

Ivan Panin's New Testament

Finally a small word about Ivan Panin's New Testament. Panin makes every possible attempt to reproduce the Greek in English. The result of course is bad English which is also archaic, but you do get as near as possible to what the original said. You also get decisions based on his numerics on all the disputed texts. You also get clarification of ambiguities of punctuation and other features that can be obtained no other way. Regrettably he did not have time to do similar work on the Old Testament.

Why not learn Greek?

My last recommendation must be to those who have aptitude and opportunity. Why not learn Greek or Hebrew for yourself? It is possible to read an interlinear New Testament with only very little knowledge of Greek. Even that is a great benefit, especially for those who teach others.

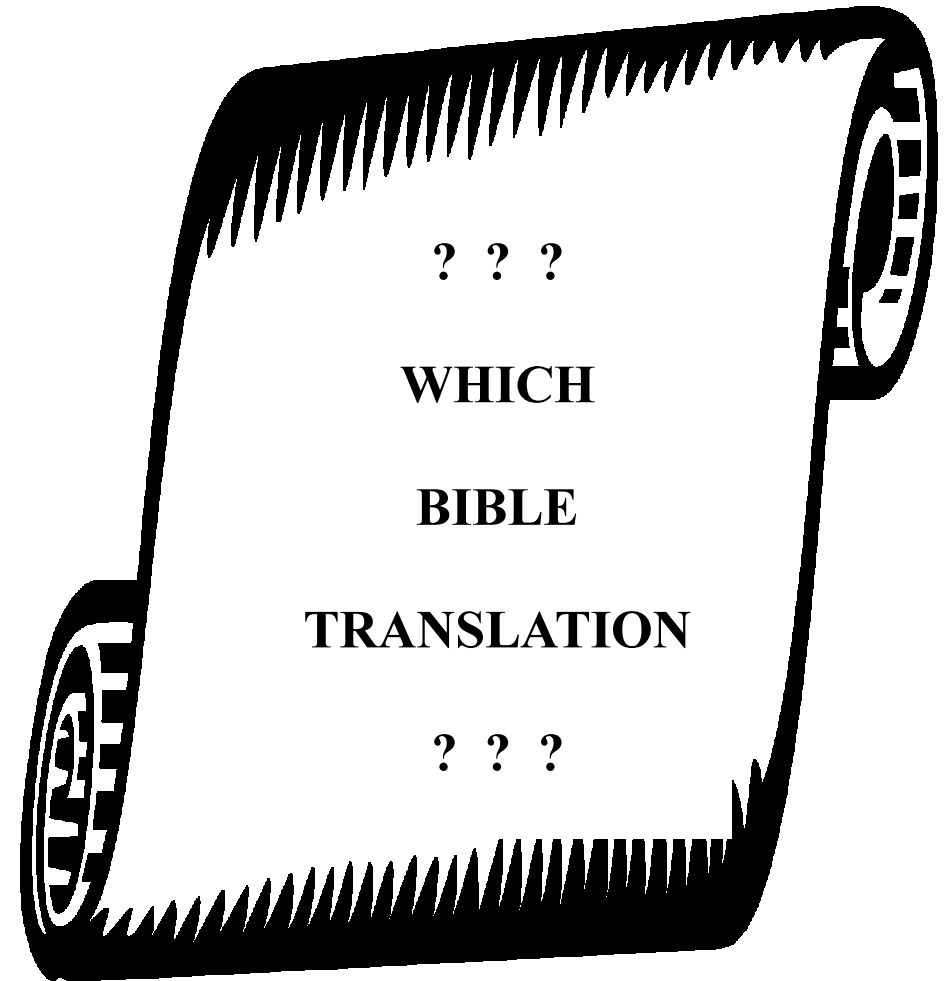
Note: I have taken information from the booklet "Which Version Now?" by Bob Sheehan available from the CLC. I recommend it among other books for further study.

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In addition, if you want to move on into further realms with God and deeper truth you will frequently find that paraphrase translations of this kind have destroyed the deeper meanings of Scripture and replaced them with ideas more acceptable and comprehensible to the carnal man.

