

Translation Discrepancies: Unpacking a Few of the Noteworthy Differences Between the KJV and NIV Bibles

Question: Are there any occasions of different meaning for the same verses from KJV and NIV?

Yes, there are numerous instances where the same verses in the King James Version (KJV) and the New International Version (NIV) of the Bible convey different meanings. These discrepancies arise from a combination of factors, primarily the manuscript sources used by the translators and their distinct translation philosophies.

The KJV, first published in 1611, predominantly relies on a body of Greek manuscripts known as the Textus Receptus (Latin for "Received Text"). This collection of manuscripts was the most widely available during the Reformation era. In contrast, the NIV, first published in 1978, benefits from the discovery of older and more geographically diverse manuscripts, such as the Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus, which are considered by many scholars to be more reliable witnesses to the original biblical text.

Furthermore, the two translations employ different approaches. The KJV is a more "formal equivalence" or "word-for-word" translation, aiming to adhere closely to the sentence structure and individual words of the original languages. The NIV, on the other hand, utilizes a "dynamic equivalence" or "thought-for-thought" philosophy, which prioritizes conveying the original author's intended meaning in natural-sounding English, even if it means not translating every word literally.

These foundational differences manifest in a variety of ways, from subtle shifts in nuance to more significant theological implications. Here are a few notable examples:

"Missing" Verses and Phrases

One of the most striking differences for many readers is the absence of certain verses and phrases in the NIV that are present in the KJV. This is not a case of the NIV "removing" scripture, but rather a reflection of the manuscript evidence. These portions are not found in the oldest and most reliable manuscripts and are therefore considered by many scholars to be later additions to the biblical text.

A classic example is **1 John 5:7-8**.

- **KJV:** "For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth, the spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one."
- **NIV:** "For there are three that testify: the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement."

The phrase in the KJV, known as the "Johannine Comma," is a powerful statement on the Trinity. However, it is absent from the vast majority of early Greek manuscripts and is believed to have been a later scribal addition.

Other examples of verses present in the KJV but often relegated to footnotes in the NIV and other modern translations include Matthew 17:21, Matthew 18:11, and Acts 8:37.

Subtle but Significant Shifts in Meaning

Even when the core message remains similar, the choice of words can alter the emphasis and interpretation of a verse.

In Philippians 2:6, the description of Jesus' pre-incarnate state differs:

- **KJV:** "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:"
- **NIV:** "Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;"

The KJV's "thought it not robbery" can be interpreted to mean that Jesus rightfully possessed equality with God. The NIV's rendering, "did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage," emphasizes Jesus' humility and willingness to relinquish his divine prerogatives.

Another example is found in **Colossians 1:14**:

- **KJV:** "In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins:"
- **NIV:** "in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."

The KJV explicitly includes the phrase "through his blood," directly linking redemption to the sacrificial death of Christ. While the NIV affirms redemption and forgiveness, the omission of this specific phrase in the main text (it is often included in a footnote) is seen by some as weakening a key theological connection found in the manuscripts used for the KJV.

Changes in Terminology

The evolution of the English language itself accounts for some differences. Words that had a particular meaning in the 17th century may have a different connotation today.

For instance, in **2 Thessalonians 2:3**, the KJV speaks of a "falling away" before the day of the Lord, while the NIV translates this as "the rebellion." While related, "rebellion" carries a more active and defiant tone than the more passive "falling away."

Similarly, the KJV's use of "charity" in **1 Corinthians 13** is rendered as "love" in the NIV. While "charity" in King James English encompassed a broader sense of love, its modern usage is often restricted to acts of giving, making the NIV's translation clearer to contemporary readers.

Conclusion: A Matter of Source and Style

The differences between the KJV and NIV are not arbitrary. They are the result of careful scholarly work based on different manuscript traditions and translation philosophies. While both versions are revered and have been instrumental in the faith of millions, understanding the reasons for their variations can lead to a richer and more nuanced engagement with the biblical text. For many, comparing these and other translations can be a valuable tool for deeper study, revealing the complexities and depths of the scriptures.

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