

TESTAMENTS ESV Bible enters the market

Shopping for a Bible? You could pick the venerated King James Version (also known as the Authorized Version) or revisions of it known as KJ2, KJ2000, KJ21, the New King James or the Revised King James, not to be confused with the Revised Standard Version or the New Revised Standard.

Not satisfied? Looking at just the other N's, you could consider the NIV, its simplified NIV, the NAB, NASB, NCV, NEB, NET, NJB, NLT, NLV or NWT.

At last count there are some 70 English renditions of the Bible, in whole or in part.



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The latest addition to this alphabet soup is the ESV (English Standard Version) from Crossway. Granted, we'll never again have a common

Bible, but does this crowded market really need a 70th edition?

Yes, asserts Raymond Van Leeuwen, New Testament professor at Pennsylvania's Eastern College, writing in Christianity Today magazine.

Modern versions generally use thought-for-thought translation, known as "functional" or "dynamic" equivalence. Van Leeuwen favors "transparent or direct" translation, conveying how things were said in the original Hebrew and Greek, word for word, as closely as English allows.

Modern Bibles have their uses but they prevent the reader from inferring the meaning "because they change what the Bible said," he contends, so careful Bible students should use a "direct" translation.

Word-for-word translation marks the Revised Standard Version (RSV), which in turn is based on the King James Version. But to Van Leeuwen the King James is hopelessly outdated, and the RSV (1952, with minimal changes in 1971) lacks scholarship from recent decades, contains a few glitches, and is saddled with archaic thees and thous.

Van Leeuwen likes the concept but won't be certain the ESV provides what's needed until he studies it. If not, he suggests, we'll need Bible No. 71.

The ESV isn't a wholly new Bible but an updated RSV. Proponents say they preserved the best of the RSV and King James "legacy" but dropped "archaic language" (thee-thou) and made "significant corrections" in "key texts."

One all-important "correction" occurs in Isaiah 7:14, which conservatives regard as a clear prediction of Jesus' virgin birth. It is quoted from the Greek Old Testament in Matthew 1:23.

Conservatives exploded in anger when the RSV rendered it, "Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." The ESV changes that to "the virgin shall conceive." (The King James says "a virgin.")

Otherwise, the ESV mostly tinkers with the RSV verbiage, judging from a quick spot check.

In Genesis, God creates an "expanse" rather than "firmament," and "cattle" instead of "livestock." In 1 Corinthians 13, the Apostle Paul's statement that love "does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right" becomes "does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth." And so forth.