

Young's Literal Translation

Background on Types of Translations

Let's first see the big picture. We know that a translation is a version that is translated from one language into another. This causes the translator(s) to face a choice of three major roads to travel down before they even start their journey. They must consistently have the focus of one of the following:

1. A literal word-for-word translation for utmost accuracy
2. A thought for thought translation for ease of understanding, (readability)
3. Or a balance between accuracy & readability

Let's list some basic reasons why the choice of one of these paths is necessary:

A...because some languages do not even have some of the exact same words as other languages.

B...because languages vary in *how they structure sentences*. For example, the adjectives & the nouns that they describe may be placed next to each other (before or after the noun), or separated. Another example is Hebrew reads from right to left while most other languages read from left to right.

C...because languages each have unique expressions. These are called "*idioms*". Here are a few examples of some English idioms:

I found myself in a real pickle.
It rained cats & dogs.
He really stuck his foot in his mouth that time.
She is sharp as a tack.

We can see how easily someone would be confused by such literal translations if these idioms are not in their language. Idioms are an example of cultural differences.

D...because languages differ in "*colloquialisms*". These are common speech. They are expressions that are intended to give a sense of realism. The following are some examples:

"What's up?" for a greeting as opposed to, "How are you doing?"
"Y'all are invited, as opposed to, "You are all invited."
"I'm gonna do it!" as opposed to, "I'm going to do it!"
"I didn't want to go back no more." as opposed to, "I didn't ever want to go back."

E...because some languages assign a *gender* to many more of their words than do other languages. For example, some words in Hebrew for “God” are masculine and at least one is feminine. That distinction is missing in English.

F...because the Hebrew language expresses time differently. Past, present & future *tenses* are applied very differently in Hebrew. The certainty of a future event is spoken of as a past event. This is evident when God tells Joshua that He has given the city to him, when from the English language perspective Joshua has yet to go in and fight for it. And Moses relates the times of Noah as though he were there, when he actually wasn't.

There are other choices as well.

But for now, let's go back to our beginning fork in the road. We understand that if a translator focuses on a literal translation then it will be very accurate, but much of the true meaning may be lost. Yet if the translator focuses on a thought-for-thought translation then the meaning may be more readily grasped, but the accuracy is sacrificed. This is why most translations seek a balance between the two.

It is important to recognize that each type of translation is very valuable in the insights to truth that they may display. They each have their place.

The Author of Young's Literal Translation

With that background on types of translations, Young's Literal Translation is a very highly accurate translation. The focus of the translation is on sticking as close as possible to the earliest copies of the original manuscripts. Young's Literal is slower reading because sentence structure and word usage seems a bit awkward at times. It is however highly valuable when we want to check out a vague passage from another English translation.

Robert Young spent about 20 years to accomplish this monumental work. He was born in 1822 in Scotland, and saw his Young's Literal Translation first published in 1862. His translation was revised in 1867, then fine tuned once again in 1898, just 10 years after his death. This final revision switched from Roman numeral Chapter numbers to numbers with which we are more familiar. The text size was made larger and the general organization much improved. The forward matter includes many helpful notes as well. Our copy of this third edition has a white hardcover. This is the one you'll want to be sure to obtain. Young's Literal is still highly relevant. It also continues to be one of our most referenced Bible versions.

In 1847 Robert Young started his own business of printing & selling of books. His passion was to publish works that made it easier to understand the Old Testament along with the various Bible versions. He also wrote several other books:

The Analytical Concordance to the Bible for the King James Version (1879)
Dictionary of Bible Words & Synonyms (1883)
Concise Critical Comments on the Holy Bible, (a companion to the Literal Trans.)
& a technical book on grammatical analysis of the Hebrew/Greek scriptures.

Features of the Third Edition

This was a man hungry for truth in God's Word! His white hardcover third-edition of the Literal Translation also comes with many special features. One feature is a chronological order of the books of the Old & New Covenants. It is very different from the traditional arrangement, especially in the New Covenant. His order of the New Covenant books is close to matching the time frame references of those given in "Revolutionary Bible Study" by Gene Edwards. (Edwards wrote several other key books in our day, but spent a good deal of his life tracking the correct order of the books to better see the context of the writings.) Young and Edwards alike had this calling to bring more Light upon the written Word.

Why the difference in the order of the books? Edwards explains that the traditional order of the New Covenant books given in nearly all English translations comes from translations of early manuscripts that in turn came from the very first reproductions. The order of Paul's Epistles in those translations was arbitrarily determined in a book binder's shop at around A.D. 200. It was there that it was decided to start binding with the longest letters first. The exception is 1Timothy, which however was kept next to 2nd Timothy, which is otherwise in that order. And then Hebrews follows all of the others, perhaps because the book binders did not know that Paul wrote Hebrews. It is no wonder that it is so easy to get a scrambled view of what was happening in the early church!

Another great feature of Young's Literal Translation is his listing of many dozens of confused renderings of the King James Revisers. And no wonder they are confused renderings! Here are a few examples from his full-page listing where the King James Version uses an English word in place of more than one Hebrew word:

"destroy" used for at least 49 different Hebrew words
"to set" used for at least 40 different Hebrew words
"to bring" used for at least 39 different Hebrew words...and so on.

Obviously the KJV translators took extreme liberties with the Hebrew language!

Following that page there is one titled, *“Lax Renderings of the King James’ Revisers”*. Here Robert Young takes a sample of 10 different Hebrew words, and lists all of the different ways each word was translated in the KJV. For example:

The Hebrew word “Panin” (face), is translated as 52 different English words, not to mention 42 idiomatic renderings, for a total of 94 variations!

The Hebrew word “Nathan” (to give) is translated as 67 different English words, not to mention 17 varieties in idiomatic renderings for a total of 84 different renderings!

An additional quick reference gem in Young’s forward material to his Literal Translation is his 2-page sample listing of words that were used in the KJV incorrectly, and what should be the correct viewing. These words were either translated incorrectly or their meanings have changed over the centuries. The list also has a column of where in general the word can be found in the Bible. This 2-page section is titled, *“Explanation of 100 Bible Terms”*. Here are just a few of the words listed there:

“bishop” should be “overseer”

“children” should be “sons”

“Christ” should be “the Christ”

[So for instance, Herod was not looking for a baby with a last name of “Christ”, but the one that was “the Christ”, the Messiah.]

“condemn” should be “judge” [for good or bad]

“church” should be “assembly”

“damnation” should be “judgment”

“create” should be “prepare”

“eternal” should be “age-during” [for the age or for the duration of that time]

“everlasting” should be “age-during” [for the age or for the duration of that time]

“for ever” should be “age-during” [for the age or for the duration of that time]

“fornication” should be “whoredom” [unfaithfulness]

“hell” should be “unseen state”

“grave” should be “unseen state”

“minister” should be “ministrant”

“ministry” should be “ministration”

“world” should be “age”

Its a real challenge to mention these to you without going off on a rabbit trail for each one! Some however are explained in more detail in our sections on “Bible Mistranslations” and “Religious Myths vs. Bible Truths”, plus throughout our Lessons and Studies.

Its time now nevertheless for us to conclude this Bible Translation Review.

Conclusion

Young's Literal Translation is often quoted throughout our studies. There are a few other translations that we think of as "truly literal", but Young's is the one we typically turn to first. The others are "The Concordant Literal", "The Emphatic Diaglott" (New Covenant only), and then the highly technical "Hebrew/Greek Interlinears". We have discovered real breakthroughs of revelation in God's Word with all of these, especially with Young's Literal Translation.

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