

Abba Hillel Silver Collection Digitization Project

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The ever-living book, 1952.

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October 19, 1952

A new translation of the Bible has just come off the press and it arouses considerable interest because any translation of this world classic would arouse interest. Translations are very difficult. It is very difficult to translate from one modern language into another modern language, and it is even much more difficult to translate an ancient classic into a modern language because they represent different worlds, different cultures. Their concepts - the same concepts - have different values. Those who translated the Bible at any time during recent centuries had before them a number of manuscript texts, nearly all of them full of corrupt texts. As these manuscripts were copies through the generations and through the centuries, a crept number of errors crept into them, as only natural. These copies frequently would omit words, sometimes whole phrases, sometimes put words in the wrong place. In the case of the Hebrew manuscripts, quite a number of the letters look very much alike - a "bes" and a "koch", a "daled" and a "rashe", a "bov" and a "yot". It is very easy for a copyist to make a mistake in transcribing from one manuscript to another. And this is true even of the printed book, not merely of the written book.

In one of the Bibles which wasprinted in 1631, the seventh commandment, "Thou shalt not commit adultery", was printed with the slight ommision of the word "not".

That Bible has since been known as the wicked Bible. In another Bible printed in 1727, the parable in St. Luke - the parable of the vineyard - is printed as the parable of the vinegar. It is very human to err, and in these manuscripts, a great number - hundreds and thousands - of errors have crept in so that it is very difficult to know the actual meaning frequently of a phrase or a verse. And they are obscure words, words which have a variety of meaning. There are nuances and over-tones, one language which they do not possess in another language. And then there are certain words in one language which do not have exact equivalents in another language. There is no adequate corresponding term for them. And then there are in-grown idioms which only those who are acquainted with the flow and the fluidity of the language would

understand, which to an outsider, even if he knows the language, would be obscure.

For example, if somebody in India - let's say - who knows English, would come across this item, I wonder whether he would be able to make sense of it, and I wonder what he would do if he had to translate it. This is from the New York Times. It is headed, "An Old Indian Scalper".

Lopat, an old Indian scalper from way back, was Casey's starter in a slick campaign mapped out some time ago, and the idea worked like a charm. For though the chunky southpaw was tagged for eight blows in his five and one-third innings on the mound, he gave up only one tally. Then, when it looked as though Eddie might be tiring in the sixth, Casey pulled the switch and the Indians hit the sidetrack.

Now, this is a description of a game which played here in Cleveland between the Indians and the Yankees just a few weeks ago. Now, to one who knows the game, it's all easy, but suppose a man found this manuscript 2,000 years from now and tried to decipher it. Well, exactly those same things creep into ancient texts. Let me give you an example in the Bible.

In the Book of Samuel, it is recorded that during the wars between the houses of Saul and David that Abner, who was the commander of Saul's forces, said to Joab, who commanded David's forces, "Let the young men, I pray thee, arise and play for us."

PThen there arose 12 for Saul and 12 servants of David, and each caught his fellow by the head and thrust his sword in his fellow's side so they fell down together and the battle was very sore that day." And commentators had a very difficult time, have to this day, to explain this very obscure passage in the Book of Samuel II. What sort of play was this in the midst of a deadly war between the dynasties? What occasion was there for an athletic contest between young men, and how did such an athletic contest terminate in a bloody mutual slaughter?

One of the numerous reliefs which were discovered recently in a place called Tel-Halat, dated from the 10th century before the common era, and some of these reliefs describing various battle scenes and battle subjects. There is a relief in clay which shows two figures, two fighters standing opposite each other, each catching

his opponent by the head while thrusting his sword into the opponent's side. Now, what Abner proposed to Joab was not a sport or a game, but a duel, a lift and death duel which was very common in ancient warfare, whereby selected men from one army, a small number - sometimes only one - fought with selected men from the other army, and the outcome of the whole battle depended upon which side, which group won, asthe struggle between David and Goliath. Instead of the whole army joining in in mass struggle, they selected one or two or five, or twelve, as in this case, from each side and let them fight it out. Whoever won - that determined the outcome of the in this sentence does not mean lads or young boys, but battle, so that the it means picked warriors. And "let them play" doesn't mean to engage in some kind of a mort, but to engage in a duel, and "they fell down together" means that this struggle between the twelve on the one side and the twelve on the other was left indecisive because the warriors on both sides fell altogether, as a result of which there was no alternative but for the whole army on both sides to join into battle, and the battle was for Israel that day.

