

Grammar 25—Russian Synodal Bible

Before the 19th century Russians who wanted to read God’s Word read it in the Slavonic Bible used by the Orthodox Church in its services. Though the Slavonic language is from the same family as Russian, it is not Russian and learning it requires considerable effort. It is much harder than reading the King James Version or Shakespeare. It is comparable to reading Chaucer. Despite the fact that few understand this translation well, it is still used on Orthodox services. However, by the beginning of the 19th century there were calls for a Russian-language Bible for reading at home.

See Also

- [Russian Synodal Bible with Audio](#)

Work on a translation into Russian was begun around 1816 by the Russian Bible Society. In 1818 the *Gospels* were published and in 1822 a volume of the *New Testament and Psalms* was published. A translation of *Genesis* through *Ruth* was completed, but due to political changes it was not widely circulated and some print runs were burned. The work of the Russian Bible Society was suspended by order of the emperor in 1826 and not resumed until 1858. A revised volume of the *Four Gospels* was published in 1860 and additional volumes followed until a complete Bible was issued in 1876. Today it is known as the *Синодальный перевод* (*Synodal Translation*) or *Синодальное издание* (*Synodal Edition*) which names reflect the fact that it is approved by the Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Later Russian Bible Translations

Until recently the *Synodal Edition* was the only complete Bible translation available to the average reader. After the fall of the Soviet Union work on translating the Bible into Russian was renewed and a number of new translations entered widespread circulation around the end of the 20th century. These include:

Name	Publisher	Year Published
<i>Kassian’s Translation of the New Testament</i>	British and Foreign Bible Society	1970
<i>Библия. Современный перевод библейских текстов.</i> <i>The Bible—A Modern Translation of the Biblical Texts</i>	World Bible Translation Center	1999
<i>Библия, Новый Перевод на Русский Язык</i> <i>The Bible, a New Translation into the Russian Language</i>	Biblica, the International Bible Society	2007
<i>Перевод нового мира свершений писаний</i> <i>The New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures</i>	Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society	Greek Scriptures in 2001, Hebrew Scriptures and revised Greek Scriptures in one volume in 2007
<i>Библия. Современный русский перевод</i> <i>The Bible, a Modern Russian Translation</i>	The Russian Bible Society	In parts from 1999 to 2010, in one volume in 2011

Organization of the Text

Most English Bibles follow the order of the books, the names of the books, and the chapter and verse divisions

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of the King James Version. The *Synodal Edition* displays certain differences:

- *First and Second Samuel* and *First and Second Kings* are referred to as *Of Kingdoms* one through four.
- *First and Second Chronicles* are referred to by their Greek name: *Paralipoménōn*
- The letters of the Apostle Paul which in the KJV start right after the Acts of Apostles in the *Synodal Edition* are placed after all the other letters but before Revelation.
- In the *Psalms* the superscriptions are either treated as the first verse or merged into the first verse. As a consequence it is sometimes necessary to add one to the verse number from the KJV to find the desired verse.
- Psalms 10 and 11 are combined. From then on it is necessary to subtract one from the chapter number from the KJV until we get to Psalm 147 of the KJV which is split into Psalms 146 and 147. After that the chapter numbering is the same.
- The *Song of Solomon* is called *The Song of Songs*, a title taken from its first words.
- There are several dozen other places where a chapter boundary is shifted by one verse or a verse boundary is shifted by a sentence or two.

The Language of the Translation

At the time work was begun on a Russian Bible translation in 1816 the great works of Russian literature were still in the future. The process of resolving the various dialects of Russian into a single widely-accepted literary language was not complete.

The New Testament (first published in 1820) is written in a form of Russian heavily influenced by the language of the Slavonic Bible. Alternative “biblical” words and forms of some words are used instead of the usual Russian forms. (See below.) Heavy use is made of abstract nouns formed from verbs, adjectives formed from verbs, and adverbs. At times this can make the language sound overly formal to the modern reader and even obscure.

