Translation

1 Introduction

Any thorough discussion of Scripture must at least touch on the topic of Bible translation. At first glance, it would seem that Bible translation is an element more distant from the topic of Scripture than discussions on inspiration, inerrancy, infallibility, authority, etc. But if we were to conclude our study without discussing translation, we would leave fundamental questions unanswered—questions that have direct bearing on such topics as those just listed:

- Is my English Bible as authoritative as the Bible in its original languages?
- Does inspiration apply to translations of the text?
- How do I know that I can trust my translation in areas of inerrancy and infallibility?

These are not mundane questions. They strike at the heart of Christian life, doctrine, practice, and faith, and they carry inherent apologetic significance as well. But more than that, we can look to Scripture itself to guide us in answering these questions, and in so doing, we'll see the purpose of a translation and what it aims to do.

2 Translation in the Bible

The paradigmatic passage for considering Bible translation comes on the heels of Judah's return from Babylonian captivity. As they returned to their land after 70 years in exile, they faced numerous problems and difficulties. There were challenges from the Samaritan populace (Ezra 4-5; Neh 4, 6). There were moral challenges within the people, including social and moral issues (Neh 5, 9-10). And they faced a linguistic challenge as well. The people had, by and large, forgotten Hebrew as a spoken language. Nevertheless, they longed for God's Word, and this led them to an assembly at the Water Gate in Jerusalem, where they requisitioned Ezra the scribe to read the Law of Moses to them (Neh 8:1). Barrick describes the import of what transpires:

> *Ezra was the first to discern what the people of Israel really needed. They needed spiritual revival. The revival, however, would have to be based upon their obedience to the Scriptures. He realized, too, that obedience is predicated upon understanding. If an instruction is not understood, it cannot be obeyed. The more complete the understanding, the more complete the obedience will be. With this in mind, Ezra appointed men to help him in the task of proclamation, translation, and interpretation.*[1]

Barrick goes on to enumerate three activities that occurred that day at the Water Gate:

1. The text of the Law of Moses was read aloud in the original Hebrew language
2. The text was translated into the vernacular of the Israelite returnees—Aramaic.

[1] Barrick, "Turning Babel on Its Head: Translating for Understanding, 11.

3. The text was made understandable to the people

To this, Barrick remarks,

> *The purpose of translating and interpreting was that the people might understand (v. 8). The people rejoiced because they understood (v. 12). They even assembled again for that same purpose ("to understand," v. 13). Hearing the Scriptures in their heart language, the people understood it so well that it produced a degree of obedience not seen in nearly one thousand years. They set about to observe the Feast of Booths in complete compliance with what they understood from the Law of Moses. Not since the time of Joshua had there been such a complete and accurate observance of the Feast of Booths (v. 17). Out of such obedience even greater joy emerged (v. 18). One of the Scripture's most beautiful prayers (Neh 9) resulted from that experience.*[2]

We find other instances of translation in the Bible outside of Nehemiah 8. In the Gospel of Mark, the author provides an episode in which Jesus raises a child from the dead. In 5:41, Mark writes that Jesus took the girl by the hand and said to her, "'Talitha kum!' (which translated means, 'Little girl, I say to you, get up!'" Here, we see that the author has provided Jesus original Aramaic words ("Talitha kum"), yet also provided a translation of those words into Greek, so that non-Aramaic speakers would understand what Jesus said to the girl. Additionally, Mark adds a phrase not present in the Aramaic statement: "I say to you," indicating that Mark was concerned with providing his readers not just with a word-for-word translation of Jesus' statement, but with a expanded translation that provided understanding to his readers.

In both passages (Neh 8 and Mark 5:41), there was necessity and purpose for translation. The necessity was brought about by the people's (or reader's) inability to access the text in their own heart language. The purpose of translation, then, was the allow the people or reader to gain access to the text in a language that would result in *understanding* and thus in fuller obedience.

3 Translation of the Bible

We certainly recognize that translation of the Bible is a necessary endeavor. As must as each of us would desire to read the text in its original languages, we also accept the reality that such a desire might not be possible for everyone. And even if one learns Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, the likelihood is small that they will ever know these languages to the degree that they can read the Scriptures in these languages alone apart from the process of translation. They will still access the Bible in English, even if they begin with the Greek and Hebrew texts.

