The impact on the meaning and comprehension of the New Testament due to the translation of the Bible

## Introduction

The Bible is one of the oldest literatures preserved through thousands of years. The significant cause for such a preservation is the sanctity by the Semitic religion. The historical event of the early Christianity is known through the New Testament which is commonly referred as the Gospels. It is the principal and the only source of the first century Christianity and the entire life of Jesus Christ is composed from the Gospels. However, New Testament of the Bible, is erroneously believed to be written by Jesus. On the contrary, the Biblical scholars unanimously agree that Jesus himself did not write the chapters of the Bible, for there is no evidence that Jesus had written or dictated others to write down. Jesus expressed a deep concern for demolishing idolatry and emphasized to have a personal relationship with God and foretold that the world will soon end and the Kingdom of God will be established. The disciples of Jesus believed that every word of Jesus was true and soon the Kingdom of God will be established. Since Jesus profoundly propagated that the the world will come to an end in the near future hence writing Jesus’ teachings did not matter for them.

### Introduction to New Testament

The word ‘Testament’ is literally derived from the Latin word ‘testamentum’, which means testimony, will or covenant. In Biblical term, it presages to the alliance between the God-Yahweh and Israel. The quote from St. Paul states that Jesus used the word "New Testament" to refer to the alliance established between himself and God and the word "New" specifically refers to distinguish this message as different from the old commandments received by Moses. Thus ‘Testament’ is referred to the collection of sacred texts containing the history and the doctrine of the alliance.

The New Testament, followed by the Christian Churches, is made up of twenty-seven different books which are attributed to eight different authors. The books attributed to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John is referred as Gospels and the writings of Paul, James, Peter and Jude are referred as the Acts of Apostles. However, there is a difference of opinion whether these writers were the apostles of Jesus or these names were the actual name of the true authors of the books. The analysis of the Acts of Apostles proposes that its writer has written in the third person and do not claim to be the eyewitness to the incidences he has recorded. These writers do not introduce themselves which could raise doubts on the authenticity of the work.

The history of the Apostles narrated by Renan, Farrar, Fouard, Weizsäcker, and Le Camus is based on the Acts and the Epistles of the New Testament. However, it is unanimously agreed that the Gospels are a reflection of the beliefs of Jesus Christ and his work. The life of the Apostles represents the Christians in belief and action. The writings of St. John proposes forth the trouble and turmoil faced by the Churches after the fall of the synagogue and the first encounter of Christianity with the violence of pagan Rome.

The modern critics lay doubts on the records of the New Testament, as it was composed by the believers of Christ. therefore the events mentioned by them could be bias and in favour of the faith they rendered credible. It could be just an elaborate narration of the life and teachings of Jesus. The text consists of irrevocable contradictions which testify the uncertainty in the tradition written at different stages of its development.

There is general consensus that the writers of the Gospels were near to the occurrence of the events they mentioned. Moreover the Christian faith defines the first condition for an Apostle to testify the Gospel is to have seen the Jesus especially the Risen Christ, after his resurrection.

## Content of The New Testament

The content and the literary form of the New Testament can be divided into three kinds (a) Historical books - Gospels and Acts (b) Didactic books - Epistles, and (c) Prophetical book -Apocalypse. The writers of the latter half of the second century used to say "Gospel and Apostolic writings" or simply "the Gospel and the Apostle". Later the name “New Testament” was coined to include all the writings of the life of Jesus and segregate it from the Old Testament- the Torah revealed to Moses.

The Canonical Gospels are the Gospel of Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John and there are thirteen Epistles of St. Paul. The Council of Trent differed over the fourteenth Epistle – Hebrew, whether it was addressed by a certain Church or was authored by St. Paul. The letters addressed to the Church includes Romans I, II Corianthian, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, I, II Thessalonians and the letters addressed to individuals are I Timothy, II Timothy, Titus, and Philemon. The seven Epistles of James; I Peter, II Peter, I John, II John, III John and Jude are addressed to the faithful in general and are also known by the name "Catholic".

The Apocalypse are collective letters of the visions of St. John at Patmos, which narrates the struggle of the Church with pagan Rome and the final destiny of the New Jerusalem. They were addressed to the seven Churches of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamus, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, [Laodicea](http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=6849) in Asia Minor.

