

LIVING WATERS NEWSLETTER

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BIBLE TRANSLATIONS; CAN WE TRUST THEM

It is difficult to write articles that many Christians either do not believe, or have doubts about. Names have been taken off the mailing list because they did “not agree with the direction you are taking. Save your money and I’ll save time.” Or “It is always painful to see a man who has been a leader and has sacrificed for the cause of Christ destroy his reputation and influence in his senior years.” Further “the doctrine you preach is an old heresy, and it takes a very twisted hermeneutic to come up with it.” One letter stated: “I was taken aback with the position you take.” The question was also asked: “where did he learn that, certainly not in Bible College?” However these remarks have been in the minority, and for the most part people have appreciated seeing a little different slant than is usually preached in their congregations. I write this to introduce a subject that has generated strong differences of opinion among Christians, that is: translations and versions of the Bible.

First let me say that the Scriptures are indeed the Word of God and He is certainly capable of defending and preserving His Word regardless of the many doubts that might be raised by the questionable translations. Also, the men who faithfully copied the original manuscripts and the ones who have through the years translated from these copies (we have no original manuscripts) were and are indeed faithful and intelligent scholars that were and are experts in Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic, and other ancient languages. Ira Maurice Price in His book *The Ancestry of Our English Bible* stated: “Those who would translate into English the Hebrew of the Old Testament or the Greek of the New Testament, face a difficult task. They undertake to render a literature that was copied over and over again for many hundreds of years.” The early “church fathers” (scholars living in the early centuries after the death of the apostles) had much to say about manuscripts and copies of manuscripts. David W. Bercot in *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* quoted Eusebius (215 A.D.) as saying: “The heretics have boldly laid their hands upon the divine Scripture, alleging that they have corrected them...And many such copies can be obtained for their disciples were very zealous in inserting these ‘corrections’ as they call them...Nor can they deny that the crime is theirs, when the copies have been written with their own hands. Nor did they receive such copies of the Scriptures from those by whom they were first instructed in the faith, for they cannot produce the originals from which they were transcribed.”

The first translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into another language was the Greek Septuagint. Seventy scholars were brought to Alexandria, Egypt from Palestine. The work began around 280 B.C. and was completed about a hundred years later. The early church used the Old Testament, probably the Septuagint, and referred to them as “the Scriptures” when they are quoted by the N.T. writers. These quotes are found numerous times in the New Testament and Peter refers to Paul’s writings as “Scripture” (II Pet. 3:15-16) putting them on par with the writings of the Old Testament. Some of the early translations are: The Latin Vulgate (450), Wycliffe’s version (1382), the first English translation, Tyndale’s Bible (1525), The Coverdale Bible (1535), the first printed edition in English, The

Geneva Bible (1560), the first to use chapter and verse divisions, The King James Version (1611), and The Douay Version. Other translations available in English are: (this is a long list and probably not complete) The English Standard Version, Good News Bible, Holman Christian Standard Bible, J.B. Philips New Testament, The Living Bible, The Message, New American Bible, New American Standard Bible, The New International Version, The Jerusalem Bible, New King James Version, New Living Translation, New Revised Standard Version, The Orthodox Study Bible, Today’s English Version, Today’s New International Version, Berkeley Version, God’s Word for Today, Moffat’s Translation and Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible, plus other individual translations and versions too numerous to mention. There are also parallel editions of the Bible, showing three or four versions side by side. We also have both interlinear versions featuring Greek and English New Testaments side by side and Hebrew and English Old Testaments side by side. The latest version to make the scene is (very expensive) The Holy Bible In Its Original Order. Many commentaries feature the writers own translation along with their comments.

In Acts 20:27 Paul states: “I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel (or purpose) of God.” This means all things necessary for man’s salvation and life are revealed in Scripture. The Bible is a message which God wrote several centuries ago; it is precisely that and, since it is the truth of God, does not change. It is a revelation that is finished and perfect in spite of the many copies and translations it has undergone. It is true and the truth of the Bible is not something that grows and changes. In spite of whatever words may be employed by the translators, we must insist the truth of the Bible does not change with every wind of doctrine. However copyists and translators are not inspired, so their bias is indicated in their translations. This does not mean that when we question the translators we are questioning or doubting the Word of God. This is why different translations should be consulted as we study the Scriptures. How then can we know what is right? For the most part Christians are schooled by what they hear from the pulpit, and the preacher is schooled by what he hears in the Seminary classroom, and children generally believe what they have always been taught and what their parents believe. It is the task of the preacher to dig into the Word and teach them, the flock, the truth. To our shame many preachers are content to preach what they have been taught and many times this is not very much from the Bible. In today’s pulpits there is little interest in preaching anything that would shake people away from what they have always been taught. Any preacher standing against this climate is considered a threat to current church dogma and is to be avoided. For that reason considering that some translations might be wrong is never a subject given much attention.

To question certain words and ways of translation in our present editions of the Bible is not to say anyone doing this is disparaging these scholarly men. Rather it is right to seriously consider the accurateness of any translation since there are so many different ones available today. Plus the fact that any deep study of the Word will result in questioning certain translations of one passage when compared with other passages.

