

Can You Tell Me?

Comparison and Preference: NIV and the KJV

Question: *How do you evaluate the New King James Version of the Bible in comparison to the NIV for worship (accuracy, readability, etc.)?*

Answer: Until well into the twentieth century the King James Version reigned supreme as the Bible of choice for the Protestants. After World War II a host of new translations appeared on the market. With this great diversity and multiplication of translations comes a greater responsibility than ever to understand and communicate the whole counsel of God as revealed in the errant Scriptures. Consequently, many are now debating which translation to use for private and church use. Since there are no perfect translations, there is no straightforward answer to this question.

In evaluating a translation we should ask: Do the translators show respect for the infallibility and divine inspiration of the Scriptures? How do they approach their work? A new English translation means going back to the early Hebrew and Greek manuscripts. The ideal is to preserve as much as possible the word order from the original language to create what is often called a literal, or a "formal correspondence" translation. Today translators prefer the "equivalence approach," which is a meaning for meaning translation. This involves carefully analyzing the meaning of words, phrases, and sentences in the original languages and reconstructing that meaning by using words and expressions that are natural in the language into which the translation is made. This principle is not a new idea. Martin Luther in the 16th century said, "Whoever would speak German must not use Hebrew style. Rather, he must see to it, once he understands the Hebrew author, that he concentrates on the sense of the text, asking himself what do the Germans say in such a situation?"

The New International Version

In 1965 a group of distinguished evangelical Bible scholars, meeting Chicago, decided to begin a completely new translation. As a result, an international group of one hundred scholars, under a controlling committee of fifteen, produced the New International Version (NIV). The New Testament appeared in 1973, followed by the full Bible five years later. The NIV translators "were united in their commitment to the authority and infallibility of the Bible as God's Word in written form." They aimed for more than a word-for-word translation. They were concerned for clear and natural up-to-date English. The result was a superb modern English translation. In other words, it is possible to have the highest regard for the original languages in which God caused His Word to be written but at the same time strive to have an English translation as we speak and write it today. For its readability, accuracy, and its clarity, this translation deserves much praise. The NIV is used in many evangelical and Reformed churches. Many modern translations come and go, but the NIV will be used for years to come.

New King James Version

In 1982 the New King James Version was published. A special feature is its conformity to the thought flow of the 1611 Bible. Hence, it is similar to the original version but without the "Thees" and "Thous." All participating scholars signed a statement affirming their belief in the verbal plenary inspiration of Scripture, and in the inerrancy of the original autographs. They also claim that they have adhered "faithfully to the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts." It attempts to be literal and faithful to the Scriptures. Comparing and revising a popular translation such as the King James Bible, often known as the Authorized Version, is a relatively recent development in the story of the Bible. In terms of clarity and readability it falls short. The English language is given in a form, which is no longer used in speaking or writing. The antiquated language used in NIJV is hard to understand and read for the average person today.

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