

HELP!!
WHICH BIBLE TRANSLATION
IS RIGHT?
Hebrews 4:12
Abbreviated

I Importance

- 1 This is the Word of God!! (Hebrews 4:12)
- 2 We bank our life on what this book says
- 3 Why read or study the Bible?
 - A To know God
 - B To think, live and communicate the mind and heart of God.

II The reasons for the different kinds of translations

- A The purpose for the translation - what is the objective of the translators in producing a new translation?
- B What manuscripts do they use for their translation?

III The three major types of translations (The purpose of the translation)

- 1 Formal equivalence or literal: New American Standard Bible (NAS), King James Version (KJV) and the New King James Version (NKJV).
 - A “Remain as close to Hebrew and Greek syntax, word order, grammar, and vocabulary as possible”¹
 - (A) When accuracy and readability come into conflict, they will opt for the most accurate or precise with the least amount of freedom exercised in the translation.
 - a The result is the translation is accurate, but it may not be as easy to read as some other versions.
 - (a) NAS-11th grade reading level.
 - (b) KJV-12th grade reading level
 - (c) NKJV-7.3 grade reading level
- 2 Dynamic equivalence: New International Version (NIV).
 - A “(At times approaching paraphrase); focuses on modern, conversational language with sentence or paragraph, not word, the basic unit.”²
 - (A) Seek to bring the idea of the phrase or passage rather than the meaning of each word, etc.

¹ *Wednesday Night Chronicles, A critical examination of current Bible translations*, by Trent C. Butler., a comparison handout from the Sunday School board.

² *ibid*

- a Greater emphasis on interpretation than allowed by formal equivalence, which sticks closer to the actual word for word translation
 - (B) When accuracy and readability come into conflict, they will exercise limited interpretive freedom in order to make the text the most readable even at the expense of some accuracy.
 - a The result is the translation is very readable, but not as accurate as the formal; consequently the dynamic translation is less suitable for detailed or in depth Bible study than the Formal.
 - (a) NIV, 6.1 grade reading level
 - (b) NIRV, 3.5 grade reading level (this is a simplified dynamic equivalence—short sentences)
 - 3 Paraphrase: The Living Bible (LB), The Message
 - A “Retells source materials in modern, conversational language; willing to insert or omit materials as needed for communication ease.”³
 - (A) Technically, these are not translations. They are paraphrases. They will sacrifice accuracy of translation for readability to the point of becoming unreliable for Bible Study.
- IV There are four families of manuscripts⁴
- A (The manuscripts used)
 - 2 The Alexandrian (2nd century)
 - 3 The Western (2nd Century)
 - 4 The Caesarean (3rd century)
 - 5 The Byzantine (4-5th century)
 - A Thus, the oldest are the Alexandrian and the youngest are the Byzantine
 - B These are also known as text-types
 - C There are 5,686 Greek manuscripts and 19,284 manuscripts written in Latin, Ethiopic, etc.⁵
 - D There are more Byzantine manuscripts than any other family; consequently, these are referred to as the Majority text⁶.
 - (A) One reason is that earlier than this, Christianity was illegal.
 - 6 The KJV, NKJV use only the Byzantine manuscripts

³ *ibid*

⁴ Manuscripts refer to the ancient handwritten copies of the autographs from which our modern translations are derived.

⁵ *The New Evidence Demands a Verdict*, Josh McDowell, p34.

⁶ See the blog, “The King James Only Debate” for a fuller discussion of the Majority Text.

- A When the KJV was written in 1611, those were the only Greek manuscripts known, and it was believed that the Koine Greek language⁷ was a language dropped out of heaven.
- (A) Now we know that Koine Greek was the common language of the Greek speaking world from Alexander the Great to A.D. 500⁸, and we have thousands of documents that demonstrate how the words of the New Testament were used in everyday life. This affords us a much better understanding of the meaning of the New Testament, and how to translate it than was available in 1611.
- 7 The NIV, NASV and other modern translations draw from all of the text families.
- A Although these other manuscripts were not found until modern times, they actually predate the Byzantine. Some of them like the Codex Vaticanus were locked up in the Vatican and no one could get to them. Dr. Geisler says that the Codex Vaticanus
- (A) "...is perhaps the oldest uncial on parchment or vellum (c.325-350), and one of the most important witnesses to the text of the New Testament. This manuscript was probably written by the middle of the fourth century; however, it was not known to textual scholars until after 1475 when it was cataloged in the Vatican Library. For the next four hundred years scholars were prohibited from studying it. After that time, a complete photographic facsimile was made of it, 1889-90. And another of the New Testament in 1904."⁹
- a Therefore, manuscripts like this were not even available when the KJV was written, and unfortunately, they do not even use them now.
- B Thus, modern translations use all of the manuscripts, and the KJV uses only those from the Byzantine.
- C The KJV translators argue that the best manuscript evidence is determined by counting the manuscripts; i.e. the more there are the better. Thus, the Byzantine manuscripts are the best source since there are more of them than the other types.
- D NIV, NAS...translators argue that the best manuscript evidence is determined by looking at all of the manuscripts and weighing all of the evidence as opposed to merely counting the number of manuscripts. Consequently, they generally would conclude that an older manuscript is more accurate than multiple manuscripts written hundreds of years later.
- V Conclusions
- 1 Paraphrases take so much liberty in seeking to make the Bible readable that it is no longer reliable for understanding what the Holy Spirit actually said. It is far better to read from a good translation and ask for clarification of difficult verses.

⁷ This is the original language of the New Testament.

⁸ Essentials of New Testament Greek, Ray Summers, Broadman Press, Nashville, Tennessee, p vii

⁹ *A General Introduction to the Bible*, Geisler and Nix p271

- This is the task of expository preaching. The expositor seeks to explain the historical meaning of the passage as well as modern day application.
- 2 The KJV, NKJV are fine formal translations, but it needs to be understood that they do not incorporate much of our modern textual knowledge into their translation.
 - 3 The NIV is probably the best dynamic translation. However, anyone who has one must realize that liberties have been taken in translation that most readers are unaware of and can be misleading.
 - 4 The NAS is the most accurate formal translation, and is essential for detailed Bible study. Therefore, everyone needs an NAS. The formal translation allows ambiguities to remain in the passage, which makes reading a little less smooth than the dynamic. However, that is a small price to pay for being able to know what the Holy Spirit really said. These ambiguities serve as an added stimulus for Bible study.
 - 5 For more information on this topic listen to my series on Help! Which Bible Translation is Right? Click on messages by Ronnie W. Rogers.