

# Bible Translation Basics

## Basic Data About the Text of the Bible

- The original texts of our sixty-six biblical books, as far as we know, were Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts.
- As far as we know, none of the extant texts are the originals. Some of the oldest date from the second century, and the oldest complete New Testament is from roughly the 5<sup>th</sup> century and the oldest complete Old Testament is from roughly the eleventh century.
- Over centuries and through heated debates (that persist even to right now), generations of scholars have compiled the texts that form the basis of our English translations. (Look at the notes in a couple versions of John 8:1-11.)

## Kinds of Translations

- Literal: Derived from the Latin *litteris* (letters), this sort of translation takes the smallest meaningful element in a language and strives to bring each such element (usually words but sometimes morphemes) into the English translation.
- Dynamic Equivalence: Derived from the Greek *dynamis* (power), this sort of translation looks at clauses rather than morphemes as the place to start translating. The aim is to produce entire English phrases that are analogous to entire Greek or Hebrew phrases.
- All translations fall somewhere on a continuum between these two. (Look up and compare 1 Samuel 25:21-22 in newer translations first, then KJV)

## He, She, They, and Why They Make People So Mad

- Whenever the New Testament uses the Greek *adelphoi* (a masculine plural word), a translator must decide between translating it as an address to Christians in general or just to the “brothers” exclusive of the “sisters” (James 1:2).
- Whenever the New Testament uses the Greek *anthropos* (a masculine singular word) translators must decide between translating it as “human being” or as “man” exclusive of “woman” (the Greek word *aner*, which is more clearly gendered, also throws in a monkey wrench). (James 1:12)

Since the connotations of words change, and since people translate Bibles for the living rather than the dead, some translations prefer to go the dynamic equivalence route. Since the Bible has been a sacred text from oldest times and comes inspired by a God who is the same yesterday, today, and forever, other translations prefer to go the literal route.

## Translation Exercise:

In groups of two or three, use this text and the concordance below to make as smooth an English translation as you can. Remember that the Hebrew text goes right to left, not vice versa and that Hebrew word order is not that of English.

לְדָוִד מִזְמוֹר 1

יְהוָה רָעִי לֹא אֶחְסָר

בְּנְאוֹת דֶּשֶׁא יִרְבִּיצֵנִי 2

מִיַּעַל מְנוּחוֹת יְנַהֵלֵנִי

## Concordance

אֶחְסָר	I will lack
בְּנְאוֹת	in oases/fields
דֶּשֶׁא	plant life
יְהוָה	divine name/YHWH/LORD
יְנַהֵלֵנִי	he/she/it is guiding me
יִרְבִּיצֵנִי	he/she/it is causing me to recline
לֹא	not
לְדָוִד	to/for/by David
מִיַּעַל	on/by waters
מִזְמוֹר	Psalms
מְנוּחוֹת	of rest
רָעִי	is being shepherd of/to me