

have to look at the sentence that contains it to decide how it was being used, then pick out the word in the other language with the correct meaning: “the thing on a person’s shoulders,” “the leader of a group,” “the foam on beer,” “the front of a line,” **or** “the toilet on a ship.”

In order to translate from one language to another, **a translator has to completely understand the original document**, and then express the same thoughts in a new language. Therefore, translations of the Bible are “colored” by the religious and historical beliefs of the translators. We know of no single translation that is “the best.” Does this mean that we cannot know what God expects of us because there is no certain Bible translation? **No!** About 95% of the time, you read the same message no matter what Bible translation you use. Furthermore, in this modern day, there are many “Bible helps” that will help an ordinary person understand the possible meanings of the Hebrew and Greek scriptures.

People who refuse to study and live by the Bible “because they cannot be sure it is really from God” are not being honest with themselves. In the vast majority of the Bible, translations differ little. In the few areas where there is disagreement, many “Bible helps” (concordances, lexicons, interlinears, commentaries, etc.) can help a person find the truth. Furthermore, the Bible shows that people **are** responsible for doing the things that they do know, but are far less responsible for mistakes made unknowingly (Luke 12:47-48, Rom 2:11-15).

What Does the Bible Say about Religion?

We previously gave one answer from the book of James. But there are many answers, depending on our ability and level of understanding. A law expert once asked:

“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments” (Matthew 22:36-40).

The answer Jesus gave was directly from the

Old Testament. He quoted from Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18. But these two sentences were not all that his listeners (or we today) need. It was the foundation. **The ten commandments, found in Exodus 20, expand on how we love God and love our neighbor.** The rest of the Bible shows us even more. We all must “...grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18).

How much of the Bible do we need to learn? As much as we can! We must spend time to earn a living to take care of ourselves and our families (2 Thessalonians 3:10, 1 Timothy 5:8) But Jesus gave us the ultimate instruction in Matthew 4:4: “It is written [in Deuteronomy 8:3]: ‘Man does not live on bread alone, **but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.**’” This does not make our lives difficult. Jesus also said: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matt 11:28).

Religion is not going to a church, joining an organization or reciting a creed. Religion is living your life the way God teaches you to live it. God’s teaching comes from the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16) and from His Holy Spirit (John 16:13). The Bible teaches us to assemble with others to learn and encourage each other. It teaches us to accept Jesus as our Saviour, to pray and to praise God. A church building is one place to do these things. But we must never let organizations or buildings replace our personal learning from the Bible and **living the life** that God wants us to live!

Begin to study and live that life now!

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What is Christian Religion?

Is Christian religion simply a matter of finding the “right” church and attending one or two times a week? Is it only a matter of believing Jesus is your Savior? Can we understand Christian religion by looking up the word in a dictionary or encyclopedia? Could we simply read a book or listen to a tape by a Christian leader?

We could do all of those things and probably benefit from them. But what answer are we really seeking? Do we want to answer this question?

“How do people define Christian Religion?”

Or do we want to answer this one?

“How does God define Christian Religion?”

I hope that everyone would be interested in God’s definition. But how can we know what God thinks? Do we have to rely on others to tell us? No! God and the people through which He worked recorded what He thinks in the Bible. What does it say about religion?

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after

continued inside...

orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world (James 1:27).

The above quote comes from the book of James, chapter 1, verse 27—about 40 pages before the end of most Bibles. (Each book of the Bible has been divided into chapters and each chapter into verses so people can easily talk to others about certain sections of the Bible). This verse tells us that religion is both **doing** good things for others, and **not doing** bad things that we see in the world around. Other parts of the Bible give details telling us much more about what we should be doing with our lives now.

Before we blindly accept the Bible as God's instruction for our life, we ought to ask: "How do we know that it is God speaking to us and not just the writings of men?"

The Bible is God's Instruction Book

The Bible consists of 66 smaller books, 39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament. The first book, Genesis, was written about 3500 years ago by Moses. The last book, Revelation, was written about 1900 years ago by the Apostle John. With over 36 writers, written over a period of 1600 years, the Bible is remarkably harmonious in its message and purpose.

