

Why are there different Bible translations?

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The Original Languages of the Bible

Some people do not know that the Bible was not originally written in English. It was originally written in Hebrew (Some small sections in Aramaic) and Greek by the original writers. Hebrew was the language of the Jews of the Old Testament and Greek was the common language of the writers of the New Testament.

Greek is more easily recognizable as many of our English words have Greek roots. For example, Philadelphia is the “city of brotherly love” (In Greek, *philos* means “love” and *adelphos* means “brother”).

The Greek text of the New Testament looks like this:

John 1:1 Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος.

Hebrew looks more like chicken scratch to most people. It has almost no direct relation to our English language and is written from right to left.

The Hebrew text of the Old Testament looks like this:

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה יְהוָה אֶלְהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד Deuteronomy 6:4

A Brief History of Bible Translation

The Septuagint

The oldest translation of the Old Testament is known as the Septuagint (which is the Greek word for “seventy” and commonly abbreviated as LXX). The Greek empire had such a cultural influence on the world that by the 3rd Century B.C. the common language of the world, including Israel, was Greek. A translation of the Hebrew Scriptures became necessary so 72 Jewish scholars collaborated a Greek translation which became known as the Septuagint. This translation of the Old Testament is commonly quoted by the writers New Testament.

The Vulgate

In the 5th Century, Jerome translated the Hebrew Old Testament into the language of the church: Latin.

The Greek New Testament

The Dutch scholar, Erasmus, created the first Greek New Testament early in the 16th Century. Before his important work, the Greek New Testament was only studied from individual

manuscript copies. Later editions of Erasmus' work became known as the *Textus Receptus* (Received Text).

The Early English Translations

Early Protestants, John Wycliff and William Tyndale pioneered the first translations into English in the late 15th Century. Protestantism had the idea that the Bible was the sole source of doctrine (*sola scriptura*) and as such should be translated into the local vernacular. However, because Bible translation at that time was viewed as a political endeavor as much as a religious one, their translations were rejected by the Roman Catholic Church.

In 1611, King James VI authorized the publication of first translation of the Bible into English. This translation was a revision of William Tyndale's earlier work. The King James (Authorized Version) utilized Erasmus' *Textus Receptus* for translation of the New Testament and the Hebrew Masoretic Text for the Old Testament.

Modern English Translations

With the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947, older manuscripts of the Old and New Testaments were now available. Coupled with this fact and a need for a translation in modern English, the modern translations (ie. New American Standard Bible, New International Version) were developed.

Disputes over Translation

Textual Disputes: Disagreement over what the original writers actually wrote

This dispute occurs when either a minority of Greek manuscripts contain a word or phrase or when there is a discrepancy between earlier and later manuscripts.

- Luke 17:36
- Romans 8:1
- John 7:53-8:11
- Mark 16:9-20
- 1 John 5:7-8 (the Johannine Comma)
- Later manuscripts are "fuller" manuscripts

Translational Disputes: Disagreement over how the original writings should be translated

By far the greatest number of variations between translations is due to translational disputes. The reason for this is that there is simply no way that a word for word translation of any language into another language can exist because nearly all words have multiple meanings and uses.

Example:

2 Timothy 2:15		
KJV	NASB	NIV
Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.	Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.	Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

Hebrews 4:12		
KJV	NASB	NIV
For the word of God is quick , and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword...	For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword...	For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword...

In addition to this, the translators must also attempt to translate idioms in a way that makes sense to someone in a different culture.

Luke 9:44		
KJV	NASB	NIV
Let these sayings sink down into your ears : for the Son of man shall be delivered into the hands of men.	Let these words sink into your ears ; for the Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men."	" Listen carefully to what I am about to tell you: The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men."

Methods of Translation

The above example (Luke 9:44) introduces us to the debate between *formal equivalency* and *dynamic equivalency*. Formal equivalency is the attempt on the translator's part to create a literal word for word translation. Dynamic equivalency, on the other hand, is the effort to translate the *meaning* of the text when the formal translation is difficult to understand.

Another example of this is John 3:16:

John 3:16		
KJV	NASB	NIV
For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.	"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.	"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

OF the three translations we have compared thus far it is important to note the method of translation of each:

Method of Translation		
KJV	NASB	NIV
Formal Equivalency	Formal Equivalency	Dynamic Equivalency

