

My Bible Versions Experiences

By Gary F. Zeolla

This article is Chapter One in the book *Differences Between Bible Versions*. This 330 page book should be available by the summer of this year from the publisher [AuthorHouse](#) and from conventional and online bookstores. The book provides further details on all the subjects raised in this article. This article is the only full chapter from the book posted on this Web site.

I have struggled much over the subject of Bible versions and which Bible to use. Below is an overview of my experiences in dealing with this controversial subject.

Initial Bible Versions Experiences

My experience with the Bible began when my brother gave me a *New International Version* (NIV) of the Bible in March of 1983. I read though it three times before I even became a Christian in the winter of 1986.

But then I purchased an interlinear—*George Berry's Interlinear New Testament* to be exact. The Greek text in it is the *Textus Receptus* (TR). *The King James Version* (KJV) is in the margin. Using this interlinear did two things for me. First, it introduced me to the question of textual variants. At the bottom of almost every page are textual variant footnotes. They compare the TR to seven other published Greek texts. Now at first sight this looked like a lot. At least one variant on every page of the Bible! It can't be that reliable! However, as I looked at these variants I found that for the most part they were not that significant. There were some that seemed to matter. But overall, the differences were more "nit-picking" to me than anything else. So my previous studies about the textual integrity of the New Testament were confirmed, not hurt by this information.¹

Second, I began comparing my NIV to Berry's word-for-word English translation below each Greek word. It did not take very long for me to realize that the NIV simply did not match up with this word-for-word translation. The preacher of the church I was attending at the time used the *New American Standard Bible* (NASB). So I purchased the NASB version of *Ryrie's Study Bible*. Comparing the NASB with Berry's translation I found that it did match up much more closely than the NIV.

I also purchased Alfred Marshall's *NASB-NIV Parallel New Testament in Greek and English: with Interlinear Translation*. It has the Greek text with word-for-word English translation in the middle column, the NASB in the left-hand column and the NIV on the right.²

This book enabled me to easily compare the NASB and the NIV with another word-for-word translation. And once again, the NIV was proving to be less than reliable while the NASB matched up with Marshall's translation rather nicely.

So I switched to the NASB as my primary Bible. Since I like to have a light-weight Bible to carry with me, I later bought a burgundy, leather-back, slim-line NASB. This edition became the Bible that I took to church and Bible studies. About this time, I also purchased *The Comparative Study Bible* (CSB). This hefty book contained the KJV, NIV, NASB, and *Amplified Bible* in parallel columns. So I could now easily compare four different translations.

I also purchased Jay P. Green's *Hebrew-Greek-English Interlinear Bible*. Along with the original languages for both the Old Testament and the New Testament, it has Green's word-for-word English translation below each Hebrew and Greek word and Strong's concordance numbers above each word. In the margin is *The Literal Translation of the Bible* (LITV for "Literal Version").³

So my Bible studies consisted of comparing the four versions in the parallel Bible along with the readings in my various interlinears. I then purchased additional study aids coded to Strong's numbers. With these aids, and Green's interlinear, I had some access to the original languages before even learning Hebrew or Greek.⁴

This study further convinced me that the NIV was not a reliable version. Again, the NIV did not match up with Green's word-for-word translation either.

The Amplified was an interesting version. It claims to express "nuances" of the Greek text. This seemed to be a worthwhile goal. But as I studied it, the "amplifications" seemed rather excessive. In the CSB it always was the longest on each page for each of the versions. And at times the amplifications seemed rather conjectural. It also was very awkward to read. So I could not see using it as my primary Bible.

The KJV compared rather closely with the word-for-word translations in the interlinears. But the Elizabethan English was simply too difficult to read. But then, even the NASB had all those "thee's" and "thou's" in it too. So I was not really satisfied with any the versions in the CSB.

Seminary Experiences

In March 1988 I moved from the Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania area to Denver, Colorado to attend Denver Seminary. I dragged all the above mentioned and many other books with me.⁵

I was especially looking forward to studying Hebrew and Greek at seminary. My Bible experiences so far had already showed me how valuable studying the original languages could be. And I was not disappointed. Learning Hebrew and Greek really helped to "open" the Bible up to me. It also led me to further struggle over the subject of Bible versions.

Greek Studies:

I took Greek first at seminary. A couple of the professors worked on the translation of the NIV. They strongly promoted the "dynamic equivalence" method of translation the NIV uses. The NIV preface explains that this translation principle seeks to express the "thought" or "meaning" of the original authors (p.x).

