



**The Readability of Selected Verses in the Book of Mark 2:1-12: Preference of Malaysian Christians Between NIV and NKJV**

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# **The Readability of Selected Verses in the Book of Mark 2:1-12: Preference of Malaysian Christians Between NIV and NKJV**

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

The Bible has been around for thousands of years and has been the foundation of Christian belief even today. The Bible is a holy scripture of Christianity and Judaism that consists of both the New and Old Testaments. And it has been referred to as ‘The Word of God’ by Christians’ beliefs. Throughout the centuries when scriptures have been spread across the world, many translations have been made so that people across the sea may come to understand the word. Among the translations was English, one of the most widely used languages in the world, and in this current era, there are numerous numbers of English translations of the scripture, such as the King James Version (KJV), New International Version (NIV), English Standard Version (ESV), Literal Standard Version (LSV), etc. Many debates have been held, and research has been done to determine which version of the English-translated Bible is best for believers due to the different types of their translations and the way they engage with audiences while preserving the message.

In this research, usage of the NIV (New International Version) and the NKJV (New King James Version) NIV and NKJV are among the most recent English translations of the Bible, and they’re considered the best and most well-known Bible translations that have ever been used up to this day. Both versions have their own origins and unique histories that contributed to their popularity amongst the Christian community. Since both versions were created in the 1900s, the usage of the English language can be considered modern English compared to its predecessor, the KJV. The purpose of the translation was to ease modern readers comprehension of the context of the Bible and increase its readability. However, the NIV and NKJV Bibles adapt two different

principles of translation, which causes readers a dilemma in determining the best version in terms of its accuracy, literature perseverance, and readability.

### **1.1 Problem Statement**

The lack of study findings on the preferences and readability of the New International Version (NIV) and the New King James Version (NKJV) of the Bible for English as a Second Language (ESL) speakers in Malaysia provides a lack of understanding of how these two popular translations impact the spiritual engagement and comprehension of Christians. Especially when the comparison studies of the NKJV Bible have always been overshadowed by its predecessor, the KJV Bible. Among the Christian community in Malaysia, versions of the Bible are often chosen based on denominations, personal bias, and opinion towards the translation's accuracy. However, the mindset contributes to a lack of consideration for its readability among Christians, especially those new Bible readers with no prior Bible knowledge or background. Malaysia's diversity of cultural linguistics calls for a necessity to conduct a comprehensive investigation into the readability and preferences of both Bible translations amongst the ESL speakers in this country and perhaps determine a superiority between both versions to promote amongst Malaysians.

Additionally, the traditional formula for accessing the readability of the text received criticism for its lack of reader perception. Traditional readability formulas such as Flesch-Kincaid, Gunning Fog, and Fry utilized sentence length, number of words, and syllables to evaluate the readability of texts; they're viewed as limited because the methods neglected the readers personal capabilities, prior experiences, and motivation, which can significantly affect the way they perceive certain texts. These formulas consist of a lack of consideration for many other elements that affect readability besides the syntactical perspective (Öksüz & Keskin, 2022). Hence, this research calls for a readability study that utilizes a self-assessment perception from the readers

themselves to access a subjective yet insightful result, which would also create the potential for further research without the restraint of formulas.

## **1.2 Objectives**

1. Examine the overall readability between the Bible translations of the New International Version (NIV) and the New King James Version (NKJV) on Mark 2:1-12 amongst Christian in Malaysia.
2. Aims to investigate linguistic factors that influence the readability of Malaysia's Christian between both translations on Mark 2:1-12.

## **1.3 Research Question**

The questions generated from this study would be

1. What is the overall readability level between the NIV and NKJV Bible translations for Christians in Malaysia?
2. What are the factors that contribute towards the translation's readability and preferences from the Malaysia's Christian's perspective?

## **1.4 Scope of Studies**

The primary objective of this study is to determine the most suitable version of the English translation Bible for the non-native English speakers in Malaysia in terms of aiding their understanding of the spiritual messages presented in the Bible. The reason for choosing the NIV and NKJV Bibles is that both translations share a similar function and purpose: to ease contemporary readers understanding of the context of the scripture by utilizing modern language that fits with the current generation. In this research, insights and observations from both versions are gathered from the respondent's preference and readability perspective in Malaysia. According to the Cambridge dictionary, readability refers to the quality of being easy and enjoyable to read.

From the context, we would look into the different linguistic aspects that show the differences between two translations, such as the principle of translation, syntax structure, and vocabulary, and how they would contribute to their readability.

The NIV Bible is known for having a thought-for-thought translation that translates meaning rather than words, and the language used and the construction of syntax are formed using contemporary English. The NKJV Bible, which derives from its predecessor KJV, consists of a word-for-word translation principle that follows the principal of literal translation, and the language usage was also contemporary to a certain degree, while still preserving some of the archaic words. It follows a similar structure from the KJV to preserve its artistic elements. A survey is conducted to explore the readability and preferences of English speakers in Malaysia regarding two distinct translations of the Bible, and the demographics involve only Christians in Malaysia. The survey aims to first study the readability of both translations amongst the Christian community in Malaysia, then assess their overall reading skills while at the same time gathering their perspective on the factors when it comes to deciding which translation to use.

The Book of Mark, chapter 2, verses 1–12, is utilized in this research to examine its readability in both translations. Mark 2:1–12 contains one of the miracles and deeds done by Jesus. The story took place in Capernaum, one of the ancient fishing villages located on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee, Israel. The passages describe the story of how Jesus healed a paralyzed man by forgiving his sins. However, his statement was frowned upon by the writers of the law in Israel because they believed only God had the power to forgive sins, but the paralyzed man was eventually healed. The story itself served as a symbol of only Jesus Himself, the son of man, having the power on earth to forgive sin. And if Jesus possessed the power of God, it would also indicate that Jesus was indeed God. Both the NIV and NKJV translations possess the same context in

regards to their story but use different linguistic aspects in portraying the story, which involve differences in the choices of words or phrases and syntax construction. From the passage, observations are made to test their readability level towards both translation and understanding of the context of the passage and to observe any misinterpretation due to the language usage and structure. Ultimately, the researcher would also like to find out the respondent's preference between both translations of the passage given to them.