The translation of the Hebrew Bible is written with a style and vocabulary much closer to modern literary Russian. It is translated from the *Masoretic Text*, but the Greek names of some notable Bible characters are retained. For example, Joshua the servant of Moses is consistently called “Иисус” (Jesus), a form of his name which the English reader of the KJV encounters only in the the Greek Scriptures at Acts 7:45 and Hebrews 4:8.

The grammar and usage of the *Synodal Edition* displays some characteristics which are now rare in Russian. These include:

- Frequent use of “иметь” (to have) instead of the “у кого есть” construction.
- Extensive use of the vocative case to indicate direct address. Notably “Боже” (O God), “Господи” (O Lord), “Иисусе” (O Jesus), and “Баале” (O Baal).
- Adjectives are generally placed after the nouns which they modify while in modern Russian they are generally placed before.
- Extensive use of the instrumental ending -ою instead of the modern -ой.
- A tendency to place the verb before the grammatical subject: “В начале сотворил Бог небо и землю.” (In the beginning created God the heaven and the earth.)
- Occasional use of the now very rare present tense forms of “быть” including “есмь” (am), “еси” (art) and “суть” (are). (See conjugation chart below.)
- Frequent use of the possessive endings -ов and -ин: “сын Давидов”, “Иисус сын Навин” (see declension charts below)
- Use of “сей” instead of “этот”. (See declension chart below.)
- Use of “да” in the sense of “let” instead of the more modern “пусть”: “Да святится имя твоё.”
- Use of “муж” and “жена” to refer to adult males and females respectively irrespective of their marital status.
- Use of “мышца” in the sense of “arm” rather than the modern sense of “muscle”.

Special Vocabulary of the Synodal Edition

As noted above, the Synodal edition sometimes uses alternative words or forms of words, particularly in the translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures. Some which you will encounter most frequently are shown in the table below:

Synodal Edition Word	Modern Russian Word	English Translation
царствие	царство	kingdom
прошение	просьба	request
agneц	ягнёнок	lamb
дщерь	дочь	daughter
дева	девушка	virgin
пастырь	пастух	shepherd
отворить	открыть	to open (a door or gate)
простирать	протянуть	to extend (generally the hand)
око	глаз	eye
десница	правая рука	the right hand
одесную	у правой руки	at the right hand

Possessive Forms

A possessive can be formed from masculine names ending in a consonant by adding -ов or -ев:

	Masculine	Feminine	Neuter	Plural
Nominative	-ов	-ова	-ово	-овы
Accusative	-ов	-ову	-ово	-овых
Accusative Animate	-ова	-ову	-ово	-овых
Genitive	-ова	-овой	-ова	-овых
Prepositional	-овым	-овой	-овым	-овых
Dative	-ову	-овой	-ову	-овым
Instrumental	-овом	-овой	-овом	-овыми

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A possessive can be formed from any declinable personal name by adding *-ин*. The best known example is “Иисус сын Навин” which means “Jesus Nav’s son” (Joshua the son of Nun). The *-ин* ending is declined using a mixture of the rules for nouns and adjectives:

	Masculine	Feminine	Neuter	Plural
Nominative	-ин	-ина	-ино	-ины
Accusative	-ин	-ину	-ино	
Accusative Animate	-ина	-ину	-ино	-инов
Genitive	-ина	-иной	-ина	-инов
Prepositional	-ине	-иной	-ине	-инах
Dative	-ину	-иной	-ину	-инам
Instrumental	-ином	-иною	-ином	-инами

Declension of Сей

In the vast majority of instances the Synodal Translation uses the adjective *сей* instead of *этот*. *Сей* is declined as follows:

	Masculine	Feminine	Neuter	Plural
Nominative	сей	сия	сие	сии
Accusative	сей	сию	сие	сии
Accusative Animate	сего	сею	сие	сих
Genitive	сего	сей	сего	сих
Prepositional	сѣм	сей	сѣм	сих
Dative	сему	сей	сему	сим
Instrumental	сим	сей, сею, сиею	сим	сими

Conjugation of Быть

In modern Russian the verb “быть” (to be) is so seldom used in the present tense that forms other than “есть” have been all but forgotten. Several of these nearly forgotten forms are used in the *Synodal Edition*.

