

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

What is the Spoken English New Testament?

The Spoken English New Testament (SENT) is an original translation of the New Testament from first-century Koine^a Greek into contemporary spoken English. Koine, the language in which the New Testament's 27 books were written, was "common" Greek, in two senses. It was "common" because nearly everybody had it in common, and because it was the everyday, common Greek you heard on the street and read in people's private letters. It was ordinary Greek, not elegant literary Greek. So SENT translates the New Testament into ordinary contemporary spoken English.^b SENT is not a paraphrase or a revision of any previous translation or version. Its aim is to be a fresh, accurate, scholarly translation from the Greek, using standard translator's tools^c and prepared with constant reference to more than a dozen reputable translations.^d Taking into account the notes and other special features, SENT brings the reader as close to the original Greek NT texts as any widely-available contemporary translation, including those known as the most "literal."

Who is SENT for? What kinds of readers will get the most out of it? Is it for me?

SENT is translated with a number of different kinds of readers in mind. Above all, it has been designed for people who have never read the Bible before, or who have only been exposed to an old, peculiar-sounding translation. But it is also

^a Pronounced either *kee-nee* or *koy-nay*.

^b The English used is North American, but some effort has been made to remove expressions that sound odd in the ears of non-North American English speakers.

^c The UBS (United Bible Societies) edition of the Greek New Testament supplied the working Greek text, and where there were significant differences between different ancient NT manuscripts, Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (2nd edn, based on the Fourth Revised Edition; New York: United Bible Societies, 1994) was consulted. Standard Greek dictionaries and grammatical resources such as BAGD, LSJ, and BDF were also routinely consulted.

^d The following fine translations were regularly consulted both for their interpretation of Greek words and grammar and for their English renderings: NRSV (the New Revised Standard Version), NIV (the New International Version), NASB (the New American Standard Version), TEV (Today's English Version, formerly known as the Good News Bible), NCV (the New Century Version), CEV (the Contemporary English Version), NLB (the New Living Bible), NAB (the New American Bible), NJB (the New Jerusalem Bible), NEB (the New English Bible), Lattimore (*The Four Gospels and the Revelation* [trans. Richmond Lattimore; New York: Farrar · Straus · Giroux, 1979]; *Acts and Letters of the Apostles* [trans. Richmond Lattimore; New York: Farrar · Straus · Giroux, 1982]), Beck (*The New Testament in the Language of Today* [trans. William F. Beck; Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1963]), Moffatt (*The New Testament: A New Translation* [trans. James Moffatt; New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1913]).

designed for Christians—old and new—who are yearning to understand the New Testament better than they ever have before. It’s for Christians who are yearning for a translation that stands “as close to the Greek” as possible, while remaining natural, easily understandable English. Thirdly, it is for people for whom English is a second language. Finally, it is for people translating the New Testament into languages that it has never been translated into before. SENT will help them understand the text deeply, and it will provide an example of how to express things in simple, ordinary ways.

Why do we need another translation? Aren’t there lots of them already?

There are a number of reasons why SENT provides a valuable addition to the body of existing translations. To begin with, the English language is always evolving and changing, and every new generation of readers deserves a version of the scriptures that is accessible, understandable, and natural-sounding to them. If you’ve only heard or read the Bible in one of the relatively traditional translations, it might come as a surprise that the people who wrote the New Testament did not talk or write in old-fashioned language. Like most of us, they wrote in the everyday language of their own time and place.^a The NT writers often say unexpected, deeply challenging things, and one important way to let their words strike home is to let them speak in a normal, everyday manner. So, to be faithful to the authors of the New Testament, the best translation should sound at least as normal in English as their writing did when it was read aloud in their language.

And that brings up several further points in favor of a translation using a “spoken” style. First of all, it was the standard ancient practice to read books aloud, not silently and “without moving your lips.” Books were composed with that in mind—that is, they were composed with the expectation that they would be read aloud. Secondly, ancient books were written one by one by hand, so they were relatively rare and valuable. A book like a gospel was composed so that it could be read aloud to groups of hearers. Nearly everything in the NT, in fact, was written to be read aloud in Christian communities, not simply to be read or studied privately by individuals. For example, much of the NT consists of letters written to specific Christian communities (i.e. churches), with the intention that they be read aloud to the believers when received. Not only that, but Paul dictated most of his letters to a person who put his words down on paper. So most of Paul’s letters—perhaps all of them—are records of what Paul *said* with his voice, not what he *wrote* with a pen. Finally, a number of the NT letters appear to be made up of material from sermons. All of these are good reasons to welcome and enjoy a translation of the NT into spoken English.

^a A few of the books of the NT are written in a relatively more literary style of Greek (e.g. Luke–Acts, 1 Peter, Ephesians, Hebrews, James), but most are written in a very ordinary, everyday style with no frills.

So what is it about the Spoken English New Testament that is new and unique?