### **1.5 Significance of Study**

From the linguistics' perspective, the research will be able to examine the linguistic aspects that influence both the NIV and NKJV bible translations, such as syntax structure and the choice of words. Ultimately, the data would provide valuable insights to determine the best solutions when it comes to selecting the best translation for Bible usage.

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Translation's Background**

#### **2.1.1 New King James Version (NKJV)**

To understand the NKJV Bible, we first must dwell on the origin of the authorized KJV Bible. The KJV Bible is one of the early translations published in 1611 under the auspices of King James I of England, according to Encyclopedia Britannica (2023). A total of 7 years were used by scholars to modify the grammar, syntax, and usage of words to maintain the artistic elements of the early manuscript, which was written in Hebrew and Greek, and to preserve the biblical language for the upcoming centuries. Even to this day, it has remained one of the most influential Bibles. However, the language used within the KJV Bible consists of a lack of coherency towards common and modern readers since language has developed and changed over the course of centuries since 1611. Words in the English language have evolved in meaning, and some of them



have even gone out of usage, hence creating a language barrier for general readers that needed to be addressed. Hence, in 1975, 130 Greek, Hebrew, and English scholars, editors, and church leaders began the most daring and extensive revision projects in creating the NKJV Bible. The motivation was to create a Bible using modern language to increase its readability while preserving the accuracy, rhythm, and beauty of the authorized KJV Bible. The New Testament of the NKJV Bible was eventually published in 1979 by Thomas Nelson Publishers, followed by the book of Psalms and the full version of the scripture in 1980 and 1982, respectively (Thomas Nelson Bibles, 2022).

According to Farstad (1975), Thomas Nelson argued that the NKJV Bible has no intention to alter or remove the basic communication from the authorized version but to transform the Elizabethan word forms into twentieth-century English for the purpose of avoiding confusion and misinterpretation of the scriptures. The usage of obsolete and archaic words in the 1611 authorized version can become confusing to most modern readers, especially when it comes to words that are still used in this generation but whose meaning has altered over the years. For example, the word 'charity' is referred to as 'love' or the word 'meat' was meant 'food' back in the day.

### **2.1.2 New International Version (NIV)**

The NIV Bible is among the most popular contemporary Bibles used in the modern generation. Published in 1978 by the International Bible Society, which is now known as Biblica. The project of the translation was initiated by a single man named Howard Long (BibleGateway, n.d.). Howard Long was known for his passion for and devotion to the KJV Bible. However, he came to realize the translation had become an obstacle for contemporary readers. Therefore, he found a need for a new translation that preserves the context and meaning of the scriptures while being able to adapt to contemporary readability.

As mentioned, the NIV Bible is a completely new translation that does not derive itself from any pre-existing English translation. For 10 years, Long's passion has united a group of like-minded supporters who have assisted tremendously in the translation process, and it has been endorsed by a large number of church leaders. With a group of fifteen self-governing biblical scholars, the Committee on Bible Translation (CBT) was formed. The project was generously sponsored by the New York Bible Society in 1968, which then changed its name to the International Bible Society and then to the name we know today, Biblica. The translations produced were checked and revised attentively by the editorial committees made up of five biblical scholars. The translation was revised alongside manuscripts and their available sources to ensure its reliability in regards to its faithfulness to the overall messages of the scripture. Another aspect they prioritized was the translation's readability and comprehensibility. Samples from the translation were utilized to test its readability for contemporary readers with different demographic backgrounds. The overall function and reason for the NIV translation was to enhance scripture transparency for modern readers by utilizing contemporary English while preserving the original meaning that was presented in the scriptures.

## **2.2 Translation Principle (Word for Word and Thought for Thought)**

### **2.2.1 NKJV**

Similar to the KJV Bible, the NKJV followed a direct footsteps in applying a complete equivalent in terms of the translation principle, also known as formal equivalence or word-for-word translation. The function of the complete equivalent principle is to produce a more literal translation as close as possible to the original language. Efforts were made to preserve the structure and all the information presented from the original source, such as using the exact words and phrases displayed from the original sources. The NKJV Bible has preserved many of the traditional

languages that were used by its predecessor, the KJV Bible (Joseph, 2023). For example, in the book of Mark 2:2 NKJV, the noun ‘paralytic’ was used to describe a man who was paralyzed; the word ‘paralytic’ has only often used in older English and is considered as rare in modern English. The noun ‘paralytic’ has often been replaced with more contemporary and straightforward terms, such as ‘a paralyzed individual’. Nelson (2007) further emphasizes the similar style of writing presented in the writing of the NKJV Bible with its predecessor, the KJV Bible, while utilizing contemporary vocabulary. The thought flow, sequences of words, phrases, and clauses are said to be close to their original sources.

### **2.2.2 NIV**

The NIV Bible is a completely new translation that utilizes the dynamic equivalent translation principle, also known as functional equivalent or thought-for-thought translation. The approach aims to translate meaning, thought, and idea into the target language without binding itself to the grammatical rules and word order of the original language. From the modern English perspective, modern translation has used a much more modern and straightforward language to convey the messages from the scripture. Which then allows for better readability for contemporary readers; however, the argument against this translation is its reliability and accuracy towards the original context from the original sources (Joseph, 2023). Dynamic equivalence stresses that just as the original language sounded as clear to the original readers back then, the translation language should sound as clear to contemporary readers on the same readability level. Hence, the translation should not follow the original sources word for word because syncretical function differs from language to language (R. Kohlenberger, 2013).

### **2.3 Overall Readability**

Many translators would argue that literal translation preserves the originality of the message and helps prevent any of the translator's own subjective misinterpretations. In other words, the translation would remain faithful to its original source with no interruption from any personal emotion, opinion, bias, or ideology (Ali, 2015). However, the idea was rejected by one of the well-known Christian scholars and a Biblical translator, St. Jerome. While St. Jerome attempted to translate the Chronicle of Eusebius of Caesarea into Latin using the word-for-word translation principle, the language sounded absurd to him. If each of the source language's linguistic elements were to be transferred to the translated language, the result would be incoherence and a lack of sense. Especially in the biblical context, where the translator would have to deal with idioms and metaphors. St. Jerome himself advocates the sense-for-sense translation principle, in which he regards the rendering of one sentence at a time as better than translating word by word.

