

Scripture Study Techniques: Choosing a Scripture Translation

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Why your Scripture Translation is Important

English Scripture Translation

There are many English Scripture translations on the market from which to choose. Some are made for easier reading while others are more accurate and precise to the original meaning of the Hebrew and Greek languages. Many of these translations are produced by a group or denomination and the Bibles produced carry with them inherent changes to the text which might be accidental or intentional to support their particular doctrines. Since much of what we know about life and our relationship with the One Most High comes from Scripture, learning to study Scripture for ourselves and to recognize these changes becomes very important.

Translation versus Interpretation

Translation

When looking for a copy of the Scriptures, one is looking for a translation. The goal of a translation should be to accurately bring to another language what was written or communicated in the original language. The translation must take into account the keywords, sentence structure, and types of literature (such as stories, poetry, parable, and legal text) and then find the closest equivalent in the new language. Great care must be taken because a modern or Greek / Roman way of thinking is very different from the Hebrew or middle eastern point of view. The translation should present the material as the original author would have considered the material.

Interpretation

When looking for help in understanding a passage of Scripture, one is looking for a commentary or an interpretation. These are the notes and understandings of an individual or denomination regarding a passage of Scripture. These can be useful when kept separate from the Scripture text, but some translations will mix their own particular understanding into a passage rather than keep it separate. This mixing does not allow one to accurately know what is the word of the Almighty and what is the word of man.

Accuracy and Readability

One of the great challenges for a translator is to keep the translation accurate while at the same time making it easily readable. Literal translations of the Scriptures will tend to do translation on a word for word basis and therefore have a high degree of accuracy in meaning while leaving little room for added interpretation. However, literal translations are often the most difficult to read because of the chosen vocabulary and because of odd sentence

structure. Easier to read translations usually opt to use a thought for thought process written with modern English vocabulary and grammar. This process of translating gets away from the direct words of the Almighty and, therefore, includes more commentary, interpretation, and theology by man. A good example of this comes with the literary category of idioms. These are familiar sayings in one language that will make little or no sense in another language. For example, we can literally read of a stiff-necked people or we could more easily understand it as 'stubborn'.

Insertions

Defining Insertions

Insertions are words that are added to the text which do not exist in the original language. Insertions are often used in translation because of the complexity of taking a word or concept from one language into another. Often, these changes are relatively harmless such as when making the wording fit the grammar rules of the new language. However, other insertions can change the entire meaning or the theological doctrine of a passage. The more reliable translations will typically make these insertions visible in some way such as italicizing the added words or writing side notes. In this way, the reader knows which text is from Scripture and which text is added by man. The less reliable translations do not indicate where insertions are made.

Grammatical Insertions

Most, if not all, English translations have words inserted that do not exist in the original Hebrew or Greek. The relatively harmless insertions are those that just help make the sentence structure work in English. A good example of this is the English use of prepositions (also, and, but, for, from, etc.). Prepositions are used heavily in the English language, but in Hebrew they are actually a part of the noun or verb. They exist in meaning, but one does not see a separate Hebrew word for the word 'and'.

Theological Insertions

Words inserted because of theology is one of the most common forms of interpretation being added to Scripture. These changes show the interpretations and theology of the translators rather than staying precisely with Scripture. One common example of this is found in Hebrews chapter 8 with verses 7 and 13. In these verses, the word 'covenant' is often added. The book of Hebrews is primarily comparing the earthly priesthood with Messiah's priesthood. In chapter 8, there is a discussion of the shortcomings of the earthly priesthood. The addition of the word 'covenant' moves that shortcoming to the entire old covenant and changes the meaning of the passage significantly.

Salvation through the Messiah

Changes to Salvation

One of the worst changes occurring in modern Scripture translation is the deliberate removal of phrases or sentences that directly show that salvation is only through the Messiah. This is usually done in an attempt to gain a larger reading audience or to not be considered

offensive. Here is a short list of examples of such changes which can be used to gauge a translation. The underlined words (also in purple online) are being omitted by some modern translations.

- | **John 6:47** - Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.
- | **Gal 4:7** - Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.
- | **Col 1:14** - In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins:
- | **Acts 8:36-38** - And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? {37} And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. {38} And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.

Summary

There are many English Scripture translations on the market from which to choose. Some are made for easier reading while others are more accurate and precise to the original meaning of the Hebrew and Greek languages. When looking for a copy of the Scriptures, one is looking for a translation and not a commentary nor an interpretation. One point to be careful of is insertions. These are words that are added to the text which do not exist in the original language. The relatively harmless insertions are those that just help make the sentence structure work in English. The harmful insertions are those due to theology. These insertions show the interpretations and theology of the translators rather than staying precisely with Scripture. One of the worst changes occurring in modern Scripture translation is the deliberate removal of phrases or sentences that directly show that salvation is only through the Messiah.

Todd Elder is a believer in the Messiah who wants to help people understand Scripture and know the message of Salvation. For more information from the Scripture Study Techniques series, please visit my website <http://www.exploringsalvation.info> and look under 'Scripture'.

Additional Information