The New English Bible

In contrast with the TEV and Living Bible the New English Bible is much more accurate. It is the work of a team of scholars from the main denominations. It suffers from the fact that many of these men had liberal or modernist views which are bound to affect their work. I would not therefore recommend it. Though it certainly has merits, the New International Version appears to me better in every way.

The Amplified Bible

This Bible is deservedly popular among many. It is not a straight translation, but frequently gives several English words for one Greek word in order to convey the different shades of meaning or possible meanings. I believe it is a valuable Bible study aid, and the work of godly men. It moves towards being a commentary in some ways and I think therefore should not be used as ones primary Bible.

The Concordant Literal New Testament (CLNT)

The CLNT is the work of a man named A.E.Knoch. He believed that all Bible translations were biased by the personal views and opinions of their translators and that the way to produce an unbiased translation was to translate every Greek or Hebrew word consistently by always using the same English word (wherever possible).

This idea sounds good but actually does not exclude Knoch's personal biases and results in many small inaccuracies and badly distorted English for reasons I've explained in a separate writing entitled [The Concordant Literal New Testament](#).

Knoch was a Universalist and the CLNT is in line with his beliefs on that and other doctrines. Hence it has been called *the Universalists' Bible*.

I believe the CLNT can be a useful study aid, especially when studying controversial subjects; but certainly not the one and only accurate English New Testament, as its introduction rather implies, and as some of its readers seem to think – especially the followers of A.E.Knoch!

Bible quotations are taken from the NIV or retranslated

also the translators lacked knowledge of large amounts of archaeological and linguistic discoveries made since their time.

Thirdly, unlike nearly all modern translations, the KJV is based on the less accurate Eastern text. Its supporters of course would disagree with me.

The KJV has some points in its favour. It follows the Greek and Hebrew more closely than many modern translations. This has the advantage of not adding to or changing the meaning; but the disadvantage of at times producing unnatural or obscure English. The powerful scholarship of its translators undoubtedly made a vast contribution to later translations.

The Good News Bible

This version, also called Today's English version, is used, I fear, much more than it should be. It simply is not accurate. For example 1 Cor 3:1 reads "As a matter of fact, my brothers, I could not talk to you as I talk to people who have the Spirit; I had to talk to you as though you belonged to this world, as children in the Christian faith." Compare this with a literal rendering of the Greek: "And I, brothers, could not speak to you as spiritual, but as fleshly, as infants in Christ". We cannot replace "spiritual" with "people who have the Spirit", "fleshly" with "belonging to this world", and "in Christ" with "in the Christian faith". The meaning is simply not the same. The TEV may or may not have merit as a commentary, but it is not the Bible.

The Living Bible

This translation also needs mentioning because of its popularity. It has no right to call itself a Bible. It is full of the translator's own thoughts and interpretations. You have only to compare it with a literal translation to find significant differences of meaning on every page. One small example out of hundreds is Hebrews 10:25. "Let us not leave off the assembling of ourselves together" becomes "Let us not neglect our church meetings". Many people these days, with complete scriptural backing, assemble to worship God in their own homes. According to this paraphrase they are wrong.

"God speaks to me through the TEV and the Living Bible", people say. "Can they really be that wrong?" Of course God can and does speak through these versions. They contain a lot of Scripture! In the communist days in Russia the believers happily accepted anti-Christian literature, so that they could read all the Bible verses in it! The troubles come when you start to ask controversial questions. Is the baptism of the Holy Spirit for today? Is Roman Catholic teaching compatible with Scripture? How should we run our fellowship? Does God heal everybody? You will not get accurate answers to these questions if you use an inaccurate Bible.

Introduction

The Bible for any true Christian records the inspired and infallible revelation of God. Jesus and his immediate followers saw the Old Testament in this way, and we would hardly put the New Testament writings on a lower level. One problem faces us, however, as we come to this book. It was not written in English, but in Hebrew and in Greek. Unless we are unusually proficient in both those languages, we must depend on a translation for our study of Scripture. We are not troubled here by shortage of choice. Over 100 new English translations of the Bible have appeared in the last 100 years. What then are the principles that should guide us in choosing the right one, or the best one, or perhaps several for our use?

