

## The Bible Version We Choose Is Important

'We have the sure word of prophecy and you do well to heed it like a lamp shining in a dark place until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. Understand this first, no prophecy of Scripture is of private interpretation, for no prophecy ever came by the will of man but as holy men of God spoke being moved by the Holy Spirit' (2 Peter 1:19 to 21).

'Whoever hears the Words of God knows the knowledge of the Most High and whoever sees the vision of the Almighty will have his (spiritual) eyes open' (Numbers 24:16).

'Listen to the statutes and to the ordinances that I teach you, to do them so you may live ... You will not add to the Word that I command you, neither will you diminish from it, so you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God' (Deuteronomy 4:1 & 2).

'Every Word of God is flawless. He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him. Do not add to His words lest He reprove you and you be found a liar' (Proverbs 30:5 & 6).

'I testify to everyone who hears the Words of the prophecy of this Book. If anyone adds to them, may God add to them the plagues that are written in this Book. If anyone takes away from the Words of the Book of this prophecy, may God take away their part from the Tree of Life and out of the holy city, which are written in this Book' (Revelation 22:18 & 19).

The entire Bible was written by several Jewish people who lived over a vast period of time, within the Jewish culture and laws, they usually lived in Israel, ate kosher food, worshipped God, spoke Hebrew and honoured the written Word of God. After Jesus established the new church about 2,000 years ago, the apostles went out to preach to Gentiles outside Israel who did not speak Hebrew so the apostles' writings needed to be translated into various languages. Reading a translation is in reality reading an interpretation. Learning a new language takes years and it is not practical for everyone to be able to read the Bible in Hebrew, its original language. If we read modern versions of the Bible, we may be surprised at how different the translations are. There is a vast difference between translation and transliteration. There are always nuances of speech in every language that make no sense in a different language and that also applies to the original Biblical language of Hebrew. There are many words, nuances, phrases, idioms, culture and examples that cannot be translated into English without losing some of the original meaning. The original Hebrew writings were written by the Lord's prophets and later, by Jewish apostles who conveyed the exact information God desired to impart to His people. Initially, all the disciples called by God were Jewish but later on, Gentiles became involved and were called Christians (Acts 11:26). The Lord would not allow His holy Word to be written in any language except His chosen language of Hebrew or a very similar language, Aramaic, nor would He allow His Word to be written by someone from a pagan nation. Any translation in another language has been translated from Hebrew or Aramaic. The Lord chose and trusted only the Hebrew people, later called Jews, to bring His Word and His oracles to the world (Acts 7:38; Romans 3:2). That mandate did not change after Jesus came. All the New Testament writers were Jewish men. No other country, race or nation has been asked to write down the oracles and laws of God. After Gentiles became believers, they copied what the Jewish writers had already written. No Gentile nation was ever given authority to write God's Word. That was the mandate given solely to the descendants of Abraham through the bloodline of Isaac and Jacob. The Lord wants all people on earth to know His thoughts, ways and words so He chose many Jews and Gentiles to continue the work Jesus had begun, using the Bible that had already been written but they were not allowed to add to, nor subtract from the original writings as we can read in the opening verses. Sometimes word for word translations are impossible when we consider the different characters and language between Hebrew and English. That is why some versions of the Bible have used paraphrases or different thoughts than what God intended.

Certainly, the message of salvation through the blood and cross of Jesus can be easily translated and understood but many times the translators, especially if they are English speaking people who happen to know Hebrew, blur the lines between translation and personal interpretation. Some translators take liberties with the Word of God and add their own ideas to what is being said according to their own personal religious bias. Also, because every author has their own writing style, nuances in the Hebrew language can be lost. When we teach from the scriptures, we need to adhere as closely to the original text as we can. We do need to keep in mind, the Bible is God's Word to humanity and He has guarded His thoughts and Word to ensure as many people as possible can hear the salvation message as He intended. Further to the salvation message is God's instructions for righteous lives for all mankind. People who follow God, follow the Bible, but the greater majority of humanity ignore God's Word. God wants us to behave in a Godly way and the Word of God gives us all the knowledge we need to live for Him in a way that is pleasing to Him as we grow in Him, which is akin to our earthly parents being proud of our achievements as we grew up.

There are many different versions of the Bible in hundreds of languages. We are writing this in English so we will compare Psalm 139:5 in a few translations so the reader will understand exactly what we are trying to relay. "Thou hast beset me behind and before and laid Thine hand upon me."

