



Opening Question:

Have you ever felt inspired? Explain.

Have you ever done or said something unexpected? Something that made you wonder: That's not me! Where did that come from? Or, have you ever had a new insight? A thought that put life in perspective? A thought not your own? If you've ever had experiences like these, you may have been inspired.

The word "inspire" comes from a Latin word. It literally means to "breathe into." Jews and Christians alike hold Scripture is inspired by God. He breathed into human authors to communicate his message. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church states:

God inspired the human authors of the sacred books. "To compose the sacred books, God chose certain men who, all the while he employed them in this task, made full use of their own faculties and powers so that, though he acted in them and by them, it was as true authors that they consigned to writing whatever he wanted written, and no more."

Catechism of the Catholic Church 106

In other words, the authors wrote down their thoughts and opinions and experiences. But God made sure their products communicated his truth. A truth necessary for salvation.

In this video, we'll investigate the Bible. The different types of bible, some of the translations available in English, and some editions that address a particular need.

Types of Bibles

- TaNaK (Jewish Scriptures)
- Christian Scriptures
 - Ecumenical
 - Catholic
 - Protestant



In English speaking regions, there are four types of bibles, one Jewish and three Christian. The latter three depend upon different denominations: Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, or Protestant. The differences in Christian bibles depend upon the recognized number of inspired books. All the Christian bibles contain 27 books found in the New Testament. No one doubts this number. The differences depend upon the number found in the Hebrew list. To explain these differences, we need to take a look at some history.

TaNaK (24 books)

- Torah (Law: 5 books)
- Nevi'im (Prophets: 8 books)
- Ketuvim (Writings: 11 books)

First, let's consider the Hebrew Scriptures, commonly called the TaNaK. This is an acronym for the three divisions of their bible. T for Torah or the Jewish Law, N for Nevi'im or prophetic books, and K for Ketuvim or the other books called the Writings. The Torah has 5 books, the Nevi'im has eight books, and the Ketuvim has eleven books. So there are a total of 24 books.

When did this list, also known as the canon, become set? The book of Daniel was composed in the early second century BC. Sometime over the next four hundred years, Jewish leaders began to close the canon to the Hebrew Scriptures.

Scholars argue approximately when this process occurred. But the definitive list did appear by the early Middle Ages when rabbis began to standardize pronunciation, chapter and verse, and cantor notes for worldwide use. Their efforts produced what we now call the Masoretic text.

In the New Testament, the Hebrew Bible is called “the Law and the Prophets.” This implies there was a list of books that were grouped together. But it does not indicate the list was final at that time.

Septuagint (53 Books)

Before we turn to the Christian bibles, let’s consider another list of the Hebrew Scriptures. In the fourth century BC, Alexander the Great conquered the Middle East. Along the way, he spread Greek language, culture and commerce. This influence would last almost a thousand years. Over time, ancient Jews who lived outside of Palestine acquired Greek as a first language and lost the ability to understand Hebrew. So there was a need for a definitive Greek translation.

Between the third and second centuries BC, Jewish scholars in Alexandria Egypt translated the core of the TaNaK into common Greek. Between the second century BC and the early first century AD, some books, like Daniel and Esther, were expanded and others were added. This translation came to be known as the Septuagint. It contains 53 books.

The Septuagint was influential and widely used. The Septuagint replaced the Hebrew TaNaK for Jews outside of Palestine.

Christian Bibles

- Orthodox – Septuagint
- Catholic – Partial Septuagint
- Protestant – TaNaK

The differences between the Ecumenical, the Roman Catholic, and the Protestant Bibles depend upon the tension between the TaNaK and the Septuagint that developed over the centuries.

Eastern Orthodox (53 Books)

Early Christians evangelized and worshiped in Greek. The New Testament was written in that

international language. So, it’s not surprising that it adopted the Greek Septuagint as its source for the Hebrew Scriptures. Even today, many Orthodox Christians consider the Septuagint as definitive and divinely inspired.

Catholic Bible (46 Books)

By the fourth century, the Roman Empire split into two cultural spheres: Greek in the East, Latin in the West. By this time, the faithful in the West needed a bible translation in their language. So, Pope Damasus I commissioned a scholar named Jerome to revise the Latin translation of the Bible. Jerome moved to Palestine and began to translate the Old Testament not from the Greek Septuagint but from the Hebrew. He believed the Septuagint was inferior because of translation errors. But he did translate many books from the Septuagint. Over time, many of them were included in his translation. Jerome’s translation became known as the Vulgate.

By the time of the Reformation, the Church had standardized the list of books found in the Vulgate.

It became the official Bible text for the Roman Catholic Church.

Why did the Catholic Church keep some of the books from the Septuagint? Throughout the history of the Church, almost all church leaders and scholars considered the Hebrew list in the TaNaK superior. These were called proto-canonical or the primary list of writings. But, the books of the Septuagint were useful as liturgical readings and for personal growth. And they were an integral part of the missionary efforts in the early Church. These were called Deutero-canonical or the secondary list of writings.

Protestant Bible (39 Books)

By the time of the Reformation, the Church had problems. Reformation leaders like Martin Luther and John Calvin believed many of these problems could be solved by asserting the primacy of the Bible. So they turned to the TaNaK. And they rejected the Septuagint books for three reasons. First, the TaNaK copies in circulation were the most reliable Hebrew texts at the time.

