

A Comparison of the HCSB with Other Major Translations

Abstract:

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The Holman Christian Standard Bible is a new modern translation based on the latest Hebrew and Greek texts. It was produced with the Accordance Bible software program and widespread use of the internet. Electronic editions of BDAG, K-B, reference tools, and translations greatly aided the development of the HCSB. Over one hundred scholars participated in the translation. The HCSB uses what we call an optimal equivalence translation philosophy and seeks to be gender accurate. In comparison with existing translations, the HCSB has improvements in accuracy, vocabulary choices, formatting, and style. It is the leanest modern translation with a word count of 718,943. It has more footnotes and textual information than any major translation and has a system of Bullet Notes to aid the reader. Yahweh is used in passages where the name of God is discussed in the OT, and Messiah is used in NT passages for the translation of christos where the subject is the Israelite deliverer. The result is a Bible that is accurate for study and reads well for personal use and corporate worship.

Introduction

To compare the HCSB with other major translations, we must define the term. What is a major translation? If this were a paper read at SBL, the major translations considered would be NRSV, REB, NAB, and NJB. These are highly esteemed but are not widely used by evangelical Bible students. For our purposes, the major translations we are using as comparisons are the NIV, NLT (second edition of 2004), and ESV. William Tyndale's (1494?-1536) tradition, which includes the KJV, NKJV, NASB, RSV, and NRSV, will be represented by the ESV. Some may not be aware of Tyndale's legacy to the 1611 KJV. Eighty-three percent of the KJV New Testament can be attributed to him. Of the books that Tyndale completed, the KJV Old Testament represents about 76% of his work. The NIV, NLT, and HCSB represent different translation streams. The TNIV, NET, and The Message are omitted from this comparison as they do not have a large market share at this time.

The HCSB was not "planned and sponsored by the Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1998" as one website claims. The origin of this translation goes back to Dr. Art Farstad, who was the Executive Editor of the NKJV. On his own, he began working on a modern language edition based on the Majority Text, which he first called *Tyndale 21* and later *Logos 21*. From 1995-1998 this project was funded by a foundation called Absolutely Free. Holman Bible Publishers purchased the rights to *Logos 21* and hired Dr. Art Farstad as General Editor in April 1998. However, the translation Art was asked to oversee was not a majority text translation but a new translation based on the critical text. He died in September 1998, and Dr. Edwin Blum was named as his successor. The goals, purposes, and translation philosophy are outlined in the introduction to the HCSB, which can be found in every printed product.

The HCSB was completed in 2004. The NT of the NIV was finished in 1972 and the OT in 1977. This means that the NIV was completed before the days of the personal computer. It was completed before the internet was used to transmit documents between scholars and editors. It also means that the NIV represents the state of scholarship at the time of 1972-77. For example, the standard Hebrew lexicon in use was the Brown, Driver, and Briggs lexicon published in 1906. HCSB was able to use the new 5-volume Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm lexicon (HALOT, 1967-1996).

The theological word books such as Jenni-Westermann's TLOT, the 15-volume TDOT, the Dictionary of Classical Hebrew, NIDNTT, and NIDOTT had not been published when the NIV was produced. Many major commentaries were also published in the interval between 1977 and 2004. For example, many volumes in the Anchor Bible were finished during this period. Milgrom's three-volume work on Leviticus in the AB, which represents a lifetime of Jewish scholarship on this book, was completed in 2000.

The NIV translation committee changed 7% of the NIV text when they made the TNIV revision. While many of the changes made were gender changes (1.68% according to the TNIV committee), this means the scholars felt that 5.32% of the NIV needed an improvement. This 5.32% included changes that were "textual, programmatic, clarity issues, sentence structure & grammar, and footnotes & headings." This is according to the TNIV website. So more than 5% of the NIV needed an improvement since 1977. Some of these changes reflect what can be seen in the HCSB.

