How We Got the Bible

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# Recent Translations of the English Bible

## Introduction

The publication of the King James Version in 1611 was an epoch-making event in the history of the English Bible. Many people regarded this revision as the final word on Bible translation.

## Weakness of the King James

Several weaknesses of the King James made more recent revisions necessary.

1. The King James Version rests on an inadequate textual base. The text underlying the King James was essentially a medieval text that contained a number of scribal mistakes that had accumulated through the years. Most were small in significance and did not affect the Bible Message, but others deserve no place in the Holy Scriptures. The revisors of 1611 are not at fault, they just did not have the manuscripts at their disposal that are now known. This includes the Vatican, Sinaitic, and Alexandria Manuscripts.
2. The King James Version contains many archaic words whose meanings are either obscure or misleading: “howbeit,” “holden,” “peradventure,” “because that,” “for that,” “thee,” “thou,” “thy,” “thine,” and many others. Much of the grammar of the King James Version is not in current usage.
3. The King James Version includes errors of translation. The study of Greek and Hebrew only became serious in the seventeenth century. Translation was a problem and some issues were resolved and other were not. The King James translation also inaccurately represented the text by creating distinctions in English that are not found in the Greek.
   1. Acts 17:19,22 – “Areopagus” and “Mars” are the same word in the Greek.
   2. Matt 2:14 – “Jeremy,” Matt 16:14 – “Jeremias”, Matt 27:9 – “Jeremiah” all are the same prophet but could seem like different people to the reader.

## The English and American Revisions

In February of 1870, a motion to consider a revision of the King James was passed by the Convocation of the Providence of Canterbury. Serious work began on a major revision of the King James Version to reflect all of these new realities. A committee of over 50 English and American scholars was established and began meeting in 1871. The result was the publication in 1881 of the English Revised Version, or Revised Version, which was the first and remains the only officially authorized revision of the King James Bible. The New Testament was published in 1881, the Old Testament in 1885, and the Apocrypha in 1895. During the project, an American revision committee had consulted with the English revisers of the Revised Version and in 1901 the American Standard Version, which was officially the American standard edition of the English Revised Version, was published. The ASV had a much stronger reception in the United States than the Revised Version had in England. In fact, copies of the ASV were imported back into England, but neither the RV nor the ASV replaced the popularity of the King James Bible. While the language of the ASV lacks the beauty of the King James Version, it became the standard Bible for many of the Sunday School publications in the early 20th century because of its greater precision in language use. As the 20th century moved on, a plethora of new translations appeared, but none, like the English Revised Version or the American Standard Version, were seen as revisions of the King James Bible.

American Standard Version had 3 good points:

1. The revision of 1901 is based on a Greek text which is far superior to that employed by the King James translator.
2. The revisers have rendered their text more accurately due to the advance knowledge of the original language.
3. The revisers cleared up the misleading archaisms of the King James.
   1. Matt 17:25 – “spoke first to him” for “prevented him”
   2. Acts 21:15 – “baggage” for “carriages”
   3. Acts 28:13 – “made a circuit” for “fetched a compass”
   4. Romans 1:13 – “hinder” for “let”

The net result was that what the American Standard gained in accuracy and consistency over the King James it lost in naturalness and beauty of English style.

## The Revised Standard Version

The beginning of the Revised Standard Version goes back to the year 1929. Due to the lack of funds, necessary funds were not secured until 1936. By the summer of 1943, the nine members of the New Testament group had completed their work. Due to the war (WWI) the New Testament did not appear until February 11, 1946. The Old Testament committee continued to meet and completed their work on September 30, 1952.

There are three reasons for the appearance of the Revised Standard Version:

1. A recognition of the many inadequacies of the King James
2. The failure of the English and American revisions to overcome all the inadequacies

The discovery of new resources of knowledge which would warrant, even if the recent version had been fully adequate, a new revision that included the results of these discoveries. The committee, with a vast store of secular papyri at hand, could be more precise in its

renderings:

* Matt 28:1 – “after the sabbath” for “late on the sabbath”
* Luke 4:13 – “until an opportune time” for “for a season”
* 2 Cor 2:17 – “peddlers of God’s word” for “corrupting the word of God”

Perhaps the greatest gain of the Revised Standard Version over its predecessors is its readability, understandable and easy to read. But the Revised Standard Version also has its faults:

Matt 3:3 – “desert” for “wilderness”

Matt 12:40 – “sea monster” for “whale”

John 16:8 – “convict” for “convince”

Hebrew 6:17 – “guaranteed” for “interposed”

## The New Revised Standard Version

After the publication of the Revised Standard Version in 1952, minor changes were made periodically. In 1974, a newly constituted committee began work on a revision of the Revised Standard Version. The committee worked at scheduled times for about fifteen years. Their assigned task was to improve the Revised Standard Version by:

* Altering some of its paragraph structure and punctuation
* Reducing archaisms that had not been entirely removed
* Striving for greater accuracy and clarity
* Eliminating all masculine-orientated language when references are made to both men and women

The New Revised Standard Version was published in 1990. It is not a new translation, but a revision. Readers will notice two things:

1. The words “thee” and “thou” are not used in language addressed to God (Matt 6:9).
2. In cases where the original languages refer to men and women in general, male-oriented language is not used (Matt 4:4)

## Other Translations

Thus far we have focused attention on translations that are in the Tyndale-King James tradition. But many other English translations have been made that are entirely independent of this tradition. Any translation that abandons the word-for-word principle leaves itself open to criticism.

1. The New English Bible
   1. Its publication coincided with 350th anniversary of the King James Version
   2. Translators insisted that a version was “faithful” only if it met the word-for-word requirement.
   3. The New English Bible is a sense-for-sense translation rather than a word-for-word translation.
   4. The translators have tried to use the vocabulary of contemporary speech.
   5. It New English Bible, along with its revision of the New Testament, appeared in 1970.
2. The New American Standard Bible
   1. This is a revision to the American Standard Bible and not a new translation and was published in 1963.
   2. It was produced because it was felt that the American Standard Version of 1901 was disappearing too rapidly from the modern scene.
   3. In 1995 a new edition of the New American Standard Version was issued.
3. The New International Version
   1. More widely accepted than any other translation.
   2. New Testament was published in 1973 and Old Testament in 1978.
   3. It offers clarity and readability for the readers.
   4. It is by no means the *par excellence* of all recent translations.
4. The Revised English Bible
   1. Published in 1989 and claims to be a substantial revision of the New English Bible.
   2. Word and phrased that were not contemporary in the United States have been removed from the New English Bible.
5. Other Translations
   1. The New King James Bible have an appeal for many who have long used the King James Version.
   2. The Good News Bible (1976) has been a pioneer of translations that employ a simple vocabulary and short sentence structure. This type of translation is particularly helpful for those who have difficulty in reading.
   3. The Living Bible (1971) and The Message (New Testament, 1993) are paraphrases and not translations. A paraphrase is not bad, but these often go far beyond the limits of the Biblical text.

## Conclusion

Other translation could be mentioned, and others are sure to come in in the future. Each translation had and will have pluses and minuses. In evaluating translations, the best procedure is to read a passage or chapter, or book as a whole, and then decide about certain details by comparing translation with translation.