

# **Bible Versions and Bible Study**

**In the days of the Lindisfarne Gospels monks wrote between the lines of Latin text and those writings are known as 'glosses'.**

Photo courtesy: Wikipedia



They were not translating the text but attempting to express in English what the Latin text said. The King James Bible translators produced, as far as they were able, a literal translation of the Hebrew and Greek text. Modern Bible versions have departed from this method of translation.

## **Different Methods**

The methods used by translators fall into three main categories. They may be known as:

- 1 Literal or word-for-word translations,
- 2 Paraphrase versions or,
- 3 Interpretations.

Other descriptions are sometimes used to explain the method or methods of translation used, for example, 'complete equivalence' for a literal translation, and 'dynamic equivalence' for interpretation.

We need to be aware that some Bible versions are produced by a mix of translation methods. They may be a mix of two or all three methods of translation. Reading the preface to a Bible can be useful in finding out the translators' brief. Bibles that are the product of paraphrases or the work of interpretive methods distance us from what God recorded for our instruction and learning.

## **The Word of God**

We must be aware that reliance on Bibles which interpret God's Word puts us totally in the hands of those who do the interpreting. Their opinion of what God has left on record may be correct or it may not, but we have no way of knowing for ourselves. On the other hand where the translators have followed a word for word translation strategy of the Hebrew and Greek text, we are nearer to understanding what God has recorded for us through His inspired writers.

When Joshua led the Israelites into the land God promised to them, they paused between Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal to hear the Word of God read to them. The Bible record emphasises for us the importance of all the Words of God being read to them, nothing was left out.

Afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessings and the cursings, according to all that is written in the Book of the Law. There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded which Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel, with the women, the little ones, and the strangers who were living among them (Joshua 8:34–35).

Jesus confirmed the importance of reading every word that his heavenly Father spoke. In response to one of the three temptations, Jesus said,

*“It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God’”* (Matthew 4:4).

If it was important for Israel, that all the Words of God were to be read, then choosing Bibles that are the most literal translations means that we will get nearer to understanding the whole of God’s counsel for living our lives.

### Which Translation is best?

To compare Bible versions we can group them across a spectrum from

literal to paraphrase. Much of this information can be gleaned from reading the Bible Preface.

We can compare the merits of the methods used by the translators in the chart opposite. The more literal a Bible translation is, the nearer we are to understanding what God actually said.

### Bible Study

Different Bible versions have a useful place in Bible study. However, we must be aware of the approaches to translation taken by the translators. If we want to know what God has declared for our learning to prepare for the coming Kingdom of God, then we must recognise the importance and value of a literal word-for-word translation of the Word of God.

The 1611 King James Bible is a literal translation which has been the vehicle for proclaiming the truth of God’s Word throughout the world for 400 years. Today it remains the key to understanding the truth that was preached by Jesus and the Apostles in the first century.

More Literal	←————→	Less Literal
Translate what is recorded	Mixture of translation & interpretation	Interpretation or paraphrase
King James Version (1611)	New American Standard Version (1971)	New English Bible (1970)
New King James (1982)	New International Version(s) (1978 and 2010)	Living Bible (1971) Message Bible (2002)
Young’s Literal translation (1863)	English Standard Version (2001)	Amplified Bible (1964)
Revised Version (1885)	Revised Standard Version (1952)	Good News Bible (1976)

More Literal	Less Literal
Translates what is said.	Translates, interprets or paraphrases what is thought to be the meaning.
Limits scope for translators' bias.	Allows more scope for interpreters' bias.
Retains original language style & idiom.	Adopts reader's language style & idiom.
Enables serious Bible study. Can investigate words, themes and develop our understanding of God's Word.	Can be helpful in initial understanding of Bible narrative but inhibits development of Bible study.

## An Example : Abraham

Using some Bible tools we will find out why Abraham was an important person in the purpose of God and the lessons his life holds for us. Useful questions to ask when exploring Bible characters: Who were they? What did they do? When and where did the event occur? And, most importantly, what are the lessons for us? Using a Strong's Concordance, Young's Concordance or one of the freely available PC software packages or online access to a Bible Concordance, we can find the first reference to Abraham in the Bible.

### ✚ Who was Abraham?

*Genesis 17:5*

We learn that "Abraham" was the name that God gave to a man called "Abram". Abraham means "father of many nations". When God gives someone a name it is because they have an important part to play in His plan and purpose. We can now look up "Abram" in the Concordance to discover more about his origins and way of life. The first time Abram is

mentioned is Genesis 11:26. He was one of three sons born to Terah.

### ✚ What did he do?

*Genesis 12:1-4*

God called Abram to leave his house, country and relatives and to go to a place that God would show him. He set out not knowing the destination! Such was his trust in God's guidance and care.

Abram was a man of great faith, he believed, without reservation, what God said He certainly would do.

*Then He brought him outside and said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness (Genesis 15:5-6).*

### ✚ Where did he live?

*Genesis 11:31*

Abraham lived in Ur of the Chaldees. He was called by God to leave his home comforts and start on a journey that would lead him to the

land that God promised him. He journeyed north following the river Euphrates to Haran. When his father Terah died, God guided Abraham down into the land of Canaan, the land God had promised to him and his children. He continued his travels and went further south into Egypt (Genesis 12:9-10). God then called him out of Egypt to settle in the land of Canaan.

**✦ What did God promise?**

God promised Abraham that he would live for ever in the land that God would give him.

*And the LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him: "Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are, northward, southward, eastward, and westward; for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever (Genesis 13:14-15).*

Using a Concordance we can find the Bible references to the places where Abraham lived and mark them on a map. We can then see that Abraham obeyed God, he never again left the land God promised him. He did literally walk the length and breadth of the land living a nomadic life in tents to the day of his death. He now rests in the grave until the day of resurrection when God will give him the land promised to him.

Now, how do those things affect us, if at all? In the next article in this series, God willing, we will see how the promises God made to Abraham really matter to us.

**Peter Moore**

*Next month: God's Word and You*

<b>Genesis 13:3,14-17</b>	Abraham was between Bethel and Ai when God told him to walk the length and breadth of the land He had promised to him for ever.
<b>Verse 18</b>	He moved (South) to Hebron or Mamre.
<b>Genesis 14:14</b>	He pursued Lot's captors to Dan (North) and rescued him from an invasion force that descended on the land.
<b>Genesis 18:1</b>	The LORD appeared to Abraham at Mamre.
<b>Genesis 20:1</b>	Abraham moved (South) between Kadesh and Shur. Then moved to Gerar (West).
<b>Genesis 21:33</b>	Abraham planted a grove in Beersheba (South) then in land of the Philistines (West)
<b>Genesis 22:2, 19</b>	Went to the land of Moriah (Jerusalem-see 2Chronicles 3:1) to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice to the Lord then returned to Beersheba (South)
<b>Genesis 23:2</b>	Went to Hebron again where Sarah died.
<b>Genesis 25:6-7</b>	Near the end of his life Abraham sent his sons Eastward. He died and was buried at Hebron with his wife Sarah.