I point to this as an indication of the difficulties which are involved in the translation of any ancient document into modern speech. And then there is the difficulty also to decide how you want to translate an ancient document. Do you want to translate it literally, word by word, so that you can get an exact - as exact as you can get it - meaning. Such a translation is frequently very stilted. Or do you want to translate it freely, giving you the general meaning of the phrase, of the paragraph but without getting an exact rendition. Well, it's very difficult to decide, who you will recall translated Homer's "Iliad" from the Greek into the English, wrote "No literal translation can be just to an excellent original in a superior language; but it is a great mistake to imagine (as many have done) that a rash paraphrase can make amends for this general defect."

Well, it takes, on the one hand, an exacting kind of reverent scholarship, and on the other hand, a very delicate ear for the niceties of language, and a fine imagination to achieve a satisfying translation. Somewhere in between the literal and the paraphrase lies the solution, and such a translation will give you enough of the original in content and in spirit to make a reading of it, when one cannot read the original, really rewarding. There have been some great translations of the ancient classics of mankind.

Now, there have been many translations of the Bible into nearly all the languages and dialects of mankind, perhaps a thousand translations of the Bible. Those of the Hebrew Old Testament and of the Greek New Testament. The oldest translations of the Cld Testament were made into the Aramaic and into the Greek - Aramaic for the Jews living in Asia, who spoke Aramaic, and Greek for the Jews of Egypt and the Mediterranean world, whose daily speech was Greek. The Greek translation was the famous Septuagint which was made in the third century before the common era. The Aramaic translations were made a little later - one of them before the common era, one made by a proselyte called Onkales. There are also two other famous Aramaic translations - one the Targun Jonathan, a translation of Jonathan, and the Targun Jerusalem.

In the fourth century a church father, a Christian, made what came to be a very famous translation of the Hebrew original into Latin, St. Jerome. That came to be known as the Vulgate. That was the standard Bible of the Christian world for 1,000 years, the Latin Bible.

Translations into modern languages - into Germany into French, into English - came very late. They began to make their appearance about the time of the Renaissance. Many of them appeared with the break of the Reformation. The whole idea of the Reformation, as you will recall, was to challenge the authority of the church, of the

vatican, the Pope. And the only way the reformers could challenge that authority was with the authority of the Bible. They pitted the living word of God, as interpreted by the inner light of a human being, against the ecclesiastical authority of the church.

And so, the Protestant reformers regarded it as of supreme importance to make the Bible available to all people, and inasmuch as Latin was not known by the rank and file of people, except to the church people, to the priests, it became incumbent upon them to translate the Vulgate into the vernacular - into German, into English, into French, into Dutch, etc. And so, in the 16th century we have a sudden outcrop wixew - a very large number of translations of the Bible into modern language. And these translations of the late 15th and throughout the 16th centuries were almost coterminous with the invention of printing, or rather, with the beginning of the use of movable type in Western Eruope, which is identified with the name of Johan Gutenberg. Of course, printing was invented long before that in China, just as the printing paper was a Chinese invention. The Chinese used printing long before the Europeans did, but about the middle of the 15th century the Europeans began to turn to printing and, of course, the first book which they printed was naturally the most popular of all books, the one that they needed most, and that was the Bible. So 500 years ago Johan Gutenberg printed in Mainz the first Bible which was, of course, the Latin Bible, the Vulgate Bible. But soon thereafter, the Bible came to be printed into the vernacular, into the national languages of the peoples of Europe.

