

Why Are There Different Versions Of The Bible?

When people hear there are over 50 different versions of the Bible in English alone, they often think to themselves, "No wonder there are many denominations each teaching different things, there are many different versions of the Bible." This view, however, is wrong. Yes there are many denominations, but don't blame that on the fact there are many versions of the Bible. There is one Bible.

First we need to understand what we mean by a "version". A better word than "version" is "translation". The Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew and the New Testament in Greek. If every man could read Hebrew and Greek, then we would have no need for an "English version". Most people can't read Greek, "It's all Greek to me"! We must rely, therefore, upon men who are fully fluent in English and Greek. These "scholars" read the original Greek Bible and come up with an English equivalent. This process is called translation. We have all seen a foreign diplomat give a news conference through the help of a translator. One translator may choose different words or sentences, but the message is identical. Translation is a reliable science of communicating between different languages. Remember, it was God Himself who created all the language barriers in Genesis 11 at the Tower of Babel. God is satisfied that His inspired word can be maintained although translated into over 200 languages.

Translation of the Greek New Testament is a very precise science. The New American Standard Bible, for example, was translated over 10 years, by over 45 scholars and was first published in 1962 AD. Similar painstaking work was applied to the production of the New International (1978 AD), and King James (1611AD) and the New King James (1982AD). These translations and others like them were the products of many years of work from scholars from many denominations.

Each translation has its own strengths and weaknesses. The King James Version (KJV) is excellent, but you must use a dictionary as you read because it uses language typical of the time it was translated (1611). I recommend you purchase a more recent translation. The New American Standard Version (NASV) is believed by many to be one of the most accurate translations and is an excellent study Bible. The American Standard Version (ASV) is also excellent and highly accurate. The New King James Version (NKJV) is high on the recommended list. The New International Version (NIV) tries to make the text as easy to understand as possible and is an excellent reading Bible, but not a good study Bible. The New World Translation (1950, the Jehovah's Witnesses Bible) should be avoided because its is actually corrupt, being a sectarian paraphrase rather than a true translation of the Holy Scriptures.

Although the exact choice of words or sentence structure is different in each translation, the meaning is identical. Take the words of Jesus in Mark 16:16 from three "versions" as an example; NIV: "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved". KJV: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved". NAS: "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved" Different words and sentences but the meaning is identical. To blame religious division on the fact there are different Bible versions, therefore, is incorrect. The view that each translation of the Bible conveys a different message is also incorrect. There is only one Bible message that has been translated into hundreds of different languages.

"IS THE BIBLE ACCURATE?"

In a conversation with a man at Walmart, a statement was made as well as a question asked: "The Bible was taken from hand written copies, much of which are only fragments. How can we trust that what we have is accurate?"

Because there are over 14,000 manuscript copies of the New Testament we can absolutely be confident of its accuracy. With this large number of manuscripts, comparing manuscripts easily reveals any place where a scribe has made an error or where there is a variation. There are approximately 150,000 variations in the manuscripts we have today. However, these variations represent only 10,000 places in the New Testament (if the same word was misspelled in 3,000 manuscripts, that is counted as 3,000 variations.) Of these 10,000 places, all but 400 are questions of spelling in accord with accepted usage, grammatical construction, or order

of words. Of the remaining variations, only 50 are of significance (such as two manuscripts leaving out Acts 2:37). But of these 50, not one alters even one article of faith which cannot be abundantly sustained by other undoubted passages.

There are some manuscripts that date as early as 130 AD, very close to the completion of the New Testament. These manuscripts are nearly identical to those dating 900 years later, thus verifying the accuracy of the scribes.

Besides this, Jesus promised that His words would not pass away. (Mat 24:35) .. "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away."