Downie (2009) emphasized that literal translation is very likely to generate words and phrases that do not reflect the use of normal English unless an individual has knowledge of the grammatical rules and patterns of the language used in the original source. Otherwise, it would prove difficult for contemporary and casual readers to break down the context or even cause misinterpretation. In order for the NKJV to adopt a literal translation principle, the translators have done their utmost to keep the original Hebrew phrasing as close as possible. However, while it preserved the artistic elements that allow experienced Bible readers to appreciate them, it has proved to be difficult for casual readers who have no prior experience in the Bible due to its complex phrase structure and the perseverance of some of the archaic or traditional words. And despite the fact that the NKJV Bible has utilized more of the contemporary language approach in comparison to the KJV Bible to adapt to the English language, which has gone through four centuries of evolution, it is rendered

less useful than it claims itself to be due to the perseverance of the KJV Bible in complex sentence structure, grammar, and terms.

Functional equivalence (thought for thought), on the other hand, has one of its strongest perks in that it prioritizes meaning over forms (R. Kohlenberger, 2013). Due to the principle of not being bound by the syntactical structure or the grammatical rules of the original source, the translator has a degree of freedom in translating the scriptures. Which means they can utilize a much more contemporary and straight-forward language in translating the context from the original source. Based on the point above, thought-for-thought translation is able to produce an expression that seems natural to contemporary readers. Which means one of the elements of this principle is that the translated language has to sound just as natural to contemporary readers as the original language sounded to its audience. However, while NIV adopted the thought-for-thought translation principle and utilized contemporary language in translating the context, it is still considered a mediating version due to its usage and perseverance with technical language. For example:

**Proverbs 16:6**

**NIV:**

*Through love and faithfulness sin is atoned for;  
through the fear of the Lord evil is avoided.*

**NCV (New Century Version):**

*Love and truth bring forgiveness of sin.  
By respecting the Lord you will avoid evil.*

From the example given above, we see NIV Bible usage of technical phrases like 'sin is atoned' which is replaced by 'the forgiveness of sin' by NCV Bible, which utilizes a full functional equivalence principle of translation. As shown, the phrase used in the NCV Bible is much more

straightforward and provides more clarity for readers. The NCV Bible also translated “fear of the Lord” as an act of respect. In the book of Proverbs, fear of the Lord is described as submission to God rather than God trying to inflict fear within us towards Him. Therefore, the NCV Bible provides better clarity about the context of the message, while the NIV Bible preserves the poetic elements of the context.

Despite the NIV Bible claiming itself to be a new translation, critics have often spotted a few dependencies on the KJV Bible in regards to the choice of vocabulary, syntactical structures, and stylistic features that parallel the Hebrew and Greek languages (Newman, 1980). It may cause inconsistency in the language level within the scriptures themselves due to its constant shift between straightforward language and formal language. If the Bible is meant to adopt thought-for-thought translation and the desire to only utilize contemporary language for better clarity, there is no reason to preserve the structure found in the Bible from an older generation. It may cause confusion among contemporary readers who did not expect the perseverance. Another criticism given by Newman is the unexpected, unnatural collocation of words, which may be strange to its main target audience, modern readers. For example, in the book of Acts 11:3, the phrase ‘the house of uncircumcised men’ could have easily been translated to ‘the house of sinners/gentiles’ for better clarification. But the NIV preserved the traditional usage of metaphorical language. There’s also an unexpected shift of pronouns within a certain context. In the book of Luke 11:5–6, it says, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight... '. The italicized pronouns shown above are the same person; we see a sudden shift of perspective that went from 2nd person to 3rd person, and it confuses readers who may have thought the 2nd pronoun used, ‘he’ may refer to the friend.

In summary, the NKJV Bible, which adopted a word-for-word translation from its predecessor, may display a much more sophisticated yet complex structure of the Biblical context. The NIV Bible, on the other hand, whose translation is based on the overall context, is more straightforward and provides more clarity about the context.

### **Mark 2:5**

**NKJV:** *When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven you.”*

**NIV:** *When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, “Son, your sins are forgiven.”*

From the example given above, when Jesus made a statement of His forgiving the sin of the paralyzed man, we see the difference in the grammatical structure displayed by both translations. In the NIV Bible, Jesus’s line is straightforward and can be understood by contemporary readers. However, in the NKJV Bible, an extra pronoun (you) was added at the very end for the purpose of preserving the structure shown in the KJV Bible: “Thy sins be forgiven thee”. The phrases’ structure itself may be easily understood by experienced Bible readers; however, it may prove to be misleading to contemporary readers due to the fact that the way it is structured does not resemble the grammatical rules of English in the 21st century, and especially to non-native English speakers. From their perspective, when you read the entire phrase as a whole without the capacity to analyze due to the lack of English efficiency, it would sound like Jesus is telling the paralyzed man that the sin itself has forgiven him, which confuses the readers. The NKJV Bible also preserved more traditional and archaic words compared to the NIV Bible. The words such as ‘paralytic’ and ‘glorified’ used in the NKJV Bible are a few examples; they were replaced by ‘paralyzed man’ and ‘praised’ respectively by the NIV Bible. The NIV Bible took a more contemporary approach when it came to their choice of words and phrases. However, NIV itself is not without flaws due to its inconsistency in adopting functional equivalence and contemporary

English. While it may claim to use contemporary language, it has preserved some, if not many, of the formal and unnatural structures found in the original sources.

According to a reading level of bible translations chart provided by Kim (2023), the NIV bible is evaluated as 7th grade, and the NKJV bible is in 7th to 9th grade. The method of evaluating their readability scores is not mentioned; reliability cannot be guaranteed, but from the chart alone, it is stated that NKJV could have a higher difficulty when it comes to readability. In terms of preferences, the NIV version is ranked as the bestselling translation in 2022, which is significantly higher than the NKJV Bible, which is rated at 6th place according to the data provided by members of ECPA (2023).

