

Standing on the Word, Part 2

We are in the middle of a three-part series on the Bible. Our focus today is Bible translations, and next week will focus on how God's Word changes us. (If you want my manuscript for the sermon or the powerpoint or an overview of this week and last, visit the website resource page.) Last week I promised to review some important truths. Here is a bit of review: we looked at the evidence for the canon and the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture.

1. Evidence for the canon (the list of books in the Bible)

-Our evidence can be broken down into these three points. All three are important to knowing what books are in the Bible.

- a. Historical evidence (from writings outside the Bible)
- b. Biblical evidence (texts from the Bible itself)
- c. Intrinsic evidence (the nature and effect of Scripture)

2. Inspiration, inerrancy

-Based on the Scripture, we believe this about God's Word:

- a. We believe that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as originally written were God breathed, both verbally and in every part. We believe God, who is Truth, communicated through Spirit-controlled men so that the Scriptures are without error and therefore authoritative in all they teach and in all matters they touch. (From NLBC Statement of Faith)
- b. These are some of the main passages that form our doctrinal statement:
II Peter 1:20-21, 2 Tim 3:16-17 (memorize), John 17:17

3. Autographs (Original Writings)

- a. We believe that God inspired the original writings of Scripture. This was a supernatural process with God working through people by the Holy Spirit, so that the words they wrote were His Words.
- b. However, these original writings were copied many times by fallible people, and those people made mistakes. Today we do not have the original writings, but we have very reliable witnesses to those original writings.
- c. We believe that God used means to preserve His Word (providential preservation). His supervision in the writing of Scripture was supernatural, but does not apply to the copying of Scripture.
- d. It is important to note that the copying errors do not change the doctrine or message of the Bible.
- e. We have manuscripts that date to one hundred years after Scripture was written.

4. Transmission

-The Scriptures were copied by hand until the invention of the printing press in Europe (1440). We are going to look at what those manuscripts looked like, and then I will show you some of our oldest manuscripts of the Bible.

- a. The material of manuscripts

-Papyrus (reeds were beaten and pressed together at right angles, then dried, and polished)
-Parchment (processed animal skins)

b. The form of manuscripts

- Scrolls: sheets of parchment stitched together and rolled up
- Codex: sheets of parchment or papyrus bound as a book

c. The preservation of manuscripts

- Many manuscripts decayed over time, but thousands have been preserved. The oldest ones are found in the deserts of Israel and Egypt, where the hot dry air slowed the decaying process.

5. Manuscripts¹

- We have over 5,600 Greek manuscripts of the NT

a. Dating manuscripts

- Handwriting (paleography): scholars study the form and style of the handwriting to determine a date (within 50-100 years, depending on the time period).
- Carbon dating: the paleography is verified by carbon dating.

b. Key manuscripts

- There is a Greek fragment of Mark recently discovered that may be from the first century (the findings will be published in 2013)
- John Ryland's MS (AD 125), contains John 18:31-33 and 37-38
- Bodmer Papyrus (AD 150-200), contains a good section of John
- Chester Beatty Papyri (AD 200), contains major sections of the NT
- Codex Vaticanus (AD 325-350), most of the Bible in Greek
- Codex Sinaiticus (AD 350), half of the OT and the entire NT in Greek
- Codex Alexandrius (AD 400), most of the Bible in Greek
- Leningrad Codex (AD 1008), Complete OT in Hebrew (from the Masoretes) This is the manuscript that underlies most of our modern translations of the OT. Even though it is from AD 1000, it is a reliable witness to OT texts much older.

- c. Masoretes, 500-1000, Jewish scholars who carefully copied the Hebrew OT. The Masoretes added vowel points (to aid in pronunciation) and added notes to the margins of the text to help in accurate copying.

d. Dead Sea Scrolls

- During the tumultuous years of the forming of the state of Israel, some major archeological finds were made in what is now the west bank of Jordan. In 1947, some Bedouin shepherds discovered seven scrolls in a cave near the ruins of the ancient city of Qumran. In the following years, the Bedouin and archeologists found more scrolls in a total of 11 caves, and they were dated to the time before Christ. When the dust settled, and the area was excavated in the 1950's, thousands of fragments and many Hebrew and Aramaic manuscripts were found that date from 200 BC to AD 70. There are many biblical documents, as well as other religious documents from the Jewish group that kept these scrolls. Sections of every book of the OT except Esther were found. One of the earliest and best finds is called the Great Isaiah scroll, dated to 125 BC. This scroll is 24 feet long and contains the entire book of Isaiah (minus a few damaged sections). When compared to OT text from AD 1000, there were very few differences, mainly in spelling.

- e. Where did our current verse and chapter divisions come from? Though the OT had divisions before the time of Christ, and the NT had divisions by the fourth century, our current divisions

¹ From *Evidence for Christianity* by Josh McDowell, chapters 2 and 3.

came later. The OT was divided into verses in 900, and into chapters in 1330. The NT was divided into chapters in 1227 and into verses in 1551.²

6. Translations

a. History

i. The use of translations in the church

From the start, the church used translations of the Scriptures. The early church read the OT in Greek, and as the gospel spread, the OT and NT were translated into different languages. However, the Catholic church used the Latin translation of the Bible, and the Latin Vulgate was the primarily used in the western church from 400–1530 (the eastern church used the Greek). Now, with the decline of the Roman Empire, the use of Latin declined, so many people did not understand it (around AD 800). Many people were ignorant of the Scriptures, because they were only read in Latin in the Roman Catholic churches. Beginning in the 1400's and taking force at the beginning of the 1500's, the Protestant Reformation challenged the teachings and authority of the Catholic church. The Bible began to be translated into the language of the people. Now common people, not just the priests, could understand God's Word. The Reformation was influenced and also spread by the printing press. "The Scriptures were made known in their original languages; the first printed Hebrew Bible was issued in 1488, and the first published Greek New Testament, an edition of Erasmus, in 1516."³ People like Martin Luther and William Tyndale had access to Hebrew and Greek Bibles, and so translated the Bible into the language of their people (German and English). Then these Bibles were spread by the printing press.

ii. English

There were some early English translations made from the Latin Vulgate, but they were not printed (Wycliffe Bible, 1382-88).

