

What Version of the Bible did Jesus Use?

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The AEGA ministerial test, administered as a pre-requisite for ministerial credentials with our Fellowship, has alerted us that many ministers--though learned in theology and ministry -- possess limited knowledge of Bible translations. For example, in the multiple choice section of the test, ministerial applicants are asked to select the correct item from a list of four “answers” listed as “a”, “b”, “c” or “d”. The question asked is, “From which version of the Bible did Jesus quote?” Believe it or not, eighty-five percent select the “answer” indicating Jesus quoted from the “King James Version.” And while many jokes have been made about this issue among American ministers, our test results prove this error to be a reality - both among the laity and clergy.

In fact, as a result of this trend, a new course entitled “English Bible Translations” has been added this year to the Bachelor’s Degree curriculum at the Omega Bible Institute & Seminary. Thus, this month’s article will address an issue seldom discussed or understood -- *English Bible Versions*. My purpose herein is not to find fault, should you prefer a favorite version, but rather to enlighten you regarding the different *kinds* of translations and *versions* currently available.

For example, while more than fifty Bible versions were produced during the twentieth century, only the more outstanding ones shall be discussed. And although numerous versions have been produced in the past four hundred years, the KJV remains popular in the U.S., while the NIV enjoys more popularity worldwide.

The word for *Bible* (book) in the Greek is *biblos*. However, in theological thought today, *biblos* usually refers to the *Bible*, not to the *Septuagint* (LXX), the version from which Jesus actually quoted. In actuality, the *Septuagint* was the most important early Greek translation of the Old Testament, there being no New Testament at that time. The *Septuagint* was developed at Alexandria, Egypt in 200 B.C. It was the preferred translation of the early Church and was responsible for the acceptance of the Apocrypha (considered “spurious” or “false” books by Protestants), which was later used by the Roman Catholic Church in their church dogma.

Most of the following information comes directly from a textbook used by Omega Seminary entitled, “A Brief History of English Bible Translations” by Laurence M. Vance, copyrighted in 1993, and published by Vance Publications, Pensacola, Florida.

► *Latin Vulgate* – The first English Bibles were translated from this Latin version -- not from the Hebrew and Greek. The word *Vulgate* is from the root word *vulgar*, which refers to the common language of the people. The *Latin Vulgate* was developed by the Catholic Saint, Jerome (A. D. 346-420), and remains the official version of the Roman Catholic Church today.

► *The Wycliffe Bible* – Produced by John Wycliffe (1320-1384), it was the first English translation of the entire Bible.

► *The Greek New Testament* – Although this version underwent many revisions, Desiderius Erasmus (1469-1536) is credited for this popular translation. The first edition appeared in 1516. The second edition, published in 1519, was the edition used by Martin Luther (1483-1546) for his German translation.

► *The Tyndale Bible* – This Bible was translated by William Tyndale (1494-1536) of England. He was the first person to translate the New Testament from Greek into English.

► *The Coverdale Bible* – Myles Coverdale (1488-1569) is credited with translating from the original languages the first complete English Bible (1535). Like Tyndale, he was forced to flee England to preserve his life.

▶ *The Great Bible* – The “Great Bible” was the first “authorized” Bible. The work was done by Myles Coverdale and released in 1538, at the direction of Thomas Cromwell. Because of Cromwell’s influence concerning this Bible, it has often been called *the Cromwell Bible*.

▶ *The Geneva Bible* – Published at Geneva, this version was produced by several great scholars using the editions of Stephanus and Beza. Stephanus was the first translator to show the present verse divisions in both Testaments. The *Geneva Bible* became very popular, and greatly influenced the Authorized Version of 1611 (King James Version). It was the official Bible of the Reformers and also was popular with the early settlers who came from Europe to America.

▶ *The Bishops Bible* – Released in 1568, it was the first Bible to be produced by a committee. Later, the “Authorized Version” or King James Version of the Bible appeared in 1611. The *King James Bible* was a revision of the *Bishops Bible*, and not a new translation, as some believe.

▶ *The King James Bible* - Meeting together at the Hampton Court, fifty-four men were nominated to produce this Bible, although only forty-seven were actually known to have taken part in the translation. Even up to the current time, no other Bible version in history has paralleled the popularity and celebrated eminent position of the KJV (King James Version).

▶ *The Revised Version* – A revision of the New Testament of the *Authorized Version* (KJV), this work began in 1870. It was completed in 1881 under the direction of C. J. Ellicott and Henry Alford, Bishop Lightfoot and Bishop Trench.

▶ *American Revised Version* – Produced in 1898 by an American Committee, it has often been referred to as the *American Revised Bible*.

▶ *The American Standard Version* – A translation of the entire Holy Bible translated out of the original tongues in 1901. This Bible was developed in England by some of the same translators who had produced the *Revised Version*.

