

The Douai-Rheims Bible

In the wake of so many English translations now available to the general public, the Catholic Church was finally forced to produce a translation of its own. The translator chosen was William Allen, an Oxford fellow and devoted Roman Catholic. The Apostolic Scriptures were produced in 1582 and the Tanach in 1609/10. The name reflects the two cities in which Allen established colleges: Douai and Rheims, France. The preface of the Bible admits that the need of the translation was to refute the many “false translations” produced by Protestants.

The translation was of the Vulgate and thoroughly Roman Catholic, with many Latinisms and translations based upon Roman Catholic theology. The Lord’s prayer reads “Give us today our superstantial bread” (reminding of the Eucharist and Transubstantiation), and Paul and Barnabas ordain “priests” (rather than elders) in every church (Acts 14:23).

The King James Bible (Authorized Version)

The political and theological spirit of the times had left the Protestant Church divided between the Anglican (Church of England) and the Reformers or Puritans. The latter held the Geneva Bible as superior, the former retained either the Great Bible or the Bishop’s Bible. It was left to the translators of the Authorized Version to bridge the widening gap.

The reign of Queen Elizabeth 1 (1558–1603) saw a time of reform and growth for England. The freedom afforded for study and writing produced some of the greatest literary talents of all time: Shakespeare, Spenser, Sidney, Bacon, Hooker, Jonson, Marlowe—all of these produced their masterpieces at this time. It was against this backdrop of literary excellence that the King James Version was born.

James 1, boy King of Scotland since his birth, succeeded Elizabeth after her death. On his way to England, the Puritans presented James with a petition, signed by over a thousand signatures, in which they set out their grievances against the Church of England, and particularly the use of the Great Bible which was a “most corrupt translation.” James, however, was not that sympathetic to the Puritans, since they had opposed him on several political issues. Yet he needed their political power. As a result, he convened a council at Hampton Court in 1604 to discuss the issues related to the various translations. Not much was accomplished except that it was determined that a translation of the whole Bible, from the Hebrew and Greek, should be made, and that

without marginal notes, and that it would be the authorized version for public reading in the churches.

The actual translators where the leading classical and Oriental scholars of the day, both Anglican and Puritan, including some laymen as well. The translators were arranged in six panels: two in Oxford, two in Cambridge, and two in Westminster. Two panels worked on the Apostolic Scriptures, three panels translated the Tanach, and one undertook the translation of the Apocrypha. Once each panel had completed their work, their translation was reviewed by a smaller committee made up of two persons from each of the panels (thus 12 in all).

The basic principles of translation, authorized (or perhaps even composed) by King James himself were:

1. The 1602 edition of the Bishop's Bible was used as the basis for the revision, but it was to be corrected from the Hebrew and the Greek. The Preface to the Reader indicates that all English translations, as well as several foreign versions were also utilized.
2. So that the English did not become too redundant, a variety of words were to be used for translating the same Hebrew or Greek term. (In later revisions this was reversed for the sake of accuracy.)
3. Words necessary for the English translation, but not found in the Hebrew or Greek were to be put in italics.
4. Names of biblical characters were to conform to those in common use (though the names were not necessarily standardized: e.g., "Elijah" in the Tanach, "Elias" in the Apostolic Scriptures).
5. Old ecclesiastical terms were to be retained. Thus *ekklesia* was translated "church" rather than "congregation" as Tyndale had it, and Tyndale's "washing" was changed to "baptism."
6. No marginal notes except to explain Hebrew or Greek words.
7. Existing chapter and verse divisions were to be retained, but new chapter headings were to be supplied.

Yet, in spite of the great scholarship and careful attention given to the process of translation, the unfortunate reality was that the translators of the KJV simply did not have good Hebrew and Greek texts to work from. Of the primary uncial manuscripts now received as the primary authorities for the text of the Apostolic Scriptures, only Codex Bezae was available at that time, and there is no evidence that it was utilized. In fact, the KJV translators most likely had no more than 25 total Greek manuscripts of the Apostolic Scriptures, and these were carelessly used. And the situation for the Tanach was even worse. They most likely relied

almost entirely upon the Complutensian Polyglot (1517) and the Antwerp Polyglot (1572). Where these two differed, the translators took what they felt was the best, but in a half-dozen instances they follow neither.

This situation, of course, was not their doing. They worked admirably with the sources available at that time. It seems clear that if these same scholars were alive today, they would surely avail themselves of the thousands of manuscripts discovered since the translation of the KJV. And they would doubtlessly make many revisions on their former work as a result.

