

Let me talk about the Bible. I have struggled with it a lifetime.

The King James version is lovely to the ear. Poetic. Nearly impossible for me to understand. Its sentences are convoluted and hard to follow. Words are used in ways that are strange and old-fashioned. Reading it was just so hard, even torturous, that I could never wade through it. Never could I understand how this verse could possibly mean what some preacher or teacher claimed. I basically gave up on reading it. It might as well have been written in Old English. Or Greek. That would have been all the same to me. I regarded it as a total waste of my time to try.

The New International Version was a great improvement for me. Now here was something I could understand. Finally, I had something that made sense! At least, parts of the book made sense, although I will admit there were still big chunks of it that my brain just couldn't (or wouldn't) focus on, especially parts of the Old Testament (the prophets) and Paul's New Testament letters (Hebrews). The Old Testament jumped around so much. Who did what to whom when just became a giant jumble.

Then I bought a chronological Bible. Not one of those read-it-through-in-a-year kind where the verses are marked by the day you should read them, but an actual rearrangement of the text so the events appear in the order they occurred. The prophets and the history blended together with only one rendition of each event. It was like reading a historical novel; it flowed! That really gave me a much better picture of the whole story. God's evolving relationship with mankind was much more obvious, and the one thing that really sprang to life was the presence of Jesus throughout the Old Testament. I had never imagined that before. More things made sense. Unity of purpose showed itself. Flow of prophecy and its fulfillment was much easier to follow. Still there were too many things I just couldn't grasp.

My next read was a Contemporary "Street English" version of the New Testament. At first, I chuckled at some of the language for its 8th grade reading level, but you know, I quit laughing when I found myself thinking, "Hey, that makes real sense" and "I never thought about it that way before." More and more things became understandable.

I have just finished reading the Phillips Modern English version of the New Testament. In many ways, that has been the best one of all. There are no numbered verses and the text reads more like a book. Hebrews, which has never made much sense to me, seemed much more rational and understandable (still not an easy book by any means, yet for the first time I feel like I have the possibility of understanding it). Paul's other letters seemed much more readable as well. I am actually starting to be excited by what I am finding in this book.

Perhaps what amazes me most is that the more I read, the easier it gets. I have heard other people say that about God's Word, but they are usually referring to reading their Bible over and over, studying. It is the different translations that have been most helpful for me. I think it's rather like hearing about an event from several different people. You get a more complete picture that way.

I think of myself as having the Word of God loose in my head. It's doing things to me I am unaware of until later. There is a particular knowledge in this book and the knowing of it changes a person. What else can I say? Find out for yourself. Read the book. Again.

Now, I know there are those of you who are aghast at the thought of there being more than one "right" translation of the Bible. People, you have got to trust the Word of God to do its (His?) work. Yes, certainly we must examine the credentials of the scholars doing the translation and determine if they are men of God who pray earnestly about what they write. But once we are satisfied they are competent, dedicated Godly men with no hidden agendas, then we should simply trust the Holy Spirit to guide their pens (or keyboards, as the case may be). In fact, I am not even certain they have to be Godly men as long as they are competent and diligent in their translation. I think the Word can take care of itself.

My husband and I had the rare privilege of viewing the Dead Sea Scrolls when they were on display in the Field Museum in Chicago. We had to stand in line for some time before we could get in. That was a good thing because it gave our eyes a chance to adjust to the dark. You see, to protect the delicate scrolls, the room lighting was so dim it took several minutes before I could distinguish any print on the scrolls. They were mounted in glass cases hung at eye level around the room. Everyone squinted and had their faces scrunched up just inches away from the glass making the effort to find the faded and faint writing. It was awesome to be in the same room with it. The quiet was intense even with people standing shoulder to shoulder.

Translations were printed next to each case. Most were from the book of Isaiah as I recall. Many in the room could read some Hebrew because you could hear them whispering about what word they found that they understood or arguing about what some word meant now. It was as if the scrolls were a living, breathing thing that held conversations with each of us.

One thing that really stuck me was how God's name was written. I could tell it was Yahweh even though I couldn't read Hebrew, because it was written in a more primitive form of script and was bigger than the other letters. Just 4 letters I think, (no vowels). You could feel the power of the word. You could feel the connection back through time--millennia of reverence for the one God. It sends shivers down my spine to remember it.

So you might say fairly that I even got some understanding of God from a 2000-year-old manuscript in a language I don't speak, written with an alphabet I can't read! Now that's impressive!