

ABIDE 102 · LESSON 1

Why So Many Translations?

Meditate and Obey. Study and Apply. Hear and Do.



SECTION 1 · ACTS 8:26–35

Which Bible Can I Trust?

“How can I,” he said, “unless someone guides me?”

Acts 8:31 · BSB

ACTS 8:26–35 1 / 4

²⁶Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Get up and go south to the desert road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” ²⁷So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official in charge of the entire treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. He had gone to Jerusalem to worship,

ACTS 8:26–35 2 / 4

²⁸and on his return was sitting in his chariot reading Isaiah the prophet. ²⁹The Spirit said to Philip, “Go over to that chariot and stay by it.” ³⁰So Philip ran up and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. “Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked.

ACTS 8:26–35 3 / 4

³¹“How can I,” he said, “unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. ³²The eunuch was reading this passage of Scripture: “He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is silent, so He did not open His mouth.”

ACTS 8:26–35 4 / 4

³³In His humiliation He was deprived of justice. Who can recount His descendants? For His life was removed from the earth.” ³⁴“Tell me,” said the eunuch, “who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?” ³⁵Then Philip began with this very Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

So What?

Every reader of an English Bible already has guides: the translators who carried God's Word out of Hebrew and Greek. Different translations aren't a reason to doubt. They're more guides beside you in the chariot.



SECTION 2 • EZRA 7:10
NEHEMIAH 8:8

The People Behind Your Bible

“For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the LORD, to practice it, and to teach its statutes and ordinances in Israel.”

Ezra 7:10 • BSB

“So they read from the Book of the Law of God, explaining it and giving insight, so that the people could understand what was being read.”

Nehemiah 8:8 • BSB

EZRA 7:10

¹⁰For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the LORD, to practice it, and to teach its statutes and ordinances in Israel.

NEHEMIAH 8:8

⁸So they read from the Book of the Law of God, explaining it and giving insight, so that the people could understand what was being read.

Teams who check one another

Nothing new

Jesus and the apostles read the Greek Septuagint. Mark keeps Jesus' words, "Talitha koum!" (Mark 5:41 · BSB), then gives their meaning.

Experts

Committees of scholars in the original languages, textual criticism, translation theory and English.

Many traditions

Scholars from different churches give "a hedge of protection from theological prejudice."

"Rather, differences occur due to legitimate points of view that come into play in the process of translation." (Fuhr and Köstenberger)

So What?

Your Bible came to you through teams of scholars who gave years to making God's Word understood, and who check one another's work. When good translations differ, it isn't malice or mistakes. It's skilled people making hard choices carefully.



SECTION 3 · FOUR REASONS

Four Reasons Translations Differ

The approach

The interpretation

The manuscripts

The English

SECTION 3 · WHEN TRANSLATIONS DIFFER, ASK WHY

Four reasons

1 · Approach

Word for word or thought for thought.

2 · Interpretation

The same words, read two ways.

3 · Manuscripts

A different Greek or Hebrew text.

