

# When the Bible Was “Updated” for Modern Audiences

[Yesterday](#) we discussed the Oregon Shakespeare Festival’s project to update the language of Shakespeare’s plays for modern audiences.

Today I thought I would point to another example of a piece of Elizabethan literature that was updated into modern idiom: the Bible. (And yes, Christians, I’m aware that the Bible is regarded as more than “literature.”)

The King James Bible is widely revered as the most beautiful English translation of the Bible (completed in 1611) from the Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, and Latin versions. However, its seemingly archaic language can seem difficult to modern readers.

Enter Eugene Peterson, a former Presbyterian pastor and professor of theology. [According to Peterson](#), the adults in his congregations “weren’t feeling the vitality and directness” of the Bible text. So he began to put the biblical books into modern English idiom, and completed a translation of the entire Bible in 2002. That bestselling translation was titled *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*, and is now used by many English-speaking churches around the world.

To give you a feel of Here are four examples of famous biblical texts in both the [King James version](#) and [The Message version](#):

## 1. John 1:14

King James

“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.”

## Message

"The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood."

## **2. Matthew 6:28-29**

### King James

"And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these."

### Message

"All this time and money wasted on fashion – do you think it makes that much difference? Instead of looking at the fashions, walk out into the fields and look at the wildflowers. They never primp or shop, but have you ever seen color and design quite like it? The ten best-dressed men and women in the country look shabby alongside them."

## **3. Deuteronomy 6:4-5**

### King James

"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might."

### Message

"Attention, Israel! God, our God! God the one and only! Love God, your God, with your whole heart: love him with all that's in you, love him with all you've got!"

#### 4. Psalm 23: 1-3

##### King James

“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me.”

##### Message

“God, my shepherd! I don’t need a thing. You have bedded me down in lush meadows, you find me quiet pools to drink from. True to your word, you let me catch my breath and send me in the right direction. Even when the way goes through Death Valley, I’m not afraid when you walk at my side.”

I’m optimistic that the translations of Shakespeare will be a bit more dignified, but we’ll see.