Second, Deutero-canonical implied an inferior status so they were not needed. In fact, they rejected the title Deutero-canonical. Instead, they called these books Apocrypha.

Third, Protestant leaders had profound differences in doctrine with Rome. Catholics sourced beliefs like Purgatory and praying for the dead in the Deutero-canonical books. So, by rejecting the books, Protestant leaders could reject the doctrines themselves.

The Protestant bible lists 39 books in the Old Testament while the TaNaK lists 24. Why the difference? Simply put, Protestants broke some of the TaNaK books down in the same way the Catholics do. The TaNaK lists the Minor Prophets as one book while Christian bibles break them into twelve separate books. Christians also split longer books found in the TaNaK into two. Samuel became 1 Samuel and 2 Samuel in Christian bibles, Kings became 1 Kings and 2 Kings, Chronicles became 1 Chronicles and 2 Chronicles. Ezra and Nehemiah were separated by Christians into different books.

So, the three types of Christian bibles reflect the tension between the TaNaK and the Septuagint. The Protestant Old Testament contains a version of the TaNaK. The Ecumenical Old Testament contains the Septuagint. The Roman Catholic bible includes some but not all of the Septuagint.

Modern Bibles in English

King James Version

To address modern English translations of the bible, we must begin with the King James Version. There were other translations at the time. But it was the first produced by a royal commission. King James wanted a bible that reflected his position as leader of the Anglican church. And one that emphasized a structure of bishops and clergy.

In 1611, the first edition appeared. It set the shape of the modern ecumenical bible. The TaNaK in the front, the New Testament in the back, and the additional books of the Septuagint in the middle. As printing presses allowed for a wider distribution of books, the King James became increasingly

available. By 1769, its standard text dropped the middle section leaving only the TaNaK and the New Testament. This version became the template for the modern Protestant bible.

Douay-Reims (Catholic)

Catholics also had an influential translation, the Douay-Reims bible. The name refers to the cities in France where it was first published. The New Testament appeared in Reims about 1582; the Old Testament in Douai by 1610. While marginal notes referred to Hebrew and Greek sources, it was translated from the Latin Vulgate. The King James, on the other hand, was translated from the original Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic. Both translations were written in the rich prose of Elizabethan English. Both had a dramatic effect on future generations of readers.

Updating Translations

Over time, scholars updated the King James and the Douay-Reims bibles for two reasons. Better resources come to light and words change meanings over time. This created a tension. Should the translation try to be as literal as possible? Better resources help clarify the original language of the text. But that does not help the reader understand a difficult passage? Instead, shouldn't the translation try to communicate the meaning of the text? This might help the reader's understanding but at the possible cost of accuracy. So, translators were faced with a dilemma. Do they translate the text word-for-word, also known as direct equivalence? Or thought-for-thought, known as dynamic equivalence? Even today, many translations are literal but try to explain difficult passages in marginal notes.

Word-For-Word Translations

Scholars have used one of the versions of the King James as a source and inspiration for a new translation. For example, we have the Revised Standard Version, the New Revised Standard Version, and the English Standard Version as descendants of the King James. These are more literal translations with notes for context. There are also many different revised versions of the

King James.

Modern Catholic Translations

In the 1960's, American Catholic scholars set aside the Douai-Reims. They translated afresh from the original Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic. Their efforts produced the New American Bible, the translation used for Catholic liturgy in the United States. Like some of the translations already mentioned, it is a literal translation.

At the same time, there was a push among scholars from different traditions for common translations. So, new editions appeared like the New Revised Standard Version for Catholics. There are even ecumenical bibles in the form of the original King James. TaNak in the front, New Testament in the back, Septuagint in the middle. The New Revised Standard has such an edition.

Thought-for-Thought Translations

Today, there are over sixty different Bible translations in English alone. Obviously, there are different translations for different audiences. For example, one of the most popular translations in print is the New International Version. Evangelical scholars translated Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic into a readable modern English. Unlike the other translations already mentioned, it leans toward a dynamic equivalence or thought-for thought text.

There are children's translations that also hue towards a dynamic equivalence. Like the Contemporary English Version or the New International Reader's Version, a simpler text based upon the New International Version.

Another popular bible is not a direct translation but a paraphrase. It is called The Message. It emphasizes narrative flow and context over literal translation.

Different Editions

With all these different bibles, which one is right for you? That depends upon how you use it. If you want to study the text, use a literal translation with extensive notes and commentary. If you want to pray the Scriptures, you could use an easy to read translation for your devotion. If you want a bible for group discussion, find one with discussion

questions in the marginal notes. If you want to read the bible to children, use a children's translation.

These are only a few of the many Bible editions available today. These have different audiences and different uses. And we haven't even touched the resources available online.

As Christians, we believe God inspired humans to write down his message. Today, we have different translations and editions to give us that message. These different versions can give us insight into the cultures and problems of ancient peoples. They can help us understand our culture and the problems we face. They even help us pass along our faith and values. Our dedication and use of Scripture reveals the flip side of inspiration. Yes, God sent his Spirit to breathe his message into ancient writers. But he also does the same to us when we study, pray over, and put his word into action. In other words, divine inspiration gets results.

Put God's Word into action! If you only listen to it and do nothing, you're only fooling yourself.

James 1:22

Closing Question:

How does the Bible inspire you?

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