The Authorized Version was widely received from its first appearance, though the Puritans favored the Geneva Bible which remained the primary competitor to the KJV for nearly 50 years. So marked was the competition that in 1618 Bishop Laud ordered copies of the Geneva Bible to be burned and forbade its importation from Geneva. It was the Geneva Bible that the Pilgrims originally brought to the New World. The KJV was rejected by them primarily because its translation in a number of cases emphasized the divine right of kings. Even so, the first Bible printed in America was the Authorized Version. And in time the criticisms of the Authorized Version died out, and it became the most widely accepted English Bible of all times.

But language does not remain unchanged, and soon the KJV, like all translations before it, was in need of revision. Beside the need to update the English and correct numerous translation errors and typographical mistakes, other manuscripts had been found. Codex Alexandrinus was acquired by the British Museum only sixteen years after the Authorized Version saw the light of day. Thus, in 1629 a major revision of the Authorized Version was undertaken with a second major revision in 1638. This second revision remained the standard text for nearly 150 years. Though several unauthorized revisions were made in subsequent decades (by Edward Wells, Daniel Mace, William Whiston, John Wesley), the first major revision came in 1762 called the Cambridge Bible of the Authorized Version. Spellings were corrected and updated, and over 360 marginal notes were added. Again, in 1769, a fourth revision of the Authorized Version was undertaken by Benjamin Blayney, Regius Professor of Hebrew at Oxford. He updated weights and measures, as well as coinage, and made other revisions. Goodspeed estimates that this version differed in at least 75,000 places from the Authorized Version of 1611. This version remained the basis for the publication of the Authorized Version and is so to this day.

The Revised Version

By the early 1800's, however, the language of the Authorized Version was already antiquated for many. Moreover, biblical scholars were anxious to incorporate the newly found manuscripts into the translation of the Authorized Version. Thus, in 1870, Samuel Wilberforce, bishop of Winchester, proposed that the Authorized Version be revised, and the Upper House of Convocation of the Province of Canterbury passed a resolution to that effect. Sixteen scholars were appointed to supervise the project, with 54 more to do the actual translation work. Many of these were the well-known scholars of the day. Initially committees were set up both in England and America with the hopes that the revised version could be made to work for both. But this was not to be. For example, the English wanted "Holy Ghost" retained, while the Americans wanted it changed to "Holy Spirit." In the end, an American Revision would come a bit later.

The Revised Version (NT: 1881; OT, 1885) incorporated:

1. About 6,000 changes in the Apostolic Scriptures where the text was changed to reflect more recently found Greek manuscripts
2. Improved ambiguous translations of the Authorized Version
3. Corrected errors in the Authorized Version
4. Alterations where the Authorized Version inconsistently rendered the Hebrew or Greek through the use of more than one English word
5. Alterations to bring parallel passages into conformity with each other

Though the work was done by eminent scholars, it was not widely received, and never displaced the entrenched position of the KJV. Part of this was that the translation was considered choppy and wooden in comparison to the KJV. Charles Spurgeon quipped regarding the new version: "strong in Greek, weak in English."

The stilted English style of the Revised Version was the result of the translators' methodology. They intended to give as close to a word-for-word translation as possible, attempting to use the same English word for each Hebrew or Greek word translated. Thus, even though the Revised Version was a superior text, its stilted English hindered it from every becoming widely accepted by the general populace. Still, its publication was important. The KJV had held an unshakable dominance for over 250 years. Yet the Bible once again was not keeping pace with the evolution

of the English language, the possibility existed in which it would no longer be available in the language the current society understood.

The American Standard Version

This was an American revision of the British Revised Version. It was published in 1901 by the Thomas Nelson Publishers. The most noticeable change was the use of “Jehovah” to render the Tetragrammaton in the Tanach. While this was received by some, most people found it hard to use. In addition, the Apocrypha was removed from this translation. The Tanach was based upon the MT supplemented from the Lxx. The Apostolic Scriptures were translated primarily from Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Alexandrinus. It was translated just prior to the time when so many papyrus manuscripts of the Apostolic Scriptures were discovered. As such, it was out of date before it had sufficient time to be fully appreciated.

Its reception was moderate, though certain of its translations became main-stream. For instance, most Americans know the Lord’s prayer from the ASV: “Our Father who art in heaven” where the KJV has “Our Father which art in heaven.” Still, even though the Presbyterian Church officially received it, the ASV never replaced the KJV. It had come in a time of American history when people were longing for a modern speech version, which the ASV clearly was not.

