

Bible Translations

(edited & expanded 11-05-17 according to current available truth)

Basic Belief

Yes, we do believe the Bible to be the inspired Word of God, (2Timothy 3:16). We believe that the Holy Spirit inspired and directed holy men on exactly what to write, (2Peter 1:20,21). And we also believe that it was written for man to instruct him on how to live in righteousness so that he may become complete, (complete & mature in godliness...the character & nature of Christ).

What Was the Original Language?

There is no perfect translation. That is because by definition a “translation” is a copy into a different language. Each language has unique differences in vocabulary, meanings, grammatical structure, idioms, colloquialisms, culture, and so on. Often a language does not even have words to match those used in the original language. Beyond accuracy, a translation must struggle with readability. It is always a balancing act. One must be sacrificed for the sake of the other. But the bottom line is that if it is not readable, then it is difficult to understand. It helps of course to have a translation that is direct from the original language as opposed to a translation of a translation. *So what was the original language?* If we miss this then we’ve missed the first turn in the road on our journey to grasp the written Word of God.

We were taught here in the Church of the West that the Old Testament was first written in Hebrew, with the exception of a few sections that were written in Aramaic. (These sections include Daniel, Ezra, Psalms, Esther, and some of the books written by the minor prophets, plus a line from Jeremiah.) And that after the Babylonian captivity at least the first five books of the Bible were written in Aramaic. But is it true that Hebrew was the original language that the Old Testament was written in? It is a valid question since there are no known original manuscripts in existence. The oldest manuscripts are all copies of copies.

Furthermore, the Church of the East proclaims that the Old Testament was first written in Aramaic. Their Bibles are translated from the Peshitta, the oldest manuscripts that they have. The Peshitta means “the original”. It is an Aramaic copy of copies from the original and dates back to at least the 5th century A.D. Unlike the differences found between various Hebrew copies, the Aramaic copies are all consistent with each other.¹ Thankfully we have an English translation of the Peshitta. It is **George Lamsa’s Translation**.

1. A nice overview of the Aramaic origins is found in the 2-page Preface of George Lamsa’s Translation from the Aramaic of the Peshitta. This Preface leaves us wanting to know more, but we are then blessed with its following 10-page Introduction of more detailed explanation. Better yet, from there read his book, “New Testament Origin”. And you can also read our review of his translation under “Eric’s Library” at www.bibleconcepts.com.

Aramaic is a language very similar to Hebrew and often confused with it because it was often the language of the Hebrews. The Hebrew alphabet borrowed from the Aramaic. The chief points of difference between the two languages are pronunciation and idioms, however there are many nearly-identical-looking-words of the two languages that are very different words with very different meanings. Copying from Aramaic to Hebrew would easily lend itself to “copyist-error”.

Now for the New Testament, the western church was taught that the originals were all written in Greek, (with the exception of 9 existing copies of Matthew written earlier in Hebrew). Why? That is because all of their earliest available copies are in Greek. But here again, in contrast to that widely-accepted-in-the-west-belief, the eastern church states that the New Testament in its entirety was first written in Aramaic.

What further justification do we have that the Eastern Church world might be correct in that the entire Bible was first written in Aramaic? Well, for starters, Aramaic is the Semitic language (through Shem’s son Aram, **Genesis 10:22** of the area of Syria), that Abraham, Isaac & Jacob all spoke.

But there is much more. It was the language of Assyria, Babylon, and of the Persians. And Aramaic was the language that Jesus and the apostles spoke and wrote.² It was the language that Paul wrote in. It was the language of the early church, and stayed with them as they went east, away from the Roman Empire, and the Greek Empire that soon followed. It was the language of the common people of much of that part of the world at the time it was written. This is easily verified by Josephus, the historian who lived at that time. Josephus himself wrote in Aramaic. He considered the Aramaic so identical with Hebrew that he quotes Aramaic words as Hebrew. It is still a living language in many parts of the world today, and is even still used in American Jewish Synagogues.

This would mean that the Greek New Testament is a translation from the Aramaic. The oldest manuscripts available to the people of the Western world were the Greek manuscripts. These Greek manuscripts were written at least 300 years after the resurrection. Western world translations of the New Testament are therefore from the Greek (or Latin, or something else), but not from the original Aramaic. However, all Eastern translations of the New Testament are from copies of the original Aramaic.

It is interesting that the term “Greek” is rarely used in the eastern text, (Aramaic). The Greek translations for some unknown reason changed the word “Arameans” (Syrians) into “Greeks” Thus nearly all of Paul’s references to “Greeks” actually refer to Arameans, (Syrians). The Aramaic word for “Greeks” seldom occurs in New Testament literature.

The good news is that the Greek translations seem to be very close to the original Aramaic text. The Greek language is also very precise and in this regard it is excellent as a study tool.

2. The scripture references for this are found in the first footnote of our review of George Lamsa’s Translation.

Which Translation is Best?

