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EDITORIAL: TRANSLATION OF SCRIPTURE

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"Out of the world's 7,000-plus languages, approximately 6,400 still do not possess a complete Bible (Old and New Testaments)—over 90 percent."[1]

Bible translation is a task of immeasurable significance for the preaching of God's Word. Jesus commanded His disciples to take God's Word to the entire world: "Go therefore and make disciples of *all the nations*, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to keep all that I commanded you" (Matt 28:19–20; emphasis added). To preach the Bible to "all the nations" requires Bible translation. William Barrick appropriately states that "Bible translation is a gospel-proclaiming, church-planting, church-guiding, and Christ-glorifying work."[2]

From the time of creation until the Tower of Babel, the world knew only one language. Moses wrote in Genesis 11:1, "Now the whole earth had the same language and the same words." But after the people built the Tower of Babel in rebellion against God, God confused their language so that they could no longer understand one another (Gen 11:7, 9). From then on, the world has multiplied languages so that they now exceed seven thousand.

While most of the Old Testament is written in Hebrew, in Genesis 31:47 we hear Laban utter a phrase in Aramaic: "Jegar-sahadutha," meaning "the heap of witness." Genesis 42:23 notes that Joseph spoke to his brothers through an interpreter to translate between Egyptian and Hebrew. According to 2 Kings 18:26, Rabshakeh who came from Assyria to threaten Jerusalem was able to speak both Judean (or Hebrew) and Aramaic (cf. Isa 36:11). Nehemiah lamented that many of the children who returned from exile could no longer speak Hebrew but spoke only the languages of foreign nations (Neh 13:23–24). Many believe that when Ezra read from the Law

[1] William D. Barrick, *Understanding Bible Translation: Bringing God's Word into New Contexts* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2019), 218.

[2] Barrick, *Understanding Bible Translation*, 221.

of Moses in Nehemiah 8, the Scripture was then translated from Hebrew to Aramaic so that the exiles would understand what he was reading.[3] Additionally, a word in Psalm 2:12 appears in Aramaic (*bar*, meaning, "son"). A verse in Jeremiah 10:11 is written in Aramaic. And much of Ezra (4:8–6:18; 7:12–26) and Daniel (2:4–7:28) is also in Aramaic.

In the New Testament, a variety of languages appear as well. While most of the New Testament is in Greek, Jesus at times speaks Aramaic. In Mark 5:41, Jesus uses Aramaic when He raises a girl from the dead, saying, "Talitha kum" (which means, "Little girl, arise"). When Jesus healed a deaf and mute man, he said to him in Aramaic, "Ephphatha" (which means, "be opened"). On the cross, Jesus cried out in Aramaic, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" (meaning, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"; cf. Matt 27:46). Acts 2 records that on the day of Pentecost, the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke in various languages (Acts 2:4). On that day, Luke writes, "Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the district of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs" were all able to understand the disciples who spoke in various languages (2:9–11). Moreover, because God is saving sinners from different nations, John declares that in heaven worshipers of God will come from "every nation and *all* tribes and peoples and tongues" (Rev 7:9).

With the mission to bring the Word of God to the ends of the earth, The Master's Seminary—along with training pastors—seeks to prepare translators of the Bible and to assist translation endeavors throughout the world. To achieve this, the Tyndale Center at TMS has three distinctives. First, it affirms a high view of Scripture and emphasizes that every word of the Bible must be translated accurately. Second, the Center maintains that the Bible must be translated from its original languages—Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. Third, the Center views Bible translation as a means to an end—the end being to preach the Word of God so that people are transformed.

The focus of the current issue of *The Master's Seminary Journal* is the translation of Scripture. In the first article, Abner Chou outlines the foundation of Bible translation ("'Unless Someone Guides Me?': Some Theological Underpinnings of Translation and the Need for an Expositor"). William D. Barrick then sets the historical and current context of Bible translation ("Because They Understand"). In a second piece, Barrick examines Nehemiah 8 as an illustration of Bible translation ("An Early Scriptural Example of Bible Translation"). Aaron Valdizan offers a close study of the revelation of God's name Yahweh ("The Significance of the Divine Name: An Analysis of Exodus 3:14–15"). Paul Twiss follows this with an analysis of the importance of repetition within the Bible and the value of maintaining this literary device in Bible translation ("Seeing and Seeing Again: Repetition in Hebrew Narrative and its Implications for Bible Translation"). Mark Tatlock considers the task of Bible translation in the work of missions globally ("Why Bible Translation is Critical in God's Plan of Redemption"). Tuvia Pollack and Yair Frank, from

[3] Barrick, *Understanding Bible Translation*, 36–37.

the Bible Society in Israel, describe the kind of translation work believers are carrying out in Israel for the sake of spreading the gospel. This is followed by a conversation between Corey Williams and Iosif J. Zhakevich about the Tyndale Center at The Master's Seminary ("An Interview with Iosif J. Zhakevich: The Tyndale Center").

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"UNLESS SOMEONE GUIDES ME?": SOME THEOLOGICAL UNDERPINNINGS OF TRANSLATION AND THE NEED FOR AN EXPOSITOR

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* * * * *

Bible translation is a noble endeavor. While many considerations factor into the topic, it is worthwhile to contemplate the theology that undergirds the discipline. Biblical theology supports the very existence of Bible translation, demonstrating that it abides within God's redemptive historical purpose for the nations. Systematic theology elucidates matters concerning the philosophy of translation. The doctrines of inspiration and inerrancy argue for a formal equivalence approach and the doctrines of anthropology, hamartiology, and soteriology qualify attempts to simplify translations for the sake of other cultures. Nevertheless, the concern for clarity posed by proponents of dynamic equivalence still remains, which is answered by the doctrine of ecclesiology. God has assigned different roles in the church, and the teacher and not the translator is the one who has the responsibility to elucidate the Scripture to the reader. The complementary roles of the translator and the expositor is attested not only in the example of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch, but also in the very pattern of the NT's use of the OT. All in all, theology provides clarity to the discipline of bible translation and reminds the church that even in this discussion there is a need for an expositor.

* * * * *

Introduction

Over the years, the subject of Bible translation has encountered great debate and for good reason. The Bible is inspired, inerrant, and infallible, the very Word of God that never returns empty (Isa 55:11). There is no book like this book, and those transformed by this very Word (Jas 1:18) are acutely aware of this reality. Scripture is the truth that sanctifies (John 17:17), and because the saints are to meditate on it day and night (Ps 1:2), they have a consummate desire to have the "right" translation.

So the discussion about Bible translation is driven by some of the highest and noblest motivations, the very love for God's Word.

Bible translation involves a whole host of issues. One question is how to prevent the translator's bias from entering into translation.[1] Another question concerns the matter of so-called gender neutral or gender accurate translation.[2] There are also linguistic considerations, from theoretical frameworks that express how communication and translation operate, to particular questions of the way certain phrases should be rendered, to the strategy that one should have to correlate languages with vastly different grammatical systems.[3] Interestingly enough, inter-textuality raises some points of discussion in translation, including the manner in which the New Testament translates the Old Testament and how one should render phrases that are interwoven throughout Scripture.[4] Since Bible translation is for the nations, missiological matters also arise. Missiologists ask how to prevent one's culture from having undue influence on translations even as they observe that Bible translation can promote literacy and preserve language and culture.[5] All these questions and more revolve around the fundamental inquiry of the purpose of translation. Should it focus more on the reader's receptivity or the author's original writing?[6]

While these factors have rightly received much attention, an area that has been neglected is theology and translation. To be sure, there has been targeted theological discussions on the matter, primarily concerning whether the doctrine of inspiration entails a certain translation philosophy.[7] However, that is far from the only

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[1] Gosnell L. O. R. Yorke, "Bible Translation in Anglophone Africa and Her Diaspora: A Postcolonialist Agenda," *Black Theology* 2, no. 2 (July 2004): 153–54; Jim Harries, "Pragmatic Linguistics Applied to Bible Translation, Projects and Inter-Cultural Relationships: An African Focus," *Cultural Encounters* 5, no. 1 (2009): 75–77; Lynell Zogbo, "Issues in Bible Translation in Africa," *Review & Expositor* 108, no. 2 (2011): 279–81.

[2] Donald A. Johns, "Understanding the Controversy over Gender Language in Bible Translation," *Journal of Religious & Theological Information* 6, no. 1 (2003): 43–53; Jeremy Punt, "(Con)Figuring Gender in Bible Translation: Cultural, Translational and Gender Critical Intersections," *HTS Theological Studies* 70, no. 1 (2014): 1–10.

[3] Harries, "Pragmatic Linguistics," 75–77; Kevin G. Smith, "The Emergence of Relevance Theory as a Theoretical Framework for Bible Translation," *Conspectus* 4 (September 2007): 65–81; Mark L. Strauss, "Bible Translation and the Myth of 'Literal Accuracy,'" *Review & Expositor* 108, no. 2 (2011): 169–71.

[4] Jonathan Downie, "Your Bible Translation Is Imperfect. It's Also a Miracle: We've Forgotten That Translation Was God's Idea from the Start," *Christianity Today* 63, no. 8 (October 2019): 60–62; John F. Elwolde, "'Inner-Biblical Exegesis' and Bible Translation: Reflections on Bernard Levinson's Legal Revision and Religious Renewal in Ancient Israel," *The Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 14, no. 2 (2011): 223–34.

[5] Johnson Kiriaku Kinyua, "A Postcolonial Analysis of Bible Translation and Its Effectiveness in Shaping and Enhancing the Discourse of Colonialism and the Discourse of Resistance: The Gĩkũyũ New Testament—a Case Study," *Black Theology* 11, no. 1 (2013): 58–95; Kate Shellnutt, "Keeping the Word: How Bible Translation Projects Preserve Endangered Languages," *Christianity Today* 63, no. 5 (June 2019): 19–20.

[6] Birgit Stolt, "Luther's Translation of the Bible," *Lutheran Quarterly* 28, no. 4 (2014): 377.

[7] William D. Mounce, "Do Formal Equivalent Translations Reflect a Higher View of Plenary, Verbal Inspiration?," *Themelios* 44 (2019): 477–86; Dane Ortlund, "On Words, Meaning, Inspiration, and Translation: A Brief Response to Bill Mounce," *Themelios* 45 (2020): 98–107; William E. Nix, "Theological Presuppositions and Sixteenth Century English Bible Translation," *Bibliotheca sacra* 124, no. 494 (April 1967): 117–24; Thomas P. Nass, "Some Thoughts on the ESV and Bible Translation Part I," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 108, no. 3 (2011): 176–200; Thomas P. Nass, "Some Thoughts on the ESV and Bible Translation Part II," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 108, no. 4 (2011): 267–88.

theological matter involved. Nearly the entire breadth of theology, from biblical theology to ecclesiology, sheds light on the subject. To that end, this article intends to probe this somewhat overlooked aspect of Bible translation to answer questions already asked, bring clarity to theological issues already raised, and provide a holistic picture of Bible translation in its justification, purpose, and role in redemptive history. Ultimately, thinking through translation theologically will demonstrate that like any ministry of the Word, Bible translation needs an expositor.

Biblical Theology and the Justification for Translation

Bible translation does not merely involve categories in systematic theology. Discussions in the discipline of biblical theology also carry ramifications upon translation, even undergirding its very existence. After all, not every religion can justify translation. Nass observes, "Strict Muslims, you may know, insist that the Koran cannot be translated into other languages. It must be read in Arabic because that is the inspired text."[8] Though Judaism as a whole had engaged in translation, rendering the Old Testament into Greek (LXX) and Aramaic (Targums), eventually certain sects abandoned that mentality, rejecting the Septuagint and believing that the Torah should not be rendered into another language.[9] Though many religions translate much of their materials, they often do not have a theological rationale for why that activity is warranted or why the sacredness of their original documents is not lost in translation.

Church history contains a long tradition of Bible translation, from the time of the New Testament through the Reformation to the present day. That is because theologically translation is not merely permitted but part of the mission of the people of God. Such a reality is seen initially in the storyline of Scripture. The very beginning of God's plan starts with His creation of the world (Gen 1:1), demonstrating that God's sovereignty and purpose was not merely over a people like Israel but over the entire universe. In fact, the Lord's focus upon Israel was a means to the end that they would be a kingdom of priests, a people to minister among the peoples of the world (cf. Exod 19:5–6).[10] Solomon proclaimed that Israel and its temple were meant to be used by God for the nations (1 Kgs 8:41–43). Israel's history intersected nations like Egypt, Sheba, Aram, Assyria, Babylon, and Medo-Persia where the Lord used His people to attest to the reality of His exclusivity and transcendence. God's purpose for the nations drives history.

The Old Testament revealed that God's objective at the beginning will be His outcome at the end. In Daniel 7, God revealed a vision depicting the sky (v. 2a), the sea (v. 2b), various animals (vv. 4–7), and a man who rules over all of them (vv. 9–

[8] Nass, "Bible Translation Part II," 280.

[9] Kirk J. Franklin, "How Can the Reformation's Focus on Faithfulness to Scripture Inspire Us for Mission?" *HTS Theological Studies* 74, no. 1 (2018): 2.

[10] Douglas Stuart, *Exodus*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2007), 422; Nahum Sarna, *Exodus*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 104. While there is interpretative controversy over the phrase "kingdom of priests," a contextual anchor is the interaction between Moses and Jethro just the chapter before. Such mediation and witness to Yahweh before the nations is in the background of this phrase (cf. Exod 18:11–12).

13), the very imagery of Genesis 1.[11] This dream about the final moments of history matches its beginning for it tells the destiny of all that God has for this world. As such, He not only revealed that His Son is the final Adam, one like a Son of Man (Dan 7:13; cf. Matt 24:30; Rev 7:9, 17), but also that all peoples, nations, and tongues will serve Him (Dan 7:14). Other prophecies reveal a similar picture. Psalm 22, after discussing the death of the Messiah, exclaims that His reward is that "all the ends of the earth" will turn back to God and worship the Messiah (v. 27). Isaiah declared that Egypt and Assyria will unite with Israel to worship Yahweh (Isa 19:23–25), and that the distant coastlands will support Israel in honor of the Lord (Isa 60:9–14). Zechariah announced that global worship will take place (Zech 14:16), which accords with Malachi's proclamation, "For from the rising of the sun even to its setting, My name *will be* great among the nations, and in every place incense is going to be presented to My name, as well as a grain offering *that is* clean; for My name *will be* great among the nations" (Mal 1:11).

It is of note that within God's agenda for all the world to give Him glory, the tongue plays a vital role. As mentioned in Daniel 7, people of every tongue will serve Christ (Dan 7:14). Isaiah also prophesied that God will gather all nations and tongues to behold His glory (Isa 66:18–20). Zechariah as well foretold that the people of every tongue will take hold of a Jew in order to go with him to Jerusalem (Zech 8:23). Though tongues or languages began because of defiance against God (Gen 10:5), continued in wickedness against Him and His people (Pss 10:7; 12:3; 31:20), and were involved in the judgment of God's people (Deut 28:49; Isa 28:11), God ordained that in the end, every tongue would give Him glory. As the Lord declared through Isaiah, "Every tongue will swear *allegiance*" (Isa 45:23).

Because God desired His glory to be confessed by every tongue, Israel declared His message in other languages like Aramaic (Pss 2:12; 117:2) and Akkadian (Dan 1:4, 20–21). Such a mission was not only for Israel but also for the church. Christ charged His church in this era to be His witness to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). In keeping with that purpose, the Holy Spirit empowered the church to speak in tongues (Acts 2:4). While God divided disobedient humanity at Babel by having them speak in tongues (Gen 11:7–9), at Pentecost, the Spirit united an obedient people by having them speak in tongues. The event established that the church's mission is to proclaim the excellencies of Christ (1 Pet 2:9) to every nation and language (Rom 15:20–21). And the apostles did so, testifying to the truth in Hebrew (Acts 22:2) and Greek. Biblical theology highlights that translation is not just done because of a pragmatic need but was a key part of God's plan and the very purpose of His people. It is not merely acceptable activity but commissioned.

For this reason, Scripture models that translation is authentic and carries divine authority. While Christ and His apostles frequently quote the Old Testament in Greek, they never qualify the legitimacy of their citations. To them, the quotation, though translated, *is* the Scripture (Matt 21:42; John 13:18; 19:37; Rom 4:3), carrying the divine authority of the original. This illustrates the notion of derived inspiration, that translations insofar as they transmit the meaning of the original, possess the authority of the original as well. The intersection of theology and translation is not limited to

[11] André Lacocque, "Allusions to Creation in Daniel 7," in *Book of Daniel Volume One*, ed. John Joseph Collins, Peter W. Flint, and Cameron VanEpps (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 114–31.

translation philosophy but pertains to its very existence. Theology provides the ultimate reasons why translation can be trusted and why the entire enterprise is noble.

Systematic Theology, Hermeneutics, and Translation Philosophy

Bibliology and Formal Equivalence

Theology not only answers the question of whether Bible translation is legitimate but also how it may be done. To be sure, the question of the approach to translation has often revolved around philosophical models of language, and such theories do play a part in answering the question.[12] Nevertheless, the role of theology cannot be underestimated in responding to the question of translation philosophy, especially given the uniqueness of holy Scripture.

For this reason, discussion on the matter has revolved around bibliology. Because of verbal plenary inspiration and inerrancy (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:20–21), every word of Scripture, while written by man, is God's very word. Joshua reminded the people that God upheld every word of all God's good words (Josh 23:14). The biblical writers' use of tense (Matt 22:32), singular versus plural (Gal 3:16), and individual key terms (Heb 3–4) are all illustrations that inspiration does not merely pertain to the general ideas of Scripture but to each particular word. The immaculate precision of God's Word has become the basis for a more "formal equivalence" approach, whereby each word of the original Hebrew and Greek is accounted for by a nearly word-for-word correspondence. Proponents of this view contend that such a translation technique is in line with the recovery of care for the biblical languages and exegesis found in the Reformation.[13]

Clarity, Church History, and Dynamic Equivalence

While such arguments are convincing, there has been a backlash against suggesting that a high view of Scripture necessarily entails such a formal equivalent approach. The pushback is not a condemnation of formal equivalence—advocates of dynamic equivalence recognize the value of such a tool—but against the notion that the doctrines of inspiration and inerrancy inherently delegitimize other translation methodologies.[14] The core of the concerns of those who advocate for dynamic equivalence is the matter of clarity, and their counter includes three arguments.

First, those who argue for a dynamic approach observe that church history is filled with examples of those who support a "thought for thought" kind of mentality to translation. They note that Origen as well as other early church leaders including Irenaeus, frequently scorned Aquila's literalistic rendering of the Old Testament into

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[12] Sidney K. Berman, "Cognition and Context in Translation Analysis: Contextual Frames of Reference in Bible Translation," *Scriptura* 113 (2014): 1–12.

[13] Leland Ryken, *The Word of God in English: Criteria for Excellence in Bible Translation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2002), 134–35; Wayne Grudem, "Are Only Some Words of Scripture Breathed Out by God? Why Plenary Inspiration Favors 'Essentially Literal' Bible Translations," in *Translating Truth: The Case for Essentially Literal Bible Translation*, ed. C. John Collins (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005).

[14] Nass, "Bible Translation Part II," 278.

Greek.[15] It is equally pointed out that Luther’s translation and even expressed theory of translation concentrated on readability of expression for the German people.[16] He took great care to ensure that both lexical and syntactic expression actually made sense in common German, even if it did not truly match the original lexical choice and style.[17] Luther desired to bring forth the emotion of the text into the receptor language and particularly made sure certain theological ideas were properly conveyed by the translation.[18] For example, Luther translates Romans 3:28 as having the phrase “faith alone” though the term “alone” is not present in the original. In defense he wrote, “Because this matter basically demands from itself that one says that faith alone justifies, and because our German way of speaking also teaches us to express it this way.”[19] Luther had a demonstrable conviction of making the meaning of Scripture clear to the common person. Proponents of dynamic equivalence argue that based upon Luther’s own mentality, they are the heirs of the Reformation and the approach found in church history.

Second, more than arguments from church history, those who contend for the value of “thought for thought” translation contend for their position on linguistic grounds. Fundamentally, they observe that there is inherent linguistic distance between ancient and modern languages, and transference between the two is not automatic.[20] Because of this, simply rendering one word in one language to its counterpart in another may produce a translation that is both unclear and misleading.[21] It is also nearly impossible to do so consistently.[22] Language and communication do not always work on the level of individual terms, and individual terms can have multiple nuances such that lexical glosses are insufficient to convey their contextual ideas.[23] On top of this are the challenges of idioms, metaphors, and different syntactical phrasing that may demand translators to modify the original wording to make sentences sensible to the reader.[24] Strauss summarizes these complexities well:

> Languages differ not only in their lexical stock (words and their meanings), but also in syntactical functions, in the meaning of idioms, and in collocational relationships. Attempting to achieve lexical concordance (word-for-word reproduction) or syntactical correspondence (formally reproducing grammatical forms, idioms, and collocations) inevitably results in changed meanings, awkward language, and/or obscurity. While formal equivalent Bible versions

[15] Jenny R. Labendz, “Aquila’s Bible Translation in Late Antiquity: Jewish and Christian Perspectives,” *Harvard Theological Review* 102, no. 3 (July 2009): 372.

[16] Mark S. Krause, “Martin Luther’s Theory of Bible Translation,” *Stone-Campbell Journal* 2, no. 1 (1999): 60.

[17] Krause, 68.

[18] Stolt, “Luther’s Translation of the Bible,” 373.

[19] Stolt, 382.

[20] William Barrick, *Understanding Bible Translation: Bringing God’s Word into New Contexts* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2019), 16.

[21] Ibid.; Strauss, “Bible Translation and the Myth of ‘Literal Accuracy,’” 189; Nass, “Some Thoughts on the ESV and Bible Translation Part II,” 279.

[22] Mounce, “Formal Equivalent Translations,” 482.

[23] Strauss, “Myth of ‘Literal Accuracy,’” 184.

[24] Mounce, “Formal Equivalent Translations,” 483–84.

> function as useful tools for beginning language students for identifying formal features of the Greek or Hebrew text, as a philosophy of translation formal equivalence is fundamentally flawed.[25]

These realizations gave way to Eugene Nida's approach to translation, one that focused upon translation as a missionary tool and was based upon a code-model of communication.[26] This model contended that communication happened not on the level of the individual word but on the level of discourse, and that every language contained certain discourse categories even if expressing them differently.[27] Put simply, one does not learn what any document means by examining words individually but seeing what they mean altogether. Based upon this, proper translation expresses what a text means not by words individually but what they convey collectively, thought for thought.

Third, the discourse notion of communication clarifies how advocates of dynamic equivalence adhere to inspiration theologically. There are some who have strongly argued against formal equivalence and ended up coming near to denying verbal plenary inspiration.[28] These have maintained that the exact wording of the biblical text is not entirely relevant as long as the sense is conveyed. Nevertheless, others in this camp still maintain that they are genuinely attempting to uphold verbal plenary inspiration and inerrancy. Their argument is that proper dynamic equivalence accounts for every word of Scripture by conveying the sense of the words of Scripture as they come together as a whole. Such consideration honors verbal plenary inspiration for it honors each word in their function.

In sum, while not denying the legitimacy of formal translation, those who advocate for a dynamic approach point out the need for clarity in translation. They have asserted that meaning is not the sum of parts, but concepts constructed by words working together. Because of this, formal equivalence may not be practically feasible for some languages and will not produce translations that are intelligible to the reader. Instead, proponents of thought-for-thought translation argue that carefully accounting for how each word comes together to produce an idea has the advantage of representing God's intent more accurately. In that way, a dynamic approach embraces more of what God inspired, both the individual words as well as their function together. For this reason, those who support functional equivalence have pointed out that church history does have significant examples of those who advocated for a "thought for thought" methodology. They recognized that for lay people to understand the Word of God, such an approach is invaluable because the Word of God is clear and so clarity in translation matters.

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[25] Strauss, "Myth of 'Literal Accuracy,'" 189.

[26] Smith, "Relevance Theory," 69.

[27] Ibid. This was taken from Noam Chomsky's notion of generative-transformational grammar.

[28] Mounce, "Formal Equivalent Translations," 479–81. "The idea that God determined every single word and every grammatical construction simply goes beyond what Scripture says about itself, and we should be cautious at being more specific than Scripture is" (479). See comments by Ortlund, "On Words," 104–105. See also Josiah K. Walters, "Verbal, Plenary Inspiration, and Bible Translation Method: Is There an Entailment?," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 32 (2021): 35, n. 1. Walters, as an advocate of dynamic equivalence, aptly describes Mounce's approach. "His approach, however, is to deny (any meaningful expression of) verbal inspiration. He denies that 'God controlled every word choice that was made' or that 'God chose every word' (480–81)."

The Rejoinder of Formal Equivalence

The counter arguments of the proponents of dynamic equivalence are formidable. However, before one goes and abandons formal equivalence, some further theological analysis is vital. As mentioned, even proponents of dynamic equivalence recognize the usefulness of formal translations.[29] So going deeper into matters of bibliology as well as delving into other systematic categories will qualify the assertions of dynamic equivalence and expound upon the significance of a formal approach.

To begin with, clarifications should be made concerning some of the above arguments. Contrary to the allegation of proponents of dynamic equivalence, formal translation does take into account that words have different lexical nuances.[30] Furthermore, while advocates of functional equivalence have observed that formal translation is not always possible or very difficult, that does not exclude accounting for every word in a translation as a worthwhile goal or aspiration. There are even tools which allow the translator to maintain a formal representation of the original manuscript, word for word, while conveying idioms or supplying terms to complete an idea in a target language. The translator can use italics to signal words that are added out of necessity for the translation but were not present in the original. For more extensive edits, a footnote can be used so that the reader knows the original wording behind the phrase he sees. Such tools are not novel but actually found in church history, particularly at the time of the Reformation.[31]

The presence of italics and footnotes in older translations also qualifies assertions made above about church history. These features suggest that early translators and the Reformers knew the importance of distinguishing that which was rendered directly from the original versus that which was the translators’ own insertion.[32] The prologues to certain Reformational translations also qualified how far their translations would accommodate the culture. Reformational translations guarded against an approach that required the Scripture be completely read in the most common vernacular of the people.[33] Instead, translators did their best to connect their renderings with the common theological vernacular, which is why certain Latinisms were maintained in the text.[34] Moreover, while Luther did desire readable translations for his people, Krause observes, “the unqualified assertion that Luther was a practitioner of the dynamic equivalence theory of translation is anachronistic and somewhat misleading.”[35] The Reformers, as a rule, recognized that the ultimate authority did not lie in their translation but in the authority of the underlying text. It was the original text that dictated the choices of the translator.[36] Such a mentality extends back far before the Reformation. Even though Aquila’s translation received a fair share of criticism, Jerome still operated with a parallel kind of literality. Smith

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[29] Walters, “Bible Translation Method,” 35–36.

[30] Barrick, *Understanding Bible Translation*, 61–71.

[31] Nix, “Theological Presuppositions,” 118–19.

[32] John C. Poirier, “The Case for Italics in Bible Translation,” *Stone-Campbell Journal* 16, no. 2 (2013): 207.

[33] Nix, “Theological Presuppositions,” 121.

[34] Nix, 122.

[35] Krause, “Martin Luther’s Theory of Bible Translation,” 73.

[36] Nix, “Theological Presuppositions,” 125.

reports that, "Jerome himself admitted that his normal practice when translating was to translate 'sense for sense and not word for word' (quoted in Comfort 1991, chapter 7). Yet when it came to translating the Bible, he 'felt the compulsion to render word for word.'"[37] Such a mentality seems to go back to the fact that every word of Scripture is God-breathed. Though church history certainly demonstrates a great concern for clarity, there is still a very present conviction that because every word of God is inspired, every word should be translated.

Additional linguistic considerations indicate that the argument for dynamic equivalence is incomplete, and that formal equivalence possesses some unique advantages. After Nida formulated his code-model schema, Ernst-August Gutt proposed relevance theory, contending that Nida's model did not go far enough.[38] To be sure, meaning involves how every word comes together. However, Gutt observed that in this process each word matters. The specific nuance of an idea was determined by a particular combination of terms, which formed intricate networks of context. These networks were so unique that a different set or ordering of words would produce a slightly different idea. Gutt observed that meaning may be the sum of its parts, but each part matters. Relevance theory reinforces the significance of verbal plenary inspiration. Every word is superintended by God and is present for a purpose. The precise word choice and arrangement produces the idea God exactly intended. Nothing is accidental or coincidental.

Accordingly, Gutt argued that maintaining every word of the original as much as possible retained the complex context to bring forth the fullest nuance originally conveyed. Smoothing out phrases for clarity, Gutt observed, would inherently result in a loss of meaning in translation.[39] There are a couple of ways that translating thought for thought may lead to a loss in meaning. For one, smoothing out a phrase can remove a theological nuance. In arguing for dynamic equivalence and the need for clarity, Mounce critiqued the use of the term "ear" in Acts, contending that translating this supposedly idiomatic term was unnecessary.[40] Ortlund countered, demonstrating the potential that Luke used the term "ear" throughout Acts to illustrate Isaiah's prophecy that unbelievers would have ears that did not hear (Isa 6:10).[41] Others have argued that in certain occasions in Genesis, it is unnecessary and misleading to translate the word ידע as "to know" when it refers to sexual intimacy (cf. Gen 19:5). However, Moses can use a variety of phrases to describe this act (Gen 16:4; 39:10), but the term ידע deals specifically to the marital covenant (Gen 4:1), which subsequently points out the wrongness of polygamous (cf. Gen 4:19) and homosexual unions (cf. Gen 19:5). Words that translators felt were incidental and rendered out of translations actually turned out to be significant.

Dynamic translation can not only lose meaning by removal but also by restriction. In an effort for clarity and to provide the sense of a phrase, scholars have rightly observed that dynamic translation must make far more than a linguistic

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[37] Smith, "Relevance Theory," 67.

[38] Smith, 66.

[39] Smith, 75–76. "By retaining all the communicative clues of the original, direct translation enables readers to recover the full author-intended meaning of the original provided they use the contextual assumptions envisaged for the original to interpret the translated text."

[40] Mounce, "Formal Equivalent Translations," 484.

[41] Ortlund, "On Words," 102.

decision. As a result, the translators’ own interpretation becomes the foregone conclusion for the reader. For example, the nature of the so-called gender inclusion may reinforce certain stances on the issue of the roles of men and women in the church.[42] Translating “old man” (τὸν παλαιὸν ἄνθρωπον) as “old self” suggests psychological elements.[43] Rendering “mist” (הֶבֶל) as “meaninglessness” precludes readers from other interpretative possibilities for the word הֶבֶל, including the notions fleeting or hard to grasp.[44] In these cases, translators have not removed a word from their translations but by moving from what was written to expressing its significance, have restricted the reader to a certain conclusion. Thomas cautioned that if the translator is not careful, translations may often reveal more about his doctrinal preferences as opposed to the original text.[45] As Van Leeuwen states, “My point is not primarily whether the NIV is right or wrong but that its abstract interpretation denies the church access to what the Spirit actually said.”[46] Likewise, Ortlund observed, “*the English reader is never allowed even to consider the possibility* due to the loss of literary concordance” (emphasis original).[47] As Gutt noted, while meaning may be a sum of its parts, every word is still crucial for the nuance of the text and the loss of individual words can be a loss of meaning (and even an insertion of someone else’s meaning).

Such loss is acutely seen in missions and broaches theological issues beyond bibliology. Those on the mission field have argued that with thought-for-thought methodology, the Western, post-colonial bias of translators seeps more dominantly into their renderings.[48] Furthermore, such translations may actually inadvertently remove elements that show a parallel between biblical culture and a non-western nation.[49] Missiologists contend that this is a form of Western imperialism over other cultures.[50] At the same time, translation is not only in danger of Western influence but also in succumbing to the trends of the native culture.[51] If one is not careful, decisions can end up having a translation repeat a cultural norm instead of having the Bible norm every norm.[52]

Many of these issues arise because of an assumption that the reader or people group require special assistance to understand the Bible. Such a presupposition potentially risks several theological missteps. First, it may inadvertently presume a poor anthropology; namely, that a people are so primitive that they could never

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[42] Punt, “(Con)Figuring Gender in Bible Translation,” 3–8; Johns, “Gender Language in Bible Translation,” 50; Aloo Osotsi Mojola, “The Power of Bible Translation,” *Priscilla Papers* 33, no. 2 (2019): 3–7.

[43] Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, “We Really Do Need Another Bible Translation,” *Christianity Today* 45, no. 13 (October 22, 2001): 31.

[44] Van Leeuwen, 32.

[45] William D. Barrick, “The Integration of Theology with Bible Translation,” *The Master's Seminary Journal* 12, no. 1 (2001): 30; Robert L. Thomas, *How to Choose a Bible Version: An Introductory Guide to English Translations* (Fearn: Mentor, 2000), 105.

[46] Van Leeuwen, “We Really Do Need Another Bible Translation,” 32.

[47] Ortlund, “On Words,” 102.

[48] Zogbo, “Issues in Bible Translation in Africa,” 279–83; Yorke, “Bible Translation,” 153–55; James Maxey, “Bible Translation as Contextualization: The Role of Orality,” *Missiology* 38, no. 2 (April 2010): 173–77.

[49] Harries, “Pragmatic Linguistics,” 83.

[50] Mojola, “The Power of Bible Translation,” 3.

[51] Punt, “(Con)Figuring Gender in Bible Translation,” 2.

[52] Punt, 3.

understand biblical truth. While cultures differ and proper interpretation faces a culture gap,[53] all mankind is from Adam, made in the image of God (Gen 1:26–28), and thereby those who can be saved and sanctified by God's grace (Rom 5:15). Second, to assume that a culture requires interpretative translational intervention also runs into an issue in hamartiology as well. Biblically, the fundamental reason one cannot understand the truth is not because there is some insurmountable cultural or language barrier, but because of sin (Rom 1:18; 2 Cor 3:15–16). Third, presuming that another culture cannot grasp God's Word when presented literally to them undermines what God does in salvation. The Spirit who regenerates and indwells the believer, illuminates him, enabling him to understand the Word He wrote (Eph 1:17; 2 Pet 1:20–21). The translator cannot improve on the Spirit's work but must depend upon it.

One does well to remember it was not that long ago when Rome argued the lay people were too unsophisticated to be able to handle God's Word. Time has illustrated that the "not wise" person (cf. 1 Cor 1:26) yet who is saved, sanctified, and illumined by the Spirit, can understand God's Word, word for word. Such a lesson is instructive when it comes to modern missions and translation. Cultures do not need to be coddled by translators; but missionaries should have confidence in what God's Word declares about humanity, the human condition, and the transformation of salvific conversion. To assume otherwise not only runs into theological pitfalls but as a result, into the very missiological problems mentioned above. All of this is a reminder that bibliology is not the only factor in approaching the matter of translation. Anthropology, soteriology, hamartiology, and pneumatology are involved as well.

The solution to all these issues is to provide, as much as possible, a word-for-word translation to the reader. Because the translator has not necessarily studied every nuance of Scripture, this method ensures that nothing is smoothed out and removed. It is better to be safer than sorry. This method also prevents an artificial restriction of terms that force a reader to a certain interpretative conclusion. Even more, such formal equivalence also avoids a plethora of missiological issues because it provides what was originally written so that the Bible's influence is asserted on its own terms.[54] Instead of using translation to inadvertently export Western culture to another country, this approach has every people group encounter the world of the Bible and see how that defines everyone's culture. Just as the ploughman can know as much as the priest, so the indigenous reader can actually understand more than the translator. [55] That is the beauty of a formal translation where the translator has neither restricted nor removed the nuance of the original.[56] For this reason, Van der Merwe remarked that in missions while congregations may prefer to read something more

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[53] Andreas J. Köstenberger and Richard Duane Patterson, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation: Exploring the Hermeneutical Triad of History, Literature, and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2011), 93–94.

[54] Punt, "(Con)Figuring Gender in Bible Translation," 8. This is what Punt calls *logoscentric*. While he uses his theory to argue in a way that this writer would disagree, his premise still stands and forms the standard by which one may debate his assertions, that is, on lexicographic grounds.

[55] Harries, "Pragmatic Linguistics," 87.

[56] Poirier, "The Case for Italics in Bible Translation," 216.

dynamic together, “‘serious Bible readers’ would prefer a more literal rendering, in which less of the interpretative decisions are made for them.”[57]

Thus, ironically, though Nida had originally intended dynamic equivalence particularly for the mission field, missiologists have pushed back against his very notion because it can undermine the work of missions. Instead, there is a recognition overseas of the value of a formal translation. The Bible student desires to know that the precise meaning of Scripture is not lost and that Christian doctrine and practice is not because of Western bias but because of scriptural dictate. With that, the theological discussion concerning translation methodology has come full circle. After all that has been said and done, the original simple logic of bibliology is upheld in support of the value of formal equivalence.

A Hermeneutical Consideration

In addition to the theological discussion above, a hermeneutical consideration is also fitting for the discussion of translation philosophy. After all, the Greek root of the term “translate” is the word for hermeneutics.[58] Translation is a form of interpretation and as such, the question of formal versus dynamic approaches of translation mirror the questions about the nature of author versus reader in hermeneutics.[59] It was none other than Friedrich Schleiermacher, the father of theological liberalism, who observed, “Either the translator leaves the author alone as much as possible and moves the reader toward the author, or the translator leaves the reader alone as much as possible and moves the author toward the reader.”[60]

As discussed elsewhere, the doctrines of revelation, inspiration, inerrancy, and illumination demand the centrality of authorial intent.[61] The meaning of Scripture is not what one desires a text to mean or whatever it could linguistically mean, but what God intended. In biblical interpretation, the reader does not determine the meaning of the text; rather, it is determined by the author. The author does not bow and adapt to the reader, the reader bows and adapts to the author. In the same way, for translation, as part of interpretation, the standard and point of reference is not the reader but the author. As such, translation should leave the author alone as much as possible and move the reader to his wording and intent. Just as the goal of exposition is to express all that God meant, so the goal of translation is to render all that God wrote.

This hermeneutical consideration reinforces that the question is not how much one should reduce in a translation but how much one can bring out from what the Author wrote. This is especially the case since God has not merely inspired the ideas of Scripture but what is written (2 Tim 3:16), down to the very word (Josh 23:15),

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[57] W. K. Winckler and Christo Van der Merwe, “Training Tomorrow’s Bible Translators: Some Theoretical Pointers,” *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 19 (1993): 53–55; Smith, “Relevance Theory,” 76.

[58] μεθερμηνεύω, Matt 1:23; 5:41; Mark 15:22, 34; John 1:38, 41; Acts 4:36; 13:8; or διερμηνεύω, cf. 1 Cor 12:30; 14:5, 13, 26–27, 28, or ἑρμηνεύω, John 1:42; 9:7; Heb 7:2.

[59] Stolt, “Luther’s Translation of the Bible,” 377.

[60] Ibid.

[61] See Abner Chou, “The Hermeneutics of the Pastor-Theologian,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 34, no. 1 (Spring 2023): 55–67.

even the "jot and tittle" (Matt 5:18), and to the point where there is no error in any of it (John 17:17). If God has written His Word with such precision, upholds it to that degree (2 Cor 1:20), and holds every believer accountable to all of it (Deut 18:19; Heb 2:1–3; 6:1–3; Jas 1:23–25), should not the translator want to abide by the same standard? Just as inspiration demands the preacher to proclaim every word of Scripture, so it demands the translator to account for every word of Scripture.

A Lingering Question

The discussion of theology and translational philosophy is most certainly complex. To be clear, because translation is a tool, there can be both room and gratefulness for multiple kinds of translation. They all have usefulness in interpreting Scripture. That being said, theological, linguistic, historical, hermeneutical, and even missiological considerations highlight the value of a word-for-word translation. This method of translation allows for the retention of the most nuanced context, an emphasis on authorial intent, and a higher prevention of bias. Church history not only illustrates that such concerns were not without precedent but even provided the tools, like italics and footnotes, to aid in this endeavor. A formal translation is a great help to both the serious Bible student and the work of missions overseas because it brings the reader to the author just as it hermeneutically ought to be.

Nevertheless, dynamic equivalence's overriding concern about clarity still remains. One can have the words of the author but lose his intent, and what profit is a translation where one has the verbiage of Scripture but loses its message? Though the above reflections have demonstrated that there is risk of restricting or removing intent by a thought-for-thought translation, the original impetus of understandability which drove that method still stands. This is precisely why church history is replete with examples of a concerted effort to represent every word of the original even as there was equal concern that people understood the sense of Scripture.

For the proponents of dynamic translation, the matter of clarity is yet to be answered by those who prefer formal equivalence. The question though exposes yet another opportunity for theology to fill out a true philosophy of translation. While translators have sought to resolve the matter of clarity through translation philosophy, the doctrine of ecclesiology points to a better and more biblical way.

Ecclesiology, Exposition, and the Missing Factor for Translation

Ecclesiology and Translation

The concern for clarity held by the proponents of dynamic equivalence is not irrelevant. The Scripture is not merely to be replicated or translated but to be heard and done (cf. Jas 1:23). If the reader cannot understand the Word of God, then he is not edified. So those who advocate a thought-for-thought methodology have raised a highly legitimate point.

The issue though is not with the problem but with the solution. Is translation where the matter of clarity is truly solved? Is that the translator's role? The doctrine of ecclesiology addresses such questions.

The church is Christ’s body (1 Cor 12:13), of which each member is given gifts by the Spirit (1 Cor 12:12) purposed to give honor to God the Father (1 Cor 12:4–6). Based upon these truths, the question is what God-given role is tasked with aiding the saint in understanding what he reads. The answer is not the translator but the teacher. God has given pastors and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry (Eph 4:11–12). He required that elders be able to teach (1 Tim 3:2) and charged the leaders of the church to feed His sheep (cf. John 21:15–17; 1 Pet 5:2), preach the Word (2 Tim 4:1–2), refute error (Titus 1:13), and model a life of obedience and godliness (1 Pet 5:3). Those who shepherd God’s people are to pay attention to themselves and to their teaching (1 Tim 4:16). So the pastor has the ministry of the Word, and it is that ministry, not the work of translation, that deals with elucidating God’s Word to the saint. To be clear, every saint is to meditate on God’s Word (Josh 1:8; Ps 1:2), but they do not do so in a vacuum. Their pastor is present to come alongside them and, like Ezra, to explain the meaning of the text and give insight into its ramifications (Neh 8:8). The job of the translator is not to ensure God’s people grasp His revelation; in God’s design of the church, that is the job of the expositor.

Acts 8: An Illustration of Translation and the Expositor

Acts 8 is a helpful illustration of the complementarity of the translator and the expositor. In context, the book of Acts narrates the origin and mission of the church and its significance in God’s plan.[62] Christ’s own words arrange the structure of the book (Acts 1:8), that gospel witness must go to Jerusalem (Acts 1–7), Samaria and Judea (Acts 8–12), and the ends of the earth (Acts 13–28).

Within this, Acts 8 initiates the section where the church’s witness moves from Jerusalem to Samaria and Judea. God sent Philip to minister to an Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26) to signal that the gospel must go to places like Samaria (Acts 8:4–24) and to Jewish proselytes far outside the land of Israel. Such a context establishes that the narrative of Acts 8 sets a precedent not only for translation and exposition, but also for missions and the nature of the church.

