

# Which Bible Translation?

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DECEMBER 2004

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### 1 INTRODUCTION

Many issues divide the Body of Christ today. Baptism, communion, pre-tribulation rapture verses post-tribulation and more all cause division in the Church as satan loves to divide and conquer; it's sad we fight among ourselves instead of the real enemy.

One of satan's strategies from early in Genesis becomes casting doubt on God's word. Recall in the garden satan's words "Has God really said?" confusing Eve and causing her to sin. Satan realizes casting doubt on what God actually says can be a winning strategy for him — what could cause more confusion than casting

doubt the Bible in your lap isn't the exact Word of God?

1 This strategy continues today with the Bible  
2 translation debate. Is the King James really  
2 the best translation? What about the old lan-  
2 guage? Shouldn't newer translations be used?  
2 As usual many views exist, and unfortunately  
some people involved become rather militant.  
3 We've been told if you're witnessing to someone  
and they become saved, but you didn't use King  
4 James Version it didn't count. That's absurd.

4 However, in view of satan's strategy of cre-  
4 ating doubt in God's word the translation and  
5 preservation of the Bible becomes critically im-  
6 portant; you can't dismiss the concept and use  
6 whatever translation you pick off the shelf. Bal-  
7 ance is required; getting that balance requires  
7 effort on your part — you need to do some  
8 homework. Fortunately acquiring a basic fa-  
8 miliarity with the issues can be done briefly,  
8 paying dividends in your Bible Study.

8 Anyone translating between languages  
quickly understands one thing, it's *impossible*  
to completely and accurately translate between  
languages. The translator must always choose  
different wording to convey the original idea;  
sometimes it's impossible to express the idea of  
one language in another. As such, the original  
always surpasses the copy for accuracy; trans-  
lation forces a compromise of sorts, subject to  
the personal ideas of the translator (which ex-  
plains why we must understand the personal  
ideas of the translator).

The idea a *perfect* translation exists quickly  
disappears — they *all* have problems; under-  
standing which translations have which prob-  
lems is important. In the following discussion,

we'll take a brief and summary look at issues affecting translation, and how those issues impact the various translations. You must understand these issues to understand the advantages and disadvantages of the translation in your lap.

## 2 ISSUES AFFECTING TRANSLATION

When considering Bible translation, many issues arise but for simplicity we'll stick to two; these main issues concern you as a Christian trying to understand the Bible translation debate.

1. What you're translating *from*. Two main lines of Greek texts exist with differences between them (section 2.1). You also must consider if what we have today was handed down to us faithfully accurate to the originals (section 2.1.1).
2. *How* you translate what you've got. In other words, do you attempt to translate literally, or use more paraphrasing? We'll cover this in section 2.2.

### 2.1 Textual Issues

#### 2.1.1 Preservation of the Bible

Written 2,000 years ago, do we have correct and accurate copies of the original New Testament? A quick glance of the following chart\* illustrates the accuracy of the New Testament as it has been passed down to us, compared to other ancient writings.

Document	Date	Copies	% Purity
Homer's Iliad	800 BC	643	95
Herodotus	480 BC	8	?
Plato's Tetralogies	427 BC	7	?
Caesar's Gallic Wars	44 BC	10	?
New Testament	50-95 AD	25,366	> 99.5

\* Eastman and Missler "The Bible: An Extraterrestrial Message" page 10

† Eastman and Missler "The Bible: An Extraterrestrial Message" page 11-12

‡ Chuck Missler, "How we got our Bible", page 17

§ Chuck Missler, "How we got our Bible", page 18

If we don't accept the validity and accuracy of the Bible, we must throw out much more than the Bible. Do we doubt writings with considerably less sources? The existence of George Washington? With considerable manuscript evidence, the Bible stands apart from other ancient writings.

*Norman Geisler, a world renowned Bible scholar echoed this when he states: "Only 400 words of the NT are in doubt, whereas 764 lines of the Iliad are questioned. This five percent textual corruption (in the Iliad) compares with one-half of one percent of similar emendations in the New Testament"*<sup>†</sup>

So the Bible has been preserved through the centuries for us as originally written; we can be confident of the accuracy of our copies as many of the differences exist in spelling or other minor issues.