But I could never seem to accept this theory. It always seemed to me that the purpose of a translation was to simply render in English what God SAID, not to try to express what God MEANT by what he said. The latter was the job of commentators, not translators.

So I guess I agreed with the translation principle that was used in the KJV, "This principle of complete (or formal) equivalence seeks to preserve all of the information in the text, while presenting it in good literary form.... Complete equivalence translates fully, in order to provide an English text that is both accurate and readable" (p.xxi).

Our class assignments included translating portions of Scripture. The comments I sometimes received on the translations I handed in were that they were "too literal." But I simply felt very uncomfortable about "changing" God's words to make it easier to understand the "meaning" of a passage.

The Greek text we used at seminary was *The Greek New Testament* by the United Bible Societies. This Greek text is known as the "Critical Text" (CT). It was simply assumed at seminary that the CT was to be preferred to the TR.

But I began to do much studying on my own. And my personal studies showed me that the TR was more reliable than my professors made it out to be. I also read about the "Majority Text" (MT). The arguments in its favor seemed to make quite a bit of sense.⁶

Now at this time I was not yet convinced that the TR or MT were to be preferred to the CT. But they at least deserved a hearing. So I purchased a leather-back, compact *New King James Version* (NKJV). Its textual footnotes enabled me to compare the TR which the NKJV is based on with the CT and the MT.

As I compared these footnotes it became apparent that the TR and MT were very similar. The footnotes indicating a difference between the TR and the MT were few and far between. Only in the Revelation were there many such variants. But even then, the differences generally were not that significant.⁷ Most of the significant variants that I had previously noticed by studying Berry's interlinear were between the TR/MT versus the CT.

In addition, the NKJV followed the same "formal (or complete) equivalence" translation principle that the KJV did. However, the NKJV does not have all those "thee's" and "thou's" in it that I found so awkward in the KJV and NASB. So I very much liked my newest Bible.

Hebrew Studies:

Next I studied Hebrew at seminary. On the first day of class the professor said that learning Hebrew would show how really bad most translations are. In particular, he did not seem to be very fond of the NIV. His comments about it were always somewhat "veiled" given that some of his colleagues had worked on its production. But his displeasure with the NIV came through nevertheless.

As I studied Hebrew I found out that the professor was right. Most translations are rather bad. For instance, it was at this time that the National Council of Churches published the *New Revised Standard Version* (NRSV).

I had read a couple of articles praising this new version before it came out. One thing that intrigued me was that it was to have extensive textual footnotes. So when it was published I purchased a nice "Reference Edition" from the seminary's bookstore.

I took it home and started going through it. I got all the way to the second half of the second verse of the Bible before becoming disappointed. The passage read, "while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters."

I started comparing other versions. In every one of these, except one, this passage was a reference to the Holy Spirit. The only version that rendered the verse in a manner similar to the NRSV was the *New World Translation* (NWT), the "Bible" of Jehovah's Witnesses. This did not sit too well with me.

So with my now limited knowledge of Hebrew I did some studying. For several reasons that I won't pursue here, my studies convinced me that the rendering of the NRSV and NWT were simply unjustified. Moreover, the NKJV seemed to be the most accurate of all the versions I checked, "And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters."⁸

As I studied the NRSV further, I found many others places where I felt its translations were rather poor, to say the least. Also, as advertised, it did have extensive textual footnotes. But it was based on the CT. And

as I continued to study the "textual" question I eventually became convinced that the CT simply was not as reliable as the TR/ MT. So with some anguish I realized that I wasted my money on this new version and put it aside.

On the other hand, as I continued to study Hebrew and to use my new NKJV it did seem to be rather accurate. So the money I spent on it was proving to be money well spent.

Leaving Seminary:

After my experiences at seminary, my new compact NKJV was now my primary Bible. I had abandoned the use of the NASB which I had brought to Denver with me. Also, at this point, I wasn't real thrilled with the CSB anymore. Since three of the four versions in it were based on the CT I really did not use it much. But I lugged it back to Pennsylvania anyways. However, later I ended up giving it away.

Of my three interlinears, Green's *Interlinear Bible* was proving to be the most helpful. The interlinear itself was a great aid in studying the original languages. And the LITV in the margin seemed even more accurate than my NKJV, though a little "stilted" in its wording.

So I packed up all my books and other stuff and headed back to Pennsylvania in December of 1990.⁹

Book Experiences

After returning from seminary to the Pittsburgh area I started Darkness to Light ministry in the summer of 1991. The first issue of [Darkness to Light newsletter](#) was published in July of 1991. From the start I used the NKJV as the "default" version for the newsletter.