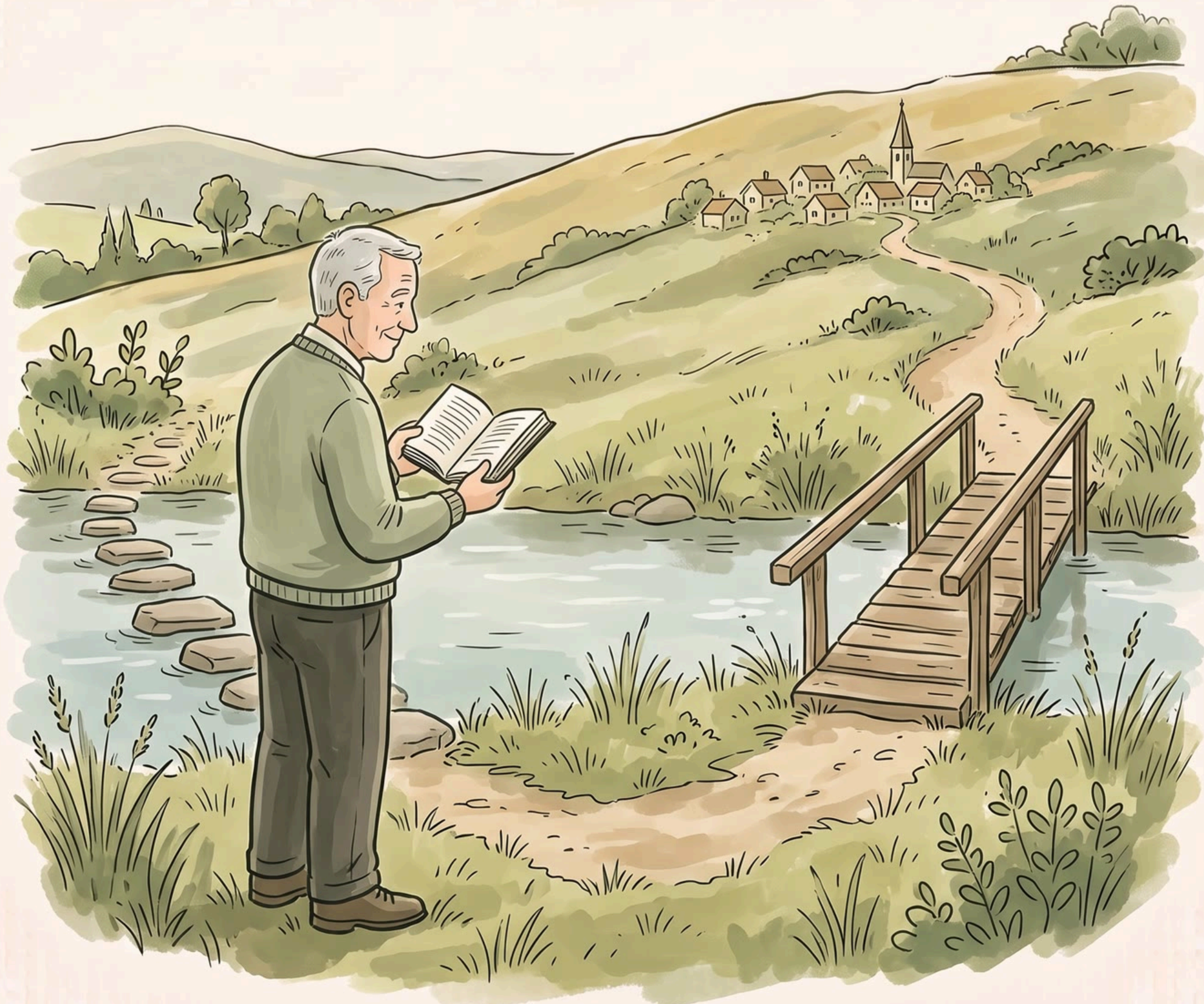
4 · English

Our language has changed.

A big difference is a clue: it becomes one of your questions for the passage.

So What?

Translations differ for four sound reasons: the approach, the interpretation, the manuscripts and the English. Most differences are style. The big ones are clues, and learning the four reasons helps you identify which reason may be driving a difference.



SECTION 4 · LUKE 9:43–45

AMOS 4:6

Word for Word or Thought for Thought

“Let these words sink into your ears: The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men.”

Luke 9:44 · BSB

“I afflicted all your cities with cleanness of teeth and all your towns with lack of bread, yet you did not return to Me,” declares the LORD.

Amos 4:6 · BSB

LUKE 9:43–45 1 / 2

⁴³And they were all astonished at the greatness of God. While everyone was marveling at all that Jesus was doing, He said to His disciples, ⁴⁴“Let these words sink into your ears: The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men.”

LUKE 9:43–45 2 / 2

⁴⁵ But they did not understand this statement. It was veiled from them so that they could not comprehend it, and they were afraid to ask Him about it.

AMOS 4:6

⁶“I afflicted all your cities with cleanness of teeth and all your towns with lack of bread, yet you did not return to Me,” declares the LORD.

