

“Jesus Wept”

John 11:35

The shortest verse in the English Bible, “Jesus wept,” would not seem a likely candidate for further study. However, a little research reveals some interesting details.

³¹ Then the Jews who were with her in the house, and consoling her, when they saw that Mary got up quickly and went out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb **to weep** there. ³² Therefore, when Mary came where Jesus was, she saw Him, and fell at His feet, saying to Him, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.” ³³ When Jesus therefore saw her **weeping**, and the Jews who came with her *also weeping*, He was deeply moved in spirit and was troubled, ³⁴ and said, “Where have you laid him?” They *said to Him, “Lord, come and see.” ³⁵ Jesus **wept**. (NASB)

Looking up a single verse on www.BibleGateway.com includes the option to see the verse “in all English translations” (or at least in the fifty-plus that are included on the BibleGateway site). Scanning down the list of translations included above shows remarkable consistency with a few surprising exceptions. Thirty-six of the fifty-two translations preserve the simple, familiar wording. Eleven change the word to the more mundane “cried” or “cry,” and a few seem to embellish the meaning: “burst into tears.”

KJ21	Jesus wept	ISV	Jesus burst into tears.	NIV	Jesus wept.
ASV	Jesus wept	PHILLIPS	and at this Jesus himself wept.	NIVUK	Jesus wept.
AMP	Jesus wept	JUB	Jesus wept.	NKJV	Jesus wept.
AMPC	Jesus wept	KJV	Jesus wept.	NLV	Then Jesus cried.
BRG	Jesus wept	AKJV	Jesus wept.	NLT	Then Jesus wept.
CEB	Jesus began to cry.	LEB	Jesus wept.	NRSV	Jesus began to weep.
CJB	Yeshua cried;	TLB	Tears came to Jesus' eyes.	NRSVA	Jesus began to weep.
CEV	Jesus started crying,	MSG	Now Jesus wept.	NRSVACE	Jesus began to weep.
DARBY	Jesus wept.	MEV	Jesus wept.	NRSVCE	Jesus began to weep.
DLNT	Jesus wept.	MOUNCE	Jesus burst into tears. -	OJB	Yehoshua wept.
DRA	And Jesus wept.	NOG	Yeshua cried.	RSV	Jesus wept.
ERV	Jesus cried.	NABRE	And Jesus wept.	RSVCE	Jesus wept.
ESV	Jesus wept.	NASB	Jesus wept.	VOICE	Jesus wept;
ESVUK	Jesus wept.	NCV	Jesus cried.	WEB	Jesus wept.
EXB	Jesus wept.	NET	Jesus wept.	WE	Then Jesus cried.
GNV	And Jesus wept.	NIRV	Jesus wept.	WYC	And Jesus wept.
GW	Jesus cried.			YLT	Jesus wept.
GNT	Jesus wept.				
HCSB	Jesus wept.			GNT	ἐδάκρυσεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς
ICB	Jesus cried.				

A useful and accessible tool for digging more deeply into word meanings is *Vine's Expository Dictionary* (see the footnote for publication and online details). Checking with Vine does not always uncover surprising information, but that kind of discovery happens on occasion. For example, consider the entry for “weep”:

Vine's Expository Dictionary:

WEEP, WEeping¹

1. *klaio* (κλαίω, 2799) is used of "any loud expression of grief," especially in mourning the dead, Matt. 2:18; Mark 5:38, 39; 16:10 Luke 7:13; 8:52 (twice); **John 11:31,33** (twice), 20:11 (twice), 13, 15; Acts 9:39; otherwise, e.g. in exhortations, Luke 23:28; Rom. 12:15; Jas, 4:9; 5:1; negatively, "weep not," Luke 7:13. 8:52; 23:28; Rev. 5:5 (cf. Acts 21:13); in 18:9, RV, "shall weep" (KJV, "bemoan"). See BEWAIL.

2. *dakruo* (δακρῶω, 1145), "to shed tears (*dakruon*, "a tear"), is used only of the Lord Jesus, **John 11:35**.

While both words mean "weep" the explanation given by Vine indicates significantly different nuances. *Klaio* (κλαίω) expresses a loud, almost violent emotion, while *dakruo* (δακρῶω) could be translated "teared" as in *The Living Bible* (TLB) rendering, "Tears came to Jesus' eyes" or "He teared up." The reaction of Jesus may have been much more subdued than those around Him.² Perhaps the emotions Jesus was experiencing were for reasons different from those around Him. He knew He was about to restore Lazarus to life. He knew that even physical death that was not restored was not the end for those who have life in Him. Maybe what "deeply moved" and "troubled" Him was the grief and wailing lament around Him ("when Jesus therefore saw her weeping..."). He was deeply stirred by both – the death of Lazarus and the anguish of others who did not share His confident knowledge of the hope He brought. Whatever the reason, John described the scene using a decidedly different description of the reaction of Jesus.

Why would the large majority of translators favor the same idea of "weep" or "wept" when clearly two different words are used? We can probably credit (or blame?) that tendency on William Tyndale. Tyndale produced the first English translation of the New Testament directly from a Greek text. John Wycliffe, one-hundred and fifty years before, had provided an English translation from the Latin Vulgate, the official Bible of the Roman Catholic Church at the time and the only source he had. Tyndale used the more reliable Greek text for his version.³ Many famous lines from Scripture can be traced back to Tyndale's very readable translation. Current translators are likely hesitant to change such well-known and much-loved wording.⁴

Translations from <https://www.biblegateway.com/verse/en/John%2011:35>
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¹ W.E. Vine, *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996), 670; highlighting added.

Online version at http://www.ultimatebiblelibrary.com/Vines_Expository_Dictionary.pdf

² Without more documentation one can only speculate about ISV and Mounce: "Jesus burst into tears." Presumably these translations take the aorist tense as an inceptive aorist, emphasizing the beginning of the action. But "Jesus began to cry" (CEB) or "Jesus began to weep" (NRSV, etc.) would convey that idea without the unfortunate exaggeration of "burst into tears."

³ For an extensive summary of the history of the English Bible, see <http://www.greatsite.com/timeline-english-bible-history/>

⁴ For many more examples and a great biography of Tyndale's life and martyrdom, see John Piper, *Filling up the Afflictions of Christ* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 2009); also an audio version at <http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/always-singing-one-note-a-vernacular-bible>