

The Living Bible

Once upon a time in a far-away land there lived a certain godly man with many little children. His heart yearned to teach his children about Jesus. So he would gather them together every evening to hear him read from the Bible. Then he would ask them questions about what he had read to be sure that they understood. But they did not understand. And so the man would explain using words that they easily understood. Then the children would ask, “Why didn’t they just write it like that in the first place?”

This set the man on a journey to translate the Bible as a “thought-for-thought” translation that even a child could follow. He did this from copies of the oldest Greek & Hebrew manuscripts that were available, for he knew both languages. His paraphrase translation became known as “The Living Bible”. Once again the Bible came alive to people of yet another generation. The book quickly became very popular and spread to distant lands, even ours here in the USA.

The man is Kenneth Taylor of England, but you will not find his name in the book. He is a humble man. He was even humble enough to come speak at the country church that I attended at that time many years ago in Fayette, Maine. So respectful is he of God and God’s Word that some of the last verses of the Bible troubled him; *“And I solemnly declare to everyone who reads this book: If anyone adds anything to what is written here, God shall add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone subtracts any part of these prophecies, God shall take away his share in the Tree of Life, and in the Holy City just described.”* He was concerned that his speech impediment was judgment from God for “meddling with His Word”. Many religious leaders would be quick to agree, but actually Kenneth Taylor had done what many other brave men had done over the centuries, and that was to get God’s Word into the hands of the common people in a language that they could understand.

For you see, without faith it is impossible to please God (**Hebrews 11:6**), and faith comes from understanding God’s Word, (**Romans 10:17**). Real change begins in a person’s heart as the Word soaks in, (**Ephesians 5:26**). And so we must be sure to read a translation that we understand. The Living Bible is a great starting point.

The first printing of “The Living Bible” was July, 1971. By November 1973 there had been over 34 printings with more than 15 million in circulation. It was at this time that there was a mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the land. What came first, the revival or the Word in the language of the common people? It was at this time that I came to know Jesus. Bible bookstores at the time were selling them out the day they arrived. Dozens sold within hours and they were difficult to obtain. It was not unusual to wait weeks until being able to get your own copy. How excited I was the day that I got mine! It was then that I began to be immersed in the Word and started to grow quickly in the love & knowledge of Jesus Christ.

I have since read well over a dozen different Bible translations, but The Living Bible remained the one that I loved the most...until Tyndale House came out with The New Living Translation in 1996. The NLT is a scholarly translation of great accuracy, but maintains the wording style of the Living Bible wherever it could. The New Living Translation is the best of both worlds, being both very readable and accurate along with great footnotes. This is the version that we give to those new Christians in whom we see the promise of deep roots and much fruit.

Interestingly, when The Living Bible first came out, the common people then often had more hunger & understanding of the Word than did many ministers. Few churches preached the Word, and so we met in barns, homes, or wherever to share its truth, just as they had hundreds of years ago.

Kenneth Taylor wisely established a trust fund to use all profit from sales of the Bibles to be turned back into producing more Bibles.

Remember that The Living Bible is meant to be an easy-to-grasp paraphrase, not a strict, literal word-for-word translation for scholarly study. For that get a copy of “Young’s Literal Translation of the Holy Bible” first published in the late 1800s.

The Living Bible opens with a quote from the prologue of Tyndale’s 1525 English New Testament. Be sure to read this when you get your own copy. If space allowed I would quote it here. Instead I will close this review with a quote from one of my very favorite Living Bible paraphrases, found in **James 1:25**.

“But if anyone keeps looking steadily into God’s law for free men, he will not only remember it, but he will do what it says, and God will greatly bless him in everything he does.”

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