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A MODERN TRANSLATION OF GENESIS 1–11 IN THE TRADITIONAL SENSE

Dominic Kent

Samuel L. Bray and John F. Hobbins, *Genesis 1–11: A New Old Translation for Readers, Scholars, and Translators* (Wilmore, KY: GlossaHouse, 2017). 326 pages, \$14.99, paperback.

Abstract: Samuel L. Bray and John F. Hobbins have recently released a new translation of Genesis chapters one to eleven. The highlight of the work is their extensive notes that provide insight into not just their translation process, but on the process of Bible translation as a whole. The book offers a great deal to interest Bible readers, scholars, and translators.

Samuel L. Bray and John F. Hobbins have done something very special with their new translation of Genesis 1–11 (technically, it's Genesis 1–12:9). They have not only produced a translation that is stimulating and thought provoking, they give their readers a deep understanding of the process of translation. Having read the copious notes (they have written 140 pages worth), I admire their diligence, patience, and skill.

In a world of multiple English-language Bible translations, one may well ask if another is wanted or required. As this one is born out of the translators' "love for the old translations, and a measure of disappointment with the new ones,"¹ they answer this question with a resounding yes.

The translation itself is refreshing to read, due to its layout. The text is free from headers, footnotes, and comments, with versification discreetly placed at the side. This unencumbered text makes for a very pleasant reading experience. The translators follow the sectioning of the Masoretic Text *Codex Leningradensis*, not just due to its antiquity, but

1. Bray, *Genesis*, 3.

because the phrasing of this codex is significant. This decision created a real shift in my personal understanding of the text as I saw that it ends each section on a note of hope amid the despair it has just described.

The translators' aim is to keep to a close translation, very much in the tradition of the Tyndale and the King James Version; theirs is not a trendy, contemporary English translation, and they are candid with their reasons why they chose this path. "The King James Version seemed old-fashioned to its first readers, and the same was true for readers in antiquity of most of the books of the Bible in Hebrew — their style has had a classical feel for at least the last twenty-two centuries."² In a world where much is being dumbed down, they resist this trend and invite the reader to grapple with the text as it is. Their aim is to help us become a "more discerning reader of biblical stories."³

Latter-Day Saint readers will instantly feel familiar with the translation, as it is very close to the KJV. Bray and Hobbins are also conscious of the need for scripture to be suitable for reading aloud, which is a hallmark of the KJV, in my opinion. It is pleasing to see a modern translation that sees this communal side of scripture as important to the translation process. This is a translation meant not just to be read but to be heard.

The notes make up the majority of the book, and that is where the real value of this book lies. Translation is a complicated and convoluted undertaking. Here we get a glimpse inside the translators' scriptorium. They lay out candidly and in great detail the reasons why they chose to translate the way they did. They discuss their translation process to a degree I've never seen in book form before. I did some biblical seminars with one of the translators for the New International Version years ago, and he furnished us with many descriptions of that work, which I loved. We get similar insights with the notes in this book. They are humble enough to admit their translation is not definitive, but their reasoning is made clear, allowing the reader to decide whether or not they agree with their choices. There were a few times I didn't agree with their choices, but I could at least understand why they had chosen that word/phrase.

Their notes on the use of wordplay and puns in the Hebrew text were some of the most helpful. I knew there were some in the Hebrew text but that many were lost in translation. This translation helpfully puts the wordplays in italics so the reader can see the author is making a pun or linking between these words, such as the Hebrew words for the

2. Ibid., 10.

3. Ibid., 193.

nakedness (*'arummim*) of Adam and Eve and the shrewdness (*'arum*) of the serpent in Genesis chapter 2:25–3:1.

Not only do these notes illuminate Bray and Hobbins' translation process, but the reader will gain insights into many other translations — both the older ones, such as KJV, and more contemporary ones, such as the English Standard Version and New Living Translation. On numerous occasions, I had to make notes in my personal scriptures because of what I read in Bray and Hobbins' work. This became a lengthy but enjoyable process as I went through all my English translations, making notes on some of those translators' word and phrase choices.

After the notes, the reader is given a superb glossary and bibliography that has brought many books to my attention. The indexes are excellent, especially the six-page index of translations referenced in the notes. The thoroughness of their research is incredible; I don't think there is a single English translation they have not examined, in addition to the numerous Hebrew and Greek sources they have investigated.

The subtitle of the book is "A New Old Translation for Readers, Scholars, and Translators," and I highly recommend this serious and studious book for all who fall into those categories. It is accessible to those new to biblical studies but will also stretch more seasoned scholars. I have gained a greater cognizance of Genesis chapters one to eleven and also have a greater appreciation for those involved in the work of translation. I look forward to the publication of future volumes.

Dominic Kent *lives in the UK and has a degree in theatre studies from Manchester University. He is currently studying for an MA in Aspects and Implications of Biblical Interpretation. His areas of interest and academic study are temple theology, hermeneutics, the theatrics and performance of ritual, the early Jerusalem church, and James the brother of Jesus.*