With this in mind, we affirm the necessity and importance of Bible translation. Yet even here, a quick glance at the Bible section of the local Christian bookstore reminds us that Bible translation is an interesting and complicated process. And it makes us ask questions like, "Why do we have so many translations?", and "How do all these translations differ?", and "Which translation should I use?" The

[2] Ibid., 12.

remainder of this study will look at the landscape of Bible translations, discuss the various approaches used, and discuss some principles for what makes a good translation of the Bible.

3.1 Approaches to Bible Translation

Why are there so many English translations of the Bible? Well, there's a negative answer and a positive answer to that question. The negative answer involves the unfortunate relationship that translations have with publishing companies, who ultimately must find a way to sell Bibles. A fresh new translation is a good way to raise interest. Unfortunately, as well, the link with publishing has also unduly influenced the translations themselves. Take, for instance, Barrick's analysis of Psalm 23 as translated by 9 prominent English translations. Based on his system of evaluation for translational accuracy, his conclusion was that the HCSB, NIV, and NRSV outscored the more literal KJV, NKJV, NASB, and NASU. What was behind this? Barrick explains:

> *Part of the reason in this particular passage is the former three translations allowed their translators greater freedom in handling this very popular and well-known text. NKJV, NASB, and NASU basically followed the KJV with little variation, even if the translation proved to be technically inaccurate with regard to the original Hebrew…. It just so happens that Psalm 23 reveals the "Achilles heel" of the KJV/NKJV and NASB/NASU pairings. The newer translations remained too faithful to the KJV at the price of accuracy. Politics and commerce do not mix well with Bible translation, because accuracy is thereby jeopardized.*[3]

In other words, the politics and commercial factors caused the publishing company to shy away from producing a translation that was too far removed from the very familiar wording of Psalm 23 in the KJV, despite its technical inaccuracies. This allowed translations which may be on the whole less accurate to actually outshine, since their translational principles allowed them to "break away" from the KJV wording.

On the positive side, the existence of numerous English Bible translations is a testament to the fact that no Bible translation is totally perfect. Now, this sounds like another negative, but it's really not. The production of new translations in English and other languages evidences the fact that the believing community recognizes that there is still need for greater and greater accuracy in the area of translation, and thus each new translation is another attempt to provide the church with a translation of the Bible in the modern vernacular. Imagine if the church had stopped translating the Bible into English after the Wycliffe Bibles were first produced in 1382 and 1388!

Yet these numerous translations of the Bible do pose a problem for the lay Christian. What makes them different? Is one more accurate from the other? The answer to these questions lie in the underlying principles that govern Bible translation. Three approaches have immerged in modern Bible translation that are responsible for the all the different versions we find on the bookshelves of Christian bookstores.

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[3] Barrick, "King James Only, Sometimes," Never, 11.

3.1.1 Formal Equivalence

Formal equivalence refers to a principle of translation by which the translator(s) attempt to stay as close as possible to the structure and words of the source language. These translations are often referred to (erroneously) as "word-for-word" translations or "literal" translations. Duvall and Hays remark,

> *Translators using this approach feel a keen responsibility to reproduce the forms of the original Greek and Hebrew whenever possible. The NASB, HCSB, and ESV use this approach. On the downside, the formal approach is less sensitive to the receptor language of the contemporary reader and, as a result, may appear stilted or awkward. Formal translations run the risk of sacrificing meaning for the sake of maintaining form.*[4]

3.1.2 Dynamic Equivalence

Dynamic equivalence refers to the principle of translation by which the translator(s) attempt to express the meaning of the original in the receptor language. These translations are often referred to as "thought-for-thought" translations or "idiomatic" translations. Duvall and Hays again comment,

> *Here the translator feels a responsibility to reproduce the meaning of the original text in English so that the effect on today's reader is equivalent to the effect on the ancient reader. Many contemporary translations utilize this approach, including the NLT and GNB. The functional approach is not always as sensitive as it should be to the wording and structure of the source language. When it moves too far away from the form of the source language, the functional approach runs the risk of distorting the true meaning of the text.*[5]

3.1.3 Paraphrase

Paraphrases are not actual translations, but rather interpretive explanations of the text. They do not attempt to maintain any kind of original form. Texts like *The Message*, *Living Bible*, and the *Amplified Bible* all evidence this approach to the text and constitute more of a commentary on the text than an actual translation of it.