The Revised Standard Version

In 1928 the copyright of the American Standard Version was acquired by the International Council of Religious Education, made up of various denominations, and part of the World Council of Churches. It was determined that a revision was in order, but the Great Depression made the necessary funds for such a project an impossibility. Money was finally gathered by 1937 and the work began. The goal was to

embody the best results of modern scholarship as to the meaning of the Scriptures, and express this meaning in English diction which is designed for use in public and private worship and preserves those qualities which have given to the King James Version a supreme place in English literature.²⁵⁸

The Apostolic Scriptures appeared in 1946, and the Bible in its entirety

258 From the preface of the RSV.

in 1952. First published without the Apocrypha, it was added in 1957 to make the RSV applicable to both Protestants and Roman Catholics. Most notably, this first edition of the RSV did not contain the longer ending of Mark, nor the disputed section of John dealing with the woman caught in adultery (John 7:53-8:11). The second edition (1971) put these back in, no doubt for economic rather than text critical reasons. In 1973 an Ecumenical edition of the RSV was published, with a complete Ecumenical version (including all the apocrypha and deuterocanonical books) being published by Oxford in 1977.

In general, the RSV was received very well. It has replaced the “Jehovah” of the ASV with the standard “Lord,” and had retained much of the KJV verbiage, especially in the well known passages. Some of the more evangelical and fundamental denominations were set against the revision from the start, since it was connected with the World Council of Churches which was deemed liberal. Moreover, the translation of Is 7:14 with “young maiden” rather than “virgin” was taken as a blatant denial of the virgin birth. Actually, “young maiden” is the better translation, though in the context “virgin” may surely be implied, and the Lxx translated as “virgin.” In another well known text, John 3:16, the RSV translated *μονογενῆς*, *monogenes* as “For God so loved the world that he gave his only son” rather than the Authorized Version’s “only begotten son.” Some felt this betrayed a weakened christology.

In spite of these things, the RSV has enjoyed a very wide readership, and its appearance marked the end of the dominance of the Authorized Version. The RSV continues to go through slight revisions even in our day.

The New American Standard Bible

The NASB (published by the Lockman Foundation) appeared in 1971. As its title and preface suggest, it purports to be a revision of the 1901 American Standard Version. The differences are so many, however, that it can rightly be described as a new translation.

The primary purpose of the revision was to bring the text into closer agreement with the originals, and to render the translation into modern English. In the first edition the archaic “Thee” and “Thou” (etc.) was used when address God. Elsewhere the modern “you” was used. In the NASB Update (1995) all archaic pronouns are removed.

In general the NASB was well received, and by 1977 it was the second most sold Bible in the United States, with The Living Bible being number one.

The NASB is a close translation of the Hebrew and Greek, though at times the flow of the English is sacrificed for accuracy. Though the theological position of the translators is sometimes evident in the translation itself (e.g., pre-millennialism), by-and-large its translation is a good representation of the original, and for that reason it has often been chosen as a study bible for those unable to work directly from the Hebrew or Greek.

The New King James Version

Thomas Nelson Publishers, said to be the largest publishers of Bibles, launched a project to bring the Authorized Version into updated English. The goal was to retain the basic textual orientation (MT for the Tanach; Textus Receptus [updated 1881] for the Apostolic Scriptures) of the translation, while at the same time bringing archaic expressions and words into modern English.

Over 130 evangelical scholars worked on the project. The NT appeared in 1979, and the entire Bible in 1982. Though it claimed to contain “the entire text of the KJV,” it did not include the apocrypha as the Authorized Version had.

Whether the NKJV accomplishes its own stated purpose is debatable. It retains some Elizabethan words and phrases²⁵⁹ while attempting to bring the translation into the 21st Century. One critic put it this way: “the voice is Jacob’s voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau.” Whether it will ever overtake the KJV is doubtful, but it remains a viable option for those who are determined to use a translation based upon the Textus Receptus, but want a more updated English rendering.