Archeology (the study of ancient ruins and historical things dug out of the ground) has shown the Bible to be a very accurate representation of the historical record. While not every detail of the Bible has been proven by archeology, the remains of many cities, peoples, kings, etc. have been found in the ground. A Christian bookstore will certainly have one or more books verifying the Bible from archeology.

The Bible also contains accurate information that was not understood by scientists until thousands of years later. Long before 1628 when the physician William Harvey discovered the purpose of blood and circulatory systems, the Bible said "For the life of a creature is in the blood..." (Leviticus 17:11). Long before there were weathermen, the Bible recorded the cycle of water from streams, to the ocean, evaporation, and back into steams again:

All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is

never full. To the place the streams come from, there **they return again** (Ecclesiastes 1:7).

It should be obvious that the great God who created the universe would have this scientific knowledge—but such knowledge is not found in the writings of ancient Greeks, Egyptians, or other cultures. Knowledge of space and the universe is recorded in the Bible. While ancient thinkers taught that the earth was flat and held by giant men or animals, **the Bible confirmed that the earth was round and free-floating in space**—and that the universe is expanding!

He spreads out the northern skies over empty space; he **suspends the earth over nothing** (Job 26:7).

He [God] sits enthroned above **the circle of the earth**, and its people are like grasshoppers. He **stretches out the heavens** like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in (Isaiah 40:22).

The divine inspiration of the Bible is also demonstrated by fulfilled prophecies (predictions), but there is not enough space in this tract. Furthermore, the Bible answers the big questions of life, such as why was the Earth created, why are people here, and what does God expect of us? It teaches a way of life that will bring cooperation and happiness, and explains how God will bring about that way even though people are too often selfish and uncaring.

The Bible We Have Today

If we accept that the Bible was originally inspired by God, how do we know that people have not changed it throughout the years?

That is a good question. Over the years, a very few errors have crept into the the scriptures in the process of copying them. But consider one of the books of the Bible, the book of **Isaiah**. A **complete copy** of it was found among the famous **Dead Sea Scrolls**. The copy was over 2000 years old; it was written before Jesus was born. How different was it from modern versions of the book of Isaiah? There were some changes in spelling, but only **one word** was significantly different. Other books of the Bible have not been maintained quite as perfectly as Isaiah, but over 99% of the significant words of the Bible are not in dispute! There

are more ancient Bible manuscripts than there are for almost any other historical document!

If the ancient versions of the Bible are so accurate, why are there so many different versions of the Bible today? There is the King James Version, the New King James Version, the Revised Standard Version, the New International Version (the one we used here) and dozens more. These versions all contain the same books and chapters and nearly the exact same number of verses. Less than 1% of the differences between these versions are due to a disagreement among the ancient manuscripts. The versions are different because each one is a **different translation** of the ancient Bible language.

None of the Bible was originally written in English! The ancient versions of the Old Testament are in Hebrew (the language of the Jews) with a few chapters in Aramaic. The Ancient versions of the New Testament are in Greek (though it is possible that a few of the Books were originally written in Hebrew). Since only a tiny fraction of the world's population speaks Hebrew and Greek, the Bible must be translated into a language that people understand.

The King James Version was the first massively produced translation into English, introduced in 1611. It was a very good translation and has been used by millions of people—even to this very day. It contains many words that we no longer use in our every day speech (for example, "What thinkest thou?"). Most modern translations use English words that are easier to understand. Unfortunately, **the process of translating a book from one language to another is not very simple**. It is **not** merely a matter replacing each Hebrew word with a similar English word. Languages have expressions (like "catch a bus") that do not mean exactly what they literally say. Also, there are many words that have multiple meanings.

To understand the problem of translation, look up some common English words in a big dictionary: "get," "head," "run," "set," "that". They all have more than a dozen meanings. Does any other language have a single word that has all of the meanings of our English "head"? **No!** If someone were translating the English word "head" into another language, he or she would