Though the main point of this pericope deals with the advance of the gospel as supported by prophecy (Acts 8:32–35; cf. Isa 56:4), the elements of translation and exposition are involved to drive this purpose. In Acts 8, Luke provided a Greek translation of Isaiah 53:7–8, and it is of note that this translation is a highly formal one (Acts 8:32–33). The translation completely matches the LXX and also highly matches the MT with two points of consideration.

First, the Greek translation renders the Hebrew term אָשׂוֹחַ (muse, consider) as διηγήσεται (recount, describe). Is this a warranted rendering? The piel of שׂיח is rare, only otherwise appearing in Psalm 143:5. There is lexical debate about the nature of the term as it can range from the notion of muse to the ideas of recounting or instructing. Given that the qal stem of the word denotes musing or contemplation, the piel is either intensive/factitive or expressive, conveying a deep consideration or the communication of that thinking. However, these two ideas are not mutually exclusive

[62] Darrell Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 24; F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 7.

since both ideas are present in the only parallel of Psalm 143:5.[63] So the Greek translation of "recounting" (διηγήσεται) is not only word for word but is a nuanced lexical choice.

Second, the Greek translates the final part of Isaiah 53:8 with ὅτι αἴρεται ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς ἡ ζωὴ αὐτοῦ (because his life is taken from the land) whereas the Hebrew has כִּי נִגְזַר מֵאֶרֶץ חַיִּים (because he was cut off from the land of the living). In determining whether this rendering is valid, it first should be said that the LXX translation could actually be one way to read the Hebrew consonantal text. At the same time, the Greek translator of Isaiah had a propensity to give the sense of the idiom "land of the living" (cf. Isa 38:11; בְּאֶרֶץ הַחַיִּים, ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς). Synthesizing these factors, the translator provided the clear sense of an idiom even while still reflecting every word of the original text, modeling cleverness in accomplishing the objectives of both formal and dynamic equivalence.

All that to say, the translation of Isaiah 53:7–8 in Acts 8 is quite precise. Since Luke did not always quote the Scripture (Luke 24:27, 32; Acts 17:11; 18:28), he partly provided the quotation not only to show the passage the eunuch was providentially reading from (and its highly related context, cf. Isa 56:4) but also to demonstrate that the Word of God was clearly presented to him. Translation is necessary and plays a crucial role in the gospel going to the ends of the earth.

However, the narrative illustrates that an excellent translation is not enough. Exposition is still required. Though the eunuch possessed such a sound translation and was reading it intently (Acts 8:30), he still had questions. The eunuch wondered who the speaker was in the passage (8:34), a matter that cannot be solved by translation. Instead, Philip "opened his mouth" (ἀνοίξας…τὸ στόμα αὐτοῦ), a phrase often associated with the initiation of speech, teaching, and official pronouncement (cf. Matt 5:2; Acts 10:34; 18:14). Translation is not sufficient; insightful instruction is needed. Consequently, Philip began (ἀρξάμενος) from the text of Isaiah to proclaim the gospel to the eunuch. To truly answer the eunuch's question and explain to him the significance of what he was reading, Philip needed to expound upon the passage in Isaiah from its context in Scripture. This may have included that salvation extended to eunuchs as Isaiah himself prophesied (Isa 56:3–5). It certainly included teaching on repentance and baptism (Acts 8:36). This illustrates that translation can only take one so far, and that it is not bad for translations to raise questions. Raising questions, particularly those found in the original text, is not a failure for a translation. Rather, in doing so, such translations set up the expositor to come in (cf. Acts 8:31) and use that accurate translation to guide one in the meaning of God's Word.

A wordplay in Luke's narration brings together the tension of translation and exposition. Luke described that while the eunuch was reading (ἀναγινώσκω) the translation of Scripture, Philip asked if he understood it (γινώσκω) (Acts 8:30). Both terms share the same root word γινώσκω, meaning "to know." A translation allows one to read and know to a certain degree. After all, the eunuch knew enough to wonder if Isaiah was the one speaking in the prophecy (8:34). However, an

[63] Note the wording of Ps 143:5 in Hebrew (הָגִיתִי בְכָל־פָּעָלֶךָ בְּמַעֲשֵׂה יָדֶיךָ אָשׂוֹחֵחַ) and that אָשׂוֹחֵחַ parallels the term הָגִיתִי which denotes "meditation" or "musing." Given that synonymous parallelism brings out the nuances between words, this suggests that אָשׂוֹחֵחַ goes beyond just "musing" to denote the expression of such musing and thereby recounting.

expositor’s job is to allow one to know more completely. As the man from Ethiopia said, “Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?” (Acts 8:31). So in God’s providence, He not only gave a translation to an Ethiopian eunuch but sent an expositor so that He could demonstrate the inclusion of those who otherwise would be excluded.

New Testament’s Use of the Old Testament

The New Testament’s translation of the Old upholds the complementarity of the translator and expositor found in the narrative of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch. Several works have analyzed the way the New Testament translates the Old.[64] Fascinatingly, a work in 1868, *The Old Testament in the New* by David Turpie, has done so quite exhaustively. It organized 275 quotations of the Old Testament in the New into five categories. The first is where the MT, LXX, and New Testament agree. The second is where the MT and New Testament agree but not with the LXX. The third is where the MT and LXX agree but the New Testament differs. The fourth is where the New Testament and LXX agree but not with the MT. The fifth is where the MT, LXX, and New Testament all differ from each other.

Based upon Turpie’s analysis, 63 out of 275 quotations fall into the first two categories where the New Testament and MT closely align. Nearly a quarter of the quotations are without question formal equivalent translations, which go beyond even what modern formal translations would do. For example, Acts 28:26 quotes from Isaiah 6:9 as follows: Ἀκοῇ ἀκούσετε καὶ οὐ μὴ συνῆτε καὶ βλέποντες βλέψετε καὶ οὐ μὴ ἴδητε. The Greek construction is awkward as it woodenly reflects an infinitive absolute construction in Hebrew (שָׁמְעָ֥ה שָׁמֹ֖ועַ וְאַל־תָּבִ֑ינוּ וּרְא֥וֹ רָא֖וֹ וְאַל־תֵּדָֽעוּ), which has no parallel in Greek grammar. Formal English translations often render such constructions along the lines of “keep hearing” and “keep seeing” (LSB, NASB, NIV) attempting to blend clarity with expressing what was written. However, the ancient translators preferred to reflect as rigidly as possible what was originally written and were undeterred that their renderings would be awkward for their readers. Such instances exemplify their mentality to preserve the author as much as possible and to bring the reader to what he penned. In fact, in ten of these instances, the New Testament writers even corrected the LXX to more closely match the MT.[65]

But what about the times when the New Testament varies from the MT? Turpie observes that such differences are often driven not by an alternative translation philosophy but because of the apostles’ expositional purpose. Fundamentally, these variations do not undermine a formal translation technique. For instance, the LXX and MT explicitly state “Honor *your* father and *your* mother” (כַּבֵּ֥ד אֶת־אָבִ֖יךָ וְאֶת־אִמֶּ֑ךָ) whereas the New Testament has τίμα τὸν πατέρα καὶ τὴν μητέρα (Matt 15:4). Though the New Testament phrasing does not explicitly have the pronoun mentioned, the

[64] G. K. Beale, *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament: Exegesis and Interpretation* (Baker Academic, 2012); G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007); Gleason Archer and Gregory Chirichigno, *Old Testament Quotations in the New Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983).

[65] David McCalman Turpie, *The Old Testament in the New: A Contribution to Biblical Criticism and Interpretation* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1868), 267.

Greek article is often used as a possessive pronoun.[66] So a formal translation is still expressed, just using the grammar of the target language. Likewise, modifications to quotations can occur to adapt them to the syntax of the context. For example, in the quote above, an additional factor of consideration is that because Christ spoke these words to the Pharisees and the scribes (cf. Matt 15:1), the wording might be slightly adapted to fit with the context as well as with the language of the next quotation (Matt 15:4b; cf. Exod 21:17). Such alteration not only happens in oral speech but in the apostles' writings as well (cf. Gal 3:12; Lev 18:5).[67] Turpie notes that the vast majority of differences stem from such limited lexical or syntactical modifications as opposed to an alternative translation of an entire clause, by nearly a 3:1 ratio.[68]

Turpie also observes that more substantial changes often occur because a New Testament quote merges multiple Old Testament quotes together. For example, Christ quoted from Exodus 16:15 in John 6:31, declaring that God gave Israel bread. The Lord also added the words "from heaven" taken from Psalm 78:24. This too is not indicative of a mistranslation or a loosening of formal equivalence but stems from blending passages together to expound the Scriptures. Such juxtaposition is not exactly "translation" per se, but an efficient way to compare Scripture with Scripture, a part of exposition. Such activity illustrates that while the apostles certainly quoted translations (see above), they also employed biblical quotations as expositors. Just as a modern-day preacher may adapt a quotation of Scripture for syntactical smoothness or may re-translate a text to bring out a certain exegetical emphasis, so the biblical writers did as the first expositors.

Such renderings for the sake of exposition explain a lot of the variations that are found in the New Testament's translation of the Old Testament. One that is a well-known example is Peter's quotation of Amos 9:11 in Acts 15. Because of the great differences between the New Testament text and the Old Testament, some have argued that the Hebrew text in Amos may not be accurate and that the LXX reading should be preferred.[69] However, two observations should be made. First, Peter did not claim that he was only quoting from a single Old Testament passage. He actually said the opposite, introducing the quotation with the formula, "the words of the Prophets agree" (συμφωνοῦσιν οἱ λόγοι τῶν προφητῶν). The plural of prophets in Peter's introductory formula (τῶν προφητῶν) implies that his quotation was not merely of one prophet but of multiple. Indeed, it is agreed that Isaiah 45:2 and Zechariah 8:22 are incorporated into this quotation.[70] Second, based upon this, others have observed allusions to Obadiah 15 and Joel 2:32 in this quotation as well, especially since those passages were inter-textually linked with Amos 9:11

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[66] Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 215.

[67] The Hebrew (אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה אֹתָם הָאָדָם וָחַי בָּהֶם) and Greek (ἃ ποιήσας ἄνθρωπος ζήσεται ἐν αὐτοῖς) of Lev 18:5 is constructed in a relative clause. For this reason, the noun "man" is added to designate the subject. Paul in Galatians 3:12 quotes the phrase not as a relative clause but as an independent clause, making certain grammatical changes to make this fit (Ὁ ποιήσας αὐτὰ ζήσεται ἐν αὐτοῖς).

[68] Turpie, *The Old Testament in the New*, 268–69.

[69] David Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 431; C. K. Barrett, *Acts* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), 726.

[70] W. Edward Glenny, "The Septuagint and Apostolic Hermeneutics: Amos 9 in Acts 15," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 22, no. 1 (2012): 8.

originally.[71] Peter’s quotation at the Jerusalem Council was not a loose translation of Amos but rather an act of exposition, weaving biblical quotes together to let Scripture interpret Scripture and bring forth its message.

Another example of an expositional rendering is Matthew’s quotation of Micah 5:2: “AND YOU, BETHLEHEM, LAND OF JUDAH, ARE BY NO MEANS LEAST AMONG THE LEADERS OF JUDAH; FOR OUT OF YOU SHALL COME FORTH A LEADER WHO WILL SHEPHERD MY PEOPLE ISRAEL” (Matt 2:6; LSB). The emphasis of leaders (ἡγεμόσιν) is not found in Micah 5:2, which uses clans (אֶלֶף, χιλιάς). However, Matthew brings out this wording in order to make a point about Christ. Though the Lord may not come from a dominant city of leaders, He will be the leader. Matthew adapted the text to make an exegetical and expositional point.

The same pattern can be seen in the New Testament quotations of Habakkuk 2:4. Turpie rightly identifies that the New Testament quotation of this text differs from the LXX translation and even differs within the New Testament itself. Galatians renders Habakkuk 2:4 differently than Hebrews. But these issues can be resolved by understanding the expositional purpose of these quotations. Regarding the quotation of Habakkuk 2:4 in Galatians, Paul’s translation is closer to the Hebrew than the LXX.[72] The only difference is that the Hebrew term faithfulness (אֱמוּנָה) is translated as faith by Paul (ἐκ πίστεως). The reason for this is to bring out the doctrine of justification by faith, which is a legitimate aspect of Habakkuk 2:4. Habakkuk 2:4 inter-textually connects with Genesis 15:6, linking it with the theme of justification by faith. Furthermore, because Habakkuk 2:4 contrasts faithfulness with a pride that does not depend upon the Lord, the faithfulness in view is a faithful faith, a nuance that Paul’s translation brings out.[73] Similarly, regarding the quotation of Habakkuk 2:4 in Hebrews 10:38, it is recognized that the latter part of the quotation highly corresponds with the MT.[74] The question is how the former part of the quotation in Hebrews, “AND IF HE SHRINKS BACK, MY SOUL HAS NO PLEASURE IN HIM,” corresponds with the original, “as for the proud one, His soul is not right within him.” In response, the term shrinking back (ὑποστέλλω) has been associated with withdrawing into the part of circumcision (cf. Gal 2:20, ὑπέστελλεν καὶ ἀφώριζεν ἑαυτὸν φοβούμενος τοὺς ἐκ περιτομῆς), a real temptation for the original audience of the book of Hebrews. To drift back into Judaism was a refusal to trust Christ and a form of arrogance.[75] The author of Hebrews worded Habakkuk 2:4 in a way that

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[71] For details see Abner Chou, *The Hermeneutics of the Biblical Writers: Learning Interpretation from the Prophets and Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2018), 147–48.

[72] The LXX of Habakkuk 2:4 is ὁ δὲ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεώς μου ζήσεται (the righteous will live from my faith) whereas the both the Hebrew (וְצַדִּיק בֶּאֱמוּנָתוֹ יִחְיֶה) and Paul’s quotation (Ὁ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται) are closer to “the righteous will by [his] faith.”

[73] See George J. Zemek, “Interpretive Challenges Relating to Habakkuk 2:4b,” *Grace Theological Journal* 1 (1980): 43–69.

[74] Compare וְצַדִּיק בֶּאֱמוּנָתוֹ יִחְיֶה with ὁ δὲ δίκαιός μου ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται. The only difference is the possessive pronoun which is in a different placement than the LXX, is sensible in context, and ties in with the following phrase, “My soul has no pleasure” (οὐκ εὐδοκεῖ ἡ ψυχή μου ἐν αὐτῷ). See discussion above about how biblical writers adapted quotes for both theological purposes but also blended multiple passages or quotes together as they are incorporated into speech.

[75] William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Inc., 1998), 305; F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Epistles to the Hebrews*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 274.

applied it directly to the audience. This adaptation is not indicative of a translation philosophy but of the author's expositional purpose.

One final observation supports that New Testament quotations at times are expositional rather than just strict translation. Turpie notes that the New Testament can differ from both the LXX and MT.[76] This raises a question. If there was a translation that was available, acceptable, and accurate, why would the New Testament diverge from it? While Turpie acknowledges that this can occur for the sake of syntax or juxtaposing multiple quotations into one, he also observes that such variation often occurs for the sake of the author's inspired theological emphasis.[77] Such an emphasis would have been even more noticeable since it contrasted the translation the audience was familiar with. The activity is quite parallel to what modern expositors do as they compare and contrast their own translations with the Bible version they use in the pulpit. In Turpie's analysis, these instances of exposition along with the times when New Testament quotations are undoubtedly formal translations are the majority of all quotations in the New Testament.[78]

That the apostles often had an expositional (and not just translational) purpose in their quotations is a reminder of the significance of these citations. These quotes of the Old Testament are not merely indicators of the Old Testament text referenced, but the very wording itself is designed to bring out the author's point. Thus, it behooves the expositor to not only understand the context and content of the Old Testament passage itself but also to compare and contrast the translation provided so as to identify the nuanced emphasis of the apostle concerning that text. Such analysis sharpens one's comprehension of the author's intent and illustrates the verbal plenary inspiration of Scripture. Even the wording of a quotation matters in bringing forth the precise message of Scripture.

Overall, Turpie concludes that though the New Testament's translation of the Old Testament does differ at times from either the LXX or the MT, those variations are not indicative of corruption whether by text or translator. In Turpie's words, such allegations are "needless."[79] There were times when the apostles quoted the Old Testament with the intent to provide a translation. In those instances, the citations possessed remarkable conformity to the original wording and grammar even if it read awkwardly to the target audience. At the same time, there were other occasions when the apostles quoted the Old Testament not merely to provide translation but to bring

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[76] Turpie, *The Old Testament in the New*, 268.

[77] Turpie, 58–59, 63, 68.

[78] Turpie, 93. One discussion should concern the instances when the New Testament agrees with the LXX but not with the MT. Interestingly enough, one of the most dominant examples of this occurs in Acts 8:32–33, the text concerning the eunuch and Philip. See above discussion on that. However, it is noteworthy in that instance that Turpie observes, "In comparing the two clauses, while it is but right that the Hebrew, as found in the received text, should be taken for the original, it is no less right that the Greek version of the inspired Luke should, with all ingenuousness, be regarded as correctly conveying the original idea, quoted, though the words be, from the Sept., inasmuch as, had they not rightly rendered the passage, It is but reasonable to believe that they would have been exchanged for others more appropriate, of which having been done there are not wanting examples." Often, Turpie observes that the differences are idiomatic (105–106). At times, it might be due to a difference of pointing (104, 108), which still demonstrates the preservation of the consonantal text. See below for Turpie's summative comments on these matters.

[79] Turpie, 268.

out an explanation. Such activity actually presumed an underlying base translation, one that by contrast would highlight the emphasis of the New Testament writer’s nuanced quotation.

Such analysis matches what Roger Nicole noted in his discussion on the way the New Testament translates the Old Testament. Like Turpie, Nicole noticed that when there is particularly a quotation of Scripture with introductory formulae, there is remarkable verbal accuracy.[80] Like Turpie, Nicole observed that often slight modifications occurred in tense or person to suit the syntactical context of the New Testament.[81] He also observed that certain citations combined quotations of the Old Testament or summarized a passage. Like Turpie, Nicole further discerned that at times the apostles intentionally deviated from the exact wording of the Old Testament to bring out a certain sense.[82] In addition to these agreements, Nicole insightfully noted that the New Testament writers did not have brackets, ellipses, or footnotes to indicate the merging of quotations or the presence of their own editorial comments.[83] That is why a modern-day reader may have initial difficulty identifying the quotation of a pure translation versus an expositional rendering; nevertheless, these two activities are distinct and discernable. Upon reflection of these principles, Nicole concluded that “they provide a very satisfactory explanation of apparent discrepancies in almost all cases, and a possible solution in all cases.”[84] This affirms Turpie’s affirmation of the fidelity of the New Testament’s translation of the Old Testament, and that indeed, the New Testament writers engaged Old Testament translation to either quote it as a translation or to expound upon it as an expositor.

The connection of translation and exposition is not just a New Testament phenomenon. In Nehemiah 8, the Levites “read from the book, from the law of God, explaining and giving insight, and they provided understanding of the reading” (Neh 8:8). The phrase “explaining and giving insight” (מְפֹרָשׁ וְשׂוֹם שֶׂכֶל) modifies the phrase “read from the book” (וַיִּקְרְאוּ בַסֵּפֶר בְּתוֹרַת), conveying that as the Levites read aloud from the Hebrew text, they commented upon the Scripture. The question is the nature of this interpretative activity. Based upon the Aramaic parallel found in Ezra 4:18, some have argued that this describes the Levites translating (מְפֹרָשׁ) the Hebrew text into Aramaic and then providing insight into the text (וְשׂוֹם שֶׂכֶל).[85] Others contend that this is unlikely since it was only later that the Israelites could not speak the language of Judah (Neh 13:24).[86] Because at the time of Nehemiah 8 people knew Hebrew, it would be completely unnecessary to have the text translated. In light of this, some suggest that the term מְפֹרָשׁ refers to explanation, as it is consistently used elsewhere (Lev 24:12; Num 15:34). They further propose that the phrase וְשׂוֹם שֶׂכֶל

[80] R. Nicole, “The New Testament Use of the Old Testament,” in *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts*, ed. G. K. Beale (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 18.

[81] Nicole, 21.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Nicole, 20.

[84] Nicole, 18.

[85] M. Breneman, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1993), 225; C. Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 217.

[86] D. Kidner, *Ezra and Nehemiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1979), 116; H. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), 290.

refers to establishing the insights or ramifications the text has upon life, which is also supported later on in context (cf. Neh 8:13–14).[87] The combination of expounding the meaning of the text and providing insightful application is the heart of exposition. This latter interpretation is most likely correct given the historical context and lexical consistency.[88] Nevertheless, the entire question of whether פרשׁ denotes "translation" or "explanation," illustrates the distinction yet connection of the two ideas. Even in the Old Testament, people understood that translation and exposition were two sides of interpretation. But while translations (like the original) were to be read (וַיִּקְרְאוּ בַּסֵּפֶר בְּתוֹרַת), exposition is what provides the reader understanding of what is read (וַיָּבִינוּ בַּמִּקְרָא, Neh 8:8).

While translation philosophy has faced seemingly conflicting purposes of meticulous accuracy and clarity, the New Testament writers demonstrate that these are not mutually exclusive options. As established in biblical ecclesiology, God has ordained many parts within Christ's body (cf. 1 Cor 12:12), including the translator and teacher. The story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch is a reminder that translation can only go so far. There is a moment when the expositor must step in, relying upon an accurate translation to be able to explain God's Word clearly. The translator is completed by the expositor. The translator's questions of clarity and understanding are resolved by the work of the expositor, even as the expositor must depend upon the translator for a precise rendering to bring forth the right questions and answers. The apostles' own use of the translation confirms those realities as they quote the Old Testament with vigorous accuracy and expound upon it with nuance. All of this argues that the translator is responsible for delivering what the author *wrote* even as the teacher is responsible for delivering what the author *meant*. One does not need to choose between accuracy and clarity; he can have both as long as he assigns these responsibilities to the right role. In that way, theology not only provides the truths that undergird the work of translation and shapes its practice, but also gives answers to its most pressing questions and completes its endeavor.

Conclusion

Theology is never separate from any area of life or ministry (cf. 2 Pet 1:3), and translation is no exception to that rule. It is theology that undergirds the endeavor of translation, providing the reason for why it exists and why it can take place. It is theology that shapes the activity of translation with bibliology reminding the translator of the importance of each word, hermeneutics reorienting him to uphold the author and not the reader, and anthropology, hamartiology, and soteriology restraining the missionary from being unintentionally condescending to those to whom he ministers. It is also theology that completes the goal of translation, as ecclesiology helps to solve the ever-present dilemma of translation; namely, how to have a precise translation that preserves every inspired word while granting clarity to

[87] In Nehemiah 8:13, the word "insight" (שׂכל) is repeated (וּלְהַשְׂכִּיל אֶל־דִּבְרֵי הַתּוֹרָה), contextually describing how they should live during the feast of booths (Neh 8:14). Insight then pertains to helpful understanding of the ramifications or applications of biblical truth.

[88] Part of this argument observes that one appeals to the Hebrew sense of the term פרשׁ as opposed to the idea of the Aramaic cognate.

the reader of what was intended. Proper ecclesiology reminds God’s people that such a task does not totally fall upon the translator’s shoulders but is shared by the expositor. Theology—more than just bibliology—helps to provide clarity and conviction about the enterprise of Bible translation. This is a reminder of the great need and benefit of thinking carefully and circumspectly about all matters of this world from the totality of Scripture.

Within this, the discussion on translation is a reminder that every part of the ministry of the Word revolves around exposition. There is a reason that the apostles constantly called upon the leadership of the church to declare God’s Word (1 Tim 4:11; 5:17; 6:2b; Titus 1:9; 2 Tim 4:1–2; Heb 13:7), that such teaching is the sustenance and sanctification of the believer (John 17:17; 1 Pet 1:22–2:3; 2 Pet 1:6; Jas 1:19–26), and that discussions of bibliology, hermeneutics, and discipleship all are in the context of such instruction (cf. Col 1:24–29; 2 Tim 3:16–4:1; 2 Pet 1:19–21). Discussions about Scripture inevitably gravitate toward exposition because it is centrifugal to the ministry of the Word in the life of the church. And this most certainly applies to translation. After all, the very word for “translate” in both Hebrew and Greek is equally connected with the notion of interpretation and exposition.[89] Even on a lexical level, translation demands an expositor.

Thus, in an age of specialization, when disciplines are done in isolation, one cannot divorce the role and work of the expositor from the endeavor of translation or on mission teams. To be sure, the work of the translator is its own skill set—vital, nuanced, and requiring adept capabilities and training. But translation is not the end all, and the translator does not have to carry the entire burden of the reader’s understanding. That is where the expositor must come in, a reminder of the God-ordained centrality of the expository ministry in the work of the church. For as the Ethiopian eunuch asked, “Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?” (Acts 8:31).

[89] See above discussion.

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BECAUSE THEY UNDERSTAND

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A chief goal of Bible translation is to provide a biblical text that its readers and hearers could understand, so that their lives could be transformed by the power of God's Word. To achieve this goal most effectively, the translation ought to be done in the vernacular. In the Old and the New Testaments, the examples of Ezra, Jesus, and Philip testify to the value of a vernacular translation and its impact on the life of an eternal soul. This article surveys various translations and shows that a Bible in the language of the people best serves the readers to be affected by the Word of God to submit to God.

* * * * *

Introduction[1]

A humid tropical heat blankets the mosque. Children chanting their lessons in Arabic lend an air of charm and mystery to the scene. In the distance the ringing of bicycle rickshaw bells punctuates the intermittent silence. Then a babble of children's cheerful voices cascades over the courtyard as they crowd into a single classroom. They settle into their cross-legged seating upon bamboo mats on the hard clay floor and a hush descends over the room.

Bustling into the room and confronting his visitors, a white-bearded mullah inquires, "Did you give this book to my son?"

"Yes," I replied. The book is a paperback edition of the Muslim Bengali Common Language (MBCL) New Testament.

"You didn't give me one," he protests.

[1] The current article originally appeared as a chapter entitled "Because They Understand," in William D. Barrick, *Understanding Bible Translation: Bringing God's Word into New Contexts* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2019), 21–42.

"I will give you a more nicely bound edition for yourself," I promise.

As the principal, the mullah oversees the madrassa (an Islamic day school) housed in a suburban neighborhood mosque in Chittagong, Bangladesh. His son serves as one of the teachers in the madrassa. Squatting down beside me where I am sitting on the floor, the elderly gentleman holds the book in his outstretched right hand. "Can you read this book?" As he asks the question, he places the Bengali New Testament in my hands.

"Yes. May I choose the passage?" He tilts his head slightly to convey his positive response—a gesture common to all Bangladeshis.

Watching us intently are about forty young students between the ages of eight and fifteen. They sit on the floor around us, filling the classroom. With a few softly spoken words, the mullah instructs a student to take the Qur'an off its stand in front of us. The student carefully removes the Qur'an and wraps it in a protective cloth. Then he gently and respectfully places it on a shelf in the wall.

My missionary colleague and I marvel at the alacrity with which the students obey their elderly principal. In but a brief minute or two, he summarily sets aside the scheduled reading of their highly revered holy book. Perhaps he is being extravagantly gracious and hospitable to two American missionaries. After all, we are not free to go until our hosts have served us some tea and "biscuits" (actually, we would call them "cookies"). Then again, he might be deeply interested in what this new book has to say.

Having obtained his permission, I open the book and begin. When I finish reading the passage, the seemingly quiet and gentle man proves how insistent he can be. He snatches the book from my hands—I'm thinking, "Now I've done it!"—and, amazingly, he continues to read aloud to the end of the chapter. This senior Muslim cleric has just participated in a public reading of Luke 5:12–39. It is but the start of an extended relationship providing years of opportunity to present the gospel to two of the madrassa's teachers. From the beginning, the Word of God displays its power to attract and to alter a person's mind and heart.

Communicating in the People's Vernacular

Five hundred years earlier, on the opposite side of the world from Bangladesh, an Italian duke desires to own a sparrow hawk for hunting. He writes in formal Latin to a village mayor requesting that a sparrow hawk (*accipetrem*) be captured, tied up in a sack, and sent to him. When the letter is delivered, it provokes a good deal of concern. The villagers take it as a demand for the seizure and delivery of their popular archpriest (*arciprete* in their common Italian dialect). They know of no reason why the duke should be so displeased with the priest, but feel compelled to fulfill his request. Therefore, they seize the bewildered priest, bind him hand and foot, deposit him inside a heavy cloth sack, and deliver him to the duke's palace.

At the palace the package baffles the receiving official. "Do you have a letter?" he asks. A quick reading of the letter reveals the nature of the villagers' misunderstanding. Being informed of the situation, Duke Borso, in a diplomatic move to preserve the villagers' face, returns the priest with a letter informing them

that he has changed his mind and that they may free the priest. From that time on, the duke writes to his vassals in their common language, not in official Latin.[2]

Over and over throughout its history, the Christian church has, unfortunately, repeated Duke Borso's mistaken use of formal language to communicate with ordinary folk. True to the biblical commission to evangelize (Matt 28:19–20), Christians rightly attempt to convey the gospel concerning Jesus Christ to every possible language group in the world. Too often, however, Bible translators choose to employ a formal literary language instead of a common vernacular (i.e., the common language of the common person). The elderly cleric in the madrassa enthusiastically received the translation of the New Testament in the Muslim Bengali dialect because it spoke to him in his heart language. Missionary and national translators did not select a Hindu dialect for reaching out to Muslims, nor did they employ Christianized Bengali ignoring common Islamic vocabulary. The madrassa principal could understand what was read and he could easily read it for himself. The translation spoke directly to him without any linguistic barrier.

By the Holy Spirit's enablement, the living and active Word of God is the only instrument that can convert the human heart (Rom 10:17; Jas 1:18; 1 Pet 1:23–25). No matter how many testimonies of conversion an unbeliever might hear, testimonies can only attract. God employs only the Word itself to accomplish the actual conversion. That biblical truth provides adequate authority and motivation for the inclusion of Bible translation ministries in the gospel outreach of the church among all peoples and language groups.

In various eras of church history, Christian translators have too often avoided vernacular translation, resulting in a divided church. During the most extreme times of division, the scholarly, cloistered clergy stand on one side of the divide, while on the other side sits a biblically illiterate laity. In the time leading up to the Reformation the debate intensified between adherents to a formal language and adherents to a common language in Bible translation. Historians agree that Scriptures in the vernacular acted as catalysts for the Reformation. William Tyndale biographer David Daniell is very specific: "The energy which affected every human life in Northern Europe, however, came from a different place. It was not the result of political imposition. It came from the discovery of the Word of God as originally written, from Matthew—indeed, from Genesis—to Revelation, in the language of the people."[3] Vernacular translation, however, did not make its first appearance on the stage of church history at the time of the Protestant Reformation. In fact, the concept and practice of vernacular Bible translations was *re*emerging following a long dormancy. Before taking up that history, we must consider briefly the question concerning the necessity of vernacular translation.

Why should the Christian church produce vernacular Bible translations? Pragmatically, individuals benefit from being able to read the Scriptures for fifteen minutes without becoming bored or bewildered by the style of the translation itself. So, Bible translations must be readable. The fact that the Bible is an ancient religious

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[2] Clifton Fadiman, ed., *The Little, Brown Book of Anecdotes* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1985), 197–98.

[3] David Daniell, *William Tyndale: A Biography* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 58. Daniell also reminds us "that during the English Reformation, lay men and women were so hungry for the Bible in English that they were often prepared to die for it" (100).

volume does not require a modern English translation to sound as though the Venerable Bede (672–735) himself had been resuscitated to write it in the patois of the thirteenth century. Nothing within the teaching of the Scriptures requires that the receiving language be as ancient as the Bible itself.

Many Bible translations employ a Hebrew-flavored language for both Old and New Testaments. This fact is equally true whether the receptor language is English, German, Bengali, or Swahili. In the modern world, White House news reporters do not write, "The President of the United States opened his mouth and spoke," nor do sports reporters announce that "Steph Curry dreamed a dream last night." Why then should translators retain a rendering that is practically incomprehensible to modern English readers? Compare the following two translations of Amos 4:2–3.

The Lord GOD hath sworn by his holiness, that, lo, the days shall come upon you, that he will take you away with hooks, and your posterity with fishhooks.	"The Lord GOD has sworn by his holiness that, behold, the days are coming upon you, when they shall take you away with hooks, even the last of you with fishhooks.
And ye shall go out at the breaches, every *cow at that which is* before her, and ye shall cast *them* into the palace, saith the LORD. (KJV)	And you shall go out through the breaches, each one straight ahead; and you shall be cast out into Harmon," declares the LORD. (ESV)

Granted, the second might be a clearer translation, but is either version as understandable in its English to modern readers as its original Hebrew to those who heard Amos proclaim his message? Should the translator or the reader be satisfied with a murky rendering? Are there sound theological or linguistic reasons for obscurity in a Bible translation? As we proceed with an examination of the history of Bible translation, as well as the principles and practices of Bible translation, we will discover answers to such questions.

A Greek Old Testament for Greek-Speaking Jews

Even before the time of Christ, Alexandrian Jews translated the Hebrew Bible into Greek in order to make it more widely available to both Jews and Gentiles who possessed little or no knowledge of biblical Hebrew. Jewish translators gathering first in Alexandria, Egypt, in the middle of the third century before Christ, permanently changed the history of the Bible with their translation of the five books of Moses (Genesis–Deuteronomy).[4] For the first time in its history, men translated the Bible into what, at the time, was a nonbiblical language. Up until then, serious-minded Jews

[4] The Greek translation of the Old Testament began with the Pentateuch (Moses's five books). For over a century, a variety of Jewish translators continued the project until its completion. This process resulted in a Greek translation displaying diverse translation philosophies and methodologies. Despite the diversity, the Septuagint generally reflects a desire to communicate the meaning of the Hebrew Bible in the Greek understood by the common people of that time.

transmitted the text in its original languages (Hebrew and Aramaic). The rabbis point out that all three divisions of the Hebrew Bible (our Old Testament) contain portions in Aramaic. An Aramaic place-name is to be found in the Torah, or Law (Gen 31:47); one verse of Aramaic is found in the Nebi'im, or Prophets (Jer 10:11); and, a considerable portion is found in the Kethubim, or Writings (Dan 2:4–7:28; Ezra 4:8–6:18; 7:12–26). "Let not the Aramaic be lightly esteemed by thee, seeing that the Holy One (blessed be He!) hath given honour to it in the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings" (Palestinian Talmud, *Sota*, vii, 2). Jews and Christians alike have come to refer to the pre-Christian Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible as the Septuagint, meaning "seventy" (often abbreviated by the Roman numerals LXX). Its title originated from the tradition that seventy-two Jewish scholars had participated in the translation of the Torah (the five books of Moses).[5] Eventually, second-century Christian writers selected "the seventy" as a nice round number by which to identify the translation.

During the writing of the New Testament, the Septuagint reigned as the Bible of choice, since the Hebrew text was not as readily available. Therefore, when New Testament writers wished to cite the Old Testament, nearly seventy-five percent of the time they chose to quote the Septuagint or its equivalent.[6] In the early centuries of the Christian church, the church fathers relied heavily on the Septuagint for citing the Old Testament in their theological treatises, commentaries, and correspondence. F. C. Conybeare and St. George Stock, in their *Grammar of Septuagint Greek*, make the following observation:

> St. Augustine remarks that the Greek-speaking Christians for the most part did not even know whether there was any other word of God than the Septuagint (*C.D.* XVIII, 43). So when other nations became converted to Christianity and wanted the Scriptures in their own tongues, it was almost always the Septuagint which formed the basis of the translation. This was so in the case of the early Latin version, which was in use before the Vulgate; and it was so also in the case of the translations made into Coptic, Ethiopic, Armenian, Georgian, Gothic, and other languages. The only exception to the rule is the first Syriac version, which was made direct from the Hebrew.[7]

The Greek language of the Septuagint is Jewish Hellenistic Greek.[8] Linguistically, Septuagint Greek is not really a separate dialect of Greek, because the translators did not choose to utilize strictly Jewish vocabulary or phraseology.

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[5] For an excellent introduction to the study of the Septuagint, see Karen H. Jobes and Moisés Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015).

[6] Analyses of New Testament writers' uses of the Septuagint reveal a number of differences between some of their quotes and the Septuagint text. Sometimes differences occur between New Testament writers citing the same reference. For example, Mark's Gospel normally reflects the same Septuagint text as Matthew and Luke use, but occasionally departs from one or both. Such departures show up in the quotations of Exodus 20:13–17; Deuteronomy 6:4; and Psalms 21[22]:3 and 109[110]:1. See Henry Barclay Swete, *The Gospel according to St. Mark*, Classic Commentaries on the Greek New Testament (New York: MacMillan, 1898), lxxvii–lxxx.

[7] F. C. Conybeare and St. George Stock, *Grammar of Septuagint Greek: With Selected Readings, Vocabularies, and Updated Indexes* (1905; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 19–20.

[8] Jobes and Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint*, 107.

Apparent Semitic influences in both grammar and vocabulary may best be explained as a reflection of either translation philosophy and technique, or cultural influence (an extralinguistic factor).[9] The translators normally chose to render the Hebrew text literally, employing legitimate Greek vocabulary and grammatical constructions. The resulting Greek is not a formal literary Greek as much as it is the spoken Greek of the Jewish community residing in Egypt in the third century BC. The Septuagint might well be considered the first vernacular translation of the Scriptures. Therefore, the New Testament writers employed a vernacular translation when quoting the Old Testament, not a formal literary translation.

Vernacular translation, as opposed to a formal literary translation, prevailed for the first translation of both Old and New Testaments into an extrabiblical language, the Syriac Peshitta. "Peshitta" means "simple" or "common." The translation began sometime in the second century AD and came to its standardized form around AD 400. Jerome's Latin Vulgate (completed just a few years after the standardization of the Peshitta) was also in the vernacular—thus the title "Vulgate," meaning "vulgar" or "common." These three ancient versions (Septuagint, Peshitta, and Vulgate) laid the foundation for vernacular Bible translations. Most subsequent pre-Reformation translations adhered to the same translation style.

A Bible for English Ploughmen

Nearly sixteen hundred years after Alexandrian Jews translated the Old Testament into Greek, John Wyclif (1330–84), the "morning star of the Reformation," declared that the Scripture should be available in a language common people can understand. Before the Reformation had gotten under way in Europe, he argued that God gave the Scriptures for all mankind:

> Christ and His Apostles taught the people in the language best known to them. It is certain that the truth of the Christian faith becomes more evident the more faith itself is known. Therefore, the doctrine should not only be in Latin but in the vulgar tongue and, as the faith of the church is contained in the Scriptures, the more these are known in a true sense the better. The laity ought to understand the faith and, as doctrines of our faith are in the Scriptures, believers should have the Scriptures in a language which they fully understand.[10]

Spurred on by his belief, Wyclif pioneered the translation of the Bible into English. However, many of his countrymen did not share his vision. At that time, the Roman Catholic Church considered any Bible translation in the common language of the people to be heretical. Henry Knighton, a Catholic historian of Wyclif's day responded to the concept in the following manner:

> Christ gave His Gospel to the clergy and the learned doctors of the Church so that they might give it to the laity and to weaker persons, according to the

[9] Jobes and Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint*, 107–14, 184–89.

[10] John Wycliffe, quoted in "Why Wycliffe Translated the Bible into English," *Christian History* 2, no. 2 (1983): 26.

> message of the season and personal need. But this Master John Wyclif translated the Gospel from Latin into the English—the Angle not the angel language. And Wyclif, by thus translating the Bible, made it the property of the masses and common to all and more open to the laity, and even to women who were able to read.… And so the pearl of the Gospel is thrown before swine and trodden underfoot and what is meant to be the treasure both of clergy and laity is now become a joke of both. The jewel of the clergy has been turned into the sport of the laity, so that what used to be the highest gift of the clergy and the learned members of the Church has become common to the laity.[11]

It has been said that Wyclif's translation determined which dialect would become the standard for England. However, Wyclif did not directly influence the establishment of Midland English as the standardized common language of England. London's prominence and England's geography and demographics affected that development more profoundly than any individual like Wyclif.[12] On the other hand, it would be correct to conclude that Wyclif disrupted the tyranny of the clergy[13] and interrupted the dominance of their Latin when he took his theological reasoning to the common people in the common language.[14] The English vernacular's rise displayed "double significance. It was a victory of the people's language over the Latin language of the learned few, and at the same time it was the victory of a popular vernacular (English) over what in England was an aristocratic vernacular (French)."[15]

German Bibles for Germany

Yet another great Bible translator in the period of the Reformation was Martin Luther. Historians, artists, and filmmakers focus on the Protestant Reformer's bold and confrontational actions and words. As a result, the church's collective memory highlights the nailing of his ninety-five theses to the cathedral door at Wittenberg and his bold stand at his trial in the Diet of Worms. These colorful and memorable scenes tend to overshadow his role in the translation of the Scriptures. Luther, however, was not the first to translate the Bible into German. According to John Reumann, before Luther's German translation, there had been others:

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[11] Henry Knighton, quoted in "Why Wycliffe Translated the Bible into English," *Christian History* 2, no. 2 (1983): 26.

[12] Albert C. Baugh and Thomas Cable, *A History of the English Language*, 3rd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1978), 191–95.

[13] Pastors in Wyclif's era (last half of the 14th century) characteristically served as absentee pastors of multiple parishes or benefices (permanent ecclesiastical appointments with property and income). Wyclif criticized them for these practices; see G. R. Evans, *John Wyclif: Myth and Reality* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 93–95. According to E. H. Broadbent, *The Pilgrim Church* (London: Pickering & Inglis Ltd., 1931), 103 and 139, the corruption of the clergy resulted from the efforts of men to obtain influential posts providing monetary gain. Herbert B. Workman, *The Church of the West in the Middle Ages* (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1898), 54–58, the well-known church historian, declares the many examples of corrupt clergy are no exaggeration of the depravity running rampant in the Western church of the Middle Ages.

[14] Baugh and Cable, *A History of the English Language*, 205.

[15] Daniel Boorstin, *The Discoverers* (New York: Random House, 1983), 523.

> Ufilas had put the Bible into Gothic before he died in AD 383, thus providing the oldest literary monument in a Germanic language. There are fragments preserved of a Frankish translation of Matthew, dated AD 738. Some unknown "German Tatian" provided a harmony of the gospels through a ninth-century translation. By the end of the Middle Ages, German manuscripts of the Bible numbered in the thousands. What is more, there were also German translations in print before Luther's day. The first printed Bible in any modern European language was the German version from the press of Johann Mentelin of Strassburg in 1466, and that translation went back to the fourteenth century. In all, four Low German translations and fourteen High German had appeared in print before Luther ever began his work. Eight to ten thousand vernacular copies were on the market, each costing the equivalent of a town house or fourteen oxen.[16]

By paying such prices, German laity demonstrated how highly they prized their German Bibles. Within fifty years, the Strassburg German translation (1466) from the Latin Vulgate went through eighteen editions.