Some aspects of this subject are very technical and I am far from being an expert on it. However I write because I feel that most people are ignorant of the issues involved and many people are using translations which they shouldn't. I trust some may benefit from at least an introduction to the subject.

There are, as I see it, three separate main questions we may ask about any translation of the Bible.

1. What original text was translated?
2. What were the principles of translation?
3. What sort of English does it use?

What Text ?

This question is probably not as important as the second, but logically comes first. The Old Testament, as most people know, was written mainly in Hebrew but with passages mostly in Daniel in Aramaic, which is a very similar language. The New Testament was written entirely in Greek, though parts may have been previously written in Hebrew or Aramaic and then translated. Obviously today we do not have the original manuscript, but copies of copies of copies ... These copies, alas, are not identical. The differences are not very significant in the Old Testament, but they are in the new. About 3 per cent of its text varies across all the manuscripts. Today, I understand we have about 1500 complete or partial manuscripts of the new Testament, but which of these, if any, is the correct one?

There are two main approaches to this question. The more common one is called the eclectic approach. Scholars put together a text from all the available manuscripts using various rules to sort out differences. For example: what do

the oldest manuscripts say? What do the majority say? What do the best say? Which reading is more likely?

This approach is rejected by some as giving too much scope to human reason. Man can easily inject his own thoughts. These people who form a very sincere minority hold to the view that the text underlying the Authorised or King James version of the Bible (KJV) is essentially the correct one. This text is known as the Received Text and is based on the manuscripts of the Greek-speaking Eastern Church that were available at the time the KJV was translated. The Eastern text is stronger on the doctrine of the Trinity. Its supporters tend to regard other texts and their translations as attacks on the truth. This view rejects the older manuscripts of the Western Church which have been discovered since.

Ivan Panin

The answer to the problem, I believe, comes from a man named Ivan Panin. After his flight from Russia and conversion from atheism, Panin discovered in 1890 that the whole Bible was filled with hidden numerical patterns largely based on the number seven. This discovery had two major implications. Firstly it gave a striking proof of the inspiration of Scripture. Every sentence, every word and even every letter had the divine seal upon it. The patterns could never have been placed there by human wit. Secondly it gave him a method of deciding in every instance which was the correct text. He produced an edition of the New Testament in Greek and also a translation in English. Numerics even enabled Panin to resolve ambiguities of punctuation. eg Compare *Truly I say to-you*, “*Today You will be with me in Paradise*” and *Truly I say to you today*, “*You will be with me in Paradise*”. Numerics showed that the first of these was correct. Ambiguities of the Greek language can also be solved in this way.

Ivan Panin's life work has been almost entirely ignored by the academic authorities. Perhaps it would put some of them out of work if they took it too seriously. In fact his findings are generally, but not always, in line with the Western text and probably would not differ from it in any major significant way. At least we may say, he stands in the witness box against those who proclaim that the KJV is the only sound and safe version to use. His Greek and English New Testaments and other writings are available from the address: Mt Avalon, Bove Town, Glastonbury Somerset.

Since writing this section I have become less convinced of the validity of Panin's findings. They cannot be validated scientifically as he claims. He appears to have been totally ignorant of statistical analysis, which was much less understood in his time than now. His methods of calculating odds were totally invalid. At the same time it is difficult to believe that a man of his

don't even mention him. Those who know Greek or Hebrew should have little difficulty in deciding which translation or translations best meet the criteria I have described above. For the benefit of others I will make comments on a few different versions.

The New American Standard Bible (NASB)

This is the version I mainly use myself. It is generally acknowledged to be the most accurate translation available. Its attempt to keep as closely as possible to the original results in rather unnatural English. It suffers also from retaining outdated English where often there is current terminology that is just as accurate.

The New International Version

This is essentially an accurate translation, though not as literal as the NASB. Its English however is more natural and contemporary. It is perhaps better than the NASB for new believers, children or those for whom English is a second language. It is good also as a second version to consult.