#### 2.1.2 Textual History

Two main lines of Greek texts exist, diverging in minor but important ways. The text used almost exclusively until the 1800's was Textus Receptus. However, manuscript discoveries in Alexandria changed some scholars views. But are those manuscripts reliable?

In 1525, Erasmus compiled the first Greek text using texts from Byzantium, which had been in use previously for centuries, forming the basis for what would later be called Textus Receptus,<sup>‡</sup> and the main text the KJV translators used. Although they had the other Alexandrian texts available (Codex Siniaticus, etc), they obviously felt the Alexandrian text base (later to become Westcott-Hort) was unsuitable.

Westcott and Hort compiled a Greek New Testament starting in 1853 and finished 28 years later, relying heavily on the Alexandrian Codex Vaticanus and Codex Siniaticus, changing the traditional Greek in over 8,000 places<sup>§</sup>. We'll treat all these Alexandrian texts similarly and refer to them collectively as Westcott-Hort (not technically correct, but for our purposes

it's close enough). How they edited the text, the reasons why and their background becomes critical to understanding the newer translations derived from Westcott-Hort's work.

Only two modern translations use the Textus Receptus Greek text (KJV, NKJV); all the others (NASB, NIV, etc) use Westcott-Hort or Alexandrian texts. After studying these a bit (which we'll get to), it becomes apparent they've all been edited for theological reasons; the influence of early Gnostic heresy runs through Westcott-Hort's text.

For ease of discussion we're grouping various families of texts, which although not entirely accurate, proves sufficient for our purposes. For our uses, Byzantine, Textus Receptus and the Majority Text will be treated as equivalent, and simply called Textus Receptus, while Westcott-Hort, UBS, and Nestle-Aland will be treated as the Alexandrian line and referred to as Westcott and Hort or Alexandrian.

### 2.1.3 Gnostic Influence — Westcott and Hort

Early in church history a heretical group sprang up called the Gnostics, accepting the Greek idea of dualism between spirit and matter.\* All matter in Gnostic teaching was evil; since all matter is evil, Jesus really didn't have a physical body and no physical resurrection occurred. The Gnostics also believed they had special knowledge, leading to spiritual elitism in the early church.

The Gnostic's teaching on the evilness of material leads to two errors. On one side was a form of asceticism — the path to heaven comes by denying yourself (the extreme puritanical view). On the other side, your body (since it is evil) doesn't matter. If you use drugs or party it really doesn't matter since your body is evil anyway.

The Gnostic heresy Jesus didn't have a body denies His death, physical resurrection, and thus His atonement for our sins. The apostle

John wrote his first letter (1 John) in part to combat Gnostic heresy. John writes he saw and handled Jesus — Jesus had a physical body. Even more, John warned anyone stating Jesus did not come *in the flesh* is not of God.

*Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world. (1 John 4:2-3 KJV)*

John's one statement debunks all of Gnostic heresy. Why then is academia so enamored by it? Why would Westcott-Hort follow such heresy when it so obviously contradicts Biblical teaching? Why have we allowed people who obviously rejected Biblical teaching to edit God's Word?

Westcott and Hort edited the original Greek as they compiled their edition, but as we shall see, Gnostic philosophy heavily influenced both men. The Greek texts they used appear footnoted in your Bible as "the oldest and best manuscripts". Yes, they're the oldest, but are they the best? Westcott and Hort held strange theological views — do we trust them with God's Word? Consider the words of Westcott and Hort themselves.

