

A textual analysis of two translations of the Bible

The texts

Text A is the *King James Bible* translation of **Genesis 3: 1-24**. The *KJB* was first translated in 1611 but was revised in 1769. This is the version in general use today.

Text B is the *Today's New International Version* translation of the same text. *TNIV* was published in 2005 and it built upon the *New International Version* of 1978, an American version intended to replace the *KJB*. The *TNIV* aims at accuracy but prioritises contemporary forms of English.

This is an analysis of the two texts showing the ways in which language has changed over time.

Audience

Since Genesis 3: 1-24 comes from the Old Testament of the Bible, its original audience was pre-Christian. One of the earliest sections of the Bible (probably written down over 1,400 years before Christ), it was part of Jewish scripture. It provides an account of the world which places Jewish ancestors at the centre of the narrative and in a special relationship with God.

The *KJB* was intended for the entire Christian population of England – including both listening and reading audiences. An important story like that of Adam and Eve would have been well known by everybody and this version would not have been difficult to understand.

The *TNIV* is intended for an international modern audience, covering both listening and reading modes of reception, albeit in vastly different contexts from the *KJB*.

Purpose

A very clear purpose of this text is to account for the current situation of human experience in terms of an ancient (original or first) sin committed by the first humans in this narrative (Adam and Eve). Audiences of the *KJB* would have accepted this as historical and factual, whereas a modern audience would include many who would view Adam, Eve and the serpent as symbolic, in line with an interpretation of the Creation text as non-literal.

A further purpose of the text may be to act as a deterrent to human aspiration to become 'as gods'. The *TNIV* gives 'like God' for this phrase, clarifying the specific nature of the offence, which is equivalent to the transgression of Lucifer. (See <http://www.crossref-it.info/repository/big-ideas-bible/Garden-of-Eden,-Adam-and-Eve,-'Second-Adam'>.) A secondary purpose of the text is to inform humankind about its position relative to God.

Content / genre

This is a sacred text, specifically the Old Testament of The Bible. The narrative is that of the Fall of humankind and its consequences, of transgression and punishment, ending with an exile and a reinstatement of the mysteries of Eden. The story of Adam and Eve is instrumental in establishing moral codes and addressing how evil operates in the world. In this sense, the genre is partly chronicle and partly an 'example' (exemplum) of how biblical morality operates.

Being transliterated from an oral tradition, the two versions provide a strong narrative but are perhaps less consciously 'literary' than other sections of the Bible. Nevertheless, there are some instances of parallelism, dialogue, the shocking image of humans as 'dust', a selection of imagery drawn from agrarian culture, followed by the final symbol of reasserted power in the 'flaming sword' used to protect Eden.

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The representation of Eve is particularly interesting in this text, as this has given rise in the past to a substantial quantity of anti-feminist literature. The *TNIV*, notwithstanding its gender-neutral choices in language, remains clear on the matter of Eve's culpability and the differences between her decision and Adam's.

Discourse

Both texts are narrated using third person pronouns, and follow a linear narrative structure, which is often joined together with the conjunction (connective) 'and'. Only five of the nineteen *KJB* verses do not start with 'and' while the word is used still more frequently within the verses. This marks the narrative out as a chronological account, which focuses on actions in a particular order.

Graphology

The layout in both versions is conventional, as the *King James Bible* (*KJB*) Text A is divided into chapters and verses with a new line for each verse, while *Today's New International Version* (*TNIV*) Text B uses a more paragraph-like modern layout. Nevertheless, verse numbers are still marked, and this suits the requirements of those in a modern who need to identify very specific passages of the text.

There is a typical use of an initial capital for 'God' and 'LORD' is written entirely in capitals in both versions, a biblical convention for indicating the divine name of God which, according to the first of the Ten Commandments, must be accorded respect.

The *TNIV* has a sub-heading of 'The Fall', which supports navigation through the text and is typical of the more user-friendly approach of modern translations. This allows modern readers to identify the particular story they want without the need to know specific chapters/verses.

