

INTRODUCTION LESSON FOUR – WHICH BIBLE?

"The key question for any Christian to ask and answer is, 'Which translation of the Bible should I use for my personal study?'" There are three primary translations and each have their own particular strong points and can contribute to the spiritual wellbeing of maturing Christians.

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Unfortunately, within the Church of Christ there is an attack against the present unity of the Church. The attack comes in the form of a question. The question is simple, "which English translation is the Word of God?" The question becomes combative and divisive when the answer is singular in nature. If the Word of God is found in only one English translations, then all other translation (English or otherwise) are in error and any deviation from the English text becomes heretical.

It is necessary to take a rather lengthy walk through the doctrine of Bibliology in order to lay hold of some basic concepts as they relate to the question, "Which Bible."

I. THE ORIGINAL TEXT

When God spoke and holy men wrote the result was inspiration. That original text or letter was inspired for it came directly from God. God oversaw the process whereby guaranteeing the accuracy of the written record.

This section is Biblical, but it is also historical. In looking at the *when* we need to focus in on certain areas or sections of the Bible. It is important to remember that we are talking about the written records.

For example, the first five books of the Bible were written around 1400 BC. However, the events recorded, for the most part, happened long before that date, but the written record was probably 'penned' at around 1400 BC. Books such as Judges, Ruth, Samuel's, Kings, and Chronicles were 'penned' at around 1100 BC. The Major and Minor Prophets were roughly around 700 BC to 400 BC. The New Testament on the other hand was 'penned' anywhere from 50 AD (Gospels) to 95 AD (The Book of Revelation).

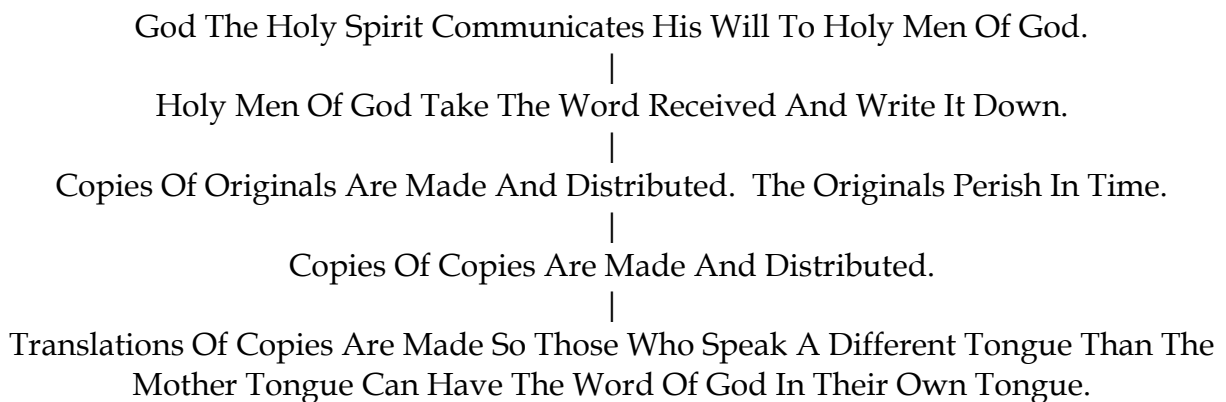
Thus, the original record was written down thousands of years ago and has long since perished in the passing of time. Since this is true, then "how did we get our present day translation of the original text?"

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II. THE DOCTRINE OF PRESERVATION

The record God has given to man could have become lost, garbled or destroyed. Therefore, God retained the text of Scripture so that today we possess the very Word of God.

The work of keeping the text of Scripture is a providential one. God has not chosen miraculously to preserve the text. Throughout history, there have been people who would have destroyed the Word of God. Their desire to destroy it was intentional and direct. They have cut it to pieces, burned its pages and outlawed its precepts, yet it abides unchanged. Historically, there has been a direct attack against the Word in order to silence its message. Yet there was also an indirect law established by God that guaranteed the ultimate destruction of the original text. This principle is decay. The original documents were on perishable material such as wood, papyrus, parchment, and stone. Though much has been preserved, much also has been lost. God has not chosen to preserve the original manuscripts, though He has chosen to preserve His Word in the bulk of existing documents. God has providentially chosen to keep His Word from obliteration. God providentially preserved the text of Scripture so that today we possess the very Word of God. Before we leave this thought of preservation, consider the following chart.



When we consider the issue from this perspective, one should be amazed that we have the Word of God at all! Considering the fact that this took place over hundreds and thousands of years is in itself nothing short of a miracle. Therefore, instead of quarrelling over which translation is God's Word we ought to study and obey the Word we do have in a language we can understand.

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III. THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION DEBATE

The English translation debate is really only pertinent in our language since most languages do not have the same plethora of Bibles available to them. There is a fundamental difference between the two translational families of the King James Version (hereafter referred to as KJV) and the New American Standard (hereafter referred to as NASB) and the New International Version (hereafter referred to as NIV). The fundamental difference is because they come from two geographically distinct Manuscript family types. The KJV comes from the Majority Text Type (Byzantine) and the NASB/NIV come from the Alexandrinus/Sinaiticus/Vaticanus Text Type.