### **3.0 Methodology**

To achieve the objectives of this research, the researcher utilized self-assessment and comprehensive research to obtain the data. The research would require respondents to provide their subjective insight and individual comprehension in terms of determining translation's difficulty. The method was partially validated by Öksüz and Keskin (2022) when they made criticisms of the traditional methods that evaluate readability, which relied on a sentence's length and words. The evaluation of readability must be associated with the reader's cognitive abilities as well as prior knowledge. Hence, this research utilizes a Comprehensive Rating Scale method to measure reader comprehensibility towards the Bible passage; the method itself was conducted by research done by R. Yeatts and W. Linden (1984) towards the Biblical passages. The method allows readers to evaluate the difficulty to comprehend a passage on a subjective manner in which allow the research to address the variables that affect readability other than the length of sentences and syllables. By the method's justification, this research utilizes both quantitative and qualitative approaches to



gather data from respondents. The book of Mark 2:1–12 from both translations will be displayed for direct comparison.

### **3.1 Type of Questionnaires**

The quantitative approach contains a closed-ended questionnaire to gather 50 respondents' perceptions of the translation's readability and their personal preferences between both translations. The book of Mark 2:1–12 from both translations is displayed to allow respondents to assess their readability based on their own capabilities utilizing the Likert Scale. Data received from a quantitative approach will be calculated using mean score for comparison purposes. Then, a portion of respondents are selected to obtain qualitative data through interviews. The purpose of the interview is to obtain a deeper insight into factors that influence the reader's decision to determine the difficulty between both translations and to investigate any potential misinterpretations that contribute to the readability of both translations. The interview also addresses any potential bias by exploring factors that influence their preferences.

### **3.2 Samples**

Samples for the quantitative survey are selected using the stratified random sampling method, which involves dividing the population into subgroups that best represent the theme presented, and respondents are randomly selected within the group (Hayes, 2023). A total of 50 Malaysia's Christians above the age of 18 are selected. The main demographic of respondents selected for this research is only limited to one denomination such as the English-speaking brethren church for the purpose of limiting the potential of bias that may cause by any personal or different denomination's doctrine. Out of the 50 respondents, 4 were selected for a qualitative interview.

### **3.3 Findings**

The findings are to be further analyzed and discussed in detail to determine the readability between the NIV and NKJV Bibles and the factors that influence preferences between both translations. Ultimately, research would suggest the best possible solution when it comes to choosing the best translations. There are several limitations to this research that would require further in-depth studies and future research, such as the potential bias that might influence their perceptions towards readability and preference. Although factors contributing to those biases are to be briefly explored through the qualitative interviews, it would require a much more in-depth analysis to determine a better solution to the issue.

Ethical considerations and procedures will be upheld throughout the research to avoid any possible conflict or misunderstanding. Consent will be obtained from all participants to ensure their awareness of the study's purpose and their rights. The participant's information will be strictly confidential to protect their privacy and anonymity. This research will strictly obey the ethical guidelines established to protect the respondent's rights.

## **Chapter 4 Findings and Discussions**

### **4.0 Introduction**

This chapter focuses on the findings and analysis obtained from the quantitative and qualitative surveys. The quantitative survey questionnaire is based on a self-assessment utilizing the Likert scale formula to analyze the readability of the selected passage between the NKJV and NIV Bible. The data obtained will be analyzed using descriptive analysis, focusing mainly on measures of central tendency. Qualitative data, on the other hand, will be analyzed using thematic analysis methodology.

### **4.1 Quantitative Data**

A quantitative questionnaire focuses on allowing the respondents to evaluate their own comprehension of the book of Mark 2:1–12 between the NKJV and the NIV Bible. The data obtained from the questionnaire will be used to determine the readability of both translations. Likert scale mean scoring will be utilized to calculate the scoring of each item and ultimately determine the respondent's perception of the difficulty range between both translations (M. Wanjohi & Syokau, 2021). The descriptive score ranges from very easy to very difficult, and the mean score of 3 represents neutral or unsure. The data obtained from this session is to address the first research question for this study, which asked about the overall readability between the NKJV and NIV Bible.

### **4.2 Difficulties Rating**

The questionnaires are separated into three main sections. Sections A and B focus on the NKJV and NIV Bible's readability evaluation questions, respectively, and Section C consists of general questions to summarize the respondent's opinion. In this scenario, cross-comparison will be done to illustrate a direct comparison between two similar questions that evaluate the

respondent’s comprehension of two different translations. In terms of difficulty, the scoring will be labeled as shown in the table below.

**Table 1**

*Likert Scale Mean Scoring*

Range of mean value	Likert scale
1.00 – 2.40	Easy
2.50 – 3.40	Neutral
3.50 – 5.00	Difficult

Table 2 shows the results of two items, each taken from sections A and B. The question requires the respondent to evaluate the difficulty of the passages given based on Mark 2:1–12 in both the NKJV and NIV Bible. The question is shown below. The descriptions of the Likert scale scoring are labeled as: 1 for 'very easy', 2 for 'easy', 3 for 'unsure/neutral', 4 for 'difficult', and 5 for 'very difficult'.

**Table 2**

*How easy was it to understand the passage given above?*

Statements	Mean	Descriptive
1. NKJV	2.78	Neutral
2. NIV	1.66	Easy

Table 3 illustrates a result of the respondent’s evaluation of the difficulties with the selected vocabulary chosen from the passages in both the NKJV and NIV Bible. The data were analyzed using the same formula as shown in Table 1 by calculating the range of the mean to determine the overall difficulties of the selected words, with the higher score implying very difficult and the

lower score indicating very easy. The words selected in the NKJV Bible are ‘paralytic’ and ‘scribes’; those words will be directly compared to the phrases selected from the NIV Bible that share the same meaning, such as ‘paralyzed man’ and ‘teachers of the law’.

**Table 3**

**Vocabularies**

Statements	Mean	Descriptive
1. paralytic (NKJV)	2.72	Neutral
2. paralyzed man (NIV)	1.4	Easy
1. scribes (NKJV)	2.82	Neutral
2. teachers of the law (NIV)	1.4	Easy

Table 4 shows the respondent’s evaluation of difficulties with the structure of phrases and sentences, which includes the variety of choice of words and the way the contexts are structured into sentences or phrases between the NKJV and NIV Bible, respectively. The formula and description of the scoring remained the same, as shown in Table 2. Phrases and sentences that shared the same context will be taken from the NKJV and NIV Bible, respectively, to conduct a direct comparison of the respondent’s scoring.