3.1.4 Summary

These three translational approaches should be viewed on a spectrum rather than in categorical fashion. For instance, not all formal equivalent translations are as "formal" as others. The NASB and its updated version (NASU) represent a much more formal and thus "wooden" translation than the ESV, which attempts to be formal but literary. Likewise, the NIV is far less "dynamic" than the GNB, which tends to sit on the edge of being paraphrastic. Thus, we can portray the various Bible versions in this way:

More Formal									**More Dynamic**
KJV ASV	NASB NKJV ESV	RSV HCBS	NRSV NET	NAB	NIV TNIV	NJB REB	NCV NLT	GNB CEV	The Message

[4] Duvall and Hays, "Grasping God's Word," 35.

[5] Ibid.

3.2 Factors in Bible Translation

In one sense, it's easy to over-simplify discussions of translational principles so that either approach is misrepresented by strawmen arguments. On the one hand, it's easy to say that formal translations can unnecessarily follow the original form at the expense of accuracy and clarity in the receptor language. On the other hand, it's unwise to brush off formal translations as "literal" or "word-for-word" approaches, as even the most ardent proponent of formal equivalence would scoff at the idea of translating the Scripture in a wholly word-for-word approach. Take for instance Matthew 17:18, as translated word-for-word and maintaining the exact "form" of the original language: "And rebuked it the Jesus and came out from him the demon and was healed the boy from the hour that." In this case, it's clear that literality does not equate with accuracy or understanding. The simple fact is, the original and receptor languages are markedly different and translators must remain sensitive to this reality.

On the other hand, it's easy to say that dynamic translations can give unnecessary interpretation, making too many interpretive decisions for the reader. And this can be true, especially for versions on the far left of the spectrum. But no honest translator will insist that translation does not involve interpretation. As Duvall and Hays observe,

> *Since languages differ in many ways, making a translation is not a simple, cut-and-dried, mechanical process. When it comes to translation, it is wrong to assume that* literal *automatically equals* accurate*. A more literal translation is not necessarily a more accurate translation; it could actually be a less accurate translation. Is the translation "and was healed the boy from the hour that" better than "and the boy was cured at once" (NASB) or "and the boy was healed from that moment" (NET Bible)? Translation is more than just finding matching words and adding them up.*
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> *Translation entails "reproducing the meaning of a text that is in one language (the* source language*), as fully as possible, in another language (the* receptor language*)." The form of the original language is important, and translators should stay with it when possible, but form should not have priority over meaning. What is most important is that the contemporary reader understands the meaning of the original text.*[6]

Here, Duvall and Hays have identified the key principle we already learned from Nehemiah 8—that translation is aimed at giving people *understanding*. Thus, Duvall and Hays are correct when they assert that "when a translator can reproduce meaning while preserving form, all the better."[7]

William Barrick, who has been involved in Bible translation for over 30 years, 15 years as a missionary in Bangladesh translating the Bible into Bengali, as well as a scholar involved in English translations (NET, ESV). His expertise in the field has led him to write extensively on the subject, challenging key assumptions

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[6] Ibid., 34.

[7] Ibid.

on both sides of the translational spectrum. His writings have addressed several factors in Bible translation.

3.2.1 Translating for Accuracy

As we've already seen, accuracy is of critical importance to Bible translation and relates inherently to reader understanding. If the text is inaccurate, it conveys wrong meaning which inhibits understanding and thus inhibits obedience. Barrick writes,

> *What good is a Bible translation that conveys no meaning—or, worse yet, that coveys wrong meaning? Erroneous translation can hinder the divinely intended effect of God's Word upon the recipient. In order to achieve accuracy and clarity translators wrestle with different ways to express the text's meaning. Translating the Bible accurately requires careful attention to meaning rather than form alone. A good Bible translation conveys truth without confusion. Few translators would dispute this point. However, agreement over the necessity of accuracy has sometimes taken second place to political, social, or religious influences that can dominate the final reading in a Bible version.*[8]

Barrick introduces three methodologies utilized to aid in translational accuracy—all of which come with benefits and liabilities.

