

# AND THE WORD IS 'UPDATE'

By Cathy Lynn Grossman, USA TODAY  
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*Note from Pastor Kevin Lea: The reader should consider the following when reading this article.*

2 Tim 4:1 I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: 2 Preach the word **[as it was inspired by God through the apostles and prophets]**! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. 3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine **[accurate Bible translations]**, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; 4 and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables **[false translations of God's Word]**. (NKJ)

Advertising isn't the only challenge facing *Today's New International Version* of the Bible published by Zondervan.

The complete Bible will arrive in stores in mid-February. But when the *TNIV* New Testament was released in 2002, it was attacked by some scholars who said it didn't just update language; it tampered with theology. And 118 critics signed a letter listing their complaints.

For Christians, every word change is measured against the Scripture's purpose: to guide a reader's life in this world by the light of God and to give readers the prospect of eternal life by bringing them, through Jesus, to salvation.

Because each verb, noun and pronoun shapes a vision of God and humanity, errors are like miscalculating the path of a rocket: One tiny navigational shift can send everything spiraling in the wrong direction.

Zondervan says the *TNIV* was essential for accuracy,

clarity and accessibility, the same reasons it created the 1978 *New International Version*, translated by the International Bible Society.

Changes are not willy-nilly. Exodus still says, "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife." Jesus still speaks of the prodigal son in Luke.

But more archaic terms are ousted, and new usage is recognized. After all, Webster added 10,000 words and made 100,000 changes in dictionary definitions in a decade, says Ben Irwin, head of Zondervan's publishing division aimed at the under 35-crowd.

In the *TNIV*, "inner parts" is now "internal organs." Likewise, words were substituted if the old ones have acquired a new connotation. Once "alien" only meant "foreigner," not an extraterrestrial, says John Stek, chairman of the Committee on Bible Translation, who worked on both the *NIV* and the *TNIV*. "We were not at all interested in using language that will be here today, gone tomorrow, or adolescent colloquialisms. We wanted language we judged was durable."

## **TWO PASSAGES, THREE VERSIONS**

Here's how two passages from Today's New International Version compare with earlier Bible translations:

### **Hebrews 12:7**

### **Psalms 1:1**

#### ***Today's New International Version (2005)***

Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children.  
For what children are not disciplined by their father?

Blessed are those who do not walk in step with the wicked or stand  
in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers.

#### ***New International Version (1978)***

Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what  
son is not disciplined by his father?

Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers.

***King James Version (1611)***

If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?

Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.

Stek points to Psalm 1:1 in *NIV*, which begins "Blessed is the man." In the *TNIV*, it's "Blessed are those," because it's clearly meant for everyone, Stek says. But "Blessed" hangs on even though most modern translations shift that to say "happy." "Readers today think 'happy' is about a mood. The Psalm reference isn't to mood, it's to a state of well being, being blessed, just as it is in the Beatitudes, which echoes this language," Stek says.

But theologians don't go to war over such tweaks. They hear a call to arms over gender changes that whittle out masculine language. For example, in Hebrews, "God is treating you as sons" in earlier translations, but in the *TNIV*, it's "children." The change is not only unnecessary, it undermines the most essential quality of a Bible translation — trustworthiness, says Wayne Grudem, author of *The TNIV and the Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy* and a professor of the Bible and theology at Phoenix Seminary in Scottsdale.

"How would you like to read a Bible where you don't know what words you can trust? People memorize the Bible. They pray on it. They want to trust every word," says Grudem. Grudem is wary of editing a Bible with young adults in mind. "Every reader knows the Bible is an ancient document and that you have to translate it as it really is, even if you might have said something differently today. People easily figure out that this (content) is eternal. They get it. ... It's not that hard."

But why not make it easy and appealing? asks Paul

Caminiti, president of Bible publishing for Zondervan. "When Jesus was on the Earth, he came to people's level. He didn't say, 'Come to my level.'"

*Note from pastor Kevin: This final statement is not the truth. It is precisely because Jesus did not come down to our level that He received so much contempt from the religious leaders. Jesus made it a point to speak in parables, making it hard for the non-searching listener to know what he was saying spiritually. He explains why He did so in Matthew 13:10-17. At one point (John 6) Jesus chooses His words in a way that caused many of His disciples to leave him. Then He turns to the twelve and asks them if they were also going to leave. Peter's answer is very applicable to this translation debate:*

*John 6:68 But Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? **You have the words of eternal life.** 69 "Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."*

*We encourage our congregation to avoid the paraphrase translations and instead stick with those translations that have attempted to maintain a strict standard of accuracy when translating from the original languages (King James, New King James).*