



# Books in Review

## THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO BIBLE TRANSLATIONS

by Ron Rhodes

Harvest House Publishers, 272 pages, \$13.99

Choosing a Bible from among the variety of English-language translations available today can be a daunting task. Apologist and scholar Ron Rhodes' latest work can be a useful guide in making that choice. The publisher defines his book as "an indispensable guide to help readers through the maze of choosing a translation." *The Complete Guide to Bible Translations* is that and more.

Rhodes prefaces the book by discussing "Why Choosing the Right Bible Translation is Important," and provides an excellent overview of the history of Bible translations — all the way from the Septuagint (LXX) to the King James Version. Along the way, the reader is introduced to Jerome, Wycliffe, and Tyndale. He then spends the next nearly 50 pages discussing and critiquing the difficulties and theories of translating the Bible, and assesses the debate over gender-inclusive language. He explains idioms, figures of speech, euphemisms, and more. Also studied are the *pros* and *cons* of both translation philosophies that have emerged among scholars: formal equivalence (word-for-word) and dynamic equivalence (thought-for-thought). If all this sounds beyond a layman's comprehension, it's not. Rhodes has a knack for taking what could be difficult subject matter and presenting it in an easy-to-read and understandable fashion.

Rhodes delves into 20 of the most popular translations, including the King James Version, the New King James Version, the New International Version, the New American Standard Bible, the English Standard Version, and the New Living Translation. In each review he presents a historical overview, the motives behind the translation, the philosophy and procedure, samples of Bible passages from the version (the same verses are used throughout for contrast and comparison), and finally the benefits and drawbacks of the translation. Woven throughout are descriptions of nuances — such as grade-reading levels — of the version surveyed. While not the first such publication to explore a history and evaluation of English Bible translations, it is a summary of facts and details

unparalleled in any single volume currently available. The endnotes and bibliography provide more resources for study of Bible translations and the transmission of Scripture.

Beyond the scope of what many see as reliable and trustworthy translations for serious Bible study and reading, Rhodes includes overviews of translations which some have regarded as questionable. Eugene Peterson's *The Message*, is one example. After considering its history and procedure and giving a benefit or two, Rhodes discusses several of the version's concerns, including, "Some reviewers have commented that some of Peterson's renderings seem awkward. For example, in John 1:1 we read: 'The Word was first, the Word present to God, God present to the Word'" (pg. 186). Two Catholic translations (the New Jerusalem Bible and the New American Bible) are also critiqued.

A final chapter is devoted to helping the reader choose the best translation and the best Bible. Given the broad range of factors involved — such as by whom, and for what the translation is used — Rhodes notes that there is no single correct answer. He does, however, provide plenty of suggestions — both spiritual and mundane — to assist his readers in making a wise choice. Of course, Rhodes instructs the most important aspect is: "Once you find a Bible you really like, based on the considerations above, *read it daily!*" (pg. 225).

The book includes five appendices, which briefly examine the textual basis of modern translations, that is, primary New and Old Testament sources including the Textus Receptus, Nestle-Aland Novum Testamentum Graece (which is the standard Greek version for most modern translations), the Septuagint, Dead Sea Scrolls, and more; the rendering of the Divine Name (YHWH); why the Apocrypha is not found in non-Catholic translations; an analysis of the "King James Only" controversy; and a warning about cultic translations (specifically Joseph Smith's *Inspired Version* and the Jehovah's Witnesses' *New World Translation*). While not exhaustive, these latter studies provide a quick and helpful overview of those subjects.

Setting aside the obviously flawed cultic translations or the narrow mindset of the "King James Only" school, choosing a Bible translation could be likened to selecting an automobile. *The Complete Guide to Bible Translations* is a bit like picking up a copy of *Consumer Reports* before heading to the auto dealership.

—MKG

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