Expanded Translation. Hebrew is very different from English, French, German, and many other modern languages. It functions differently in its natural expression. As much as translators wish to maintain the original form as much as possible, there are times when doing so would be inaccurate or confusing. What should translators do in such contexts? Many translations make use of expanded translation in order to deal with this issue, and they often identify these expansions for their readers by using italic typeface.

Barrick submits Psalm 69:22 as a prime example of this type of issue. The Hebrew text contains only 6 words, while various English translations have used upwards to 22 words:

HEBREW	יְהִי־שֻׁלְחָנָם לִפְנֵיהֶם לְפָח וְלִשְׁלוֹמִים לְמוֹקֵשׁ׃
LITERAL	Let-become their-table before-them for-trap and-at-peace for-snare.
KJV 1769 (22 words)	Let their table become a snare before them: and *that which should have been* for *their* welfare, *let it become* a trap.
ESV 2001 (20 words)	Let their own table before them become a snare; and when they are at peace, let it become a trap.
NAU 1995 (19 words)	May their table before them become a snare; and when they are in peace, *may it become* a trap.
NIV 1984 (16 words)	May the table set before them become a snare; may it become retribution and a trap
NLT 1996 (17 words)	Let the bountiful table set before them become a snare, and let their security become a trap.

[8] Barrick, "What is Truth in Translation?" The Issue of Accuracy in Translating the Bible," 1.

As Barrick remarks, "Expansions of Psalm 69:22 attempt to convey the meaning of the text with accuracy. One has to admit that an overly literal translation of this verse would be more difficult to understand. On such occasions translators regularly try to resolve the puzzle for the reader…. ***Sound translation principles require the transference of exact meaning from the original text to the receptor language, while retaining as much of the wording as possible.***"[9]

The reason for Barrick's assertions in this regard is that far too often, translators or translations that utilize this methodology have often come under scrutiny from the "literalist" segment of evangelicalism. But as Fields has noted,

> *Frequently one encounters the erroneous belief that a difference in* number *and* order *of words in the transference from the source language to the receptor language somehow equals a difference in* meaning *in the translation. Every translator, however, from the third-grade student who is studying French to the seasoned scholar who has years of translation experience, knows this is not true. Yet, among Bible translators and biblical language scholars there is very often a distrust of a translator who espouses the translation of meaning, or who casts Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic idioms (especially dead metaphors) into idiomatic English.*[10]

Idiomatic Translation. The existence of linguistic idioms demonstrates that language is always changing, and over the course of centuries—or in the case of the Bible, millennia—not accounting for these changes can result in a loss of accuracy. The same goes for the receptor language of a translation. The responsibility of the translator is to produce a translation that is both sensitive to the readers and modern language usage, as well as faithful to the meaning of the original. This is no easy task.

On the one hand, faithfulness to the *form* of the original at the expense of the receptor language can quickly lead to inaccuracy. There are numerous idioms in the Bible which, if translated word-for-word may cause more confusion than less:

COMMON HEBREW IDIOMS	
Literal Translation	**Meaning**
a son of seventeen year	Seventeen years old
Behold me	I'm ready
Lord/master of the dreams	Dreamer
Hard of neck	Stubborn, obstinate
To cover his feet	To defecate
The sons of the prophets	The group of prophets (*or*, the prophets)
On a horn of a son of oil	On a fertile hill
Short of hand	Weak (short of strength)
The fields of Moab	The country of Moab
They took for themselves women/wives	They married

[9] Ibid., 2.

[10] Weston W. Fields, "The Translation of Biblical Live and Dead Metaphors and Similes and Other Idioms," *Grace Theological Journal* 2, no. 2 (Fall 1981): 192-93.

