# A study of the influence on the meaning and comprehension of the New Testament by the different translations of the Bible

## Introduction

The Bible is one of the oldest literatures preserved through thousands of years. The key reason is that it is the sacred book the Semitic religion. The history of the early Christianity is known through the New Testament commonly known as the Gospels. It is the principal and the only source of the first century Christianity. The life of Jesus Christ is composed from the Gospels. The New Testament of the Bible, the holy book of the Christians, is erroneously believed to be written by Jesus. Whereas the biblical scholars unanimously agree that Jesus himself did not write anything, as there is no evidence that Jesus had written or dictated for 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 was going to end soon and the Kingdom of God will be established. The disciples of Jesus believed in every word of Jesus and the establishment of the Kingdom of God. The teachings of Jesus consisted of the message that the world was to come in near future hence writing Jesus’ teachings did not matter for them.

### New Testament

The word ‘Testament’ is derived from the Latin word ‘testamentum’, which means testimony, will or covenant. In biblical term it connotes to an alliance between the God-Yahweh and Israel. St. Paul quotes Jesus where he has used the word "New Testament" as being the alliance established between himself and God and the word "New" refers to distinguish from the old commandments given to Moses. The name ‘Testament’ is given to the collection of sacred texts containing the history and the doctrine of the alliance.

The New Testament, received in the Christian Churches, is made up of twenty-seven different books 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 and even whether the name of the person attributed to the books were the true authors of the books. The analysis of the Acts of Apostles proposes that the writer has written in the third person and do not claim to be the eyewitness to the incidences recorded. These writers do not introduce themselves which further raises doubts over the authenticity of the work.

The history of the Apostles, as narrated by Renan, Farrar, Fouard, Weizsäcker, and Le Camus, is based on the Acts and the Epistles of the New Testament. It is unanimously agreed that the Gospels are a reflection of the belief in Jesus Christ and his work. The life of the Apostles represents Christians in belief and action. The writings of St. John put 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 the believers 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. The Christian faith determines the first condition for an Apostle to testify the Gospel is to have seen the Lord especially the Risen Christ

## Content of The New Testament

The content and the literary form of the New Testament can be divided into historical books - Gospels and Acts, didactic books - Epistles, and 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.

The Canonical Gospels are the Gospel of Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John. There are thirteen Epistles of St. Paul. The Council of Trent differed over the fourteenth Epistle – Hebrew, whether it was addressed by a particular Church or Paul was the author of the Epistles. 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 consisting the visions of St. John at Patmos, regarding 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 at ones, it took around half a century to compile the New Testament and nearly four centuries to be universally accepted. 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, due to the difference in position over some Books of the Bible, some books were included or excluded from the canonized approved 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 giving least importance to the authenticity of the contested books. In the sixteenth century, the question on authenticity was raised for the Epistle - the Hebrews was written by St. Paul, and the Epistles - Catholic were in reality 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 which abstracted the Epistles of John from the Canon.

St. Matthew originally wrote in Aramaic and did not put his writings into Greek. It is proposed that he must have written it 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 who had attempted to write similar scripture before him. Thus, there could be a possibility that there were other scriptures which were written but could not find their way into the contemporary book.

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

The process employed for the analysis of the text is called Individual Examination which is examining each case by itself, wherein the fidelity of the document is determined by its genealogy. Westcott and Hort concluded that none of the documents of the New Testament are free from alterations. They grouped the text into three families - Alexandrian, Syrian, and Western. B. Weiss, H. Von Soden, R. C. Gregory have proposed a different classification, but they agree with Westcott and Hort in their conclusions except in two points. Westcott and Hort propose - the Western text is the most altered although it was widely available in the second and third century.