*But the book which has engaged me most is Darwin ... My feeling is strong that the theory is unanswerable.†*

*No one now I suppose holds that the first three chapters of Genesis, for example, give a literal history—I could never understand how anyone reading them with open eyes could think they did.‡*

*Christians are themselves in a true sense "Christs".§*

\* "Nelsons New Illustrated Bible Dictionary" page 500

† F.J. Hort, *Life of Hort*, Vol I, page 416 (Chuck Missler, "How we got our Bible", page 19)

‡ *Life of Westcott*, Vol II, page 69 (Chuck Missler, "How we got our Bible", page 19)

§ B.F. Westcott, *The Epistles of St. John*, page 73 (Chuck Missler, "How we got our Bible", page 19)

\* F.J.A. Hort, *Life of Hort*, Vol I, page 78 (Chuck Missler, "How we got our Bible", page 19)

*I am inclined to think that no such state as Eden (I mean the popular notion) ever existed, and that Adam's fall in no degree differed from the fall of each of his descendants.\**

These are their views. They're entitled to them, of course, but do they agree with your Bible reading? In light of John's warning about Gnostic heresy, can we trust these men to compile an accurate Greek text? As we'll see in the examples, they allowed their un-orthodox views to influence their compilation of the Holy Scriptures — in some ways that simply make no sense.

The Bible must be considered an integrated message to be used as whole and complete. As soon as editing begins, contradictions and other problems arise, as we'll see in the examples section. No way exists for Westcott-Hort (or anyone else) to edit the Biblical text and keep it consistent.

Go back and re-read the previous paragraph and make sure it sinks in. If the Bible is the inspired, inerrant Word of God, any internal inconsistencies in a manuscript cause the rejection of that manuscript. No need to spend hours in the library on archaeological and historical records, if the manuscript contains internal errors it must be rejected.

## 2.2 Translational Issues

Once you decide on the textual base (Textus Receptus or Westcott-Hort), you must decide exactly how to translate — literal or paraphrase? Both have pros and cons, but mostly you want to know where on the scale your translation lies. If you've ever picked up a Greek-English interlinear you know it can be difficult to read, as this example shows.

*so For loved God the world, so as the Son of Him, the Only-begotten, He gave, that everyone believing into Him not may perish, but have life everlasting. †*

So the question isn't quite literal vs. paraphrase, but how much paraphrasing does the

translator perform? A translator trying to remain literal will do the minimum required to put the sentence into grammatically correct English and no more, while a paraphrase tries to convey the *idea* of the original without using the exact wording of the original and may take into account cultural or other differences.

Weights and measures provide one easy example. How many people know what a cubit is? Or that 4 cubits make one fathom? Or 1 firkin is about 9 gallons? In a literal translation, these quantities translate as-is, and it's up to you to understand what they are. In more of a paraphrase translation, these appear in modern measures.

It's easiest to show this issue with examples, so we'll move right to it.

## 2.3 Examples

### 2.3.1 Literal vs Paraphrase

Consider 2 Timothy 2:15 in two translations and examine how the literal verses paraphrase problem presents itself.

*Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (KJV)*

"Rightly divide" translates the Greek word *orthotomeo* (from *orthos*) — you might recognize as similar to the math term *orthogonal* meaning a right angle. So the KJV is literal. But do you know what it means? If you have a math background you understand *orthogonal* as precise, an exact right angle, as the KJV accurately and literally translates the Greek. Now consider the NIV.

*Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth (NIV)*

"Correctly handles" is not literal, but for many people brings the truth of the verse out better. But notice instead of "Study" the NIV uses "Do your best" which completely changes the

† John 3:16 *Interlinear Greek-English NT, 3rd Edition*, Jay P. Green

meaning making it less clear. Study implies dedication or devotion, while just doing your best can mean a lot less. John chapter seven provides another example.

*His brethren therefore said unto him, Depart hence, and go into Judaea, that thy disciples also may see the works that thou doest. For there is no man that doeth any thing in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly. If thou do these things, show thyself to the world.* (John 7:3-4 KJV)

You might miss Jesus' brothers picking on Him a little; since they didn't believe Jesus was God, they're actually baiting Him to show His stuff. Now compare the New Living Translation.

*Jesus' brothers urged him to go to Judea for the celebration. "Go where your followers can see your miracles!" they scoffed. "You can't become a public figure if you hide like this! If you can do such wonderful things, prove it to the world!"* (John 7:3-4 NLT)

In these two examples you can see both the advantages and disadvantages of literal and paraphrase translation. Most of the time literal translation proves the most beneficial, but sometimes referring to a paraphrase proves advantageous.