SENT has many valuable features, all of which are designed to make this the most accurate and the most engaging and readable translation most people have ever encountered. For example:

- SENT is consistently presented in a spoken, not a written or literary style. SENT is especially intended for reading aloud—whether in church, or in one’s own private reading.^a
- SENT maintains two translation values that are usually regarded as impossible to achieve at the same time: 1. to give the reader the closest possible rendering of the scriptural text, and 2. to render the text into English in a way that is natural and easily understandable to contemporary hearers and readers.
- In order to give reader the closest possible feel for the Greek text that it translates, SENT prints in lighter type (like this) words that do not correspond to any Greek word(s) in the original, but are supplied in English for sense or style. For example, consider Mt. 19:3:

Some Pharisees came up to Jesus, and began testing him. They said, “Is it allowed for a man to divorce his wife for any reason he chooses?”

The word “Some” in the first sentence is not translating the Greek word for “some,” but has been supplied for style. The sentence means the pretty much the same thing whether or not the word “Some” is added, but it doesn’t sound quite right in English without it. So the word “Some” is added, and is printed in lighter type. In the second sentence of Mt. 19:3 above, the words “he chooses” are supplied for sense, not for style. They’re added because without them the sentence can be misunderstood to be asking, “Is there any valid reason that a man can give for divorcing his wife?” The words “he chooses” are printed in lighter type to let the reader know that the Greek text of Matthew does not contain any words that correspond to “he chooses.”^b To take another example, have a look at Rom. 12:6-8:

^a SENT shares this feature of consistent spoken English style with the CEV (the Contemporary English Version), but SENT’s renderings are often significantly closer to the original Greek, and SENT does not resort to paraphrase without offering a literal rendering in a footnote.

^b Many editions of the King James Version and the New American Standard Bible have an equivalent feature, but they use italics. Italics, however, sometimes confuses inexperienced readers, who end up emphasizing the very elements that are not present in the original Greek (or Hebrew) text.

And we all have gifts, according to God's grace, which is given out in a different way to each person. If it's prophecy, the grace comes out in proportion to the person's faith. If it's service, it comes out in their service. If someone is a teacher, it comes out in their teaching. If someone is gifted with encouraging people, it comes out in their encouragement. The giver gives wholeheartedly, the leader leads enthusiastically, the person who serves the needy does it joyfully.

This example demonstrates how SENT makes the text as easy to understand as possible on a first reading or hearing. The Apostle Paul's writing here is tightly condensed—so condensed, in fact, that English speakers will find it very difficult to make sense from a word-for-word translation. (To see what a word-for-word translation might look like, read these verses and skip over the words printed in lighter type.) Where possible, SENT clarifies the text or makes it more understandable by adding words in lighter type, rather than by completely rephrasing. In that way, SENT gives readers a readable English text while retaining as much information as possible about the actual words of the original Greek text. Those who like to do in-depth study of the Bible in English will find this feature useful over and over again.

- SENT supplies numerous easy-to-understand explanations and (more) “literal” or alternative renderings in footnotes. With its combination of lighter type and explanatory footnotes, SENT gives you as good a window into the Greek written by the original authors as any translation out there.
- SENT supplies unique cues to aid in reading the text aloud. First, unfamiliar words, names, and place names are sounded out in footnotes, with bold formatting indicating the accented syllable of the word. And secondly, italics are used in the main text to indicate the translator's sense of the word or words in a sentence that should be given the stress in order for the sentence to communicate most clearly and accurately in English what the underlying Greek says.
- SENT uses gender-inclusive or gender-neutral language in English when the Greek text makes non-gender-specific references to people. There has been a lot of furor over this issue lately in Bible translation circles, but the matter is not complicated. It is a breach of good translation principles to imitate grammatical features of the source language when doing so is likely to sound improper or archaic to the readers of the translation.

- SENT has been field tested. Many portions of the first version have been read aloud in a series of “focus groups,” in order to test and refine the naturalness of its spoken English. The groups recruited for participation in the focus group process were intentionally very diverse from one another. Some were made up of experienced Christians from various denominational backgrounds, some were made up mostly of new Christians, and some were made up mostly of non-Christians. Highly educated people, relatively uneducated people, people with English as a second language, and people from various ethnic groups participated.

Although it is not a unique feature, SENT has a characteristic that many readers will find welcome: highly accessible English. Sentences have been kept as short as possible, and grammatical structures have been kept relatively simple, for the sake of maximum readability. Spoken English naturally expresses things with less complex grammar than literary English, so the values of spoken English style and accessibility are nicely compatible.

How Accurate is SENT as a Translation?

It's commonly believed that a Bible translation, in order to be “accurate,” should try to translate each individual word in the original (Greek or Hebrew) text with a single English word.^a The problem with putting this belief into practice is that the words in different languages cannot be paired with each other one to one. Just as words in English sometimes have one meaning and sometimes another, depending on the context, so it is in Greek. One common Greek NT word, for example, in one place means ‘put,’ but in other places means ‘place,’ ‘throw,’ ‘cast,’ and ‘send,’ among other things.^b To give an example that goes the other way, the single English word “but” is typically the best translation for at least four Greek words.^c And if the words don't correspond item for item between Greek and English, neither do grammatical features. If you try to translate in a way that always represents each grammatical form of the Greek with a single consistent English grammatical form, you'll often end up with weird-sounding and hard-to-understand English. What this means is that the best translation doesn't embrace as its highest value the ideal of feature-for-feature correspondence between the translation and its source text. More important than so-called “formal” correspondence is the value of expressing clearly and understandably what the person was trying to say. “Formal equivalence,” or, in simpler terms, “staying close to the Greek,”^d is a good value to strive for, and SENT not only strives for it,

^a This is known as the principle of concordance.