Where translations sit

Word for word

Close to the original words
(formal equivalence).

LSB, NASB, ESV, KJV, NKJV

Balanced

Some of both. The BSB calls itself
“near the middle of the range.”

BSB, CSB

Thought for thought

The meaning in natural English
(functional equivalence).

NIV, NLT, NET

Past the far end: paraphrases, such as *The Message*. “Therefore, if you consult a paraphrase, treat it as you would a commentary.”

The picture or the meaning

	Luke 9:44	Amos 4:6
BSB	“Let these words sink into your ears”	“cleanness of teeth and all your towns with lack of bread”
NIV	“Listen carefully to what I am about to tell you”	“I gave you empty stomachs in every city”
NLT	“Listen to me and remember what I say”	“I brought hunger to every city and famine to every town”

The word-for-word Bible keeps the picture. The thought-for-thought Bible hands you the meaning.

Watch what happens to the eye

	Matthew 6:22	Matthew 20:15	Mark 7:22
KJV	“if therefore thine eye be single”	“Is thine eye evil, because I am good?”	“an evil eye”
NKJV	“If therefore your eye is good”	“Or is your eye evil because I am good?”	“an evil eye”
LSB	“if your eye is clear”	“Or is your eye envious because I am generous?” (Lit evil)	“envy” (Lit an evil eye)
BSB	“If your eyes are good”	“Or are you envious because I am generous?”	“envy”
ESV	“if your eye is healthy”	“Or do you begrudge my generosity?”	“envy”
NIV	“If your eyes are healthy”	“Or are you envious because I am generous?”	“envy”
NLT	“When your eye is healthy”	“Should you be jealous because I am kind to others?”	“envy”

So What?

Word-for-word Bibles keep the picture. Thought-for-thought Bibles hand you the meaning. Both are faithful work. Read one of each, and you get the picture and the meaning together.



SECTION 5 · PSALM 8:3–6

The Same Words, Read Two Ways

*“You made him a little lower than the angels;
You crowned him with glory and honor.”*

Psalm 8:5 · BSB

PSALM 8:3–6 1 / 2

³When I behold Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have set in place— ⁴what is man that You are mindful of him, or the son of man that You care for him? ⁵You made him a little lower than the angels; You crowned him with glory and honor.

PSALM 8:3–6 2 / 2

⁶You made him ruler of the works of Your hands; You have placed everything under his feet:

One Hebrew word, three choices

Psalm 8:5	Translations
“a little lower than the angels”	BSB, KJV, NKJV, NIV (LSB footnote: Or God)
“a little lower than the heavenly beings”	ESV
“only a little lower than God”	NLT

“Clearly, any of the three translation choices could work, and a good argument can be made lexically and contextually for any of them.” (Fuhr and Köstenberger)

So What?

When good translations disagree on a word, slow down. The difference points to a real question in the text, and the footnote is the translators showing you their work. Reading two or three translations side by side lets you see the choice they had to make.



SECTION 6 · COLOSSIANS 1:13–14
EPHESIANS 1:7

Different Manuscripts, and Why We Can Trust Them

“He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

Colossians 1:13–14 · BSB

“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace”

Ephesians 1:7 · BSB

COLOSSIANS 1:13–14

¹³He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of His beloved Son, ¹⁴in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

EPHESIANS 1:7

⁷In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace

Behind English New Testaments

Critical text

Weighs the readings of all the manuscripts verse by verse, including the earliest ones found.

Most modern translations

Majority Text

The reading found in most of the surviving manuscripts.

MSB

Textus Receptus

“Received Text”: the printed Greek text of the 1500s.

KJV, NKJV

“No area of Christian doctrine rests upon a textual variant.” (Fuhr and Köstenberger)

Where did “through His blood” go?

Colossians 1:14	
BSB	“in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” (MSB the same)
KJV	“In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins”
NKJV	“in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.”

“Whatever the history behind the variant, clearly the New Testament doctrines relating to the blood of Christ don’t depend on the variant in Colossians 1:14.” (Fuhr and Köstenberger)

So What?

