

'The Voice' Translation for New Bible Readers Has Screenplay Format

The latest Bible translation from Thomas Nelson aims to reach people who have never read the Bible before. But *The Voice* isn't a dumb-downed version of the Bible; it's written like a screenplay.

The following is the passage from Genesis in which God is angry at Adam for eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil:

"Adam (pointing at the woman): It was she! The woman You gave me as a companion put the fruit in my hands, and I ate it.

"God (to the woman): What have you done?

"Eve: It was the serpent! He tricked me, and I ate.

"Later, Eve bears her first son, Cain.

"Eve (excited): Look, I have created a new human, a male child, with the help of the Eternal."

The team behind *The Voice* insists the new Bible translation is not a gimmick.

"We've put together a translation that pays attention to a number of things that haven't been considered before in Bible translations," explains Frank Couch, vice president for reference, curriculum and translation development at Thomas Nelson.

The Voice, which took seven years to complete, was created by skilled writers and scholars who translated from original manuscripts in Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic.

“Where many translations are trying to just translate a single word,” Couch says, “we’re trying to put that word into the context of when it was written and how that word has been used in many situations.”

In addition to being translated from the original texts instead of from existing translations, *The Voice* pays attention to nuance, and takes in account each perspective of the original author.

Although the translation has received criticisms, Couch says the negativity is mostly from people who have not read it.

“Most criticisms come with the idea of doing a different type of translation,” he explains. “On the whole those criticisms disappear when people actually read the translation.”

After reading the above example from Genesis, New Testament professor Craig S. Keener commented: “This approach can help readers hear the Bible in a culturally relevant way just like the Bible’s first audience heard it in ways relevant to them. Modern readers are accustomed to graphic novels and (even more often) movies.”

However, Keener points out that different translations serve different purposes. “Those that relate the text most to our modern cultures, idioms, and even ways of storytelling can help people engage the text better,” he explains. “But the greater the degree of contextualizing for modern readers, the more that the translator does the job of interpreting for the reader.

“Ideally, then, we should have both study Bibles that help us engage the original, and versions that help us catch the sense in ways relevant to our cultures.”

Couch says *The Voice* is not meant to replace the literal existing translation, but is for people who have never read the Scriptures before.

“It is a translation to help people understand the genre of Scripture and make an entrance into Bible reading,” he notes. “We’re trying to give people a running start.”

The Voice may be easier to understand, but it is not a simple-to-read Bible, Couch insists.

“We don’t assume that because someone hasn’t read the Bible they’re stupid. We expect that they want something that is sophisticated and has richness to it, and we have a very full vocabulary and a lot of complex sentences. We just don’t use the language that people in the world have not heard before.”