Bread	Food
They lifted their voice and wept	They wept loudly
Being for a man/husband… I will be for a man/husband	To have a husband… I were married
He laid down (*or*, slept) with his fathers	He died

While we me assume that it would be easy enough to simply look up a phrase's meaning in order to understand it's meaning, it's clear that this does not always happen, and there are numerous examples where word-for-word translations of idioms have resulted in inaccurate meaning and thus misunderstanding on the part of the reader. We can't assume that an idiom will be clear to the reader, nor should we wish to. If accuracy in meaning is the goal of translation, then the *meaning* of an idiom is more accurate than the form in which it appears in the original language.

On the other hand, Barrick notes that "attempting to be too up to date has its perils."[11] He goes on to write,

> *Translations of ancient texts that read too much like today's magazines do not give the impression of authenticity. Novelty wears thin. In the end, people tend to gravitate back to the familiar even if they have to put up with a little more opacity or obscurity. This is what accounts for high interest in a translation like the ESV. Due to its literality it has a sense of familiarity. A translation like NET Bible is more highly prized for its notes than for its translation per se. The latter has the attraction of being an exegetically technical commentary that aids the reader to better understand the text of Scripture, but, like the classroom translations of Hebrew professors, the translation will not be the one that people memorize or turn to in a time of crisis.*[12]

Ambiguous Translation. Barrick also notes that there are times when the inherent ambiguity of the original language must be retained. While translations must provide expansions at times to convey meaning accurately, creating *more* clarity in the text than is offered by the original may lead to inaccuracy, if the ambiguity was intended by the author.

The phrase "the revelation of Jesus Christ" (Rev 1:1) provides a helpful illustration. The genitive ("of Jesus Christ") could be either objective ("the revelation **about** Jesus Christ") or subjective ("the revelation **given by** Jesus Christ"). While most translations leave the phrase alone, the NLT decides for the reader by translating the genitive as subjective. Barrick observes,

> *Perhaps Moises Silva is correct in observing that it might be an unwarranted 'assumption that typical English readers recognize an ambiguity when they see one.' However, we must either conclude that John was intentionally ambiguous or that he intended only one of the meanings of the genitive. The former conclusion would obligate the translator to retain*

[11] Barrick, "What is Truth in Translation," 7.

[12] Ibid.

> *the ambiguity; the latter would indicate that John believe that the context was sufficiently clear to direct the reader (and the translator) to the correct meaning.*[13]

To this, Walter Bodine comments that

> *When an ambiguity has been resolved, if the translator is right, the reader misses the opportunity to puzzle over the ambiguity—a process that may on occasion have been intended by the author. Much more importantly, if the translator's decision is wrong, then the reader is given the wrong meaning—one not intended by the author. In this case the reader is deprived of access to the original text, so that he or she has no opportunity to discover the author's intended meaning.*[14]

3.2.2 Translating for Understanding

We have already seen from Nehemiah 8 that understanding is the goal of Bible translation—not accuracy. Accuracy to the original (i.e., accuracy in meaning, not simply form) is for the purpose of giving understanding to the reader. As Glen Scorgie has noted, "In Bible translation, faithfulness to the original meaning of a text is important, but it is not enough. The other critical test is what it enables its readers to understand."[15]

Part of imparting understanding to readers is putting the Bible into the heart language of people. While anyone may access the original text through personal study of Greek and Hebrew, a translation in their own language gives them God's Word in a language that for them imparts understanding. The great history of Bible translation, from the Greek Septuagint, to the German Bible of Luther, to the English Bibles of John Wycliffe and William Tyndale, the goal has always been to put the Scripture into the language of the common people—to give them access to the text so that they may read and understand.

To this, Barrick offers the episode of Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch as an illustration:

> *Philip's question to the Ethiopian eunuch was, "Do you understand what you are reading? (Acts 8:30, NIV). The high official from the court of Queen Candace of Ethiopia was a proselyte to the Jewish faith. According to the text of Isaiah 53 cited in Acts 8:32-33, he was reading the Greek Septuagint translation of the Old Testament. Greek was not his heart language. In addition to this problem, the Septuagint's translation of Isaiah 53 was (and still is) "gravely deviant." In spite of these handicaps, enough of the truth came through with Philip's helpful guidance that the eunuch came by faith to Christ as his personal Savior.*

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[13] Ibid., 15-16.

