

The Translations of Scripture
The Revelation of God - Week 12 - Summer 2019

- The Translation of Scripture

- First off, we should justify the use of translations at all.
 - Shouldn't we only be reading Hebrew and Greek copies of Scripture?
 - ❖ Is it really God's Word if we don't?
 - ❖ Don't we lose something if we don't read the original languages?
 - While it's certainly possible to lose God's Word by incorrectly translating Scripture, the concept of translation is Scripturally affirmed.
 - ❖ The New Testament regularly quotes from the Greek version of the Old Testament, the Septuagint (LXX).
 - Yet such quotations are treated as if they were identical to the Hebrew originals.
 - God's Word, though translated, remained the same.
 - ❖ Jesus' own words are most likely translations in the form they appear in our Bibles.
 - Most of Jesus' teaching probably was originally given in Aramaic.
 - Yet Christ's words in the Gospels appear in Greek, but still keep their authority as Christ's very words.
 - ❖ Pentecost involved the Apostles speaking God's words that were miraculously translated into the many languages present that day.
 - Yet the status of those words as God's own words remained the same.
 - Translating them did not change them.
 - All of that to say: We have Scriptural support for treating our *English* Bibles as the very Word of God.
- No translation is 100% perfect.

- ▶ Every people-group should have folks that work to be experts at Biblical Hebrew and Greek.
- ▶ This will lead, over time, to better Scripture translations into the native language of that people group.
- ▶ The ability to improve translation is a large part of the reason as to why we have so many English versions of the Bible.
- ▶ It's not the only reason though...
 - ❖ Money does drive some of it...
 - ❖ A new translation equals new profits for the publishers...
 - ❖ Not all Biblical publishers are even Christian companies!
- ▶ Yet another, far more understandable reason for the prevalence of newer translations is that language changes over time.

- **Evaluating *English* Translations of Scripture**

- When it comes to evaluating English translations of the Bible, one should be aware of two schools of thought in the translation field.
 - ▶ Some publishers strive to maintain as close to a *word-for-word translation* as possible.
 - ❖ The classic examples are the ASV (KJV), NASB, and, to a slightly lesser extent, the ESV.
 - ❖ The goal of this philosophy is admirable: To preserve God's individual words as they were originally given.
 - ❖ This leads to translations that are more literal than others.
 - ❖ Yet these translations can also be less readable due to the words used and how the sentences are structured.
 - ▶ Others seek to do something which has been referred to as *thought-for-thought translation*.
 - ❖ The classic examples of these would be the NIV and NLT.

- ❖ The goal of this philosophy is to translate original words, idioms, and phrases into the equivalent versions of such things in modern English.
 - ❖ This style of translation is routinely more readable than the other style.
 - ❖ Yet this style can introduce the possibility for loss of meaning if the modern verbiage is not an accurate reflection of the original.
- ▶ There are important things to note about these two styles and the English versions that utilize them:
- ❖ First, even the most “literal”, word-for-word translation doesn’t translate *every* word literally.

Jonah 3:9 (NASB95) - “*Who knows, God may turn and relent and withdraw His burning anger so that we will not perish.*”

 - In Hebrew, the expression “burning anger” is literally “hot nose” - a Hebrew idiom for someone red-faced with rage.
 - The NASB translators realized that the expression “hot nose” would confuse many English readers.
 - So rather than render it literally, they chose to use a more common English idiom (this happens a lot!).
 - Still, they tried to keep some of it with the word “burning”.
 - ❖ Sometimes, the less literal, thought-for-thought can be more accurate *in English*.
 - The NIV translates the same verse above with “fierce anger” instead of burning.
 - Sure, the translators left the heat element of their rendering.
 - But by adding the far less literal “fierce”, they potentially preserved the threatening element.
 - ❖ But then again, thought-for-thought has its problems too.

Galatians 4:7 (NIV) - *So you are no longer a slave, but God’s child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.*

 - Every time the word “child” is used above, it’s translating the Greek word “son”.

- The NIV is making the leap to assume that Paul meant not *just* men, so they went with the English word “child”.
 - Besides, in English, it’s more natural to refer to both genders as “child” rather than “son”.
 - The problem with that decision is that it potentially clouds a key point Paul is making in the passage:
 - ★ We *all*, men and women, are treated in God’s family as the oldest Son that gets the inheritance.
 - ★ The reason for that is this we’re all seen as being in the true Heir, God’s true Son, Jesus.
 - Thought-for-thought translations can, for the sake of modern clarity, cloud original meaning (though not always!).
 - It also has to be said that thought-for-thought translations seem to be the most susceptible to the passing trends of culture.
 - ★ The 1984 NIV was a truly valuable English translation.
 - ★ The more recent TNIV switched to gender-neutral translation throughout, which really lessened its accuracy.
- Which translation should *you* use?
 - ▶ For serious study of Biblical passages, get as many translations as you can afford.
 - ▶ For general Bible reading, all are adequate, of course; but I would recommend the ESV.