"You hem me in behind and before. You laid Your hand on me."

"You have beset me and shut me in – behind and before and You have laid Your hand upon me."

"You hem me in behind and before and lay Your hand upon me."

"You are all around me on every side, You protect me with Your power."

"You keep close guard behind and before me and place Your hand upon me."

"You both precede and follow me. You place Your hand of blessing upon me."

"With Your powerful arm you protect me from every side."

"You have closed me in behind and before and laid Your hand upon me."

"You have hemmed me in both behind and in front and laid Your hand on me."

In Hebrew this verse reads, "Behind and before You besiege me and You are setting on me palm of You." When we read all of these different translations, we can see how the original Hebrew is diminished in favour of the opinion of the various translators. The translators wrote what they thought God was thinking. As we consider the above verses, we can imagine God hemming or hedging us in, surrounding us, being behind us and in front of us, protecting us with His holy hand in almost siege-like conditions. Two verses in Job back up this thought. 'You (God) made a hedge around him (Job), around his house and around all that he has on every side. You have blessed the work of his hands and his substance is increased in the land ... Why is light given to a man whose way is hidden (in God), whom God has hedged in?' (Job 1:10; 3:23). We can see this verse means, God protects us from every angle and keeps His hand on us at all times. Translators withheld some of the actual original words, choosing instead their own words to express what they thought God meant. This kind of translation makes it difficult for Christians to know what the Bible actually says in the original texts.

An example of being 'lost in translation' is the act of giving. In English, giving to charities, aid or alms is usually considered an act of 'feel-good' obligation. In Hebrew, the word is 'tzedakah' which means an act of fairness, justice or righteousness. For the Jewish person, giving is an expression of gratitude for what God has given to them. It is also the acknowledgement of us all being created in the image of God so we should share what we have. It is scripture in action. In English, 'Praise the Lord! Blessed is the man who fears God, who delights greatly in His commandments ... He has distributed (his wealth), he has given to the poor, his righteousness endures forever, his wife will be exalted with honour' (Psalm 112:1 & 9). In Hebrew, 'Praise Yah! Happy man fearing Yah! He delights exceedingly in Yah's instructions to him ... He disperses (his wealth), he gives to the needy ones, the righteousness of him is standing to the future, his horn (wife) will be exalted in glory'.

Another verse of many verses differing in translation is this one, firstly in Hebrew; "You will not avenge and not be resentful with the sons of the people of you. You will love to associate with people like you" (Leviticus 19:18). In English; 'You will not take revenge nor bear any grudge against the children of your people. You will love your neighbour as yourself'. Loving one's neighbour and loving to associate with them are quite different. Loving our neighbour is being kind to them even when they are being rude, unkind or persecuting us. We do not like to associate with people who are unkind to us, so we can see the difference in the original Hebrew and the translation of this verse. There are thousands of verses that differ in their meaning just like this one.

The original Hebrew Bible is completely without error. It is exact, precise, God breathed and in some cases, dictated by God Himself to the various prophets. God said several times to His prophets, "Write this down ..." God said to Moses, "Write this for a memorial in a book" ... "Chisel two stone tablets like the first and I will write on the tablets the words that were on the first tablets" ... "Write these words, 'In accordance with these words, I have made a covenant with you and with Israel'" (Exodus 17:14; 34:1 & 27). There are other examples where God told the prophets what to write and since those words came from the Lord God Himself, it is 100% accurate. The Bible is trustworthy and God's truth is in every page. Over the centuries, the Lord has carefully kept His Word as true to the original as is possible when we consider the differences in languages, language characters, nuances in speech, idioms, cultures, translators, spiritual aspects, changes in attitudes over time and all manner of changes that take place in humanity globally. However, if we want the original thoughts of God as He dictated to the prophets, we need to return to the Hebrew Bible. There are excellent versions of Hebrew to English, or Hebrew to other languages. Those Bibles are always the best ones to study. The Jewish people are the ones who know the Bible better than anyone and the Jewish scribes have been careful to preserve God's sacred Word. They pay careful attention to tiny nuances on the Hebrew characters of their language. If anyone wants to translate the Bible and keep it without error, the translators themselves must believe the scriptures are utterly inerrant or they might deviate from the original

text. When we compare the 2,000 year-old Book of Isaiah that is kept in a museum in Jerusalem, it is almost exactly the same as modern translations of the Hebrew Bible.

