it.
3. Is a Bible version (in any language) inspired? No. Those who translate scripture (including the KJV) are not inspired.
  - a) The original word of God (the original manuscripts) is inspired – God breathed (2 Tim. 3:16), the original prophets and apostles were inspired by the H.S. (Mt. 10:17-20; 1 Cor. 2:12-13; 2 Pet. 1:19-20); but, there is not one translation (ancient or modern) that is inspired. There are “KJV only” people who actually believe the KJV is inspired of God. Peter and Paul did not preach from the KJV. God has never directed men to translate scripture. He has never given men the word-for-word English words they are to use in translating scripture. (This is the position of the Mormons concerning the Book of Mormon.)
  - b) All translations are uninspired; they are fallible and subject to mistake. All versions and translations, including your favorite translation (KJV, NKJV, ASV, NASV, RSV, NRSV, NIV, ESV, etc.), are all subject to weaknesses and inadequacies. There is no perfect English translation of the Bible.
4. Is it proper to use a Bible version or translation? Yes.
  - a) Jesus read from the Hebrew text (Lk. 4:17) and he also read from the Septuagint which was a Greek translation of the Hebrews text made c. 250 B.C. Paul and others also read from the Hebrew text (Acts 13:15) and the

Septuagint. When they quoted from the LXX, they referred to it as “scripture” or the “word of God”. They used the LXX because it was the common version of the OT in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century due to the wide-spread use of Greek at the time. (The Septuagint is not a perfect version. It is mostly literal with some looser paraphrasing in places and some places where the Hebrew text has been omitted.)

- b) Additionally, we have several Bible examples of a word in one language being translated into another language (Mt. 1:23; Mk. 5:41; 7:11, 33; 15:22, 34; Jn. 1:34, 41-42; 9:7; Acts 4:26; 9:36; 13:8; Heb. 7:2). Some at Corinth even had the gift of interpreting tongues (1 Cor. 12:10).
5. Are all English versions/translations the same? No. They differ greatly (and I am not simply talking about their wording) concerning the theory or approach they take in translation (see below). Today, many purchase Bibles based upon marketing (looks, size, latest edition, etc.), but this is not a good practice.
6. Why do we have so many English translations? Here are a few reasons: 1) different manuscripts have been discovered through the years, 2) our English language and word meanings change with time, 3) there are variant readings in the ancient manuscripts, and 4) there are four basic translation theories.

## II. TRANSLATION PRACTICE.

### A. Bible Translation.

1. The OT was written in Hebrew (and some Aramaic) and the NT was written in Koine (Common) Greek. Unless you read Hebrew or Greek (the “source language”), you will require a translation in your own language (the “receptor language”). A language you do not know needs to be translated into a language you do know.
2. Long before there were English versions (in the A.D. 1500’s), there were ancient versions in other languages: Septuagint (Greek), Syriac, Coptic (Egyptian), and Jerome’s Latin Vulgate. Today, there are Bible translations in more than 1,000 dialects!

### B. Four Different Translation Practices

1. Literal (L) – this is a word-for-word translation of the original Hebrew and Greek words; maintaining the word order (Interlinear).
2. Formal Equivalent (FE) / Essentially Literal (EL) – this is a translation that seeks to maintain the same meaning and sense of the original Hebrew and Greek words; to be as literal as possible and as clear as possible using a modern language (KJV, NKJV, ERV, ASV, NASV, RSV, NRSV, ESV, etc.).
3. Dynamic (or Functional) Equivalent (DE) – this a meaning-for-meaning translation of the original words; it seeks to find the best modern equivalent for the meaning of the original words; literalness and original word order are not as important as modern idiomatic expression and clarity (NIV, TNIV, NLT, CEV, etc.).
4. Paraphrase (P) – this is a thought-for-through translation that is a restatement of the author’s words in the thoughts of the translator (TLB, TEV, TM, etc.).

### C. Examples of Each Theory.

1. OT example: Psalm 1:1
  - a) Literal: 1) Blessed 2) the man 3) that 4) not 5) do walks 6) in the counsel 7) of the ungodly 8) and in the way 9) of sinners 10) nor 11) stands 12) and in the seat 13) of the scornful 14) nor 15) sits.