**Table 4**

**Phrases and Sentences.**

Statements	Mean	Descriptive
1. “Son, your sins are forgiven you.” (NKJV)	2.42	Neutral

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2. "Son, your sins are forgiven." (NIV)	1.44	Easy
1. ...reasoned thus within themselves, (NKJV)	2.52	Neutral
2. ...what they were thinking in their hearts, (NIV)	1.4	Easy
1. "Why do you reason about these things in your hearts?" (NKJV)	2.12	Easy
2. "Why are you thinking these things (NIV)	1.38	Easy
1. Immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went out in the presence of them all... (NKJV)	2.22	Easy
2. He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. (NIV)	2	Easy

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### 4.3 Engagement

This section focuses on respondent's engagement when it comes to reading the passage between both NKJV and NIV Bible. The data for this section is also obtained through the utilization of Likert Scale. The description of the rating is shown below with higher score indicates a positive response and lower score indicates negative response.

1.00 – 2.40 Not engaging

2.50 – 3.40 Neutral

3.50 – 5.00 Engaging

**Table 5**

Statements	Mean	Descriptive
1. NKJV	3.5	Engaging
2. NIV	3.68	Engaging

#### **4.4 Qualitative Data**

Qualitative data is obtained through a series of interview sessions with four different respondents selected from the quantitative respondent form. Two of them are selected based on their preferences for the NKJV Bible, and the other five prefer the NIV Bible. The purpose of this research is to address the second research question of this study, which is to research the factors that influence the readability between both translations.

The data obtained will be analyzed using thematic analysis. The audio of the interview session will first be transcribed into texts, which will be coded into different categories of labels, followed by the generation of themes that determine the outcome of the readability between both the NKJV and the NIV Bible (Caulfield, 2023).

Sections below are the identified themes generated from the codes of responses. Among the main themes generated are factors of difficulty and factors of preference.

##### **4.4.1 Theme 1: Factors of Difficulty**

This section prioritizes the respondents' personal opinions regarding the factors that contribute to both translations' difficulty. The respondents were then required to give their personal

opinions based on what they had read from the passages given. The responses will be analyzed starting with NKJV-related questionnaires, followed up with NIV.

## **NKJV**

### Code 1: Confusion

The code of confusion was identified by all four of the respondents. Disregarding their preferences, all of them admit that the NKJV Bible provides the most confusion for them in comparison to the NIV. Mainly, the reason was due to some of the archaic language that was inherited from its predecessor translation, the King James Version (KJV) Bible. One participant specifically stated that the structure of the sentences used in the NKJV Bible can be confusing at times, and one of the examples is the phrase "Son, your sins are forgiven you." He stated that the particular phrase can be confusing because of the additional 2nd person pronoun 'you' added at the end of the phrase. Another participant stated that the words used in NKJV can mean something else due to the poetic and artistic elements implemented.

## **NIV**

### Code 1: Clear

When it comes to the NIV Bible, all 4 respondents agreed that this version is easy to understand with no particular parts they find difficult to understand except for some minor confusion which can be easily resolve. One of the respondents also mentioned that the choice of words used in the NIV Bible is simpler and offer more clarity to the context than the NKJV Bible.



#### **4.4.2 Theme 2: Factors of Preference**

This section focuses on the respondents' preference between both the NKJV and NIV Bible and their personal factors that influence their choice between both translations.

##### **NKJV**

###### Code 1: Authenticity

Amongst the most heard reasons for the preference for the NKJV Bible by two of the respondents is that the NKJV Bible is more reliable in terms of its authenticity and accuracy due to the direct word-for-word translation from the KJV Bible. which the KJV Bible itself is also a word-for-word translation from the original manuscript. Hence, there's less possibility of the inclusion of personal agendas or misinterpretations from the translators themselves.

###### Code 2: Engagement

One of the respondents who preferred the NKJV Bible mentioned that the choice of words used in the NKJV might be difficult, but it was more interesting to read due to its artistic and poetic elements. Another respondent argued that the NKJV Bible allows for more lateral thinking due to its ambiguous style of writing.

##### **NIV**

###### Code 1: Easy

Two respondents who prefer the NIV Bible said that mainly because the NIV Bible is just easier to read in general. One of them said that they can quickly understand the context of the scripture instead of feeling like they have no idea what is going on as they read on. One of them

also mentioned that he is less confused when reading the NIV Bible because of the clarity in choosing the right words.

Code 2: Up to date

One respondent also argues that the NIV Bible would actually be more reliable because of its utilization of more recently found manuscripts and scrolls, such as the Dead Sea Scroll.**4.5**

## **Chapter Summary**

In a general summary, when it comes to readability, the NIV Bible has an upper hand in providing easier writing in every aspect of the linguistic factors for the respondents, who represent Christians in Malaysia. All the descriptions for the syntax and words from the NIV Bible is rated as easy. The NKJV Bible, in contrast, is on the neutral side of difficulty.

## **Chapter 5 Discussion and Conclusion**

### **5.0 Introduction**

This chapter focuses on the in-depth analysis of the data obtained from the respondents who participated in both the quantitative survey and qualitative interview with the intention of achieving the main objectives of this study, which is to evaluate the readability of the NKJV and NIV Bibles. The limitations of the study as well as recommendations for further research will be stated after the conclusion of the data analysis in the hope of further research to cover the gaps of this study.

### **5.1 Analysis of data**

As shown by the organization of the tables above, the data is separated into a few different categories, mainly to distinguish the purpose of each section. Deriving from the quantitative data, there are four categories to consider, such as the difficulty of the entire passage given, the

vocabulary, phrases, or sentence structure, and finally their engagements between both the NKJV and NIV Bible.

## **5.2 Difficulty of passage**

As shown in Table 2, the calculated mean score for the NKJV Bible is recorded at 2.78 m, which categorizes it as having a neutral level of difficulty according to Table 1. This implies that most Christians in Malaysia find the translation challenging to read at a moderate level. The NIV Bible, on the other hand, has a lower mean score of 1.66 m, which indicates the translation provides better ease for the comprehension level of Malaysian Christians. The questions are asked in a pattern that requires respondents to rate both passages from both the NJKJV and NIV Bible in terms of their respective difficulties using the Likert scale. Hence, it would likely decrease the chance of the respondent's bias.