History's verdict in land after land and century after century is clear: A Bible in the language of the learned or the aristocracy does not become the people's Bible. Since the Word of God is for all people, it must be made available in the language of the people. Every Bible translator and each translation team must identify the level and style of the average person's language within their target group. A Bible translation in any other level or style steps backward toward the pre-Reformation tyranny of a professional priesthood. Translators tend to choose language type and language level in accord with their convictions regarding the authority of Scripture, the priesthood of every believer, the role of the church, and the universality of the gospel. Insistence upon a high language level and formal style reflect a practical denial of those tenets. Those who held these doctrines became the champions of common language translations in the Reformation. The Reformation witnessed a logical and happy congruence of theology and translation.

In every area of Christian endeavor, the labor of one individual is often multiplied many times over by those whom he or she has influenced. A seemingly endless chain of interrelated ministries grows into an overflowing river of blessing. In like fashion, Luther's Bible translation in the vernacular German spawned a number of Reformation Bibles:

- Low German translations based on Luther's High German
- A Dutch translation of Luther's New Testament (1523)
- A Danish New Testament (1524) heavily dependent on Luther's German translation
- A Swedish New Testament (1526) by a blacksmith's son who had attended Luther's lectures

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[16] John H. P. Reumann, *The Romance of Bible Scripts and Scholars: Chapters in the History of Bible Transmission and Translation* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1965), 58. Cf. Matthew H. Black, "The Printed Bible," in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, ed. S. L. Greenslade (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 3:423: "It has been calculated that altogether 8,000–10,000 copies were printed: which indicates a considerable market, when it is remembered that early editions probably cost (as Vulgates also must have cost) the equivalent of a town house, or fourteen fattened oxen. From the evidence of bequests, most vernacular Bibles were owned by laymen—which is what one would expect."

- An Icelandic New Testament (1540) borrowed extensively from Luther
- A Finnish Bible translation (1548–52) begun by a Finn acquainted with Luther
- A Modern Greek Pentateuch (1547)
- The Gospels in Polish (1551–52)
- A Hebrew New Testament (by 1600) for missionary work among Jews.
- A Slovenian Bible (1584) published at Wittenberg
- A Croatian New Testament (1562–63) for Slavs
- Prior to 1555 the English translations of Tyndale and Coverdale were influenced by Luther's work.[17]

All of these translations had a common thread: they were translations for common people in the language of the people. Leaders of the Reformation believed that God never intended His Word to be the property solely of the clergy. The Bible confirms this truth: in the Old Testament, the Lord demanded obedience from the people, not just the priests; in the New Testament, Christ spoke His parables and taught His doctrine to the common people of Israel. He did not confine Himself to the temple in order to teach only the doctors of Mosaic Law. Since the target of Scripture's teaching has always been the common person, its language has always been the common person's language.

Obedience Proportionate to Understanding

Bible translation in the vernacular is rooted and grounded in the teachings of the Word of God itself. God purposes to communicate with mankind so that a person might know who God is and what He requires. How does God convey that communication? He chooses to utilize hearing and reading. A person can neither believe nor understand what he or she has not heard or read.[18] In addition, merely hearing or reading without understanding cannot produce full obedience. God's Word in an understandable language stimulates the proper response. A seminary professor wrote, "In Bible translation, faithfulness to the original meaning of a text is important, but it is not enough. The other critical test is what it enables its readers to understand."[19]

The challenge of Bible translation, therefore, is to make the Word of God understandable. It is one of the greatest challenges to which the Christian exegete or expositor might respond. Understanding is the goal of all proclamation of Scripture (see Matt 13:13–15, 19, 23). Without understanding the Scriptures, a person is unable to implement biblical instruction through obedience. Without obedience there is no divine blessing. The more accurate one's understanding, the more exactly and fully he or she will obey, and the fuller the resulting blessing.

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[17] Reumann, *Bible Scripts and Scholars*, 72–73.

[18] Some readers might cite sign language for the deaf as an exception. However, the signs may be understood as being "read" by the deaf. Likewise, Braille is "read" even though the organ of perception becomes the finger tips.

[19] Glen G. Scorgie, "Introduction and Overview," in *The Challenge of Bible Translation: Communicating God's Word to the World*, ed. Glen G. Scorgie, Mark L. Strauss, and Steven M. Voth (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 20.

One's own language—the language of his or her everyday existence—acts as the most efficient medium for understanding the Scriptures. When dire circumstances press upon us and we cry out to God for help, we do so in our own heart's language. We normally do not respond with some formalized and archaic liturgical language. In other words, we cry out, "Please, God, don't let this happen to me—not here, not now!" instead of "Our Father, Who art in heaven; hallowed be Thy name.… O God of heaven and earth, halt Thou this turmoil that hath engulfed me!" No matter how many languages we speak, we most readily pray and dream in our native tongue. That language must become the Bible translator's language—the common language of the common people in any one cultural setting. It might be Arabic or Zulu, Bengali or Yaqui, Chinese or Xhosa. It could be a major dialect or a small tribal tongue. No matter what its identity or linguistic behavior, it exists as the heart language of a people to whom the church should proclaim God's Word. They comprise a people, a language group, for whom Christ accomplished His redemptive work. He redeemed them "from every tribe *and tongue* and people and nation" (Rev 5:9 NASB, emphasis added).

Translating the Bible into the common language of common people is an uncommon challenge that produces an uncommon reward. Each individual has the joy of explaining some aspect of life to an eager young learner. It may be a subject as theologically profound as the Trinity or as down-to-earth simple as gravity. One person utilizes amazing plants like the Venus flytrap and the closing leaves of a mimosa to explain the marvels of creation. Another may enlist a clear plastic model of an automobile's combustion engine as a teaching tool. Whatever the occasion or whatever the subject matter, there is no greater reward than to witness a young person's glowing countenance when understanding comes. Likewise, beaming faces and shining eyes testify to the dawn of spiritual understanding when it comes through the instrumentality of an understandable translation of the Bible.

How Can They Understand?

In Bible college and seminary I fulfilled the obligatory translation assignments from both the Greek New Testament and the Hebrew Old Testament. My teachers awarded grades for accuracy, but the process was often purely academic. I possessed no deep sense of divine accountability for such assignments. My heart was not burdened by the potential of misleading a reader who depended upon my translation for knowing the will of God. However, when I became a Bible translator in Bangladesh, all of that changed. A professor's grade was not my goal. How individuals understood my translation might determine whether they might come before the Lord with an adequate or an accurate understanding of His demands for them. As a result of fifteen years of Bible translation experience in Bangladesh, I returned to the seminary classroom determined to help students look upon their translation assignments with a heightened sense of accountability. How might any reader understand or react to their translation? Yes, accuracy matters, but so do understandability and clarity.

Translation involves more than just getting the meaning right; it involves correct spelling, in order to avoid misunderstanding. Spelling in one's own language is difficult enough; spelling in a second language is sometimes a nightmare. In English, I had only one *d* and one *t* to remember and to employ accurately. Bengali presented

me with four *d*'s and four *t*'s! Proper spelling is important when it comes to Bible translation. A spelling mistake might turn a serious text into a real laugher. Consider a translation of Genesis 37:34 that one of my seminary students submitted to me: "he put sack cloth around his waste." Confusion between two homonyms (similar sounding words: "waist" and "waste") results in a very different mental picture. Instead of Jacob wrapping himself with sackcloth as a symbol of his mourning, the reader pictures him bagging his trash (or worse). In this case, the error was harmlessly committed in an academic environment. What if such an error were to slip into a published translation of the Bible? How many might be misled? Unbelievers in Mongolia or Montana, India, or Indiana, who possess little familiarity with the Bible, will not always be able to filter out erroneous translations as they read. Attention to detail must be the hallmark of every Bible translator. Accuracy depends upon it. Right understanding depends upon it.

Misspelling a word is one kind of potential error. Let's consider what happens when translators ignore just one little word in the original languages of Scripture. English versions commonly translate the command of the Holy Spirit in Acts 13:2 as something like, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them" (NAS; compare NIV, KJV, NKJV, ESV, NRSV). All of these translations ignore the little two-letter word *dē* (pronounced like "day") following the imperative "set apart" in the Greek text. Translators often treat that little word as though it were nothing more than a marker of "relatively weak emphasis—'then, indeed' or frequently not translated but possibly reflected in the word order."[20] J. P. Louw and Eugene Nida suggest the translation, "set apart for me, then, Barnabas and Saul to do the work for which I have called them."[21] However, A. T. Robertson, a venerated Greek scholar, indicates that this Greek particle, though difficult to translate, remains strongly emphatic.[22] Combined with an imperative (as in Acts 13:2), it conveys a "note of urgency."[23] The nature of the particle is such that no translator should omit it from the rendering of the verse.[24] Therefore, translators should consider wording the Holy Spirit's command in such a way that it conveys the concept of "do it immediately." The premier Greek lexicon of H. G. Liddell and Robert Scott supports Robertson's view of the particle by indicating that it is "used to give greater *exactness*, to the word or words which it influences … *now, in truth, indeed, surely, really* … often with Superlatives, … *quite* the greatest, *confessedly* the best.…"[25] What difference does it make? Omitting the force of this one tiny Greek particle reduces the sense of urgency with which the Holy Spirit addresses the

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[20] J. P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), 811 (§91.6).

[21] Ibid.

[22] A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1934), 1149. Cf., also, Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 673.

[23] Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, 1149.

[24] "It ought to be preserved in the translation."—A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 6 vols. (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1930), 3:178.

[25] H. G. Liddell, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon Founded upon the Seventh Edition of Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon*, electronic ed. (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996), 181. See BDAG, 222: *dē* was used with "exhortations or commands, to give them greater urgency." Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 761 lists *dē* as a "true emphatic conjunction."

Antioch church's leadership. Those men who received the Spirit's instruction clearly understood the urgency, since they apparently commissioned Saul and Barnabas for missionary service immediately following the completion of their prayer and fasting. In the SBCL and MBCL Bible translations we employed the adverb "now" (Bengali, *ekhon*) to represent the Greek particle ("set them apart now"). The discussion of this particular Greek particle should not be taken as a claim that all particles should be translated. As D. A. Carson points out, "precisely because particles are subtle things, one can always find instances where any particular translation has it wrong."[26]

How do these observations about Acts 13:2 affect an individual's understanding of the role of translation, the evaluation of translations, and the practical use of various Bible translations? Being aware of the potential for error in a translation should make each person aware of the fact that no translation of the Bible perfectly conveys every detail of the original languages in every passage. Also, one verse's treatment in a Bible version does not necessarily characterize the overall translation philosophy and accuracy of that version. We will pursue the topic of evaluating English Bible versions in chapter 8.

As a result of the matters we have discussed above, certain recommendations might be offered regarding the use of Bible translations.

- *Use a variety of versions in order to compare translations*. Through multiple translations, readers might become aware of details they sometimes miss in one translation as compared to another.
- *Refer to good commentaries based upon the original languages of Scripture*. By utilizing such tools, readers might discover which translation most closely represents the meaning of the original text.

Unfortunately, virtually every available English version provides incomplete or inaccurate translations of a few texts like Acts 13:2. However, the reader may rest assured that such situations are rare occurrences. Despite the variations one finds between popular English Bible translations, those versions testify to the faithful preservation of the God-given text with but rare exception. As a result, texts like Acts 13:2 and their less than accurate translation seldom affect major doctrinal teaching. But, having no major doctrinal implication need not eliminate the significance of each and every detail within the text. No Bible translator has the freedom to select certain elements of biblical content for preservation and to excise the remainder from the text. A translation must be fully accurate, not selective or partial in its translational integrity.

Ezra and the Books of Moses

When their exile in Babylon ends, the Jews return to Judah under the patronage of Cyrus, king of Persia. Back in the land out of which God had evicted them, they face external opposition from the Samaritans (Ezra 4–5; Neh 4; 6). Their internal problems include the treatment of the poor (Neh 5) and the divisiveness of

[26] D. A. Carson, "The Limits of Functional Equivalence in Bible Translation—and Other Limits, Too," in Scorgie, Strauss, and Voth, *The Challenge of Bible Translation*, 73.

intermarriage with Gentiles (Ezra 9–10). The latter problem creates a multilingual situation in Israelite homes (Neh 13:23–24). That only intensifies the language problem the exiles bring with them from their captivity in Babylon, for most of them no longer speak Hebrew.

Yet, in the midst of all their problems, the people of Israel hunger for the Word of God. They desire divine direction so that God will not uproot them from their land again because of their disobedience to His teachings. The returned exiles express a desire to gather at the Water Gate in Jerusalem, and they request Ezra to read the Law of Moses to them (Neh 8:1). The first day of the seventh month begins the civil New Year and the observance of the Feast of Trumpets (Lev 23:23–25; Num 29:1–6). Thus, the Israelites make some preparations for the occasion. Carpenters construct a platform of wood so that the gathered Israelites will be able to both see and hear Ezra (Neh 8:4). Timing and arrangements are purposeful, but the eager attentiveness of the people is spontaneous (Neh 8:3).

Ezra discerns that the people of Israel need spiritual revival. Indeed, he understands that obedience to the Scriptures will provide the catalyst for such a revival. He realizes, too, that obedience is predicated upon understanding. If the people cannot understand any particular instruction, they cannot obey fully—the more complete the understanding, the more complete the obedience. With this in mind, Ezra appoints men to help him in the task of proclamation, translation, and interpretation (Neh 8:4, 7–8).

A threefold process takes place on the day of assembly. First, Ezra and some of the appointed men read aloud the text of the Law of Moses in the ancient Hebrew language in which it had been written: "They read from the book, from the law of God" (Neh 8:8 NASB). Second, they translate the text into the language most returnees best understand after seventy years of Babylonian captivity. At the time, Aramaic, the language of Babylon, dominates as the language of the common Israelite. Interestingly, modern Hebrew script reveals just how much the Babylonian exile affected the people of Israel linguistically. What we call the "Hebrew" script today is actually an Aramaic script borrowed from Babylon.[27] The borrowing can be dated to the time of Ezra. Two different phrases in Nehemiah 8:8 may be interpreted as a reference to translation: "distinctly, and gave the sense" (KJV/NKJV)—compare ESV ("clearly, and they gave the sense"), NIV ("making it clear and giving the meaning"), and NASB ("translating to give the sense"). In other words, the best interpretation of the verse as a whole indicates that Ezra and his fellow teachers translated the reading of the Hebrew text into the more commonly understood Aramaic.

Third, Ezra and the leaders working with him cause the people "to understand." The words "understanding," "understand," and "understood" occur repeatedly in Nehemiah 8 (vv. 2, 3, 7, 8, 12, and 13). It is significant that the record of the events of that New Year's Day emphasizes understanding. The purpose of translating and interpreting is that people might understand (v. 8). The Israelites rejoice because they understand (v. 12). They even assemble again for that same purpose ("to understand," v. 13).

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[27] Martha L. Carter and Keith N. Schoville, eds., *Sign, Symbol, Script: An Exhibition on the Origins of Writing and the Alphabet* (Madison: University of Wisconsin–Madison, 1984), 42. See, also, F. F. Bruce, *The Books and the Parchments: Some Chapters on the Transmission of the Bible*, 3rd rev. ed. (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1963), 52–53.

Hearing the Scriptures in their heart language, the people understand it so well that it produces a degree of obedience not seen in nearly one thousand years. They set about to observe the Feast of Booths in complete compliance with the Law of Moses. Not since the time of Joshua has there been such a complete and accurate observance of the Feast of Booths (v. 17). Out of such obedience even greater joy emerges (v. 18). What is more, one of Scripture's most beautiful prayers (Neh 9) results from the experience of such understanding and obedience. All these things (the obedience, the joy, the prayer, and the ongoing desire to know more) arises out of understanding—an understanding rooted and grounded in the Aramaic vernacular translation, which they now understand better than they do the original Hebrew.

For such a spiritual experience to occur in the present, ministers of God's Word must give equal attention to the production of an understandable translation of the Bible. Anything less results in the perpetuation of spiritual mediocrity—a mediocrity that could continue for more than a thousand years like it did in ancient Israel. Vernacular Bible translation is an imperative, not an option.

Jesus and the Parable of the Sower

Matthew 13:1–23 offers many enticing tidbits for the interested reader's study. Two significant statements occur in verses 19 and 23. Just like Nehemiah 8, the key concept repeated in Matthew 13:1–23 is *understanding* (vv. 13, 14, 15, 19, and 23). In His interpretation of the parable of the sower (vv. 19–23), Jesus makes it clear that dissemination of God's Word depends upon understanding His words. If recipients of God's Word do not understand the words, Satan ("the wicked one") will be victorious (v. 19). On the other hand, if hearers and readers understand the Word, fruitfulness results and God will be victorious (v. 23).

Believers normally desire two spiritual products in their lives: joy and fruitfulness. Obedience to Scripture produces both. The more completely the believer understands Scripture, the more completely obedient he or she can be. Difficulty in understanding a Bible translation hinders the highest degree of obedience, thereby diminishing joy and fruit, or shutting down these two products completely. Translations difficult to understand tend to be unfruitful. If a Bible translation is too easily misunderstood, it can produce confusion, satanic interference, and spiritual starvation.

Lest we overstate the matter, it is true that a proper understanding of Scripture does not rest with translation alone. Translation does not eliminate the need for exposition and teaching. Nor does translation ignore the responsibility of the reader of God's Word to obey what they do understand. Adding too much to the text in the service of clarity can force a translation into the realm of inaccuracy and the insertion of too much subjective interpretation. As Sijbolt Noorda explains, "Ancient texts, and especially ancient religious texts, are not conspicuous by their clarity. We'd better be prepared in their case for some opacity, some obscurity.… We should practice restraint, avoiding excessive explanation and explication."[28] George Steiner

[28] Sijbolt Noorda, "New and Familiar: The Dynamics of Bible Translation," in *Bible Translation on the Threshold of the Twenty-First Century: Authority, Reception, Culture and Religion*, eds. Athalya Brenner and Jan Willem van Henten, JSOTSup 353, The Bible in the 21st Century 1 (London: Sheffield Academic, 2002), 14–15.

simply states: "Bad translations communicate too much."[29] Translators too often face the temptation to overinterpret. Leland Ryken rightly complains about this very problem with many dynamic equivalence translations. In his words, "A translation that substitutes an interpretation for what the original actually says … removes the foundation on which to build a trustworthy interpretation of a text."[30]

Difficult as it might be, translators must allow the biblical text to force readers to think, rather than to be lazy in their approach to the text. Wisdom literature (as in Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and some psalms in the Psalter) purposefully utilizes some ambiguity and incomplete statements to cause the hearers and readers to cogitate. God did not design Scripture to encourage lazy thinkers. Instead, He commands believers, "prepare your minds for action" (1 Pet 1:13 NASB; compare NKJV, "gird up the loins of your mind"—an apt cultural figure describing how a man in ancient times would tuck his long robe into his belt in order that his legs be unhindered in running or working). God desires that we use the minds He gave us. He demands we put them to work when we read His written Word.

With God's command in mind, how much interpretation should a translation reflect? What kind of interaction should exist between translation and exposition? Does the New Testament itself provide any direction concerning these matters? Its writers often translate Hebrew texts from the Old Testament and Aramaic statements from their own immediate environment into Greek. Should we follow their model? In order to answer that question, we now turn to a significant example in Acts 8.

Philip, the Ethiopian Eunuch, and Isaiah

When persecution came to the church in Jerusalem, a deacon named Philip (Acts 6:5) became an evangelist in Samaria (Acts 8:4, 5; 21:8). According to Acts 8, an angel from God directed Philip to "Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza" (v. 26). Finding an Ethiopian eunuch in a chariot headed back to his home country, Philip hears him reading from a scroll the eunuch evidently had purchased before leaving Jerusalem. Philip asks, "Do you understand what you are reading?" (v. 30). This high official from the court of Queen Candace of Ethiopia appears to be a proselyte to the Jewish faith. A comparison of Acts 8:32–33 with Isaiah 53:7–8 reveals that he is reading the Greek Septuagint translation of the Old Testament. Greek is not his heart language, but it is the *lingua franca* (a convenient language for trading goods) of that day. Further investigation uncovers the fact that the Septuagint's translation of Isaiah 53:7–8 is "gravely deviant."[31] In spite of the handicaps, enough of the truth comes through with Philip's helpful guidance so that the eunuch comes to Christ by faith for salvation from his sins.

Until he clearly understands the Bible's message, the Ethiopian official cannot come to Christ. Theological realities (see John 8:43–44; 1 Cor 2:14; Eph 4:18) and language barriers both impair his understanding. Even though the Ethiopian has some

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[29] George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 66.

[30] Leland Ryken, *The Word of God in English: Criteria for Excellence in Bible Translation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002), 219.

[31] Gleason L. Archer and G. C. Chirichigno, *Old Testament Quotations in the New Testament* (Chicago: Moody, 1983), 123.

proficiency in Greek, the poor quality of the translation hinders his understanding. Miraculously, the Holy Spirit intervenes to compensate for the deviant translation (Acts 8:29). In this situation the Spirit intervenes by sending Philip to provide a more accurate translation and explanation.

From this brief account in Acts 8 we learn several facts about Bible translations:

- *God can use a second language or even a deviant translation to bring people to Christ*. The Scripture in flawed Greek speaks to the Ethiopian's heart and stirs him to believe in Christ.
- *A translation may be so poor that by itself it cannot be the instrument of the Holy Spirit's work of regeneration*. The Septuagint Greek translation of Isaiah 53 is too flawed to bring the Ethiopian all the way to a complete saving knowledge of Christ without adequate instruction from someone like Philip.
- *Understandability is the key factor in regard to the efficacy of a Bible translation*. Only when the eunuch understands what Isaiah says does he believe in Christ and experience Holy Spirit regeneration.

We must realize that the understanding produced by the Word of God commences on the linguistic level, then moves to the spiritual. A missionary should not distribute Greek New Testaments to Americans, Mexicans, Ugandans, or Thais with the expectation that God will perform a miracle and allow the recipients to understand the Greek. The Holy Spirit normally operates by convicting the heart of the person who is reading God's Word in a language he or she understands—especially one's own language. Granted, believers, as well as unbelievers, will always find portions of the Scriptures difficult to fathom spiritually, even if the language itself is perfectly understandable. As Charles Taber points out,

> Understanding is never instantaneous nor is it "perfect or total. It can and does improve with time, and becomes sufficient for all practical purposes; and one can understand parts of M [the message] very well. But there is always room for growth and correction in our understandings. And yet through this humanly imperfect process, the marvel is that God speaks to us with power and clarity from the Scriptures, so that one can learn to know him, and to discern and do his will."[32]

But, that does not release the translator from the responsibility of rendering the Scriptures as clearly and accurately as possible. According to Peter, the epistles of the apostle Paul contain "some things hard to understand" (2 Pet 3:16 NKJV). Peter does not mean that Paul's vocabulary and grammar are too sophisticated, odd, foreign, or outdated. Spiritual concepts are the heart of the problem. Bible translation ministries must focus on the nuts and bolts of communication (and thus, of translation)—in other words, on language itself.

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[32] Charles R. Taber, "Hermeneutics and Culture—An Anthropological Perspective," in *Down to Earth: Studies in Christianity and Culture*, eds. John R. W. Stott and Robert Coote (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1981), 87.

Some people, like the Ethiopian of old, read portions of the Bible in their second or even third language. No substitute exists, however, for reading God's Word in one's first language. Consider the testimony of a present-day "Ethiopian":

> Skip Firchow and David Akoitai (ah-KOY-tie) sat at the plywood desk translating Mark's Gospel into the Rotokas language. A cool breeze drifted through the open window, heralding the rain that fell every afternoon on this Papua New Guinean (PNG) island of Bougainville.
>
> Akoitai re-read the verse they'd just translated. He thought for a moment and then said to Skip, "When I read God's Word in my own language, it's much easier for me to understand than when I read it in English.
>
> "Trying to read the English Bible is like trying to drink out of a cup with a lid on it. I know there's water inside, but I can't get at it. When I read the Bible in Tok Pisin [PNG's main trade language], I understand it a little. It's like I can pry the lid partway off. I can sip some of the water.
>
> "But when I read the Bible in my own language, it's like drinking deeply from a full cup with no lid! My thirst is quenched. I understand completely."[33]

After nearly two thousand years of church history, one would think that at least the major languages of the world would possess understandable translations of the Bible. Even major languages, however, may have Bibles whose language the common person finds difficult to understand. Bengali, the language of Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan) and India's West Bengal, is one such language. According to the eighteenth edition of the Summer Institute of Linguistics's *Ethnologue* (SIL International, 2015), 245 million Bengali-speaking peoples comprise the world's tenth largest language group (surpassed in populations only by speakers of Mandarin Chinese, English, Spanish, Arabic, Hindi, Malay, Russian, French, and Portuguese—in that order). In 1966 the Association of Baptists for World Evangelism (ABWE) established a team of missionary and national translators to produce a new Bengali Bible in Bangladesh. Principles and practices learned in that translation project form a large part of my own experience in Bible translation and form a background for this book.

Since the first Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint) 2,300 years ago, Bible translation history chronicles the spread of God's Word to the farthest corners of the globe. A common language Bible for common people is that history's hallmark. The principle is rooted and grounded in the teachings of both Scripture Testaments. Ezra's public reading of the Law, Jesus Christ's parable of the sower, and the account in the book of Acts concerning the conversion of the Ethiopian all provide a powerful witness to the role of understanding how Scripture impacts people's lives.

The Reformation gave birth to a new eruption of Bible translations. In the past two centuries since William Carey's remarkable translation work in over forty Indian languages, Bible translation once again flourishes. The Bengali Common Language Bibles in the Muslim (MBCL) and the standard (SBCL) dialects serve as a recent example. Reading from the Gospel of Luke in the madrassa marked a seminal moment in my understanding of what effectively communicating the Word of God

[33] Quoted in Kim Beaty, "Take Off the Lid!" *In Other Words* 17, no. 5 (1991): 5.

across linguistic and cultural boundaries involves. If Viggo Olsen[34] had not heeded God's leading into a ministry of Bible translation, that Muslim dialect Bengali New Testament would not have been available and I would not have had the experience of reading it in the mosque. Literally thousands of Muslims in Bangladesh have come to faith in Jesus Christ through that translation. Its language is their language, but its message is God's message. The language barrier has been shattered, now the Spirit of God is at work to tear down the spiritual barriers.

[34] For the life, testimony, and ministry of Viggo Olsen, read his book *Daktar: Diplomat in Bangladesh* (repr.; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1996).

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AN EARLY SCRIPTURAL EXAMPLE OF BIBLE TRANSLATION

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* * * * *

According to Scripture, the Levites, under the direction of Ezra, provide the earliest example of Bible translation. When the Israelites heard in Aramaic what the Law of God had declared in Hebrew, they understood what God had instructed them to do. Their accurate understanding led to full obedience, and their obedience led to abundant joy and blessing. Bible translation supplies the foundation for these three results both then and now.

* * * * *

Introduction

God appointed the priests and Levites as interpreters and teachers of His written revelation. He commanded them to receive, preserve, and teach His words: "They shall teach Your judgments to Jacob, and Your law to Israel" (Deut 33:8a, 10) and "instruct the sons of Israel in all the statutes which Yahweh has spoken to them through Moses" (Lev 10:11; cf. Deut 17:11).[1] If any translation of the Scriptures had taken place in ancient Israel, the priests and Levites certainly would have been the ones involved in doing so. Just such an occurrence appears to have taken place following the return of the Israelites from their captivity in Babylon. Not surprisingly, the individual God chose to lead such an effort was Ezra the priest-scribe (Ezra 7:6–10; Neh 8:1, 2).[2]

[1] Unless noted otherwise, the Legacy Standard Bible (LSB) is the source for all biblical quotes.

[2] See William D. Barrick, "Ezra: A Preacher-Theologian in the Old Testament," *TMSJ* 34, no. 1 (Spring 2023): 273–85.

Setting the Stage

Two language problems afflicted the Israelites and created internal turmoil. First, the returning exiles brought the language of Babylon with them; second, they had also begun to marry non-Israelite women who spoke different languages (Neh 13:23–24). The initial problem came about as they fulfilled Jeremiah's instruction to settle themselves into the Babylonian culture so they might "seek the peace of the city where [Yahweh has] sent you into exile" (Jer 29:1–7). While they lived in Babylon, Jeremiah encouraged the exiled Israelites to testify to their faith in Yahweh by means of the following exhortation and declaration: "Thus you shall say to them, 'The gods that did not make the heavens and the earth will perish from the earth and from under the heavens'" (Jer 10:11). This exhortation ("Thus you shall say to them") and the declaration to make to Babylonian neighbors regarding the worship of idols are both given in Aramaic.[3] Responding to those who suggest this verse has been inserted into the text from some marginal note, Huey uses "a literary and linguistic argument that v. 11 is original, the center and main verse of a chiastic structure in vv. 3–16."[4] In other words, without verse 11 the context does not cohere. It is not a later insertion.

Further evidence of Aramaic as the language of the exiles includes the situation of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah who learned Akkadian and quite possibly Aramaic so they might serve in the palace of Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 1:4).[5] Daniel wrote a significant portion of his prophetic book in Aramaic (Dan 2:4b–7:28). The fact that the book of Ezra also contains Aramaic (Ezra 4:8–6:18 and 7:12–26) indicates the language continued to be used and understood. Indeed, as Stephen Kaufman states, "Aramaic was the primary international language of literature and communication throughout the Near East from ca. 600 B.C.E. to ca. 700 C.E."[6]

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[3] Leslie C. Allen, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 127: "The Targum interprets the citation as a response the exiles were to give to Babylonians who urged them to worship local gods.… It was a way to 'make your defense' to inquirers, to use the terms of 1 Pet 3:15, though it lacks the 'gentleness' counseled in that text, …" For the Targum text see Robert Hayward, *The Targum of Jeremiah: Translation, with a Critical Introduction, Apparatus and Notes*, Aramaic Bible 12 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1990), 79; R. K. Harrison, *Jeremiah and Lamentations: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries 21, ed. Donald J. Wiseman (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1973), 96 finds this viewpoint "doubtful" but offers no reasons for his doubt. Cf. Hetty Lalleman, *Jeremiah and Lamentations: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries 21, ed. David G. Firth (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2013), 126: "Jeremiah refers to the idols, using language that the exiles could use in Babylon."

[4] F. B. Huey, Jr., *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, New American Commentary 16, ed. E. Ray Clendenen, Kenneth A. Mathews, and David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 127, n. 44 citing E. R. Clendenen, "Discourse Strategies in Jeremiah 10," *JBL* (1988): 401–408. Agreeing with Clendenen, Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible 21A (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 593–94 identifies verse 11 as "the climactic verse" in verses 2–13.

[5] A form of Akkadian (Neo-Babylonian) was the official administrative language of the Babylonian government; J. Paul Tanner, *Daniel*, Evangelical Exegetical Commentary, ed. H. Wayne House and William D. Barrick (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2020), 138; cf. John J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, Hermeneia, ed. Frank Moore Cross (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1993), 138–39; Aramaic, however, "had been used for several centuries prior to the Neo-Babylonian Empire and was used by the Babylonians themselves" (Collins, 169). The young trainees also needed Aramaic to communicate with the Aramaic-speaking Chaldeans serving as Babylonian court astrologers; Louis F. Hartman and Alexander A. Di Lella, *The Book of Daniel*, Anchor Yale Bible 23 (New York: Doubleday, 1978), 129.

[6] Stephen A. Kaufman, "Languages: Aramaic," in *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols., ed. David Noel Freedman, (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 4:173.

Scholars classify this particular form of Aramaic as Imperial (or Official) Aramaic used from the seventh through the third centuries B.C. According to Kaufman, "The model for this standard appears to have been Babylonian Aramaic spoken and written by educated Persians."[7]

Aramaic so dominated the language and thought of the returning Israelite exiles that they abandoned the paleo-Hebrew script as the script of choice for recording and preserving the Hebrew Bible.[8] The only books of the Hebrew Bible to be preserved in the paleo-Hebrew script among the Dead Sea Scrolls are the five books of Moses and the book of Job.[9] Yardeni provides a succinct historical description of this transition to a different script for Hebrew:

> While in Babylon, the Jewish scribes who were using the **early Hebrew script** for writing the Hebrew language became familiar with the *official* ***Aramaic language*** and script …, which shortly before had become the ***lingua franca***. In 539 BCE Babylon fell to Cyrus, king of Persia, and became part of the huge Persian Empire that dominated the countries "from India to Kush (Ethiopia)" (cf. Esther 1:1). Cyrus allowed the exiles to return home. By this time, not only the exiles but many of the people who had remained in Judaea had abandoned the Hebrew language, as evidenced in Nehemiah 13:24: "and their children spake half in the speech of Ashdod and could not speak in the Jews' language."[10]

The linguistic stage for the reading of the Law of Moses by Ezra in Nehemiah 8 has been set. The Israelites might have retained some knowledge of the Hebrew language of their parents and grandparents but returned to the land of Israel more comfortable with both the language and script of Babylonian Aramaic. To ensure their accurate understanding of the Hebrew text of the Law, therefore, required the translation of some or all of what Ezra read.

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[7] Kaufman, "Languages: Aramaic," 174.

[8] See Martha L. Carter and Keith N. Schoville, eds., *Sign, Symbol, Script: An Exhibition on the Origins of Writing and the Alphabet* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin–Madison, 1984), 42; F. F. Bruce, *The Books and the Parchments: Some Chapters on the Transmission of the Bible*, 3rd rev. ed. (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1963), 52–53; 10.

[9] Michael O. Wise, Martin G. Abegg, Jr., and Edward M. Cook, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (New York: HarperOne, 2005), 10: "Also surviving among a small group of the scrolls, however, is a developed form of the ancient Hebrew script that the Aramaic form had supplanted among the Jews. This script had been the standard in the days of David and Solomon and on down to the time of Jeremiah. In our period this form of writing, known as *Paleo-Hebrew,* was especially used for copies of the books of Moses (Genesis through Deuteronomy) and of Job. Presumably the scribes who chose it regarded those books as the oldest of the Hebrew Scriptures; Paleo-Hebrew was therefore most appropriate." According to Florentino García Martínez and Elbert J. C. Tigchelaar, eds., *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Study Edition*, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 1:294–95, 2:1306, two classifications of paleo-Hebrew texts among the Dead Sea Scrolls exist in addition to the biblical books: a paraphrase of Joshua (4Q123 = 4QpaleoParaJosh) and unidentified texts (4Q124 = 4QpaleoUnid[1], 4Q125 = 4QpaleoUnid[2], 11Q22 = 11QpaleoUnid).

[10] Ada Yardeni, *Understanding the Alphabet of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Development, Chronology and Dating*, ed. Barbara L. Ball (Jerusalem: Carta, 2014), 8 (all emphasis hers).

Reading and Rendering

The book of Nehemiah contains the reports of as many public readings of Scripture (8:3, 8, 18; 9:3; 13:1) as the rest of the Old Testament (Exod 24:7; Josh 8:34; Jer 36:10; 2 Kgs 23:2; 2 Chr 34:30).[11] Smith rightly notes that "There is no indication that Ezra or Nehemiah called the people together; they assembled together on their own"[12] for this particular public reading. Doubtless, they had gathered on the special occasion of celebrating the new year ("the first day of the seventh month," Neh 8:2; cf. Lev 23:23–25; Num 29:1).[13] Their actions also demonstrate "an unusual eagerness on their part and an uncommon degree of unity."[14] The assembly did not represent "a regularly constituted service, as may be seen from the place (the Water Gate—regular services were held in the temple courts) and character of the participants."[15] The gathering was spontaneous and spiritual. The people themselves asked Ezra to read the Scriptures ("they said to Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses," v. 1).

Responding to the people's request, Ezra read aloud "the book of the law of Moses which Yahweh had commanded to Israel" (v. 1) while standing on "a wooden podium which they had made for the purpose" (v. 4).[16] His position set him above the people (v. 5) so they could see him as well as hear him. The assembly consisted of "men, women, and all who *could* understand when listening" (v. 2). The text repeats the qualification of ability to understand in v. 3. Twenty-six men took part in the event in addition to Ezra. Thirteen stood alongside him on the platform (v. 4) as witnesses signifying the importance of the occasion, and thirteen Levites positioned themselves among the throng of Israelites to "provide understanding" (v. 7).[17] Since "provide understanding" consists of the same Hebrew word (מֵבִין, *mēbîn*) as "who could understand" in verses 2 and 3, the gathered throng must have possessed the capacity to act upon their understanding because of their age or education (cf. Deut 31:12; Neh 10:28 [Heb. v. 29]).[18] The capacity to understand remained inadequate without the addition of an accurate knowledge of what the text said as well as how God intended them to obey the text's demands. The Levites would provide those two additional elements.

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[11] Israel Loken, *Ezra & Nehemiah*, Evangelical Exegetical Commentary, ed. H. Wayne House and William D. Barrick (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2011), Neh 8:1.

[12] Gary V. Smith, *Ezra-Nehemiah & Esther*, Cornerstone Biblical Commentary 5b (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2010), 163.

[13] Smith, 163.

[14] Douglas J. E. Nykolaishen, "Ezra and Nehemiah," in *Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther*, Teach the Text Commentary Series, ed. Mark L. Strauss and John H. Walton (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2018), 158.

[15] Jacob M. Myers, *Ezra-Nehemiah: Introduction, Translation and Notes*, Anchor Yale Bible 14 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 153.

[16] Such preparation does not negate the spontaneous nature of the assembly. The people must have made their request on the previous day and Ezra must have recognized immediately the need for the platform and have delegated the task to a trustworthy and efficient expediter.

[17] These first thirteen men were perhaps the elders of Israel; Smith, *Ezra-Nehemiah & Esther*, 164.

[18] Loring W. Batten, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, International Critical Commentary (New York: Scribner, 1913), 354: "children old enough to understand what was read."

Verse 8 summarizes the actions of Ezra and his thirteen assistants: "They read from the book, from the law of God, explaining[19] and giving insight, and they provided understanding of the reading." Loring considers the plural ("They read," וַיִּקְרְאוּ, *wayyiqrəʾû*) to be a mistake because he takes Ezra as the sole reader.[20] The text not only lacks any variant reading but specifies that the thirteen Levites also read. What did they read? Did they merely repeat verbatim what Ezra read, or did they render the text in Aramaic? The Hebrew verb does not require them to read from a physical manuscript in their own hands. It carries the meaning of "recite, call, name, read,"[21] and implies that their recitation represents the document in Ezra's hands.

The next verb is the participle "explaining" (מְפֹרָשׁ, *məpōrāš*), which modifies the main verb and specifies how they read. The verb root *prš* (פרשׁ) occurs in Ezra-Nehemiah in the Aramaic of Ezra 4:18 and the Hebrew of Neh 8:8. Both are participles (Ezra uses the pael passive participle מְפָרָשׁ, *məpāraš*, while Nehemiah uses the pual passive participle מְפֹרָשׁ, *məpōrāš*). In both texts, the participles adverbially modify a regular form of the verb "read" (קרא, *qrʾ*). Both contexts speak of reading a document—in Ezra a letter and in Nehemiah the law of Moses.

Interpreters take seven different views on the meaning of מפרשׁ (*mprš*): (1) repeating or explaining paragraph by paragraph,[22] (2) interpreting, making clear, explaining,[23] (3) repeating verbatim, word for word,[24] or "slowly with exact pronunciation, intonation, and phrasing to make the sense clear,"[25] (4) explaining in

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[19] LSBmg, "translating."

[20] Batten, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 356.

[21] Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, rev. Walter Baumgartner and Johann Jakob Stamm et al., ed. and trans. M. E. J. Richardson (Leiden: Brill, 1994–2000), 1128; cf. Leonard J. Coppes, "2063 קָרָא," in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody, 1999), 810: "The root *qrʾ* denotes primarily the enunciation of a specific vocable or message. In the case of the latter usage, it is customarily addressed to a specific recipient and is intended to elicit a specific response (hence, it may be translated 'proclaim, invite')."

[22] ESV mg; Philip A. Noss and Kenneth J. Thomas, *A Handbook on Ezra and Nehemiah*, United Bible Societies' Handbooks, ed. Paul Clarke et al. (New York: United Bible Societies, 2005), 405; H. G. M. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, Word Biblical Commentary 16 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985), 278–79.

[23] LSB, NET, NIV, TNIV, NRSV, LEB, NCV, YLT, ERVmg, NASBmg, NASB1995mg, ESVmg; James Montgomery Boice, *Nehemiah: An Expositional Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 93 says it approximates what we understand as exposition. Derek Kidner, *Ezra and Nehemiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, 116–17; J. G. McConville, *Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther*, The Daily Study Bible Series (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1985), 116–17; Herbert Edward Ryle, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah with Introduction, Notes and Maps*, Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1901), 242–43.

[24] Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 53 argues for this meaning in Ezra 4:18.

[25] RSV ("clearly"), NEB, REB, ESV ("clearly"), NLT ("clearly"), NABrev ("clearly"), KJV ("distinctly"), NKJV, ASV ("distinctly"), ERV, D-RB; Noss and Thomas, *A Handbook on Ezra and Nehemiah*, 405.

full (not in summary),[26] (5) repeating in a loud voice,[27] (6) translating and interpreting,[28] and (7) translating.[29]

Evidence supporting Aramaic as having become the language of the returning Israelites includes the following: (1) the repetition of the concept of "understanding" speaks to something more than just repeating the Hebrew text of the Mosaic law; (2) the following verb in verse 8 specifies the result as "understanding"; (3) the change of Hebrew script historically involved transitioning from the paleo-Hebrew to the Aramaic; (4) Hezekiah and his officials indicated that the common people prior to the Babylonian captivity did not understand Aramaic (2 Kgs 18:26; Isa 36:11); (5) rabbinic memory and tradition (*b. Megillah* 3a, 18b; *Genesis Rabbah* 36:8) state that the returning exiles spoke Aramaic;[30] (6) the word "Hebrew" (Greek Ἑβραϊστί, *Hebraisti*) throughout the New Testament refers to Jewish Aramaic (John 5:2; 19:13, 17, 20;[31] Acts 21:40[32]); (7) Jesus Himself used Aramaic in speaking to the common

[26] Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 56: "From the root 'to separate, divide,' the pael participle appears to have some such meaning as 'piece by piece,' and hence in the present context 'word by word,' i.e., 'in full,' not just in summary."

[27] Mentioned as an alternative by Batten, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 357.

[28] Wallace P. Benn, *Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther: Restoring the Church*, Preaching the Word, ed. R. Kent Hughes (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 109; Smith, *Ezra-Nehemiah & Esther*, 168–69; Gary V. Smith, *Ezra-Nehemiah: God's Restoration of His People*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament, ed. Daniel I. Block (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2022), 361–62.