Person	Singular	Plural
1st	я есмь	-
2nd	ты еси́	-
3rd	он есть	они суть

Rendering of the Tetragrammaton

In most cases the personal name of God is replaced with the word “господь” which is an archaic form of the word “господин” (lord, master, mister). It is transliterated “Иегова” in the following nine places:

Verse	Comments
Genesis 22:14	As part of place name “Jehovah-Jireh”
Exodus 3:14	In parenthesis in some editions
Exodus 6:3	In a footnote to the word “Господь”

Verse	Comments
Exodus 15:3	In one of two instances
Exodus 17:15	As part of the place name “Jehovah-Nessi”
Exodus 33:19	
Exodus 34:5	
Judges 6:24	As part of the place name “Jehovah-Shalom”
Hosea 12:5	In parenthesis

See the discussion of Psalm 83:18 below.

Noteworthy Readings

This is a list of verses which are rendered in interesting ways in the *Synodal Edition*. It is helpful to be familiar with these readings if you intend to discuss the Bible with readers of the *Synodal Edition*.

Scripture	Synodal Edition	English Translation of Synodal Rendering	Comments
Exodus 3:14	Бог сказал Моисею: Я есмь Сущий. И сказал: так скажи сынам Израилевым: Сущий (Иегова) послал меня к вам.	God said to Moses: I am the Existing. And said: say thus to Israel’s sons: The Existing (<i>Jehovah</i>) sent me to you.	God calls himself “the Existing” rather than the “I AM” of the KJV.
Exodus 7:1	Но Господь сказал Моисею: смотри, Я поставил тебя <u>БОГОМ</u> фараону, а Аарон, брат твой, будет твоим пророком:	But the Lord said to Moses: look, I have set thee <u>as a God</u> to pharaoh, while Aaron thy brother will be thy prophet.	Instrumental case is used to indicate that godship is a role which Moses will take on rather than an intrinsic aspect of his being.
Exodus 15:3	Господь муж брани, Иегова имя Ему.	The Lord is a man of war, Jehovah is his name.	One of the few places in the <i>Synodal Edition</i> where the name “Jehovah” is preserved.
Psalm 82:19 (Psalm 83:18)	и да познают, что Ты, Которого одного имя Господь, Всевышний над всею землею.	and let them know that Thou, whose name alone is Lord, art the most high over all the earth.	Unlike in the KJV, the personal name “Jehovah” is replaced with the title “Господь” (Lord, Master). This produces the puzzling assertion that God alone is called “Lord”.
Psalm 109:3 (Psalm 110:3)	В день силы Твоей народ Твой готов во благолепии святыни; из чрева прежде денницы подобно росе рождение Твое.	In the day of thy force thy people is ready in the splendor of holiness; from the womb before the daystar like unto dew is thy birth.	The wording of the Hebrew original is obscure here. The <i>Synodal Edition</i> follows the interpretation of the Septuagint and the Latin Vulgate. Trinitarian interpreters see a statement here about the origin of the Messiah.

