

4. English Translations after the KJV

a The English Revised Version (1881)

In the late 1800s, as we discussed in the text portion of this class, the plethora of manuscripts that became available (especially Vaticanus and Sinaiticus) forced scholars to publish a new Greek Text that would ultimately replace the *Textus Receptus* on which the KJV was based. This was *Westcott and Hort's* critical text. The **English Revised Version** (ERV) came soon after their Critical Text was published. Even though this was based on a different manuscript tradition, the ERV was careful to not radically depart from the A.V. But there were over 6,000 changes due to the differences in the Greek text. In 1881 the ERV was published in both America and England; it had very mixed reviews as you can imagine. KJV adherents saw it as a potential departure from orthodoxy, while others celebrated a more accurate rendition of God's Word.

b The American Standard Version (1901)

The ERV had two committees that worked on it, one in Britain and one in America. The British committee had editorial rights that favored British terminology. So, the American committee released the ASV in 1901 with terminology that was more comprehensible to Americans. One of the unique functions of the ASV was that it used "Jehovah" instead of "LORD" for God's name (YHWH). Almost no translation since the ASV has chosen to translate God's name; but rather, English translations tend to continue with the tradition of using LORD instead of Jehovah/Yahweh.

c English Translations from 1901-1970s

The KJV based on the Byzantine tradition and the ERV based on the critical text both had other translations that followed and gained notoriety.

- The KJV had the KJII which never really took off.
- But the New King James (1979) has truly been a great edition in the KJV tradition.
- The ERV has had three primary revisions of it.
- The ASV in 1901 as discussed above,
- The Revised Standard Version (RSV) by the more liberal branches of Christianity was published in 1946 and 1952. This is a very competent translation but was never well accepted by the conservative branch of Christianity.
- Therefore, in order to update a modern Bible in the Critical text tradition, the NASB was released in 1963 (NT only) and 1971 (the whole Bible). This became a very popular formal equivalence translation.

d. The New International Version (NIV)

The NIV, A fresh translation (i.e., not a revision), was being prepared simultaneously as the NASB. A committee of 15 scholars started in 1956 and the NT was published in 1973 with the whole Bible made available in 1978. The NIV has had several minor edition changes, but the two major ones were in 1984 and 2011. Each edition has utilized a gender neutral methodology that has caused some controversy. The NIV is the best selling Bible currently on the market.

e. **The Plethora of Modern Translations**

Today we have dozens and dozens of modern translations; then add to that the fact that study bibles have flooded the market in various translations. From 1952 when the RSV was published until 1990 when the NRSV was released, there have been 27 complete translations of the Bible. During that same time period there were another 25 translations of the New Testament alone. In those 38 years we have 52 complete or partial translations of the Bible.¹

The above paragraph was written well over 10 years ago. I decided to update this information. I went to the ever-reliable website: Wikipedia.com

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_English_Bible_translations; accessed March 15th, 2021).

According to them, there have been approximately 80 English translations of the entire Bible since 1900, they also mention 24 partial translation that are primarily the NT. This seems to contradict the above information from Christian History Magazine. But the point is obvious, the English language has a plethora of translation, indeed.

f. **The Worldwide Status of Bible Translations** According to Wycliffe Bible Translators (<https://www.wycliffe.org/about/why>)

- At least 7,000 languages are spoken or signed around the world.
- At least 1.5 billion people do not have the full Bible in their language — that's more people than the entire continent of Africa!
- More than 1,500 languages have access to the New Testament and some portions of Scripture in their language.
- Almost 700 languages have the complete translated Bible.
- At least 2,000 languages still need a Bible translation started.
- Work is being done in more than **2,700** languages worldwide and over **2,100** of these projects involve Wycliffe Global Alliance partners.

Two great resources to explore more about the Bible comes from Christian History Magazine downloads (christianhistoryinstitute.org)

- *How We got our Bible*; 1994, Issue 43 (Text only)
- *America's Book: How the Bible Helped Shape a Nation*; 2021, Issue 138

Here are two very good books that can assist on choosing a Bible translation.

Fee, Gordon D. and Mark L. Strauss. **How To Choose A Translation For All Its Worth.** (Zondervan, 2007) (Fee was an Editor for the NIV). This book argues for a dynamic equivalent methodology

Ryken, LeLand. **The Word of God In English: Criteria for Excellence in Bible Translation.** (Crossway, 2002). (Ryken is the Literary Stylist for the ESV). This book argues for formal equivalent methodology

¹ Christian History Magazine, *How We Got Our Bible*. Issue 43, (vol. XIII, No. 3) pg 40.

X. Interpretation of the Bible

The last section of pipe in our illustration is the “interpretation” section. I would argue that up to this point in the pipes, very little pollution has entered into the stream of God’s revelation. What has entered in does not significantly affect our faith. But in the “interpretation section, I would say that a great deal of pollution (i.e., error) is likely to enter in.

A. *The Four-Fold Process of Bible Study*

- Observation: *What does it say?*
- Interpretation: *What does it mean?*
- Principalization: *What is the universal principle being taught?*
- Application: *What are the specific applications to our lives?*

B. *Recognize that your presuppositions and pre-understanding affect your interpretation.*

Listen to the words of Stan Gundry as he addresses this question of what we bring to the text (He was speaking at an Evangelical Theological Society Meeting).

I wonder if we all really recognize that all theology represents contextualization, even our own theology? We speak of Latin American theology, black theology, or feminist theology; but without the slightest second thought we will assume that our own theology is simply theology, undoubtedly in its purest form. So, do we recognize that the versions of evangelical theology held by most people in this room are in fact North American, white, and male and that they reflect and/or address those values and concerns?²

1. What are Presuppositions?

A presupposition is a starting point that is assumed to be true and then acted upon.

