

Why Don't the Quotations Match?

Astute Bible readers sometimes note that Old Testament passages quoted in the Letter to the Hebrews do not quite match what is actually said in the Old Testament itself. For example:

Psalm 8:5: "lower than God"

Hebrews 2:7: "lower than the angels"

The Letter to the Hebrews regularly quotes from the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Old Testament. Almost all modern Bibles contain translations of the Old Testament done from the Hebrew, not from the Septuagint (so as not to produce a translation of a translation).

The Hebrew word in Psalm 8:5 is *elohim*, which usually means "God," though it might sometimes mean "angels." Almost all Bible translators have thought that the psalmist intended the word to mean "God," and almost all English Bibles translate Psalm 8:5 as "lower than God." The Septuagint, however, translates *elohim* with the Greek word for "angels" in this one verse, and the author of Hebrews relied on that somewhat idiosyncratic translation in making his point.

Something similar happens a number of other times in the letter. For example, in Psalm 40:6 we read "you have given me an open ear" in modern translations of the Old Testament, but Hebrews 10:5 follows a Septuagint reading in quoting the text as "a body you have prepared for me."