Scripture	Synodal Edition	English Translation of Synodal Rendering	Comments
Proverbs 8:22, 23	Господь имел меня началом пути Своего, прежде созданий Своих, искони; от века я помазана, от начала, прежде бытия земли.	The Lord had me as the beginning of His way, before his works, from the dim past, for ages, I am anointed, from the beginning, before the existence of the earth.	This famous Arian proof text is rendered ambiguously. This is in contrast to the KJV which gives it a distinctly trinitarian interpretation.
Ecclesiastes 3:11	Все соделал Он прекрасным в свое время, и вложил мир в сердце их, хотя человек не может постигнуть дел, которые Бог делает, от начала до конца.	Everything he has made beautiful in its time, and he put the world in their heart, though man cannot comprehend the deeds which God does, from the beginning to the end.	Like the KJV, interprets the Hebrew word to mean “the world” rather than “eternity”. Russian readers may understand the word “мир” to mean “peace”.
Malachi 2:16	Если ты ненавидишь ее, отпусти, говорит Господь Бог Израилев; обида покроет одежду его, говорит Господь Саваоф; посему наблюдайте за духом вашим и не поступайте вероломно.	If thou hatest her, let her go, says the Lord God of Israel; an offense covers his clothing, says the Lord <i>Savaof</i> ; for this reason keep watch over your spirit and do not behave in a way that breaks faith.	The wording of this verse is a bit obscure and translators parse it in various ways, but this reading is still unusual as it seems to condone divorce.
Matthew 5:22	А Я говорю вам, что всякий, гневающийся на брата своего напрасно, подлежит суду; кто же скажет брату своему: "рака", подлежит синедриону; а кто скажет: "безумный", подлежит геенне огненной.	Whereas I say to you, that anyone who is being angry at his brother without cause, is liable to the court of justice; as for the one who says to his brother “ <i>raka</i> ”, he is liable to the sanhedrin, whereas he who says “senseless one”, he is liable to fiery gehenna.	Follows the Received Text which inserts “without cause”.
Matthew 24:36	О дне же том и часе никто не знает, ни Ангелы небесные, а только Отец Мой один;	As that day and hour no one knows, not the heavenly Angels, but My Father alone.	Omits “nor the Son”.
Matthew 26:39	И, отойдя немного, пал на лице Свое, молился и говорил: Отче Мой! если возможно, да минует Меня чаша сия; впрочем не как Я хочу, но как Ты.	And, having stepped away a little, [he] fell on His face, prayed and said: O My Father! If it is possible, let this cup pass Me by, otherwise not as I wish but as Thou wishest.	

Scripture	Synodal Edition	English Translation of Synodal Rendering	Comments
Mark 13:32	О дне же том, или часе, никто не знает, ни Ангелы небесные, ни Сын, но только Отец.	Concerning that day or hour no one knows, not the heavenly Angels, not the Son, but only the Father.	Includes “nor the Son” omitted at Matthew 24:36.
John 1:1	В начале было Слово, и Слово было у Бога, и Слово было Бог.	In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was by God, and the Word was God.	Disregards the definite article used with “God” in the first instance, and the predicative use of “God” in the second instance. As in the KJV this creates the impression that the Word is that very God with whom he was. The translators could have elegantly conveyed the nuances of John’s statement by writing “Слово было Богом.” as they did for Moses at Exodus 7:1.
John 1:18	Бога не видел никто никогда; Единородный Сын, сущий в недре Отчем, Он явил.	No one has every seen God; the Only-Born Son, existing in the depths of the Father, He presented.	Follows Received Text which has “son” instead of “god” as in the critical texts. Translates “at the bosom” in a mysterious manner.
John 8:25	Тогда сказали Ему: кто же Ты? Иисус сказал им: от начала Сущий, как и говорю вам.	Then they said to Him: Who then art Thou? Jesus said to them: the Existing from the beginning, like I have even been saying to you.	The terse words of Jesus have two widely recognized possible interpretations, but in both cases “the beginning” refers to the beginning of the conversation. Here the translator, by inserting “the Existing”, has turned it into a statement about the origins of Jesus and created an “I AM” connection with Exodus 3:14.
John 8:28	Итак Иисус сказал им: когда вознесете Сына Человеческого, тогда узнаете, что это Я и что ничего не делаю от Себя, но как научил Меня Отец Мой, так и говорю.	And so Jesus said to them: when the Son of Man is lifted up then know that it is I and that I do nothing of Myself, but as My Father taught Me, thus I speak.	
John 8:58	Иисус сказал им: истинно, истинно говорю вам: прежде нежели был Авраам, Я есмь.	Jesus said to them: truly, truly I am telling you: before Abraham was, I am.	Same literal translation of verb tenses as in the KJV, but here it fails to create the “I AM” connection because the expression at Exodus 3:14 is different.