The King James Version

The KJV was completed in the year 1611, and will be 400 years old in 2011! It must be by far the most read translation of the Scriptures for all time. For millions it has been the vehicle through which they have received teaching and spiritual understanding. Its language is majestic and has been a lasting influence on the English language. In spite of all this it has some serious drawbacks.

Firstly, in some areas, the KJV has significant bias. Most people today are totally ignorant about its translators. They were a very mixed selection of Anglican clergymen. They included brilliant scholars, as well as murderers, drunkards and adulterers. My good friends in America, especially those who believe the KJV is the one true Bible, should note that their ancestors, the pilgrim fathers left this country (England) to escape persecution from some of these very men. The translation was actually controlled by King James himself, and he dictated how some words should be translated. For example *ecclesia* had to be *church* not *congregation*, and *episcopos* had to be *bishop* not *overseer*. The translators could only keep their jobs if they submitted to the church and the king.

Secondly and inevitably, it suffers from its age! Its English, needless to say, is now archaic even if it was current at the time of writing. Many words are now obsolete or, worse, have changed their meanings since 1611. Inevitably

What Kind of English?

The third main question we must ask about a Bible translation is, what kind of English does it use? The main choice here is between old English and modern, though the issue is not as simple as appears at first sight.

The problem is that to many people - especially those brought up on the King James Version - modern English sounds irreverent while old English somehow seems more honouring to God. There is no doubt that many people feel this way. I would suggest that the root of this feeling is a lie fostered by the devil. God wants to speak to us, and we might add, wants us to speak to him in the language we understand best - that is the language we normally speak! The effect of reading the scriptures and praying (or prophesying) in old English is to remove God one step, even if a small one, from the centre of our experience.

We may compare this to the use of Latin. Many people who would decry the use of Latin in church services have been quite content to use a semi-foreign language themselves! Whatever arguments may be used in favour of Latin, its effect is to keep the priest in the place of power and prestige, and the common person in the place of inferiority and ignorance. The same I believe is true, though obviously not to the same degree, of the use of old English. It gives a spurious prestige to the person who has mastered it, and binds an unnecessary burden on the back of the one who has not.

The New Testament itself was not written in classical Greek, but in the ordinary commonly used Greek of the time. Paul's purpose in writing was not to sound grand, but to communicate the truth of God in the clearest manner possible.

Must the new believer learn a new vocabulary when he comes to Christ? The answer is yes and no. He will need to learn the meaning of words like repentance, sin, grace and holiness which hitherto have probably not been in his speech. This is true though of any new subject we may study. Law, medicine, computers and sport all abound in technical terms. This is a different matter though from using outdated English and words no longer current when there are modern English equivalents.

Actual Translations

Inevitably I must close this study with comments on specific Bible translations. I would prefer to leave people to draw their own conclusions, and, as the scope is so wide, I will largely have to do that anyway.

One can learn quite a lot about a Bible and its translators by reading its introduction. Some introductions exhibit a humble dependence on God. Others

intelligence could have spent several decades of his life working under a complete illusion. The patterns may be valid even though they cannot be proved scientifically as he claims. At least his sincerity cannot be doubted.

Problems of Translation

If God has taken such care over every word of the Scriptures, then we want to have the most accurate translation possible in our own language. Unfortunately this is not as easy as it sounds.

The first problem is that exact translation is impossible. Meanings of words and grammatical structures in any two languages do not generally correspond.

We can illustrate this with the Greek word "logos". No one English word is exactly equivalent to it. It can mean a word, a thought, a saying, a discourse, a narrative, a matter and many other things besides. The translator must choose the best equivalent in each situation.

To illustrate grammatical problems we can consider tenses. English has two present tenses where most other languages only have one. "Esthio" in Greek or "je mange" in French can mean "I eat" or "I am eating". Pronouns also are full of problems. Hebrew has four words for "you" distinguishing between masculine and feminine and singular and plural. Modern English has only one. In the song of Solomon, it is always clear from the gender in Hebrew whether the bride or bridegroom is speaking. (Some English versions lose the distinction.)

To summarise, it is totally impossible to take a document in one language and make an exact word for word equivalent of it in another. Frequently the translator must grasp the meaning of the original as best he can and then seek to reproduce that meaning in the target language.