Grammar

Some grammatical developments have led to alterations in the modern text in order to maintain clarity of communication. In terms of verbs and verb phrases, the dummy auxiliary 'do' is used in v. 12 of the *KJB* text '... I did eat' and amended in the *TNIV* to suit modern expectations, while in v.3 the modal auxiliary 'shall' is replaced with the modern choices of 'must' and 'will'. The use of modern 'will' to replace 'shall' does not involve a shift in meaning, but the choice of 'must' creates a sense of obligation, and addresses the potential misunderstanding by modern readers of 'shall' as a prediction of what will happen. It also, therefore, avoids representing the command 'Ye shall not' as an erroneous prediction (since Adam and Eve *do* eat the fruit).

In v. 11 the archaic word 'whereof' is replaced with a construction 'from which I commanded you not to eat.' Similarly, in v.6 'thereof' is replaced with the simpler: 'she took some and ate it.' In v.12 the old-fashioned word 'whom' is removed completely, leaving the slightly elliptical 'The woman you put here with me'. Interestingly, modern simplification often requires more words to convey the same meaning.

At other times, the simplification comes through using more commonly used conjunctions like 'and'. In v.3 the 'not ... neither...' construction is no longer in common use so this is simplified in *TNIV* using 'and' to connect the two prohibitions.

TNIV varies the use of conjunctions from the repeated 'and' of the *KJB*, using adverbs of time such as 'then' and 'when', and language which connects cause and effect: 'so', 'because', and 'for'. In both versions, there is a sense of the narrator as using a matter-of-fact tone, avoiding direct judgement on the events described.

Lexis

In the *KJB*, the lexis is simple, with familiar concrete nouns such as 'tree', 'fruit',

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'garden', 'thorns', 'thistles', 'ground' and 'dust'. The abstract nouns are also very familiar e.g. 'good' and 'evil', 'sorrow' and 'conception'. Such lexical choices are well suited to a general audience and a purpose to convey the narrative of the Fall without obscuring the message.

The *TNIV* version is very close to the *KJB*, with mostly lexical substitutions, intended to update the text so it is more accessible to a modern audience. Accordingly, archaic forms are largely removed. Pronouns such as 'ye', 'thee' and 'thou' are replaced with the modern pronoun 'you', and 'thy' becomes 'your'. Some archaic verb forms have changed slightly, e.g. 'wast' (was), 'hast' / 'hath' (have, has), 'art' (are), 'shalt' (this becomes 'will'), and 'shouldest' is removed completely from v.11. Other classes of words such as the preposition 'unto' are updated ('to') and 'lest' is replaced with 'or'. The archaic 'Yea' of the *KJB* v. 3 – a challenging, even insinuating expression – is removed completely but the element of challenge is expressed more directly in *TNIV* as 'Did God *really* say..?' Still in use but increasingly rare, 'beguiled' is changed to 'deceived'. This might also be due to the amelioration of the verb 'beguiled' – something beguiling could be considered attractive whereas 'deceived' remains more negative on the whole.

The humiliation of the serpent's punishment is further emphasised in the *TNIV* version of v. 14 by the choice of 'crawl' instead of *KJB* 'go'. The human suffering resulting from the chain of consequences of the Fall serves to underline the text's emphasis on the omnipotence of God and the dependence of humans.

Semantics

Other lexical substitutions are in response to semantic changes – *TNIV* aims for clarity and accessibility. The archaic phrase 'beast of the field' is replaced with 'wild animals', while 'subtil' has undergone semantic

narrowing and amelioration, with its older meaning being supplied by the word 'crafty' in *TNIV*. The present-day word 'subtle' has far more positive connotations (as 'something so delicate or precise as to be difficult to analyse or describe'), and so is not used in the modern text.

Other words which have narrowed in their meanings are 'sorrow' (changed to 'pain'), 'herb' (changed to 'plants') and 'seed' (changed to 'offspring'). The word 'bruise' has undergone semantic weakening so the stronger choices in *TNIV* of 'crush' and 'strike' restore the powerful sense of destructive attack. It is very interesting that the word 'serpent' has been retained. The exact nature of this creature is still debated, and the retention of the word allows this to be open to interpretation. Perhaps the term is also still present because it is such a powerful and recognised image from the story of the Fall.

