

Why are there so many Bible Translations, and which is the best?

Got Question

There are two primary reasons for the different English Bible versions. (1) Over time, the English language changes/develops, making updates to an English version necessary. If a modern reader were to pick up a 1611 King James Version of the Bible, he would find it to be virtually unreadable. Everything from the spelling, to syntax, to grammar, to phraseology is very different. Linguists state that the English language has changed more in the past 400 years than the Greek language has changed in the past 2,000 years. Several times in church history, believers have gotten "used" to a particular Bible version and become fiercely loyal to it, resisting any attempts to update/revise it. This occurred with the Septuagint, the Latin Vulgate, and more recently, the King James Version. Fierce loyalty to a particular version of the Bible is illogical and counterproductive. When the Bible was written, it was written in the common language of the people at that time. When the Bible is translated, it should be translated into how a people/language group speaks/reads at that time, not how it spoke hundreds of years ago.

It is probably wise to have access to at least two or three of the major translations KJV (King James Version), NIV (New International Version), NAS (New American Standard), NKJV (New King James Version), ESV (English Standard Version), NLT (New Living Translation), CSB (Christian Standard Bible), for comparison's sake. If a verse or passage in one translation is a little confusing, it can be helpful to compare it side-by-side with another version. It is difficult to say which translation is the "best." "Best" would be determined by a combination of the translation method personally considered best and your interpretation of the textual data underlying your translation. For example, the KJV, ESV and NAS attempted to take the underlying Hebrew and Greek words and translate them into the closest corresponding English words as possible (**word for word**), while the NIV and NLT attempted to take the original thought that was being presented in Greek and Hebrew and then express that thought in English (**thought for thought**). Many of the other translations attempt to "meet in the middle" between those two methods. Paraphrases such as The Message or The Living Bible can be used to gain a different perspective on the meaning of a verse, but they should not be used as a primary Bible translation.

There are many more Bible translations than the seven mentioned above. It is wise to have a personal method for determining whether a particular Bible translation is accurate. A good technique is to have a set of Scripture verses you know well, and look those verses up in a translation you are unsure of. A good idea is to look at some of the most common verses that speak of the deity of Christ (John 1:1, 14; 8:58; 10:30; Titus 2:13) to make sure a Bible translation is true to the Word of God. Despite the multitudes of English Bible translations, we can be confident that God's Word is truth and that it will accomplish His purposes (Isaiah 55:11; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Hebrews 4:12).