The Tanakh: A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures According to the Masoretic Text

The first complete translation of the Tanach for Jewish communities prepared by a committee of scholars, was the “Holy Scriptures” published by the Jewish Publication Society of America in 1917. From the preface we read:

We are, it is hardly needful to say, deeply grateful for the works of our non-Jewish predecessors, such as the Authorized Version with its admirable diction, which can never be

259 “day of his espousals,” Song of Songs 3:11; “hew down trees,” Jer 6:6; “feigned,” 1Sam 21:13; “winebibber,” Prov 23:20, etc.

surpassed, as well as for the Revised Version with its ample learning—but they are not ours. The Editors have not only used these famous English versions, but they have gone back to the earlier translations of Wycliffe, Tyndale, Coverdale, the Bishops' Bible, and the Douai Version, which is the authorized English translation of the Vulgate used by the Roman Catholics; in a word, upon doubtful points in style, all English versions have been drawn upon. The renditions of parts of the Hebrew Scriptures by Lowth and others in the eighteenth century, and by Cheyne and Driver in our own days, were likewise consulted.²⁶⁰

Indeed, this 1917 publication is very close to the Authorized Version, being only changed in those places where the Synagogue may have taken issue. For instance, “virgin” is removed from Is 7:14 and Is 9:6[5] is translated: “For a child is born unto us, A son is given unto us; And the government is upon his shoulder; And his name is called Pele-joez-el-gibbor-Abi-ad-sar-shalom.” A footnote states that the meaning of this name is: “Wonderful in counsel is God the Mighty, the everlasting Father, the Ruler of peace.” In 1955 a Hebrew-English edition was offered in a 2 vol. set.

The Tanakh was produced by the JPS to replace this older translation. An impressive array of scholars worked on the new translation, headed by Harry M. Orlinski. They utilized the full number of extant manuscripts available of the MT, including the DSS, and incorporated the many advancements in understanding Hebrew grammar gained since the 1950's. As such, the translation is (for the most part) an accurate English translation of the Tanach but with an anti-Yeshua bias in some cases (e.g., Is 7:14; 9:5[6]; Ps 22:17[16]). As in the 1917 edition, the order of the books follows the generally accepted MT order²⁶¹

Other Modern English Translations

The number of English translations that have been produced since the 1950's is nothing short of amazing. Most of them aimed at a particular target group, or were the product of publishers and Bible societies who thought a niche in the Bible market could be filled. The following is a representative list.

260 From the preface, p. ix.

261 i.e. Torah, Neviim, and Ketuvim, putting 1 and 2Chronicles as the last books.

Bible	Date	Comments
Phillips Version	1958/1972	Nearly a paraphrase; very easy to read
Berkeley Version	1945/1959	Uses Thou when addressing deity; some inconsistencies; footnotes contain wrong info
New World	1961/1981	Flawed translation of the Jehovah Witnesses
New English Bible	1961/1970	Produced as a modern English Bible for England; took 26 years to complete; liberal tendencies.
Jerusalem Bible	1966/1985	First Catholic Bible based on Hebrew and Greek rather than Vulgate. Revised edition (1985) called the New Jerusalem Bible
Living Bible	1967/1907	Kenneth Taylor's paraphrase; very easy to read; full of bad theology and translation
Good News Bible [Today's English Version]	1966/1976	American Bible Society; also called "Good News for Modern Man;" dynamic equivalence translation; leaves much to be desired; does not accurately represent the original in many places (e.g., Gen 1:2)
New International Version	1973/1978	worked on by over 110 evangelical scholars; most popular English Bible of our times; very easy to read; generally represents the originals well in a dynamic equivalence translation
Revised English Bible	1989	Revision of the NEB (1970); updated language; moved toward inclusive gender language; quite liberal (accepts rearranging of texts; many emendations, etc.)
The Message	1993/1997	Free, dynamic equivalence translation; nearly a paraphrase at times; in the idiom of the 1990's

Bible	Date	Comments
New Living Translation	1996	Revision of the Living Bible
Stone Tanakh	1998	Translation of the Tanakh with Hebrew parallel text and notes/commentary; done by Orthodox Jewish scholars
English Standard Version	2001	word-for-word rather than thought-for-thought (dynamic equivalence) translation; attempts to do the same thing as the NIV, but with a word-for-word approach
NET Bible [New English Translation]	2005	Dynamic equivalent translation; many footnotes which contain explanations for the chosen translation as well as indicating significant variants in the manuscripts and, in some verses, linguistic helps regarding the Hebrew and Greek which underly the chosen translation.
TLV [Tree of Life Version]	2016	Dynamic equivalent translation; directed toward a Messianic Jewish audience. Sponsored by the Messianic Jewish Family Bible Society and The King's University.