Now, the Jews were not far behind in printing their Bible in the Hebrew, and we have the first printing of a book of the Bible, the most popular of all the books of the Bible, the Book of Psalms, in Hebrew in 1477 in Belona. While printing was invented in Germany, it spread very rapidly to Italy, which was the home of the Renaissance and where great printing presses were established in Rome and in Venice and in Florence and in Milan and Belona and Jews were very active in this printing business. In 1477, as I said, the Book of Psalms was printed. A few years later, in

1482, the first Torah, the Five Books of Moses, was printed. A few years later, in 1485, the early Prophets were printed, and the first complete Tenach, the first complete 24 books of the Bible, was printed in 1488. There were, of course, many other editions following.

Now, this new translation called the Revised Standard Version, which has just come off the press, is the work of some 32 scholars who worked for fifteen years to produce it. As you may well imagine, it is not an altogether new translation. It is a revision, a revision of an earlier "American Standard Version" which was made approximately 50 years ago, in 1901, which was again a revision of an earlier translation made in 1885, which again was a revision of the famous, the most famous of all translations of the English Bible, the King James version, which was printed in 1611.

Now, you can readily understand why new revisions are called for from time to time. First of all, in the last 50 years a great deal of scientific study has been made in the Bible. A great deal of scientific study has been made in the three languages in which the Bible was written, the Hebrew, the Aramaic and the Greek. And much new insight has been gained into the meaning of words, into grammar and syntax. New manuscripts have been discovered which threw new light upon obscure passages in the Bible. For example, just within the last two years or so, there was discovered north of the Dead Sea in Palestine a collection of manuscripts which scholars maintain date from the Maccabean period which was 200 years approximately before the common era. One of these manuscripts found is a complete text of the Book of Isaiah. That now is the oldest manuscript in Hebrew that we have of any portion of the Bible. Up to now, the oldest manuscript which existed of the Bible dates from about the 10th century of the common era, and of all places, it is in the Leningrad Library so that Stalin can read it whenever he has the heart to.

Now, a comparison between the text of that manuscript, the Dead Sea manuscript, and the Leningrad manuscript, the printed Bible of today reveals many divergencies, many variants of the text - slight in most instances, minor changes, but important ones - important changes. Let me give you one instance of what I mean. There were corrections, so to speak, of the Dead Sea manuscript which were incorporated in this new revised Standard Version of the Bible. In Isaiah 45:2, we read: "And I will go before you and I will make the crooked places straight. The Hebrew reads: means, and the guess that it means crooked places Now, nobody knows what was only a guess to fit in with the general drift of the argument, the thought of that particular chapter. Now, the manuscript discovered in the Dead Sea area reads, with a slight revision of the Hebrew lettering: the mountains. That's a common Hebrew word, and so the text reads: "I will go before you and I will make level the mountains," just as we find in an earlier chapter of Isaiah, "Every val ley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low."

There have been quite a number of archaeological discoveries in the last half a century - excavations which shed new light on geography, on millions of places, on locale - and give a clue to new meaning.

And there is another important meason why new revisions are necessary from time to time. The English of the King James Bible is the English of Shakespeare. The English of the time of Queen Elizabeth. Shakespeare died five years after the King James version was printed. Now, we don't use Shakespeare's English today in our daily talk. The English language has developed in the last 300 years, greatly developed. And there are at least 300 words in the King James version which have an altogether different meaning in English today. For example, the King James version gives you the word "let". "Let me do it," you know - to mean, hinder, keep me from doing it. The word "comprehend" is used in the King James version - comprehend, to mean "overcome". "Ghost" means spirit in the King James version. "Prevent" is used in the sense of precede, the old Latin root. "God appeared to Moses apparently," we

read in the King James version; it actually means, clearly. "Esau was a cunning hunter." It actually means a skillful hunter because cunning in those days meant skillful. "Outlandish women caused Solomon to sin." Solomon was too much of a connoisseur to permit outlandish women to cause him to sin. It actually means that foreign women caused him to sin, but "outlandish" in Shakespeare's day meant out of the country, foreign.