The reason behind the comparison result may be contributed by the difference in linguistic factors such as vocabulary, syntax structure, and the overall language flow utilized by both translations, in which the NIV Bible was able to align itself better with the English proficiency level of Christians in Malaysia.

Despite the differences, the scores between both translations are not too far apart. This implies that the Christians in Malaysia are partially capable of reading the NKJV Bible, despite the higher difficulty in comparison to the NIV Bible. The reason this study was able to generate was because both translations share a similar purpose, which is to utilize contemporary language that allows modern readers to have a better understanding of the scriptures. However, due to the NKJV Bible being a direct word-for-word translation from its predecessor, the KJV Bible, the

author's freedom of the utilization of contemporary language is limited. The reason being that the author's intention is to preserve the general writing flow of the KJV Bible (Nelson, 2007).

### 5.3 Vocabularies

The data shown in **Table 3** emphasize on the comparison of the choice of vocabularies of words used to describe a term that share similar context between both the NIV and NKJV Bible.

#### 5.3.1

##### *paralytic (NKJV)*

##### *paralyzed man (NIV)*

The first comparison is between the word 'paralytic' from the NKJV Bible and the phrase 'paralyze man' from the NIV Bible. Respondents were to look at both of the terms used and rate their difficulties utilizing the Likert scale. Data show that the term used in the NKJV Bible scores at 2.72 m, which indicates the term is considered neutral by Malaysia's Christians. The term used in the NIV Bible, on the other hand, is rated at 1.4 m, which implies that most Christians find the term easier in comparison to the alternative from the NKJV Bible.

The reason being due to the different way of approach utilized by both translations in describing the noun portrayed in the passages. The main context for the noun was to describe a man who was paralyzed. The NKJV Bible utilized a more formal word to describe the noun, which is 'paralytic'. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, formal vocabulary is commonly derived from Latin or Greek in terms of its originality. The etymology for the word 'paralytic' is originally a Greek word that was known as paralytikos according to the Online Etymology Dictionary; hence, it's safe to assume it is considered a formal vocabulary category. The word paralytic is rather ambiguous in terms of its usage and meaning. Besides describing a paralyzed state of something

or a paralyzed person, the term was also used to describe a state of drunkenness. And the term can be utilized as an adjective as well; hence, there's a possibility of causing a certain level of confusion for readers. Besides, the term itself is not as well-known due to its formality and is mainly used as a scientific term; hence, it may prove itself to be slightly difficult for readers.

On the contrary, the NIV Bible made use of contemporary and straighter-forward language in describing the noun, 'paralyzed man'; by merging a simple adjective and noun together, the phrase was able to clarify itself as it is to describe the paralyzed individual and thus allow readers to quickly comprehend and clarify the context of the passage.**5.3.2**

*scribes (NKJV)*

*teachers of the law (NIV)*

A similar occurrence is shown through the comparison of both terms shown above. The word scribe in contemporary language can be ambiguous, depending on the context. The word 'scribe' 'is' derived from Latin, which implies that the word can be labeled as a formal vocabulary category. As indicated in the Cambridge Dictionary, a scribe is usually described as a person whose job it is to make written copies of documents during the time period when printing was not available. From the biblical perspective, scribe would mean a teacher of religious law. Without clarification of the word in the NKJV Bible, there could be a potential for slight confusion or misinterpretation. Furthermore, the word scribe is not commonly heard in Malaysia or in casual conversation as well, as the term is only limited to a specific context or topic. Hence, it wouldn't be surprising if someone hadn't heard of the word. The NIV Bible, in contrast, again merged simple and more straightforward words to construct the context. By simply stating the phrase 'teacher of the law', it would allow readers to immediately clarify the nature of the subject. Hence, there would be little to no confusion for readers when they stumbled upon this term due to the

clarity in the nature of its writing. To further validate the reason, according to the data obtained from the quantitative session, one of the respondents mentioned that the words used in the NKJV Bible do not always mean what we thought they meant; hence, it has caused a lot of confusion and misinterpretation in understanding the context of the Bible.

#### **5.4 Syntax's Structure and Language Flow**

This section will focus on the analysis of data shown in **Table 4**. Table 4 shown data in regards to the respondent's rating of the difficulty regarding to the syntax structure and language flow portrayed in both the NKJV and NIV Bible.

##### **5.4.1**

**"Son, your sins are forgiven you." (NKJV)**

**"Son, your sins are forgiven." (NIV)**

Both of the lines shown above illustrate a similar context with different styles of writing between the NKJV and the NIV Bible. The line from the NKJV Bible is calculated at 2.42 m, which indicates a neutral level of difficulty. The line written in the NIV Bible, in contrast, is calculated at 1.44 m, which is considered easy to understand and comprehend by the respondents.

The language utilized by both translations is shown to be similar to one another but with an extra pronoun 'you' found at the end of the sentence written in the NKJV Bible. The reason for such a phenomenon was the translation intention of capturing the language flow of its predecessor, the KJV Bible. In the KJV Bible, this line was written as such: "Son, thy sins be forgiven thee"; the word 'thy' is the archaic word for 'your' and 'thee' means 'you'. In this scenario, the NKJV preserves the archaic language flow found in the KJV Bible with the replacement of the archaic pronouns. The extra pronoun itself may cause a moderate level of confusion if readers read the

sentence from a modern English standard perspective. One respondent, who was a sample from the qualitative session, when he was asked specifically about which part of the NKJV Bible he found difficult to understand, implied that this particular sentence was confusing to him at first due to the extra pronoun found. The reason was because instead of God forgiving sins, it sounds like the sins themselves are forgiving the person, which would not make much sense in this context.

The NIV Bible shares a similar language flow with the alternative by utilizing a passive sentence describing God forgiving the person without an extra pronoun. The usage of passive language might contribute to one of the reasons that some people might find it slightly difficult due to the fact that the mean score was not recorded as 1 m. Otherwise, the sentence proved to be easier to understand with little to no difficulty.

#### **5.4.2**

**...reasoned thus within themselves, (NKJV)**

**...what they were thinking in their hearts, (NIV)**

In this comparison, the language used in the NKJV Bible is recorded at 2.52 m with neutral difficulties, and the NIV Bible, in contrast, is rated at 1.4 m, which indicates the language used is easy from the respondent's perspective.