^b The word is *ballō*.

^c The words are *de*, *kai*, *plēn*, and *alla*.

^d Of course, in relation to the Old Testament, we'd be talking about staying close to the Hebrew (and, in a very few cases, the Aramaic).

but in many cases succeeds as well or better in this than even the most literal of the familiar translations. But concordance (matching each Greek word with a single English word) and formal equivalence cannot be more important than successfully conveying to the reader what the person was trying to say. So the working principle of SENT is formal equivalence wherever possible, dynamic (i.e. meaning-for-meaning) equivalence and natural English—always.

A Few Specific Translation Challenges, and How SENT Deals with Them

SENT renders the Greek word *kurios* (commonly translated as “Lord”) in four different ways, because this word doesn’t have one always-appropriate English equivalent. 1. It is rendered as “Lord” when the writer of a gospel is referring to Jesus, e.g. “The Lord said...,” because to the evangelists Jesus is the Lord and King of all humanity. It is also rendered as “Lord” when it clearly refers to God. 2. When somebody speaks to Jesus or someone else as a stranger, it is rendered as “Sir,” because in Greek it often functions exactly like “sir.” We say “sir” just as a form of politeness, but even “sir” is an old word meaning “lord” (note the word “sire”). 3. It is rendered as “Teacher” when Jesus’ followers or others clearly address him as an authoritative teacher. 4. Finally, *kurios* is rendered as “owner” when it refers to the owner of a home or of property (e.g. Mt. 20:8). The primary relationship we see in the gospels between Jesus and his close followers before his crucifixion and resurrection is that of teacher and students, spiritual master and disciples, rabbi and students. To render the word *kurios* as “Lord” in such contexts would be anachronistic: they didn’t fully know him as Lord yet. Exceptions come in places such as Mt. 15:22 and 20:29-34, where people address Jesus as “Lord, Son of David.” Clearly these speakers are being represented as appealing to Jesus as heir to the kingly throne of David, not as a teacher.

SENT renders the Greek expression *ho huios tou anthrōpou* (traditionally translated as “the Son of Man”) as “the Human One,” because the traditional phrase “the Son of Man” does not convey what the Greek words behind it mean, and in fact doesn’t convey very much of anything to a contemporary English-speaking hearer. In Hebrew, which is the ultimate source of the expression, it is common to use the expression “a son/child of humanity” to mean no more or less than “a human being” (e.g. Ps. 8:3-4; see “Bible Words” under “Children of”). The only reason why “the Human One” has been used rather than “the Human Being” is that it sounds better.

SENT renders *idou*, traditionally translated as “behold,” in a number of ways, depending on what seems most natural in the context. Obviously “behold” won’t do, since no one ever says “Behold!” in contemporary English. Sometimes it is rendered as “Look,” sometimes as “See,” and sometimes—and perhaps this will be surprising—it is rendered as “Suddenly.” In everyday spoken English, when people are telling a story, the word “suddenly” tends to appear frequently, and it usually functions very much like *idou*—serving more to draw heightened

attention to something happening in the narrative, than literally to assert that it happened in a sudden way.

Why “First Edition”? Doesn’t That Go Without Saying?

The Spoken English New Testament was released as a Preliminary Edition in 2008, with a print run of 2,200 copies. The expectation—which has proved true—was that reader and reviewer feedback on such a brand new translation would result in numerous adjustments and changes. These have been incorporated into the First Edition, and the expectation is that from this edition forward the text ought to be relatively stable. Thus this First Edition is explicitly named in order to distinguish it from the Preliminary Edition as well as from any later editions that might appear.

Acknowledgments

This translation could not have come into being without the constant help of many fine translations that have preceded it. In today’s world, every translator of the Bible into English is standing on the shoulders of literally hundreds of dedicated translators, lexicographers, grammarians, historians, and exegetes who have contributed to this work through the centuries. Among them all, I would like to honor two who are particularly close to my heart: Bruce M. Metzger and Richmond Lattimore.

I would also like to thank the moderators and members of the Biblical Greek (B-Greek) and Bible Translation (B-Trans) online discussion groups for their generous support in this translation project during the nearly four years of its authoring. Each of these groups offered advice, correction, and encouragement to me in the form of many hundreds of online discussions and dialogues.

Finally, it is fitting to conclude the Preface to a translation of the New Testament our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ with thanks to the One for whom the New Testament, and this translation itself, is named: Jesus Christ. He is the Sent One (see Jn 9:4-7), who has given his life for the life of the human family. May his voice, and the voices of all his representatives in this book, ring out and ring true for everyone who reads this book with an open heart.

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January, 2022