[14] Walter R. Bodine, "The Bible in a World after Babel: On the Challenge of Bible Translation," *Notes on Translation 14, no. 4 (2000), 37.*

[15] Glen Scorgie, "Introduction and Overview," in *The Challenges of Bible Translation: Communicating God's Word to the World*, ed. By Glen G. Scorgie, Mark L. Strauss, and Steven M. Voth (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 20.

> *Until he possessed a clear understanding of the Bible's message, the Ethiopian official could not come to Christ. The absence of a translation in his own language impaired the Ethiopian. Even though he had some proficiency in Greek, the poor quality of the translation he had obtained was a hindrance to him. The Holy Spirit intervened to compensate for that deviant translation. He sent Philip to provide a more accurate translation and explanation.*

To this, Barrick notes three take-aways from this episode: (1) God can use a second language to save people to Christ—even a deviant translation! (2) A translation can be so poor that it inhibits understanding and thus inhibits saving faith. (3) Understanding is the key factor in the efficacy of a Bible translation, seen in Philip's explanation of the text which gave understanding, which ignited saving faith.

3.2.3 Translating for Literary Excellence

A third element of translation concerns literary quality—how successful an author is in "communicating with his readers by means of literary conventions to which both he and his readers agree."[16] In other words, literary excellence is the effective utilization of language so that the meaning of the original is communicated in the receptor language with beauty, dignity, and mystery. Barrick notes three criteria for literary excellence in translation.

First, literary excellence involves clarity in translation. The original authors of Scripture worked hard to craft their words using certain vocabulary and syntax. The translator must work equally hard to capture the intended meaning of the author in the receptor language. As you might except, this rules out word-for-word translation. But it also rules out flippant idiomatic translation as well.

Second, literary excellence involves vividness of expression. This is especially true in poetry, where vivid imagery is a critical element of the genre. Translations that transform imagery into concrete ideas at the expense of the literary device have failed to accurately express the text—the image is part of the author's meaning.

Third, literary excellence involves literary ambiguity. "Great literary contains the potential for multiple meanings, openness for application, and preservation of the element of mystery."[17] Barrick goes on to give Nahum 2:13 as an illustration:

> *When Nahum writes "a sword will devour your young lions" (2:13 [heb. 14]), the immediate meaning is obvious. God will slay Assyria's warriors. Nahum's comparison holds for a number of reasons: (1) Assyrian warriors were fierce hunters of their human prey; (2) lions are part of an extended metaphor employed in verses 11-12 (Heb. 12-13); (3) Assyrian kings depicted themselves in writings and in palace reliefs as great lion hunters; (4) the ultimate challenge and boast of Assyrian kings was that of slaying a lion with one's sword or dagger and now the Assyrians will perish by the sword; (5) Assyrian kings boasted of killing large numbers of lions and now the Lord will slay large numbers of their warriors; and, (6) resident in the text is the implication that the hunter will become*

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[16] William D. Barrick, "Bible Translations as Great Literature: Problems and Perspectives," 1.

[17] Ibid., 5.

> *the hunted. All of these implications combine to give the phraseology and the picture vividness and force. The ambiguity is in not knowing which of these factors (or even some other factor unknown to the modern reader) we should keep most clearly in mind. Bible translation should retain this aura of ambiguity that engages the mind and keeps its attention rather than limiting the force of the imagery to only one aspect of the allusion.*[18]

Fourth, literary excellence involves effective rhythm. Translations must attempt the hard work of trying to communicate the cadence of the original text in the receptor language. Hebrew often uses sound as part of its literary rhythm—assonance, alliteration, and other devices can add to the beauty and literary vividness of the text.