Initial articles in the newsletter centered on the essentials of the "the faith" (see Jude 3). But eventually I knew I would have to write on more "controversial" subjects as well (Acts 20:26,27). Given the amount of time I had spent studying the subject of Bible versions it seemed like a logical topic.

I wrote one article that I was going to use in the newsletter, then another, then another. It quickly became apparent that this was simply too difficult of a subject to be dealt with adequately in a short article or even in a series of articles.

So I collected together the articles I had written, added a couple of more, and decided it would be best to publish them in a book format instead. In the spring of 1994 the first edition of *Differences Between Bible Versions* was published by Brentwood Christian Press.

In the book I expressed my reasons for why I thought "dynamic equivalence" was not an appropriate method for translating the Bible. I also detailed why I thought the CT was not as reliable as the TR/ MT.

I advocated "formal equivalence" in translation and the use of the TR/ MT. I recommended the use of any version that adhered to these two criteria. These included the KJV, NKJV, and LITV, along with the then recently published *Modern King James Version* (MKJV).¹⁰

The reaction I got to my little (95 page) book surprised me. I thought that I would get a bunch of angry letters from NIV users for saying that their Bible version, as compared to the KJV or NKJV, is a "less dependable rendering of the Word of God."¹¹

But instead, what I got was mainly angry letters from "KJV Only" people screaming at me for actually recommending the use of any version other than the KJV. Many of the letter writers even included "tracts" condemning the NKJV.

I had tried to prepare for the "KJV Only" people by including a chapter in my book critiquing just such a tract.¹² But I was not prepared for the venom that flowed from some of these letters and tracts.

This anger seemed misplaced to me. The differences between the KJV and NKJV simply were not that great, in my mind, to elicit such a response. I wrote an article in my newsletter using these tracts as an example of what I thought was improper "judging" on the part of Christians.¹³

Computing Experiences

In September of 1995 I got my first computer.¹⁴ One of the first programs I purchased was the *Online Bible*. Included on it are the KJV, MKJV, LITV, and many other versions, including the Hebrew and Greek texts. It also has a wealth of other study aids on it.

But "missing" on it were the NKJV and an interlinear. So in November I purchased Biblesoft's *PC Study Bible*. It has both of these, along with the KJV and other versions, and many study aids.

The use of these two programs makes the comparing of Bible versions, along with Bible study in general, very easy. I set the LITV as the "default" version on the former program and the NKJV on the latter. I would constantly have both programs open and go back and forth between them.

I also eventually purchased a handheld PC (H/PC). The first program I bought for it was Laridian's *PocketBible* with the NKJV text.¹⁵ The use of a H/PC with this program on it enables me to have a portable Bible program. In addition, with the permission of Jay P. Green the translator of the LITV, I copied the entire text of the LITV off of the Internet onto my H/PC.¹⁶ So I now carry my H/PC to church and Bible studies rather than a hardcopy version of the Bible.

The use of all this technology only confirmed what my previous studies had showed me: namely, the NIV and similar versions are simply not reliable while the four above mentioned versions are faithful to the original texts.

Once I got used to this computing stuff, I decided to set up a Web site for Darkness to Light (www.dtl.org). It went online in July 1996. Initially posted on this site were all the articles from all the back issues of *Darkness to Light*. Then in December of the same year I added the full text of my first book.

This subject area has proven to be the most popular section on the Web site. I have received more e-mail on Bible versions than other subject covered. And once again, most of the e-mail I have received has been from "KJV Only" people, or at least, "KJV first" people. I have heard barely a whimper from advocates of the NIV and similar versions.

I have also received some e-mail from advocates of the MKJV and LITV telling me I should be advocating these versions instead of the NKJV. In response, I have basically tried to explain that I think the KJV, NKJV, LITV, and MKJV are all worthwhile versions. If someone thinks one of these is "better" than the others that is fine with me. I use all four.

What really bothers me is, while advocates of these four versions are firing salvos at each other, sales of the NIV and similar versions are skyrocketing.

Conclusion

So after all of the above experiences, where do I now stand in regards to Bible versions? First off, I rarely use versions based on the CT or which use a dynamic equivalence method of translating.

My personal studies have shown me that the CT is not as reliable as the TR/ MT. And when I need help understanding what the God meant by what He said, I consult the many commentaries or other study aids I own in hardcopy format and on the above mentioned Bible programs.

The only times I would ever consult such versions would be to write an article or respond to questions on a particular version or verse in a such a version.

As for my primary Bible, I doubt I will ever switch to the KJV. In my opinion, it is no more accurate than the NKJV, but it is much more difficult for me to read. I never liked Shakespeare in high school and I see no reason to struggle with that kind of English while reading the Bible.

