

## Chapter 2 — The Holy Scriptures

### Q10. How many testaments are there in the Holy Scriptures?

A. Two: The Old and the New Testaments (2 Cor. 3:14, Heb. 9:15).

This question speaks about the “testaments.” Sometimes these testaments are called the Old Covenant and New Covenant. What is a covenant? It is a binding agreement between two parties. This agreement has promises and threats. Promises if a party keeps the agreement, and threats if he does not keep it. Think about marriage. That is also a covenant. You promise to remain with the other party until death parts you. A divorce is thus a breaking up of that covenant. That is a serious matter!

Other times is spoken of a testament. What is a testament? We sometimes call this a last will. It means that someone, for example a child, inherits the property his parents. Let’s say that father makes a testament. When he dies the farm will go to his son. After many years the father passes away. What will happen? The son will inherit the farm. But what is needed to ‘activate’ that testament? Yes, the death of the person that made the testament. Well, the Bible speaks also about testaments. That means there is a people that receives an inheritance. But how is it activated? By the death of the testator. That is Jesus Christ. And this testament is activated, He died indeed.

In our answer is spoken of “two” testaments. The Old and New Testament. What is the difference between the two? First we have the *Old Testament or Old Covenant*. It is God’s special arrangement with Israel. God made that covenant when He brought Israel out of Egypt. We read in Jeremiah, “Not according to *the covenant* that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake...saith the LORD” (Jer. 31:32). This covenant has promises. What are they? That God would deliver them out of Egypt. God would provide them all kinds of blessings. Israel would be cleansed from sin by the sacrifices. Not that God did not forgive sin. But this was depicted in the sacrifice of an animal. And what was all part of the old covenant? Priests, animal sacrifices, and access to God via the (high)priest. Had this covenant also a law? Yes. An external law. The passage in Jeremiah shows that this law was constantly broken.<sup>1</sup> Think in relation to this covenant about the tabernacle worship. God had given many laws. Israel transgressed those laws. Then they had to bring an animal for sacrifice. After that, the Israelite was forgiven. In summary, we can say that this Old Testament looked forward to the coming of Jesus Christ. Everything was depicted in the laws and sacrifices under that Old Testament.

What is the *New Testament or New Covenant*? This is God’s agreement with the believer in Jesus Christ. We read in Hebrews, “This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more” (Hebr. 10:16-17). Does this covenant have promises? Yes, indeed. What? The forgiveness of sin, eternal life, and to know God in with one’s own heart (Hebr. 9:15). And what is part of this covenant? Not a normal priest but the only High Priest, Jesus Christ. Also, the one sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Moreover, direct access to God without a human

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/old-covenant-vs-new-covenant.html>

mediator. And what is the relation of this covenant with the law? No, this is not an external law. But God promised to write the law in the hearts of the true believers. In summary, we can say that the Old Testament is a visible picture of salvation, and looks forward to the coming of Christ. The New Testament is the fulfillment of what was depicted and promised in the Old Testament. All was fulfilled with the coming and death of Christ. Our Bible exists of two testaments. The Old Testament, the first part of our Bible, and the New Testament, the last part of our Bible. But what were the languages wherein they were written? That is what we find in our next questions.

### Q11. In what language was the Old Testament written?

A. In the Hebrew language, with a small part in the Aramaic language.<sup>2</sup>

This question and answer are about the language of our first part of our Bible. Why is this question asked? Because the original Bible is not written in English. Why is that important to know? It means that we have only a translation. Any translation comes to the original. In English, we have many different Bible translations. These translations can mainly be divided in two main categories. The first is a *paraphrase or dynamic equivalence*. The person tries to translate the “message” to the target English. It does precisely follow the original language. Think of the New International Version (NIV). The other group exists of *literal translation*. These translators try to stay as close as they can to the original language. One of their statements is to translate the Bible literal as possible and as free as necessary. Sometimes there are phrases that cannot be translated literally, for example an expression. Then the translator will try to convey that expression in its meaning instead of the literal words. Think for this group of translations of the King James Version (KJV) or the New American Standard Bible (NASB). Let us show a translation difference in a verse in of Matthew,

- The NIV translates, “And [Jesus] said: “Truly I tell you, unless you *change* and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 18:3).
- The KJV says, “And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye *be converted*, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 18:3).

Do you hear the difference? The first translation has “change,” the latter “be converted.” Is conversion a change? Certainly. But is every change conversion? No. We can say this, that the first one can be outward, the second is a thorough inward change. Both translations do reflect the original language. The word has the meaning, “change (one’s mind), and turn.” Here the KJV is better. What is the best translation in the English language? This is the King James Version. It is the most faithful one, though at times it can be more difficult to read than other translations.

The question continues to ask about the language of the Old Testament. Before we think about the language, we have to spend some time on the order of books. This differences between our English Bible and the Hebrew Bible, the original language. What is the order in Hebrew and English?

#### Hebrew Order

- (1) Law
- (2) Prophets
- (3) Writings

#### English Order

- (1) History Books
- (2) Poetry
- (3) Prophets (Major, Minor)

<sup>2</sup> Literally, “A. In the Hebrew, and a small part in the Chaldean language.”

