

Saturday "Sermon"

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Which Bible?

You may know that 2011 marks the 400th anniversary of the King James Version of the Bible. While it's likely that no other book has had the effect that the KJV has had and continues to have on Western culture, there are many other translations available today, especially in English. The many choices easily prove confusing, though, and perhaps a quick overview would be helpful.

While the language of the KJV is elegant and wonderful, our language has changed so much over 400 years that the KJV is not easily understood by many today. The translation almost needs a translator in order for its meaning to be clear—which was one of the main reasons for the KJV in the first place: so that ordinary people could read and understand the Bible for themselves.

There are other good reasons for using a modern translation of the Bible, but how might one choose among those available? I suggest that you consider a "committee translation" rather than a translation by just one or two people, so that you have the benefit of many minds cross-checking each other (the KJV was a committee translation). I also suggest that you consider translations done by theologically conservative, non-denominational groups, which are less likely to be driven by particular doctrinal perspectives.

Bible translations tend to emphasize either word-for-word accuracy to the original languages or thought-for-thought accuracy to the meaning the original readers would probably have understood. For word-for-word accuracy, the translation I use most these days is the English Standard Version, or ESV. For thought-for-thought accuracy, I enjoy using the New Living Translation (NLT), which uses language much like we use in everyday life. In my own study, I frequently use the KJV as an anchor, since that's the version in which I've done most of my memorization over the years.

The translation that seems to have become "the KJV of today" is the New International Version, or NIV. The NIV stands pretty much at the center, making a concerted effort to stay close to the original text while rendering the meaning of that text in an easily understandable form. Both the New Living and the New International versions can be found with the Life Application Bible study notes, which is one of the least agenda-driven of any study Bible available today. The ESV also has quite excellent study notes.

The impetus for this reflection is that a 2011 version of the NIV will become available next month, the first major revision in almost thirty years. But whichever version you choose, the most important thing is that you actually read and study it!