



The First Translation

Unlike the Muslims, who believe that their sacred book, the Koran, is holy only in its originally written language, therefore they demand that all serious Muslims learn Aramaic, the Jews and Christians believe that God's Word, the Bible, is holy and pure in its message, not in its printed form.

So, while affirming the authority and inspiration of the original writings, Bible believers have long recognized the need to translate the Bible into as many of the world's languages as possible, so as to get people in touch with the message of the Word of God. Dedicated missionaries have even spent their entire lifetimes developing written languages for peoples who did not have a written language, in order to be able to give them a written version of the Holy Scriptures.

The first translation that I know of came nearly 300 years before Jesus' birth. The Jews of Alexander the Great's world recognized that they needed a Greek translation of their Hebrew Bible for their fellow Jews around the world who were losing their ability to read Hebrew.

The Septuagint or *LXX* was begun in 285 B.C. and slowly finished over the next couple of centuries. This first effort of translating the Hebrew Bible into Greek came when 72 scholars in Alexandria, Egypt began translating the Pentateuch or five books of Moses. Eventually, the entire Old Testament, was translated in the Koine or common Greek that was spoken in the Mediterranean world from about 300 B.C.- 300A.D.

It is notable that the Septuagint became the Old Testament of the early Christian Church. Furthermore, Jesus and the Apostles often seem to quote from the Septuagint, rather than directly from the Hebrew Bible.

Also, as the Hebrew language became more and more of a dead language, with Aramaic replacing it in Jewish life, the meanings of some of the ancient Hebrew words began to be lost. So, over the centuries, when the Bible began to be translated into the various languages of the Middle East, Africa, and Europe, the scholars found the Septuagint's Greek very useful in helping them understand the older Hebrew vocabulary.

One last point—a very important point! In modern times, there have been many controversies about which translation of the English Bible is best. People have had all kinds of strong opinions on this, and some have even made it a mark of fellowship—which is sad and divisive!

These days, there are some Bibles that you can buy that do not claim to be accurate translations at all, but rather are looser paraphrases. One paraphrase that is very popular right now is called *The Message*. Paraphrases have their place, but do not confuse them for accurate translations of the Bible.

On the other end of the spectrum, the King James Version is probably a little archaic in its English for most modern readers to understand well. Many people today use the New International Version (NIV), which is what we mostly use here. Also, the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) and New American Standard Bible (NASB) are both excellent modern day translations. The English Standard Bible (ESB) is a brand new translation that looks pretty good. And, for an easier to read version, I think the New Living Translation (NLT) is a good choice.

As I have said many times before, the best English translation of the Bible is the one that is open in your lap! After all, it is not so much the actual book itself, as it is the message and how the Holy Spirit uses that message in our hearts that counts. The main thing is that we need to be reading God's Word often and with prayerful and open hearts.

Let us be thankful for all of the dedicated scholars and missionaries who have tirelessly worked to make the Word of God available to as many people in the world as possible. Let us do our part in reading, learning, living, and sharing God's Word with others.

“All Scripture is God-breathed, and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

(2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Scott