[29] NJPS, HCSB, CSB, NASB, NASB1995, GNB, Message, NET (alternate meaning in interpretive note), LSBmg, NIV2011mg, TNIVmg; Batten, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 356: "*in translation*. The last clause is clear, *and they understood what was read*. מפרש must define the means by which the people understood. The obscure clause may mean: *and the translator set forth the meaning*." In Ezra 4:18, F. Charles Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament, ed. R. K. Harrison (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 75: "According to a common practice in those days the letter of the Samaritan officials was written in Aramaic, the chancellory language of the Persian empire, and was read for the king. Because he did not understand Aramaic, the letter was interpreted (*m^{e}pāraš*) for him. This means that it was translated into Persian to make it intelligible for him." In regard to Nehemiah 8:8, Fensham, 217–18 says, "It is thus either translating or interpreting. In v. 8, however, it seems that a distinction is made between translating (*prš*) and interpreting (*bîn*). In such a case our rendering is to be preferred." Mervin Breneman, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, New American Commentary 10, ed. E. Ray Clendenen, Kenneth A. Mathews, and David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 225; Smith, *Ezra-Nehemiah & Esther*, 164: "Although Hebrew and Aramaic are similar, they are different enough that many people would have had at least some trouble understanding the Hebrew that Ezra spoke." Raymond Brown, *The Message of Nehemiah: God's Servant in a Time of Change*, The Bible Speaks Today, ed. J. A. Motyer and Derek Tidball (England: Inter-Varsity, 1998), 132; Loken, *Ezra & Nehemiah*, Neh 8:8; Myers, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 150, 154.

[30] Breneman, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, 226. See *b. Megillah* 3a, 18b; *Genesis Rabbah* 36:8.

[31] Edward W. Klink III, *John*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, ed. Clinton E. Arnold (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 269, 782, 791, 793; Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 175, 523, 540.

[32] David J. Williams, *Acts*, Understanding the Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 372; Mikeal C. Parsons, *Acts*, Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 306: "The 'Hebrew language' here most likely means Aramaic (see Acts 1:19; 22:2; 26:14)" (especially 26:14 and note in LSB). Contra Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts*, expanded digital ed., Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 898: "The term Ἑβραῖς can denote the Aramaic language (διαλέκτος), the main language spoken by the Jews of Palestine. While Paul likely spoke to the crowd in Aramaic, it is not impossible that he spoke in Hebrew, a language that was still in use, as the Dead Sea Scrolls have demonstrated."

people even in His own time (Mark 5:41[33]); and, (8) the common people spoke to Jesus in Aramaic (John 20:16[34]). In other words, when it comes to Nehemiah 8:8, "the Levites had the job of making sure the people knew what was being said. They were helping them bridge the cultural gap between the last seventy years in Babylonia with their cultural heritage as found in Scripture."[35]

Reasonable objections have been raised against taking *mprš* as "translating." Some scholars offer an argument based on Nehemiah 13:24 since just twelve years later Nehemiah expressed concern over the loss of the Israelite's language through intermarriage.[36] Does that occasion imply that the majority still spoke Hebrew? Texts like 2 Chronicles 32:18 do indicate that "the language of Judah" referred to Hebrew in this period of Israel's history. The text of Nehemiah 13:24, however, says nothing about what the people commonly spoke or understood. It deals only with the children from mixed marriages to women speaking the languages of nearby neighbors like the Ammonites, Moabites, Edomites, and Canaanites. No mention is made of Babylonians (who spoke Aramaic).

Another argument notes that later biblical books in the Hebrew Bible were still written in Hebrew, not Aramaic.[37] Use of the Hebrew language in the writing of Scripture preserved and unified the Hebrew Bible. The burden of preservation, interpretation, and translation rested upon the priests and Levites just as it had from the beginning. The Hebrew Bible's existence and preservation does not require all God's people, even among the returning exiles, to be fluent in Hebrew.

Responding and Rejoicing

The key concept throughout Nehemiah 8 is understanding (vv. 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 12; cf. v. 13). A faithful translation and interpretation/exposition of the Hebrew text resulted in the people understanding what it said and how they should respond to its instruction. Some present at the public reading might very well have understood the Hebrew read by Ezra and some might have understood only after having the text translated into Aramaic. Through both translation and interpretation (explanation), the Levites worked hard to give the people an adequate understanding of God's Word from the Law of Moses.

The Levites' translation and interpretation of Scripture enabled Israelite believers to apply God's Word to their own lives. After hearing that it was nearing the time to observe the Feast of Booths (v. 14), the people obeyed the instruction with careful attention to detail. Accuracy in understanding led to accuracy in implementing obedience in a fashion that had not been witnessed since the time of Joshua (v. 17b)—a period of nearly one thousand years. Such obedience led to "exceedingly great gladness" (v. 17c). Their experience then motivated them to

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[33] Mark L. Strauss, *Mark*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, ed. Clinton E. Arnold (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 36, 46, 184, 234; Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Mark: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries 2, ed. Eckhard J. Schnabel (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2017), 14, 129.

[34] Klink III, *John*, 845; Köstenberger, *John*, 566.

[35] Breneman, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, 225.

[36] Kidner, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 116.

[37] Ryle, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 242–43, 317.

confess their sins (9:2) and commit themselves to additional public reading to continue searching the Word for what else they should do to obey the Lord (v. 3). Yet another result consisted of the Levites' Scripture-saturated prayer (vv. 5–38).

The Westminster Confession recognized the practical necessity of Bible translation for enabling God's people to worship the Lord and live godly lives:

> … because these original tongues are not known to all the people of God, who have right unto, and interest in the Scriptures, and are commanded, in the fear of God, to read and search them, (John 5:39) therefore they are to be translated into the vulgar language of every nation unto which they come, (1 Cor. 14:6, 9, 11–12, 24, 27–28) that, the Word of God dwelling plentifully in all, they may worship Him in an acceptable manner; (Col. 3:16) and, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, may have hope (Rom. 15:4).[38]

Writing about the Westminster Confession, Warfield emphasized the spiritual nourishment that Scripture in translation provides: "In making good this right, the competence of translations to convey the Word of God to the mind and heart is vigorously asserted; and as well the duty of all to make diligent use of translated Scripture, to the nourishing of the Christian life and hope."[39] There is no better example of these truths than the report of Bible translation and its fruits in Nehemiah 8–9.

[38] *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, electronic ed. (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1996), I, 8.

[39] Benjamin B. Warfield, "The Westminster Doctrine of Holy Scripture," in *The Westminster Assembly and Its Work*, The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield, 10 vols., 6:153–257 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2000), 240; originally published in *Presbyterian and Reformed Review* 4 (July 1896): 582–655.

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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DIVINE NAME: AN ANALYSIS OF EXODUS 3:14–15

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The personal name of God is usually left out of translations of the Old Testament. However, God told Moses that Yahweh (יהוה) is the name by which Israel was to remember Him forever (Exod 3:15). This study of Yahweh's self-revelation to Moses in Exodus 3:14–15 shows the significance and meaning of the name, in order to demonstrate that God has given His personal name to His people and intended them to use it, which has implications for Bible translation.

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Introduction

From the naming of Eve in the Old Testament (Gen 3:20) to the renaming of Simon in the New Testament (John 1:42), the Bible repeatedly shows the importance of names. The most important name of all must surely be that of God Himself. The divine name, often referred to as the Tetragrammaton due to it appearing as the four Hebrew consonants יהוה, is the most frequently occurring name in the Hebrew Bible.[1] Although God's personal name was known by Israel's patriarchs and appears 165 times in Genesis,[2] the proclamation of the divine name to Moses at the burning bush theophany stands out as a key point in Israel's history that highlights the significance of the divine name. The following discussion will examine God's self-introduction to Moses in Exodus 3:14–15 from cultural, contextual, syntactical, and lexical

[1] Joshua M. Greever and Douglas Estes, "Tetragrammaton in the New Testament," *The Lexham Bible Dictionary,* ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), Logos Bible Software edition.

[2] For an explanation of what Yahweh meant when He said in Exodus 6:3, "I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as God Almighty, but *by* My name, Yahweh, I was not known to them," see Allen P. Ross, "Did the Patriarchs Know the Name of the LORD?" in *Giving the Sense: Understanding and Using Old Testament Historical Texts*, ed. David M. Howard and Michael A. Grisanti (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2003), 323–39.

perspectives in order to determine a reasonable meaning for the divine name, which has implications for Bible translation today.

Cultural Background

The Israelites were exposed to Egyptian religious beliefs for hundreds of years and seem to have adopted some of them (cf. Exod 32; Lev 17:7; Ezek 20:8, 24; 23:3, 8, 19, 21, 27). Therefore, the Ancient Near Eastern (including Egyptian) understanding of the significance of names is extremely relevant to the discussion of the divine name. Names were very important in the Ancient Near East. There were two prevailing beliefs about names in Moses' day that highlight how significant the proclamation of God's name in Exodus 3:14–15 would have been for Moses and his original audience. First, a name was considered to reflect the character and essence of a person.[3] Second, it was believed that knowledge of a person's name could give one power over that person.[4] Bauckham succinctly sums up the situation for the Israelites in Egypt as follows:

> [The Israelites] live in a world in which gods have names. All around them in Egypt live people who invoke the Egyptian Gods—Ra, Osiris, Isis, Horus, Set, and others. To call on one of these gods for favor, one had to distinguish one from another by their names. Gods were no use unless one could call on them by name. There may even have been the sense that to know a god's name was to have some power to make the god respond. So if the God who sent Moses was really going to help the Israelites, they needed a name with which to call on him.[5]

One major difference between the Egyptian understanding of names and that of Israel is that, although God willingly gave His name to the Israelites, they could not use it to manipulate or control Him.

Contextual Background

Exodus 3:14–15 resides in the middle of the section of the book that is often referred to as "The Call of Moses" (Exod 3:1–4:17).[6] This section lies near the

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[3] John L. Mackay, *Exodus*, Mentor Commentary (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2001), 76; Donald E. Gowan, *Theology in Exodus: Biblical Theology in the Form of a Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 78; Victor H. Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, and John H. Walton, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 80.

[4] Gowan, *Theology in Exodus*, 78; Matthews, Chavalas, and Walton, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*, 80. For an example of this importance in Ancient Egyptian mythology, see Robert K. Ritner, "THE LEGEND OF ISIS AND THE NAME OF RE (1.22)," in *The Context of Scripture, Volume One: Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World,* ed. William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger (New York: Brill, 1997), 33.

[5] Richard Bauckham, *Who Is God? Key Moments of Biblical Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), 40.

[6] Allen Ross and John N. Oswalt, *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary: Genesis, Exodus* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2008), 282; Noel D. Osborn and Howard A. Hatton, *A Handbook on Exodus*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1999), 5.

beginning of the part of Exodus in which God prepares to redeem the Israelites from bondage in Egypt (Exod 2:1–7:7). Exodus 3:1–4:17 can be divided thematically as follows with the smallest outline units denoting individual paragraphs:

I. The Burning Bush Theophany (3:1–10)
   A. Yahweh Appears to Moses (3:1–6)
   B. Yahweh Commissions Moses (3:7–10)
II. Moses' Objections and Yahweh's Replies (3:11–4:17)
   A. Objection and Reply 1 (3:11–12)
   B. Objection and Reply 2 (3:13–22)
   C. Objection and Reply 3 (4:1–9)
   D. Objection and Reply 4 (4:10–12)
   E. Objection and Reply 5 (4:13–17)

As seen in bold above, the climactic announcement of God's name in Exodus 3:14–15 is contextually part of God's response to Moses' second objection to God's call. Prior to these verses, verse 11 begins the long dialogue between Moses and Yahweh in which Moses raises no less than five objections to his commission. His first objection and Yahweh's reply make up the third paragraph of this section (vv. 11–12). In verse 12, Yahweh graciously replies to Moses' first objection by saying, "I will be with you." This statement was not only meant to change Moses' focus from his own inability to God's ability.[7] It was also intended to prepare Moses and every Israelite who would later hear this text for the "I am" declarations that lead up to the full declaration of the divine name in the next paragraph. Kaiser highlights the significance of this statement when he writes:

> In the statement אֶהְיֶה עִמָּךְ (*ʾehyeh ʿimmāk*, "I will be with you"), *ʾehyeh* is the first-person form of the name of Yahweh (= Lord) rather than its familiar third-person form, Yahweh…. In effect, then, God pledges his very person and being as signified by his name; he will be dynamically and powerfully present for Moses and thus for all the people.[8]

Despite Yahweh giving this assurance, Moses raises a second objection in verse 13, which leads to Yahweh's lengthy response in verses 14–22. It is important to note that Moses' question is not "Who is he?" but "What is his name?" This question is put indirectly as a hypothetical question that Moses is concerned the Israelites will ask him if he does accept Yahweh's commission. Regarding the difference between the two interrogative particles, Kaiser suggests that "who?" (מִי) "asks only the identity, ancestry, or some external feature of a person (cf. Gen 33:8; Exod 3:11; 2 Chron 2:6; Mic 1:5)," whereas "what?" (מָה) "inquires into the character, quality, or essence of a person or event (cf. Gen 31:26; 32:27; Exod 13:14; Josh 4:21; Prov 30:4;

[7] Mackay, *Exodus*, 74.

[8] Walter C. Kaiser Jr., "Exodus," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 12 vols., ed. Frank Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 2:319.

Zech 1:9; 5:6)."[9] The fact that Moses asks for a name also suggests that knowing the name of the one who was sending him was essential for the Israelites to verify his commission.[10] On account of the ancient beliefs about names mentioned previously, knowledge of the sending God's name was important.

Yahweh's response to this second objection begins with the main text under discussion (Exod 3:14–15). Yahweh continues the wordplay on the verb "to be" (היה) that he had subtly begun in verse 12.[11] This wordplay builds suspense which culminates in the declaration of the divine name—the thematic climax of the whole section. God directly answers Moses' question with three statements that will be addressed below, the first two providing a basic explanation in verse 14 that the third statement builds upon in verse 15.[12] It is to this climax in Exodus 3:14–15 that we now turn.

Meaning of the Name

As stated above, in Exodus 3:13 Moses expresses his second objection to Yahweh's commission by stating his concern that the Israelites will ask him for the name of the God who sent him. Exodus 3:14–15 then contains Yahweh's answer to this question, which sheds light on the meaning of the divine name. The following attempt at discerning this meaning will begin with a phrase-by-phrase analysis of the syntax of Exodus 3:14–15, followed by an evaluation of proposed meanings for the name.

Syntactical Analysis of Exodus 3:14–15

Verse 14a: וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־מֹשֶׁה ("And God said to Moses")[13]

God's reply to Moses' question is introduced with a typical construction for introducing direct speech in narrative passages. The subject who speaks is designated with the generic title for God (אֱלֹהִים) that is used exclusively in the speech of God and Moses throughout the dialogue up to this point. The one to whom God speaks is then designated as Moses, indicating that what follows is God's answer to the question Moses asked in the previous verse.

Verse 14b: אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה ("I am who I am")

Yahweh's reply to Moses begins with the only instance in the Hebrew Bible of this expression or of any imperfect first person singular form of היה being

[9] Kaiser, "Exodus," 323. Contra Surls, who thinks that Moses is just asking for a name because the Israelites will only believe him if the name of the one who sent him is the same as the name of their God (see Austin Surls, *Making Sense of the Divine Name in the Book of Exodus: From Etymology to Literary Onomastics* [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2017], 49).

[10] Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), 66.

[11] Childs, 69.

[12] Kaiser, "Exodus," 320.

[13] The English translation of Exodus 3:14–15 used through this syntactical analysis is the author's.

immediately followed by the relative pronoun אֲשֶׁר. The interpretive challenge is compounded by the fact that אֲשֶׁר can function in a variety of ways.[14]

One debated issue about this phrase has to do with the role this statement plays in the dialogue between Yahweh and Moses. Some scholars consider this phrase to be an *idem per idem* construction, which Ogden defines as "a verb in the principal clause repeated in the subordinate clause, and linked by some form of the so-called relative pronoun."[15] Joüon further notes that this construction is used to "express certain nuances of indeterminateness."[16] Scholars disagree over precisely which nuances this construction expresses. Lundbom has argued that it is specifically used to close a debate by leaving no chance for a response.[17] However, the canonical text shows that the discussion does not end after this statement in Exodus 3:14–15. Since God does indeed answer Moses' question and Moses even goes on to make three more objections to Yahweh's call, this cannot be a case of God using this structure to shut down the conversation and deliberately avoid revealing His name.[18]

Kaiser believes that this construction can also be used "to express a totality, intensity, or emphasis to the form so highlighted by the repetition."[19] However, the only example he provides for this understanding of the construction (Exod 33:19) could also be understood as an expression of indeterminateness, and the context in which it occurs does not require his interpretation in order for the passage to make sense. Therefore, the common understanding that the function of this construction is to express indeterminateness still stands.

Others have questioned whether this statement is an *idem per idem* construction at all. Following the LXX rendering (ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὤν) that was adopted by the church fathers, Schild has argued for the translation "I am the one who is" or "I am he who is."[20] This interpretation considers the statement to be a way of distinguishing the God "who is" from the pagan gods who do not really exist.[21] Schild came to this conclusion by applying an expansion of the following principal from Gesenius to the statement under discussion: "If the governing substantive forms part of a statement made in the first or second person, the retrospective pronoun (or the subject of the appositional clause) is in the same person."[22] Put another way, "Hebrew relative clauses dependent on antecedents in the 1st or 2nd person must have their verbal

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[14] Ronald J. Williams and John C. Beckman, *Williams' Hebrew Syntax*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 163–66; Van der Merwe et al., *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*, 2nd ed. (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 304–307 (§36.3.1).

[15] G. S. Ogden, "Idem Per Idem: Its Use and Meaning," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 17, no. 53 (1992): 107.

[16] Paul Joüon and T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 2nd ed., Subsidia Biblica 27 (Roma: Editrice Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 2008), 563 (§158o). Hereafter, Joüon. See also Bill T. Arnold and John H. Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 199.

[17] Jack R. Lundbom, "God's Use of the Idem per Idem to Terminate Debate," *Harvard Theological Review* 71, no. 3–4 (1978): 197.

[18] Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 69; Gowan, *Theology in Exodus*, 83.

[19] Kaiser, "Exodus," 321.

[20] E. Schild, "On Exodus III 14: 'I Am That I Am,'" *Vetus Testamentum* 4, no. 3 (1954): 296–302.

[21] Mackay, *Exodus*, 77.

[22] E. Kautzsch, ed. *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, 2nd ed., trans. and rev. A. E. Cowley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910), 445 (§138d). Hereafter, GKC.

forms in the same person."[23] Schild used this rule to argue that the second "I am" (אֶהְיֶה) after the relative pronoun should be interpreted as the third person ("he is") because it only appears in first person form due to this rule.[24] However, all the examples Schild used to prove his interpretation have an expressed personal pronoun (אֲנִי) and a predicate followed by a relative clause and are thus different syntactical structures than what appears in Exodus 3:14.[25] This interpretation also does not fit the context because the existence or non-existence of pagan gods is wholly absent from the discussion.[26] Idols or foreign gods also do not appear in the preceding chapters of Exodus.

It is best to understand this first part of Yahweh's response to Moses' request for a name as a genuine *idem per idem* construction that expresses indeterminateness, and it could be translated, "I am whoever I am." Despite the deliberate vagueness this construction gives, the rest of the passage shows that it cannot be considered a refusal to answer. Rather, this phrase can be viewed as "the explanation component of an explicit naming wordplay."[27] Such usage of היה not only continues through verses 14 and 15, but even links these verses back to Yahweh's answer to Moses' first question in verse 12.[28] Yahweh is most likely adopting the language of verse 12 (אֶהְיֶה עִמָּךְ, "I will be with you") in order to emphasize His presence, first with Moses (v. 12), then with Israel (vv. 14–15). This statement could be considered a "preparatory comment" that builds suspense by developing wordplay to lead up to the proclamation of the divine name, which is first given as the first person singular form אֶהְיֶה, then as the third person singular form יהוה.[29] Additionally, given the significance of deity names in the time of Moses, the indefinite nature of this *idem per idem* expression also highlights the transcendent nature of God.[30]

A second debated issue is the stem of the verbs in this statement. According to the Masoretic Text vocalization, both instances of אֶהְיֶה are imperfect *yiqtol* first person masculine singular forms of the verb "to be" (היה) in the Qal stem. However, Albright and others argue that these words were originally in the Hiphil stem and had a causative meaning.[31] Albright's initial proposal involved not only changing the vocalization to reflect the Hiphil stems for both instances of אֶהְיֶה, but also emending the second instance to a third person masculine singular form ("I cause to be what

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[23] Karl Heinz Bernhardt et al. "הָיָה," *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 3, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. John T. Willis et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1980), 380. Hereafter, *TDOT*.

[24] Schild, "On Exodus III 14: 'I Am That I Am,'" 302.

[25] Surls, *Divine Name*, 51; Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 50; Bertil Albrektson, "On the Syntax of אהיה אשר אהיה in Exodus 3:14," in *Words and Meanings, Essays Presented to David Winton Thomas*, ed. P. R. Ackroyd and B. Lindars (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 21.

[26] Mackay, *Exodus*, 77.

[27] Surls, *Divine Name*, 54.

[28] Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 69; Gowan, *Theology in Exodus*, 83.

[29] Peter Enns, *Exodus*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 102–103; Surls, *Divine Name*, 57.

[30] Clifton J. Allen, *The Broadman Bible Commentary,* vol. 1*, General Articles, Genesis–Exodus*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1973), 315–16.

[31] W. F. Albright, "Contributions to Biblical Archaeology and Philology," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 43, no. 3/4 (1924): 377; David Noel Freedman, "Name of the God of Moses," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 79, no. 2 (June 1960): 153–54; Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 121.

comes into existence").[32] Freedman later adapted this idea by retaining the first person forms throughout the *idem per idem* construction, rendering the translation as "I create what I create."[33] However, the verb היה never occurs in the Hiphil stem anywhere in the Hebrew Bible, so the use of that causative stem here would be unprecedented.[34] Furthermore, this unprecedented causative stem is being forced onto the text based on the assumptions that the divine name is a causative form and that the material that precedes the declaration of the divine name must conform to it in form.[35] The alteration of the Masoretic vocalization is based on an etymological assumption about the divine name and the theological assumption that in this passage Yahweh is emphasizing that He is the Creator, a concept that is not focused upon in the context of Exodus 3:1–4:17 or the two preceding chapters. It thus makes best sense to retain the active Qal vocalization of the Masoretic Text for this statement.

Another debated issue is the tense of the imperfect verbs in this statement. While historically the two instances of אֶהְיֶה have been viewed as present tense,[36] it has become increasingly popular to view them as future tense.[37] Indeed, most of the forty-two occurrences of the first person singular imperfect form of היה without the *waw*-consecutive are in contexts that indicate future time.[38] However, cases in which that form clearly functions in contexts other than future time (i.e., Ruth 2:13; 2 Sam 15:34) indicate that a present tense interpretation is still possible.

A second reason advocates contend for the future tense view is the belief that the overall context of this section in Exodus concerns what God is about to do for his people.[39] Johnstone writes, "[I]n context, God's affirmation of the divine name is more likely to be a soteriological statement about the certainty of immediately impending future action."[40] However, the immediate context of Exodus 3:14–15 is a reply to Moses' request for God's name, which is related to His essence and significance, not a question about what God will do. As mentioned previously, it is likely that the shared use of אֶהְיֶה in verses 12, 14, and 15 functions as a wordplay to build suspense for the proclamation of the divine name. A future tense interpretation of אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה only limits God's mysterious statement about Himself to future time, but the Hebrew imperfect conjugation quite often expresses the idea of continuation or "progressive continuous action."[41] Calvin suggests this aspect of the imperfect conjugation when he interprets this statement to have "the same force as the present, except that it designates the perpetual duration of time."[42] Thus a continuous, present

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[32] Albright, "Biblical Archaeology and Philology," 376.

[33] Freedman, "Name of the God of Moses," 154.

[34] "הָיָה," *TDOT,* 3:381; Gowan, *Theology in Exodus*, 83; Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 63; Benno Jacob, *The Second Book of the Bible: Exodus* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 1992), 77; "הָיָה," *NIDOTTE*, 1:1025.

[35] Stuart, *Exodus*, 121.

[36] Lienhard and Oden have compiled numerous writings about this passage from the early church, all of which interpret this statement to be present tense (see Joseph T. Lienhard and Thomas C. Oden, *Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture 3 [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001], 19–23).

[37] Bauckham, *Who Is God?,* 41.

[38] "הָיָה ," *TDOT,* 3:380; Gowan, *Theology in Exodus*, 84.

[39] Bauckham, *Who Is God?,* 41.

[40] William Johnstone, *Exodus 1–19* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2014), 81.

[41] Van der Merwe et al., *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*, 162 (§19.3.4); GKC, 313 (§107a).

[42] John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries,* vol. 2, *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses Arranged in the Form of a Harmony*, trans. Charles William Bingham (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 73.

tense understanding of this expression is grammatically acceptable and even preferable because the focus of Moses' question in verse 13 is on God's name (i.e., His identity) rather than on His future actions.

The present tense view was also the understanding of the LXX translators in the third century BC, who translated this phrase as "I am the one who is" (ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὢν). While the first occurrence of אֶהְיֶה was translated into Greek as a present tense verb with a personal pronoun ("I am," ἐγώ εἰμι), the second occurrence was translated as a present active participle ("the one who is," ὁ ὢν). Although the two occurrences of אֶהְיֶה were translated differently in the LXX, both occurrences were translated with present tense forms.

Furthermore, Jesus and the New Testament authors may have understood this expression to be in the present tense as well. Several times in the Gospel of John, most notably in John 8:24, 28, 58 and 13:19, Jesus is quoted declaring the present tense phrase "I am" (ἐγώ εἰμι) to indicate that he is Yahweh in human form.[43] Although many scholars consider Jesus' use of ἐγώ εἰμι to be references to the LXX rendering of "I am he" (translating אֲנִי הוּא as ἐγώ εἰμι) statements made by Yahweh in Isaiah (Isa 41:4; 43:10, 13, 25; 46:4; 48:12),[44] those passages also appear to be allusions to Exodus 3:14.[45] Regarding Jesus' "I am" statement in John 8:58, Köstenberger remarks, "Jesus' language here echoes God's self-identification to Moses in Exod. 3:14."[46]

One final issue about this statement in Exodus 3:14 has to do with its exact meaning. If אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה is an *idem per idem* construction expressing indeterminateness in the active present tense, what does that say about Yahweh? The answer to this question depends on one's understanding of the rhetorical purpose of this statement and the semantic nature of the verb היה.

Regarding rhetorical purpose, Surls argues that the statement only serves to raise suspense for the unfolding narrative in Exodus that gradually reveals the character of Yahweh.[47] However, this view rejects the understanding that Yahweh's second response to Moses in this verse ("I am has sent me to you") uses אֶהְיֶה as Yahweh's name for himself, which the discussion below will show makes the most sense syntactically. If this statement and the shorter expression later in verse 14 are only a case of wordplay being used solely to build suspense, then they would not account for the instances of Yahweh referring to himself elsewhere with "I am" statements (cf. Deut 32:39; Isa 41:4; 43:10, 13, 25; 46:4; 48:12) nor for Jesus to use similar

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[43] D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 342; Murray J. Harris, *John*, Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament, ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger and Robert W. Yarbrough (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2015), 183.

[44] Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 342; Harris, *John*, 183.

[45] J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 533; Barclay Moon Newman and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on the Gospel of John*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1993), 124; Andreas J. Köstenberger, "John," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. D. A Carson and G. K Beale (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 457.

[46] Köstenberger, "John," 459. Note that the *New English Bible* and the marginal note for the *Revised English Bible* translate this statement in John 8:58 as "I am that I am," while the marginal note for the *Good News Bible* translates it as "I am who I am."

[47] Surls, *Divine Name*, 57.

terminology to state His deity. Thus, there does seem to be some semantic significance to this statement beyond mere wordplay.

As for the nature of that semantic significance, there are two main views proposed about the meaning of the verb in this statement. The traditional view presented in the LXX rendering adopted by the early church is that אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה emphasizes the absolute existence of God.[48] Adherents to this view hold that the verb היה refers to a static state of existence and is used in this statement to indicate that God is "the One who Is, who exists, who is real."[49] The problem with this understanding of the meaning of היה is that such usage is not the standard way to express existence in Hebrew. The usual ways to indicate existence are by juxtaposing two nominal elements in a verbless clause (e.g., Exod 6:2 אֲנִי יְהוָה = "I am Yahweh") or using the existence particle (e.g., Gen 28:16 יֵשׁ יְהוָה בַּמָּקוֹם = "Yahweh is in this place").[50] Although היה can be used in the sense of "is" (e.g., Gen 1:2 וְהָאָרֶץ הָיְתָה תֹהוּ וָבֹהוּ = "And the earth was formless and void"), it is not used to express absolute existence.[51] Thus Allen rightly remarks, "The use of the verb *hayah* (to be) does not imply the philosophical concept of absolute existence or being in a metaphysical sense."[52]

The second and most popular view about the meaning of היה in this expression is that the verb denotes an active or dynamic sense, such as "happen," or "occur."[53] The specific meaning is then drawn from the context of God's conversation with Moses, namely his first use of אֶהְיֶה in verse 12 when he tells Moses, "I will be with you." Based on this theme of God's presence and the wordplay of אֶהְיֶה in verses 12, 14, and 15, many scholars believe that the expression is emphasizing God's "active presence," even though the idea of "presence" is not explicitly a meaning for היה by itself.[54] Rather than viewing היה as simply denoting a "static sense of existence," this view sees the concept of divine presence that was introduced in verse 12 continued through wordplay to this passage.[55] Motyer summarizes this view as follows:

> Unlike Greek, which uses different verbs to express either existence or active presence, Hebrew has only one verb for both meanings, *haya,* but unquestionably this verb leans strongly in the direction of 'active presence'. The

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[48] Bauckham, *Who Is God?,* 41n3. For a list of quotations from the church fathers regarding their interpretation of this phrase, see Lienhard and Oden, *Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*, 19–23.

[49] Schild, "On Exodus III 14: 'I Am That I Am,'" 301.

[50] "הָיָה," *NIDOTTE*, 1:1022.

[51] Gowan, *Theology in Exodus*, 83.

[52] Allen, *The Broadman Bible Commentary,* 315. Contra Duane A. Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2014), 211–12.

[53] *HALOT*, 1:243.

[54] Cornelis Den Hertog, "The Prophetic Dimension of the Divine Name: On Exodus 3:14a and Its Context," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 64, no. 2 (2002): 226–27; Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1987), 38; John I. Durham, *Exodus*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 39; Jacob, *Exodus,* 72; Eugene E. Carpenter, *Exodus*, Evangelical Exegetical Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), 21–25; Gowan, *Theology in Exodus*, 82–83; Allen, *The Broadman Bible Commentary,* 315; J. A. Motyer and John R. W. Stott, *The Story of the Old Testament: Men with a Message* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001), 34; Mackay, *Exodus*, 77; R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1969), 580–81.

[55] Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 580.

> old hymn which proclaimed 'God is here—and that to bless us' caught the sense exactly. The presence of this God is not, therefore, a bare 'is' but a living force, vital and personal. In no situation is he an ornamental extra; in every situation he is the key active ingredient.[56]

Carpenter supports this interpretation by noting that the divine presence is an important theme in Exodus that is highlighted in this section and developed throughout the rest of the book. God had previously promised the patriarchs that He would be with them (Gen 26:3; 31:3; 46:3–4) and Exodus picks up that theme.[57] As Exodus continues, Yahweh's presence first goes with Israel in a cloud (Exod 13:21; 16:10), then God expresses his intent to dwell with Israel (Exod 25:8–9), and he ultimately does so in the tabernacle at the end of the book (Exod 40:34–38). Regarding how this theme of divine presence fits into Yahweh's statement in Exodus 3:14, Carpenter states:

> The immediate context stresses Yahweh's presence with Israel in order to bring them out of Egypt (3:17–22) via the exodus, just as Yahweh will be at Mount Sinai after the exodus and as he leads them through the wilderness to the mountain of God (3:12) as well. His presence is vital, the *sine qua non* that makes his people who they are (cf. 33:15–17), as Moses has just been told concerning himself.[58]

This "active presence" understanding of אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה functions as an answer to Moses' question in that it shows that Yahweh is the one who was not only with his people in the past as "the God of your fathers" (Exod 3:13, 15–16), but would also be with His people in a new and more tangible way that unfolds throughout Exodus as Yahweh reveals more of his character.[59] Combining this "active presence" understanding of the verb היה with the indeterminateness expressed by the *idem per idem* construction, this statement would thus mean that Yahweh is assuring Moses that He will be with His people, but He is doing so in a way that builds suspense while preparing Moses for the announcement of the divine name as אֶהְיֶה in the latter part of verse 14, then as יהוה in verse 15.

Verse 14c: וַיֹּאמֶר כֹּה תֹאמַר לִבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל ("And he said, 'Thus you will say to the sons of Israel'")

This sentence begins in an unusual manner in that it opens with the customary construction for introducing direct speech ("And he said," וַיֹּאמֶר) but the one speaking has not changed from the previous sentence. Both sentences in this verse begin with וַיֹּאמֶר, the first of which designates God (אֱלֹהִים) as the subject while the second implies it with the third person masculine singular form of the verb. This appears to

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[56] J. A. Motyer, *The Message of Exodus: The Days of Our Pilgrimage* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 69.

[57] Carpenter, *Exodus*, 21.

[58] Carpenter, 227.

[59] Carpenter, 25.

be a deliberate breaking up of Yahweh's speech in order to indicate a pause for rhetorical effect.[60] God then begins His second answer to Moses' question from verse 13 by giving him instructions for what he should say as His chosen messenger. These instructions are introduced with a common formula used for introducing a messenger's words: "Thus you shall say" (cf. Gen 32:4).[61] This phrase also indicates that what follows is a direct answer to Moses' question in the previous verse, which he introduced with "What shall I say?" God then uses the "to" (לְ) preposition to indicate to whom Moses is to deliver the message, "the sons of Israel," which is a common term for the descendants of Abraham who had grown into a large people group while in Egypt.

Verse 14d: אֶֽהְיֶה שְׁלָחַנִי אֲלֵיכֶם׃ ("I am has sent me to you.")

This clause is the content of the first part of the message God is sending Moses to tell the Israelites. This verb appears in the first person because these are the exact words Moses was to report. The most difficult part of this clause is the meaning of the first word, which functions as the subject of the verb and is placed before the verb for emphasis.[62] The difficulty comes in distinguishing form from function. Although functioning as a nominative subject for the verb that follows it, אֶֽהְיֶה also has the form of a Qal imperfect first person singular verb. It is identical to the two verbal forms in God's first statement to Moses earlier in the verse. The verb that was repeated in the mysterious *idem per idem* construction from God's first response to Moses' question is now adopted as a name itself. The pairing of this word with the Qal perfect third person masculine singular form of the verb meaning "he has sent" (שׁלח) indicates that אֶֽהְיֶה here is functioning as a name for God, since he is the one sending Moses.[63] Although not the primary name for God used in Scripture, it is the form of the name which God uses to refer to Himself, as designated by the fact that it is a first person verbal form.[64] The wordplay with the previous statement in verse 14a and God's response to Moses's first objection in verse 13 is obvious, but the function of אֶֽהְיֶה is different here. The God who has promised to be with Moses (v. 13) and who is whoever He is (v. 14a) now becomes the one who sends Moses (v. 14b).[65]

The evidence from the New Testament also seems to support this interpretation. It has already been stated that the Gospel of John shows that Jesus referred to Himself by what appears to be the Greek translation of this name (ἐγώ εἰμι)[66] as a claim of deity. The clearest instance of this is in John 8:58 when Jesus says, "before Abraham was, I am," which arguably alludes to both the usage of אֶֽהְיֶה and the reference to "the God of Abraham" in Exodus 3:15. The violent reaction from the crowd that John

[60] Surls, *Divine Name*, 54. This also occurs in Gen 15:2–3 and Exod 3:5–6.

[61] "כֹּה," *HALOT*, 1:461.

[62] GKC, 456–57 (§142f).

[63] Den Hertog, "Prophetic Dimension," 220.

[64] Hertog, 228. Some contemporary Jewish Bible translations also recognize this occurrence of אֶֽהְיֶה to be a name and transliterate it as the proper name "Ehyeh" (see Alter, *The Hebrew Bible*, 223; *Tanakh: A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures According to the Traditional Hebrew Text* [Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1985]).

[65] Carpenter, *Exodus*, 228–29.

[66] Although the LXX uses Ὁ ὢν for אֶֽהְיֶה in this second statement in verse 14b, Jesus may have adopted ἐγώ εἰμι from the first occurrence of אֶֽהְיֶה in the first statement at the beginning of that verse.

records in the next verse further indicates that at least Jews living in first-century Judea considered "I am" to be a name for God. That Jesus, God in the flesh, would consider "I am" to be a name for God is strong inter-textual evidence that his Father also considered it to be a name for Himself when He told it to Moses. While using a first person singular verb as a proper noun is unprecedented in biblical naming practices, the one giving this name is also unique.

This sentence then continues with a first person singular pronominal suffix attached to the verb to indicate the object of the verbal action. Then this second statement from God to Moses ends with the "to" (אֶל) preposition joined with a second person plural pronominal suffix to indicate to whom Moses was being sent. Moses was to tell the sons of Israel that "I am" had sent him to them.

Verse 15a: וַיֹּאמֶר עוֹד אֱלֹהִים אֶל־מֹשֶׁה ("And again God said to Moses")

This verse begins with an introductory clause that is nearly identical to that of the beginning of verse 14. As with the second statement in the previous verse, this third statement from God begins with a break in God's speech for rhetorical effect. This effect is emphasized by the one difference it has from the previous parallel expression—the addition of "again" (עוֹד). This adverb draws special attention because עוֹד does not typically occur in speech introductions and can only be found here and in three other places in the Hebrew Bible (1 Sam 16:11; 1 Kings 20:32; Jonah 3:4).[67] Carpenter remarks that עוֹד here was "added to the name already given to establish clarity and to establish a link between God's two responses that would help the Israelites accept Moses."[68] It indicates that what follows is further instruction to Moses. As with the beginning of verse 14, here the generic name for God indicates the one speaking and the "to" (אֶל) preposition denotes to whom He is about to speak.

Verse 15b: כֹּה־תֹאמַר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל ("Thus you will say to the sons of Israel")

This clause is identical to the parallel expression in the middle of the previous verse. This is the standard message introduction formula that identifies the same messenger in the second person and the same intended recipients.

Verse 15c: יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֹתֵיכֶם אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם אֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק וֵאלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב שְׁלָחַנִי אֲלֵיכֶם ("Yahweh, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob has sent me to you.")

At last, the suspense built up through the wordplay involving אֶהְיֶה reaches its climax with the clear proclamation of the divine name. The initial *yod* and consonantal similarity of יהוה to the structurally parallel אֶהְיֶה in the previous verse would have made the name sound to the listener like the third person masculine

[67] Den Hertog, "Prophetic Dimension," 228; Jacob, *Exodus,* 74.
[68] Carpenter, *Exodus*, 222n123.

singular alternative to the first person אֶהְיֶה.[69] The divine name functions as the expressed subject of the verb that occurs near the end of the sentence. As with אֶהְיֶה in verse 14, יהוה is fronted in the sentence for emphasis.

The name is followed by four appositive phrases that further designate Yahweh's relationship to the recipients of this message. First, He describes Himself as "the God of your fathers," using the plural form of "your" in order to refer to all the sons of Israel to whom Moses would speak these words.[70] The remaining three appositive phrases refer specifically to Israel's patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Yahweh thus identifies Himself as the God whom Israel's ancestors worshipped by name (cf. Gen 4:26; 9:26; 12:8; 26:25; 28:16) and with whom He had established an everlasting covenant. This full expression of the divine name with references to the patriarchs thus harkens back to the Abrahamic Covenant and warrants the view that יהוה is the covenant name of God.[71] This statement would have been extremely encouraging for both Moses and those to whom he was being sent. Indeed, the effect can be seen when the elders worshipped Yahweh in response to Moses' first meeting with them to proclaim these very words (Exod 4:31).

Verse 15d: זֶה־שְּׁמִי לְעֹלָם ("This is my name to eternity.")

The verbless sentence that comprises the rest of verse 15 divides into two halves that form a poetic bicolon with synonymous parallelism (a b c // a′ b′ c′) on both syntactic and lexical levels.[72] This first colon begins with "This" (זֶה) to indicate that the subject of this sentence is the divine name that was announced in the preceding sentence. This entire sentence then provides further information about this name. As addressed earlier, the word "name" (שֵׁם) here does not only denote a moniker or provide another title by which to address God. Keil notes that His name "expresses the objective manifestation of the divine nature."[73] It is important to note that this name would have been known by the Israelites in Egypt. Among the many reasons that Enns gives that they would have known Yahweh's name, four stand out as most salient: (1) If they had not known the divine name, then Moses would not have gained credibility with them by saying that Yahweh had sent him, and gaining credibility was the exact reason why he had asked God for His name. (2) The divine name occurs not only earlier in Exodus 3, but was also spoken by people in Genesis. (3) The mention of "forever" in this clause refers to perpetual time, both backward and forward in time, so Yahweh has always been and will always be God's name forever (cf. Exod 15:18). (4) If the divine name had been introduced in Exodus 3:15 for the very first time, then it would seem significant enough for Moses to have mentioned

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[69] Bruce Wells, "Exodus," in *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary (Old Testament): Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*, ed. John H. Walton (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 175.

[70] Thomas B. Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 133.

[71] Henry O. Thompson, "Yahweh," *The Anchor Bible Dictionary,* vol. 6, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 1012. Hereafter, *ABD*.

[72] Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, 39.

[73] Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Pentateuch*, 3 vols., Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament, trans. James Martin (repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1959), 1:442.

it when he had first met with the Israelites in Exodus 4:29–31, but the narrative is silent about this.[74] Therefore, it is best to consider the proclamation of the divine name in this verse to be a reiteration of the Name for the specific purpose of establishing Moses' credibility with the Israelites.[75]

Yahweh then ends this clause with the "to" (לְ) preposition attached to the word "eternal" (עוֹלָם) to indicate temporal direction. Yahweh is God's name "to eternity" or "forever." Yahweh thus affirms that His name and the essence and character it represents will never change (cf. Mal 3:6).[76]

Verse 15e: וְזֶה זִכְרִי לְדֹר דֹּר׃ ("And this is my memorial to every generation.")

