

English Translations of Scripture



The New Life Version of the Holy Bible By Dr. Wayne J. Gerber

Gleason Ledyard knew from his boyhood that he was to be a missionary to the Eskimos. But he had no idea that a Bible translation in easy-to-read English would be his main ministry to the world. God's plans went far beyond anything he could have dreamed.

Born and reared in Ashland, Ohio, Ledyard was the son of a Sunday school teacher in the Evangelical Church. His young life almost ended when he was two years old. A peanut hull lodged in his trachea, and surgeons were unable to remove it in several attempts. In desperation his mother prayed that God would either take her near-lifeless son to himself or spare his life for Christian service to which she was dedicating him. A few minutes after this prayer he started resting comfortably, and several days later the hull was coughed up.

As a young boy the call to the Arctic was strong, so when Ledyard was old enough to get a student permit to fly he began training in a biplane. He felt the best way to reach the Eskimos who were widely scattered in remote areas of the Canadian Arctic was by air. Before he reached his goal of a license to fly, the money ran out. He would take up the training later and complete it when he was a student at Bible college.

Ledyard's father died when he was thirteen years old. This turn of events delayed his formal preparation for missionary service until he was in his mid-twenties. With a clear sense of call to missionary work he enrolled in the training program at Fort Wayne Bible College, Fort Wayne Indiana, where he was profoundly influenced by great men such as Dr. S. A. Witmer. As a student he attended First

Missionary Church that was near the college campus. His Fort Wayne experience helped him to further affirm the calling to missionary ministry. In 1957, Dr. Witmer accompanied Gleason on an extensive ministry trip around northern Hudson Bay.

When Ledyard met his beloved Kathryn and knew that he wanted to spend his life with her as his partner, he made a proposal of marriage to her with one special condition. Would she be willing to live in an igloo? Kathryn had to think this over. Six weeks later she concluded she preferred living with him in an igloo to living with anyone else in a mansion. Thus a missionary partnership was born that would last for many years of exciting ministry.

Gleason and Kathryn spent fifteen years of ministry among the Eskimos in the Canadian Central Arctic. Traveling in a ski or float-equipped airplane or by dogsled, sleeping for months in igloos, enduring severe sub-zero temperatures, they took the good news to many Eskimos for the first time. Their trips could cover 5,000 miles from their base on the west coast of Hudson Bay. God brought them safely through whiteout flying conditions, blizzards on the ground, raging storms on the water, and two plane crashes. The exciting story of this ministry period is presented in *Eskimos* (new hardcover edition) by Gleason Ledyard, Canby, Oregon, Christian Literature International, 1999.

After fifteen years of pioneer work, others came to continue the work and Gleason and Kathryn felt led to leave the Arctic for other ministry. Their first new assignment was a survey and report of the diversified home missions operations of the Christian and Missionary Alliance. During some of their visits to Indian reservations, they became concerned the Indians were not understanding some of the difficult biblical words, and they needed a simpler translation of Scripture. The Ledyards thought something should be done, but at this time they did not see this as a task for themselves.

When the survey was completed the Ledyards felt the tug to get back to primitive ministries again. Some areas of British Columbia needed missionaries to remote Indians, and Gleason and Kathryn soon obtained a four-wheel-drive truck and camper to answer the call. They traveled over a wide area for several months, but it didn't seem to them that they were on the right task. An easy-to-read translation was still needed. They couldn't get the need off their minds.

One night they pulled off a dirt road in a remote area of British Columbia and Gleason got out some translations and other books they had with them. With a notebook and small gas light he began translation of the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5, 6, and 7, into a simple easy-to-read version. In a few evenings he completed the task, and the result was gratifying. Right away he felt the Lord

telling him to keep going. Depending completely on God, he started immediately. Although he didn't think himself qualified for the job, he had learned that God empowers you when he calls you to a task. The translation of the *New Life Version* of the Holy Bible had begun.

Now instead of reaching out to touch people personally in remote areas, the Ledyards devoted their energies to sitting at a desk and translating the books of the New Testament. It was quite a change, but they diligently pursued the new challenge God had given them. They set up some significant guidelines for the work: do a lot of research; try to use only one meaning for each word; use short phrases to translate all difficult words; keep the sentences short as much as possible. As parts of the New Testament were completed, they were sent to missionaries all around the world for their response. It was very encouraging. The work continued.