-William Tyndale (1494-1536) made the first attempt at an English translation from the original languages. He translated the NT, the Pentateuch, and a few more OT books. Because of the religious strife in England and the rest of Europe (the Roman Catholics versus the Reformers) he did much of this in hiding in Germany. His translation of the NT (1525) clearly set forth salvation by grace through grace, which the Latin Vulgate and Catholic church obscured. Some of his New Testaments were burned by the Catholic church when they reached England. But Tyndale had given the English speaking people the NT in their own language.

John Foxe reports that Tyndale was once was disputing with a Catholic scholar and greatly annoyed that scholar. In response to Tyndale he said, "We were better to be without God's laws than the pope's." Tyndale replied, "I defy the pope, and all his laws." He added that "if God spared him life, ere many years he would cause a boy that driveth the plough to know more of the Scripture than he did."⁴

"On October 6, 1536, he was put to death by strangling and his body burned. His last words were 'Lord, open the king of England's eyes'.⁵ He was martyred for his faith 476 years ago (yesterday).

² From *Evidence for Christianity* by Josh McDowell, pages 41-42.

³ Metzger, B. M. (2001). *The Bible in Translation: Ancient and English versions* (58).

⁴ Foxe, John. *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*.

⁵ Metzger, B. M. (2001). *The Bible in Translation: Ancient and English versions* (60).

-Coverdale, used Tyndale's translation as its basis (1535)

*The following translation updates were done by teams of scholars who referenced the original Greek and Hebrew. Before the 1800's many of the manuscripts that I mentioned had not been discovered, so translation updates were made as these manuscripts were found and as the English language changed.

- KJV (1611, update 1861)- Used four other English Bibles as its basis, including Tyndale's Bible, which influenced them all. According to one writer, Tyndale's NT accounts for 84% of the KJV NT.⁶ The KJV is the most popular English translation to date, and has influenced English literature and culture. The use of the KJV in some circles remains strong today, even though it is 401 years old.

-ERV (1885)- The English Revised Version (British), an updated translation based on the KJV, taking into consideration more reliable Greek and Hebrew manuscripts.

-ASV (1901)- The American Revised Version, an American version of the ERV. Neither the ERV or the ASV were able to supplant the KJV because of popular favor.

-RSV (1952)- "[It]should be a thorough revision of the American Standard Version and that the revision should stay as close to the King James tradition as it could in the light of present knowledge of the Greek text and its meaning on the one hand, and present usage of English on the other."⁷

-NASB (1971, update 1995)- an updated translation based on the ASV

-NIV (1978, updates 1984, 2011): a completely new translation based on the Hebrew and Greek

-NKJV (1982)- substantial update to the KJV into modern English, with reference to more reliable manuscripts.

-ESV (2001)- a conservative translation based on the text of the 2nd edition (1971) of the RSV.

b. Translation Theory

1. Essentially literal: captures the precise wording when possible (word-for-word)
2. Dynamic equivalent: translates the meaning of phrases (thought-for-thought)
3. Paraphrase: amplification of the text, a running commentary of the text

The fact is, no translation is perfect; they all have problems in certain passages. I recommend the essentially literal translations for your use at home and at church. Why do we say "essentially literal? Word-for-word translation is not feasible.

Example from John 2:4 of why a strictly word-for-word translation does not always work. This is the exception, not the rule in difficulties in translation.

KJV: Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me?"

NASB: And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does that have to do with us?"

NIV: "Dear woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied.

NLT: "Dear woman, that's not our problem," Jesus replied.

Greek: Τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί, γύναι
What to me and to you, woman.

⁶ Moynahan, Brian (2003). *William Tyndale: If God Spare My Life*.

⁷ Metzger, B. M. (2001). *The Bible in Translation: Ancient and English versions* (118).

Example from Job 2:9 why translators sometimes do need to engage in interpretation:

KJV: Then said his wife unto him, Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God, and die.

NIV: His wife said to him, "Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!"
(Hebrew is read right-left.)

וּמַת:	אֱלֹהִים	בִּרְךָ
die and	God	Bless

-The Jewish author or scribes could not bear to read or write "curse God," so they substituted "bless God." The euphemism is quite obvious though (example in English: I need to see a man about a horse.). This is not that common.

Comparison chart of word-for-word (essentially literal) and thought-for-thought (dynamic equivalent) translations.

Word-for-word	Thought-for-thought
Pros	Pros
Faithful to the <i>words</i> of the text	Can be easy to read
Less over-translation	
Good for study <i>and</i> reading	Cons
Cons	Over-translation brings out one interpretation of the text
Can be more difficult to read	Not as faithful to the <i>words</i> of the text
	More correcting in preaching

c. Recommended Translations

-The fact is that the meaning of a text is in its words, so it is best to stick to an essentially literal (word-for-word) translation. While dynamic equivalent (thought-for-thought) translations can be helpful in some contexts, I recommend essentially literal translations for your use. Here is a list that Pastor Mark and I recommend, but the order is my preference.

1. English Standard Version (ESV)
2. New American Standard Bible (NASB)
3. New International Version, 1984 edition (NIV)
4. New King James Version (NKJV)
5. Kings James Version (KJV)