This second colon opens with a simple "And" (וְ) conjunction attached to the same demonstrative pronoun ("this") that began the previous colon, thereby demonstrating exact parallelism. The demonstrative pronoun here also refers back to the divine name earlier in the verse. The next word in this colon has the first person singular pronominal suffix ("my") as with the parallel expression "my name" (שְׁמִי) in the previous colon, but here the phrase "my memorial" (זִכְרִי) is used instead. Although "name" (שֵׁם) and "memorial" (זֵכֶר) are often used in parallel expressions (e.g., Prov 10:7; Job 18:17; Isa 26:8),[77] the two terms are not synonymous. The word זֵכֶר is related to the verb "to remember" (זָכַר) and primarily expresses the idea of memory or remembrance.[78] Thus the parallel connection between שְׁמִי and זִכְרִי indicates that Yahweh is the name to be remembered, as is also shown in a similar pairing of these words within Exodus 20:24 (אַזְכִּיר אֶת־שְׁמִי, "I cause my name to be remembered").[79]

Other occurrences of זֵכֶר help determine how the name Yahweh is a "memorial" or "remembrance" of God. Propp notes that זֵכֶר not only expresses the concept of memory, but most of the contexts in which it occurs indicate that it also has the connotation of something that is spoken.[80] Childs as well notes that this word "denotes the act of utterance."[81] Jacob further cites several examples to show that this term is frequently used in the context of spoken or sung praise to Yahweh (cf. Hos 12:6 [Eng. v. 5]; Pss 30:5 [Eng. v. 4]; 97:12; Isa 26:8).[82] Out of the twenty-three occurrences of this word in the Hebrew Bible, eleven of them are in the Psalms and out of those eleven occurrences, six are in the context of direct praise to Yahweh (Pss 6:6 [Eng. v. 5]; 30:5 [Eng. v. 4]; 97:12; 102:13 [Eng. v. 12]; 111:4; 135:13; 145:7). Among these, Psalms 102:13 (Eng. v. 12) and 135:13 actually contain paraphrases of Exodus 3:15 in that praise context. The link between remembrance and praise is also seen in the parallel phrases in Psalm 6:6 (Eng. v. 5): "For there is no remembrance

[74] Enns, *Exodus*, 104–106.
[75] Enns, 104.
[76] Carpenter, *Exodus*, 238.
[77] Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, 39.
[78] "זֵכֶר," *HALOT*, 1:271.
[79] Johnstone, *Exodus 1–19,* 85.
[80] William Henry Propp, *Exodus 1–18: a New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible Commentary (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 205.
[81] Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 80.
[82] Jacob, *Exodus,* 75.

of You [זִכְרֶךָ] in death; In Sheol who will give You thanks?" Regarding this passage, Kaiser points out that the problem in view is not that the dead do not remember Yahweh, but that they are not able to praise Yahweh among the living.[83] The connection between these ideas of remembrance and spoken utterance within the context of praise is logical; the one who is not praised or spoken about is also not remembered. Regarding the importance of remembering names in the ancient world, Garrett writes:

> In the ancient world, and certainly in Egypt, the memory of a name was closely connected to the existence of the being who had that name. Thus, for example, inscriptions with the name Akhenaten were defaced by later pharaohs, not simply to wipe out the memory of him in the modern sense, but so that his eternal soul, conveyed by the Egyptian concept of *ka* and *ba*, would cease to be. That is, one's identity and one's being were closely bound to the memory of one's name. By analogy, Hos. 2:19 (Eng. v. 17) says of the Baals, "They will no longer be remembered by their names." The idea is that if nobody remembers the names of the Baals, then they have no identity and no longer exist. What, then, does God mean by describing the name he gives himself in this verse as his *zekher* through all generations? It is that he has forever bound his being and identity to the name "YHWH, the God of the fathers."[84]

Therefore, the parallel pairing of שְׁמִי and זִכְרִי in this passage suggests that Yahweh desires his name to be remembered by means of speaking it. Furthermore, since Yahweh's name is bound with His identity, this pairing also emphasizes the importance of remembering who God is.

This second colon ends with a "to" (לְ) preposition denoting direction in time toward the attached phrase "generation, generation" (לְדֹר דֹּר), which is an expression that functions as a periphrasis for the superlative and could mean "to the remotest generations."[85] This phrase is parallel to the phrase "to eternity" in the previous colon, thus completing the parallelism of this sentence.

Putting it all together, this two-part sentence with synonymous parallelism advances the idea that Yahweh is not only God's eternal name, but the name by which he wants to be spoken of and remembered throughout all generations. Verse 15 has not only revealed God's personal name to be Yahweh, but has also revealed His desire to be remembered by that name forever.

Evaluation of Proposed Meanings for יהוה

We now address the meaning of the divine name itself. The following survey and evaluations of proposed meanings for the divine name will be limited to the following: (1) those proposed meanings that do not require emendation of the Hebrew consonantal text (יהוה), and (2) those meanings that are not based on hypothetical

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[83] Kaiser, "Exodus," 322.
[84] Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus*, 194n51.
[85] GKC, 432 (§133l).

origins from other ancient languages and thus do not prioritize the context within the Hebrew text.

No Inherent Meaning

A few scholars have proposed that the meaning of the divine name itself simply cannot be determined. This view dismisses the resemblance of יהוה to the verb היה that permeates the immediate context of Exodus 3, claiming that the resemblance is semantically insignificant wordplay that is common in Old Testament naming contexts.[86] Surls holds to this view but states that the meaning of the name is later revealed through God's actions in Exodus: "[T]he name יהוה appears to be etymologically opaque. Such a personal name makes direct reference to the name bearer without adding any sense (descriptive meaning) to its reference. Such a name must gather its sense from the biblical narrative rather than from a supposed etymology."[87] Garrett also holds to this view and writes, "The origin of YHWH is unknown, and all supposed descriptions of the etymology and of its original meaning are speculations, many of them based on misinterpretations of Exod. 3:14–15."[88]

This view is a minority view and goes against views that have arguably been held from as far back as the writing of the LXX in the third century BC. Throughout the histories of both Judaism and Christianity it has been assumed that God's name had a knowable meaning. Saying otherwise ignores the well-established Ancient Near Eastern cultural belief that names held great importance and were considered to reflect the character of those who bore them. It would be difficult to understand why the personal name of the most important character in the Bible and the most important being in all existence would have no inherent meaning when those whom he spoke to expected names to have meaning.

This view also ignores the point established earlier that Moses used the interrogative מָה ("What?") rather than מִי ("Who?") to ask for more than a mere label for God. Furthermore, this view too easily casts aside the semantic value of the aforementioned wordplay developed in Exodus 3:12–15. The clear use of wordplay actually accentuates the meaning of the divine name, rather than suggesting that there is no meaning. In short, the proposal that the name Yahweh has no apparent meaning is not preferable because it does not give adequate attention to the lexical similarities between אֶהְיֶה and יהוה, rejects the ancient use of names, and stands opposed to the majority of Jewish and Christian scholarship throughout the ages.

היה Verb-related Meaning

The majority of proposed meanings for the divine name recognize that it does have a meaning that can be known. Among these proposed meanings, the overwhelming consensus throughout history has been the understanding that יהוה is the adaptation of a verb into a proper noun. This verb is usually considered to be היה based on the shared consonants between the words (the exchange of *yod* and *waw*

[86] Bauckham, *Who Is God?,* 44.
[87] Surls, *Divine Name*, 79.
[88] Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus*, 220.

will be addressed below).[89] Harrison proposes this majority view when he states: "There can be no question that the name is connected etymologically with the Hebrew word היה, 'to be,' or more preferably with an earlier variant form of the root הוה."[90] Those who accept the verbal connection agree that the *yod* at the beginning of יהוה denotes a third person masculine singular prefix in the imperfect conjugation.[91] Apart from the morphological resemblance to an imperfect prefix, the other reason for considering the *yod* to indicate a third person form is its parallel relationship to אֶהְיֶה in Exodus 3:14–15.[92] As discussed above, after telling Moses to tell the Israelites that אֶהְיֶה had sent him, Yahweh used the same sentence pattern to say that יהוה had done so. Stuart remarks about this shift from first to third person as follows: "God also made clear that the third-person form of his name, *Yahweh,* was to be employed immediately (since no human could use it properly in the first-person form) and would identify him to his people for the generations hereafter."[93]

The main argument against a verbal interpretation of יהוה is that it would be unusual and against common naming practices in the Old Testament to use a verbal form for a name.[94] However, the name Isaac (יִצְחָק) is a good example of an Old Testament name that originated from the verb for "laugh" (צחק) and has a third person masculine singular prefix, as it would seem in the case of יהוה.[95] Furthermore, references to deities with names that use verbal forms have been found among Akkadian and Amorite texts that predate the writing of Exodus.[96] Therefore, the use of a verbal form for the divine name is not without precedent.

Another issue related to this verbal interpretation of the divine name is that יהוה appears to come from the root הוה rather than היה. This can be explained by the evidence of *yod* and *waw* being used interchangeably in some words. For example, when Adam named Eve in Genesis 3:20, the text states that he named her חַוָּה because she was the mother of all "the living" (חָי). The term translated as "living" (חָי) is a nominal adjective derived from the verb for "live" (חיה), which has a *yod* for the middle root letter. That *yod* has been changed to a *waw* in Eve's name, despite the verse implying that her name came from the same verbal root.[97] In the same way as the verbal root חיה had a shift from *yod* to *waw* in the middle root letter for the name חַוָּה in the First Book of Moses, so too could היה have employed the same shift for the

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[89] Kaiser, "Exodus," 321; "יהוה," *TDOT*, 5:513; Matthew J. Suriano, "TETRAGRAMMATON*,"* *Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics*, ed. Geoffrey Khan (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2013), 753; Wells, "Exodus," 175–76; S. Amsler, "היה," *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, ed. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 359.

[90] Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 579.

[91] Suriano, "TETRAGRAMMATON," 753; "Yahweh," *ABD*, 6:1012; K. van der Toorn et al., "Yahweh," in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, 2nd rev. ed. (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1999), 913.

[92] Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus = [Shemot]: the Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation* [Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991], 17–18.

[93] Stuart, *Exodus*, 122.

[94] Surls, *Divine Name*, 79.

[95] Gowan, *Theology in Exodus*, 84.

[96] K. van der Toorn et al., "Yahweh," 913.

[97] Albright, "Biblical Archaeology and Philology," 374.

name יהוה in Moses' Second Book.[98] This tendency to shift from *yod* to *waw* in the Pentateuch can also be seen in the author's preference for writing the third person feminine singular pronoun הִיא as הוּא (cf. Gen 3:12, 20).[99]

The consensus view that יהוה is related to the verb הוה, which is an alternate or older spelling for היה, gives adequate attention to the wordplay parallels between אֶהְיֶה and יהוה in God's proclamation of His name to Moses. Its form can also be explained linguistically and has some historical precedence. However, this understanding is just one step toward determining the name's meaning. The next step is to determine exactly what verbal form and semantic function the divine name displays. There are three main proposals based on the verbal interpretation of יהוה: (1) the causative sense ("he causes to be"), (2) the static sense ("he is/exists"), and (3) the dynamic sense ("he is actively present").

Causative Meaning

The proposal that יהוה has a causative meaning was popularized by Albright in the mid-twentieth century and modified by others, such as Freedman and Cross.[100] This view is based on the assumption that יַהְוֶה is the correct vocalization of the divine name. This vocalization has an a-class vowel under the preformative *yod* that is the same consonant-vowel combination used for the first syllable of a third person masculine singular imperfect verb in the causative Hiphil stem.[101] This causative verbal interpretation leads to such proposals for the name as "the one who causes to be," "the one who brings into existence," or "the Creator."[102]

There are two main arguments against the causative interpretation. Despite Albright's insistence that "Yahweh must be a causative,"[103] the primary problem with a causative use of the verb היה is that there is no evidence of this verb ever occurring in a Hiphil form in Hebrew or any Semitic language.[104]

A second problem with the causative proposed meaning for the divine name is that the sense of causing something to come into existence or creating something

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[98] It is interesting to note that הוה is the Aramaic form for the Hebrew היה. Jacob states that the הוה verb form still existed in both Hebrew and Aramaic imperatives and participle forms in the time of Moses (see "הָיָה," *NIDOTTE*, 1:1022; "יהוה," *TDOT*, 5:500; Ernst Vogt, "הוה," *A Lexicon of Biblical Aramaic: Clarified by Ancient Documents*, trans. Joseph A. Fitzmyer [Roma: Gregorian and Biblical Press, 2011], 107–110; Franz Rosenthal,. *Porta Linguarum Orientalium*, vol. 5, *A Grammar of Biblical Aramaic*, 6th ed. [Wiesbaden, Germany: Harrassowitz, 1995], 53 [§132]; Jacob, *Exodus*, 76).

[99] "הוּא," *HALOT*, 1:240. In the Pentateuch, 200 out of 211 occurrences of the third person feminine singular pronoun appear as הוּא, indicating that this was Moses' preferred form for this word (see BDB, "הוּא," 214–15; GKC, 107 [§32l]).

[100] Albright, " Biblical Archaeology and Philology," 374; David Noel Freedman, "Name of the God of Moses," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 79, no. 2 (June 1960): 152–53; "יהוה," *TDOT*, 5:513; Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 60–75.

[101] "יהוה," *TDOT*, 5:513; Stuart, *Exodus*, 121; GKC, 144 (§53a); Joüon, 148 (§54a).

[102] Albright, " Biblical Archaeology and Philology," 375; Ernst Jenni, "יהוה," *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, vol. 2, ed. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 523.

[103] Albright, "Biblical Archaeology and Philology," 374.

[104] "Yahweh," *ABD*, 6:1011; Charles R. Gianotti, "The Meaning of the Divine Name YHWH," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 142 (1985): 44; Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus*, 217–18.

does not fit with the purpose of God's message to Moses throughout Exodus 3–4. Although Yahweh does mention making people to have certain traits in Exodus 4:11, that statement is a direct response to Moses' excuse in the previous verse about not being a good speaker. Furthermore, the God-as-Creator concept is not a focus of Exodus. Given these considerations, the causative meaning proposal is not preferable.

Simple Active Meanings

The last two significant meaning proposals both view יהוה as a simple Qal imperfect third person masculine singular form of the verb היה. Regarding the morphological challenges to this view, it has already been shown that הוה is a legitimate alternate spelling of היה, and it appears in Biblical Aramaic (cf. Dan 4:26; 5:19; 7:13; Ezra 5:5). Although the preformative *yod* (י) lacks the standard vocalization for a Qal imperfect form, there are other instances in the Hebrew Bible of verbs in the Qal imperfect form with a *ya* prefix. For example, Psalm 58:9 contains יַהֲלֹךְ with a *ya* prefix for the Qal imperfect third person masculine singular form of the verb "to walk" (הלךְ), despite this form of the same verb appearing in other verses with a *yi* prefix that lengthens to *ye* (יֵ) due to compensation for the elision of the first guttural root letter.[105] The issue that divides this interpretation has to do with the semantic implications of the Qal imperfect form of היה. Since היה can express either a static ("be") or dynamic ("happen") sense in the Qal form,[106] two meanings for the divine name have been proposed based on those two senses.

Static vs. Dynamic Meaning

The oldest and most prevalent proposed meaning for יהוה throughout history is the static view. Proponents of this view argue that the divine name expresses static existence, leading to translations like "the one who exists," "the one who is," or "he is."[107] The earliest appearance of this interpretation is in the LXX, which replaces יהוה with the title Κύριος ("Lord"), but suggests that the name be interpreted to mean "the one who is" (ὁ ὤν) based on the parallel expression from the previous verse. This view most likely reflects the philosophical mindset of the LXX translators, who, as Hellenistic Jews living in Alexandria, were heavily influenced by Greek thought.[108] Philo of Alexandria expressed this ontological interpretation when he

[105] The other instances of this verb occurring in the Qal imperfect third person masculine singular form with the *ya* prefix occur in Jeremiah 9:3; Psalm 91:6; Job 14:20; 16:6; 20:25. Instances of the same grammatical form with the *yi* prefix (יֵלֵךְ) can be found in some of the same books as those with the *ya* prefix version (cf. Jer 46:22; 49:3; Psalm 126:6) and elsewhere, such as in Exodus 10:24, 26; 23:23; 32:34; 34:9; Deuteronomy 20:5–8; Joshua 16:8; Judges 7:4; 1 Samuel 17:32; Habakkuk 3:5; Proverbs 10:9; Ecclesiastes 5:15 (see "הלךְ," BDB, 229). For the shift of the *yi* prefix to *ye* with הלךְ, see Russell Thomas Fuller and Kyoungwon Choi, *Invitation to Biblical Hebrew: A Beginning Grammar* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2006), 241).

[106] "הָיָה," *NIDOTTE,* 1:1022; Van der Merwe et al., *Hebrew Reference Grammar*, 76 (§16.2.2).

[107] Gianotti, "Divine Name YHWH," 41; Durham, *Exodus*, 39; S. Amsler, "היה," *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, ed. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 364.

[108] Gianotti, "Divine Name YHWH," 43.

paraphrased the LXX of Exodus 3:14–15 as follows: "And God said, 'At first say unto them, I am that I am, that when they have learnt that there is a difference between him that is and him that is not, they may be further taught that there is no name whatever that can properly be assigned to me, who am *the only being to whom existence belongs*'" (*Vita Moses,* I.75).[109] As mentioned in the syntactical analysis of "I am who I am" (אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה), the ontological interpretation of that clause ("I am the one who is") was considered to express the meaning of the divine name. Due to the early church's reliance on the LXX, this interpretation was adopted by the church fathers and has been the popular Christian interpretation until modern times.

Despite being the historical view upheld throughout most of church history, this proposed static meaning for the divine name has notable weaknesses. First, this interpretation imposes Greek ontological concerns onto the Hebrew Scriptures.[110] Van der Toorn notes, "The Greek translation ὁ ὤν (LXX) has philosophical overtones: it is at the basis of a profound speculation on the eternity and immutability of God—both of them ideas originally unconnected with the name Yahweh."[111] Bernhardt argues that the verb usually expresses "being" in a dynamic and active way, rather than just expressing existence, a concept for which Hebrew has its own particle (יֵשׁ).[112] Mowinckel also writes, "To the Hebrew 'to be' does not just mean to exist—as all other beings and things do as well—but to be active, to express oneself in active being."[113] Thus it is better to see an active idea not only in the אֶהְיֶה statements that lead up to the divine name announcement, but also to the divine name itself due to parallel and wordplay association with אֶהְיֶה.

The second weakness of the static ontological view is that it does not naturally fit the context of Exodus 3. In the context of Exodus 3, God is about to act on behalf of His people in a mighty way that would bring about a greater revelation of His character and attributes than ever before in human history. In the events that follow the calling of Moses, Yahweh acts on behalf of His people and for the glorification of Himself (e.g., Exod 13:3–16; 14:4, 12–13; 15:1–18). The signs He gives Moses to use in Exodus 4:2–9, the plagues He casts upon the Egyptians, the parting of the Red Sea, and His acts of provision and punishment in the rest of Exodus all emphasize that Yahweh is a God who acts, not simply exists.

This active understanding of the divine name, also known as the dynamic view, is the preferred view. It takes into account the context of Exodus and better shows how Yahweh's response to Moses' question would address Moses' fears and concerns that God had introduced with the promise of his presence in the statement, "I will be with you" (Exod 3:12). This view also takes into account the open nature of the imperfect tense, since the imperfect can be considered, "the tense of action open to new acts."[114] Such an understanding would have been more significant to Moses as he risked his life to speak with Pharaoh. The same could be said for the

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[109] Charles Duke Yonge, trans., *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged*, new updated ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 466. Emphasis added.

[110] Surls, *Divine Name*, 52; Gianotti, "Divine Name YHWH," 42.

[111] K. van der Toorn et al., "Yahweh," 914.

[112] "הָיָה," *TDOT*, 3:381.

[113] Sigmund Olaf Plytt Mowinckel, "The Name of the God of Moses," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 32 (1961): 127.

[114] Amsler, "היה," 364.

Israelites who would be asked to risk everything, leave all that they had ever known, and rely upon God for their daily sustenance.

In consideration of all that has been said above, the Qal imperfect dynamic meaning of the divine name appears to be the best understanding. This view best explains the morphology of יהוה, giving proper consideration to the parallel and paronomastic connections with the אֶהְיֶה statements that precede the giving of the name. As to the actual meaning, the wordplay that began with the promise of God's presence in Exodus 3:12 suggests that the idea of יהוה is something like "the actively present one." Vriezen's rendering as "the One who is always really present" is helpful as well.[115] Regarding the concept of presence within the divine name, Duvall and Hays write: "[D]ue to the clear meaning of presence in Exodus 3:12, quite a large number of scholars maintain that the connotations of *hayah* as reflected in the divine name Yahweh imply that there is a promise or an implication of divine presence associated with the very name of Yahweh."[116]

This understanding also helps to explain Yahweh's difficult statement in Exodus 6:2–3. On this point, Duvall and Hays state:

> … although the patriarchs in Genesis experienced the "I am with you" accompanying presence of God, they did not experience the more intensive presence of God as Moses does at the burning bush or as Israel does at Mount Sinai and later in the tabernacle, where fire, smoke, lightning, and holiness create powerful but dangerous situations of encounter that require precautions such as protective veiling, distancing, the removal of shoes, and atonement for sin.[117]

Although Yahweh later goes on to add to the definition of His great name, this initial proclamation to Moses prepares for later expansions by defining Him as the only God who is actively present with His people.

Conclusion and Implications

The preceding exegetical analysis of the divine name proclamation in Exodus 3:14–15 has revealed several important points about the divine name that have implications on Bible translation practices. The discussion of the cultural background revealed that the cultures of Moses' day assigned great significance to names, especially the names of deities. This importance also exists in many cultures today that do not yet have Bible translations. Therefore, retaining the divine name in Bible translations can greatly benefit those cultures that need to have a specific name for God.

The discussion of the contextual background of Exodus 3:14–15 revealed the wordplay beginning with Yahweh's promise of His presence with Moses in Exodus 3:12 ("I will be with you"). This theme of divine presence was developed in the

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[115] Theodoor Christiaan Vriezen, *An Outline of Old Testament Theology*, 2nd ed. (Newton, MA: C. T. Branford, 1970), 181.

[116] J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *God's Relational Presence: The Cohesive Center of Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 25.

[117] Duvall and Hays, 27.

divine name proclamation of verses 14 and 15, shedding light on the meaning of the name.

The syntactical analysis of Exodus 3:14–15 showed that Yahweh's statement "I am who I am" (אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה) was used in order to build suspense for the proclamation of the divine name in the next verse and also develop the wordplay about God's presence. The abbreviated statement of אֶהְיֶה ("I am") further continued the wordplay by providing a form of the divine name in first person singular form that Yahweh used in reference to Himself. This led to the declaration of the standard form of Yahweh's name in verse 15, which resembles a variant form of a Qal imperfect third person masculine singular form of the verb "to be" (היה). An evaluation of various views regarding the meaning of the divine name then revealed that the name "Yahweh" refers to the God who is actively present with His people. This meaning is quite different from the meaning of the title that is most frequently used as a substitute in Bible translations: "Lord." When referring to God, the Hebrew word for Lord (אֲדֹנָי) is used in contexts where God's authority is being emphasized, which the above discussion has shown is not a concept emphasized by the Tetragrammaton.[118] Furthermore, this practice of substitution can mislead readers into thinking that "Lord" is actually God's name or that he doesn't have a personal name at all. Practically speaking, substitution for the divine name is also especially awkward in places where the name itself is being discussed, such as the beginning of Isaiah 42:8 where God declares, "I am Yahweh, that is My name."

Lastly, verse 15 ends by emphasizing Yahweh's desire for His name to be remembered as a "memorial" forever. Yahweh's proclamation of His name to Moses thus revealed that God gave His name to His people and wants it to be known and remembered. The simplest way to ensure this is to retain the divine name in translations of the Old Testament.[119]

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[118] "אֲדֹנָי," *NIDOTTE*, 1:275.

[119] For a brief explanation of a possible theological reason why the New Testament authors continued the LXX practice of substituting the divine name with "Lord" (Κύριος) when quoting Old Testament passages, see "Foreword," *Legacy Standard Bible* (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 2021).

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SEEING AND SEEING AGAIN: REPETITION IN HEBREW NARRATIVE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR BIBLE TRANSLATION

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Repetition characterizes Hebrew narrative. As it occurs at the levels of sound, word, motif, event, and theme, it invites the reader to consider its role within the story. Translators may be tempted to eliminate instances of repetition to avoid apparent redundancy, however, such a reduction may rob the narrative of its beauty, goodness, and truth. Therefore, the translator should seek to discern the narrator's strategy of repetition, allowing the reader to engage with the story properly. This concern will drive the translator to render words consistently when possible, as the narrator forges analogies, builds themes, and establishes the narrative.

* * * * *

Introduction

Repetition is one of the most distinguishing characteristics of Hebrew narrative. Whereas Old Testament stories share many other features with narratives from the Western world, the frequency with which the biblical narrator develops meaning through repetition exceeds more modern literary customs. The thing repeated varies—from sounds to words, motifs, and themes—and there are often several different types of repetition within one episode. As such, the narrator frequently communicates the manifold significance of an Old Testament story by creating a complex network of repeated elements working together.

Because we are not accustomed to stories that tell themselves in this way, we often miss the importance of repetition in Hebrew narratives. We frequently fail to see the repeated elements in the text. Of those that we do spot, we are tempted to interpret them simply as indicators of emphasis. Worse still, we can equate repetition with a lack of sophistication. Hebrew narrative, we sometimes think, is simplistic.

Good reading requires that we understand how repetition functions within Old Testament stories. Faithful translation requires that we try to represent the artistic ambition of the narrator, not least in his strategy of repetition. In this article, I discuss the purpose of repetition in Hebrew narrative. I survey the various levels at which repetition occurs in Old Testament stories and offer some suggestions as to how this characteristic of the text should affect our translation efforts.

The Goal of Repetition

The highly stylized nature of Old Testament narrative suggests that its purpose is to communicate more than mere history. That the Jewish people refer to the first five books of narrative as Torah ("instruction") indicates a belief in its power to teach. The people of Israel learnt not only from legal texts, but also from stories.

A narrative's capacity to teach depends, in part, on the audience seeing overlap between their own world and that of the text. This does not mean that all the details must align, but that the author must develop some kind of affinity between his readers and his characters. Often, he does this through the behavior of the protagonist and the governing principles that guide the action. We empathize with the hero because his response is our own, or at least we want it to be. We recognize the way a drama unfolds because we know how life goes. And when the story reflects something of us and our world, it has the power to instruct.[1]

Repetition has a part to play in this dynamic. In a very simple way, the narrator's recycling of events affords us multiple opportunities to experience the same reality. Whereas at first the characters and/or circumstances of a story are new, with each repetition they become more familiar, even more real. So as the plot progresses, we grow increasingly comfortable with the narrative world. It begins to feel like home. In this way, repetition engenders understanding which enables instruction.[2] For example, when we see the cyclical nature of life in the time of the Judges, we grasp more readily the extent of the problem. The people's sin is made real and extensive because we see it over and over. When we finally read the narrator's assessment of the situation—"In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (17:6; 21:25)—we do not resist. His strategy of repetition serves the narrative's goal to teach.

On occasion, repetition can contribute to a story's acceptability by reflecting better the nature of life. Our experience is not that of endless novelty. The passing of time is marked by routine. We repeat ourselves as a way of living in the world. Kawin writes, "Repetition is the great unifier…in identity and in time…through its

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[1] Aristotle explains that the emotional impact of a story comes when the characters and sequence of actions are probable. That is, the plot affects the reader when it is believable. Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1530. In agreement with this, Ricœur argues that every narrative forms an invitation to see our world and order our lives in light of its story. This then depends on a shared affinity between reader and narrator. Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, 3 vols., trans. Kathleen McLaughlin, David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 1:83.

[2] See Bruce F. Kawin, *Telling It Again and Again: Repetition in Literature and Film* (Champaign: Dalkey Archive, 1972), 93. In turn, Kawin is drawing from Eliade, who argues that repetition confers reality upon events. Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, trans. Willard Trask (New York: Pantheon Books, 1954), 90. Incidentally, this is one of the reasons why the instructive capacity of a story does not decrease with subsequent readings. It increases.

fundamental sympathy with the rhythms of our desires, of our existence."[3] So, for example, when we read how the patriarchs frequently built altars to the Lord, we see the regularity of their religion. This small but significant detail is then repeated across several generations, showing that the nature of worship does not change. Although we share few other details with these men, we honor God with a similar, repetitive cadence. This point of affinity contributes to the narrative's believability and power to teach.

Repetition also contributes to the instructive power of stories because it is a means by which the narrator solicits our interest and participation. Within any narrative, various features of the text prompt the readers to invest themselves in the drama of the plot. Irony, an unanswered question, gaps within the narrative—these are common techniques used in literature to draw us in. They serve the purpose of teaching by leading and showing, rather than telling. In each case, the narrator refrains from giving a principle but opts to show it through story and lead us to identify it. Akin to a Socratic discussion, the narrator allows us to make the discovery. Because of the demands this places on us, we are more invested in the conclusion.[4]

The narrator of Old Testament stories is especially inclined towards showing rather than telling. Direct comments from him explaining a situation or character are relatively rare. He prefers to describe each episode by drawing minimum attention to himself. Oftentimes, we are oblivious to his presence. The narrator skillfully directs our focus to the events represented and leads us to form certain conclusions.[5]

Repetition is one means by which he accomplishes this end. This may seem counterintuitive to us. We readily see how a system of gaps within the narrative works to secure reader interest, but a strategy of repetition appears to do the opposite. Again, we are not accustomed to literary modes that convey meaning by repeating themselves. We often equate repetition with redundancy, even monotony. But if we think carefully about how each level of repetition works within a narrative, we see that it is a powerful tool with which the narrator draws us in, so as to instruct.

Different Types of Repetition

As the magnitude of repetition changes within the narrative, so also do the demands made upon us as readers. In turn, this determines the kind of instruction given. A brief survey of the different types of repetition shows this variation.

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[3] Kawin, *Telling It Again*, 94.

[4] Booth discusses this reality with particular reference to metaphor and figurative language. He writes, "The energy I expend in reconstructing the figure is somehow transferred to retaining the figure itself and bonding with its maker … every deviation from the conventional way of speaking, every special demand on the listener's powers of reconstruction, will add to the effect." Wayne C. Booth, *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 299.

[5] Bar-Efrat's discussion of the narrator is particularly helpful. Ordinarily, the narrator adopts a posture of reticence. On occasion he draws attention to his presence by way of direct narrator comment. This skillful balance between overt and covert storytelling is the means by which he ensures both reader interest and the correct interpretation of events. Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (London: T&T Clark International, 2004), 13–45. See also, Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and The Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 179.

Repetition of Sound

The reoccurrence of sound is the most basic level at which Hebrew narrative uses repetition. When a consonant or vowel sound occurs more than once in proximity, a repetition is formed as we read the text. This feature is not as obvious when we read stories in isolation and in silence. But as many Old Testament texts were frequently read aloud, the congregation would have heard the repeated sounds (e.g., Deut 31:10–13; Neh 8:1–8).

We can categorize the specific ways in which narrative repeats sounds by thinking about where the reoccurrence occurs, relative to the word in which it is found. For example, the repeated sound can occur at the beginning of several consecutive words. This is alliteration. "The pink porcupine was particularly proper." "A house on a hill is higher than the rest."

The repeated sound can occur in the middle of consecutive words. Often, this kind of repetition is the result of similar vowel sounds and can be harder to spot. This is assonance. "How now brown cow?" "The rain in Spain falls mostly on the plain."

The repeated sound can occur at the end of related words. This is perhaps the most familiar pattern to us. This is rhyme. "I walked to the top of the shop, and I didn't stop." "The cat sat on the mat."[6]

We can learn to hear the repetition of sound in narrative simply by reading the text slowly, aloud. With practice we develop a sense of how the language feels to the ear. Then, we will be able to hear more readily when the narrative uses alliteration, assonance, and rhyme. The reoccurrence of sounds binds words together more tightly. It confirms various associations already implied within a sentence. Bar-Efrat explains: "The similarity between the sounds of the words hints at the similarity between the things those words signify or, sometimes, at the contrast between them…the relations between the sounds create or draw attention to the relations between the meanings."[7]

Concerning our investment in the narrative, the repetition of sound gives to the text an aesthetic quality, which we enjoy. Much like a child who finds pleasure when he or she recites a poem in rhyme, we enjoy seeing wordplays or alliteration in narrative. We enjoy hearing sound associations, especially if they reinforce an idea that is already plain to the verse. This enjoyment is participation. Through it we become more invested in the narrative.

For example, in the creation account we read: בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים (Gen 1:1). The repeated "b" sound is an example of alliteration that unites God's creating work with the beginning of all things. One verse later we read: וְהָאָרֶץ הָיְתָה תֹהוּ וָבֹהוּ וְחֹשֶׁךְ עַל־פְּנֵי תְהוֹם (1:2). The repeated "o" sound creates a degree of assonance that brings together the emptiness, the formlessness, and the darkness that existed before God spoke. Later in the same chapter, we read God's instruction to humanity: פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמִלְאוּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ (1:28). Here, the repetition of the "u" sound at the end of each command gives the verse a rhythmic quality and with it a sense of unity. In each case, these effects are the result of the grammar and syntax of the language. At the same time, they are

[6] For further discussion of these categories particularly as they relate to style in Hebrew narrative, see Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 201–203.

[7] Bar-Efrat, 202.

the intentional choice of a highly selective narrator who had other options available to express the same ideas. Our correct understanding of these verses does not depend on seeing these repetitions. However, the reoccurring sounds give the narrative an aesthetic quality that we enjoy.

Sometimes, this aesthetic quality does even more than bring words together. The repetition of sound can provide a sensory representation of a particular relationship. For example, in Genesis 2, we read that the man and woman in Eden were both "naked" (עֲרוּמִּים 2:25) and not ashamed. The serpent was "more crafty" (עָרוּם 3:1) than any other beast of the field. Here, the repetition of sound depicts audibly the snake's cunning. They were עֲרוּמִּים; he was עָרוּם. If we are not careful, we will think that he is harmless! This kind of repetition helps us to feel the point already inherent to the verse.

Repetition of Words

Words are the next level of repetition in Hebrew narrative. The repetition of words is easier to spot than the repetition of sounds and does not depend on proximity within a sentence. As such, it is a more versatile form of repetition. Sometimes, the narrator will reuse a word or set of words within one episode. Sometimes the repetition occurs across several chapters. Occasionally, the repetition will occur at the two ends of a story. In every case, the repetition is valid because the words being used exceed their normal frequency within the narrative. If the repeated word is common, its use is even more frequent (and usually clustered within a shorter length of text). If the repeated word is uncommon, only a few uses are sufficient (and they may occur at a significant distance from each other in the story).

Seeing the repetition of words depends then on our awareness of their relative frequency within the narrative. Today, Bible software can help. We can quickly ask how many times a particular word occurs across a defined range of text. At the same time, reading and rereading a text helps us to see more inductively when the narrator uses certain words with a higher-than-average frequency.[8]

Similar to the repetition of sounds, the repetition of words secures our participation in the narrative by adding an aesthetic quality to the text. We enjoy seeing how the narrator moves his story along by using a word, or cluster of words, across an episode or plot. More than that, the repetition of words also helps and confirms our interpretation of the narrative. As we read a story, the narrator's reuse of a certain word will lead us in a correct understanding of the plot, especially if the repetition of a word contributes to the development of a theme. This is why we often call the repeated word a *leitwort*, or leading word. It leads us in our efforts to read the story.[9]

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[8] An inductive approach is especially important when the repeated word is a verb. The narrator may readily play with the tense, person, and stem to add significance to the repetition.

[9] Alter offers the following translation of Buber's definition of a *Leitwort*. "A *Leitwort* is a word or a word-root that recurs significantly in a text, in a continuum of texts, or in a configuration of texts: by following these repetitions, one is able to decipher or grasp a meaning of the text, or at any rate, the meaning will be revealed more strikingly." Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, rev. and updated ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 117. Cf. Martin Buber, *Werker*, vol. 2 (München: Kösel-Verlag, 1964), 1131.

For example, in Ruth 1 we read about the death of Naomi's husband and her sons. Because of her loss, she intends to return to Judah. At this point in the story, we cannot know just how providential her homegoing will be. Back in Judah, Ruth will meet Boaz! Throughout the first chapter, the narrator uses the verb "to return" (שׁוב) twelve times (Ruth 1:6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 15 [x2], 16, 21, 22 [x2]). The repeated use of שׁוב draws our attention to Naomi's return, and hints at its importance within the overall development of the story.

In the second and third chapters, the narrator does something different. Boaz greets Ruth in the field and blesses her according to the God of Israel, "under whose wings (כָּנָף) you have come to take refuge" (2:12). Then in chapter 3, Naomi sends Ruth to entreat Boaz. Could he be a kinsman redeemer to the family? When Boaz finds Ruth at his feet in the night, she petitions him: "Spread your wings (כָּנָף) over your servant, for you are a redeemer" (3:9). The singular repetition of "wings" gently leads us in our reading of the narrative. It invites us to ponder the possibility that Boaz could be the answer to her need. Will he be the source of God's kindness in Ruth's life?

We find a similar kind of repetition in the Abraham narrative, though with much more text between the repeated words. In Genesis 12, God calls Abram to leave his land and go: לֶךְ־לְךָ (Gen 12:1). Neither the verb "to walk" (הלך) nor the pronominal suffix (ךָ) are rare. But the combination of them is. The only other time לֶךְ־לְךָ occurs in Genesis is at 22:2. So, this combination forms an *inclusio* around the main part of the narrative. The repetition of לֶךְ־לְךָ asks us to understand the binding of Isaac in light of the initial command. It leads us in our interpretation of the narrative. God's testing of the patriarch in chapter 22 is the climactic expression of the original command for Abraham to leave his family.

We see a somewhat different strategy with the narrator's clustering of words in Genesis 39, to depict Joseph's experience in Egypt. To begin, Joseph is in Potiphar's house. The narrative repeatedly stresses his foreign context by describing his surroundings as "Egyptian" (מִצְרִי 39:1, 2, 5). It stresses that Yahweh was with him by repeating God's covenant name (יְהוָה 39:2, 3 [x2], 5 [x2])—used otherwise sparingly in the story of Joseph (38:7, 10; 49:18). And the narrative emphasizes God's favor upon the exiled son by stating that Joseph was both successful (מַצְלִיחַ 39:2, 3) and blessed (ברך 39:5 [x2]). At the end of the chapter, Joseph is still in Egypt; only now he is in the prison. The narrative repeats some of the same words again: מַצְלִיחַ 39:23, יְהוָה 39:21, 23 [x2]. Looking at the broader narrative, this repetition of words at the beginning and end of chapter 39 helps us to anticipate things to come. Although his circumstances have changed, Joseph is still blessed by God. He is a channel of God's goodness in a foreign land. This is true in Potiphar's house, it is true in the prison, and it will soon be true in Pharaoh's palace.

Repetition of Motifs

Beyond the repetition of words, Hebrew narrative frequently employs motifs. A motif will often involve the repetition of a word, yet it possesses some symbolic value that goes beyond the meaning of the word itself. For example, the hero leaving his homeland is a motif. It implies certain ideas such as bravery or adventure. This motif communicates more than merely repeating the word "go."

A motif is distinct from a theme in that it is anchored in the physical world. Though it can be used to communicate ideas, at the same time the motif is in some way perceptible. For example, a journey, a smell, an object—these could be motifs. A theme is not physical. It belongs to the sphere of ideas and values. Knowledge, joy, freedom—these are themes.[10]

Seeing motifs depends again on our careful reading of the text. Not everything in the narrative is a motif. But when an image or object reoccurs across several episodes or chapters, and each time it possesses a similar symbolic value, we find a motif.

The way motifs function within the drama of reading is similar to sounds and words. They add another layer of aesthetic quality to the narrative, showing the intentional artistry of the narrator in his telling of the story. Motifs also help us as interpreters. Understanding the development of the plot rarely depends on us seeing a particular motif. But as we recognize the reoccurrence of a symbol, it confirms our reading of the text.

For example, in the Sodom and Gomorrah narrative (Gen 18–19) sight is used as a motif to communicate the idea of righteousness. The narrative begins when Abraham lifts his eyes and looks on the three men standing before him (18:2). He honors them as they reveal God's plan for Sarah (18:9–15). Then the men look down on Sodom, in preparation for judgment of the city (18:16). Yahweh questions whether to hide from Abraham what he is about to do (18:17). He reveals the plan to him because Abraham is one who will practice righteousness and justice (18:19). When the angels visit the city, Lot sees them and hosts them (19:1). The men of Sodom draw near to Lot's house in wickedness, and they are struck with blindness as a result (19:11). The angels then urge the family to leave the city and warn them: "Do not look behind you!" (19:17). But Lot's wife disobeys and is turned into a pillar of salt (19:26). The episode closes as Abraham looks down on Sodom and Gomorrah (19:28). This motif of sight is not restricted to a single word. It confirms the progression of thought already evident in the text: the righteousness of Abraham and the wickedness of the Sodomites.

In the Joseph narrative, we read the story of Jacob's sons as they contend for the firstborn blessing of the patriarch. Clothing is used as a motif throughout to represent a change in status. At the beginning of the narrative, we read that Jacob has a special love for Joseph (37:3), and that the favored child has dreams of ruling over his family (37:5–11). At the same time, the patriarch dresses Joseph in a special coat (37:3). Away from the family home, the brothers tear the robe from Joseph as they throw him into a pit (37:23, 24). Then in Egypt, Joseph loses his garment as he flees from Potiphar's wife (39:12), an incident that results in him going down to the prison (39:20). Eventually, Pharaoh summons the exiled son from his cell at which point he changes his clothes (41:14). When Joseph shows his skill as a dream interpreter, the king of Egypt promotes him and clothes him in regal robes (41:42). Again, the

[10] Robert Scholes, Robert Kellogg, James Phelan, *The Nature of Narrative*, Fortieth Anniversary Edition ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 2006), 27. This distinction is helpful in that it avoids the more subjective appeal to significance. While it is true that a motif tends to carry less weight within a narrative than a theme, their relative significance is in fact representative of a more qualitative difference. While a motif may contribute to the development of a theme, nevertheless it is not part of the narrator's value system. See also, Alter, *Biblical Narrative*, 120.

narrative accomplishes a sense of repetition with more than a single word. A change of clothing is the reoccurring element, and every time it indicates a change in status. This motif helps us to see the varying fortunes of Jacob's favorite son.

In Samuel, we find the motif of a messenger with his coat torn and dirt on his head (1 Sam 4:12; 2 Sam 1:2; 15:32). His first two appearances are not good: he brings a report that leads to the death of Eli (1 Sam 4:18), and then announces the death of Saul (2 Sam 1:4). These two occurrences, coupled with the messenger's appearance of mourning, lead us to associate the motif with death. So, when Hushai appears with his clothes torn and dirt on his head, we expect the worst. David is on the run from Absalom. The king might die! Wonderfully, however, Hushai becomes to David a vessel of God's provision (2 Sam 17:5–14). His appearance brings about a turning point in the king's demise. If we miss the motif, we still see the change in David's fortunes. The narrative clearly shows us his desperate situation, and the salvation brought about through David's Archite friend. The motif accentuates the message of the story and adds to our enjoyment of the reversal. By following the story carefully from its beginning, the appearance of Hushai creates suspense. We then delight to see how he is not a messenger of death, but of life.

Repetition of Events

The next level of repetition is repeated events. We read of something happening and then find a similar episode occurring later in the story. The narrator usually forms this type of repetition by using some of the same key words in the second event as in the first, and by repeating the same sequence of actions. The characters may be different and the specific circumstances may have changed, but the drama progresses in a similar way it did previously.

This kind of repetition is very versatile. It does not depend on proximity. Because of the highly stylized nature of Hebrew narrative, the narrator can readily cast one episode in the likeness of another. As such, we often find the repetition of events occurring in quite dissimilar contexts with many chapters of Scripture separating them.

As with motifs, seeing this kind of repetition depends on our careful consideration of the narrative. We must question whether the elements, the sequence of verbs, the relationship between characters in one episode resemble those that we have read before. As a general rule, the closer the repeated events are in Scripture, the less work the narrator will do to show us a correspondence. A few clues are sufficient to create an analogy. If the two events are separated by many chapters, the narrator of the latter event will more plainly show it in the likeness of one prior.