I do not know Aramaic or Greek or Hebrew (although I'm beginning to learn Hebrew), so as second best I resort to reading English translations. I have dozens of them and have read most of them cover to cover. A translation by its definition is not as fully inspired as the original writings in the original languages. How is this so? Well, again, a translation is taking the words of one language and converting them into the words of another language. The difficulty here (even if you fully understand the nuances of the correct meaning the word of the original language), is that there may be many similar words to choose from to match it. These similar words are each somewhat different in meaning from each other. There also may be no similar words at all to choose from. And this all assumes that the translators understood the intended meaning of the original to begin with.

I don't lose sleep over that. I am just thrilled that I can read God's Word, even though translations are not perfect. I trust Him to help me to understand what I read. Without His Spirit I would be sure to miss the main points, as did the Pharisees. I suspect that most parts of most translations carry the same basic meanings as the original. When I want to learn more about what I read, then I compare various translations. I have many Hebrew & Greek reference books to help me as well. When hungry for truth, then seek...dig deeper. Call out to the Holy Spirit to guide you into truth and to enlighten you with understanding. That's what I do and He blesses me.

The King James Version until recently has been the most commonly read translation. It does have a poetic beauty that is hard to match. God used it to change the world. It was one of the first major translations in the English language made available to the common people. But there is a little known reason for that. The KJV became the popular English translation because it was illegal to print any other translation! It was the only one made available to the common people. The people of the day actually much preferred the Geneva Bible. The Geneva Bible became illegal for many decades because King James (and other rulers), did not like its Reformation notes that pointed to God rather than the religious church systems with its political & religious rulers. In fact, the King James Version was not even allowed on the Mayflower. Had anyone wanted to bring one along it would have betrayed that they did not catch the vision for freedom of religion and thus would have belonged with a different crowd.

Like all translations it does however have some weaknesses. It was written with stipulations from the King who funded it. The translators were not to rock the boat regarding the newly established Anglican Church, a close copy of the Catholic Church. Perhaps that is why the Greek word for "Passover" is translated as "Easter" in Acts 12:4. Consistently elsewhere, (about two dozen times), it is translated correctly as "Passover". "Easter" has its roots in paganism which the Catholic Church had compromised with.

And the King James version was written over 400 years ago when English was a very different language than today. That alone makes it often hard to follow.

Also there are many words that were inserted, (not present in the original languages), to help the reader understand what the translators thought was the apparent meaning. In some copies of the KJV these words are italicized. Most variances lack significance. They usually do not stray far from the meaning of the original inspired Word. A few though are of significance. It would take too lengthy an explanation of them to go down that rabbit trail here, but we do point them out in our lessons when they apply. God has used these inaccuracies to keep certain truths hidden until the time of the end, (**Daniel 12:2**). The time of the end is now.

We are living in the age where the book is becoming unsealed. Hidden truths are now coming forth for the transition into the next age. It is the time of knowledge increasing. This does not mean just knowledge of science & technology, but of the Word especially. This is the most exciting time to be reading the Bible!

After first reading The Living Bible I then read all of Dakes, (the KJV with his notes). I have a special fondness for it also because it was given to me by my parents when I was in college. I even read *ALL* of his notes. When I read another copy of the King James Version I often refer to the notes of Dakes, and also those of Bullinger. The notes provide insight and cross references.

I have many favorite translations. I love George Lamsa's translation because it translates directly from copies handed down from what I believe were the original Aramaic scriptures of the east. George grew up speaking Aramaic in a part of the world that still embraces much of the culture of when and where it was first written. Lamsa's Translation has helped me to understand several parts of the KJV that were confusing to me. For example, the KJV quotes Jesus on the cross in **Matthew 27:46** as saying, "... *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*" Lamsa's translation from the Eastern texts reads, "*My God, my God, for this I was spared!*" along with a footnote, "*This was my destiny*". In other words Jesus was pointing out that he was born to be the Passover Lamb for mankind. He knew exactly why he was on the cross. He wanted to make it plain to the observers that God had kept him protected in his life so that he would be alive to go to the cross on that Passover Day in that year. He was acknowledging that he knew the Father was in control. He was cooperating with the Father. They were one in what was happening. He knew that the Father had not deserted him. He knew that the Father would get him off the cross if he so desired. But Jesus desired the highest will of the Father out of love for the Father...and secondarily out of love for us.

This is important for me to know because I have faced the cross in many situations in my own life in my walk with the Lord. All I needed to know at those times is whether or not it was the Father's will for me to embrace the difficult situation. If so, then I could trust Him to carry me through it. He usually provided an obvious way out, but I knew that to move on in Christ I had to keep following as He led. Jesus went to the cross because of the joy that he knew was waiting on the other side of it, (**Hebrews 12:2**).

Quick Reviews of Other Translations

The Amplified Bible has the advantage of expanding upon the meaning of the original so that the reader may better understand the meaning. For example they always make it clear as to who a pronoun is referring to. There are other amplified translations too, such as **Jonathan Mitchell's**, as well as **Kenneth Wuest** although these are limited to just the New Testament. Amplified versions can be wordy and somewhat repetitious, but also very helpful.