This difference in order means that the last book of the Old Testament also differs. What is the last book in the Hebrew Bible? No, not Malachi but 2 Chronicles. Also, the categories differ. Some books are in the Hebrew Bible under the prophets while we believe that they belong under history. What is an example? The book Joshua. The Hebrew Bible calls it a book of the Prophets, we say that it belongs to the Historical books. Let us think about another difference. Who do we believe to be among the Prophets? Daniel. He is one of the Major Prophets. But the Jews place it under the Writings. The same is true for the Psalms. We call this Poetry but the Jews a Writing.

Let us now think about the language of the Old Testament. What is it? Most parts are written in the “Hebrew language.” May we ask you, why did God choose this language? The answer is simple. It was the language of Israel. They were the people that God whom God gave His Word. How does Hebrew look like? Let us show a sentence in Genesis,

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים (‘‘And God said,’’ Gen. 1:3)

Hebrew is much different from English. It reads from right-to-left instead of left-to-right. Hebrew has consonants. They are always the bigger letters. For example the mem (מ). You can compare it to our M in English. Hebrew has also vowels. These are in general the smaller dots above or under the big letters. For example, the tsere is . . .

But a part of the Old Testament is written in another language, ‘‘Aramaic’’ or ‘‘Chaldean.’’ This was the language when Israel was in Babylon. It looks very much like Hebrew. Only the spelling and some words are a bit different. You can compare with the difference between Spanish and Italian. Think for example about the word justification. In Spanish, it is ‘‘justificaci3n,’’ and in Italian ‘‘giustificazione.’’ Now you ask, what parts are written in Aramaic? We only find it in the books Ezra (67 verses), Daniel (200 verses) and Jeremiah (one verse). The exact places are Ezra 4:8–6:19, 7:12-26, Dan. 2:4–7:28, and Jer. 10:11. Remember that even Jesus spoke Aramaic. How do we know? He said it on the cross, ‘‘Eloi, Eloi, Lama Sabachtani’’ (Matt. 27:46). That means ‘‘My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?’’ So, we can say that the Old Testament is written in Hebrew and Aramaic, and that we have different translations in the English language. Let us ask such questions also about the New Testament.

### **Q12. In what language was the New Testament written?**

A. In the Greek language.

Why is this question asked? Is the New Testament not written in the same language as the Old Testament? The answer is no. It is written in Greek. Maybe you ask, why Greek? This was the world language in the days of Jesus. Most people spoke this language. Both Jew and Gentile knew this language. Think about the tribes that were scattered abroad (James 1:1). That is why it was best to write the Bible in Greek. It is the same as we find with other world languages. Around the time of the reformation, Latin was the main language. That is why much of that time is written in Latin. Think also of today, what is the world language? English. So it was with the New Testament. Greek was the world language. Therefore, it was easiest to write the New Testament in that language.

How does Greek look like? Maybe you are curious. Let us show an example from the Gospel of Mark. We look at the first verse. What do we read?

Ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (Greek)  
 Arche tou euangeliou Iesou Christou (Transliteration)  
 “Beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ” (English, Mark 1:1).

Greek is more like English. It is written from left-to-right. The only difference is that Greek letters are used. Many English words are related to Greek. Think about evangelizing, bringing the good news, that is related to the Greek “euangelion,” which means “good news.”

We have two main streams of manuscripts in the Greek language, the original language of the New Testament. A manuscript is a document with the written text of the Bible. The two main streams are,

- **1. Received Text.** Traditional for translations until 1900ths. Basis Geneva Bible, KJV.
- **2. Critical Text.** Basis of most modern translations. Think of the ESV, NIV, NASB.

Why is this an important thing to consider? Are they not the same? No. If you study these mainstreams manuscripts, you will find many differences. We say that the Critical Text is problematic. And still, it is the basis for most modern translations. One of those translations is the English Standard Version (ESV). Why is this text problematic? First, many verses or parts of verses are left out. This counts for 650 changes in total. One example is in John 8, the history of the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11). Second, this text contains errors. One example is the phrase “only-begotten God.” Theologians do agree that this cannot phrase be true. Consider the following verse in John,

- New American Standard Version '95 translates, “No one has seen God at any time; the *only begotten God* who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him” (John 1:18).
- King James Version says, “No man hath seen God at any time; the *only begotten Son*, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him” (John 1:18).

Interestingly, many modern translations, which are based on the wrong Critical Text, see the issue of this verse. What do they do? They translate it away! They will translate it as, “the one and only God.” But the original manuscript of the Critical Text clearly says “only-begotten God.” Do you see how ‘smart’ these theologians are to keep their wrong basis?

Now we come to the next. The defense of the King James Version. There are some reasons why we would defend this translation. First, it is based on a faithful Greek Text, the Received Text. This has been the Greek text that was used for all translations until the 1900ths. It has been preserved throughout the ages past. Second, this version is faithfully translated from the original. It is as literal as possible and as free as necessary.

The last thing that we will discuss of the New Testament is the order of books. This is as follows,

- **I. History.** Gospels and Acts
- **II. Letters.** Paul’s Letter’s (Church, Personal, Hebrews)  
 General Letters (James, Peter, John, Jude)
- **III. Future.** Revelation.

We see that we have a faithful translation of the New Testament in English. Let us read it as well.