The correspondence between two episodes is never absolute. One is only ever a reflection of the other, not an exact mirror image. Seeing the similarities is important. This is the essence of the repetition. But we understand the significance of the repetition by noting the differences. The narrator makes his point through subtle shifts within the repeated pattern. Alter writes, "When…you are confronted with an extremely spare narrative, marked by formal symmetries, that exhibits a high degree of literal repetition, what you have to look for more frequently is the small but

revealing differences in the seeming similarities, the nodes of emergent new meanings in the pattern of regular expectations…"[11]

How does the repetition of an event secure our participation? Each time we see an analogous relationship between two events, the narrator is inviting us to make a comparison. Because the significance of the repetition is a function of the differences between the events, in order to see this significance we must first compare and contrast. So, in a very practical way, the narrative secures our participation by asking us to consider how the two events differ from one another. If we are not accustomed to reading narratives in this way, seeing the variations will be a demanding exercise. Because of the sparse nature of Old Testament narration, seemingly minor inflections can carry a lot of theological weight.

Regarding purpose, whereas the repetition of sounds, words, and motifs adds to the aesthetic quality of the text, the repetition of an event will usually accomplish more than this. By casting one episode in the likeness of another, the narrator frequently communicates some kind of ethical reality.[12] The reason this form of repetition is particularly effective at highlighting matters of behavior and morality is that the first event functions like a datum. It presents a standard—positively or negatively—by which we interpret the second event. So, the narrator will often use the repetition of events to give an indirect commentary on a character. We see his or her behavior in light of someone else's, or with reference to how he or she previously behaved.

We find an example of this kind of repetition between Genesis 19 and Judges 19. Both episodes recount the attempt of depraved men to commit sexual sin against guests in their town. Though there are differences in the details and conclusions of each chapter, there exists a high level of motific overlap between them. In both cases we read of a traveling group arriving in a city at night (Gen 19:1; Judg 19:15). A foreigner to the city engages with the group, offering hospitality (Gen 19:1, 2; Judg 19:16, 17), as the travelers think to spend the night in the square (Gen 19:2; Judg 19:15, 18). In both episodes, the individual brings the men to his home where they wash their feet and eat (Gen 19:3; Judg 19:21). Then, men from each city surround the house (Gen 19:4; Judg 19:22) and demand that the host give up his male guests for sexual sin (Gen 19:5; Judg 19:22). In both cases, the host protests (Gen 19:7; Judg 19:23) and offers instead a female (Gen 19:8; Judg 19:24).

In addition to these parallels, the two chapters show a high level of shared vocabulary, especially with respect to verbs. Block notes well how both narratives speak of spending the night (לין Gen 19:2 [x2]; Judg 19:10, 11, 13, 15 [x2], 20), turning aside (סור Gen 19:2, 3; Judg 19:11, 12, 15), rising early to go on their way (וְהַשְׁכַּמְתֶּם וַהֲלַכְתֶּם לְדַרְכְּכֶם Gen 19:2; Judg 19:9), washing the feet (וְיִרְחֲצוּ רַגְלֵיהֶם Gen 19:2; Judg 19:21), and eating (וַיֹּאכְלוּ Gen 19:3; Judg 19:21).[13]

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[11] Alter, *Biblical Narrative*, 121–22.

[12] Yoram Hazony, *The Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 75. Hazony writes, "What results from the construction of these *sets of events* from far-flung instances is a generalized account of a certain kind of circumstance—often including both the motives of the individuals involved and the consequences of their actions—which can easily be seen as referring to a thesis of a general nature."

[13] Daniel I. Block, "Echo Narrative Technique in Hebrew Literature: A Study in Judges 19," *WTJ* 52 (1990): 327.

The significance of the analogous relationship between Genesis 19 and Judges 19 emerges as we examine the differences. Block shows how the latter episode portrays the "Canaanization" of Israel, since the events in Genesis happened outside of the Promised Land, but the men in Judges purposefully avoided a foreign city (Judg 19:12). Ironically, their efforts to stay with the people of Gibeah proved disastrous. Block writes, "Whereas the travelers had thought they had come home to the safety of their countrymen, they have actually arrived in Sodom."[14] Alter notes how the two episodes conclude differently: in one, the men are struck with blindness (Gen 19:11); in the other, the men pursue their sin with the woman (Judg 19:25). As such, the episode at Gibeah is a version of Sodom only without divine intervention.[15] We might add to this a difference concerning the characters in each episode. In Genesis 18:16–33, Abraham is portrayed as a virtuous man who intercedes for Sodom. This is the reason Lot is spared. In Judges, there is no such individual. With no righteous intermediary, the people of Benjamin are almost completely destroyed and all their towns set on fire (Judg 20:48). The near extinction of this tribe furthers the sense that Israel needed a leader (like Abraham)—a righteous king (Judg 21:25).

A special case of the repetition of events occurs with the repetition of speech. If we think of dialogue as a kind of action, we see that the narrator can use his own words and/or the words of characters to create correspondences, in the same way he repeats events. Using speech in this way is even more versatile than the repetition of pure action because the means by which the narrator can introduce differences between the two events is greater. The words themselves will often vary, so also will the person saying them. Comparing two similar speeches requires careful consideration of who is speaking. Differences in the words are often revealing of one of the characters speaking. It is an effective tool by which we can form assessments of characters in the narrative.

Sternberg summarizes the repetition of speech according to the categories of forecast, enactment, and report. Any instance of repeated speech will employ at least two of these categories, oftentimes more. Our role is to consider not only the words spoken, but who is speaking them, and where they fit within the dynamic of forecast, enactment, and report.[16]

For example, in Genesis 1 we read direct speech from God: "Let there be light" (יְהִי אוֹר Gen 1:3). We can categorize this as a forecast insomuch as it sets an expectation for what is about to happen. Immediately, there is a level of repetition as the narrator reports: "and there was light" (וַיְהִי־אוֹר). This is the enactment. Comparing the two, the only lexical dissimilarity is the word "and"—one that is necessary according to the grammar of the language. Enactment matches forecast exactly. As such, the narrator uses the repetition to communicate not only how the light was formed, but to infer something of God's character. He is the almighty Sovereign of the universe. When He speaks, creation responds immediately and in exact accordance with His will.

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[14] Block, "Echo Narrative Technique," 336.

[15] Robert Alter, "Sodom as Nexus: The Web of Design in Biblical Narrative," *Tikkun* 1, no. 1 (1986): 37. This conclusion extends to events after those around the house. In Genesis, God destroys the city with fire, in Judges, the people of Israel inflict punishment through civil war.

[16] Sternberg, *Poetics*, 376–77.

In the following chapter, God speaks again. He instructs humanity concerning their freedom in the garden: "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (2:16–17). This is the forecast. It projects what ought not happen. In chapter 3, the serpent sows a seed of doubt by asking Eve about God's command (3:1). She repeats the instructions given previously: "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, you shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die" (3:2–3). This is a second forecast. Eve attempts to represent God's projection of what should not happen. Comparing the two, we see how Eve omits certain details. She does not represent God's emphases "surely eat" and "surely die," and she adds a prohibition "neither shall you touch it." That is, she restricts her freedom, increasing the prohibition, and reducing the punishment. These differences lay the foundation for the enactment—when Eve eats of the fruit (Gen 3:6). They serve as a telling sign that the narrative is moving in a negative direction.

Returning to the book of Judges, we read at the end an extended epilogue which narrates the depravity in Israel at that time (Judg 17–21). Across the narrative, we read: "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (17:6; 21:25) and also the abbreviated form, "In those days there was no king in Israel" (18:1; 19:1). These are reports. They narrate how things were at that time. Interestingly there is no difference between each iteration. The words used are always the same, and it is always the narrator who speaks them. The only difference then between each iteration is the immediate context. We read the statement first when Micah makes a shrine and appoints his son a priest (17:1–6), then when the Danites establish a dwelling place for themselves and worship carved images (18:1–31), then when the men of Gibeah abuse a Levite's concubine who is then cut limb by limb (19:1–30), and finally when the tribes of Israel enter into civil way with the near loss of the Benjaminites (20:1–25). There are connections between these narratives—reoccurring elements that give the epilogue a sense of cohesion. At the same time, every time the narrator tells us about the absence of a king and the lawlessness of the people, the immediate context is entirely different. The point of the repetition is to show us that this truth pervades every aspect of life in the land. Every individual, in every set of circumstances is a law unto himself, because there is no monarch to lead the people in the way of righteousness.[17]

Repetition of Themes

The highest level at which Hebrew narrative repeats itself is through themes. Again, themes belong to the domain of ideas. They communicate values or foundational

[17] In addition to this, we might add that we as readers have changed between each instance of the formula. Our perspective of Israel's sin grows as we read more of the narrative. As such, even though it is always the narrator who speaks the same words, their relative weight within the narrative increases. In this sense, there is no such thing as exact repetition. Fokkelman summarizes: "Even though the writer may repeat a string of words without any change, their sense and function cannot remain unaltered as the context has changed: they have moved along the linear axis, and in the meantime all sorts of developments have taken place." J. P. Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Poetry: An Introductory Guide* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 121.

truths. The sovereignty of God, his loving character, the sinfulness of humanity—these are common biblical themes. Often, the narrator develops a theme by employing a combination of literary devices including different levels of repetition. Perhaps he repeats a certain word, employs a motif, and repeats several events. If these elements all center around the same idea, a theme emerges in the narrative.

Themes are versatile because the narrator has many means by which he can develop them. However, by its nature, a theme tends to be pervasive. It shows up in different ways, but we see it everywhere within the narrative. If we find an idea at just a few points in the story, it probably isn't a theme. If every episode brings into view the same foundational truth, it is a theme.

Identifying a theme depends on our familiarity with the narrative. Often, we will need to read and reread a story before we see the foundational truth which the narrator is emphasizing. We must go further than the surface level reading of the text and consider what are the governing principles that drive the plot forward. This means we must read with a view to synthesizing the individual episodes of the text. We must try to view the entirety of the plot as one tapestry and understand what unifies each constituent part.

A theme secures our participation through the multifaceted way in which the narrator creates it. Rarely does he tell us what the theme is. He employs many different tools, all of which work together to show the governing idea. Our role is to bring the various clues together. This is a demanding task. It requires a thorough understanding of the narrative and a willingness to see how the various parts are working together. Themes are the highest level of repetition, they make the highest demands on the reader, but they give the greatest reward. If we can identify the theme of a plot, we have learned a lot about the narrator's worldview. That is to say, when the narrator develops a theme through his narrative, the purpose is not to give the text an aesthetic value. Nor is he trying to show some kind of ethical principle so much as he is communicating a statement of truth. The truth may have moral implications, but a theme is usually concerned with ideas that govern the narrative world.

In the first fifteen chapters of Exodus, the knowledge of God is a theme. Before He redeems Israel, He makes himself known to them. So, Moses arrives at the burning bush and God reveals Himself as "the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Exod 3:6). Moses asks for further revelation, to which God says, "I AM WHO I AM" (3:14). Then, when Moses hesitates to act as a messenger to the people, God gives him a sign. Importantly, the purpose of the sign is to prompt the people's belief in God's self-disclosure (4:5). When Moses goes to Pharaoh, the king refuses to let the people go. His rejection of God's plan is a reflection of Pharaoh's obstinate ignorance. He asks, "Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice and let Israel go?" (5:2). God then promises deliverance through Moses, as another act of self-disclosure: "I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the LORD your God" (6:7). He reminds Moses of this purpose throughout the plagues that follow: "By this you shall know that I am the LORD" (7:17; cf. 8:10; 9:30; 10:2). Finally, after God redeems His people from Egypt, the section concludes with the song of Moses (15:1–18). In it, the people declare God's character (15:3, 6, 7, 11, 13, 16), His name (15:3), and His deeds (15:4, 5, 7, 8, 10, 12, 13–18). They have come to know and recognize the God of their salvation. Significantly, the narrator never tells us that the knowledge

of God is his theme. Moreover, we see it develop in many different ways—events, direct speech, questions, even song. Piecing the theme together we learn something of the narrator's value system: freedom from bondage in Egypt has as its theological goal knowledge of and relationship with the God of creation.[18]

In the book of Jonah, God's authority over salvation is the theme. God announces that the evil of the Ninevites is a specific offense against Him (Jonah 1:2). He commissions the prophet, but when Jonah disobeys God ordains the storm at sea (1:4). Ironically, the sailors testify to God's sovereignty over physical safety when they plead with Jonah, "Call out to your god!...that we may not perish" (1:6). God appoints a fish to swallow Jonah (1:17), who correctly understands his circumstances as an outworking of divine sovereignty (2:2–7). It is in the belly of the fish that Jonah speaks the central truth of the book: "Salvation belongs to the LORD!" (2:9). This confession prompts God to deliver the prophet (2:10). When the king of Nineveh repents, he orders everyone to cry out to God: "Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish" (3:9). Then, in the last chapter, Jonah is wrongly jealous because of God's grace towards Gentiles. Surely his own displeasure towards the Ninevites should have affected God's decision to act. Why was God so merciful towards them? The book ends on a negative note, showing that Jonah must learn again that he is not in control of God's grace. Salvation belongs to the LORD. We see this theme by noting not only Jonah's utterance of it at the literary center of the book, but also through the varied use of irony throughout, and the narrator's use of a rhetorical question to close. All work together so that we would learn better than the prophet.

In a similar way, God's providence is a theme throughout the Joseph story. In the first chapter, we see the favored son sent from the family home (Gen 37:14). He is lost, yet chances upon an unnamed stranger who is able to direct him (37:15). The brothers intend to sell Joseph to some Ishmaelites (37:27) but their plans are thwarted. Nevertheless, he is taken out of the pit and sold to the passing traders (37:28). In Egypt, Joseph is sent to the prison by Potiphar, but his demise proves to be a means of exaltation as it leads to his appearance before Pharaoh (41:14). When he presides over the nation on the king's behalf, the brothers come down to Egypt looking for food (42:6, 7). They do not recognize him, yet speak more truth than they realize: "We are all sons of one man" (42:11). When Joseph finally reveals himself to them, he teaches them the reality of God's providence: "So, it was not you who sent me here, but God" (45:8). Then, Jacob comes down to Egypt (46:1–7) and the family dwells apart from the Egyptians in Goshen. There the land produces sufficient crops for them to live—a different experience to that of Pharaoh's people at that time (47:13–26). When Jacob dies, the brothers plead with Joseph for his kindness, fearing he will exact revenge (50:15). Joseph is exasperated because they still have not learnt: "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good" (50:20). At every stage of the story, the narrator invites us to see the providence of God. He never states it as a reality but develops it as a theme. Joseph's appeal in the closing chapter is particularly significant. He functions as an example for us to follow. Alongside him, we should champion divine providence as a principle that governs Genesis 37–50. More than

[18] L. Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?: A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015), 77–85.

that, we should acknowledge the same reality in our lives. But in order to do this, we must give careful attention to the story and consider how each episode develops this central idea.

Conclusion: Implications for Translation

On the drama of reading, Sternberg argues that every narrative is regulated by three principles: aesthetic, historiographic, and ideological.[19] Similarly, Booth suggests that every plot tells a story whose concern is qualitative, practical, or intellectual.[20] In both cases, these categories correspond to Plato's main ideas: the beautiful, the good, and the true.[21] In any story, the narrator communicates in accordance with these ideas. More than that, he uses various tools to raise our interest with respect to them. The narrator wants us to see and experience beauty, goodness, and truth. Through his story, he intends to teach. Repetition is a tool that he uses to accomplish this goal.

Good reading demands that we are mindful of the manifold ways in which Hebrew narrative repeats itself. Similarly, faithful translation requires an awareness of the narrator's strategy to convey meaning, not least through repetition. Most philosophies of translation focus on the issue of functional vs. formal equivalence. Does the translation represent the original text according to the words used, or the thoughts implied? Is the goal to produce a literal reading in the target language or to allow some flexibility, for the sake of increased accessibility? Though these questions are important, they usually limit the discussion to matters of grammar and syntax.

Translators should be mindful of other issues, not least those that relate to the narrator's strategy of repetition. If he frequently secures our involvement in the narrative by giving to it an aesthetic value, the translator might consider how he could represent this. Alter offers an example from Genesis 1:2 when considering the translation of תֹהוּ וָבֹהוּ, a clear case of verbal assonance. He writes "My guess is that the writer wanted to strike a phrase in which the second term phonetically mirrored the first, suggesting how in the moment before the ordering acts of creation, everything was intermingled, everything spilled into everything else."[22] Alter attempts to represent this repetition of sounds with the English words "welter and waste," explaining that he could not find a way to reproduce the assonance, and so opted for alliteration.

Is this the best translation? Is the more common "without form and void" better? Both options have their merits. Even if the translator chooses a more traditional rendering of the phrase (placing greater value on the lexemes than phonetics), he might at least consider the possibility of mirroring the repetition of sound. Because the meaning of the phrase comes by way of the words used *and* their interaction with one another, representing the aesthetic quality of the text should be part of the translator's burden. Alter explains, "[meaning] involves the communication of affect

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[19] Sternberg, *Poetics*, 41–42.

[20] Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 125–36.

[21] Jean Louis Ska, *"Our Fathers Have Told Us": Introduction to the Analysis of Hebrew Narratives* (Roma: Editrice Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 1990), 61–63.

[22] Robert Alter, *The Art of Bible Translation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 71.

and can never be separated from the nuanced connotation of words and their dynamic interaction as they are joined through sound, through syntax, and through poetic or narrative context."[23]

The same issues persist as the size of the repeated element increases. The repetition of a word often showcases the narrator's artistic ambition and forms part of the reading experience. Translating the twelve uses of שׁוּב in Ruth 1 with a cluster of alternatives may not change the sense of the text, but it might diminish our enjoyment of it. Consider for example the *New International Version*, which translates the verb with the words "return," "take them back," "go back," "turn back," and "arrived." Similarly, the NIV neglects to translate the second use of כָּנָף with the same word as the first. Whereas Boaz prays: "May you be richly rewarded by the Lord…under whose wings you have come to take refuge" (Ruth 2:12), Ruth later petitions: "Spread the corner of your garment over me" (3:9). With no knowledge of the original language, readers will not see how the second request responds to the first. The sense of the text is conveyed, but its aesthetic quality is not.

Considering the use of motifs and themes, the questions for the translator are similar. Apart from a predefined philosophy of functional or formal equivalence, his concern should be to represent the narrator's strategy of repetition. Because motifs and themes develop across a narrative, consistency in word choice is important. For example, failing to translate זֶרַע in the same way throughout Genesis may hinder the reader from seeing the narrative concern to trace the line of promise.

On occasion, it may even be that the translator has the option of helping his readers make the appropriate connections within a narrative, to prompt our participation. On numerous occasions, the *New American Standard Bible* translates the *waw* conjunction as "again." At Genesis 24:25, וַתֹּאמֶר is translated "again she said." Though this is not the standard way of representing the *waw* in English, it helpfully draws attention to Rebekah's repeated interaction with Abraham's servant.[24] Translators could think through similar opportunities to highlight repeated elements, as the narrator forges analogies and builds themes.

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[23] Alter, *The Art of Bible Translation*, 76.

[24] Similarly, see Exod 5:5, and Lev 11:1; 23:1, 23, 33; 27:1, 16; Num 3:11; 6:1; 8:5; Num 20:19; Deut 9:22; Ruth 2:20; 3:15; 1 Sam 17:10; 2 Sam 9:8.

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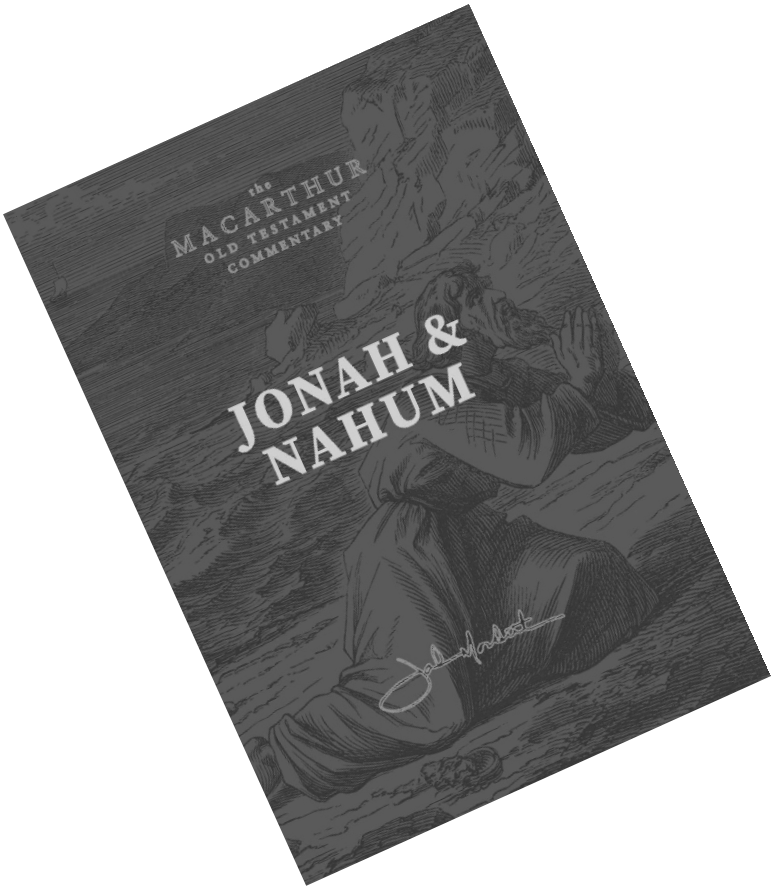

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WHY BIBLE TRANSLATION IS CRITICAL IN GOD'S PLAN OF REDEMPTION

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* * * * *

Language remains a central component in the fulfillment of the Great Commission. From the confusion of languages at the tower of Babel, to the chorus of voices from every nation, tribe, people, and language before the throne and the Lamb, gospel advance depends upon Bible translation. Missions and Bible translation are intertwined. Yet, it is of utmost importance that Bible translators be trained as pastors, doctrinally and practically. The translation of the Scripture is not merely a linguistic exercise; it is a work that pastoral training promotes. Therefore, the call for translators equipped in sound doctrine and furnished with pastoral love and zeal resounds in the carrying out of the Great Commission.

* * * * *

Introduction

The fulfillment of the Great Commission cannot be considered apart from the work of Bible translation, since the very proclamation and progress of the gospel message requires the overcoming of linguistic barriers. This reality demands that Christians called to "preach Christ" and "make disciples" by teaching all that Christ has commanded—found explicitly in the Scriptures—must contend with the dilemma language presents when doing ministry cross-culturally.

Today though, there is a dilemma in Bible translation, often due to a disconnection from the broader biblical scope of missions and failing to ensure that translators have strong biblical, theological, pastoral, and missiological training. To be sure, many Bible translators do their best to overcome these dilemmas and produce translations that faithfully represent the authorial intent of the Scriptures in the target language. Still, this dilemma in Bible translation is prevalent and will most certainly produce translations that do not best serve the Church in its mission.

In other words, while it is an admirable goal to get the Bible into every language in the world, it does little to further the Great Commission if a Bible translation is poorly done and given to a people group with no intention of planting a church and training disciples among that group. This article will address the current imbalance in translation efforts by arguing for an intimate connection between languages and the broader scope of missionary work. It will do so by first tracing a biblical theology of languages and missions, and then by showing the practical pastoral-missiological impacts of connecting languages to church planting.

The Biblical Connections between Languages and Missions

Why the language barrier exists and how it relates to the progress of God's redemptive plan are two important questions to understanding Bible translation. The biblical-theological rationale for these is traced below to show that God has always planned to overcome the barrier and redeem a people from every tongue, tribe, and nation.

Genesis 11 and the Introduction of Languages

The first connections between languages and mission are found in Genesis 11. Following the near-total destruction of the human race in the Flood, Noah's sons began to repopulate the earth, just as God had created man and woman to do (Gen 1:27–28). This reset to the human race led to the table of nations in Genesis 10 and anticipated the fulfillment of God's assignment to man in the creation mandate—to subdue the earth and rule over it (1:26).

The construction of the Tower of Babel was an act of rebellion against God. Instead of spreading out over the world, mankind was centralizing in one place. And instead of glorifying God through their work, they were attempting to glorify themselves by making for themselves a name (11:4), indicating the presence of the same heart that led to rebellion in the Garden and before the Flood.

The text indicates that the primary external factor that enabled mankind's collective act of rebellion against God was the use of one common language. Genesis 11:1 begins with the statement, "Now the whole earth used the same language and the same words." Having no barrier to communication, man was unhindered in sharing and persuading his fellow man to participate in the rebellion in building the Tower. Therefore, to prevent mankind from following his sinful inclination to elevate himself, God intervened in history and introduced a new, permanent reality into the human experience: diversity of language (vv. 6–9). God's response to mankind's rebellion was to confuse their language and thereby scatter them abroad on the earth.

Genesis 11, then, presents the "table of nations," which would proliferate while scattering over and across the planet. Thus, unique language was the genesis of unique and distinct people groups and cultures. Today, it is estimated that over seven thousand language groups exist.[1] A global map will show that the farthest reaches of

[1] William D. Barrick, *Understanding Bible Translation: Bringing God's Word into New Contexts* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2019), 218.

the world have been populated and that the diversity of languages defines the world not only ethnically but geographically.

God could have simply toppled the Tower of Babel to stop mankind's rebellion. However, confusing mankind's language was much more effective. One of the most common traits of those who speak a common language is to cluster together and to isolate from those whose language they do not share. This trait is demonstrated today, whether in a rural, animistic, tribal context, or within a multicultural, Western local church. Language is essential to community relationships and to fellowship. God's decision to respond to the rebellion in Genesis 11 by confusing mankind's language and creating new and different ones presents a direct challenge to the missionary and pastor as they seek to reach different cultures. As Goldingay notes: "At the end of the history of the world's origins, the Bible opens up the problem of language."[2] Linguistic diversity is thus the very context in which the nations are birthed and acknowledged in the next chapter of Genesis.

Genesis 12: Languages and the Beginning of Missions

Genesis 12 has direct implications for God's plan of redemption regarding how distinct language and culture groups would be reconciled to Him. The chapter begins with the recognition that there now existed multiple linguistic and cultural people groups organized as nations. From these nations, God calls out one man from one nation and declares to Him that from him He would make a "great nation" (v. 2).[3]

Moreover, unlike those at Babel who sought to make for themselves a great name, here God would bless Abraham and make his name great (v. 2). God's promise to bless Abraham and his descendants is not exclusive but includes "all the families of the earth" (v. 3).[4] In that phrase, all nations are represented along with God's pursuit to call out and select one specific linguistic, cultural group to first be blessed and then extend that blessing to all groups.[5]

The term "bless" in Genesis often has to do with progeny and material blessing.[6] However, in its fullest sense, Scripture makes clear in Galatians 3:8–9 that the primary blessing God intended for the nations is one of redemption and the reversal of the effects of the Fall. Thus, in Genesis 12, God is calling out and setting apart what would become the nation of Israel for a particular role in advancing His plan of

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[2] John Goldingay, *Genesis*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament: Pentateuch (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), 192.

[3] Allen Ross notes that the dispersion of the peoples in Genesis 11 is what sets up for the call of Abraham in Genesis 12. See Allen Paul Ross, "The Table of Nations in Genesis" (Th.D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1976), 2. Mathews notes that it is from these scattered peoples that Abraham is called. Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, New American Commentary 1A (Nashville: B&H, 1996), 85.

[4] Kaiser connects the judgment in Genesis 11 to God's blessing in Genesis 12 and God's call to use Abraham to bless the nations: "What the nations could not attain on their own organization and goals would now be given to them in grace." Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 83.

[5] The term "family" is more specific than a nation; it refers to extended blood families or clan groups ("מִשְׁפָּחָה," *HALOT*, 651). Cf. Genesis 36:40; Deuteronomy 29:17; Joshua 6:23; 7:14. See also John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*: *A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 146.

[6] E.g., Genesis 17:16, 20; 22:17; 26:12. So also Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 113–14.

redemption, and in this He reveals that the scope of His redemption extends to "all the families of the earth" (v. 3).

Languages and Pentecost in Acts 2

The most important point in the Scriptures where God demonstrates the inclusivity of the gospel message and its importance in being understood across linguistic barriers is at the inauguration of the Church in Acts 2. Because of the celebration of Passover, there were Jews and Jewish proselytes who had traveled back to Jerusalem from every known linguistic and cultural group which existed within the Roman Empire. Because the Jews had suffered persecution and exile both before and during the intertestamental period, they had been scattered by God, and when they took up residency in another land, they built synagogues for the purpose of maintaining their religious practices. Living among these other culture groups, the Jews had come to speak their local languages, which the apostles, being from Galilee, would not have been expected to know.[7] People were often prejudiced against Galileans (Acts 2:7).When, therefore, the apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in different tongues (v. 4), it amazed the other Jews present (v. 7).

The apostles' languages were heard by those from every language group represented in the Roman Empire and illustrated two things. First, God had promised that the blessing of salvation would first be presented to the Jews but that through the Jews the blessing of salvation would be communicated to the other linguistic people groups of the earth.[8] And second, the giving of the gifts of tongues, both here in Acts 2 and elsewhere in the New Testament, was the speaking of another known language (cf. vv. 8, 11). Clearly used in the apostolic period, this gift was to be employed so that the gospel could begin to advance to all the families of the earth. The ability of the disciples to speak in foreign languages, and for all who were present to understand them, represented the first and only occasion we find in Scripture in which God reverses His actions at the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11 (until believers are glorified in heaven; Rev 5:9–10; 7:9–10).[9] Acts 2 thus shows that God's missionary heart has always been to overcome the divisions in peoples brought about by the Fall and the confusion of languages at Babel.[10]

Darrell Bock further points out that the word for "dialect" in Acts 2:8 (from *dialektos*) in context most likely refers to each person's own native language. He concludes: "God is using for each group the most familiar linguistic means possible to

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[7] See Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, ed. Clinton E. Arnold (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 115.

[8] There is debate as to whether Luke's primary referent is the different parts of the Roman Empire, or whether it is the Jewish Diaspora. See the discussions in Ajith Fernando, *Acts*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 88. Either way, Luke's narrative puts Jerusalem as the worship center of the world, with people from all around the world there to worship God.

[9] So also F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, rev. ed., New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 59.

[10] Fernando concurs and notes that from now on, people will not have to come to one place (Jerusalem) to worship but could go to the far corners of the world and worship God in their own tongue. See Fernando, *Acts*, 90–91. For further parallels between Pentecost in Acts 2 and Babel in Genesis 11, see Schnabel, *Acts*, 116 and 116, n. 23.

make sure the message reaches the audience in a form they can appreciate."[11] In other words, at the very beginning of the Church's founding, God showed a concern to reach people groups in their heart language, to press home the message of the gospel.

Languages and the Fulfillment of Missions in Revelation 5 and 7

The conclusion of the grand biblical storyline of the redemption of the nations was prophesied and revealed to the Apostle John on Patmos, recorded in the book of Revelation. In Revelation 5 and 7, the distinctions between people groups shows that God is still concerned with the Gentiles from all over the world—even down to particular languages.

The first picture of the redeemed nations in the end is in Revelation 5:9–10. Craig Koester notes about verse 9 that, unlike world empires and the beast who conquered peoples (Rev 13:7), the Lamb purchases people from the world, not through battle but through His own blood.[12] Those the Lamb purchases then have an elevated status of membership in God's kingdom as priests (5:10), just like the Israelite slaves God saved out of Egypt (Exod 19:16; Isa 61:6).[13]

In Revelation 7, the same pattern of Jews being reached first will continue during the Tribulation Period. The 144,000 Jews saved during the Tribulation Period (Rev 7:4–8) will also be counted along with those from every tribe, tongue, and nation, crying, "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb" (7:10).[14] This shift from the 144,000 to a multitude emphasizes both the broad scope of God's purposes for redemption,[15] and the distinction of the multitude from the Jews and each other—emphasizing the extent to which the gospel has gone throughout the entire earth.[16] This multitude that cannot be counted is the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham to bless the families of the earth through him (Gen 12:1–3; cf. 15:5; 32:12).[17]

Now, after the apostolic period and with the completion of the canon, the Church possesses the full revelation of the Scriptures. The task of translating the Scriptures into the multitude of languages is therefore a paramount task for the Church. Only by doing so effectively can it extend the knowledge of Christ to those linguistic groups not yet able to read and hear the good news of the gospel in their own language, pointing towards the salvation of the multitude in Revelation.

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[11] Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 102.

[12] Craig R. Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible 38A (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 388.

[13] G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 389.

[14] For discussion on the distinctions between the 144,000 and the multitude from every tribe, tongue, and nation, as well as their setting in the future seven-year Tribulation Period, see Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1–7: An Exegetical Commentary*, Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary, ed. Kenneth Barker (Chicago: Moody, 1992), 483–89.

[15] Koester, *Revelation*, 428.

[16] Paige Patterson, *Revelation*, New American Commentary 39 (Nashville: B&H, 2012), 200.

[17] So Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 426.

The Urgent Need to Reconnect Pastoral Training to Bible Translation

The following statistics on Bible translation worldwide in 2022 portray the global need for Bible translation:[18]

- 7,388 languages are spoken in the world today
- 724 languages have a full Bible
- 1,617 languages have the complete New Testament
- 1,248 languages have some portion of the Bible
- 3,266 languages have work in progress

The same year, translation work progressed at a remarkable pace:[19]

- The largest annual recorded increase of 367 new languages with work begun
- New translated Bible or New Testament launched almost every week
- Scripture portions published in almost two new languages per week

Producing the translation is considered by many organizations today a first step to long-term missions goals. Thus, a common pathway to Bible translation is to send linguists and specialized workers to indigenous locations with minimal biblical, theological, and pastoral training. Bible translation as a work unto itself, regardless of its application, is the tendency of ecumenical organizations, and can lead to unintended consequences in the global Church.

The Ecumenical Direction of Bible Translation

While the upward trajectory of Bible translation projects appears encouraging, the numbers tell a different story. In 1982, the United Bible Societies listed 574 translation projects underway, which were conducted by translators from 200 different denominational groups, of which 133 projects involved Roman Catholics.[20] Such an ecumenical approach to translation invites compromises to textual accuracy, because interpretive biases are inserted, which are driven by denominational doctrines and a low view of Scripture—especially by those denominations that have abandoned Scripture's inerrancy, and the Roman Catholic Church which considers its interpretations as equally authoritative to Scripture.

Furthermore, many Bible translators take a "hands-off" approach that separates translation work from church planting, evangelism, and discipleship.[21] Training

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[18] Jeremy Weightman, "Record Breaking Year for Bible Translation!" March 30, 2022, accessed October 9, 2023, https://wycliffe.org.uk/story/record-breaking-year.

[19] Ibid.

[20] George M. Cowan, "Bible Translation Since John Wycliffe." *Christian History* 2, no. 3 (1983): 27–30; accessed December 27, 2023, https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/bible-translation-since-john-wycliffe.

[21] Paul Edwards of Wycliffe Bible Translators stated: "Wycliffe missionaries don't evangelize, teach theology, hold Bible studies, or start churches. They give (preliterate people) a written language…. They

people to focus only on linguistics has the advantage of speeding up the language and translation skill acquisition process. However, such an effort marks a separation of translation efforts from the goal of transforming the reader and the believing community through the text-oriented activities of evangelism, discipleship, church planting, local elder training, and pastoral training. Waiting until the biblical text is in hand to begin the ministry of the Word risks leaving many places with a project that has stalled, failed, or has never been released from the publisher, and—as the ultimate consequence—with no gospel witness.

However, an effective Bible translation assumes there will be a church ready to use it when it becomes available. A translation process that is conducted simultaneously with evangelistic and church planting efforts is a more biblical approach.

The Necessity of Pastoral Training for Translation Work

Bible translators must be reconnected to theological and seminary training, specifically at a level of preparation that provides the missionary candidate with the biblical, exegetical, theological, and pastoral toolkit to be equipped for pastoral ministry anywhere.

Students who have embraced their responsibility to accurately know and interpret the biblical languages for careful sermon preparation are on their way to becoming pastor-theologians and pastor-translators, who will spend their lives giving the utmost attention to biblical interpretation, so that they translate and explain the text with clarity and accuracy.[22]

Many pastors recognize Bible translation as an essential task for discipleship on the mission field. Yet, pragmatism has now begun to overtake the philosophies of many translation agencies. It is a noble goal to complete a Bible for every spoken language. But pragmatism, such as valuing quantity over quality, makes that goal a slave to haste. The passionate statements of leaders, such as, "We can complete the work of Bible translation in our lifetime," are compelling, but their expediency begins to inform method. Translation requires painstaking diligence to understand unwritten languages and cultural meaning. When accuracy is sacrificed, it often leads to misinterpretations of key biblical doctrines.

Part of this threat is that today's missionary Bible translators usually hold degrees in linguistics but rarely in theological studies, and few possess graduate training in the biblical languages in particular. D. A. Carson observes this reality in his friendly critiques of SIL (formerly Summer Institute of Linguistics) and Wycliffe Bible Translators:

> I am a huge admirer of their work, some of it undertaken in highly challenging circumstances. Some of [the translators] are linguistically well trained. But I have to say that rather few of them are trained in exegesis, biblical theology, or

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teach them to read and write in their mother tongue." Electa Draper, "Bible translators hope to have every language covered in 15 years," *Denver Post*, June 21, 2010, updated May 6, 2016, accessed December 11, 2023, https://www.denverpost.com/2010/06/21/bible-translators-hope-to-have-every-language-covered-in-15-years/.

[22] I am indebted to Kyle Davis of Bible Translation Fellowship for coining and developing the apt title "pastor-translator."

> systematic theology. Very few of them have an MDiv, let alone more advanced training. With rare exceptions, I have not found them to be deep readers of Scripture, with the result that their approaches to translation challenges tend to be atomistic. No one can be an expert in everything, of course—but if I have any hope for this book [i.e., *Jesus: The Son of God*], it is that some of these diligent and learned workers will begin to see the importance for Bible translation of the considerations I am advancing here, and that more of them will pursue advanced theological training as part of their preparation for a life in translation.[23]

Since many contemporary translators have little to no theological education, and are instead only trained as experts in linguistics, their consideration is given more to the technicalities of the local language rather than the biblical languages. Their focus can allow for less priority given to biblical authorial intent in the process of cross-cultural translation.[24] However, well-trained pastors are most concerned and careful to see where cultural accommodations can lead to misinterpreting the Bible, which can cause confusion, and even discredit the Bible. Thus, there is a need for those trained in doctrine and pastoral ministry to move into translation, and for translators to be involved in training nationals for the work of translation, evangelism, and discipleship.

It is simply not enough to be a linguist and Bible translator. Either the translator must work in tandem with church planters, or, ideally, the church planter must himself be an indigenous Bible translator who has a strong, biblical, theological, and pastoral foundation. Then he will have the necessary training to ensure a translation that is both accurate to the original intent and serves as part of a broader Great Commission effort.

Pastors, professors, and translators must stop and examine the collective influences of the last forty years in missiology. In reality, church leaders, entrusted with the responsibility to raise up and send out missionaries, are often illiterate when it comes to knowing the internal battle for translation work. Instead, they are enamored with the urgent call to complete the task in their lifetime, and they unintentionally send their best missionary prospects through agencies and translation training programs only to then learn that their own convictions about translations are downplayed by those with whom their missionaries work. This can lead not only to poor translation but to discouragement, division, and ultimately reassignment of the missionary, either back home or to another field. Therefore, pastors should carefully investigate the issues of translation that those whom they send out will encounter, to ensure the care, protection, and stewardship of lives and financial resources of their church.

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[23] D. A. Carson, *Jesus the Son of God: A Title Often Overlooked, Sometimes Misunderstood, and Currently Disputed* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 107–8.

[24] Biblical accuracy is sacrificed when haste is coupled with the increasing desire to contextualize the Bible and not offend a religious group—see for example, the Insider Movement and its Muslims and their offense at the translations "the Son of God" and "Father." In these cases, translators might opt to intentionally avoid translating the Scriptures accurately, all in the name of reaching the lost better. For further discussion see David Garner, "Inside the Insider Movement," Westminster Theological Seminary Faculty Resources, July 2, 2013, accessed May 20, 2023, https://faculty.wts.edu/posts/inside-the-insider-movement/.

Conclusion: The Future of Bible Translation

Modern Bible translation proponents tend to espouse the motto, "Bring the Bible to unreached people groups," which can disconnect from the church planting focus of biblical missions. However, those that see translation as essentially linked to disciple-making operate with a different motto: "Mature churches become sending churches become translating churches." They hold the long view of Bible translation, that the Word of God must penetrate further and further dialect groups, and that dialect translations are ultimately the work of local believers rather than missionaries.

Ultimately, the most accurate and effective Bible translation will be one that is done by nationals, who themselves are pastorally and theologically trained. These are pastors who not only know their culture well but are trained to understand theology, hermeneutics, and original languages. They will not supplant the accuracy and authority of the Scriptures in their culture. This is the most effective and faithful way to mature believers in a church, from which the next generation of pastor-translators can arise.

The Church, wherever it is located and whatever cultural context it is in, needs an accurate Bible translation. It is a matter of getting the gospel right, as well as aiding the sanctification of believers and giving them confidence to study the Scriptures for themselves. Bridging the gap between pastoral ministry and translation will correct the drift in philosophy of recent decades, and it will ensure that national pastors can preach from an accurate Bible version, which will instill confidence in their congregation and will be used by God to raise up the next generation of church leaders. These will then become the Bible translators and church planters of tomorrow.

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THE OLD TESTAMENT HEBREW BIBLE IN MODERN HEBREW

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* * * * *

In order to make the Old Testament more accessible to the Modern Hebrew speaker, the Bible Society in Israel has devoted efforts to produce the Old Testament Hebrew Bible in Modern Hebrew. Describing this work as an "intralingual translation," Tuvia Pollack and Yair Frank detail the need for, and the unique challenges inherent to, this project. In grammar, syntax, and vocabulary, Modern Hebrew possesses an abundance of distinctions from Biblical Hebrew, warranting a new translation. However, because of the shared linguistic ground, a Modern Hebrew translation permits a closer rendering to the original text than other target languages. Consequently, the readers of this new translation will be blessed to behold the beauty of God's Word.

* * * * *

Introduction

Among people who study and love the Word of God, it is often said, "Unless you speak Hebrew and Greek, you need a good Bible translation to understand the Word of God." Some may assume that the native speaker of these two languages today would not encounter any trouble handling the text. Surprisingly, however, people who speak Modern Hebrew or Greek have great difficulty understanding the original. In the Greek-speaking world, the modern language is so different from New Testament Greek that a translation was an obvious need as early as the 11th century.[1]

[1] For a summary of the translation of the Greek New Testament into Modern Greek, and opposition to such a translation, see Philip Carabott, "Politics, Orthodoxy, and the Language Question in Greece—the Gospel Riots of November 1901," *Journal of Mediterranean Studies* 3, no. 1 (1993): 117–38.

In the Jewish, Hebrew-speaking world there are also large linguistic obstacles to understanding the Hebrew of the Bible. Difficult vocabulary, spelling changes, and a structurally different syntax all add to the difficulty of the reading process. Because of this, and because of the high regard for the original text, no full translation of the Old Testament into Modern Hebrew has ever been produced until now. Paradoxically, this means that Modern Hebrew speakers have very limited access to the Old Testament and its message. It is not uncommon in Messianic congregations in Israel to hear people say, "I can't understand the Old Testament. Is there a translation that can help me understand it?"

