

WHY ARE THERE SO MANY TRANSLATIONS OF THE BIBLE?

If you go to the Bible bookstore you will find several different translations of the bible. They'll have the NIV, NASB, RSV, KJV, NKJV, AMP, ESV, and the B.I.G. "*baby, baby*", LOL just kidding. The question is often, why are there so many different translations? I'll give you three main reasons:

1. Sometimes meaning of words change over time and we no longer speak Old English

In 1611, Shakespeare was very popular and Old English was the language of the day, thus, the King James Version of the Bible was written that way. Today, we don't speak Old English and the meaning of some words has changed overtime. This makes the church responsible for producing an updated translation of the bible in order to help the reader and student of the scriptures understand what the bible is saying. Let's look at an example:

- KJV – Acts 28:12-13 "And landing at Syracuse, we **TARRIED** there three days. And from thence **WE FETCHED A COMPASS**, and came to Rhegium: and after one day the south wind blew, and we came the next day to Puteoli."
- NIV – Acts 28:12-13 "We put in at Syracuse and **STAYED** there three days.¹³ From there **WE SET SAIL AND ARRIVED** at Rhegium. The next day the south wind came up, and on the following day we reached Puteoli."

2. *We now have more manuscript evidence than we've ever had before.*

Our King James Version (KJV) was translated in 1611, that's over 400 years ago. Since then we've found many more copies of the bible and much older manuscripts. When translating any ancient document, your hope is to get your hands on the oldest documents possible and as many copies as possible for comparison. The closer your material is to the time of the events, the less chance error has to creep in through reproduction. The more copies you have, the greater chance you have of recognizing copyist mistakes and getting back to the originals. The KJV was translated from material that dated from 500AD – 1000AD. Newly discovered documents date from 200AD – 400AD. That's a difference of almost 800 years in some cases. Can you see why it would be so important to translate the bible from material which predates earlier copies by almost 800 years? Which copies would you rather read from, copies from 200AD, closer to the actual events or copies from 500AD?

- Over the 400 years since the KJV was written, scholars have grown in their knowledge of their understanding of the ancient Greek language allowing them to more accurately understand, interpret and translate the language.
- Despite certain words or phrases not being found in the earliest manuscripts, the earlier copies proved that the text had been accurately copied and preserved over the years with only a 2% difference in the manuscripts.
- The newer bibles even note the differences in the footnotes showing when a word or sentence was not found in the earliest manuscript evidence. This doesn't necessarily mean it was not

supposed to be in the bible, but it's for reference. Also, the differences have no effect on any doctrine in the Bible.

3. Different methods of translating "Word for Word" vs "Thought for thought"

The two prior reasons can more accurately be considered reasons a new translation was necessary, but the different methods of translation the bible make up the main reasons we have so many translations. Basically, there are two basic methods to translating the Bible, "Word for Word" or "Thought for thought".

- **Word for Word** – Is when the translation is translated word for word from the original language as much as possible. The problem is sometimes a word or phrase doesn't translate over well from another language. Think about when someone says, What up dog? or Wassup? How would you translate that into Chinese? They'll think you were asking a dog what's in the air. Or what about wassup, a short version of What's up, how do you translate that? In some instances, you lose the meaning if you translate word for word and in those cases, thought for thought is better.
- **Thought for Thought** – These translations translate the verse with the ideal of bringing the meaning of the verse across. The focus is not on translating it word for word, but bringing out the thought of each verse. This is why you can have two bibles beside each other that say the same thing in a different way.

These translations fall on a scale between word for word and thought for thought so depending on your preference, there are many different translations of the bible out there for you. Do you prefer more of a Word for Word translation? Do you prefer more of a Thought for Thought? Maybe you prefer one more in the middle. The purpose is to get something that will clearly help you understand the word. It's a good idea to get multiple translations so you can compare verses when you get into deep study. The only translation that I would recommend you stay away from is the New World Translation (NWT). The Jehovah's Witnesses once used the KJV, but they produced their own translation to match their doctrine in certain areas. Greek and Hebrew scholars will agree that it's a bad translation.

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Translation Comparison Charts