The NKJV Bible again makes use of a more formal language flow in constructing the sentence by mixing ambiguous vocabularies such as 'reasoned' and the adverb 'thus'. The word 'reasoned' being used as a verb could be an uncommon phenomenon among the ESL speakers in Malaysia because it is most of the time used as a noun, and hence, it may prove itself to be confusing for some readers who're not as proficient in the English language.

The NIV Bible used the term ‘thinking’ instead, which again demonstrated a clear clarity as a verb without any alternative possibility of having an alternative definition. Hence, any readers who stumbled upon this line would immediately understand someone was thinking about something. However, the term ‘in their heart’ may be slightly ambiguous. However, the term itself may be considered a well-known metaphorical expression that has been used across many languages; hence, it shouldn’t pose any difficulty for readers when they stumble upon the term.

### 5.4.3

*“Why do you reason about these things in your hearts?” (NKJV)*

*“Why are you thinking these things (NIV)*

The comparison above is similar to the points mentioned in the previous analysis. The line from the NKJV was rated with 2.12 m, which was considered easy to prepare, and the line from the NIV was rated with 1.38, which was also considered easy and easier in comparison.

The NKJV Bible again uses the word ‘reason’ as a verb to describe someone who was thinking or debating about something with themselves. However, it was shown that by removing the adverb ‘thus’, the sentence has become slightly easier to comprehend. And the utilization of the most common metaphorical expression, ‘in your hearts’, may have helped readers comprehend the context easier.

The NIV Bible, on the other hand, utilizes more straightforward and literal writing, which again replaces the verb ‘reason’ with the simpler term ‘thinking’. Hence, the sentence can easily be understood by readers without the necessity of high English proficiency.



#### 5.4.4

**Immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went out in the presence of them all... (NKJV)**

**He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. (NIV)**

For this comparison, the main context is about the paralyzed man who got healed by Jesus, and he stood up and walked away from the crowd as he was commanded by Jesus to do so. The language used in the NKJV Bible to describe the context is rated at 2.22 m, which again implies that the language used is deemed easy to read by the respondents. The language used within the NIV Bible was for the first time rated at 2 m, despite being still considered an easy-to-read category.

In the sentence constructed by the NKJV Bible, it was again shown that it was written in a more formal and archaic style of writing. Especially the phrase ‘Immediately he arose, took up the bed...’, which is a direct copy from the KJV Bible. The word ‘arose’ is rather formal in the sense that it is only commonly used in formal or a more poetic style of writing. The phrase ‘took up the bed’ may be confusing for some readers. From a contemporary English perspective, the word ‘bed’ would refer to an entire piece of furniture for sleeping. In this case, it may be unrealistic to simply imply that the subject, in context, just took the bed up and walked away. According to the King James Bible Dictionary, the term ‘bed’ in a Jewish setting was to describe a platform for sleeping, which mostly consisted of a coverlet, a mattress, or even a mere mat. This suggested that readers would need to have a certain level of historical biblical knowledge in order to make sense of this phrase. The NIV Bible, on the other hand, gave a more literal word to describe the object the person took up, which is the word ‘mat’ without any hidden context.

In describing the subject walking away from the crowd, the NKJV Bible uses a formal style of writing by using the phrase ‘presence of them all’ to describe the subject walking away from the crowd. The NIV Bible was more literal in describing the event by using the phrase ‘full view of them all’. This would be able to clarify that not only was he walking away from the crowd, but it also implies that the crowd was watching him as he walked away as well. But the style of language used in the NIV Bible is rather unusual and uncommon. Although it may not be a formal style of writing, it is an unorthodox form of speech as well. Hence, it may cause some level of confusion for readers.

## **5.5 Engagement**

According to the data shown in Table 5, both the NKJV and NIV Bibles were rated at 3.5 m and 3.68 m, respectively. The scores indicate that both translations are found engaging to read amongst the respondents, who represent Christians in Malaysia. Despite both translations being labeled as engaging, the NIV Bible has a slight advantage over the NKJV.

This may be influenced by the simpler language and the thought-for-thought translation utilized by the NIV Bible. Since the NIV Bible prioritizes translating the meaning or context of the scriptures, it would be able to provide more clarity and certainty upon reading the passages written within. Especially in Malaysia’s context, where the English proficiency amongst the population is not as advanced as in other countries with English as their native language, The English language used in the NIV Bible has the intention of reaching the general English-speaking population around the world by utilizing updated or contemporary language and focusing on translating the context of the scriptures (Zondervan, 2020). According to one of the respondents selected for the qualitative data, he stated that the NIV Bible actually provides better clarity to the

overall context because the way it describes things is more literal in comparison to the NKJV Bible, and it is easy to read as well.

The NKJV Bible, on the other hand, is still rated as engaging to read, and this may be due to the influence of the KJV Bible and the perseverance of some of the linguistic elements and styles that are also derived from the KJV Bible. What makes the NKJV Bible engaging, according to one respondent from the qualitative session, is that it allows lateral thinking due to the word-for-word translation. In which the passage must be slowly read and analyzed for readers to grasp the context of the passage. Hence, it allows readers to have more room to explore the details or hidden meaning of each word used in the NKJV Bible and ultimately creates more engagement. However, casual readers might find this particular method difficult or just merely not as interested in minor details; hence, the NIV Bible still retains the upper hand when it comes to engagement level.

## **5.6 Conclusion**

In conclusion, in order to examine the overall readability between the NKJV and NIV amongst Christians in Malaysia and to investigate the factors that influence the readability between both translations of Mark 2:1–12, the NIV Bible has proven to be easier to read and comprehend in comparison to the NKJV Bible. Amongst the factors that led to the result was mainly the different linguistic styles of writing utilized by each translation, respectively. The NIV Bible utilizes a more straightforward and contemporary style of syntax construction and the choice of vocabulary to allow modern readers to understand the context easier, while the NKJV Bible preserves the archaic and poetic nature of writing from its predecessor KJV to allow a more traditional approach for readers to study the scripture.

