



## Lesson 14: Critical Questions on Bible Inspiration

### Which Translation Should I Use?

#### MANY VERSIONS TO CHOOSE FROM

A “version” of the Bible is a translation of the text into another language. The Bible was originally written in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. To have it in English or any other language it must be translated. Today there are many different English versions to choose from. Each translation varies from the next. Usually these variations are small and insignificant, but not always. This can lead to questions about the reliability of the Bible in English. It is important for Bible believers to understand what makes for a good translation, why there are differences, and whether a given translation is to be used with confidence, with caution, or not at all.

#### WHY THE DIFFERENCES?

There are three main reasons for the many translations and the differences between them.

- 1. The Purpose of the Translators.** Most translations are attempts to bring the original meaning of Scripture over into modern English. But English, like every living language, is constantly changing. A good English translation from 400 years ago will contain a number of words and phrases that are no longer in use, or that have changed meaning. So, occasional updates, revisions, or entirely new versions are attempted to keep up with the ever evolving English language.  
However, another goal of some new translations has been to change the meaning of Scripture to fit the beliefs of certain religious groups. The *New World Translation* of the Jehovah’s Witnesses is the most obvious example of this. Calvinist and premillennialist scholars have also slanted some translations to favor their doctrines.
- 2. The Theory of Translation.** Language scholars have different approaches to translating. Some want to bring the exact meaning of the original words into English with as close to a literal translation as possible. This is sometimes called *Complete Equivalence*. Other translators favor what is known as *Dynamic Equivalence* in which they attempt to bring over the sense of the original into English, but not necessarily by directly translating each word. A third approach to translation is known as a Paraphrase; it seeks to bring the essential thoughts of the original text into English but often uses words and phrases which have no literal correlation in the original text. Notice how these different approaches to translating are reflected in the translation of Amos 4:6a:
  - **Complete Equivalence (NKJV):** “I gave you cleanness of teeth in all your cities. And lack of bread in all your places”
  - **Dynamic or Functional Equivalence (NIV)** “I gave you empty stomachs in every city and lack of bread in every town”
  - **Paraphrase (CEV)** “I “took away the food from every town and village”
- 3. Which original language text is used?** As we studied in Lesson 12, due to repeated copying, manuscripts of the Bible in the original languages have some variation

between them. If one version relies on one manuscript tradition and another version relies on a different tradition, the English translation will naturally reflect that. The King

James and New King James versions are based on the Received Text whereas most other translations rely heavily on manuscripts that are older but fewer in number. Such differences are often explained by footnotes in modern versions. The New English Translation (NET) available online has the most thorough system of such footnotes.

ACCURATE OR UNDERSTANDABLE: WHICH IS MORE IMPORTANT?

There is often a trade-off between accuracy and understandability. The versions that are easy to read may not be the most accurate, and the versions that are accurate may be hard to understand. A good balance of readability and accuracy is hard to find.

- **For sheer accuracy:** The American Standard Version (ASV), New American Standard Version (NASV), King James Version (KJV), and the New King James Version (NKJV).
- **For a combination of accuracy and readability** the following are listed with the more accurate ones listed first: English Standard Version (ESV), New English Translation (NET), New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), New International Version (NIV).
- **For sheer understandability**, paraphrases such as The Message (MSG), the Contemporary English Version (CEV), The Living Bible (TLB), and Today's English Version (TEV) are very readable, but they are so careless with the original text that they often fail to convey its true meaning. It is best to steer clear of all of these.

*Recommendations:*

- ✓ Use the most accurate translation that you can comprehend, even if it takes some work on your part to learn the meaning of unfamiliar words.
- ✓ Get in the habit of comparing multiple translations. Learn to use Bible software or apps that enable quick and easy comparisons of translations.

QUESTIONS:

1. Which of the three theories of translation shows the most respect for the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures? How can you use this information to choose a translation?
2. Read the Preface or Foreword at the beginning of the version you use. What theory of translation was used by its translators?
3. Give examples of how the English language has changed in your lifetime. What new words and phrases have been invented? What old words have changed meaning?
4. Why do you use the version you use?
5. Here are some examples of archaic wording in the KJV.
  - Ye are not straitened in us, but ye are straitened in your own bowels. (2 Cor. 6:12)
  - But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things. (1 John 2:20)
  - Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong. (1 Cor. 16:13)What do the words "straitened," "bowels," "unction," and "quit you like men" mean in modern English?

Is it possible that this outdated language could prevent someone from understanding God's word?

6. The following is a verse quotation from The Message version: "You are truly blessed when you are content with just who you are – no more, no less." Try to find this verse as it is translated in the version you use.