Translation Philosophy

In practice translations are seldom, if ever, based purely on formal or dynamic/functional equivalence. Rather they are mixed, with a tendency in one direction or the other. Optimal equivalence is our attempt to describe a translation philosophy recognizing that form cannot be neatly separated from meaning and should not be disregarded. It should not be changed unless comprehension demands it. For example, nouns should not be changed to verbs or the third person "they" to second person "you" unless the original sense cannot otherwise be clearly conveyed. The primary goal of translation is to convey the sense of the original with as much clarity as the original text and the target language permit. Optimal equivalence appreciates the goals of formal equivalence but also recognizes its limitations.

Gender Issues

Since 1977 the gender controversy has become a major issue among Bible translators. The goal is to accurately translate Scripture. The ESV and HCSB follow the Evangelical Guidelines of May 27, 1997 for translation of gender-related language in Scripture. The NIV was done before there was a lot of gender sensitivity. One estimate is that there are 800 places in the NT of the NIV that use masculine language where the Greek text would allow a more generic or neutral translation. A classic example is Romans 12:6-8. In this passage, the NIV has inserted nine male pronouns or the word "man" where the Greek text does not require it. The NIV reads, "We have different gifts, according to the grace

given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith . . ." The HCSB is gender accurate and has no male language inserted in this passage. The HCSB reads, "According to the grace given to us, we have different gifts: If prophecy, use it according to the standard of one's faith . . ." The TNIV has gone overboard to avoid gender insensitivity and is more gender neutral. We would claim that the NIV is gender biased, the TNIV attempts to be gender neutral, and the HCSB is gender accurate.

The NLT shares to a lesser degree the gender neutrality of the TNIV. Comparing 17 English translations in 115 gender-sensitive passages, involving various kinds of grammatical constructions, yields the following percentage of gender inclusive translations:

KJV 8%, RSV 10%, NKJV 13%, NASB 14%, NIV 17%, ESV 24%, HCSB 25%, NLT '04 67%, TNIV 79%, NRSV 84%, CEV 96%. Clearly we believe a gender inclusive translation is correct 25% of the time—more than the KJV, but much less than the TNIV.

The result of a bias toward gender inclusivity is that many masculine terms are removed, muted, or changed. The Greek NT has *anthropos* 548 times and *aner* 216 times. *Anthropos* has a larger semantic field and should be translated as "human" in many contexts, but *aner* refers to a male person. Of the 216 times it occurs in the NT, NLT has removed, replaced, or changed it 43 times, eg. Ac 27:25 and Rm 11:4.

In the OT there are five major words for humanity. *Adam* means a man or human, and it occurs 546 times. *Ish* means male, man, or husband, and it occurs 2,199 times. (The female form is *ishshah* and occurs 775 times.) The Hb *enosh* occurs 42 times, and the Aramaic *enash* occurs 25 times, making a total of 67 occurrences. *Gebher* means manly or vigorous, and it occurs 66 times. So the total number of Hebrew words for men, males, or man is 2,878. If we only look at the word *ish*, which is the clearest term for male, it occurs 2,199 times. Yet the NLT only has the words "man, man's, men, and men's" a total of 1,617 times. For example, in Lv 20:2-5 *ish* occurs five times, but they change it to the plural words "they" or "them" instead of using the word "man."

In many places, the more gender inclusive translations change "fathers" to "parents." The book of Proverbs is no longer a father's instruction to his "son"; instead, it's written to his "children." The HCSB and ESV have not followed this trend and have translated the text more accurately than the TNIV or the NLT.

Accuracy or Translations of Certain Problematic Words

The following words are representative of the accuracy of the HCSB.