Young's Literal Translation of the Bible is just that. Accuracy is very high, although readability is not always easy. It is cumbersome at best going from one language to another. **Rotherham's Emphasized Bible** is a literal, word-by-word translation but has the advantage of added emphasis to further convey the meaning of the original languages. It is sort of like a combination of YLT and the Amplified Bible.

The Jubilee Bible is a fairly recent English translation from a Spanish Bible that was written in the 1500s. It was translated back then by a man who learned Hebrew from Jews in Spain who still spoke Hebrew as a "living" language. This gave him a clear understanding of many Hebrew words that today are otherwise obscure. For example, his translation in **Exodus 5** makes it clear that Israelites were not forced to gather "straw" in making their bricks for Pharaoh, but "firewood" for baking the clay bricks. That makes a lot more sense!

The Jerusalem Bible is written from a Jewish perspective by the Jewish Publication Society. Who else would be better acquainted with Jewish customs & the Jewish calendar? I also have other translations by them such as the "Tanakh" (more of a commentary), and the first five books of the Bible, ("**The Torah**"). These were all key for me in confirming exact dates and places. This helped confirm that the Feast of Pentecost is for remembering & celebrating the day when God came down (on Mount Sinai) in fire to give the Word to His people. The Pentecost in **Acts** is this same day of the year when God came down (in Jerusalem) in fire to give the Spirit to His people. It is critical to get the translations correct in order to open up the correct concepts and patterns.

The New International Version has been much maligned as a "new age version", but it is highly valued by me as one of the rare translations to honestly point out in a footnote of **Exodus 12:40** that they were not in Egypt for 430 years (which does not fit other timelines found in scripture), but that they were in Egypt AND CANAAN 430 years! My timeline study leads through the scriptures to show that they were in each exactly 215 years. The NIV gives the sources of the original manuscripts that are the basis for this. Other translations from the same sources either missed this or stuck to religious tradition.

If you want true accuracy then read the Bible in the original languages. If you don't know those languages, then read a translation that you can understand. I started with **The Living Bible** because it is a paraphrase. This means that the meaning of the original was paraphrased for easy understanding. It was written by Kenneth Taylor of England whom I met in Maine many years ago. He had many children and when he read the King James Version to them they just didn't get it. So he would explain what the King James said in terms that they could understand. Then they could follow. Kenneth Taylor knew Hebrew and Greek. He paraphrased the book of John from the Greek, (which we recall is a translation itself...from the original Aramaic), and printed

it for his children. Soon others demanded copies, and so the entire Bible followed eventually. He sold millions of copies but had the income put into a fund to use to further the work of printing and distributing the Word. He definitely was a humble man who was not “riding the Beast”, (**Revelation 17:7**).

The Living Bible was the first Bible I read cover to cover. (I was so excited to be able to understand the Word that I bought them by the case to give to friends!) It only took me about three months to read it through! I was 20 years old. I had just received the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. One of the first evidences of this was a great hunger for the Word. The Holy Spirit also led me to read this translation first. It is a translation not designed to be a study Bible but rather for ease of reading and seeing the big picture. That’s all I needed the first time through.

Today **The New Living Translation** preserves the language of the Living Bible paraphrase whenever it can while maintaining a scholarly translation from the original languages.

I use copies of all these translations, and many more besides. They each have a place. The purpose of this topic is not a full comparison of translations. Instead this is an exhortation to not confuse the inspired Word as originally given (**2Timothy 3:16** & **2Peter 1:21**), with thinking that a particular translation is equally inspired. Why? Because it has been converted into a different language by other men & women. Many people think for example that the **King James Version** is as inspired as the original manuscripts. The King James, like all translations, is written in an entirely different language that does not match the original in all points. For an excellent history of the English translations leading up to the King James Version, please read the eye-opening 10-page study written by Elwin Roach. We introduce & provide his review on our website under Eric’s Library.

And remember that the Word is dead letter without the Spirit quickening it to you. Follow the Holy Spirit (who leads into all truth), when searching the Word. Don’t be afraid to compare various translations. These various translations reveal different shades of meaning that help shed light on the original inspired Word. It is a blessing to have so many types of translations available. They may be limited as translations, but they each have advantages. Together they are a tremendous help.

As we close we must wonder, “Why didn’t the Lord leave us an original manuscript of the books of the Bible?” Perhaps it is because then we might look to the written Word as the source of truth instead of to Jesus Christ, who is the Word. The Word without the Spirit is a form with no life... death, (**John 6:63**). Faith comes from *HEARING HIM* who is the Tree of Life. He is still speaking today. He is speaking to us by His Spirit. He is speaking to us in many different ways just as He typically has for centuries: through dreams, visions, prophecies, circumstances, nature, children, teachers, thoughts, writings, and so on, plus many different Bible translations! And we are not to make an idol of any method, but rather focus on relationship with Him. Otherwise we miss the whole point of the written Word. It is to lead us as a “child-leader” to our master.

Over time we expect that the Lord will enlighten us to present reviews of many different Bible Translations as seen under “Eric’s Library” on our website given below.

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