- b) KJV: Blessed *is* the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.
  - c) NIV: Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers.
  - d) TLB: Oh, the joys of those who do not follow evil men’s advice, who do not hang around with sinners, scoffing at the things of God.
2. NT example: Hebrews 11:1
- a) Literal: 1) Now 2) moreover 3) faith 4) of hoped for 5) substance, 6) of things 7) proof 8) not 9) being seen.
  - b) KJV: Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.
  - c) NIV: Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.
  - d) TLB: What is faith? It is the confident assurance that something we want is going to happen. It is the certainty that what we hope for is waiting for us, even though we cannot see it up ahead.

### III. MODERN (ENGLISH) VERSIONS.

#### A. Questions To Ask.

1. What manuscripts were used to translate this version? The Received Text, Majority Text, or a Critical Text?
2. What is the translation committee’s theological stance? Are they Calvinist?
3. Which translation practice (theory) produced this version?
4. Does this version promote errors and PERversions? Calvinism, “gender inclusive”, Jehovah’s Witness doctrine (NWT, Mt. 25:46; Jn. 1:1, 18; 8:58; Col. 1:16-17; Rev. 3:14), etc.
5. What are the strengths and weaknesses of this version?

#### B. Which Bible Version Should I Use?

1. Like Paul, we want to deliver only what has been received from the Lord (1 Cor. 11:23; 15:3). We want to know “What saith the scripture...” (Rom. 4:3). We do not want to add to or take away from God’s word (Rev. 22:18-19). What Bible version (the main one we use to read and study regularly) will best help us do these things?
2. First, pick a version by a committee, not an individual. Is the version a work of one man (James Moffatt, J.B. Phillips, William Beck, or *The Message* by Eugene Peterson) or a committee?
3. Second, pick a version that comes from the Formal Equivalent (Essentially Literal) practice of translation.
4. Third, pick a version and know all about its strengths and weaknesses. (The accuracy of any English version has to be tested on a passage by passage basis. Some verses will be great, others not so great. Like eating a whole fish, eat the meat and throw away the bones.)
5. Fourth, pick versions from the other categories (L, FE, DE, P) for comparative study. Parallel Bibles and online Bible websites are helpful.

### IV. CONCLUSION.

- A. Be Informed and Use Good Judgment Before Buying A Particular Version. Do Not Bind Your Opinion Concerning A Particular Version.

1. We have no right to bind “KJV only” (or some other version) or “KJV language” (thee and thou). Some elders in the past have bound a certain version to be used. Some churches in the past have bound a certain version for the preacher to use.
  2. As you become informed of the strengths and weakness of different versions, kindly point those things to other brethren and welcome any constructive criticism concerning the Bible version you use. Recognize that disagreements exist among sincere Bible students over which Bible version to use and do not allow the use of Bible versions to threaten the unity of the body of Christ. Do not classify someone as “liberal” or “conservative” based upon the version used by that individual. Be patient with new converts and visitors who use “looser” paraphrases and give them time to see the value of a more literal version.
- B. What Are the Results of Translation?
1. Great sacrifices were made to transmit God’s word into the language of the people (Jer. 36:23ff).
  2. God wants his word to be read and understood everywhere (Neh. 8:1-8; Eph. 3:4; 5:15).
  3. God’s word continues to go “into all the world” via translations (Mt. 28:19).
  4. Our Bible in English was born, not just from a language need, but from a desire to follow the Bible alone without the Catholic Church – “Sola Scriptura” (2 Tim. 3:15-17).
  5. The practice of translation generally was one of literal, word-for-word transmission (Rom. 4:3); loose paraphrases were not produced until the mid 1900’s A.D. to the present.
  6. The practice of placing man-made comments in the margin at this time was highly scrutinized after the appearance of the Geneva Bible (Mt. 15:3-6); today it is a common and accepted practice to have man-made notes in the margin.
  7. The greatest gift you can give is a Bible in someone’s own language!
- C. What Is the Absolute Best Bible Translation?
1. God wants his word written not only on paper, but also upon “the tablet of thy heart” (Prov. 3:1-3; 7:1-3).
  2. God’s word is to be translated into your heart (Rom. 2:15) and life (2 Cor. 3:2-3)!
  3. The NT is to be written in your mind and heart (Jer. 31:33; Heb. 8:10; 10:16).
  4. “The problem with most folks is not the translation they use, but the fact that they do not use the translation they have!” (Wayne Jackson, *The Bible Translation Controversy*. Expanded Edition. Page 30).