- What are some of our presuppositions as 21st century, American, Evangelical Christians?
- Where do our presuppositions come from?
- Can we think outside of our presuppositions or are they like prisons from which we cannot escape?

² Stanley Gundry, *Evangelical Theology: Where Should We Be Going?* Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 22 (1979) : pg.11.

- If our culture has great influence on how we interpret the Bible (and all reality), then how do we step outside of this influence?

2. What is Pre-understanding

- Discuss your theological backgrounds.
- Who has been some of your primary influences in understanding the Bible?
- Do you ever challenge your present beliefs to make sure they are biblically sound?

C. Some Basic Rules of Interpretation (i.e., Hermeneutics)

1. Context

Just remember that the first three rules of hermeneutics are *Context, Context, and Context*. Strive to always remind yourself that whatever book or verse of the Bible you are reading, it has a context that must never be separated from the passage of which it is a part.

2. Authorial Intent

Our concern is not what do you think it means, but rather what did the biblical author mean by his words. A check and balance for this rule is we need to ask “what did the audience it was written to understand by these words of the author.”

3. The Grammatical-Historical-Cultural Method of Interpretation

Grammatical: What we mean by this is that all written communication is through the use of words put together in sentences. This requires us to pay attention to the grammar and syntax of a passage. Verbal communication is meaningless without a proper understanding of these elements.

Example: 1John 5:13 *These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.*

- ***From this verse tell me how you know that you have eternal life?***

Most would answer “those who believe in the name of the Son.” But grammatically that is not true. The phrase “*who believe in the name of the son of God*” is simply identifying the immediately preceding pronoun “you.” Look at the verse without this phrase and then ask how you know you are saved.

1John 5:13 *These things I have written to you . . . , so that you may know that you have eternal life.*

The obvious answer is “*these things*” are what I need to know in order to know that I have eternal life. The “these things” are the content of the previous chapters of 1st John. Namely that you love God and brother and that you do not continue in sin. If you are growing in righteousness and love, you have evidence that you are saved. This is written to “you, who believe in the name of the Son.”

Historical: The historical background of the author (and the first readers) is pertinent to understanding his words. Remember that the OT was written between 1,500 B.C. and 500 B.C.. to a Semitic people who spoke Hebrew. The NT was written 2,000 years ago to a multicultural group primarily from the near eastern portion of Asia and southern Europe. These people spoke Greek, not to mention several other languages.

Example: Isaiah 6:1 "In the year of King Uzziah's death. I saw the LORD . . .then I said 'woe is me, for I am ruined.'" You must understand the history behind Uzziah's death to understand the fear Isaiah felt being in the presence of Yahweh

Cultural: Every society in every generation has different customs and practices. The Bible was written to different people of different cultures. To fully understand their words, we must understand their culture and customs. In the NT era, we have several people groups that the Gospel reaches. We have Jews, Samaritans, Ethiopians, Greeks and Romans. We should not assume that all these people were just like us, nor should we assume that they were all like each other.

Example: John 8; the woman caught in adultery

4. Distanciation and Culture

Distanciation means that we must distance ourselves and our culture from the text. This is very difficult to do. Our culture is an intricate part of our thinking. There is much of our Christianity that is not actually biblical but rather American. When we read a text we can easily allow ourselves to read it with all of our 21st century influence. As was stated above, we must ask "what did it mean to the writer and his audience." After we determine this, then we can apply it to our times.

Example: Matt. 16:18 . . . *I will build my Church. And the **gates of Hell** shall not overpower it.*

Question: *What does the term "gates of hell" refer to?*

Answer: See Isa. 38:10; Ps 9:13; 107:18; Rev. 1:18; non-canonical books, Wisdom of Solomon 16:13; 5:51.

5. Dual Authorship

Who wrote the Bible?

We brought this up early in our class. The question is “*has God put meaning in the text that the human author was unaware of?*”

General principles:

Principle #1: *God intended to say exactly what the human author said; therefore, our starting point is the intended meaning of the human author which is ascertained by the grammatical, historical, cultural method of Interpretation.*

Principle #2 *Some OT may texts take on more meaning than the human author intended because of the progress/fulfillment of Salvation history.*

This is sometimes called *Sensus Plenior*, which is Latin for “fuller sense” or “fuller meaning.” The following definition is given by Raymond Brown:

The additional, deeper meaning, intended by God but not clearly intended by the human author, which is seen to exist in the words of the biblical text (or group of texts, or even a whole book) when they are studied in the light of further revelation or development in the understanding of revelation³

Examples

- Hosea 11:1 in Matthew 2:15
- Exodus 17:6 & 1 Corinthians 10:4
- Isaiah 7:14 in Matthew 1:23
- Deut 25:4 in 1 Cor. 9:9
- Joel 2:32 in Romans 10:13

Concerns

- What are some of the dangers in saying that God has placed a meaning in the text that the human author was not aware of?
- If God did put a meaning there, then how do you determine what that hidden meaning is?

If we say that there is a meaning that is separate from what the human author intended, then how do we implement some controls over how to determine that meaning. Every person can say that God really meant this or that, and we would have no way of arguing against it because there would not be an objective method for determining that meaning.

³ Raymond Brown, *The Sensus Plenior of Sacred Scripture*. (Baltimore, St. Mary's University, 1955), 92. Brown is a Roman Catholic scholar. A good article by a Protestant scholar is by Douglass Moo, *The Problem of Sensus Plenior*, in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*. Ed by D.A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Zondervan Academic, 1986), 175-212.

