

Does it Matter Which Bible Translation I Use?

It depends on what you want to get out of your Bible reading and study. If you want the general ideas of God, any easy-to-read translation or paraphrase should be okay. If your concern is that you have the most accurate, authoritative words possible -- the very words God intended you to have, it does matter which version you read.

All translations and paraphrases are not equal.

Inspiration

Those of us who believe the authority of the Bible believe that the original Greek and Hebrew were inspired. God supernaturally guided sinful men to record the very words he wanted. It was a supernatural act of God extending beyond the thoughts of God to the actual words of God.

If God stopped his supernatural guidance with the inspiration of the Scriptures, that would mean the Bible was the word of God in the original manuscripts, but is not the word of God as we have it now.

What do the original Greek and Hebrew manuscripts say anyway? We don't know for sure because God elected not to preserve the originals. There is not one original scrap of paper with the Scriptures on them. So understand that when people refer to the original Greek and Hebrew, they are talking about something that technically doesn't exist. But that doesn't mean we don't have the very words God wants us to have.

Consider Timothy. Paul told him in I Tim. 3:15, "*And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.*" Paul told Timothy he knew the holy Scriptures? How could that be? Timothy didn't have a copy of the original Hebrew Old Testament. Yet he was said to have known the holy Scriptures, and they were able to make him wise unto salvation.

Preservation

That's because after God inspired the original Greek and Hebrew, he kept up his supernatural guidance in the act of preserving His word.

He said he would do that. "*The words of the Lord are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. Thou shalt keep them, O Lord, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever.*" (Ps. 12:6&7)

From this generation for ever means WE have the Word of God in our language. Again, God didn't stop with inspiration. He is active in preservation in other languages just as supernaturally as in inspiration. If you've been to Bible college, you probably didn't study God's action in preservation.

Version Differences

The Bible versions most of us use today are translations from one of two lines of Greek and Hebrew texts. The New American Standard and New International versions as

well as other popular versions, come from one line, and the King James Version comes from another.

The question we have to answer is, which line of Greek and Hebrew texts is most accurate? That is an important issue, because there are places where the NASB and NIV differ significantly from the KJV.

For example, Satan first tempted Christ in the wilderness by telling him to command the stone to be turned into bread. In the NASB and NIV, Jesus said, "*Man shall not live on bread alone.*" (Luke 4:4) The KJV says, "*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.*"

Which is right? What did Jesus really say? If God supernaturally preserved His word (which He had to, because we don't have the originals) one of these lines of Greek texts is wrong.

There are many more major differences, but one of the most notable is in Acts when Philip witnessed to the Ethiopian eunuch. After Philip finished talking, they approached some water. The eunuch asked Philip why he couldn't be baptized. (Acts 8:36) You'll be surprised when you open your NIV and read Philip's response. He didn't have a response. The chapter jumps from verse 36 to verse 38. It skips verse 37, number and all. The missing verse tells how to be saved and gives the eunuch's confession of faith.

Textus Receptus

The Authorized Version of 1611, otherwise known as the King James Version, is an English translation of the Textus Receptus. The Textus Receptus is a standard Greek text collated by a scholar named Erasmus. He worked from a group of manuscripts known as the Byzantine or Received Text.

There are more than 5,000 ancient manuscripts of the Greek new testament written in Koine Greek, and 90-95 percent of those manuscripts agree with each other. Though people speculate God chose not to preserve the very original manuscripts because we might be tempted to worship them, the fact is, they were written on papyrus. Papyrus is a very perishable paper. So the writings were passed around and copied over and over to preserve them. This Received Text not only comprises most of the manuscripts found, they also were found in a wide geographic area. These matching manuscripts were found in Greece, Constantinople, Asia Minor, Syria, Alexandria, Africa, Italy, England and Ireland. They also are known as the Byzantine Text because it was the Greek text used throughout the greater part of the Byzantine Period. (A.D. 312-1453)

This Majority Greek text was accepted and used as the basis for all translations until 1881.

Alexandrian Text

At this point, two men named Westcott and Hort used two other early manuscripts called the Vaticanus or B and the Sinaiticus or Aleph. These manuscripts came from 1 percent Minority Text type, to create a new Greek text. It is from this text that the newer

English versions come, including the New American Standard Bible and the New International Version.

Not only did the Majority Text they used comprise only 1 percent of the ancient manuscripts, those few manuscripts came from only one geographic area: Alexandria, Egypt. It is possible these Alexandrian manuscripts didn't spread further because they were checked against originals and did not match them, and therefore spread no further. The Alexandrian Texts date back to the days of a man named Clement. (200 A.D.) He founded the "Catechetical School" in Alexandria. His school brought the wisdom of the world into the teachings. One of his best known students was a man named Origen. He was famous for editing a 6-column Bible called the Hexapla. Each column had a different version of the Bible. He changed Bible verses that did not agree with his ideas. Some of his beliefs include: water baptism was necessary for salvation, the Old Testament was not true, the writings of Plato, Socrates and Aristotle were inspired of God, Jesus Christ was not God and he did not rise bodily from the dead.

The next alteration of Scriptures came when Constantine ordered a Bible to be written that would appeal to the masses. Eusebius, a follower of Origen, took on that task. Alterations to the Scriptures continued when the Pope asked Jerome to prepare a Bible that would favor the Roman Catholic teaching. The Catholic church officially accepted this Bible at the Council of Trent in 1546. This is when the seven Apocryphal books were added into the Bible.

It was from this Origen-Eusebius-Jerome line of Alexandrian texts that Westcott and Hort developed a two-volume edition of the New Testament in Greek in 1881. The NASB, NIV and most other modern English translations come from this line.

Original Greek?

When a pastor or Bible teacher stands before you explaining a verse and says, "the original Greek says this..." You need to consider a couple things. First, we don't have the original Greek. Second, which Greek text is he studying when he tells you that? Is it the Textus Receptus text or the Westcott and Hort Alexandrian text?

The differences are more than a word here and there. Important doctrines are changed. The blood atonement is one. In Col. 1:14, the KJV says, "*we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins.*" New versions remove the phrase, "through his blood" destroying the blood atonement. This is not surprising since some of those who edited the Alexandrian texts did not believe in the blood atonement.

In I Tim. 3:16, the KJV says "*God was manifest in the flesh.*" This is one of the boldest pronouncements of the Deity of Christ. But new versions water it down and say "*He was manifest in the flesh.*" That "he" could be anyone. It could be Jesus, when the point is, God was manifest in the flesh (through Jesus) asserting Christ's Deity. Again, many of those who worked on the Alexandrian line of Bibles didn't believe in Christ's Deity.

Matt. 18:11 in the KJV says, "*For the Son of man is come to save that which is lost.*" That verse isn't even in the NIV. The NASB places it in brackets with a note, "most ancient manuscripts do not contain this verse." The truth is, 90-95 percent of the ancient manuscripts DO contain that verse.

The differences between the two lines of Bibles is confusing and causes us to ask, “what can I believe? What did God really say?”

This is similar to Eve’s encounter with Satan in the Garden of Eden. Satan’s first attack was on the word of God. “*Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said?*” (Gen 3:1)

It makes sense that his attack today would still be on the word of God, causing us to question what God really said.

One thing we know God said. “*The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the Word of our God shall stand for ever.*” (Isa. 40:8)

Do you believe that when God promised to preserve His word (not his ideas and thoughts, but his Word) he meant to start that preservation process in 1881 with Westcott and Hort, who didn’t even believe in the Deity of Christ? It is from their Greek text that all the new versions of the Bible come.

It does matter which version you read if you want the very words God intended -- and not just his general ideas.

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