The task of translating the entire New Testament proved to be a daunting one. Estimated originally to be a two-year project, the work actually required four years of very long working days. A total word count at the completion of the project yielded only 850 words plus proper names. The vocabulary had been controlled. An easy-to-read translation had emerged.

A non-profit organization, Christian Literature International, was created to publish and distribute the *New Life New Testament*. Soon 125,000 copies were in the hands of Indians all across the U.S., Canada, and Alaska. But circulation was not limited to North America. People from around the world were asking for copies, and the new version soon circled the globe.

The huge success of the *New Life New Testament* raised a significant question: Should the Old Testament not be translated in this easy-to-read format as well? A complete Bible was a desirable goal but the Old Testament is considerably longer than the New Testament, and the New Testament required four years of labor to complete. However, something happened at this time to make translation faster. The computer was now an asset that wasn't available for the first translating task. What would have seemed



Historical Perspective

The International Cabinet of the Gideons met on January 26th and 27th in London, Ontario, the first time on Canadian soil. One of the highlights of their rally was the historic presentation of the 1,000,000th copy of the Scriptures to be placed in Canada by the Gideons.

— *The Gospel Banner*, February 7, 1952, p. 2

impossible with the old system of notebooks now seemed achievable. The task was begun. Working with three other helpers the Ledyards completed the translation of the Old Testament in four additional years. The *New Life Version* was now complete.

The *New Life Version* was intended mainly for use by persons with a limited English vocabulary, and it is used in this way around the world. But its distribution is not limited to this clientele. People with a good command of English appreciate the version for its clarity and ease of understanding. It peels away theological jargon and tells the story in plain words and phrases. What people found puzzling before is understandable now. Here are some well known passages of Scripture as found in the *New Life Version*.

The Lord is my Shepherd. I will have everything I need. He lets me rest in fields of green grass. He leads me beside the quiet waters. He makes me strong again. He leads me in the way of living right with Himself which brings honor to His name. Yes, even if I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will not be afraid of anything, because You are with me. You have a walking stick with which to guide and one with which to help. These comfort me. You are making a table of food ready for me in front of those who hate me. You have poured oil on my head. I have everything I need. For sure, You will give me goodness and loving-kindness all the days of my life. Then I will live with You in Your house forever (Psalm 23).

Those who have it very hard for doing right are happy, because the holy nation of heaven is theirs. You are happy when people act and talk in a bad way to you and make it very hard for you and tell bad things and lies about you because you trust in Me. Be glad and full of joy because your pay will be much in heaven. They made it very hard for the early preachers who lived a long time before you (Matthew 5:10-12).

Christian brothers, I ask you from my heart to give your bodies to God because of His loving-kindness to us. Let your bodies be a living and holy gift given to God. He is pleased with this kind of gift. This is the true worship that you should give Him. Do not act like the sinful people of the world. Let God change your life. First of all, let Him give you a new mind. Then you will know what God wants you to do. And the things you do will be good and pleasing and perfect (Romans 12:1-2).

Today the *New Life Version* may be found in the hands of Bible scholars, international students, literacy workers, city pastors, children's workers, national pastors, missionaries, prison chaplains and prisoners, to name just a few of the groups who profit from this easy-to-read version.

The *New Life Version* has spawned other helps and other books by Gleason Ledyard. Each copy of the Bible contains a section titled "Topical Study Outlines." These outlines provide an introduction to the major points of theology for the reader. To make these outlines useful for students, a student workbook and a teacher's manual have been prepared. A topical verse finder is printed in each Bible, also. This consists of selected topics and Scripture verses appropriate for each topic. A synopsis of the gospels printed in a harmony of the gospels format is included in each Bible as well. In addition to helps in the Bible, Ledyard has authored a paperback titled *Walking in New Life*. This is a compilation of 1,000 verses of Scripture arranged in a format that logically follows the issues of life. One thing more, the *New Life Study Testament* now is available in Spanish.

The ministry of Gleason and Kathryn Ledyard now spans the world, and the end is not in sight. One can only imagine what further developments might come from these dedicated partners in ministry who learned obedience by taking the gospel to the Eskimos and following God's leading from then until now.

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