However, a translation in no way diminishes the authority of the original record. "Versions and copies [are] authoritative or normative [as] they faithfully reproduce the message of the original text. This is why copies can be called THE WORD OF GOD." (Dr. McCune, "Inerrancy and Manuscripts")

The key in all of this is to remember that even though there are fundamental differences the similarities far outweighs the differences. The differences are of no significant consequence. However, the differences should have never produced the quarrel that presently divides Christianity.

Why is it that we have so many different translations? In addition, why do the 'big three' (KJV, NIV, NASB) differ? To summarize this thought there are *five statements* to keep in mind when looking at the English translation debate.

- **First**, the fundamental difference between the three is not language, but text type.
- **Second**, the KJV and NASB follow the same approach in translation whereas the NIV follows a somewhat different approach.
- **Third**, the text type behind the NIV and NASB are essentially the same whereas the KJV comes from a different text type family.
- **Fourth**, though there are some non-essential variations, they are essentially identical.
- **Fifth**, only the original autographs are technically 'inspired,' translations derive their authority only as they reflect the originals. Hence as any translation (English or otherwise) reflects the original text at that point it is the inspired, inerrant and infallible book.

Before moving on, we need to ask ourselves the question, "What makes for a good translation?" We can note *three points*. **First**, is the translation doctrinally orthodox? Is the message consistent throughout and with the other portions of Scripture? Do people

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of orthodoxy receive the text? **Second**, is the translation technically good? Does the language reflect the people receiving the Word without the sacrificing of the author's intended meaning? **Third**, is the translation using the best available resources? Are the translators using all available manuscripts and resources at their disposal?

IV. ISSUES OF INTERPRETATION AND ILLUMINATION

The New Testament uses the word "unction" three times. All three occurrences are found in these two verses (1 John 2:20, 27). The word literally means, "To anoint." "This 'anointing' or indwelling of the Holy Spirit is sufficient to make lucid all truth in matters of faith and practice. No one needs additional experience, knowledge, or enlightenment to understand the biblical storyline. This verse does not eliminate the need for Christian teachers. Rather, the verse recognizes the adequacy of the Holy Spirit in teaching and in testing the truth of what is taught by human teachers." (Criswell Study Bible, p. 1465.)

The anointing is the divine enlightening by the Holy Spirit to enable man to understand Scripture. It is only through hard work and a dependence on the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit that we can every hope to master the content of Scripture. "'The internal testimony of the Holy Spirit' is a description given by theologians to the ministry of the Spirit in the reception of the truth of Scripture by sinful men. It is an ever-recurring ministry by which sinful men receive the ability to perceive the self-evidencing perfections and qualities inherent in Scripture. It consists essentially of a regeneration of the mind. Without this ministry, faith in the Scriptures as absolute divine truth is impossible." (McCune, "Bibliology," p. 16).

Our English word "hermeneutics" is a transliteration of the Greek noun **hermeneia** or its verb **hermeneo** □ the idea is "to interpret." It is used of translating what has been spoken or written in a foreign tongue into the language of the audience (1Cor. 12:10; 14:26; John 1:38, 42; 9:7; Heb. 7:2).

'Interpretation must be preceded by the Spirit-generated conviction that Scripture is infallibly true and has come from God." (McCune, "Bibliology," p. 16). The Scripture is clear or transparent. God spoke to be understood and through a proper hermeneutic, the reader can understand the mind of God. "In the written Word, God's purpose and plan for man and the universe are revealed so clearly that anyone with an enlightened mind may come to Scripture and be taught directly by the Holy Spirit." (McCune, "Bibliology," p. 17).

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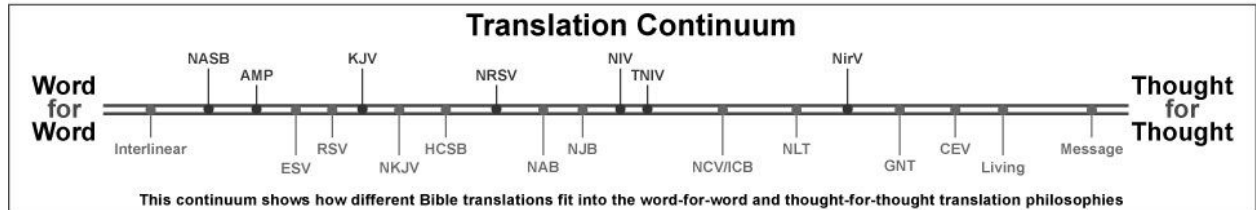
Often we ask the question “why are there so many different interpretations, if indeed there is only one meaning?” We offer *three reasons* as to why there are multiple interpretations of any given text. **First**, because of innate or original sin, **second**, ignorance due to finitude and **third**, insufficient revelation. We simply do not have all the information in order to answer all the questions.

Today’s church has within its hands the very Word of God. The Bible is to be a cherished book. Not because of its intrinsic value, but because of its purpose. It is only through the Word of God that one can come to know the God of the Word. Instead of *quarreling* over which translation is the Word of God, we ought to be *studying* the Word of God.

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<http://differentway4kids.blogspot.com/2011/06/whats-best-bible-translation.html>
<http://www.mardel.com/bible-translation-guide.aspx>



The Five Leading Bible Translations¹

Based on Earliest
 Word for Word Greek & Hebrew Publication Year²
 Manuscripts

ESV	YES	YES	2001
NLT	NO	YES	1995
NKJV	YES	NO	1983
NIV	NO	YES	1978
KJV	YES	NO	1611

¹Based on CBA and ECPA data for 2008. ²Listed in order of publication date.