### 2.3.2 Textual

For these, we're using KJV and NKJV as examples of Textus Receptus, and as a representative of Westcott-Hort, the NIV (and also the NASB or the New American Standard Bible). Westcott-Hort influence most "modern" translations, even if they don't follow exactly the full changes Westcott-Hort made (NIV more, NASB less). Some translations include the changes in footnotes, others include in the main text.

*(Matthew 18:11 NKJV) For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.*

*(Matthew 18:11 KJV) For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost.*

*(Matthew 18:11 NIV) deleted*

NIV deletes entirely, while NASB brackets it as probably not in original text. Why delete this verse? Perhaps if you believe (as Westcott) we're all true Christs and don't have need of salvation.

*(Matthew 25:13 NKJV) Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which **the Son of Man is coming.***

*(Matthew 25:13 KJV) Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein **the Son of man cometh.***

*(Matthew 25:13 NIV) Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.*

That's a bizarre one. Why would I keep watch if I don't know what time it was? But it's not the time, it's the time of Jesus' return you don't know. Jesus taught to always be on the lookout for His return — it can come anytime.

*(Mark 2:17 NKJV) When Jesus heard it, He said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, **to repentance.**"*

*(Mark 2:17 KJV) When Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners **to repentance.***

*(Mark 2:17 NIV) On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."*

Another fun one. Jesus didn't come to call the righteous, but sinners. For what? An invitation to dinner? To Saturday's football game? (NASB contains similar edit to NIV).

*(Acts 8:37 NKJV) Then Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."*

*(Acts 8:37 KJV) And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.*

*(Acts 8:37 NIV) deleted*

If you didn't believe Jesus was God, you certainly wouldn't want it in your text so you delete it. NASB brackets as not in original text.

*(Ephesians 3:9 NKJV) and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things **through Jesus Christ**;*

*(Ephesians 3:9 KJV) And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things **by Jesus Christ**:*

*(Ephesians 3:9 NIV) and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things.*

NIV has God creating all things, NOT Jesus — which you wouldn't want to say if you accept Gnostic heresy. Here Westcott-Hort directly contradict Paul in Colossians 1:16-17 who attributes creation to Jesus. In Colossians 1:17, Paul even states Jesus holds the atoms of the universe together. (NASB contains similar edit to NIV).

*(1 Peter 4:1 NKJV) Therefore, since Christ suffered **for us** in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin,*

*(1 Peter 4:1 KJV) Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered **for us** in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin;*

*(1 Peter 4:1 NIV) Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin.*

Jesus didn't just suffer, he suffered and died for us. NASB with similar edit to NIV.

*(Revelation 11:17 NKJV) saying: "We give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty, The One who is and who was and **who is to come**, Because You have taken Your great power and reigned.*

*(Revelation 11:17 KJV) Saying, We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and*

*wast, and **art to come**; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned.*

*(Revelation 11:17 NIV) saying: "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign.*

Denying the return of Jesus. (NASB similar to NIV).

In these few examples, you can see how Westcott-Hort personal theology (or lack thereof) influenced their compilation of the Greek text. Some of these changes contradict other areas of the Bible, while others make no sense at all. Since the inerrant Word of God contains no errors, it must be Westcott-Hort making the mistakes.

### 3 KING JAMES VERSION

#### 3.1 King James Only

Some claim the KJV as the only true Bible, claiming the translators of the KJV were divinely inspired just as Peter, Paul and John were. Unfortunately, no basis for this exists. They claim the KJV as the "perfect" Bible in English and put in on par with the original Greek! But as anyone who ever translated anything soon finds, it's *impossible* to accurately translate one language to another. Even worse, Greek is one of the most rich languages, with English one of the worst.

My father tells me a story of someone who was KJV-Only and said when he finished reading another translation, he just tossed it on the coffee table. But when he finished reading the KJV, he reverently and gently placed it back from whence it came. That's idolatry.

We could continue to debate the KJV-only crowd, but most people don't hold such a view, and as such it isn't worth the time to continue the discussion. Just be aware some people hold this view, and from time to time you will encounter them.