The traditional text of the Bible is accepted by the entire Christian Church as against the received text which is used in selected regions. As regards to the textual criticism there is no text which can be considered traditional as the original text is yet to be established. After centuries of work there are still many doubtful readings. According to Westcott and Hort seven-eighths of the text, that is 7000 verses out of 8000, are considered established

The easy access to the Greek translation of the Torah gave the non-Hebrew Jews and later the Christian to study and quote the verses of the Old Testament without referring to the Hebrew version. A similar phenomenon was practiced later, Martin Luther King translated the Bible into native German. The people derived exegesis from the translation leaving the Hebrew text. This even allowed them to fuse their philosophies and stories as a part of the understanding of the Biblical verses. Nevertheless, 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, thus mistranslation is observed in the New Testament particularly the quotes taken from the Greek translation of the Old Testament.

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

The reference to Old Testament texts found in the New Testament does so by quoting the Septuagint using the Greek translation and not the actual Hebrew version. For example, in Hebrew, there are two words for "lord" - Adonai and Adoni. Adonai is "LORD" referring to the God-YHWH only and Adoni is "lord" simply a human title. Greek has only one word for "lord" - κύριος (kyrios). The writers of the gospels wrote in Greek. 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 LORD is "Adonai" and the second "lord" is "adoni" in this case is refers to a human - 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 Greek used in the Septuagint. Hence the writer of Matthew wrote 22:41-44 and quotes Psalm 110, he thinks that both lords have the same divine "lord" status of ‘God’. Thus, you get the inaccurate idea that the "lord / adoni", a god in Matthew's case, Jesus sits at the right hand of the "lord" (YHWH). A Hebrew trained Pharisee could recognize the differe**nce i**n the two types of "lords" . This also imply that Jesus spoke Greek which is against the reality that Jesus spoke 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 Exodus 3:14. In Hebrew "I am" is ‘*ehyeh’* and not *yahweh. T*hey both share the name "YH". John uses multiple "I am" statements to 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". Christian ideology finds their base from the Greek translation of the Septuagint. If there was no Septuagint there would be no Christianity.

The Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament suppressed the usage of the Hebrew text. This is evident from the extensive usage of Greek terminologies over the Hebrew words. The Christians refer to Jesus by the Greek name "Jesus" instead of the Hebrew name "Joshua" Or call themselves the Greek word "Christian" and for which there is no Hebrew word. These evidences indicates that the early Christians refer to the Hebrew text due to their unawareness of the language and "exploited" the ignorance of Hebrew on all their proselytes.

### The Writers of the New Testament

The writers of the Bible had their own personal and theological ideology which could have influenced their writing. For instance, the writings of Martin Luther King, who translated the Bible in German. Martin Luther 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 writing of the Bible. Martin Luther argued Epistle of James was not the work of an apostle because the James mentioned chapter 2 is contrary to Martin Luther's doctrine of "Sola Fide", describing faith without works as spiritually worthless

There were other doctrines which crept into the Bible though they lacked their roots to the teachings of the Prophets. The ideologies of writers from the pre-Christian’s era could be categorized 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 fused Greek philosophy with Jewish theology. He preached that God cannot encounter matter hence he sends the Logos- word or reason. Philo calls the Logos the firstborn of god's creation, the son of god, a mediator between humans and god, the mind of god and a heavenly mediator of sins. A similar teaching is found in the New Testament, I Corianthians 2:16. Philo established schools in Alexandria, Egypt where Cerinthus, an Ebionite and proto-Gnostic, was a student.

When the Septuagint was translated into Greek, it brought the gentile Greeks to interpret the Septuagint without the help of the Pharisees and the Hebrew text. Hence, they developed their own exegesis and Midrash. Their fresh exegesis 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 background. 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

* First Generation of Writers
* Second Generation of Writers
* Third Generation of Writers
* Fourth Generation of Writers

The writers of the scriptures which found 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 CE and John was written last around 110 CE.

##### 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?

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*.* Hence one can infer, the Greek ideology could have influenced their writing. The Characters of the Gospels are Jews but the writers of the Gospels were most likely not Jews which 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 observed.

Conclusion

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 also go against its true meaning. Therefore, research and analysis of the scriptures is significant to reduce the manipulations caused by the mistranslation of the scripture.

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