1. The Greek word *doulos* occurs 124 times in the Greek NT. Many Bibles have translated it as "servant" or "bondservant." ESV uses servant in the text, but they attach a footnote that reads, "Greek *bondservant*." NIV and NLT alternate between "servant" and "slave." The translation of *doulos* as servant is faulty (cf. BDAG, p. 260) and causes people to miss a significant Pauline

metaphor. HCSB uses slave. There is a significant difference between a servant and a slave. Paul says, “. . . You are not your own, for you were bought at a price . . .” (1Co 6:19b-20)

2. The key term *torah* occurs 223 times in the Hebrew Bible. Most Christian Bibles consistently translate it as law. Most Jewish Bibles normally use instruction or teaching. “The majority of present day exegetes translate *tora* as instruction, education, teaching” (TDOT, XV: 615). If we compare the translation of *torah* in Ps 1:2; 19:7, and 37:31 in the major Bibles we note the following:

- ESV – law
- NIV – law
- NLT – law and instruction
- HCSB - instruction

3. God’s personal name, *YHWH*, occurs 6,828 times in the Hebrew Bible. In English Bibles LORD is commonly used following the LXX tradition of rendering it with *kurios*. However, LORD is not a name; it is a title. It has been argued that the use of YHWH (or Yahweh) will offend Jewish people. Very orthodox Jews will not even vocalize the word “God,” preferring the use of “G-D.” However, some modern Jewish translations have used YHWH. French Protestants as well as the Moffatt translation have used “The Eternal” as a name. B. Waltke prefers to translate the name as “I AM” (OTT, p. 365.) If we compare the translation of *YHWH* in major translations we see the following:

- KJV – Jehovah 4 times
- RV (1881) – Jehovah 10 times
- ASV (1901) – Jehovah 6,777 times
- NJB – Yahweh 6,342 times
- NLT – Yahweh 7 times (all in Exodus)
- REB, NASB, NIV, NKJV, TNIV, ESV – all use LORD
- HCSB – Yahweh 75 times (first printing); currently 467 times; the 467 uses are where the name of God is praised or discussed. For example:

“I am Yahweh, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another or My praise to idols.” Is 42:8

“Yahweh is the God of Hosts; Yahweh is His name.” Hs 12:5

“May they know that You alone—whose name is Yahweh—are the Most High over all the earth.” Ps 83:18

4. In the HCSB NT, *christos* is translated Messiah where there is a Jewish context (cf. BDAG, p. 109). An example is, Mt 16:16, which reads “Simon

Peter answered, ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God!’” NLT agrees with HCSB, but ESV and NIV translate this as “the Christ.” (TNIV has changed this to “the Messiah”.)

Vocabulary Choices

The NIV, NLT, and the HCSB use a more modern and American vocabulary. The ESV retains some of its British heritage by including dated or archaic language. Here are some examples:

- | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------|
| • ails | Ps 114:5 |
| • alms | Lk 11:41 (8 total occurrences) |
| • barley was in the ear | Ex 9:31 |
| • bosom | Ex 23:8 (12 total) |
| • chide | Ps 103:9 |
| • disdained | 1Sm 17:1 |
| • ears of grain | Gn 41:5 (4 total) |
| • fodder | Gn 24:25 (7 total) |
| • he-goat | Pr 30:31 |
| • morsel | Gn 18:5 (13 total) |
| • she-bear | Pr 17:12 |
| • whoredom | 2Ch 21:11 (13 total) |

The NIV and TNIV also include some archaic or unusual word choices:

- | | |
|----------------|-------------|
| abound | spurn |
| alas | strode |
| astir | suckling |
| befuddled | thus |
| bosom | toil |
| deluged | to no avail |
| kindred | unkempt |
| naught | unmindful |
| profligate | unsandaled |
| reckon | unto |
| rend | unwary |
| self-abasement | upon |
| shall | vaunt |
| slew | vilest |

When we compare six specific words among the major translations, we see the following:

1. Tithe - an old English word for a tenth.
 - KJV – 40 times
 - ESV – 41 times

- NLT – 22 times
 - NIV – 15 times
 - HCSB – 0
2. Behold
- KJV – 1,326 times
 - ESV – 1,106 times
 - NIV – 6 times
 - NLT – 0
 - HCSB – 0
3. Lepers, leprous, leprosy – should not be used today because of the confusion with Hansen’s Disease. Hansen’s Disease does not grow on clothing, walls, or other objects as mentioned in Lv 13-14.
- ESV – 68 times
 - NLT – 34 times
 - NIV – 33 times
 - HCSB – 0
4. Shall – is fast disappearing in modern American usage (cf. B. Garner in *Modern Legal Usage*, 2nd ed., pp. 939-941).
- KJV – 9,838 times
 - ESV – 6,389 times
 - NIV – 467 times (TNIV – 480 times)
 - NLT – 8 times
 - HSCB – 0
5. O – is an old spelling of the word “Oh” and is considered archaic when used before a name in direct address, e.g. “O King, live forever.”
- KJV – 1,065 times
 - ESV – 1,129 times
 - NIV – 978 times (TNIV - 64 times!)
 - NLT – 743 times
 - HCSB – 0
6. Strong drink – is a 14th century term. HCSB uses the correct term beer. The average reader would understand strong drink to be a distilled product rather than a fermented one, but distillation was not discovered until the ninth century AD.
- KJV – 22 times
 - ESV – 23 times

Verbose or Lean?

The word count of the Hebrew and Greek text in the standard critical editions is 545,202. Let’s compare this to some major translations.

• Original KJV	774,746
• Current KJV	790,676
• ESV	757,439
• NLT	747,891
• NIV	726,109
• HCSB	718,943

That means the ESV uses 38,496 more words than the HCSB to convey the source text of 545,202 words. As a side note, NASB95 is considered by some to be a fairly literal translation, yet its word count is 775,861. So it uses 56,918 more words than the HCSB.

Reader Helps

1. Bullet Notes - the HCSB has an appendix of 145 words or phrases that average readers might need some help in understanding. These words, e.g. Asherah, Ashtoreth, or atone, are marked with a bullet on their first occurrence in a chapter of the biblical text. When readers see a bullet in the text, they can refer to the appendix if they want to learn more about the term.
2. Footnotes – The HCSB has the following notes:
 - 1,586 textual notes
 - 5,161 alternate readings
 - 843 explanatory notes
 - 27,565 cross references
 - 237 OT citations in the NT

The NIV and ESV have far fewer notes. For example, the NIV has no textual notes in Gl, Php, 2Tm, and Ti. HCSB has 16. The NLT does have extensive notes, but often a critical term like atone or atonement is left without explanation. In Nm 25:3 there is no help given on Baal of Peor. And in Lv 13:39, ESV uses the term leukoderma with no footnote to help the reader.

3. Formatting – In addition to special formats for poetry, dynamic prose, OT quotes, and using new paragraphs for new speakers, care has been taken in the database of the HCSB to avoid what is called widows and orphans in the typesetting process. Single words wrapping to the next line are avoided so that units of thought are kept together. This produces a Bible page that is more readable and pleasing to the eye.

In summary, the HCSB is more accurate than the NIV, ESV, or NLT. It reads well and has a modern, American vocabulary. Particular attention was devoted to clear and contemporary word order and formatting. The HCSB is more up-to-date in scholarship, and it offers more help and notes to the readers so they can understand what God is saying to them.

The most famous verse in the Bible is Jn 3:16.

NIV translates it as:

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

Similarly, ESV has:

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”

NLT uses:

“For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.”

However, the HCSB correctly translates the Greek *houtos*:

“For God loved the world in this way: He gave His One and Only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.”

Craig Keener in his commentary *The Gospel of John*, Vol. 1:556 supports our translation when he says, "Some could understand English translations (God 'so' loved the world) as intending, 'God loved the world so much'; but John's language is qualitative rather than quantitative. *Houtos* means 'this is *how* God loved the world'; the cross is the ultimate expression of his love." His footnote reads, "On the syntax in 3:16 yielding 'in this way,' see esp. Gundry and Howell, "Syntax."