## Composition of The New Testament by the Writers

The New Testament was not composed all together at one time, but it took around half a century to compile the New Testament and nearly four centuries to be universally accepted as a canon. The universally accepted canon reached the far east in the seventh century. There is an extensive debate over the canonization and the authentication of the Gospels among the Biblical scholars. Centuries after the standardization of the New Testament some books were included or excluded from the canonized approved Bible due to the difference in position over some Books of the Bible. One such example is the Lutherans who disapproved the Epistles of St. James.

In the fourth century, St. Jerome canonized the Bible on account of ecclesiastical prescription and little importance to the authenticity of the contested books. In the sixteenth century, the question on authenticity was raised for the Epistle - the Hebrews which was written by St. Paul and the Epistles - Catholic whether in reality it was composed by the Apostles whose names they bore. The Lutherans initiated to discredit the traditional Canon and therefore the Council of Trent was defined in 1546 C.E. to canonize the Bible and they abstracted the Epistles of John from the Canon.

St. Matthew primarily wrote in Aramaic and did not put his writings in Greek. It is proposed that he must have written in Greek as the present copy is in Greek. St. Luke writes that “many took in hand to set forth in order” indicating that there were many before him had attempted to write similar scripture- referring to the Bible. Thus, there could be a possibility that there were other scriptures which were written but could not find their way into the contemporary Bible.

### The Manipulation of The Old Testament by the Greek Translation

The process employed for the analysis of examining each case of the text by itself is called ’Individual Examination’ , wherein the fidelity of the document is determined by its genealogy. Westcott and Hort concludes that the documents of the New Testament are subjected to alterations. They grouped the text into three families (a) Alexandrian (b) Syrian and (c)Western. B. Weiss, H. Von Soden, R. C. Gregory proposed a different arrangement, and disagree with the conclusions of Westcott and Hort only in two points. Westcott and Hort propose that even though the Western text was widely available in the second and third century yet they are the most altered texts.

The traditional text of the Bible is accepted by the entire Christian Church whereas the received text is used in certain provinces. As to the textual criticism no text of the scripture could be recognized to be the traditional text considering that the original text is not traceable. Nevertheless, there has been painstaking efforts made to reinstate the authentic original text there exists uncertain narrations. According to Westcott and Hort, 7000 verses out of 8000, that is seven-eighths of the text, are considered established.

The easy access to the Greek translation of the Torah gave the non-Hebrew Jews who became the followers of Jesus and later Christians to study and quote the verses of the Old Testament without referring to the actual Hebrew version. A similar phenomenon was practiced later by Martin Luther King who translated the Bible into native German. The people derived exegesis from the translation leaving aside the Hebrew text. This gave them way to fuse the contemporary philosophies and stories into the understanding of the Biblical verses. However, the translation of a text cannot be equivalent to the original text due to the limitation of vocabulary, essence and different grammatical sequence of every language. Therefore, mistranslation is observed in the New Testament, specifically those quotes which are taken from the Greek translation of the Old Testament.

### The Incorrect Inferences in the New Testament from the Greek translation of The Old Testament

The New Testament refers to the Greek translation of the Old Testament quoting from the Septuagint. It does not quote the authentic Hebrew text. For instance, in Hebrew, there are two words used for "lord” and they are Adonai and Adoni. Adonai is "LORD" referring to the God-YHWH alone and Adoni is "lord" referring simply to a human title. The Greek language has only one word for "lord" and that is κύριος (kyrios). The writers of the gospels wrote in Greek, therefore all references to YHWH in the Greek translation of Septuagint use either "kyrios" for “lord” or "theos" for “god”. Hence the writers of the New Testament use these words.

The most glaring example of this confusion by the gospel writers is Psalm 110 (NIV):

*"The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet”.*

In Hebrew, the first word ‘LORD’ is "Adonai" and the second "lord" is "adoni" in this case is refers to King David. Adoni is never used for a divine entity. The difference in the word Adonai and adoni is understood by the capitalization of the letter ‘L’ in the word ‘Lord’. However, this distinction between the two types of lords doesn't exist in Greekwhereas it is used in the Septuagint. Hence the writer of Matthew in the verse 22:41-44 quotes Psalm 110, where he deduces that both words referring to ‘lord’ have the same divine "lord" status of ‘God’. Thus, the inaccurate idea that the "lord / adoni", a god in Matthew's case, Jesus sits at the right hand of the "LORD" (YHWH). A Pharisee trained in Hebrew could distinguish between the two types of lords. Moreover, it also implies that Jesus spoke Greek which is inaccurate. Jesus spoke in Aramaic or Syriac language.