And we no longer use today the words, thou and thee, and wouldst and cometh and hath, peradventure and begats and ye. Those were common words 300 years ago. And so from time to time it becomes desirable and helpful to correct old translations and modernize them in order to give a more accurate rendition, in order to make the book more plain and more readable. This is what the editors of this Revised Standard Version have attempted to do and have, to a large measure, succeeded. It's a good translation.

They took the King James version as their basic translation, which was very wise because no translation ever succeeded in giving the beauty, richness, vitality, the majesty both of the English language and of the Hebrew as did the King James version. The King James translation itself was based on earlier translations. It was based on the famous Minank Tyndale translation, on the translation of Coverdale, on the Matthew translation, the Geneva Bible, on the Great Bible, on the Bishop Bible - any number of translations before. King James, in an effort to reconcile the opinions of all the Protestant sects in his kingdom who were fighting bitterly, because during the first century of the Reformation there were bitter theologic disputes, and they fought over everything - every verse in the Bible - in order to reconcile all these numerous sects. He thought of having an authoritative translation finally made so that all Protestants could use that Bible, and he summoned some 17 scholars and they worked some 5 years to produce what has come to be known as the King James Bible.

Such was its excellence that while, for a time, it had to compete with other translations, in the course of time it assumed supremacy in the Anglo-Sazon world so that for about 250 years it has been the recognized English translation of the Bible. And those who read the preface to this newest translation are entirely correct when they say that this version, King James, entered as no other book has into the making of the personal character and the public institution of the English-speaking peoples. We owe to it an incalculable debt.

Let me give you an example of the delicacy and the quality of the translation of the King James as over against the earlier Bibles - say, the Bishops Bible, which was printed in 1568, I helieve. Well, here is the way Isaiah 2:h reads in the earlier Bible, the Bishop Bible: I selected these verses because they are more or less familiar to you. "They shall breake their swords into Mattockes, and their speares to make sithes: And one people shall not lift up a weapon against another, neither shall they learne to fyght from thenceforth." Here is the way the King James translates the same verse: "They shall beate their swords into plow-shares, and their speares into pruning hookes: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learne warre any more." A far more literary, a far more fluid, a far more exciting translation.

Take another example. This is from Job. The earlier translation: "When the starres of the morning praysed me together, and all the children of God rejoyced."

The King James version: "When the morning starres sang together, and all the sonnes of God shouted for joy." The difference between a good translation and an inspired translation.

Take another example. This is the famous lament of David over the death of Jonathan from the Book of Samuel. The earlier translation: "Woe is me for thee, my brother Ionathan: very kinde hast thou bene unto me: thy love to me was wonderful,

passing the love of women: how are the mighty overthrowen, and the weapons of warre destroyed." Here is the King James Version: "I am distressed for thee, my brother Ionathan, very pleasant hast thou beene unto mee: thy love to mee was wonderfull, passing the love of women. How are the mightie fallen, and the weapons of warre perpished."

I will give you some indication now of the revision of the King James version made in this new Bible which has some very interesting revisions. First of all, let me read you one sentence from the Book of Leviticus 19. In the King James version it reads: "Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shall not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty, but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbor." And here is how this new translation modernizes it so that the modern reader can grasp at once the meaning of that: "You shall do no injustice in judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor." So respect the person of the poor and honor the person of the mighty - which translated, do not be partial to the person of the person of the poor nor defer to the great.

That famous quotation over which many battles were fought from Isaiah 7:14

"A young woman will conceive and give birth to a child". That was taken by the Orthodox church to refer to the Virgin mother of Jesus, and so in the King James version it is translated, "Behold, therefore, the Lord Himself shall give youa sign. Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Immanuel." The new translation entirely correctly translates it, "Therefore, the Lord Himself will give you a sign. Behold a young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."