This leads us on naturally to another problem - that of understanding the Bible. Here in fact there are at least three problems. There is a plain language problem in that ancient languages can only be understood by guesswork. No one who spoke the language is around to tell us what it means. Words must be studied in all the places where they occur in available writings and compared with similar words in related languages and their meaning then guessed. Usually but not always this process gives reliable results!

There is also a culture problem. With an imperfect knowledge of ancient cultures it is not always possible to understand references of various kinds.

In both these areas archaeological and linguistic research are continually increasing the knowledge available.

The third and most important problem in understanding the Bible is the spiritual problem. "The natural mind does not receive the things of the Spirit of God" (1 Cor 2:14). Anyone who knows God has had the experience of reading a Bible passage a hundred times and then suddenly seeing what it means. As we grow in spiritual understanding the Bible continually unfolds its deeper meanings. The Holy Spirit guides us into all truth. Who then would claim to understand every word of the Bible? Hidden gems may well lie beneath the surface of its every sentence.

Requirements of Translators

What then is required of translators?

Firstly it is obvious that they must be people of scholarship. The more they know of Hebrew and Greek and related languages and ancient cultures, the better they will understand the Scriptures at the natural level. The resources of a committee of translators will obviously exceed those of a single person.

Secondly they must be people who believe in the verbal inspiration of Scripture. Three verses from the end of the Bible we find these words, "I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book." Many translations of the Scriptures have been made by people who have no such belief. They will obviously not feel the same obligation to translate accurately. Indeed why should they be so scrupulous to translate accurately the thoughts of people who lived so long ago, when their own thoughts might be just as good or better?

Thirdly translators must be people full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. Many people who believe passionately in the inspiration of Scripture have little or no spiritual understanding. They are simply in the position of the Pharisees. In Exodus 32:2,3 God chose a workman to construct the tabernacle. He said to Moses, "See, I have called by name Bezalel ... and I have filled him with the Spirit of God in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge and in all kinds of craftsmanship.... ". If this was necessary for the craftsman who built the tabernacle, how much more for those who translate the Scriptures that are inspired by the Holy Spirit. Only people full of the Holy Spirit will have a spiritual understanding of the scriptures.

Fourthly translators must be people of integrity. It is well-known that some Bible translations have strong sectarian or doctrinal biases. The New World Bible of the Jehovah's Witnesses is an example. It frequently replaces the

Greek word *kurios* with the name Jehovah, which occurs nowhere in the Greek. The KJV less obviously has definite Church of England bias in places. "Pascha" meaning "Passover" is translated "Easter" in Acts 12:4. "Episcopos" is translated "Bishop" rather than "overseer".

Translating

We will move on now to the actual process of translation. We see that the translator has a dilemma. The ideal would be an exact reproduction of the original word for word in his own language. We have seen though that this cannot be done. He must come to some compromise. In my opinion he must keep his translation as near to the original as he can while retaining reasonable English. The further he moves from the original in his translation, the more he introduces his own thoughts, and the more he excludes possible meanings that he may not have seen.

Sometimes things are not what they appear to be. We read a difficult passage in some literal translation. We then turn to some new translation which we find much clearer and say, "This is marvellous. Now I understand what it means. God really speaks to me through this Bible." In fact the truth may be that the translator took something that was spiritually hard to understand, and reduced it to something easier to the natural mind. We are no longer receiving the word of God, but something that has been brought down to a lower level and maybe changed in meaning as well.

We may illustrate this from an example. Romans 8:1 literally reads, "(There is) now therefore no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus." The Living Bible translates this, "There is now therefore no condemnation awaiting those who belong to Christ Jesus." This great truth of Scripture embraces past, present and future. We can be free from condemnation now, not just when we die. Sadly however many people believe they will go to heaven when they die, but live their present lives with a permanent sense of condemnation. The translator evidently was one of these. His translation only deals with the future aspect. A more literal translation would have avoided the problem.

If a translator recognises firstly the total verbal inspiration of the Scriptures and secondly the inability of his natural mind to grasp all their meaning, his only reasonable approach will be to translate as literally as language compatibility allows.