A similar mistranslation is observed in Romans 10:9 - 13

‘*That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.[...].For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."*

In another instance, the gospel of John implies that YHWH's name is "I Am", taken from the verse in the Book of Exodus 3:14. In Hebrew "I am" is ‘*ehyeh’* and not *yahweh*. The Gospel of John mentions multiple times "I am", these statements imply that Jesus is God. The name YHWH that could be substituted in the Septuagint with "lord" and YHWH cannot be written in the Septuagint as "I am". Nevertheless, Christian theology is derived from the Greek translation of the Septuagint. Without the Septuagint there would be no Christianity.

The Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament suppressed the true message that could be derived from the Hebrew text. This is evident from the extensive usage of Greek terminologies over the Hebrew words in the New Testament. For instance, the Christians refer to Jesus by the Greek name "Jesus" instead of the Hebrew name "Joshua". Moreover, they even refer to themselves by the Greek word "Christian", for which there is no equivalent Hebrew word. These evidences indicate that the early Christians did not refer to the Hebrew text due to lack of awareness and thus exploited their proselytes.

### The Writers of the New Testament

The writers of the Bible had their own theological ideology which could have influenced their writing. For instance, the writings of Martin Luther King, who translated the Bible in German. believed in the doctrine of *Sola Fide* that is salvation by faith alone. He translated Romans 3:28 and inserted the word ‘alone’ which does not exist in the Greek Bible. Martin Luther denied that the Epistle of James was the work of an apostle, as James mentioned in the second chapter ideology contrary to Martin Luther's doctrine of "Sola Fide", describing faith without works as spiritually worthless.

Several doctrines made their way into the Bible which lacked their link to the teachings of the Prophets. The ideologies of the writers from the pre-Christian’s era could be regarded as proto–Christian Writers. Plato (c. 424 BCE - c. 348 BCE) had a massive influence on the thoughts, philosophy, and theology of the Greeks. The writers of the gospels were Greek speaking gentiles, who could not have escaped the influence of Plato’s thinking. Plato held the material world insignificant and developed the idea of the Logos.

Another philosopher, Philo of Alexandria (20 BCE - 50 CE) was a Hellenized Jew who also played a role to fuse Greek philosophy with Jewish theology. He preached that God cannot encounter matter hence he sends the Logos which is the word or reason. Philo calls the Logos the firstborn of god's creation, the son of god, a mediator between humans which is reflected in the New Testament, I Corianthians 2:16. Philo established schools in Alexandria, Egypt where Cerinthus, an Ebionite and proto-Gnostic, was a student.

The translation of the Septuagint in Greek brought the gentile Greek people to interpret it without the help of the Hebrew Pharisees and the Hebrew text. Hence, the Greek developed their own exegesis and Midrash. This renewed exegesis which was influenced by the Greek thoughts, later found its place into the New Testament. The Greek speaking gentiles of the writers of the New Testament used the Greek translation of the Torah and used it to elaborate the New Testament.

The New Testament is an amalgamation of writers living at different centuries and under different political and theological thoughts. Based on the period and contribution for the compilation of the New Testament the writers of the New Testament could be classified into the following

1. First Generation Writers
2. Second Generation Writers
3. Third Generation Writers
4. Fourth Generation Writers

The writers of the scriptures whose writing made their way into the New Testament during the early first two centuries, could be categorized into the First-Generation Writers of the New Testament. The Gospel of Mark, Matthew, Luke, John, and the Acts of the Apostles are among the earliest writings of the life of Jesus. The Biblical scholars lay doubt over the authenticity of the authors of this work. The later Christians attributed the scriptures to the respective authors. There is consensus among the scholars that the Gospel of Mark was first written around 70 C.E. and the Gospel of John was written around 110 C.E.

