Twitter Thread by Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg



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Since we're talking about the King James Bible, I'll just point out a few places where it's clear how there's always loss in translation. Like, if you're only relying on the English there are things that just plain don't make sense. But in the original? Lots clearer. 1/x Thread.

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

I mean, what??

In the Hebrew her name is Hava /■■■ because she is the mother of all living/haye/■■ (and you need enough Hebrew to understand what the vavs and yuds are doing here).

"And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed."

Again, this makes no sense and honestly is a bad translation, I know how they got "prince" but ■■■■ should be "you have striven +

Or "contended" or "struggled" or "wrestled" with God /Elohim/aka the "El" suffix and the word for wrestled I didn't transliterate, in the past tense it's "sarita" so even if you don't know conjugation you can already figure out how sr + el gets you close to Israel, yes?

None of this is clear in the KJV.

Or a third example.

"And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you... Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The LORD God... +

hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations."

Again, totally misses what's happening here. First part: "And God said to Moses, "Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh." He continued, "Thus shall you say to the Israelites, 'Ehyeh sent me to you."

It's more "I will be" than "I am," ok, that's a quibble, but God is saying, tell the people that Being-Conjugated-In-The-First-Person sent me. But that would sound silly coming from Moses' mouth. Moses says, "I Will Be sent me!" Just weird. So in the next verse...

God sort of catches Godself and gives Moses a different name to use. The Tetragrammaton. Translated in KJV as the LORD because Jews don't say the holy Tetragrammaton, but rather "Adonai", which you can translate as Lord, so ok. But the Tetragrammaton is a mashup of

Tenses of the verb "to be". So God goes from saying "my name is I-will-be" to "my name is [pure being]." Moses has something clearer to tell the Israelites.

All this is lost in the KJV.

Of course, if you don't know Hebrew you don't know Hebrew. (You can learn!) But it's important to just get that you're, like, kissing through a veil, missing some nuances that are difficult to render or, sometimes, just rendered badly or not rendered. Be aware of the limitations.

For the record, my favorite English-based Torah-with-notes is The Torah: A Women's Commentary (not just for women! Lots of great stuff and not even always gender focused, just brilliant women scholars who ALSO have good gender lenses), but Everett Fox's translation +

Is also good (very literal, tries to capture the language) and Robert Alter's is beautiful, poetic.

And of course if the KJV is your jam, keep rocking it! Not trying to dissuade anybody, just calling attention to some of the issues with translation.

Oh! And if you go to @SefariaProject, they have a bunch of translations online (click a verse and then find "versions") so you can compare and contrast.

Ok great way to help you wrap your head around the Eve thing—"I'll name you Livie because you're the mother of all living" is kinda how it sounds.

That's how a lot of the Torah wordplay goes. (Not all! But some!) https://t.co/efBBX6Ospw

> Oooh so it would be like her name is Livie or something?
>
> — Sir David Xanatos (@letswanthink) December 20, 2020

Ok, and the good Rabbi Wolkenfeld has one to give you a sense of how Moses (well, Moshe) got his name. https://t.co/Ec1sxFoaTe

> How about, \u201cshe named him Drew because she drew him from the water.\u201d
>
> — David Wolkenfeld (@DavidWolkenfeld) December 20, 2020

Another. There are so many. Isaac's name (same root as the verb "to laugh") is another. A lot of people's names tbh. But also lots of other moments. https://t.co/61s9AagHO2

> Here\u2019s another good name pun that one misses in English:https://t.co/cTwh3oLWif
>
> — David Wolkenfeld (@DavidWolkenfeld) December 20, 2020

Like Yocheved in Exodus (2:1-2) looks at Moses & sees he is good--ki tov, the Hebrew says. Who else, after Creation, looks and sees ki tov? God, of course. (Gen 1:4 and etc.) We're meant to hear that echo. Trampled in the KJV: "when she saw him that he was a goodly child."

Also good for more historical-context commentary (as opposed to linguistic or mythical or spiritual or etc). The Jewish Study Bible and the Torah: A Women's Commentary both use JPS as their base, which isn't a disaster but is also not the absolute best, Dr. Eskenazi +

Oh whoops, meant to respond to this—anyway, in the Torah: A Women's Commentary (need shorter name for that) Dr. Eskenazi tweaked the JPS in places but mostly what I like about it is the quality of the commentary.

I feel good about recommending all 4 of these tbh. https://t.co/L9dkHuMeFC

> How about the Jewish Study Bible?
>
> — Jon Stout (@jon_stout) December 20, 2020