There have been translators who have rewritten the Bible as a history book and have removed from it the genuine spiritual connotations hidden in the pages. The Bible is a spiritual book written for spiritually minded people who are able to discern the things of God. What is written is foolishness to ungodly people who cannot understand what God is saying. 'The natural man does not receive the things of God's Holy Spirit, for they are foolishness to him and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned' (1 Corinthians 2:14).

When we pray, we speak to God. When we read the Bible, that is God speaking to us. We need to know what God thinks about what is going on in our lives and there is a scripture verse for almost every situation known to mankind. The Bible is not just a book, it is a living entity. Jesus Himself is the Word of God so if we minimise the importance of the Bible, we minimise the importance of our Faithful, True, Saviour, King, Lord and ultimately, our Judge. Jesus is our real Commander and Chief, the ruler of the earth, all humanity and all the holy angels and other heavenly beings. 'I (Apostle John) saw the heaven opened and behold a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True. In righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes are a flame of fire and on His head are many crowns. He has names written and a name written which no one knows but He Himself. He is clothed in a garment sprinkled with (His own) blood. His name is called "The Word of God." The armies (of holy angels) in heaven followed Him on white horses clothed in pure white fine linen. Out of His mouth proceeds a sharp, double-edged sword (the Bible), with it He should strike the nations. He will rule them with a rod of iron. He treads the winepress of the fierceness of the wrath of God the Almighty. He has on His garment and on His thigh a name written, "KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS" (Revelation 19:11 to 16). We should never ever minimise the spiritual importance of the Bible. It is the one and only illuminated pathway to eternal life with our Lord and Saviour.

When people depart from the true interpretation of the Bible, heresies creep in, anti-Semitism arises, the Gospel becomes watered down and warped, people lose the powerful impact of the Words of God, their relationship with the Saviour is so minimised, all kinds of sin and worldliness are accepted and considered normal. Those 'watered-down' Christians rarely hear the quiet whisper of the Holy Spirit and they resent the genuine believers and disciples who are deeply committed. The genuine believers and modern-day disciples can easily understand the Bible, but the Christians who believe in fables like the 'Replacement Theology', the 'Rapture theory', the 'Prosperity Teaching', who celebrate Christmas and Easter (known as 'Chreasters') instead of the holy feasts of the Lord, and who believe other heresies are the ones who have difficulty understanding deeper meanings in the Bible. They gloss over what they do not want to hear and often openly ignore God's opinion of sin and will only listen to a weak 'watery' form of the Gospel, not true doctrine. The Lord warned us, people like them would come. 'The time will come when they will not listen to sound doctrine but having itching ears, will heap up for themselves teachers after their own desires and will turn away their ears from the truth and turn aside to fables' (2 Timothy 4:3 & 4). One example of heresy is the belief Jesus was a 'Palestinian' or Arab. Jesus was a Jewish Man, the Holy One of Israel, the Son of God, born in Israel to a Jewish family within the Jewish culture, He spoke Hebrew and followed all the Laws of Moses down to the letter. There was not one drop of Arab blood in Him.

The salvation message is very easy to understand. However, the deeper things like the prophetic actions recorded in the Old Testament are hard for non-spiritual people to understand or to link them with our Saviour. Many people cannot understand prophetic actions like the near-sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis 22:1 to 13) that gives us a 'picture' of the sacrifice of Jesus, or the pillars of cloud and fire sent to the Children of Israel that can be linked to Jesus, or the shape of the tabernacle in the shape of a cross can be missed by people who minimise the Bible. The blood of the sacrificial lamb at Passover and the death of our Sacrificial Lamb of God at Passover are often missed. To be able to understand what God is saying to us, we need a heart-felt, strong relationship with Him so we can have our spiritual eyes opened to the truth. The entire Bible is there to teach us about God, to guide us through life and to help us serve God. 'Every Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, reproof, correction and instruction in righteousness so the man (or woman) of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work' (2 Timothy 3:16 & 17).

The Word of God washes us spiritually and will change our lives if we study it enough. Jesus came to start the new church and to sanctify it. 'Jesus loved the assembly or church and gave Himself up for it so He might sanctify it, having cleansed it by the washing of water with the Word' (Ephesians 5:25 & 26). It is sad when people view the Bible as a 'good book' rather than the living Words of God. By minimising the Words of God, people cannot comprehend the fulfilments of scriptural prophecies regarding Jesus, Israel becoming a nation again and the return of the Jewish people to Israel. The 'minimisers' cannot see the hand of God in this resounding miracle. The fact that the Jewish people have not been assimilated into the countries where they were scattered is an enormous miracle in itself. Jewish people have remained Jewish in their faith, beliefs,

culture and in some cases, their ancient language of Hebrew, wherever they were living. If people cannot see that miracle, then they would have to be spiritually blind. God is fulfilling His ancient promises to the Jewish people and it is happening right now in our lifetime.