Despite the differences in readability between both translations, it was also shown that both translations possess their own pros and cons, respectively. The implication of the study is that Christians in Malaysia should not be fixated on only one translation in terms of utilizing it for reading or teaching purposes. The study would suggest Christians explore both translations with an open mind by utilizing the pros that are provided by any translation at all so that readers can get benefits from both sides.

### **5.6.1 Limitations and recommendations**

The limitation of this study includes a potential bias that might influence the respondent's rating of the difficulties between both the NKJV and NIV Bible. Within the Christian community, there are several factors that may come into play in influencing how Christians perceive different Bible translations, such as denomination, personal agenda, and doctrine.

Which brings us to another point about the lack of background research on the respondent's background before the sample selection. Despite the effort to limit the sample demography to only Christians from the English-speaking brethren churches, the personal experience of each respondent was not evaluated before the selection, which may affect the result of obtaining the readability score between both translations. For example, some respondents might have grown up with the NKJV Bible, and that person may have already become accustomed to the language used by the translation itself; thus, he may not find the NKJV Bible harder than the NIV Bible, despite the fact that it should be.

Finally, the passage selected for this research may be too limited, allowing only a limited number of linguistic effects that influence both the translation's readability.

### **5.6.2 Recommendation**

By acknowledging the limitations of this research, there are a few recommendations that must be considered to conduct further research to further address the issues.

The first recommendation is to diversify the respondent's demography selected for the quantitative research, which involves including non-Christians. Non-Christians have no personal agenda or any scriptural doctrinal influence when it comes to reading the scripture. Hence, the data obtained may avoid any potential bias that may influence the objective rating of the difficulty itself.

The second recommendation is to conduct further research on how the environmental background may be a factor that may influence the readability of certain materials. In this case, research studies how the background of Christians may come into play in influencing their readability's perception of different Bible translations.

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## APPENDIX

### Quantitative questionnaires

#### Consent

1) I agree to the terms and consent to participate in this survey.

a. yes

b. no

#### Demography questions

1) Name \_\_\_\_\_

2) Age \_\_\_\_\_

3) Email \_\_\_\_\_

4) Age \_\_\_\_\_

#### Section A

New King James Version (NKJV) Bible. Kindly read through the passage below.

**1** And again He entered Capernaum after *some* days, and it was heard that He was in the house. **2** [a]Immediately many gathered together, so that there was no longer room to receive *them*, not even near the door. And He preached the word to them. **3** Then they came to Him, bringing a **paralytic** who was carried by four *men*. **4** And when they could not come near Him because of the crowd, they uncovered the roof where He was. So when they had broken through, they let down the bed on which the paralytic was lying.

**5** When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, "**Son, your sins are forgiven you.**"

**6** And some of the **scribes** were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, **7** “Why does this *Man* speak blasphemies like this? Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

**8** But immediately, when Jesus perceived in His spirit that **they reasoned thus within themselves**, He said to them, “**Why do you reason about these things in your hearts?** **9** Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘*Your sins are forgiven you*,’ or to say, ‘Arise, take up your bed and walk?’ **10** But that you may know that the Son of Man has [b]power on earth to forgive sins”—He said to the paralytic, **11** “I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.” **12 Immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went out in the presence of them all**, so that all were amazed and glorified God, saying, “We never saw *anything* like this!”

1. Very Easy 2. Easy 3. Not sure 4. Hard 5. Very Hard

1. How easy was it to understand the passage given above?
2. On a scale of 1 to 5, rate the difficulties of the word shown below. (paralytic)
3. On a scale of 1 to 5, rate the difficulties of the word shown below. (scribes)
4. On a scale of 1 to 5, how easy do you find to understand the following phrase? (“Son, your sins are forgiven you.”)
5. On a scale of 1 to 5, how easy do you find to understand the following phrase?  
(...reasoned thus within themselves,)
6. On a scale of 1 to 5, how easy do you find to understand the following phrase? (“Why do you reason about these things in your hearts?”)
7. On a scale of 1 to 5, how easy do you find to understand the following sentence?  
(Immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went out in the presence of them all,...)
8. On a scale of 1 to 5, how much do you find the passage above engaging to read?

## Section B

New International Version (NIV) Bible. Kindly read through the passage below.

**1** A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. **2** They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. **3** Some men came, bringing to him a **paralyzed**

**man**, carried by four of them. **4** Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on. **5** When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, “**Son, your sins are forgiven.**”

**6** Now some **teachers of the law** were sitting there, thinking to themselves, **7** “Why does this fellow talk like that? He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

**8** Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was **what they were thinking in their hearts**, and he said to them, “**Why are you thinking these things?** **9** Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, take your mat and walk’? **10** But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” So he said to the man, **11** “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.” **12 He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all.** This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this!”

1. Very Easy 2. Easy 3. Not sure 4. Hard 5. Very Hard

1. How easy was it to understand the passage given above?
2. On a scale of 1 to 5, rate the difficulties of the word used below. (paralyzed man)
3. On a scale of 1 to 5, rate the difficulties of the word used below. (teachers of the law)
4. On a scale of 1 to 5, how easy do you find to understand the following phrase? (“Son, your sins are forgiven.”)
5. On a scale of 1 to 5, how easy do you find to understand the following phrase? (...what they were thinking in their hearts,)
6. On a scale of 1 to 5, how easy do you find to understand the following phrase? (“Why are you thinking these things?”)
7. On a scale of 1 to 5, how easy do you find to understand the following sentence? (He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all.)
8. On a scale of 1 to 5, how much do you find the passage above engaging to read?

## Section C

This section evaluates your personal opinion after reading both versions of the passage.

1. Which version help you have a better understanding towards the overall context? (NKJV / NIV)
2. Which version would you prefer personally? (NKJV / NIV)
3. Which version would you recommend to someone with no prior Bible knowledge? (NKJV / NIV)

### **Quantitative questionnaire**

- 1) Which version do you find it easier to understand the context and why?
- 2) In your own opinion, what do you think makes the passage difficult to understand for NKJV?
- 3) In your own opinion, what do you think makes the passage difficult to understand for NIV?
- 4) In NKJV, can you point out which part of the passages that you found challenging to understand
- 5) In NIV, can you point out which part of the passages that you found challenging to understand
- 6) Which version would you prefer and why?