##### The Lost Sayings Gospel "Q" Document

Majority of contemporary scholars believe that Matthew and Luke made use of two different sources- The Gospel of Mark and a non-extant second source termed ‘Q.’ The siglum ‘Q’ is derived from the German word “Quelle” which means “source”. The ‘Q’ consisted of the text matter not present in Mark but is present in Matthew and Luke. Some of the ‘Q’ material only be preserved in Matthew and Luke is called Sondergut and if found only in Mark it is called Mark/Q overlap.

Tuckett writes in ‘The Anchor Bible Dictionary’ v. 5 pg. no. 568 that ‘Q’ at some stage existed in written form. He further ascribes that much of the material of ‘Q’ was available to Matthew and Luke in Greek form. This hypothetical document lists the sayings of Jesus without a narrative. It was proposed to solve the Synoptic Problem - why Mark differs from Matthew and Luke? and why Matthew and Luke contain similarities?

Conclusion

The Greek script of the Gospel also signals that the writers had received Greek Education. The Gospel uses the ‘Kione’ script which was famous with the Greek Educated writers. The general Greek education included the study of the writings of philosophers like Plato and writing skills and style of Greek stories, sayings, and plot devices*.* The characters of the narration of the Gospels are Jews but the writers of the Gospels were perhaps not Jews. This has led to numerous inaccuracies in regards to Jewish law, geography of the area where the incidence took place, and the slight anti-Jewish bias narratives is also detected.

The translators, their education and their times has influenced their writers. This has impacted the meaning and interpretation of the message of the scriptures. It has been more than two thousand years; the message of the Bible is circulated throughout the world. The sole manner to trace the original scripture and the process of its translation is through research. The message of the Bible has been interpretated which could be unlike its true meaning. Therefore, research and analysis of the scriptures is significant to reduce the manipulations caused by the mistranslation of the scripture.

Bibliography

# References

Armstrong, Karen. *Jews, God and History*. Manjul Publishing House, 2012.

—. *The Bible The Biography*. Bhopal: Manjul Publishing House, 2012.

—. *The History of God*. New York: The Random House Publishing group, 1993.

Aslan, Reza. *Zealot The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth*. Harper Collins

Brocklehurst, Malcolm. *The secret History of Christianity How the Church has Exploited the Myth of Christ*. London: Magpie Books, 2008.

Brown, A.C. Jonathan. *Misquoting Muhammad The Challenge and Choices of Interpreting the Prophets Legacy*. London: One World Publications, 2015.

Churton, W.R. *The Influence of the Septuagint Version of the Old Testament upon the Progress of Christianity*. London: Macmillan, 1861.

*http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/synagogue-background-and-overview*. n.d. 10 March 2018.

*https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Deuteronomy+31:9-12*. n.d. 16 January 2016.

*https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/Dictionary/viewTopic.cfm?topic=IT0007812* . n.d. 14 07 2016.

*https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MmPajo9LoAo*. n.d.

Karen, Armstrong. *St. Paul: The Apostle We Love to Hate* . New Harvest, 2015 .

Metzger, B.M. *The Bible in Translation: Ancient and English Versions*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001.

Shutt, R. *Letter of Aristeas: A New Translation and Introduction’. In J.H. Charlesworth,ed. The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*. New York: Doubleday, 1985.

Siddiqui, Mona. *Christians, Muslims and Jesus*. London: Yale University Press, 2013.

Thomson, Ahmad, Ata-ur-Rahman Muhammad. *For Christ's Sake*. London: Ta-Ha Publishers Ltd., 1989.

Timothy, Lim H. *The Dead Sea Scroll*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

www.biblehub.com. *http://biblehub.com/library/gladden/who\_wrote\_the\_bible/chapter\_ii\_what\_did\_moses.htm*. n.d. 12 September 2016.

Shutt, R. *Letter of Aristeas: A New Translation and Introduction’. In J.H. Charlesworth,ed. The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*. New York: Doubleday, 1985.

Timothy, Lim H. *The Dead Sea Scroll*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

www.biblehub.com. *http://biblehub.com/library/gladden/who\_wrote\_the\_bible/chapter\_ii\_what\_did\_moses.htm*. n.d. 12 September 2016.