



Common English Bible / Common English Bible with Apocrypha

Nashville, TN: Common English Bible, 2011. Pp. xv + 1189. DecoTone. \$29.95. / Pp. xv + 1468. DecoTone. \$34.95.

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Introduction

Let me begin by saying that this is far from a detailed review of the Common English Bible. The time it would take me to really familiarize myself with this translation would extend well beyond the limits of the blog tour of which this post is a part. But having spent a few weeks with this Bible I wanted to offer some scattered thoughts about it.

Aesthetics

To start, I received two different versions for review. The first was a brown/red DecoTone copy without Apocrypha. The second copy was a black DecoTone with Apocrypha. The DecoTone is comparable to other synthetic covers such as Zondervan's Italian DuoTone or Crossway's TruTone. The material has a pleasant feel in the hand and it's quite pliable. Both Bibles, which come equipped with a single ribbon marker, lay open at any point if I'm holding them in my hand, which would be quite useful for preaching purposes, but both will require some use before they are able to be laid open from any point on a flat surface.

In terms of size, each Bible measures 5 3/8" x 8 3/8", which again, is just about the perfect size for holding in my hand when preaching. The layout is a straightforward double-column format with no cross references and minimal footnotes. Each Bible has a presentation page in the front and 8 pages of color maps in the back. The paper is not quite "onion paper" but there is some minor

ghosting. I haven't found this to be a problem when reading though. The point type is 9, which for me personally is large enough that I can lay the Bible on my lap and read without issue. As far as the binding is concerned, I can't tell if it's sewn or glued, but it seems well bound, at least at the moment. We'll see how it holds up over time.

Translators

The CEB boasts that it was translated by “one hundred twenty biblical scholars from twenty-two faith traditions” and that “members of seventy-seven reading groups from congregations throughout North America reviewed and responded to early drafts of the translation.” (xiii) A [list of the translators](#) can be seen on the CEB website. There are some discrepancies with the numbers though. The preface cites 120 translators while the Bible's box says 118 and the website lists 111.

Even with the discrepancies these numbers are impressive, but when one looks at the denominations represented and the scholars chosen to do the translations, one thing becomes abundantly clear: this is a predominantly mainline Protestant production. There were a handful of Roman Catholic scholars (11 from my count) who were involved in the translation of the CEB and 1 Reform Jew. One might say that this is something of an updated NRSV (in terms of its translation team, not its translation) although a bit less ecumenical.

Translation

I'm in no position of authority to critique the accuracy of any Bible translation. I can, however, speak to the flow of a given translation as I'm reading it. To be honest, I'm not that thrilled about the way that the CEB rolls off the tongue. I was reared on the KJV and for the past year or so have been making much use of the ESV, so my primary Bibles of use have been geared more toward a formal equivalency translation philosophy. The CEB falls more into the category of functional equivalence, which I'm a fan of in general (e.g., I adore the NLTse and the NIV), but there's something off-putting about the CEB. Take Psalm 23 for example:

23 The LORD is my shepherd.

I lack nothing.

² He lets me rest in grassy meadows;

he leads me to restful waters;

³ he keeps me ^p alive.

He guides me in proper paths

for the sake of his good name.

⁴ Even when I walk

through the darkest valley,

I fear no danger
because you are with me.
Your rod and your staff—
they protect me.
⁵ You set a table for me
right in front of my enemies.
You bathe my head in oil;
my cup is so full it spills over!
⁶ Yes, goodness and faithful love
will pursue me all the days of my life,
and I will live^a in the LORD 's house
as long as I live.

^p Or my soul

^a LXX; MT I will return

This translation may very well be accurate, and perhaps it represents something of the common vernacular (I don't think so, but I'll get to that in a moment), but it doesn't flow smoothly when read aloud. It diminishes the beauty of the Psalm, in my opinion. The ESV has found a way to update the language from what we've come to know and love in the KJV and yet they've managed to preserve the overall flow.

While it's commendable to seek to produce a translation in contemporary English, I think that perhaps the translators have underestimated just how influential the KJV has been on the English language throughout the generations, which is somewhat strange considering that they acknowledge that certain terms persist as idioms in Bibles that preserve King James usage (see xiv). For example, their use of the clunky "Lord of heavenly forces" rather than "Lord of hosts" as a translation of *YHWH sebaoth*, sounds highly unnatural. Contemporary English speakers are more than capable of discerning that "hosts" refers to armies, especially if they read their Bibles more than one verse at a time!

And then there's the issue of their translation of the Hebrew *ben adam*, the Aramaic *bar enosha*, and the Greek *huios tou anthrōpou* as "human being" or the "human one." This is no more understandable than "Son of Man" in a world largely shaped by Christianity. In other words, I'd argue that the influence of the Church over the past two thousand years has been strong enough to make "Son of Man" just as idiomatic as "human one" is allegedly supposed to be. In fact, "Son of Man" sounds rather natural to my Christian ears while the "human one" is almost unintelligible. I'd also suggest that in the NT passages where the translation appears it actually serves to distance the translation from thousands of years of Christian theology. While they say

that the connection to Daniel 7 is preserved, they seem to fail to recognize that its messianic import is somehow weakened.

Apocrypha

To end on a positive note, I'm thrilled to finally have a Bible containing the deuterocanon that I can actually travel with. I haven't had the opportunity to spend a lot of time in the Apocrypha, so I can't offer any real comments on how it compares to other translations, or how it flows in general, but I'm so happy to have it in there. The CEB is to be commended for its inclusion.

Conclusion

At the end of the day I doubt that I'd ever make the CEB my main translation. For the most part I'll use it for comparison. My primary use of this Bible in the future will most likely be in studying the Apocrypha. To be honest, I can't imagine the CEB ever overtaking more popular versions such as the ESV, NIV, or NLT (and certainly never the KJV), but time will tell how much impact it will have.