Fifth, literary excellence involves considering the orality of a translation. There is no doubt that large sections of Scripture were intended by their authors to be read orally (Exod 24:7; Deut 31:11; Josh 8:34-35; 2 Kgs 23:2; Neh 8:3, 18; 9:3; 13:1; 2 Cor 3:14). This practice seen in the days of Jeremiah (Jer 36:6; 51:61) as well as the days of Jesus (Luke 4:16; Acts 13:27; 15:21). We find in Colossians 4:16 instructions for public reading of Paul's epistles (cf. 1 Thess 5:27), and explicitly instructed Timothy not to neglect the public reading of Scripture (1 Tim 4:13). Thus, Barrick asserts,

> *Audio-visual presentations of Scripture are, therefore, a return to the original environment of the proclamation of God's Word. The proper cantillation of such readings, with significant pauses, variation of tone, gestures, and dramatical flourishes may do more to convey the original intent than the printed page could ever accomplish. When read properly, themes, repetitions, assonance, and even chiasms might be clearer to the hearer than to the isolated silent reader. Tyndale's wonderful literary cadences in the English translation of the Bible are far more impressive when read publicly with proper inflection than they are in private, silent reading. I suspect that the same is true with all of the great literary Bible translations. Translators must never neglect producing a translation that performs well in public reading.*

3.3 Principles for Bible Translation

At the close of this study, I have provided a list of seven translation principles developed by Barrick. While these principles are aimed at helping the translator, they provide an overview for us as to what goes into making a good Bible translation. Many of these principles reflect concepts we've already discussed in the preceding sections.

1. **Clear, understandable language ought to have priority over dialectal, literary, or technical language.**
   This principle reflects the necessity for *clarity* in translation, which necessitates translating the text into the *common* language of the people. The translation needs neither to be "dumbed down" nor elevated to the point that it does not reflect the common language.

2. **Natural expression ought to have priority over form.**

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[18] Ibid.

Translations that demonstrate loyalty to the original text only will ultimately prove to be inaccurate and less able to give understanding. If the translation cannot maintain the form (word order, etc.) of the original and still be given through natural expression in the receptor language, then the translation must express it differently. The text must be made clear in the receptor language.

3. **Give attention to how acceptable and smooth a public (oral) reading of the text would be.**
   This is frequently overlooked in translations. It is clearly seen by the erroneous rendering of *Yahweh*, "LORD," thus making no oral differentiation from *adonai*, "Lord". Yet even beyond this, word order and tone play an important part. Carelessness in the order of words and phrases, the color of the vocabulary, or the actual words used can lead to misunderstanding when read orally.

4. **Translate the exact meaning of the text while maintaining as much of the wording as possible—but, expand the translation where necessary to convey the exact meaning.**
   This was discussed previously. Expansion can be a necessary element of accuracy, but care must be taken to indicate when words are added for clarity, and they must be added only when necessary.

5. **Contextual consistency takes priority over verbal consistency.**
   Whether in English or Greek, the meaning of words is derived from context, not a dictionary. Translations must be sensitive to the context a word. Thus we find up to eleven different English terms used to translate the verb *be holy*. This variation is absolutely necessary to capture the nuances of the term throughout its various contexts.

6. **Details of culture (customs, vocations, clothing, food, and ceremonies), geography (places and features, climate and weather elements), and history (nations, empires, and events) should be retained even if they are not within the audience's range of common knowledge.**
   ANE culture will not always be immediately accessible to modern readers. While idioms should be translated for meaning in the receptor language, cultural, geographical, and historical elements should be maintained. Sometimes, unfamiliar elements (e.g., sheep) might be replaced with more familiar terms when translating for cultures far removed from the ANE, but this cannot be acceptable. The culture, geography, and history of the Bible is part of its meaning and must be maintained for clarity and understanding.

7. **Every effort should be made to reflect the different styles of language found in different parts of Scripture.**
   In general, the level of language should be neither too formal nor too casual or slangy. Too often, translations tend to sound the same—everywhere in Scripture. But this flies in the face of what we know of Scripture! Not only do we have different literary genres throughout the Bible (history, law, poetry, prophecy, epistle), but we have numerous authors as well. We can't imagine that all of these authors wrote just like each other. Then why do our translations seem to suggest they did? Good translations should attempt to reflect the different styles of language found in different genres and different authors.