A very interesting translation is that of Psalm 90: "For all our days are passed away in thy wrath; we spend our years as a tale that is told." That is the way King James translates the Hebrew sentence:

The meaning of the word . means to murmur, to speak, but it also means, to sigh. The King James translation takes it to mean from the root meaning to speak, to delcare. Therefore, it says, "For all our days are passed away in thy wrath; we spend our years as a tale that is told," which is a magnificent translation, a very poetic one. The new translation takes it, "For all our days pass away under thy wrath: our years come to an end like a sigh," which is also a very beautiful translation. You can have your pick.

One good thing this new translation does, it drops the word Jehovah. In one of
the earlier 1901 Bibles, the word for God is always translated, Jehovah, which is a
fantastic translation. It has no authority in Hebrew or in English or in any other
language. The Hebrew word for God has four letters, , which no Jew ever
pronounced. He substituted another word for it, Adonoi - My Master, My Lord - so
when the word appears in the Bible, the person reads Adonoi, a substitute.

Now, for some strange reason the translators of the 1901 Bible took the vowels from
Adonoi, My Lord, and put them under the and got the word Jehovah out of
it. Jehovah is my Shepherd, I shall not want. A very ugly sort of a translation.

King James didn't have it, and so the editors of this new revision go back to the word,
Lord, instead of Jehovah.

There are other interesting revisions, some of them not as fortunate as others.

"If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget her cunning," is translated,

"May my right hand wither." I don't think that that adds much to the text. Neither

is, of course, an exact translation of the Hebrew.

In the Book of Proverbs 32, "A woman of valor who can find." King James says, "Who can find a virtuous woman." The Revised Standard Version says" good wife, who can find?" Well, there, too, you can have your pick.

"Man goeth to his long home," the last chapter in the Book of Ecclesiastes which defines oncoming old age and approaching death, how everything wears down, the whole system wears down. "For a man goeth to his long home," the King James version reads. This new version says, "to his eternal home". I prefer the King James.

"Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness," is the King James translation.

The new translation is, "Worship the Lord in whole array." I don't think it's near as good.

"When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion we were like them that dream," is the translation of Psalm 126. The new translation is, "When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion." Both translations are inaccurate, unfortunately. First of all, the psalm does not refer to an event which has already taken place, but an event which is going to take place. It is a song which the exiles sing prayerfully, looking forward to the time of their restoration, and saying, "When the Lord will return from the captivity of Zion," - that is, when Babylon - "we shall be like unto those who dream. Then our lips will be full of song, etc." It's an incorrect reading of the Hebrew verb, where the tenses are not as sharply defined as in English. There is really no past verb, no present verb, no future verb in Hebrew. There are verbs referring to completed actions and to actions incomplete and to actions continuing into the future, and one has to know that approach to a Hebrew verb in order to get the full sense of the sentence.

An interesting translation of the Hebrew verb, a new translation in the Revised version here, is the Hebrew word which we always translate as mercy, as kindness. "For his mercy endureth forever." They have translated the word to mean steadfast love. While it's a little awkward translation, I thinkit's a good translation because there are other words in Hebrew which mean mercy and kindness.

means something which is steadfast, which is enduring. A Chassid is a pious man who remains loyal to his faith, in spite of all persecution, in spite of all op-

position. Now God's unlike human is of a steadfast, enduring quality. Therefore, they translate it almost throughout the Bible, wherever the word is mentioned as steadfast love.

Well. if I had the time I would go much more into this very interesting comparison of translations. It's a fascinating subject, but the whole purpose of my giving you this discourse this morning is to encourage you to read the Bible. I don't care whether you read the King James or any of the other editions that I have mentioned, or the Revised Standard Version or the Jewish version published by the Jewish Publication Society in 1927, which is also a first-rate translation; or if you prefer, to read the original Hebrew Bible. The important thing is to read the Bible. The best way to read it is to read it with a commentary. It is not an easy book to read, not like picking up a modern novel andreading it through. It is an ancient document, an immortal document, but it's ancient. It has in it incrustrated things which have to be studied. Scholars through the centuries have devoted a great deal of patience and study and illumine the meaning of the text. There are such commentaries, good commentaries available in English and when you want to pick up a book of the Bible, like Ecclesiastes, like Job, like the Psalms, get a commentary on it, read the text, read the commentary - and go back to the text, and suddenly the text will begin to glow, be rich in meaning because you will understand the references, the allusions, the bakeground, the history, the ethical significance of it.