The Bible Society in Israel is an organization whose chief goal is to make the Bible accessible and understandable to speakers of Modern Hebrew and to enable people to effectively engage with the Word of God. We at this organization have provided a translation of the New Testament into Modern Hebrew that is widely used in both Messianic congregations and academic circles. The Bible Society is also aware of the challenge that Modern Hebrew speakers experience with the Biblical Hebrew of the Old Testament. Therefore, in order to meet this need, since 2020 the Bible Society has been working on a translation of the Old Testament into today's Hebrew. This article presents the need for this project, its challenges, and its stages, along with the role of the Bible Society to accomplish this work.

Historical Background and Current Accomplishments

The Bible Society in Israel has existed since the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. Before that, the Bible Society existed as a branch of the British and Foreign Bible Society and had premises in Jerusalem beginning in 1905. The earliest Protestant missionaries arrived in the land of Israel as far back as 1818. At that time, Hebrew was mostly a liturgical language used in synagogues for prayer and Bible reading.[2] However, it was also the lingua franca used among Jews who came to the land of Israel from different parts of the world. Many of the Bibles brought by these missionaries were, therefore, in Hebrew.

The first Bible depot of the Bible Society in the land of Israel opened in 1905 in Jerusalem when it was under the rule of the Ottoman Empire. Many of the employees, who were known as Hebrew Christians, were Jewish believers who sought to spread the truth of the gospel. They shared the gospel with Jews of all origins, including the early Zionist pioneers, in their own revived Modern Hebrew language. When the Ottomans joined Germany during World War I in 1914, many employees of the Bible Society fled. However, an old local Christian man appointed himself to watch over the premises of the Bible Society. When the British troops marched into Jerusalem three years later, they were met by an old man who sold Bibles to them.

From 1917 to 1948, while the land was ruled by the British Mandate, the Bible Society tried to stay neutral in the growing tensions between Jews, Arabs, and the

[2] Philip S. Alexander, "How did the Rabbis Learn Hebrew?" in *Hebrew Study from Ezra to Ben-Yehuda,* ed. W. Horbury (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999), 71–89; Arie van der Kooij, "The Origin and Purpose of Bible Translations in Ancient Judaism," in *Archiv für die Religionsgeschichte* 1, ed. Jan Assman et al. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999), 204–14; Avraham Tal, "Is there a Raison d'Être for an Aramaic Targum in a Hebrew Speaking Society," *Revue des Études Juives* 160, no. 3–4 (2001): 357–78.

British. Nevertheless, the Bible Society was at one point attacked by an Arab group which claimed that the Bible Society housed "a book that says that the Jews own this country."[3] Due to the association the Bible declares between the Israelites and the land of Israel (e.g., Gen 12:1-3; 15:18-21; 17:1-21; 26:2-5; 28:10-17), the Bible Society was held in suspicion for producing and distributing Bibles.

When Israel declared independence in 1948 and an immediate war ensued, the Bible Society premises were hit by a bomb and the property was seriously damaged. However, the Bible Society was able to reestablish itself and continue in its ministry. Later, in 1979, the Bible Society relocated to its current location on Jaffa Street, not far from the walls of the Old City of Jerusalem.

The ministry of the Bible Society became tremendously active in the first few years of Israel's existence, since the State of Israel welcomed many Jewish people returning to the Promised Land from all over the world. The Bible Society printed or imported Bibles in several languages to serve the new immigrants coming to Israel. Among the achievements during this time was that in 1959, the first full Bible in Hebrew was printed in Israel. This was the first time the Old and New Testaments were bound together as one book in Hebrew in Israel. That accomplishment even drew the attention of Prime Minister David Ben Gurion, who is said to have been delighted by this, saying, "We can now print the Bible in the land of the Bible."[4]

The Hebrew New Testament translation used for this purpose was the translation of Professor Franz Delitzsch (1813–1890), made in the 1870s. However, the Hebrew of Delitzsch's translation was not the resurrected and renewed Hebrew spoken by people in the 20th century, and it was clear that a new translation was needed. In light of this, the project was begun in 1969.

Today, the Bible Society in Israel manages three Bible book shops, which are located in Jerusalem, Tel-Aviv, and Haifa. This organization publishes Bibles, teaching material, and Messianic children's books in Hebrew for the body of local believers as well as for non-believers who are open to hearing the gospel. Since the local body is still relatively small (an estimated 30,000 people), the Bible Society is not economically self-sustaining; the services provided rely almost entirely on donations. Nearly all local ministries look to the Bible Society to supply them with Bibles, New Testaments, the Gospels, and other biblical material.

In 2023, the Bible Society completed the Hebrew translation of and published *Fundamentals of the Faith* (of Grace Community Church) and a number of classic children's books. In addition, to support the growing community of immigrants, the Bible Society has published several bilingual Bibles, with Hebrew and another language side-by-side (i.e., English, Arabic, Russian, French, German, and Spanish; Portuguese and Amharic editions will be released soon).

The Bible Society in Israel was the first to publish a full Bible with cross-references, over a decade ago, and later a full annotated Bible in Hebrew. Between 2009

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[3] Referring to the Bible's role in the Zionist movement, Eyal Chowers writes, "The Bible, as the key text in Jewish religious and cultural identity, was used by Zionists not only as a testimony to their attachment to and right over *Eretz Israel* [the Land of Israel], but also as a text justifying the displacement of indigenous people (e.g., Canaanites and Philistines) from the land through violent means…" See Eyal Chowers, "Israel's 'National Law': Reconsidering Settlement, Citizenship, and Ethics in the Context of Occupation," *Journal of Holy Land and Palestine Studies* 21, no. 1 (2022): 79.

[4] See https://firmisrael.org/learn/the-bible-society-in-israel.

and 2015, the Bible Society produced the first ever professional dramatized Hebrew audio Bible, in cooperation with "Faith Comes by Hearing," involving professional Israeli radio voices. The overarching goal is to encourage people to read, study, and understand the Bible.

Since the chief goal of the Bible Society is to enable Modern Hebrew speakers to engage with the Word of God, the Bible Society embarked on the project to produce a translation of the Bible in Modern Hebrew, which would bridge the gap between Biblical and Modern Hebrew.

The Need for Translation

The difficulty of Biblical Hebrew is recognized in all levels of life in Israel. Old Testament Studies is one of the subjects in the school system of Israel, and it is a significant challenge for teachers to help their students understand the ancient Hebrew of the Old Testament. Consequently, the pupils often struggle with the biblical text. But the challenge of the Hebrew of the Bible applies to adults as well. Leading up to the establishment of the State of Israel, there was great enthusiasm in the Israeli society to learn the Old Testament. It was seen as the document giving legitimacy to the Jewish rights of the land. Currently, arguably due to the complexity of the ancient language, this enthusiasm has been dwindling, and fewer and fewer Israelis devote time and effort to read the Bible.[5]

Even when this enthusiasm was at its height in the early 20th century, Israelis acknowledged that the Old Testament was difficult to read and that it needed regular explanation, annotation, and commentary.[6] Professor Joseph Klausner (1874–1958), an expert in Hebrew, said that when he wished to read rather than study the book of Job, he would turn to a translation in French: "Linguistically, everything was clear and obvious here [in the French]. I was able to focus my thoughts on the idea. I could be enchanted by the elevation of the discussion, and find comfort in my trouble."[7] Klausner was a professor of Hebrew literature and the first editor of the Hebrew Encyclopedia. If even he struggled, how much more so does the ordinary Hebrew speaker?

Eighty years have passed since Klausner's time, and Modern Hebrew is a dynamic and developing language. The Hebrew of the Old Testament is even more challenging for the average Israeli today. It can be compared to the English speaker's struggle with

[5] In a 2006 article published by *The Jerusalem Post* titled "Are We Still the 'People of the Book'?" Gabriel Sivan observes that Israelis should not "be surprised if most secular folks under the age of 40 are incapable of reading half-a-dozen sentences of biblical Hebrew correctly." See Gabriel A. Sivan, "Are We Still the 'People of the Book'?" *The Jerusalem Post*, May 23, 2006. See also, Shira Kadari-Ovadia, "Israel's Education Minister Adds Bible Studies to Core Elementary School Curriculum," *Haaretz*, June 6, 2023, https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2023-06-06/ty-article/.premium/israels-education-minister-adds-bible-studies-to-core-elementary-school-curriculum/00000188-9140-df21-a1b8-b3cd5f030000.

[6] See Uriel Simon, "The Bible in Israeli Life," in *The Jewish Study Bible*, ed. Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1990–2000.

[7] Joseph G. Klausner, *Ha-Ivrit Ha-Khadasha Uveayoteha* (*Modern Hebrew and Its Problems*), (Tel-Aviv: Masada), 36, quoted in Ghil'ad Zuckermann and Gitit Holzman, "Let My People Know! Towards a Revolution in the Teaching of the Hebrew Bible," in *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, no. 226 (February 2014), 57–82.

Shakespeare, but much more than that, since Biblical Hebrew is 2700 years old.[8] Some words are unfamiliar, others have changed meaning, and the grammar is quite different. Even if the ordinary reader can get the general idea of a portion of the text, it is still a struggle because of the differences between the two eras.

According to a survey conducted in 2014 on Bible-reading habits among average Israelis, 59% never read the Bible, 19% read it occasionally, and only 21% read it at least once a week.[9] Among secular households, only 1% read the Bible at least once a week, and 89% stated that they never read it.[10] This is despite the fact that almost every Israeli household owns an Old Testament, and even the most secular households see the Old Testament as an important part of their heritage and history.

Understanding this reality, the Bible Society is committed to making the Old Testament as accessible as possible to the Modern Hebrew speaker, so that at least the language barrier would be mitigated and that the people would read the Bible more often. Bible Societies throughout the world regularly invest time, money, and energy into projects that would cause even a small percentage of a people to read the Bible more frequently. How much more, then, should the Bible Society in Israel undertake a project that would profit such a large percentage of the population?

Existing and Expected Objections

The Jewish people are known worldwide as "the People of the Book," and they see this as an important value and part of their identity.[11] The Old Testament, therefore, has a unique position in Israeli society, beyond the religious scope. For Orthodox Jews, it is the foundation of their entire belief system. Even though Rabbinic Judaism is chiefly based on the *Halacha* (religious law), while the study of the Old Testament is less emphasized, the Bible is still the foundation upon which everything else rests. Rabbinic Judaism puts a special emphasis on the written word and even finds meaning in the structure, shape, and form of the individual letters.[12] Because of this level of sanctity attributed to Biblical Hebrew, a large proportion of ultra-orthodox Jews speak Hebrew only on the Sabbath and during the holidays; meanwhile, they speak Yiddish or another language during weekdays. In some traditional and superstitious environments, people use tiny books of Psalms or Old Testaments as amulets for good luck.

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[8] The reasons for this development, even over a relatively short period such as eighty years, include political/geographical, cultural, religious, and literary factors. For example, one part of the development of Hebrew can be traced to its interactions with other languages between the era of Biblical Hebrew and the proliferation of Modern Hebrew. These languages themselves were in flux; thus, as one language developed over time, it in turn affected neighboring languages. See Edit Doron, ed., *Language Contact and the Development of Modern Hebrew* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 1-22; Richard M. Hogg, ed., *The Cambridge History of the English Language*, vol. 1, *The Beginnings to 1066* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 1–25.

[9] See https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2016/03/08/jewish-beliefs-and-practices/.

[10] See http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/198465 /.

[11] Avigdor Shinan, "The Bible in the Synagogue," in *The Jewish Study Bible*, ed. Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1929.

[12] James Kugel, "Two Introductions to Midrash," in *Midrash and Literature*, ed. Geoffrey H. Hartman and Sanford Budick (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 77–103; Benjamin D. Sommer, "Inner-Biblical Interpretation," in *The Jewish Study Bible*, ed. Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1829–1835.

Even in secular Israeli society, the Old Testament is considered an important historical document that solidifies Jewish claims to the land of Israel.[13] It is also seen as a cultural treasure representing the impact of the Jewish people on the entire world. Even the most secular and liberal Israelis find in the Old Testament a source of pride because of its universal messages of caring for the needy, like the fatherless, widows, and strangers.

With this background, it is not surprising that the translation of the Old Testament into Modern Hebrew is a controversial topic, one that draws a lot of criticism. In the early 2000s, there was a secular attempt to produce an Old Testament translation into Modern Hebrew by Yedioth Ahronoth, one of the largest and most influential publishers in Israel. The project was halted in 2010 due to protests from journalists and academics who argued that such a translation would rob the youth of the richness of their language and heritage. Some said the translation would encourage ignorance and intellectual laziness. As a result of the opposition, only the *Torah* (Pentateuch) and the *Nevi'im Rishonim* (Former Prophets: Joshua, Judges, 1st and 2nd Samuel and 1st and 2nd Kings) were published.[14]

The Bible Society, therefore, needs to be able to answer difficult questions in order to explain the reason and the warrant to translate the Old Testament from Biblical Hebrew to Modern Hebrew. A sampling of such questions and objections is: "How dare you touch the holy original text?" "God told us not to change His Word!" "You are reducing the richness and depth of the Bible!" "Teach people Biblical Hebrew instead of translating the Bible!" "The Holy Spirit gives the understanding; we have no need of scholarly efforts." Because of the controversy, and the large scope, the Bible Society did not start this project until it knew that it had the capacity and the finances to see the translation through from beginning to end. As a guideline for the preparation, the Bible Society adopted the words of Jesus:

> For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, saying, "This man began to build and was not able to finish" (Luke 14:28–30).

For many years the Bible Society prayed and hoped that this would come about in the right timing, but only in 2019 did everything align with the funding, the capacity, and the resources needed to build this tower. The work on the translation soon commenced in early 2020.

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[13] In fact, the Hebrew Bible is not viewed as something distinct from Israeli politics. Yair Zakovitch (Professor Emeritus of the Department of Bible at Hebrew University of Jerusalem), in reference to a Bible Study at the Parliament, states, "The Israeli Parliament should be a role model, even when it comes to learning the Bible. What makes us a united people is our collective memory and common language—the Bible. We live in this land because of our biblical roots and we should not be ashamed of it"; see Aviel Schneider, "Bible Study in Parliament," *Israel Today* (January 2010): 3.

[14] See Rochelle Furstenberg, "Israeli Life: Translating the Bible Into Hebrew," *Hadassah Magazine* (February/March 2012), https://www.hadassahmagazine.org/2012/02/28/israeli-life-translating-bible-hebrew/; and Ghil'ad Zuckermann, "Do Israelis Understand the Hebrew Bible?" in *The Bible and Critical Theory* 6, no. 1 (2010), https://bibleandcriticaltheory.com/issues/vol6-no1/vol-6-no-1-2010-do-israelis-understand-the-hebrew-bible/.

The Relationship of Modern to Biblical Hebrew

Translating the Old Testament into Modern Hebrew is a unique kind of project. Unlike other translation projects, this is not about translation from one language to another.[15] Modern Hebrew is merely a more current version of Biblical Hebrew. Even calling it a "translation" might not be accurate. It would be more correct to call it a "rewording" or an "intralingual translation."

In fact, this intralingual translation is not necessarily a new phenomenon; it is present in the Bible itself. The book of Chronicles, which was written a few centuries after the books of Samuel and Kings, uses Samuel and Kings as its sources, and yet the book of Chronicles is an independent work. J. A. Thompson writes, "The fact that the Chronicler used Samuel-Kings as a source for his work does not mean that he slavishly followed it. Chronicles is not an exposition of Samuel-Kings, nor does it have the same structure. It is a separate work with an independent purpose."[16] In many cases, the text is identical, word-for-word, but sometimes the Hebrew vocabulary has been updated by the Chronicler. In 2 Samuel 23:13, for example, the texts states: "…while *the band* (וְחַיַּת; *wehayyath*) of the Philistines was camping in the Valley of Rephaim."[17] But 1 Chronicles 11:15 renders this as: "…while *the band* (וּמַחֲנֵה; *umahaneh*) of the Philistines was camping in the Valley of Rephaim."[18] These verses look the same in English; however, the Hebrew word for "band" in 2 Samuel 23:13 is *wehayyath*, but the Hebrew word for "band" in 1 Chronicles 11:15 is *umahaneh*. This is a helpful case of an intralingual translation due to the fact that the Hebrew language had slightly evolved between the writing of the book of Samuel and the writing of the book of Chronicles.

Another example is evident between 1 Samuel 31:12 and 1 Chronicles 10:12, specifically with regard to the word for a dead "body":

> "[They] took *the body* (גְּוִיַּת; *gvi'at*) of Saul and the bodies of his sons" (1 Sam 31:12).
> "[They] took away *the body* (גּוּפַת; *gufat*) of Saul, and the bodies of his sons" (1 Chr 10:12).

Samuel uses *gvi'at* while the Chronicler uses *gufat*, which suggests that the Hebrew language was dynamic and evolving. A word that was clear when the book of Samuel was written (*gvi'at*), was not necessarily clear at the time of the Chronicler.

This kind of dynamic evolvement of the Hebrew language, however, was put on "pause" for about 2000 years when Hebrew ceased being a living daily language in the way that it was prior to the diaspora in AD 70. With the revival of the Hebrew language in the early 20th century, the Hebrew spoken today is much closer to Biblical Hebrew than it would have been had it been steadily evolving for 2000 years.

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[15] For a brief history of key Bible translations, see Leonard J. Greenspoon, "Jewish Translations of the Bible," in *The Jewish Study Bible*, ed. Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 2005–2020.

[16] J. A. Thompson, *1, 2 Chronicles*, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 24.

[17] See חַיָּה in Ludwig Koehler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 310.

[18] See מַחֲנֶה in Koehler, 570.

The linguistic proximity between the two stages of the Hebrew language is clear when it comes to vocabulary. All the words of the original Hebrew Old Testament can be divided into three categories as to their relation to their modern counterparts. The first category is regular words that are still used as common words in Modern Hebrew; this is about 67% or two-thirds of all words. The second category is words that are still used in Modern Hebrew but are considered difficult words in today's Israeli society. If we take the example of Shakespeare, these would be words like "prated."[19] They still mean the same thing in modern English, but they are not words often used in day-to-day speech, and the average person will not necessarily understand them. About 17% of the text in the Hebrew Bible consists of words like these. The third category is words that are no longer used in Modern Hebrew at all. This is about 16% of the words.[20] In our intralingual translation, it is unnecessary to translate the understandable words. Words in the second category, however, are a case-by-case judgment call. In some cases, they are translated to a more common word; in others, they are kept as is. The last category always has to be translated. This brings the reader to the unique challenges of this intralingual translation.

Challenges of the Translation

The Bible Society in Israel has defined the goals and guiding principles of the translation: a) it must be as professional, exact, and authentic as possible, and faithful to the original meaning; b) it must consider the difference in grammar and syntax between Biblical and Modern Hebrew, while taking into account the poetic and narratival characteristics of the biblical text; c) it will be a translation of the Masoretic text from the Leningrad Codex, not an eclectic text translation. When the text is hard to decode, however, alternatives from the Septuagint or the Qumran scrolls might be presented in footnotes; d) whenever possible, the same words as the original will be used, but there will be room for dynamic equivalence translation when needed; e) when there are a number of alternative legitimate meanings of an original Hebrew text, there will be a footnote. Finally, while this translation endeavors to make the Bible understandable to the Modern Hebrew speaker, it is of great importance to the Bible Society that this translation is fundamentally used as a tool to understand and strengthen the original—not to replace it.

In accomplishing these goals, challenges still exist in translation by virtue of the difference between Modern and Biblical Hebrew, and the nature of translation itself.

Grammatical Differences between Modern and Biblical Hebrew

Biblical Hebrew is a VSO-language (Verb-Subject-Object) while Modern Hebrew normally uses the SVO order.[21] For example, a common saying that often

[19] From the verb "prate," meaning "to talk idly," see "prate," Noah Webster, *A Compendious Dictionary of the English Language* (New Haven, CT: Sidney's Press, 1806), 232; cf. *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 288–89.

[20] Ruvik Rosenthal, *Old Language, New Language: The Biblical Foundations of Modern Hebrew* (Jerusalem: Gefen, 2018), 40.

[21] Joel M. Hoffman, *In the Beginning: A Short History of the Hebrew Language* (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 207.

comes up in the Torah is וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵּאמֹר (*waydabber YHWH el-mosheh lemor*), meaning "Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying" (Num 6:1). Word-for-word, this reads: "And spoke YHWH to Moses, saying." In the Modern Hebrew, this has become יהוה דִּבֵּר אֶל מֹשֶׁה וְאָמַר (*YHWH dibber el mosheh weamar*), which word-for-word reads: "YHWH spoke to Moses and said."

Biblical Hebrew expresses possessive pronouns and direct object pronouns as suffixes, while Modern Hebrew has developed separate words that are more common. Using the suffixes in Modern Hebrew is possible, but rare. For example, אַרְצְךָ (*artsekha*) means "your country," comprised of the word אֶרֶץ (*erets*), country, and ךָ- (*-cha*), the possessive suffix of the second person masculine singular pronoun. In Modern Hebrew, this will more often be written as הָאָרֶץ שֶׁלְּךָ (*haarets shellekha*)—where שֶׁלְּךָ (*shellekha*) uses the second person masculine singular pronoun "your." Similarly, וַיִּקָּחֵנִי (*wayyiqqaheni*) means "and he took me," where the final נִי- (*-ni*) is a suffix denoting the direct object pronoun of first person ("me"). In modern Hebrew, this pronoun would be a separate word, אוֹתִי (*othi*).[22]

The waw-consecutive (or *wayyiqtol*) is a grammatical construction that involves prefixing a verb with the letter *waw* to indicate the distinctive tense and aspect of that form.[23] This construction is no longer used in Modern Hebrew. It is an extremely common construction in Biblical Hebrew, but it gradually fell out of use already in the time of Mishnaic Hebrew. So, in Biblical Hebrew, we often see the expression וַיֹּאמֶר (*wayyomer*)—"and he said"—while in Modern Hebrew this has been rendered as וְהוּא אָמַר (*wehu amar*)—"and he said."

Additionally, the verbs in Hebrew have seven derived stems (*binyanim*), and in the Bible, about 97% of all the verbs that appear use one of these seven stems. In a few rare cases, the Bible uses archaic and rare *binyanim* that are no longer used in Modern Hebrew. In these cases, they ought to be translated with a Modern equivalent. For example, Jeremiah 22:23 says, יֹשֶׁבְתִּי בַלְּבָנוֹן מְקֻנָּנְתִּי בָּאֲרָזִים, "You who dwell in Lebanon, nested in the cedars." The verbs "you who dwell" and "nested" both use an unusual and archaic derived stem that the Bible Society has translated with its modern equivalent.

One further difference is that in Modern Hebrew, the *begedkefet* letters will always have a dagesh Qal at the beginning of a word, with the plosive pronunciation, while in Biblical Hebrew they will sometimes lack the dagesh Qal and instead have the fricative pronunciation, depending on the preceding word.[24] For example, Psalm 23:3 says יַנְחֵנִי בְמַעְגְּלֵי־צֶדֶק, *yaneheni vema'gele-tsedeq*, "He guides me in the paths of righteousness." In Biblical Hebrew, the *beth* at the beginning of the second word is pronounced as a fricative "*v*," while in Modern Hebrew, the previous word wouldn't affect its original plosive pronunciation, so the letter would be read as a "*b*": *bema'gele-tsedeq*.

At the level of syntax, when a verse has two possible explanations, an effort is made to preserve the two options rather than to eliminate one of the possibilities. For

[22]Angel Sáenz-Badillos, *A History of the Hebrew Language*, trans. John Elwolde (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 285.

[23] Bill T. Arnold and John H. Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 83–90.

[24] Hoffman, *In the Beginning*, 204–205.

example, in Isaiah 6:1, the text reads, "I saw the LORD sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted." The description "lofty and exalted" could refer to the LORD, but it could also refer to the throne. Many translators choose to narrow the meaning in cases such as this toward a particular interpretation. In the intralingual translation, similar decisions are sometimes made, but in many situations the grammatical structure is kept intact. When a decision has to be made, the alternative explanation is added in a footnote.

These essential distinctions between Modern and Biblical Hebrew invariably add obstacles to a straightforward reading of the text. However, the difference between Modern and Biblical Hebrew is not merely in the grammar and syntax. There are also vocabulary differences that pose additional challenges for the Modern Hebrew reader.

Vocabulary Differences Between Modern and Biblical Hebrew

There are words that have undergone change in their meaning throughout the centuries. We can again see an analogy when we compare Shakespeare's English to modern English. "Habit" used to mean clothing, and "still" used to mean always. This has happened with many Hebrew words as well. For example, the word רְחוֹב (*rehov*) means "city square" in Biblical Hebrew, but in Modern Hebrew it means "street."[25] When the angels say to Lot, "No, but we shall spend the night in the square (בָּרְחוֹב)" (Gen 19:2), a Modern Hebrew reader might think they said that they will sleep in the street.

Another example is the word בָּחוּר (*bahur*), which usually means "chosen" in Biblical Hebrew, but sometimes means "young man."[26] But in Modern Hebrew, it only means "young man." So, when the bride says about the groom that he is "Choice (בָּחוּר) as the cedars" in Song of Songs 5:15, a Modern Hebrew reader will think it says, "A young man as the cedars," which is not the correct understanding of this specific verse. In fact, this verse from Song of Songs has become a saying in Modern Hebrew denoting a strong, young, and brave man, but that is not the original meaning of the verse. In these cases, the words have been translated to their modern equivalent.

Some keywords that have no equivalent expression in Modern Hebrew will be explained in a lexicon included at the end of the Bible, as they cannot be rendered succinctly. This includes phenomena that are less known to the modern reader, such as *qarban olah* (קָרְבַּן עוֹלָה), the Biblical Hebrew word for "burnt offering."

A hapax legomenon—a word that only appears once—is a common source of trouble for any translator, especially when the meaning of the word is uncertain or unknown. In Hebrew, it is further complicated when that word is in common use in Modern Hebrew with a meaning that is not necessarily the Biblical meaning. In these cases, the modern understanding of the word could be correct, but it could also be different. The Bible Society has translated these words to the closest equivalent in

[25] "רְחוֹב," HALOT, 1212.

[26] Because this form can be the passive participle form from the verb בחר, or the noun בָּחוּר, only context can dictate the meaning of the word. Though an English translator must still make the same interpretative decision, a Modern Hebrew reader may assume no interpretative decision to be necessary, given the exclusivity of the meaning of בָּחוּר in the target language; "בָּחוּר," HALOT, 118.

Modern Hebrew based on the academic understanding of the original meaning, which in some cases might be the same word as the original.

The presence of difficult vocabulary throughout the Bible is not distributed evenly such that there may be some books and full chapters that are very difficult to understand. Yet, as a whole, the difference in vocabulary is substantial enough to warrant a new translation.

Additional Challenges in Translation

Parallelism is a common device used in biblical poetry and wisdom literature, in order to convey a particular message using synonyms, antonyms, or other features in parallel structure. There are a few different types of these parallelisms, and a challenge many translators face is that the target language does not always have enough synonyms. In the translation to Modern Hebrew, we can solve this by letting at least one of them be translated to a modern expression, while the other can be kept as is, since the reader will understand the meaning based on the parallelism.

Another challenge is preserving the poetic aspects of biblical poetry. In acrostic poems that are written alphabetically (e.g., Lam 1–4; Ps 119; Prov 31; etc.), the order of the alphabet (the *aleph-beth*) is preserved, even if a word has to be translated to a synonym of the original one; an effort is made to use a modern word starting on the appropriate letter. For example, in Psalm 119:17–24, each verse starts with the letter *gimel*. Verse 20 says גָּרְסָה נַפְשִׁי לְתַאֲבָה אֶל־מִשְׁפָּטֶיךָ בְכָל־עֵת: "My soul is crushed with longing after Your ordinances at all times." The first word here, *gorsah* means "is crushed," which is not a commonly used word in Modern Hebrew. This verse is translated גּוֹוַעַת נַפְשִׁי מֵרֹב הִשְׁתּוֹקְקוּת אֶל דִּינֶיךָ בְּכָל עֵת. The word that was chosen, *gowaath* means "starving," which is close to the original meaning and preserves the *aleph-beth* structure of the psalm.

In other cases, the poetics of Biblical Hebrew engage the sounds of the Hebrew language to give a dramatic effect. This is almost always lost in translation, but in this intralingual translation there is an opportunity to preserve part of it. In Isaiah 5:24, for example, the prophet utilizes a lot of "sh" sounds, intended to sound like fire in Hebrew (*esh*):

> Therefore, as a tongue of fire consumes stubble and dry grass collapses into the flame, so their root will become like rot and their blossom blow away as dust (Isa 5:24).
>
> Biblical Hebrew:
> לָכֵן׀ כֶּאֱכֹל קַשׁ לְשׁוֹן אֵשׁ וַחֲשַׁשׁ לֶהָבָה יִרְפֶּה שָׁרְשָׁם כַּמָּק יִהְיֶה
> *Lachen ke'echol kaSH laShon eSH vechaSHaSH lehava yirpe SHorSHam kamak yihye.*
>
> Modern Hebrew:
> לָכֵן, כְּפִי שֶׁלְּשׁוֹן אֵשׁ אוֹכֶלֶת אֶת הַקַּשׁ, וְעֵשֶׂב יָבֵשׁ מִתְכַּלֶּה בְּלֶהָבָה, כָּךְ יֵרָקְבוּ שָׁרְשֵׁיהֶם
> *Lachen kefi SHelaSHon eSH ochelet et hakaSH, ve'esev yaveSH mitkale belehava, kach yihye SHorSHam lerikavon.*

Wordplays are another area where many translations struggle, but our intralingual translation can try to preserve them as they are. In Jeremiah 1:11–12, God asks Jeremiah, "'What do you see, Jeremiah?' And I said, 'I see a rod of a *shaqed* (שָׁקֵד) ("an almond tree").' Then the LORD said to me, 'You have seen well, for I am *shoqed* (שֹׁקֵד) ("watching over") My word to perform it.'" As Jeremiah sees the almond tree and hears the Word of the LORD, the meaning of the vision becomes clear: as the almond tree buds at the beginning of spring, so God's Word will be fulfilled in just a short time.[27]

In Amos 8:2, by means of a basket of fruit, God shows Amos that he is bringing an end to the Northern Kingdom of Israel. "He said, 'What do you see, Amos?' And I said, 'A basket of *qayits* (קָיִץ) ("summer fruit").' Then the LORD said to me, 'The *qets* (קֵץ) ("end") has come for My people Israel. I will spare them no longer.'" There is archaeological evidence that the "ai" sound was pronounced as "e" in the Northern Kingdom.[28] So, the people who heard the prophecy from Amos heard twice the word *qets* and immediately understood the wordplay. These wordplays are examples where the intralingual translation preserves both the form and content of the original text.

One challenge for many translators is the issue of place names, especially when it is not clear whether the word is a name of a place or merely a Hebrew word. Consider a text that might say, "I was in Independence." A contemporaneous reader will relatively quickly understand that this statement refers to the city Independence in the state of Missouri in the United States. But if someone were to come along and read this text in another two thousand years, he would have to figure out whether it is an expression meaning to be independent, or the name of a place. Comparable situations of ambiguity are fairly frequent in the Bible.

As translators encounter such cases, they need to determine the meaning of the text and then decide whether to translate the word or keep it in its original Hebrew, indicating that it is a place name. Sometimes, however, a prophet takes the name of a city and uses it in a wordplay, which then makes complicates the matter. In Amos 6:13, for example, it says: "You who rejoice in Lodebar, and say, 'Have we not by our *own* strength taken Karnaim for ourselves?'" Beyond being names of specific locations, the literal meanings of "Lodebar" and "Karnaim" bear additional weight on this passage. In this intralingual translation, there is no option but to keep these place names as they appear in the original, but the consequence is that a Modern Hebrew reader will not know that these are names of cities. He will read this verse as: "You who rejoice in nothing [Lodebar], and say, 'Have we not by our own strength taken horns [Karnaim] for ourselves?'" In cases like these, the translators must add a footnote to explain that besides the immediate meaning of the words, "nothing" and "horns" are names of two cities east of the Jordan River, cities that

[27] In both this example and the example to follow from Amos 8:2, the wordplay contributes to the import of the vision on Jeremiah and Amos respectively. This illumines one of the special features of this intralingual translation: the difference between Modern and Biblical Hebrew is great enough to warrant a new translation, yet it is close enough to preserve the poetic devices of the original language. For the assessment of this wordplay in Jeremiah 1:11–12, see J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 153.

[28] As Hoyt notes, even if Amos made this statement in the southern dialect, the wordplay would have been preserved; see JoAnna M. Hoyt, *Amos, Jonah, & Micah*, Evangelical Exegetical Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), 284.

were captured by the kingdom of Israel. The prophet surely meant for his listeners to understand the play he carried out on these words to convey a rhetorical point.[29]

Other cases where footnotes are needed are when later rabbinical additions have made changes, such as in Judges 18:30, where it says, "The sons of Dan set up for themselves the graven image; and Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of *Manasseh*, he and his sons were priests to the tribe of the Danites until the day of the captivity of the land" (emphasis added). Rabbinic additions changed the word "Moses" (or, *Mosheh*) here by adding a small "suspended nun," turning it into "Manasseh" (or, *Menasheh*). In the Hebrew Bible, it looks like this:

וַיָּקִימוּ לָהֶם בְּנֵי־דָן אֶת־הַפָּסֶל וְיהוֹנָתָן בֶּן־גֵּרְשֹׁם בֶּן־מְנַשֶּׁה הוּא וּבָנָיו הָיוּ כֹהֲנִים לְשֵׁבֶט הַדָּנִי עַד־יוֹם גְּלוֹת הָאָרֶץ׃

In the translation to Modern Hebrew, the text will say "Moses" (or, *Mosheh*) with an added footnote that explains, "The Masoretic text has a suspended *nun* here added by the sages in order to hide the fact that Moses' grandson was an idol-worshiper."[30]

The Translation Process

The team working on the translation is comprised of a number of translators, a team of Bible scholars, and an expert on Modern Hebrew from the Israeli Hebrew Academy. Some of the classic philological tools used are Bible lexicons, academic linguistic research, Hebrew grammar books, rabbinic interpretations throughout the ages, international academic Bible research, the UBS Handbook for Bible Translators, and the Annotated Bible published by the Bible Society in 2019. The work is done in a Scripture translation program called ParaText, developed by SIL International and the United Bible Societies, a program dedicated specifically for Bible translations. The individual translators were given guidelines and principles, and access to ParaText, which also includes numerous lexicons and guides. Within the program, the translators and the scholars can discuss different issues that arise until they reach the first draft of a biblical book.

When a translator completes the first draft of one of the books of the Old Testament, the scholars evaluate and edit it, ensuring that the translation is exact and faithfully reflects the original text. After this editing process, the text is sent to the Hebrew expert, who is charged with checking the quality of the Modern Hebrew language and ensuring consistency.

After the expert is finished, the translation is again re-evaluated by the scholars to ensure faithfulness to the original text. This process can continue until the book of the Old Testament is ready to proceed to its final stage.

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[29] For example, Pinker notes that these city names are intended to strike the readers with irony, in that the people have captured a city of "no value," and rejoice over the horns, "the useless part of the animal." See Aron Pinker, "Observations on Some Cruxes in Amos Part IV," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 29, no. 4 (Oct–Dec 2001): 237.

[30] Daniel I. Block, *Judges, Ruth*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 512.

The first part of the final stage includes proofreading the translation by a test group comprised of individuals who provide feedback as to how well they understand the translation.

The second part of the final stage consists of the placement of vowel-pointing (the *niqqud*) onto all the words in the text. In Modern Hebrew, vowel-pointing is not used in general texts, unless it is a religious text, poetry, or children's literature. Moreover, the average Israeli does not have the proficient ability to insert the vowel-pointing into an official text. Therefore, this must be done by a professional. Once this step is complete, the text is examined again, to make sure there are no mistakes or misunderstandings in the vowel-pointing, since incorrect vowels can change the meaning of a word.

Once this step is finalized, the text is then ready to be shared on our online platform, haktuvim.com, to receive feedback from readers.[31] Based on that feedback, the text may sometimes be reexamined by the translation team. While the process is complex and tedious, currently every part of the Old Testament has gone at least through the initial draft stage.

Distribution Strategy

The intent of the Bible Society is to distribute this Bible translation in three formats: digital, audio, and print.

In order to reach the greatest breadth of Hebrew speakers, the Bible Society has already released this Bible online on haktuvim.com and on Haktuvim's Facebook page. At this point, the Bible Society is inviting feedback from users of the online format, in order to refine the translation and produce the best possible biblical text available. Parallel to this, the Bible Society is working to add the translation to the Digital Bible Library (DBL). The DBL is the source from which Bible translations can be added to applications and software programs, such as YouVersion, Logos, E-Sword, Accordance, Bible Gateway, Biblehub, and others. In this way, the text will be available for Hebrew readers worldwide.

In addition to the digital format, this translation is also being produced in audio form. The recording of this translation undergoes steps of proof-hearing and will gradually be added to the website. Once the recording is complete, it will be published and available on USB keyrings.

Finally, the Bible Society is planning to release this Bible translation in printed form. The first edition will be a "diglot," with the Masoretic and the Modern text presented in parallel columns. Two major versions of the printed Bible will be produced: the Old-Testament-only version, and the Old Testament together with the New Testament. With respect to the Old-Testament-only version, the desire is to reach the general Israeli public that otherwise would not read the Bible. The Bible Society will present this version to the Israeli public as an important part of our heritage and history, and as a resource that is truly accessible and understandable. In order to avoid accusations of having ulterior motives, the Bible Society is preparing answers in advance to show how this translation strives for academic excellence and

[31] See https://haktuvim.co.il/he/contemporary-hebrew-bible/Gen.1.

accuracy. With respect to the Old Testament and New Testament together, the intent is to serve the Hebrew-speaking believers.

Of course, the ultimate goal is to put the full Bible—the Old Testament and the New Testament—into the hands of as many Hebrew speakers as possible.

Conclusion

The Bible Society is quickly approaching the point at which it can present a solution to people who say, "I can't understand the Old Testament. Is there a translation that can help me understand it?" The people who are working on the project are thrilled to see this project reach its destination in the coming year. The hope is that this translation will be an accurate and faithful reflection of the original text, one that will not replace the original, but that will enhance and increase the people's engagement with the Word of God.

TYNDALE CENTER FOR BIBLE TRANSLATION

Become a Pastor & a Translator

The Tyndale Center for Bible Translation seeks to equip the next generation of pastor-translators through the Bible translation emphasis in the Master of Divinity program.

The Master's Seminary offers courses in The Tyndale Center Translation Track to prepare men to translate the Bible from the original languages. While the courses focus on the translation of the Bible from Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek into English, the principles of translation could be applied to many contexts in which this work is to be carried out. Five courses comprise the translation curriculum: Introduction to Bible Translation, Introduction to Semantics, Hebrew Readings, Greek Readings, and an Old Testament or a New Testament exegesis elective. Upon successful completion of this program, the diploma will indicate that the student fulfilled the requirements of The Tyndale Center Translation Track.

View the LSB Translation notes at tyndale.tms.edu

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AN INTERVIEW WITH IOSIF J. ZHAKEVICH: THE TYNDALE CENTER[1]

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M.A., California State University, Northridge
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* * * * *

This conversation between Corey Williams and Iosif J. Zhakevich, the director of the Tyndale Center for Bible Translation at the Master's Seminary, explores the necessity for faithful Bible translation and its relationship to biblical training. Having served on the Legacy Standard Bible *translation committee, Zhakevich recounts his own biblical and academic training and formation both for Bible translation as well as for academic ministry. Throughout this dialogue, Zhakevich underscores the centrality of the Word of God and its power to transform lives.*

* * * * *

Corey Williams (hereafter **CW**): *Talk about William Tyndale, the namesake of the Tyndale Center. What is his contribution to church history and how is the Tyndale Center carrying on his work?*

Iosif J. Zhakevich (hereafter **IJZ**): William Tyndale was a giant of faith and a genius of a translator. He was so committed to the Word of God that he devoted his life to translating it into English from the original languages—Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. He wanted everyone to have it and read it. He is renowned for saying, "If God spare my life, ere many years I will cause a plowboy to know more of the Scripture than does the Pope in Rome."

[1] This interview, slightly revised from its original form, first appeared as a John MacArthur Trust publication at https://www.jmacarthurtrust.org/people/tyndale in December 2023.

While hiding away from the authorities, Tyndale translated the New Testament and much of the Old Testament before he was caught and executed. He was hanged and then his body was exploded with gunpowder. Though he was killed, his translation lived on and influenced future English translations, such as the Great Bible in 1539 or the KJV of 1611. Tyndale gave his life (literally!) to translating Scripture because he believed in the authority of God's Word. That also is the foundational conviction of the Tyndale Center: to train men to translate Scripture, and to help translators translate Scripture, because it is the inspired and powerful Word of God.

CW: *When you were young, your family immigrated to the United States to escape persecution in the Soviet Union. How did that experience help you treasure the Bible and see its value not just for yourself, but for the world?*

IJZ: Nothing was more valuable in our household than the Bible. As a child, I remember wanting to be able to read the Bible. The very first book I read was a children's Bible that was smuggled into Russia from abroad. We treasured the Bible because it was the Word of God and also because the Communist regime did everything in its power to destroy all the Bibles they could.

In 1981, our house was raided by the KGB for over 10 hours, and they took every piece of Christian literature they could find—about six bags of Bibles, Christian books, and other Christian literature. We were hiding this literature in our house to distribute to the believers in Russia. But someone informed the KGB, and all of it was confiscated. So, even as kids we knew that having a Bible was a gift—not something we could take for granted.

When I think about parts of the world like China or North Korea and many other places, it saddens me that the precious people of those places do not have Scripture. This drives me to do what I can to spread God's Word, and I pray that the Tyndale Center can be a small part of such work globally.

CW: *Tell us about your unique education path. After studying at The Master's Seminary, you pursued more education in Israel and at Harvard. How did it prepare you for your teaching post at TMS and your work with the Tyndale Center?*

IJZ: Even before studying at TMS, I had already started learning Modern Hebrew, and I knew that I loved it. At TMS, I grew in my love for Biblical Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. During my studies, God was already preparing me for work at TMS as well as for the LSB translation work. After TMS, I spent two years at Hebrew University in Jerusalem completing a rigorous program in Modern Hebrew, Biblical Hebrew, and Akkadian (the language of the Assyrians who exiled Israel). After that at Harvard, in God's wise providence, I wrote my Ph.D. dissertation on how the rabbis translated the Pentateuch from Hebrew into Aramaic.

Though I didn't realize it at that time, God was using my five years of Ph.D. studies to prepare me in a specific way for Bible translation, as I examined various principles and practices of Bible translation. This, of course, reached its culminating point when I was invited to be part of the LSB translation team. God's providence is beyond what we can ask or think.

