

# Know the Scriptures - Part Seven

by Pastor Elton Hallauer

## Modern Translations

Approximately 250 years after the KJV appeared, people began to feel the need for a revision of the Bible. Two committees of men were formed in England, one for the Old, the other for the New Testament. Two like committees were gathered in America. Schaff, Thayer, and Green were the names of some on the American committee. The Americans made several suggestions to the English committee, but very few were incorporated into the text of the *English Revised Version* (ERV) whose Old and New Testaments appeared in 1881 and 1885 respectively. The English committee did agree, however, to print the suggestions of the Americans in an appendix, provided the Americans would not publish a version for 14 years.

This they did in 1901 by means of a translation known as the *American Standard Version* (ASV). Some of its features are that it used "Jehovah" instead of "Lord" and "God," divided the text into paragraphs, and improved the marginal notes. It removed many of the archaisms of the KJV and ERV, such as, "hinder" for "let" (Romans 1:13), and "in nothing be anxious" for "be careful for nothing" (Philippians 4:6). At the same time, it kept some of the old and even added more to give the text a "Biblical" flavor, such as, "howbeit," "lest haply," and "us-ward." So, while it may be more accurate than the KJV, it does not have the latter's naturalness and beauty of English style. Spurgeon said of the ASV: "strong in Greek, weak in English."

*The Twentieth Century New Testament* also appeared in 1901. The work is a new translation done by some 35 persons who remained anonymous for some time. When the names of some were revealed, it was discovered that two were wives of ministers, one an editor, one an engineer, and the rest were clergy and laymen who felt a need to make the Bible intelligible to ordinary men and women. This volume is considered to be the forerunner of the many twentieth

century "modern language" translations. It divides the text into paragraphs and makes use of quotation marks for direct quotations. It was revised in 1904 and reissued in 1961.

*The Holy Scriptures according to the Massoretic Text, A New Translation*, is of course, of the Old Testament. It was done by Jews for Jews in 1917. It is being revised at the present time to bring the language and scholarship up to date. The Pentateuch appeared in three volumes in 1963: the Prophets and Writings in two volumes are scheduled for 1975.

Goodspeed, a University of Chicago professor of Greek, translated the New Testament in the American idiom. He avoided such terms as "thee," "thou," "makest," and others similar, even when God was addressed. This translation, which appeared in 1923, is based on the Wescott-Hort text. Four years later, Smith, a Baptist from London and Professor of Bible in America, translated the Old Testament. He endeavored not to be slavishly literal, yet his work was not a paraphrase either. He retained the "Thee"'s and "Thou"'s only when God was addressed. His work is mentioned here because it was combined in 1931 with Goodspeed's, revised in 1939, and published by the University of Chicago Press as *The Complete Bible, An American Translation*.

Moffat's *A New Translation of the Bible* appeared in 1926 in modern, colloquial British English and was revised in 1935. It uses "Eternal" for "Lord" and "Jehovah" except for "Lord of Hosts." Someone has said, "It often caught the deeper significance of a passage where more literal translations failed." It is more a paraphrase than a translation.

At least three reasons were given for attempting another translation - the *Revised Standard Version* (RSV) of 1946 (New Testament) and 1952 (Old Testament):

1. The King James Version is inadequate.
2. New sources of knowledge have been discovered.
3. The ERV and ASV did not eliminate previous inadequacies.

The aim in translating was to allow the best Greek text to say what is meant in plain, modern English. Many scholars agree that it did; some do not. While it presents a language which is contemporary, it seems to detract from the deity of Christ in some of its renderings. Some of its words are still cumbersome or could have been translated more accurately. The RSV is a revision of the ASV, ERV and KJV. It is more readable than the others in that it makes use of quotation marks, arranges poetical passages in poetical form, and places important variant readings (from manuscripts) into the footnotes.

J.B. Phillips produced *The New Testament in Modern English* in 1958. It was first published in sections and finally in a complete volume by Macmillan Company. It, too, is a paraphrase rather than a translation.

The *New American Standard Bible*, produced in this country, is a revision of the American Standard of 1901. Its authors aimed at preserving the essential characteristics of the ASV and presenting an accurate translation from the original. It appeared in 1971.

*The New English Bible*, New Testament, published in England in 1961, aimed at giving us a new translation from the original Greek, not a revision. This was to be a thought for thought translation, rather than a word for word.

Jay Green, in his preface to *King James II* (1971), contends that the RSV and NEB are presenting a new Bible to the people because of omissions, additions, imprecise translations and changes, and accuses the revisors of rewriting the Bible to suit their own tastes. *King James II* is an attempt to present the old Bible in a form people can read and understand. More than 1000 hours of prestudy convinced Green that Tyndale and the translators of the KJV used the best text as basis for their works. Elizabethan English is removed from this Bible and replaced by modern English, but not slang. Words added for clarification are again in italics, which is not the case in the RSV and NEB.

[Addendum: In 1963, a Lutheran pastor by the name of William Beck published *The New Testament in the Language of*

*Today*. Beck's philosophy was that the Bible should be written the everyday language of the people so that everyone can understand it. Although Beck was very careful about preserving the thoughts of the original languages, his work is what is called a dynamic equivalence (when a translator tries to take the meaning of the original languages and put them into comparable expressions from our own day). After his death in 1966, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod encouraged Concordia Publishing House to produce Beck's entire translation of the Bible, which happened in 1976 under the title: *The Holy Bible - An American Translation*.

In 1978 the International Bible Society published the *New International Version* which was produced by a team of 115 transdenominational Biblical Scholars with the goal of providing a translation with clear and natural English. The NIV is also considered a dynamic equivalence.

Finally, there is one more translation that we should look at: The *New King James Version* was published in 1982 as a revision of the King James Version of 1611. They had as their stated purpose, "To preserve the authority and accuracy, as well as the rhythm and beauty, of the original King James while making it understandable to Twentieth Century readers." This translation was also produced by a group of transdenominational scholars from all over the world. The NKJV is what is considered a complete equivalence since it tries to keep the meaning and structure of the original language.]

There are many, many translations of the Bible into the English language. Just to compile a list of them would involve several pages, say nothing of making a few brief comments concerning each. Let this suffice as a listing of the more noteworthy and popular versions. Furthermore, to evaluate each of them extensively as pertains to their merits and demerits would involve a volume in itself. This has already been done by some, and often reliably so; their writings are available. Topics revolving around a comparison of the various recent translations could well be, and have already been, suggested for area delegate conferences.