Fewer people read the Bible in our day than in times past. The erroneous lie of evolution has played a huge part in that, because evolution removes God from the equation and if God is ignored then people feel they are free to believe and do whatever they choose. When we remove our Creator, people no longer feel they need to acknowledge God and many people pretend He does not exist, which means they do not want to adhere to the Bible. These people remove the constraints of obedience to the Bible and live their own lives, which in turn has resulted in the breakdown of marriage and society as a whole. Bible scholars have written easy-to-understand paraphrased versions of the Bible but unfortunately, the paraphrases weaken the powerful truth of God's Word. Some translators think the Bible is full of errors. They are wrong of course because the true Bible is the infallible Words of God. We are living in an age where absolute truth is under attack and has been replaced with 'relative' truth or truth according to the individual, so therefore the absolute truth of the Bible is undermined. Sin is more tolerated and the fear of the Lord has been replaced with a blasé attitude. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10). When people do not fear the Lord, that is to hold Him in the highest regard knowing all too well He is our Judge, then those people are foolish. Common sense tells us we need to fear the Lord. It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the Living God (Hebrews 10:31), unless we are washed, cleansed, justified and forgiven by accepting the blood of Jesus then it is a mighty blessing to be in His adoring hands.

The truth of the Bible reveals to us, fear of the Lord is critical to our relation with Him (Psalm 61:5). Our overall behaviour is determined by our deep understanding of the fact, God is not only watching our every move (Proverbs 15:3), He listens to every word we utter (Matthew 12:36 & 37), He knows our thoughts (Psalm 139:2) and He writes down in His books everything we do and say. Those books will be opened on Judgement Day and we will be judged accordingly (Daniel 7:10; Revelation 20:12). That knowledge should be enough to make people shudder. Many people do not like to talk about God's judgement and various versions of the Bible minimise the concept. The version of the Bible we choose to study should produce spiritual fruit and a holy change in our lives. Here are some examples of changes that should occur when we regularly study our Bibles. We should be honest in all our dealings with people. For example, do we return change to a cashier if we are inadvertently given too much? That may seem a small thing but God sees! Our manner of speech should not be like that of the world. When a nasty neighbour provokes us, do we react with anger or turn the other cheek and pray for them? Does the Bible we choose speak strongly against sin like homosexuality, prostitution, idolatry, witchcraft, the occult or violence, all of which are abominations to God?

If the Bible you choose to read waters down the power of God or minimises sin then it is not a good translation to use. God has His opinion regarding sin and He has spoken. It is up to us to listen and we can only hear from God when the Word of God we use is correct. God is a holy and righteous Judge and will judge all people according to how we live our lives and if a Bible is watered down, people may take that as meaning sin is acceptable. Sin is never acceptable. We are called to be holy (1 Peter 1:16), righteous, Godly, faithful, loving, patient, gentle (1 Timothy 6:11), perfect towards God (Deuteronomy 18:13), to behave in a holy manner like our Mentor and Judge, the Lord Jesus our Messiah. 'Just as He Who called you is holy, you yourselves must be holy in all of your behaviour' (1 Peter 1:15). 'Let your manner of life be worthy of the Gospel of Jesus' (Philippians 1:27). Jesus did not preach a watery Gospel. He preached a Gospel full of life and power. He preached sermons that were so powerful, people became convicted of sin, they were offended and walked out (John 6:66). Jesus preached about the Kingdom of God where only righteous people will dwell. He taught us the vast difference between being 'fans' and following Him because He does kind things, and loving Him so much we commit our lives entirely to Him. We are to have a Bible that also teaches power and righteousness and focuses on His sacrifice, His blood and the cross. Until the full Gospel of the Kingdom is preached worldwide, Jesus will not come. He said, "This Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached throughout all the nations, then the end will come" (Matthew 24:14). If we want the Lord Jesus to return and sort out this crazy, sinful world, then we need to teach and preach the full, powerful Gospel Jesus gave us, not a watered down, paraphrased version of the truth. The version of the Bible we choose to study is very important. 'He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I come quickly." Amen! Yes come, Lord Jesus' (Revelation 22:20).

Amen and God bless you.

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