Incidentally, this book is still the best seller. The first printing of this book three weeks ago was 1,000,000 copies. There are still people who read the Bible.

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- x/5) > N/c p1/25 of This give un or lawy nd a frader - Rebel -(d) 12.96.9. Ciù x322 3'//128-KJ=6 world the land in the heart of litures"

KJ.V-= "World the land in long array" (K) Ps. 126 - pillow 15" & fish will who is when the after of g Zin we K.f. - When the hard turned again the after of g Zin we were alle them that draw"

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While "I'll the him that draw" 18. SV. "When the had nevitored the Justimes of 21 cm" Ps. is a product | Babyl- hale & prage for restiration and when we return a court wall of fature - her court wally when the Zad vitores coffee Zern, we shall be like a leaven. Then with regrange to fills with larght with regrange.

(e) 3 or - structured line! - werey - Kindneis -How Bell

Leviticus 19.15 -

- 1616 "Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty, but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbors."
- 1952 "You shall do no injustice in judgment; you shall (not 'shalt') not be partial to the poor or defer to the great (mighty), but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor."
- "Therefore, the Lord Himself shall give you a sign: Behold, Isaiah 7.14 a virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Immanuel."
 - "Therefore, the Lord Himself will give you a sign. Behold a 1952 young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."

Ps. 90-9

- "For all our days are passed away in thy wrath; we spend our 1611 years as a tale that is told."
- "For all our days pass away under thy wrath; our years come 1952 to an end like a sigh."

An Old Indian Scalper

Lopat, an old Indian scalper Lopat, an old Indian scalper from way back, was Casey's starter in a slick campaign mapped out some time ago, and the idea worked like a charm. For though the chunky southpaw was tagged for eight blows in his five and one-third innings on the mound, he gave up only one tally. Then, when it looked as though Eddie might be tiring in the sixth, Casey pulled the switch and the Indians hit the side track.

But, that wasn't to southform mexican hander for long. For he woodling, filling the base this inviting setting Berra down the right field foul drive in Collins and Mantle. ling, who took third on the beautiful thank Bauer was the into a force play at second Garcia finished out the then vacated for a pinch side track.

shovel the ball to the plate to nail Li'l Phil.

then vacated for a pinch

Isaiah ii.4:

1568/

Bish.

They shall breake their swords into Mattockes, and their speares to make sithes: And one people shall not lift up a weapon against another, neither shall they learne to fyght from thenceforth.

Kg.

They shall beate their swords into plow-shares, and their speares into pruning hookes (Or, sythes): nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learne warre any more.

Job xxxviii. 7:

Gen. When the starres of the morning praysed me together, and all the children of God rejoyced.



When the morning starres sang together, and all the sonnes of God shouted for joy.

Job iii. 17:

Gen. The wicked have there ceased from their tyrannie, and there they that laboured valiantly, are at rest.



There the wicked cease from troubling: and there the wearie be at rest.

2 Sam. i. 26-7:

thou bene unto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women: how are the mighty overthrowen, and the weapons of warre destroyed.



I am distressed for thee, my brother Ionathan, very pleasant hast thou beene unto mee: thy love to mee was wonderfull, passing the love of women. How are the mightie fallen, and the weapons of warre perished!

Macauley -

The English Bible (is) a book which, if everything else in our lanauge should perish, would alone suffice to show the whole extent of its beauty and power.

A person who professes to be a critic in the delicacies of the English language ought to have the Bible at his fingers! end.

Alexander Pope who translated Homer's "Illiad". "No literal translation can be just to an excellent originalin a superior language; but it is a great mistake to imagine (as many have done) that a rash paraphrase can make amends for this general defect."