The MKJV is somewhat more accurate than the NKJV. But the difference is not that great. And the MKJV is also somewhat more difficult to read. So I see no reason to switch to it.

The only version I have seriously considered switching to is the LITV. It is definitely more accurate than any of the above versions. But it can be rather stilted in its wording. For my own personal studies I have gotten used to it, but I think it might be too awkward to use on my Web site.

And finally, I recently completed my own translation of the New Testament. It is called the *Analytical-Literal Translation* (ALT).¹⁷ For working on this project, I purchased a new Bible program, *BibleWorks for Windows*. It is much more oriented towards the original languages than the above two programs.

The ALT is similar to the LITV in that is a very literal version, but the LITV is based on the TR while the ALT uses the MT. I also tried to make it as readable as possible. So I am now, of course, also using the ALT in my own studies and writings. I even copied the files for all the New Testament books onto my H/PC. So I now have the ALT, the NKJV, and the LITV with me whenever I go to church or Bible studies.

Footnotes:

¹See Chapter Six: "Introduction to Textual Criticism."

²The Greek text used in Marshall's interlinear is the 21st edition of Eberhard Nestle's *Noveum Testamentum Graece*, a CT type of text.

³Green's interlinear is available in a one volume or four volume format (three for the OT and one for the NT). The newest edition of the NT volume now also has the KJV in the right-hand margin. It is bound in a black, leather cover, all of which makes for a very nice-looking and helpful edition.

⁴Such study aids are available from [Books-A-Million](#).

⁵"Dragged" is the correct term here. I pulled a rented "trailer" behind my car all the way from the Pittsburgh area to Denver. After three days and 1500 miles, I arrived in Denver in the middle of a snowstorm. Quite a trip!

⁶ Some of the books I studied are listed in the bibliographies at the end of the various chapters in this book.

⁷ See Chapter Ten: "Significant Textual Variants: TR vs. MT" for detailed discussions of the most significant differences between these two texts.

⁸See Chapter Eighteen: "Two NCC Bible Versions" for a detailed discussion of Genesis 1:2 and the NRSV in general.

⁹ This time, rather than "dragging" my books, I mailed them! I packed them all up in about two-dozen boxes, took them to the post office and mailed them back to Pennsylvania. I was then able to drive straight through from Denver to the Pittsburgh area—1500 miles in 32 hours. Quite a trip again!

¹⁰Both the LITV and MKJV are published by Christian Literature World.

¹¹From page 48 in my first book, in a chapter titled "Three Popular Bible Versions" (see Chapter Five).

¹²Critiqued in a chapter originally titled, "Is the KJV Inspired?" In this edition of this book, I have expanded this chapter into an entire section. I wanted to be prepared for the KJV only onslaught this time!

¹³This article was titled, "Judge Not" It is now posted on Darkness to Light's Web site at: www.dtl.org/dtl/article/judge-not.htm

¹⁴Actually, I got my first computer in July of 1995 from a computer "superstore." But there was a problem with the processor that the store never could seem to fix right. So after two months, during which time their repair department had it longer than I did, I returned it. I then bought a new computer from a small, local computer store.

¹⁵Laridian's *PocketBible* is available from their Web site: www.laridian.com . Along with the NKJV, many other Bible versions and Bible study aids can be purchased for the *PocketBible*.

¹⁶The LITV is posted on A Voice in a Wilderness's Web site at: www.cet.com/~voice/litv/litv.htm .

¹⁷The ALT is available from the publisher AuthorHouse(www.AuthorHouse.com) and from conventional and online bookstores.

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PC Study Bible. Seattle: Biblesoft, 1996.

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Most of the Bible versions, study Bibles, and interlinears mentioned in this article are available from [Books-A-Million](#). Below are direct links to such items in the order in which they are mentioned in the article.

[New International Version](#) ..

George Berry's [Interlinear Greek/English New Testament](#) .

[King James Version](#) .

[New American Standard Bible](#) (NAS77 and NAS95). Copyright .

[Ryrie's Study Bible: NASB](#) .
[Alfred Marshall's NASB-NIV Parallel New Testament in Greek and English](#) .
[Comparative Study Bible](#) .
[Amplified Bible](#) .
[J.P. Green's Interlinear Hebrew-Greek-English Bible](#) .
[Literal Translation of the Bible](#) .
[Greek New Testament](#) (United Bible Societies).
[New King James Version](#) .
[New Revised Standard Version](#) .
[Modern King James Version](#) .
[PC Study Bible: Complete Reference Library](#) .

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