▶ *The Holy Scriptures According to the Masoretic Text* – This is a Jewish Version of the Old Testament produced in 1917 by the Jewish Publication Society.

▶ *The Holy Bible: A New Translation* –The work of James Moffatt, this Bible was published in 1913. Moffatt endeavored to present the Bible in effective, understandable English.

▶ *The Revised Standard Version* – The New Testament portion was produced in 1946, although the entire version was not completed until 1952. James Moffatt, Edgar Goodspeed, and J.M. Powis Smith were the producers. The second edition appeared in 1971.

▶ *The Holy Bible from Ancient Eastern Manuscripts* – The New Testament from the Aramaic of the Peshitta first appeared in 1936. A translation by George Lamsa, an Assyrian, the entire Bible was published in 1957. This version sheds light on some obscure passages and helps the reader to understand with clarity the accurate intent of Scripture.

▶ *The New Testament in Modern English* – Produced in 1958 by J.B. Phillips, an Anglican Priest. Though the work is a paraphrase, it is, nonetheless, a masterful work that has been hailed as one of the best paraphrases ever produced.

▶ *The Berkeley Version in Modern English* – Translated by Gerrit Verkuyl, it was released in 1959 as the *Berkeley Version of the New Testament* and was so named because the translator lived in Berkeley, California.

▶ *The Amplified Bible* – The New Testament portion was released in 1958, although the entire Bible was not released until 1965. *The Amplified Bible* is the work of twelve editors for the Lockman Foundation. The translation is based on the Westcott and Hort Greek text.

▶ *New English Bible* – The New Testament portion was released in 1961, and the entire Bible in 1970.

▶ *The Living Bible* – Translated solely by one man, Kenneth Taylor. Began as a project to help Dr. Taylor produce a Bible that his children could understand, this paraphrase is based on the *American Standard Version* of 1901.

▶ *The New American Standard Bible* – First published as a New Testament in 1971, it is another translation by the Lockman Foundation of California. Fifty-eight anonymous translators produced this work as an ecumenical committee from different denominations.

▶ *Good News Bible* – Released in 1976, this popular version was originally produced in 1966 as *Good News for Modern Man*.

▶ *New International Version* – First released as a New Testament in 1973, the original name for this version was *A Contemporary Translation*. Over 100 international scholars from different denominations worked directly with the best available Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek texts to produce this version which is currently the #1 best selling translation worldwide.

▶ *New King James Version* – First produced in 1979 with only the New Testament, the entire Bible was completed in 1982. It is a revision of the *Authorized Version* of the Holy Scripture, and claims to be the fifth major revision of the *King James Version*, the last one being the 1769 Oxford revision of Benjamin Blayney. A special feature of this Bible is that its thought conforms to the 1611 King James Version. This NKJV changes the Elizabethan English words into modern-day English words.

► *New Century Version* – This edition appeared in 1987 as a complete Bible, while the New Testament portion first appeared in 1984. Some of the same translators who had worked on the *New King James Version* also worked on this one.

► *New Revised Standard Version* - This translation was published in 1989. It is an effort to “continue in the tradition of the *King James Bible*,” although some changes were made.

► *Contemporary English Version* – Produced by the American Bible Society in 1991, this is a translation of the New Testament only.

► *21st Century King James Version* – According to the editor, this version is “not a translation” but rather an attempt to eliminate obsolete words and phrases found in the *King James Version*. It appeared in 1991.

► *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* – Developed and written by Pastor Eugene Peterson and published in segments from 1993 to 2002. Published in its entirety in 2002 with both Old and New Testaments, it is a popular paraphrase taken from the original languages, but crafted in a way that expresses events and ideas in everyday language.

In closing, I trust my article has helped you to better understand the various types of Bible versions and why they were developed at different periods in history. Be assured there is much to be gained from studying the Holy Writ in different versions and styles. Even paraphrases shed light on some passages that are difficult. And for those who believe it’s a sin to use a paraphrase, even when the cover says, “Paraphrased Version,” perhaps it should be remembered that Paul the Apostle used a paraphrased quote of the Lord’s words in Acts 20:35, when he said: “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” Did the Lord Jesus *really* say this, or did He say *something like* this? This proves that rabbis and teachers would often paraphrase certain quotes while at other times a literal rendering was required. Even when one paraphrases Scripture, the meaning is essentially the same as the literal. However, I believe it’s a good idea if you plan to *paraphrase Scripture* vocally or in writing, that you inform your audience so no one will assume what you say or write is *literal Scripture*.

Hopefully, you have learned from my article (if you didn’t already know), that *Jesus did not quote Scripture from the King James Version, but from the Septuagint*.

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