The KJV ranks as one of the best translations, although it's not the only translation that has use.

### 3.2 Olde English

Some would throw away the KJV due to its old English. Certainly that *can* be a valid reason, but shouldn't preclude your use of it; when studying any technical subject (math or science) certain terminology must be learned. The KJV is no different. Remember you're reading text 2,000 years old from a different culture — it's going to be different.

The first problem pops up with archaic words. Dictionaries exist if you need help, but you'll quickly become accustomed to the vocabulary. But the bigger issue arises from words you *think* you know, but changed meaning over time; unless you're aware of them you'll definitely have problems reading the KJV.

*For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. (1 Thessalonians 4:15 KJV)*

Any new translation translates "prevent" as "precede"; the word prevent changed meaning between 1611 and now and if you didn't know this verse makes no sense.

*For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. (2 Thessalonians 2:7 KJV)*

"Let" changed meaning to "hinder". Again, any recent translation correctly translates this verse (both of these verses change in the NKJV as well). A note for people who do like the KJV over other translations, the New Scofield Bible (1967 edition) gives you these notations so you'll understand with outdated word changes made right in the text. If you're a KJV person, get a copy of Scofield's 1967 edition.

The other problem with old English arises from all the thees and thous in the KJV. However, a reason does exist for these in the text; it's to differentiate singular and plural. Consider the following chart:\*

	<b>Nom</b>	<b>Obj</b>	<b>Poss</b>
1st Singular	I	Me	My
1st Plural	We	Us	Our
2nd Singular	Thou	Thee	Thy
2nd Plural	Ye	You	Your
3rd Singular	He	Him	His
3rd Plural	They	Them	Their

NOM = nominative, case of the subject

OBJ = objective, case of the object of the verb

POSS = possessive, case of possessing.

Why is this important? Consider Luke 22:31-32.

*And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren. (Luke 22:31-32 KJV)*

Here you can easily see Satan asked for much more than Peter — perhaps the entire group! However, Jesus prays for Peter *himself*. The distinction easily missed in other translations (including NKJV) the KJV makes abundantly clear (a similar situation also occurs in Exodus 4:15).

### 4 COMPARISON OF TRANSLATIONS

So how do we rate the various translations? The following chart provides a guide for modern translations, showing which textual base they follow and a rough guide of how literally they translate the original Greek.

<b>Translation</b>	<b>Text Base</b>	<b>Literal Scale</b>
KJV	TR	1
NKJV	TR	1
NASB	WH	1-2
NIV	WH	4
NLT	WH	6
The Message	?	9

TR = Textus Receptus

WH = Westcott-Hort

Literal scale runs from 0 (a perfect literal much like a Greek-English interlinear) to 10 (a complete paraphrase — the translator reads a paragraph and the translates it without trying to be literal).

\* <http://av1611.com/kjbp/articles/bacon-theethou.html>

It's important to know just because the newer translations are marked as Westcott-Hort does not necessarily imply they follow *all* of Westcott-Hort; each translation has different ways of handling it. Some footnote, some delete, some ignore Westcott-Hort changes in some areas.

## 5 RECOMMENDATIONS

The preferred translation is the NKJV, useful for both teaching and personal study. The KJV appears in the majority of writings for a simple reason: no copyright issues (look at the first few pages of any other translation to see a list of rules of how you can quote it).

Use the New King James for primary use, study, and reading as it comes from the preferred Textus Receptus Greek Text. However, referring to a New Living Paraphrase in some cases will help you with meaning. These two translations provide a solid foundation for Bible Study.

Most importantly, understand *all* translations have problems. It's important to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the Bible translation you use. In the event you're using another translation, it does *not* mean to throw it out or stop using it.

## 6 CONCLUSION

You must have balance — no translation is 100% perfect, they *all* have problems. This does not mean errors or inconsistencies exist

in the Bible, only translation can never be perfect. It's important to understand how your translation came to be, and what methods were used in its creation. Most importantly, you are encouraged to study on your own.

## 7 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND NOTES

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This article was typeset using L<sup>A</sup>T<sub>E</sub>X2<sub>ε</sub>.