Some differences come from the copies behind the translation, and the scholars who weigh them work in the open. No doctrine rests on a disputed reading. The blood of Christ never left your Bible: it's in Ephesians 1:7 and all through the New Testament.



SECTION 7 • 1 PETER 2:11–12

English Keeps Changing

“Conduct yourselves with such honor among the Gentiles that, though they slander you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us.”

1 Peter 2:12 • BSB

1 PETER 2:11–12

¹¹Beloved, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from the desires of the flesh, which war against your soul. ¹²Conduct yourselves with such honor among the Gentiles that, though they slander you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us.

1611 English and today

	KJV (1611)	BSB
1 Peter 2:12	“Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles”	“Conduct yourselves with such honor among the Gentiles”
2 Corinthians 8:1	“Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia”	“Now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the churches of Macedonia”

“Therefore, as S. Augustine saith, that variety of Translations is profitable for the finding out of the sense of the Scriptures.”
(The King James translators, preface to the 1611 Bible)

So What?

Words change. God's Word doesn't. When an older Bible says something strange, a newer one often clears it up in seconds, and the King James translators themselves told their readers to compare.



SECTION 8 · ACTS 2:5–11

What's in Your Translation Toolbox?

*“we hear them declaring the wonders of God
in our own tongues!”*

Acts 2:11 · BSB

ACTS 2:5–11 1 / 3

⁵Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. ⁶And when this sound rang out, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking his own language. ⁷Astounded and amazed, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?”

ACTS 2:5–11 2 / 3

⁸How is it then that each of us hears them in his own native language?

⁹Parthians, Medes, and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome,

ACTS 2:5–11 3 / 3

¹¹both Jews and converts to Judaism; Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!”

Where English Bibles sit

	Word for word formal equivalence	Balanced optimal equivalence	Thought for thought functional equivalence	Hebraic voice Messianic Jewish
GREEK TEXT ↓				
Critical Text Earliest manuscripts, weighed verse by verse	NASB LSB ESV RSV NRSV LEB UASV AMP NABRE	BSB CSB HCSB ISV	NIV NET NLT CEB	TLV CJB
Majority Text The reading in most manuscripts (Byzantine)	WEB	MSB		WMB
Textus Receptus The 1500s “Received Text” behind the KJV	KJV NKJV MEV			

For study, open three or four from **different columns**, and at least one from a **different row**.

Build your toolbox

The Scholar's Set

LSB or NASB: close study of words and grammar

CSB or NIV: your reading Bible

KJV or NKJV: where the Textus Receptus differs

NET: translators' notes

The Devotional and Discipleship Set

ESV or BSB: daily reading and study

NKJV or KJV: keeps the words and idioms

NIV: the main idea

NLT: read it like a commentary

TLV: Jewish names and setting

AMP: a word's range of meaning

Keep a Bible you love, and read its preface. For study, open three or four from different parts of the map.

SECTION 8 · WHEN TRANSLATIONS DIFFER

Ask why

1 · Approach

Word for word or
thought for
thought?

2 · Interpretation

The same words,
read two ways?

3 · Manuscripts

A different Greek
or Hebrew text?

4 · English

Has the language
changed?

This week: read Ephesians 1:3–14 in your three or four translations, mark one difference, and ask which reason is at work.

So What?

Keep a Bible you love, and know its preface. For study, open three or four from different parts of the map. When they differ, ask why, and let the difference become your next question. Every faithful translation is the wonders of God told in your own tongue.

GOD WANTS TO BE UNDERSTOOD

“God is more intent on revealing himself to you than you are to get to know him.”

Fuhr and Köstenberger, *Inductive Bible Study*

How is God inviting you to live out this abiding principle this week?

Meditate and Obey. Study and Apply. Hear and Do.

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Textbook. Fuhr, Richard Alan, Jr., and Andreas J. Köstenberger. *Inductive Bible Study: Observation, Interpretation, and Application through the Lenses of History, Literature, and Theology*. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016.

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