

HEARTBEATS - Staying Connected

7/26/2021

Dear Friends in Christ,

ONE AT ONE – Every day this week beginning on Tuesday, July 27 you are encouraged to pray for one minute at one o'clock. This week, pray for our world as the new variation of the coronavirus spreads. Ask God for health and healing for all people. Pray for new versions of vaccines to protect God's children throughout the world.

How many English translations of the Bible would you guess there are? More than 100? More than 200? In truth, there are more than 450 translations of the Bible in English. Why are there so many translations? And which one(s) should we read?

The Bible was originally written in two languages: Hebrew and Greek. The Old Testament was written in the formal language of the Jews—Hebrew. Because of the shift from trying to just evangelize Jews to reaching out to Gentiles (read the Book of Acts to follow this transition) the New Testament was written in Greek, the language that the Roman Empire and many other parts of the world read. The Septuagint, abbreviated LXX, is the oldest attempt to translate the Old Testament into Greek so that the educated world could read both parts of the Bible. In the late-4th-century, the entire Bible was translated into the scholarly Latin language and is called the Vulgate. Some translations today are made from the Greek and Hebrew, while others come from the Septuagint or the Vulgate, and still others are translations of translations.

Already, you might imagine there are challenges. Certainly, the original (or manuscripts as close to the originals as could be found) of the Hebrew and Greek provided the most accurate reading of what the Testaments say. But even here there are problems. The Hebrew in Biblical times did not include vowels. So did Moses and the Israelites cross the Red Sea (which is what most translations say) or the Reed Sea, which was a large area of water at

the mouth of the Nile River. In the Greek, certain words have multiple meanings, just like in English. (Consider the multiple meanings of our words like “arm,” or “leaves,” or “tie.”) In reference to Christ, Hebrews 2:17 says “...that He might hilaskesthai the sins of the people.” The Greek word hilaskesthai occurs only here in the Bible and can be translated as “expunging of” or “erasing of,” or it can be translated “propitiation for” or “payment for.” So, did Christ erase our sins or make payment for our sins? Both meanings can be correct.

Martin Luther in 1522 translated the Bible into German, an early attempt to write the Bible in the common language of the people. Luther chose to use both Hebrew and Greek rather than the Septuagint or Vulgate. Because of the many dialects and variants in German, Luther’s translation became the basis for the German language spoken by the German nation today. In 1611, King James of England ordered one of the earliest English translations, but King James instructed his team of translators to make sure their work emphasized the divine right of Christians to evangelize the world at sword point (“Do you want to believe or do you want to die?”) to justify the crusades his ancestors had commanded, and to stress the superiority of men over women to help keep women in their place. Some translations today are more modern language versions of the King James Bible. And some translations are written to reflect the theology of the denomination sponsoring them, rather than the original. The New World Translation used by the Jehovah’s Witnesses translates John 1:1 to read “...and the Word was with God and the Word was a god,” suggesting that Jesus was just a god among many and not part of the triune God.

So, which translations are better? Translations are written at different grade levels to help readers use them. Today’s English Version, sometimes called the Good New Bible is written at a third-grade level and is a good first Bible for children. Some, like the Living Bible or The Message, are paraphrases that give a sense of the message but are not as accurate to the original language of the Bible. The King James Bible, with its problems in translation of some sections, is written at a 12th grade level and gives beautiful presentations of the Psalms. The Jerusalem Bible, sometimes called the Catholic Bible, is written at a 7th grade level and is an excellent translation of the Old Testament. One of the best translations of the New

Testament is the Revised Standard Version which is written at a 12th grade level. The New Revised Standard Version which many ELCA churches use because the ELCA owns the copywrite is written at an 11th grade reading level. For Bible Study, my favorite is the New International Version, written at an 8th grade reading level and is a very good translation of both the Old and the New Testament.

So many different translations from which to choose. Hopefully this gives you a some background on the history of Bible translations. And, if you are looking for a Bible for yourself or someone else, perhaps this can guide you toward which translation to purchase.

In Christ's love,
Pastor Jeffrey