Scripture	Synodal Edition	English Translation of Synodal Rendering	Comments
John 14:28	Вы слышали, что Я сказал вам: иду от вас и приду к вам. Если бы вы любили Меня, то возрадовались бы, что Я сказал: иду к Отцу; ибо Отец Мой более Меня.	You heard what I said to you: I am going away from you and I shall come to you. If it were that you loved me, then you would rejoice what I have said: I go to the Father, for My Father is greater than I.	
Romans 9:3-5	я желал бы сам быть отлученным от Христа за братьев моих, родных мне по плоти, то есть Израильтян, которым принадлежат усыновление и слава, и заветы, и законоположение, и богослужение, и обетования; их и отцы, и от них Христос по плоти, сущий над всем Бог, благословенный во веки, аминь.	I would desire to be myself alienated from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my relatives according to the flesh, that is, for the Israelites, to whom belong the adoption and the glory and the covenant, and the law code, and the promise; theirs also are the fathers, and from them the Christ according to the flesh, the God existing over all, blessed for the ages, amen.	As in the KJV, Paul’s words (which have no punctuation in the original) have been parsed to make a statement about Christ being “God over all” rather than the alternative which is a statement of respect for the divine providence in rejecting Israel according to the flesh.
1 Corinthians 15:24—28	А затем конец, когда Он предаст Царство Богу и Отцу, когда упразднит всякое начальство и всякую власть и силу. Ибо Ему надлежит царствовать, доколе низложит всех врагов под ноги Свои. Последний же враг истребится - смерть, потому что все покорил под ноги Его. Когда же сказано, что Ему все покорено, то ясно, что кроме Того, Который покорил Ему все. Когда же все покорит Ему, тогда и Сам Сын покорится Покорившему все Ему, да будет Бог все во всем.	And then the end, when he will hand over the Kingdom to God and Father, when [he] cancels all overseership and every authority and power. For he is to rule as king, until [he] lays low all enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be annihilated is death, because [he] will have subjected everything under his feet. When then it is said that everything is subjected to him, it is clear that this is besides the One Who subjected everything to him. When he will have subjected all things to him, then the Son Himself will also subject himself to the Subjector of everything to him so that God will be all in all.	

Scripture	Synodal Edition	English Translation of Synodal Rendering	Comments
Philippians 2:5, 6	Ибо в вас должны быть те же чувствования, какие и во Христе Иисусе: Он, будучи образом Божиим, не почитал хищением быть равным Богу;	For in you their ought to be the very same feelings as there were in Christ Jesus: He, being the image of God, thought it not a seizure to be equal to God;	As in the KJV Paul seems to be calling on Christians to be like Christ and seize equality with God.
Colossians 1:15	Который есть образ Бога невидимого, рожденный прежде всякой твари;	Who is the image of the God invisible, born before all creation;	Trinitarian interpretation of the expression “firstborn of all creation” avoids the implication that he is part of creation.
1 Timothy 3:16	И бесспорно - великая благочестия тайна: Бог явился во плоти, оправдал Себя в Духе, показал Себя Ангелам, проповедан в народах, принят верою в мире, вознесся во славе.	And indisputably great is the secret of piety: God was revealed in the flesh, justified Himself in the Spirit, showed Himself to Angels, was preached among the nations, accepted by faith in the world, ascended in glory.	Follows the Received Text which by an extra pen stroke turns a word meaning “who” into an abbreviation for “ <i>Theos</i> ” (God).
Hebrews 1:8	А о Сыне: престол Твой, Боже, в век века; жезл царствия Твоего - жезл правоты.	While of the Son: thy throne, O God, is for the ages; the rod of thy kingdom is a rod of righteousness	The Greek text literally reads “the throne of you the god to the age of the age”. It is a quotation from Psalm 45:6. Whether the king is addressed as “god” or his throne is God or his throne is divine is a matter of much scholarly debate. Here in the <i>Synodal Edition</i> it is assumed that Jesus is addressed as God.
Hebrews 11:1	Вера же есть осуществление ожидаемого и уверенность в невидимом.	Faith now is the realization of the anticipated and confidence in the unseen.	
1 John 5:7	Ибо три свидетельствуют на небе: Отец, Слово и Святой Дух; и Сии три суть едино.	For three bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one.	Includes the Johannine Comma