Concepts

Informalisation has been identified as a common element of language change, but it seems that the Bible has been less prone to this development, despite a number of 'dynamic equivalence' translations which aim to convey the sense of a text rather than follow word-for-word. The *TNIV* text is quite formal, choosing elevated lexis if changes are made (e.g. 'cattle' becomes 'livestock') and introducing some old-fashioned grammatical constructions which are in keeping with the syntax of the *KJB*. An example of this is, 'Cursed are you above all livestock' – this choice may have been made in order to give prominence to the word 'Cursed'.

Contexts

In addition to the words already noted as unexpectedly old-fashioned, *TNIV* may have tried to uphold religious tradition with phrases like 'all the days of your life' and lexis such as 'enmity', setting the Bible apart from other modern texts while also making it more accessible through other lexical choices. Inverted syntax is often

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retained, it seems, for the seriousness of the tone this conveys: 'for dust you are and to dust you will return'.

Some of the language is also very typical of the Bible: 'dust' is used to mean 'earth' but the bigger concept of the insignificance and transitoriness of human life is signalled by this familiar word choice.

Some of the references to Adam and Eve in *KJB* might have seemed unacceptable in a modern context of gender politics, and this might account for a certain proportion of the changes made. The *TNIV* is known for its use of gender-neutral or inclusive language, e.g. 'human beings' instead of 'man'; however, there are no instances in this extract and 'God' remains masculine in any references in *TNIV*. Some quite minor alterations may have resulted from social pressure to represent male and female as equals:

- ❖ When Adam refers to Eve, his word 'gavest' ('The woman whom thou

gavest to be with me...') is replaced with 'put here' in *TNIV*, perhaps to limit the idea of Eve as a possession of Adam

- ❖ Likewise, 'seed' is replaced by 'offspring', possibly because of the masculine bias in 'seed'
- ❖ The modern day feminine connotations of 'aprons' are also avoided by using 'coverings'.
- ❖ The universalizing choice of 'the man' to replace 'Adam' in several of the verses may be a reflection of a tendency towards general interpretations.

For a modern audience, literal and/or metaphorical readings of the text may be affected by knowledge of Darwin's *Origin of the Species* and scientific developments in relation to evolution. These scientific developments generally run counter to a literal reading of the Creation story, leading to wider global debate about the nature of Bible stories.

Text A

Genesis 3: 1-24 KJV

¹ Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?

² And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden:

³ But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.

⁴ And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die:

⁵ For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.

⁶ And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.

⁷ And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons.

⁸ And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God

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amongst the trees of the garden.

⁹ And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?

¹⁰ And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.

¹¹ And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?

¹² And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.

¹³ And the LORD God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat.

¹⁴ And the LORD God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life:

¹⁵ And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.

¹⁶ Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.

¹⁷ And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life;

¹⁸ Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field;

¹⁹ In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.

²⁰ And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living.

²¹ Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them.

²² And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever:

²³ Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken.

²⁴ So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.

Text B

Genesis 3: 1-24 TNIV

The Fall

¹ Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God really say, "You must not eat from any tree in the garden"?''

² The woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, ³ but God did say, "You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die."'

⁴ 'You will not certainly die,' the serpent said to the woman. ⁵ 'For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.'

⁶ When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. ⁷ Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

⁸ Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ But the LORD God called to the man, 'Where are you?'

¹⁰ He answered, 'I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.'

¹¹ And he said, 'Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?'

¹² The man said, 'The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.'

¹³ Then the LORD God said to the woman, 'What is this you have done?'
The woman said, 'The serpent deceived me, and I ate.'

¹⁴ So the LORD God said to the serpent, 'Because you have done this,

"Cursed are you above all livestock
and all wild animals!
You will crawl on your belly
and you will eat dust
all the days of your life.

¹⁵ And I will put enmity
between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and hers;
he will crush your head,
and you will strike his heel."'

¹⁶ To the woman he said,
'I will make your pains in childbearing very severe;
with pain you will give birth to children.
Your desire will be for your husband,
and he will rule over you.'

¹⁷ To Adam he said, 'Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, "You must not eat of it",
"Cursed is the ground because of you;
through painful toil you will eat of it
all the days of your life.

¹⁸ It will produce thorns and thistles for you,
and you will eat the plants of the field.

¹⁹ By the sweat of your brow
you will eat your food
until you return to the ground,
since from it you were taken;
for dust you are
and to dust you will return." '

²⁰ Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living.

²¹The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. ²²And the LORD God said, 'The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live for ever.' ²³So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. ²⁴After he drove them out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.