

‘Demeaning’ terms cut in new NRSV

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10 DECEMBER 2021

A NEW edition of the New Revised Standard Version of the [Bible](#) includes thousands of changes to text and grammar, including replacing “demeaning” words such as “girl” for “young women”, and rewording the text where people are identified by their disabilities.

In the latest edition, which will be available next year, Mark now writes of a “female servant” instead of a “servant-girl” (14.69); and a verse in Matthew’s that previously referred to “demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics”, now reads “people possessed by demons or having epilepsy or afflicted with paralysis”.

The phrase “sin offering” has been replaced with “purification offering”, which, scholars agree, more accurately represents the meaning of the Hebrew word *hatta’t*. “Slave woman” in Galatians has been replaced by “enslaved woman” to emphasise that it is an “imposed condition”, notes on the text explain.

The new edition is the culmination of four years of work by dozens of editors and biblical scholars.

It is 32 years since the New Revised Standard Version was published in 1989. The update, which scholars have made clear is not a new translation, was commissioned by the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA (NCC) and carried out by the Society of Biblical Literature.

Editors were drawn from multiple faith traditions, with the aim of making the text as inclusive as possible.

The “unwavering goal [was] to render an accurate version of original source texts into the most current understandings of contemporary language and culture”, the NCC said in its foreword to a sample of the new edition, which is known as NRSVue.

“The NRSVue extends the New Revised Standard Version’s purpose to deliver an accurate, readable, up-to-date, and inclusive version of the Bible. It also continues the work of offering a version as free as possible from the gender bias inherent in the English language, which can obscure earlier oral and written renditions.”

Overall, editors made 12,000 editorial changes to the text, and 20,000 revisions, including changes to grammar and punctuation.

“It is both ecumenical and interfaith, suitable in Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, and Jewish contexts,” the executive director of the Society of Biblical Literature, Dr John Kutsko, said at a launch event. “In a period of social and political divisiveness, it’s a virtue to be celebrated.”

He said that some of the updates were based on new evidence drawn from the Dead Sea Scrolls.

An assistant professor at Boston University and an Itinerant Elder in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the Revd Dr Shively Smith, said that the new version was a “testament to what translations should be when they intentionally engage members of the National Council of Churches of Christ Historic Black Churches and other diverse Christian communities and scholars historically absent from the translation endeavours of our English Bibles”.

The new version is expected to be released by publishers next May, but Friendship Press, a subsidiary of NCC, plans to make an e-Bible available on its Word@Hand app by this Christmas.

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