Consider some thoughts on some passages where the translation might be called in question. There are many passages where words are missing in the original language but obviously understood and must be supplied by the translators in order to complete the thought of the passage. In most editions these words are in *italics* showing they were supplied by the translators. Some examples: Rom. 12:1 “present our bodies to God *which* is your reasonable service...” The NASV adds: service “of worship”, I Cor. 12:1: “Now concerning spiritual *gifts*...” the word is simply “spirituals”. I Cor. 2:13: “...which things we speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit combining spiritual *thoughts* with spiritual *words*” (NASV). There are many small words inserted by *italics* in the Gospels. Some examples from Luke 19: (KJV) Ver 1: “And *Jesus* entered and passed through Jericho” Ver 2: “And, behold, *there was* a man named Zachaeus” Ver 4: “for he was to pass that *way*” Ver 8: “I restore *him* fourfold” Ver 20 “behold *here is* thy pound” Ver 27: “at the mount called *the mount* of Olives” ver 30: “loose him, and bring *him hither*” Ver 42: “the things *which belong* unto thy peace”.

Sometimes adding a small word or omitting a word can result in a false understanding of what the original text intended. Also sometimes a word is inserted or omitted due to the bias of the translator. An example of this is the small Greek term *εγω εμι* (I am). This term is used in John 8:58: “Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you before Abraham was born, I AM.” This has been taken, and understood by translators, to mean Jesus was applying the name of God to himself, (“And God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM’ and He Said, ‘Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you’”) saying he was the Jehovah (I AM) of the Old Testament. The inconsistency and bias of the translators is seen when the same term (I am) is used throughout the Gospels and the translators always add (in *italics*) the word “*he*”, that is “I am he, the Messiah (Christ).” John 8:58 is the only place they capitalize the words “I AM”. (It is the discretion of the translators to capitalize one word over another). Note the many times where the same word (I am) is used and is never capitalized, and the word *he* is always added: John 4:25,26: “The woman saith unto him, ‘I know that Messiah comes, which is called Christ, when he is come he will tell us all things.’ Jesus saith unto her, ‘I that speak unto you am *he*’” John 8:24, 28: “I said therefore to you, that you shall die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am *he*, you shall die in your sins...When you lift up the Son of man, then you will know that I am *he*”. John 13:19: “From now on I am telling you before it comes to pass, so that when it does occur, you may believe that I am *he*.” John 18:5,6 in answering Jesus’ question “whom do you seek?” “They answered him, ‘Jesus the Nazarene.’ he said to them, ‘I am *he*’...When therefore he said to them, ‘I am *he*,’ they drew back and fell on the ground.” Ver 8: “Jesus answered, “I told you that ‘I am *he*, if therefore you seek me, let these go their way.” John 6:20 is translated: “He said to them, ‘It is I; do not be afraid.’” The literal translation is “He says unto them, ‘I am’ fear ye not”. “I am” is translated “it is I” in Matt. 14:27 and Mark 6:50. The Disciples used the phrase “Not ‘I am’ Lord” (Matt. 26:22, 25).

All these Scriptures use the same term used in John 8:58 (*εγω εμι*) “I am” and in every case except John 8:58 the term *he* is added by the translators and never are they capitalized. Even if one believes Jesus is the Jehovah of the Old Testament, they

must concede there is translator inconsistency and bias in this passage. If Jesus is saying He is “I AM” as the term used in God speaking to Moses, (used 6,399 times in the O.T.) then He is the Jehovah of the Old Testament. If this is true, then anywhere and everywhere the word “Jehovah” (LORD) is used, it must refer to Jesus. This just doesn’t make sense. In all the passages cited above Jesus is declaring He is the Messiah (Christ) not trying to convince them He is Jehovah.

When we consider the fact that there are no original manuscripts in existence and the oldest manuscripts are copies of the original, and note the multitude of different translations available today that may have questionable interpretations, we may ask the question posed as the title of this article; can we trust the Bible translations today? To answer that question I would like to quote Dr. Henry Halley’s words from the *Halley’s Bible Handbook* which was first published in 1924 and has gone through hundreds of editions resulting in over 1,200,000 copies printed since first introduced. It states: “Apart from any theory of inspiration; or any theory of how the Bible books came to their present form or how much the text may have suffered in transmission and translation at the hands of editors and copyists; apart from the question of how much is to be historical and what may be poetical; if we will assume that the Bible is just what it appears to be, and study its books to know their contents, we will find a unity of thought indicating that One Mind inspired the writing and compilation of the whole series of books; that it bears the stamp of its Author; that it is in a unique and distinctive sense THE WORD OF GOD...It may be that some Bible utterances are ‘ancient thought-forms’ for ideas that would now be expressed in a different way; for they were expressed in language of ancient times. But even so, the Bible contains precisely the things that God wants mankind to know, in exactly the form in which He wants us to know them. The Bible will remain the one and only answer to humanity’s quest for God” As N.T. Wright states in his book *Surprised by Hope* “When we read the Scriptures we must remind ourselves that these are the documents designed to shape and direct the community of the new covenant, the people who were called to take forward the work of new creation. As we read Revelation, we must not allow the wonderful heavenly vision in chapters 4 and 5 lull us into imagining that this is the *final* scene in the story, as though the narrative were simple to conclude with the redeemed casting their crowns before the throne. This is a vision of *present* reality, seen in its heavenly dimension. We must read on to the end, to the final vision or Revelation 21 and 22, the chapters that give final meaning to all that has gone before.”

The problem we are facing today is not a lack of the availability of Scripture but is the fact that the words of God to Israel through His prophet Amos, have come to pass in our day: “Behold the days are coming, declares the Lord God when I will send a famine on the land, not a famine for bread or thirst for water, but rather for hearing the word of the Lord” (Amos 8:11). The evidence of this famine is seen today in the fact that in the modern church we have substituted programs and methodologies for the preaching of the Word of God. Contemporary Christians are no longer a people of the Word. A solid sense of the truth is sadly lacking in many of our pulpits today. We are attracted by movements that have replaced Biblical standards with a theology of therapeutic, charismatic and managerial emphasis. The neglect of the Word of God is the famine we are facing today.