CW: *You have a Ph.D. with a focus on Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations. How has the study of ancient languages reinforced your belief in the trustworthiness of the Bible?*

IJZ: Knowledge of the languages has enabled me to go to the source and to work with the original text and sentences penned by Moses, Isaiah, Ezra, Matthew, Mark, Paul, and all the authors of the Bible. I am able to look at those words and know exactly what these men said and wrote. When I was at UCLA, I was witnessing to a Jewish friend, and I quoted Zechariah 12:10 to show that Jesus is God, because God says in that verse: "They will look on Me whom they have pierced." At that point, I did not know any Hebrew, and so when I cited this verse, my Jewish friend immediately said to me: "That's a mistranslation. That's not what the Hebrew says." I had no response. I couldn't turn to the Hebrew Bible and tell him that in fact this is exactly what the Hebrew says. I knew that if I were to speak God's Word with confidence, I needed to know the original languages. God has been kind to give me all these years of study, so that I could know with full confidence exactly what He says.

CW: *How is the Tyndale Center unique compared to other Bible translation organizations or initiatives? How is it advancing the gospel around the globe?*

IJZ: The Tyndale Center has three distinctives. First, the Tyndale Center affirms a high view of Scripture. We are committed to the fact that the Bible is the Word of God, and so we emphasize that every word of Scripture must be communicated accurately. Second, we maintain that the Bible needs to be translated from its original languages—Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. In this regard, the Tyndale Center is perfectly aligned with TMS, because TMS focuses on teaching the original languages. Finally, the Tyndale Center considers the work of Bible translation to be a means to an end—the end being to preach the Word of God to people so that they are saved and transformed.

In addition to training translators, the Tyndale Center seeks to provide tools for pastors to preach the Word. To this end, we are producing the Legacy Standard Bible translation notes on the Tyndale Center website (tyndale.tms.edu), explaining the exegetical significance of key translational details in the LSB translation. These notes are intended to serve those who are engaged in Bible translation as well as those who are studying Scripture in order to teach or preach it, or to be personally edified by it. We share the perspective of Tyndale: to do what we can to make Scripture accessible and understandable to people on a global level.

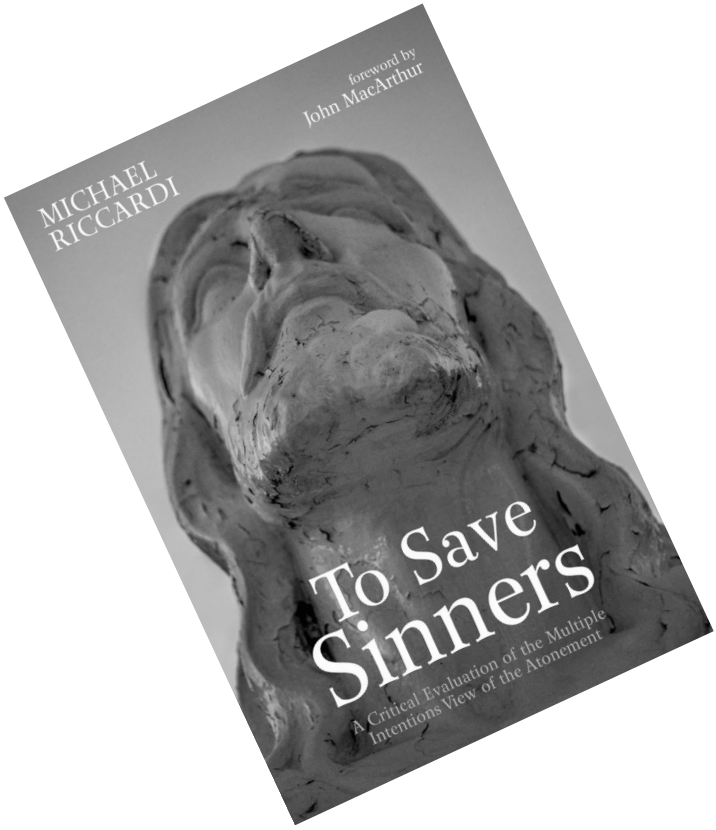
CW: *TMS and the Tyndale Center do not just work to make the Word of God more available. They also prioritize principles of interpretation so that people are able to know what the Word of God means. Talk about the connection between Bible translation and Bible interpretation. Why are both important?*

IJZ: This builds on the question above. In translating Scripture, we affirm the literal-grammatical-historical hermeneutic. So, as we approach Bible translation, our commitment is to translate every word literally, to follow the principles of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek grammar in translating sentences, and to take history into account so that the translation captures the message correctly.

As an example, it is important to translate words consistently in order to convey the theological message of a passage or a string of passages. So, in Daniel 2, Nebuchadnezzar dreams about a massive "image" (or sometimes translated "statue"). Then in chapter 3, he builds a manifestation of this "image" and demands everyone to worship it. But when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refuse to worship that "image," Daniel 3:19 states that Nebuchadnezzar became angry and the "image" of his face changed. In using the same word, Daniel made the point that Nebuchadnezzar dreamt about an image, he built that image, and that he himself was that image. Nebuchadnezzar imagined himself as the "image" that he demanded everyone to worship. Well, the problem with Nebuchadnezzar was that he was trying to take the place of God. In Genesis, God created man in His image, and God demanded that everyone worship God (Gen 1:27). Later on, Paul writes that Christ is "the image of the invisible God" and that He is the only One we are to worship (Col 1:15–16). But Nebuchadnezzar tried to take the place of God. We emphasize that translation must bear in mind the literal-grammatical-historical hermeneutic in producing any Bible translation.

In the end, the mission of the Tyndale Center is to equip translators, teachers, and preachers to interpret and bring the Word of God in an accurate and understandable way to the world. The prayer is that this work would transform lives and help believers be conformed to the image of Christ.

"FOR WHOM HAS CHRIST ACCOMPLISHED SO GREAT A SALVATION?"



In this book, Michael Riccardi offers a critical evaluation of the multiple intentions view from the perspective of classic particularism. The book demonstrates that while the third way proposed is attractive at first blush, beneath the surface it faces insurmountable biblical and theological problems—including the redefinition of the nature of the atonement itself. Riccardi demonstrates that particular redemption is the teaching of the text of Scripture against the objections of one of its strongest opponents.

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REVIEWS

Eswine, Zack. *Preaching to a Post-Everything World: Crafting Biblical Sermons That Connect with Our Culture*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008. 288 pp., $17.00 Paperback.

Reviewed by Brad Pixley, Senior Pastor, Anza Avenue Baptist Church.

Dr. Zack Eswine has served as a pastor, author, and professor for the past 25 years. He is currently the Senior Pastor at Riverside Church in Webster Groves, MO. He is an adjunct professor of homiletics at Covenant Seminary and teaches homiletics, apologetics, and pastoral leadership at Indianapolis Seminary. In addition to writing *Preaching To A Post-Everything World* (Baker Books, 2008), he has written other five books; *Kindled Fire: How the Methods of C. H. Spurgeon Can Help Your Preaching* (Mentor, 2006), *Sensing Jesus: Life and Ministry as a Human Being* (Crossway, 2012), *Recovering Eden: The Gospel According to Ecclesiastes* (Crossway, 2015), *The Imperfect Pastor: Discovering Joy in Our Limitations through a Daily Apprenticeship with Jesus* (Crossway, 2015), and *Spurgeon's Sorrows: Realistic Hope for Those Who Suffer from Depression* (Christian Focus, 2015). Dr. Eswine runs two personal blogs, *sagechristianity.com* and *preachingbarefoot.com*. He is married (Jessica) and has three children.

Eswine opens the Introduction to *Preaching to a Post-everything World* with a very brief autobiographical sketch. He was raised by "a single mother in a low-income apartment complex" (10), and his extended family is a hodge-podge of stepmothers, stepfathers, stepbrothers, and stepsisters who "tried to love one another, but we often broke one another with various forms of active abuse, passive neglect, or earnest attempts to love that didn't accomplish what we hoped" (11). However, instead of groveling in self-pity, Eswine rejoices that God reached into the world, plucked him out of the life in which he was entrenched, and changed him radically.

Eswine writes from the perspective that his family is not the only mixed-up family in the world. He notes that the "post-everything world" of today is dominated by "doubt" which he defines as "the presence of skepticism regarding the meaning or proof of the words in the biblical text" (16). This is the world in which the modern family exists and the setting in which the modern preacher preaches—mixed-up people from mixed-up families living in a mixed-up world with mixed-up worldviews.

Eswine's experience as a preacher and a professor of preaching lead him to realize that part of the problem is the way many preachers preach. They are often so

caught up in explaining the text that they forget that while they are preaching, God is working on the mixed-up people who are present in the church that day. In essence, the preacher has forgotten who he once was and how he got to where he is now. Pondering this dilemma, Eswine writes,

> Each preacher is a human being who once was a child needing to grow up, whose stories are mixtures of tragedies and triumphs. Every preacher is a human being who has given wrong answers, prayed incorrectly, misquoted the Bible, day-dreamed, and longed for things that now embarrass or have hurt other people. And it was there as such a person in such environments that God came and found us. Anything good we ever preach has been made possible by a prior testimony of God's mercy. We've dreamt of making a difference. But what if differences are made by remembering where we'd be without God and then ministering to others out of that knowledge? (11).

Thus, the doubt or skepticism that dominates today's world must be addressed by preachers who remember from whence they have come or, better stated, from whence God has brought them.

Accordingly, Eswine reveals the purpose and thesis of his book when he writes,

> I am convinced that biblical preaching will meet th[e] challenge [of reaching a post-everything world dominated by skepticism] only when a generation of preachers remembers where they have been. Until we remember that God drew us to himself and nourished us before we even knew where to find the book of Exodus in the Bible or that such things as Arminianism and Calvinism even existed, we will withhold from others the same mercy that was required for us to learn what we now know (11).

Eswine builds the body of his book around three major sections with four to seven chapters in each section. The first section (chapters 1–4) addresses sermon preparation, the second section (chapters 5–9) aims at using biblical models for the type of preaching he advocates, and the third section (chapters 10–16) deals with sermon delivery.

In the first chapter ("Preach What Is Real"), Eswine advises preachers to connect with reality. He defines reality as the biblical phrase "all things" which is inclusive of God, heaven, the earth, [and] anything visible or invisible" (25). Thus, "reality concerns God and everything else" (25). According to Eswine, the preacher must be willing to speak of these things the same way Scripture speaks of these things because unbelievers need to know that God has something to say about all these things. Doing so recognizes that "the Bible is God's means for supplying his knowledge to prepare people to navigate the fallen world we have created" (31). Unbelievers need to know that God's Word is not an obsolete set of commands. It is God's means of guiding men and women through the perils of a sin-spoiled world.

The second chapter ("Preach What is Redemptive") gets to the heart of the preacher's responsibility. A faithful preacher must be constantly aware of the fallen nature of mankind. He must be willing to go to the first two chapters of the book of Genesis to explain God's design for creation and he must also be willing to explain

the sad reality of Genesis 3 which explains how Adam sinned and brought condemnation upon all mankind (43–45). Furthermore, the preacher must also constantly aim at teaching the reality of redemption through Christ, the promised Messiah (50). Doing so aids in revealing the fact that every text of Scripture upholds God as the hero (51). He is the One who has planned the possibility of redemption and made it possible for men and women through His Son, Jesus Christ.

The third chapter of Eswine's book is more practical than theological. He encourages the the faithful preacher to "Preach the Stories" (60). Many preachers can get myopic in their examination of words and phrases (lexicology and grammar) and forget that those words and phrases are often parts of a larger story. Eswine advises preachers to avoid this conundrum by identifying the "big idea" of the story (61) and building his sermon around the retelling (69) of the story. Eswine advises the preacher to apply the truths of the story by taking the "intention of the text into contemporary situations that are comparable or parallel to the situations found in the text" (74). Doing so helps the hearers of the sermon realize that their circumstance or situation is not isolated. God understands where they are and what they are going through and he has provided proof of the same in the stories of Scripture.

The fourth chapter of the book ("Remember Where You've Been") is the heart of this book. It is here that Eswine reminds the faithful preacher to remember who he is and how God reached down into history and redeemed him from condemnation because someone listening to the sermon that day may be in a similar situation and in need of God's redemptive work in his life. To the preacher who has a faulty memory, Eswine offers a stern warning.

> Forgetting where we have been is deadly. We no longer reach out to who we once were, and we fail to extend the time and grace that we ourselves have needed to get where we are. We talk about God in ways that veil the fact that we once knew less and did wrong more (87).

Accordingly, it is this remembrance that brings the preacher into direct, one-to-one contact with his hearers. He is no longer above them. Instead, he has revealed that he is one of them. Eswine states it this way, "When we reawaken to mission, we reawaken to our own testimony. We desire to reach others because we palpably feel what it meant for others to reach us. A preacher learns how to love with a recovery of testimony" (87). Learning to love others is never an unwarranted endeavor, especially when it comes to preachers.

Eswine offers two more significant insights into the homiletician's task in this chapter. In the first quote offered for consideration, Eswine states,

> A homiletic position that is able to treat the Scriptures without an awareness of those outside the church is hauntingly similar to the way preaching was being done by those religious leaders who challenged Jesus and whom Jesus challenged. A community that was raised on the regular teaching of God's Word was shocked that Jesus would not come for the righteous but for those who need a physician (81).

This is a sobering thought to consider. The preacher who is unaware of "those outside the church" should not be surprised if he is failing to reach unbelievers with the gospel. It could be said that he is guilty of treating outsiders as unworthy of the message of the gospel, even if he is doing so unwittingly. The second quote the reader should ponder is, "The preacher's own story serves the lordship of Christ when the preacher shows himself as clay and shows Christ as the surpassing power" (89). Eswine is correct in his assessment. One's testimony of how he or she came to be saved reveals the individual to have been a fallen person not at all unlike the fallen person to whom he or she is speaking. Furthermore, one's testimony must include the story of how God reached down in time and rescued the speaker from certain condemnation, granting instead absolute assurance of eternal life in Christ.

The strengths of Eswine's book are found largely in these first four chapters where he makes a case for preaching that is aware, even sensitive to those who are unsaved. He advocates more than a simple gospel presentation tagged on to the end of every sermon. He promotes taking into consideration during the sermon preparation process the lost among us. He encourages and challenges the faithful preacher to constantly be aware of where the lost are in life and the realities that may be influencing them. He warns that to do less fails to measure up to God's standard of preaching. In this reviewer's opinion, the first four chapters of the book (Section One) were tremendously valuable. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said about the material in sections two and three.

The main weaknesses of sections two and three are verbosity and dependence on Bryan Chapell's *Christ-Centered Preaching*. Eswine's work would arguably be stronger if it were reduced without compromising its message. Second, Eswine's work is considerably hindered by its many references to Chapell's homiletic textbook *Christ-Centered Preaching* and specifically certain concepts that are openly stated as being borrowed from Chapell (such as the "Context of Reality" or "COR" and the "Fallen Condition Focus" or "FCF"). Eswine should either state at the outset that he expects his reader to be familiar with the concepts that are distinctly borrowed from Chapell or he should simply not borrow these concepts. Instead, he should come up with his own catchy phrases or abbreviations. Borrowing from Chapell adds an unnecessary impediment to hearing Eswine and his many helpful pointers.

For instance, in chapter five, titled "Follow God's Lead," Eswine challenges preachers to avoid being like the religious leaders of Jesus' day. He encourages the faithful preacher to find his own voice (99) and remember that they are merely the next recruits in a long history of preaching (101). In chapters six and seven ("Find a Prophetic Edge" and "Try on a Priestly Paradigm"), Eswine exhorts preachers to "be spokespersons for God" (118) and guardians of the faith (lit. "deposit") entrusted to the preacher (132). While these are needful exhortations, the author fills the rest of these chapters with brief sections designed to explain these roles given to the preacher. Unfortunately, much of the material is rather redundant, possibly even unnecessary for one who has received competent, formal training in homiletics.

In chapter eight ("Speak like a Sage"), Eswine challenges the preacher to plumb the treasury of biblical wisdom literature and in chapter nine ("Step Outside") Eswine defends natural theology as a useful tool for the faithful preacher.

Chapters ten through fifteen are somewhat helpful, but, too often, pithy, short sections where Eswine offers ways the preacher can "engage the cultures of a post-everything world" (see section heading, 179) encumber the material.

In chapter sixteen ("Clean the Dish and Light the Candle"), Eswine concludes his book by challenging the preacher to pursue holiness in his own life before he attempts to be light in a sin-darkened world. He states poignantly,

> No Christian can flourish without the provision of solitude and meditation. These quiet means are what God has ordained for those who wish to bear fruit and not wither (Ps. 1:2–3). How much more necessary are these means for preachers who intend to tromp through the trashed alleys of reality (262).

This is a wonderful way to conclude a book on preaching, so much so that this reviewer has written these words down and pasted them in the front of his Bible to remind him daily of his utter dependence on God and His Word.

Main, G. F. *Forgotten Reformer: Myles Coverdale and the First Forty Years of the English Reformation.* Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2023. 201 pp., $26.00. Hardcover.

Reviewed by Aaron M. Shryock, Missionary, Grace Community Church

G. F. Main's *Forgotten Reformer* is an excellent and much-needed biography of Myles Coverdale (1488–1569), a leading figure in the English Reformation, remembered for his work on the translation of the English Bible.

When preparing to write this biography, Main noted that Coverdale was being forgotten despite the many contributions he made to the English Reformation. In response, Main set about writing a biography to highlight the contributions of this preacher, translator, and faithful sufferer for the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Main has organized his biography into twelve chapters, with the first two describing the historical backdrop to Coverdale's life and the final one summarizing his major contributions. The intervening nine chapters lay out Coverdale's life from the day he joined the Reformation in 1527 until his death in 1569. It is very fitting that Main's work has the subtitle *Myles Coverdale and the First Forty Years of the English Reformation*. By God's grace, Coverdale survived the first forty-two years of the English Reformation. Main succeeds in recounting Coverdale's life and interweaving an introduction to the broader events of the Reformation, both in England and across Europe, maintaining a positive perspective which succeeds in being both edifying and challenging.

In Chapter 1, Main presents Myles Coverdale and offers several reasons for the biography. Main notes that Coverdale lived a long life, "brimming with interest" (1). Coverdale was among the Cambridge scholars in the 1520s who led the charge for reform in England and who, for the most part, ended their lives being burned at the stake. Although often in danger of execution, Coverdale survived the persecution under Henry VIII and Queen Mary, spending many years in exile in the process. Main also notes that only a couple of biographies have been written on Coverdale, the last

one being published over 50 years ago. By contrast, reformers such as Thomas Cromwell, a contemporary of Coverdale, have been the subject of seven major biographies since 2000 (3). Finally, Main notes a general forgetfulness if not complete ignorance about the English Reformation and the benefits we enjoy today because of what reformers like Coverdale dedicated their lives to accomplish. Main concludes the chapter by highlighting that we need to be reminded of the single-mindedness and devotion of these reformers.

Main proceeds in Chapter 2 to describe English society and religion at the dawn of the Reformation. In short, England was a rural and relatively impoverished country with few roads and little to offer Europe in trade beyond wool. In the midst of this poverty and ignorance, the Roman Catholic Church was a well-established institution which taught the importance of obedience to the pope, bishops, and priests. For several centuries, the popes had considerable power in spiritual and temporal affairs. In this setting, priests held positions of respect and power whereas the common parishioners were expected to merely obey the authorities and faithfully attend mass, confess their sins to their priest, fast the Lent, set up candles before images, creep to the cross, and fulfill similar duties. It was in this historical and religious context that Coverdale and the early reformers began to proclaim the truths of Scripture.

In Chapter 3, Main presents the events that led to the dawn of the English Reformation, noting in addition the events in Coverdale's life that led to his conversion and eventual flight into exile. Main begins with the Lollards and explains how this movement persisted until the Reformation and, more importantly, provided fertile ground for the preaching of the first English reformers. Looking beyond the Lollards and events in England, Main then discusses the changes brought about by the Renaissance, especially the printing of books and Erasmus' Greek New Testament and new Latin translation. He then turns to Martin Luther and the beginning of the Reformation in Germany. In 1521, five years after Luther nailed his theses on the Wittenburg chapel door, a group of students at Cambridge were reading Erasmus' New Testament. The leader of the group, Robert Bilney, found salvation in Christ and rejected the teachings and duties of the church. Myles Coverdale and other students joined Bilney, studying the Scriptures and reading the works of Luther as well. In 1525, some of the reform-minded students at Cambridge went to Oxford. By 1527, the movement for reform had spread beyond these centers of learning, and Coverdale left his monastic life at Cambridge to preach the gospel and advance reform. With the increasing persecution of his fellow reformers, Coverdale finally decided that he had to go into exile in 1529.

Chapter 4 covers the events that took place during Coverdale's first exile from England. In 1529, it appears that Coverdale fled to Hamburg, Germany, in order to work with William Tyndale. Tyndale had fled England a few years earlier to translate the New Testament into English. When Coverdale joined Tyndale in his translation work, he assisted in the translation of the Old Testament. When Tyndale was betrayed to the Roman Catholic authorities and imprisoned, Coverdale continued the work and eventually published a complete English Bible in 1535. When King Henry VIII received a copy of this translation, he approved it for use in his kingdom, saying "in God's name let it go abroad among our people" (51).

During Coverdale's first exile, several significant events took place in England that would lead to his return. In Chapter 5, Main presents the events that led Henry

VIII to establish the Church of England and himself as the head of the church. Main notes the relationship between one of the leading figures, Thomas Cromwell, and Coverdale. Working closely with Cromwell, Coverdale translated various theological works and also produced the Great Bible of 1539. Main quotes A. G. Dickens as saying that this was Coverdale's masterpiece of translation (64). The Great Bible was published and widely used by the church until overshadowed by the Bishops' Bible in 1568. In 1539, Coverdale married Elizabeth Macheson. Not long after, with Henry VIII turning in favor of the traditional party and against the reformers, Coverdale and his wife went into exile in 1540.

Chapter 6 covers Coverdale's second exile, from 1540 to 1548. After spending a brief time in Denmark and Strasburg, Coverdale and his wife settled in Bergzabern, Germany. Coverdale served as the pastor of the town's church and headmaster of the local school. When Coverdale learned of the martyrdom of Robert Barnes, his fellow reformer, he wrote *Confutation of Sir John Standish*, a defense of his friend Barnes from the attacks of Sir Standish. Despite his many responsibilities as pastor and teacher, Coverdale continued to translate works that he thought would benefit the reformation in England. In the summer of 1548, after the death of Henry VIII, Coverdale and his wife returned to England.

For six years, the length of King Edwards VI's reign, Coverdale devoted himself to strengthening the reformation in England as seen in Chapters 7 and 8. Coverdale worked alongside Archbishop Thomas Cramner and others on the Book of Common Prayer. When the new Book of Common Prayer led to revolts in the county of Devon, Coverdale was the only preacher willing to go to the region. He was eventually appointed bishop of Exeter, the cathedral city of the county. Coverdale faithfully preached and taught, but the region remained hostile to the reformers and the prayer book. When Queen Mary came to the throne, Coverdale was imprisoned. The King of Denmark intervened on his behalf by asking for the release of Coverdale. In 1555, Queen Mary released Coverdale to go into his third exile.

Chapter 10 presents the events of Coverdale's third exile on the continent. He arrived in Denmark and, after thanking the king for saving his life, eventually made his way to Germany. However, Coverdale and many other Marian exiles found the situation in Germany too precarious. Coverdale eventually reached Geneva, Switzerland. He joined a growing community of exiles and assisted with the work on the Geneva Bible. On August 14, 1559, he left Geneva to return to England.

Coverdale spent the last ten years of his life preaching and teaching. He declined his former position as bishop of Exeter or similar office in the church because he could not agree with a number of practices introduced by Queen Elizabeth, such as wearing vestments and kneeling for communion. He was one of a growing number of churchmen who would eventually be known as the Puritans. Because of his age and frailty, Coverdale spent the last years of his life in London. He was highly respected and commonly referred to as "Father Coverdale." He died on January 20, 1569.

In Chapter 12, Main summarizes Coverdale's contributions to the Reformation. He notes Coverdale's part in the translation of the English Bible. He also notes his influence on congregational worship through the publication of metrical psalms and hymns from Germany. Furthermore, Coverdale translated many works of Luther, Calvin, and other reformers to further the reformation in England. Apart from the

printed page, Coverdale was a noted preacher. He preached at the most important preaching stations in England, including Paul's Cross, and in many little-known pulpits. Finally, his willingness to suffer for the sake of the gospel and even go into exile repeatedly encouraged many and advanced the cause of Christ.

One particularly striking conclusion is that Coverdale was truly the translator of the English Reformation, devoting many years to translate the Scriptures, hymns, and the writings of other reformers for the sake of church. Main provides an appendix listing Coverdale's various translations and works. It is fitting that the Anglican Church remembers Myles Coverdale and his mentor, William Tyndale, on the same day each year, October 6th. What Tyndale started, Coverdale brought to completion, all for the glory of their common God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

G. F. Main's biography of this English reformer and devoted servant of the Church of Jesus Christ is highly recommended. Coverdale faithfully served the Lord in his own generation and has blessed many subsequent generations of English-speaking Christians through his translations. Main skillfully introduces the reader to the broader events of the English Reformation, thereby providing a fuller historical perspective for appreciating the impacts of this period which endure to our own day. Finally, Main writes in a style accessible to a broad audience and, as a result, this biography should be a valuable resource in the classroom, at a Bible study, or for personal reading.

Hopefully many are encouraged by Coverdale's example of service and faithful suffering for the sake of the gospel. May the Church be challenged by the single-mindedness and devotion of his generation and, by God's grace, strive even more to honor their common Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Marsden, George. *An Infinite Fountain of Light: Jonathan Edwards for the Twenty-First Century*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2023. 176 pp., $26.00.

Reviewed by David W. Hegg, Senior Pastor, Grace Baptist Church.

Continuing in his quest to bring Jonathan Edwards to a wider audience, George Marsden offers a small but weighty set of five chapters that argue well for Edwards's relevance today. He begins with the assertion that the study of history can help us recognize how much people have been "shaped and sometimes blinded by the prevailing assumptions of their age and culture … and that includes us" (3).

Like many of today's Christian philosophers, Marsden's intention is first, to reflect on how we came to be a culture now driven by expressive individualism, and second, to ask the simple question: "how can Edwards help us formulate a constructive theology in a twenty-first-century cultural setting?" (23).

After a short biographical sketch of Edwards's life, Marsden skillfully contrasts him with Benjamin Franklin to show how the American democratic experiment helped establish the foundation of today's "self-made" man. The unintended consequence of imbedding individual rights and religious pluralism in the US Constitution was seen in the way Americans, who were no longer under the hierarchy of the British Crown and the Church of England, were free to create a

variety of religious denominations representing a wide array of theological and philosophical viewpoints.

And what began in the eighteenth century has given us today's greatest challenge: The combination of religious diversity, the growth of technology, and the acceptance of individual expression as the foundation of identity has largely left our society with little or no appreciation for a spirituality grounded in the existence of a personal God who has created and now sustains all things.

It is in this culture that Marsden believes Edwards's view of "the dynamic beauty of God" can provide a great benefit to those pastors and churches who intend to bring the light of the biblical gospel to bear on the lives of their neighbors. As Marsden states it, "Edwards's greatest insight arose in the context of living at the intersection of two remarkably attractive worlds, the formidable New England Puritan heritage and the cosmopolitan, British, enlightened culture of the eighteenth century" (40). Edwards was living in a time when the conflict between belief in a transcendent, sovereign God and the Enlightenment's coronation of human intellect was in full swing. Specifically, the Puritan doctrine of God's sovereignty in salvation was increasingly being eroded as society was coming to value innate human rights and question arbitrary authority. If it was wrong for human rulers to treat their citizens in arbitrary ways, then certainly it was wrong for God to do so as well.

Edwards believed the answer was found in a wider, more personal way of perceiving God himself. He underscored the Christian view that the Creator God is essentially personal and exists in loving relationship as the triune God. Further, the essential quality of the Godhead was their mutual love. So, the universe is not simply the impersonal end result of divine action but rather it is the "expression of an essentially loving and always active God" (47).

From this starting point, Edwards drew out his understanding that the beauty of life, and the wide array of creation's beauty were not merely the product of material processes but the "personal expression of the exploding and overflowing love of the living triune God (48). He also viewed the cross and Christ's sacrificial love as both the "center of created reality" and "life's greatest solace in the face of evil and suffering" (55). As he wrote "All the perfections of the Deity have their brightest manifestation in the work of redemption, vastly more than in the work of creation. And our seeing in the bright light the meaning of that redemptive love is our ultimate consolation" (55). Edwards's understanding of God's beauty as the expression of his sovereign love is among his most important and beneficial contributions to our understanding of God's nature. Rather than being an arbitrary power, the God of the Bible is a loving, personal Creator who has expressed his sovereign love in all that is beautiful.

In chapter 4 Marsden applies Edwards's theological vision to the church community struggling to maintain biblical focus over time and through cultural changes. He asserts that pastors and churches today must "challenge some of the cultural idols, prejudices, and practices" through which culture attempts to influence and erode the testimony of Christ. He goes on to chronicle George Whitefield's influence in the churches of America as he encountered two related traits of the new evangelicalism in the eighteenth century: distrust of established institutional authority, and an increasing trust in individual experience. This section of the book is greatly beneficial as Marsden speaks to the unintended consequences of the

Protestant emphases of the importance of individual faith and adoption of "the Bible alone" as foundational to the church.

In the last chapter Marsden reminds the reader that Edwards's great work – A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections – continues to be must reading for Christ-followers today. With Edwards, he champions the belief that the mature Christian life is one where an individual's loves are "well ordered."

Overall, this small book is filled with truths and statements that both excite the mind and warm the heart while preparing the reader to walk confidently for Christ in our day. I highly recommend it.

Strauss, Mark L. *40 Questions About Bible Translation*. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2023. 352 pp., $24.99. Paperback.

Reviewed by Aaron M. Shryock, Missionary, Grace Community Church

Mark Strauss' *40 Questions About Bible Translation* is an excellent addition to the 40 Questions Series by Kregel Academic, edited by Benjamin Merkle. Strauss, a New Testament scholar and experienced Bible translator, approaches the topic of Bible translation by way of 40 questions organized into six general categories.

In the first section, Strauss addresses several introductory topics such as the need for Bible translation and the goals of translation. He then surveys the major methods of translation, noting their strengths and weaknesses. He concludes by surveying some of the latest research on translation and considers whether these approaches go beyond the accepted boundaries.

The second section looks in more detail at some more technical questions that translators consider in preparation for a translation, including which books to include, which manuscripts to follow, and which audience and reading level to focus on.

The third section of the book, entitled "Challenges for Translators," is the longest and most in depth. Strauss walks the readers through different challenging topics in translation such as lexical issues including collocations, figurative language, cultural differences, and gender. He also notes the issues relating to determining chapter, verse, paragraph, and section breaks. Finally, he introduces the readers to several challenges related specifically to the translation of terms for God and manners of referring to God.

The fourth section shifts from topics in translation to the history of Bible translation, focused primarily on English. Strauss begins with the first translations of Scripture and then works forward, noting the contributions of John Wycliffe and his colleagues at Oxford, William Tyndale and his associates Miles Coverdale and John Rogers, and the translators who produced the King James Version. He then surveys the revisions of the King James Version until the present as well as modern translations which are outside that tradition. He then reviews the major Roman Catholic translations. Finally, he notes early attempts at "natural-language" versions.

Strauss then shifts from history to the current Bible-translation scene in his fifth part of the book. He surveys the most popular or noteworthy translations in five categories. He considers the most popular formal and functional equivalent versions. He then considers mediating versions, which stand between formal and functional

and include the New International Version. He then considers amplified or expanded translations which "blur" the line between translation and commentary. He concludes with a survey of several "radically recontextualized" Bibles, that is, translations that change the cultural background of Scripture.

In the sixth and final section of the book, Strauss considers the work of Bible translation beyond English or in his words, "international" Bible translation. Strauss surveys the major world's languages and their translations. He then notes the need for Bible translation that still exists in many languages of the world, and the work of mission organizations like Wycliffe Bible Translators and the Bible Societies in meeting these needs. He notes some of the unique challenges of translating outside the English-speaking world. Finally, he discusses one of the most controversial topics in Bible translation—the replacement of "Son of God" in translations for Muslims.

Strauss' *40 Questions About Bible Translation* is a valuable contribution to the literature on Bible translation oriented to a general audience. He skillfully introduces the readers to the history of Bible translation, the modern versions in English, the challenges of translation, and the incredible need for Bible translation beyond English. The book ends with a list of resources for further study and a Scripture index. An index of topics addressed in the book would have been a helpful addition. A glossary of technical terms would also have been useful, given the introductory nature of the work and the breadth and complexity of the topics addressed.

One of the strong points of Strauss's work is his recognition of the strengths and weaknesses of the major approaches of translation. Although Strauss favors the mediating translations and especially the New International Version, he recognizes value in formal equivalence translations. Furthermore, Strauss is not averse to noting the shortcomings of works that move beyond translation into commentary and cultural adaptation. He even reminds the readers of the dangers of cultural adaptation as seen in Muslim Idiom translations in his discussion of the "Son of God" controversy.

Unfortunately, Strauss sets aside his impartial presentation of translation methods and describes formal equivalence in an unusually negative light at several points. For instance, he states that formal equivalence fails as a consistent method of translation (43). He also states that formal equivalence translations introduce inaccuracy to the extent that obscure language may lead the reader to misunderstand the intended meaning (42). He doesn't explain that he has redefined accuracy from presentation of the meaning of the source to the accurate comprehension of the reader, following the redefinition of accuracy proposed by Eugene Nida and proponents of meaning-based and functional translation. Strauss favors the mediating translations and also considers functional translations as valuable. Even though he implies that expanded translations and cultural adaptations are problematic, he doesn't speak as directly and forcefully against them as he does the formal equivalent translations.

On the topic of formal and functional approaches to translation, it is important to note that Strauss defines functional equivalent translations as ones that focus on translating the meaning (29). Formal equivalent translations, by contrast, focus on the form (29). Strauss does not provide the classic definition of functional equivalency as focused on translating the meaning of the message of the text. The distinction between formal and functional is not a difference between form and

meaning. Rather, the difference lies between the relative importance of the meaning at the lexical and sentential levels for formal translations, and the meaning at the level of the paragraph or text (i.e., the message) for functional translations. Furthermore, Strauss fails to note that one striking feature of functional translations is the avoidance of traditional biblical language and theological terms. Interestingly, he does note this topic in the context of explaining how the New International Version gained a larger readership than the Good News Bible and other non-formal equivalence translations. Finally, he does not mention that the functional equivalent translations are intended for those outside the organized church and with a limited knowledge of the Bible. These are significant features of the functional equivalence translations which should be explained to the readers so that they might understand more fully the differences between formal, mediating, and functional translations.

Strauss' introduction to Bible translation is highly recommend. He skillfully introduces the readers to a broader range of topics in this field, drawing on his own expertise and involvement as an experienced translator. He also writes in a style accessible to a general audience and, as a result, this work should be a valuable resource in the classroom as well as for personal study.

Wilson, Andrew. *Remaking the World: How 1776 Created the Post-Christian West*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2023. 384 pp., $23.75 Hardback.

Reviewed by Karl Walker, Associate Editor, The Master's Seminary.

Remaking the World: How 1776 Created the Post-Christan West examines the question of why our world functions the way it does, an exploration Andrew Wilson has undertaken over the past three years. Wilson's education is in history and theology from both Cambridge (MA) and King's College London (PhD), and he serves as the Teaching Pastor of King's Church London. His experience as a historian and theologian unite in this book as Wilson is discontent to merely understand the making of the West as we know it. His historical exegesis, combined with the homiletical flair of the acronym WEIRDER, exhibit a pastoral aim: for Christians to know "how to love, live, and thrive in [their world]" (15).

Wilson's first chapter declares the primary argument of his book: "1776, more than any other year in the last millennium is the year that made us who we are" (13). Though his thesis may appear reductionistic, Wilson does acknowledge, albeit in a footnote, that the happenings of 1776 exist within a broader framework. He proceeds to explore these developments under seven headings which form the acronym WEIRDER: Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, Democratic, Ex-Christian, and Romantic. And so, Wilson's first task is to prove that the world in which we reside is indeed WEIRDER, a task to which he turns in chapter two.

Wilson begins his defense of WEIRDER by unleashing a barrage of second-person declarations that characterize the reader (i.e., "you can read," "you can vote," "your society is pluralistic," "you have a refrigerator," etc.). Wilson collapses almost all of society under the banner WEIRDER, though he admits that this banner is not entirely original with him. He advances upon WEIRD, proposed by Joseph Henrich,

tacking Ex-Christian and Romantic on the end of the word.[1] If the world is indeed WEIRDER, how did it become so? His answer? 1776! Chapters 3–9 explore the words that comprise this acronym and their relationship to 1776.

In chapter three, Wilson seeks to explain why our world is westernized. He looks to the departure of two ships in 1776, the *Endeavour* and HMS *Resolution* as a guide in answering this question. To be clear, the departure of these two ships does not westernize the world, nor even does it begin globalization. Rather, the departure of these ships reveals something about why the world became westernized—the important, oft-neglected role of geography.

Next, Wilson takes chapter four to demonstrate the rise of democratic policy in the west. The Declaration of Independence, the publication of *Common Sense*, and Washington crossing the Delaware strengthen Wilson's argument for the significance of 1776, at least as it pertains to democracy. Yet Wilson also gives attention to lesser-known events or writings from 1776, such as Benjamin Franklin's trip to France or the Virginia Declaration of Rights, two pertinent developments in the history of the United States of America.

Chapter five unfolds the educated person and his development, as it occurred in 1776. Wilson frames this chapter with a question: Could racists (or those with racially prejudiced views) such as Hume, Kant, and Voltaire have produced an "intellectual awakening?" Wilson answers yes, not primarily by influencing "*what* people think…but *how*" (113; emphasis original). The drafting of *Critique of Pure Reason* by Immanuel Kant in 1776 and Edward Gibbon's 1776 publication *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* are two examples of foundational works in the development of the educated person. As Wilson suggests, "we could make a good case that there was more intellectual firepower sitting down for Sunday lunch in Europe on February 11, 1776, than at any time before or since" (Smith, Lavoisier, Gibbon, Linnaeus, Rousseau, Wollstonecraft, Diderot, and Kant, to name a few; 98–99).

Chapter six moves to examine the seeds of Christianity's rejection, making our society ex-Christian. Wilson's answer is controversial. Not that Wilson is seeking controversy; his tone remains charitable throughout the book. However, Wilson argues that Ex-Christianity was forged by smelting paganism with Protestantism. Wilson is not attacking Protestantism per se, only suggesting that an unintended consequence of the Reformation was division, and with it came pluralism. Wilson suggests, in the words of Alec Ryrie, that "the Reformation, by choosing scepticism as its key religious weapon, in effect required believers to transition to a different kind of post-sceptical faith, a journey many of them struggled to complete" (155). The purpose of drawing attention to this tenet of Wilson's book is not to offer a response to this assessment of the Reformation. Rather one might note that in laboring a defense of this point, Wilson forfeits space defending his primary claim—that the Ex-Christianity of our world was created by 1776.[2] Examples such as *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, or the edits to the Declaration of Independence make some progress in moving this conclusion along, but not to the

[1] Joseph Henrich, *The WEIRDest People in the World: How the West Became Psychologically Peculiar and Particularly Prosperous* (London: Allen Lane, 2020).

[2] For an extended response to this argument, see Kevin VanHoozer, *Biblical Authority after Babel: Retrieving the Solas in the Spirits of Mere Protestant Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016).

depth found in Wilson's other chapters. This may be slightly disappointing for the reader, given that this is one of the chapters where Wilson advances the previous acronym, adding Ex-Christian to Henrich's WEIRD.

Subsequently, chapter seven accounts for the industrialized world we inhabit. Beyond James Watt's steam engine from 1776, Wilson gives attention to the Lunar Society's role in these developments. Furthermore, Wilson explains why in England, Scotland, and Wales, invention flourished, affording it to the Protestant spirit.

At the beginning of chapter eight, Wilson acknowledges the obstacles his argument faces in linking 1776 to the contributions of the Romantic period. Defining the Romantic period remains difficult, and key Romantic figures were either children or not yet born in 1776. So Wilson offers eight characteristics to define his usage of the term, and then argues that though Romanticism did not exist in 1776, "its roots—temperamentally, artistically, sexually, and philosophically—lie in the 1770s" (191). To bring these roots to the surface, Wilson looks to developments in 1776 within Venice, Weimar, London, and Paris, all of which embody the eight characteristics of Romanticism he has just provided.

The last letter of WEIRDER—Rich—forms Wilson's ninth chapter. To be "rich" refers to more than just financial prosperity. It includes life expectancy, social growth, and cultural development. Essential contributions from 1776 include the publication of Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*. Again, Wilson asks why this "great enrichment" occurred, answering by looking "to people who were working and writing in 1776, before anyone knew the great enrichment had even started" (221). His four explanations include institutions, GREED (guns, resource extraction, enslavement, and death), culture, and fragmentation.

Wilson concludes his book with two chapters, offering the Christian wisdom and encouragement to engage with the culture at large. His approach is decidedly optimistic, centering on three avenues. As the Christian embodies grace, pursues freedom, and articulates truth, he will flourish in this WEIRDER world.

In assessment of Wilson's book, two reflections are worthy of consideration. First, consider the nature of Wilson's thesis. Verifying that "1776, more than any other year in the last millennium is the year that made us who we are" (15) requires proving two points: 1) that 1776 is responsible for making us who we are, and 2) that every year prior or after pales in comparison. Both of these arguments are incredibly difficult to prove.

To the first point, many events in Wilson's examination occur in 1776 and bear great significance. Yet of these, how many are responsible for creating us to be who we are? The Declaration of Independence, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, *The Wealth of Nations*, the steam engine—all these reside in the flow of the past. Thus, linking causality of broad movements (Romanticism, Enlightenment, Industrial Revolution, etc.), across centuries to particular events in a single year remains difficult. Furthermore, the date listed of some of Wilson's key events may mislead the reader. For example, which year will be remembered by historians for its influence in the Enlightenment: the drafting of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1776) or its first publication (1781)? Was the retirement of Carl Linnaeus (1776) more significant than his publication of *Species Plantarum* (1753) in contributing to WEIRDER? Did Romanticism's most significant events happen in 1776? Was James Cook's third voyage essential to globalization and westernization?

Or were his earlier voyages (1768, 1772), or even the circumnavigation of the world in 1522 more foundational? If 1776 is not the key date in these events, then is Wilson's argument for 1776 deterministic, forcing too much out of a 366-day period?

Conversely, Wilson does not have the space to compare 1776 to every other year's contributions to this WEIRDER world. It is only by inference that the reader must accept his thesis, and that devoid of knowing what events occurred in other years, much less their significance. Given the time, could it be shown that 1803—with the Louisiana Purchase, Lewis and Clark expedition, the British capture of Ceylon, the exhibition of a steamboat in Scotland, Marbury v. Madison, and the beginning of the Napoleonic Wars—was just as influential as 1776 in creating the WEIRDER world?

Second, consider the scope of Wilson's objective. Wilson argues that the world is Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, Democratic, Ex-Christian, and Romantic. Then, he must connect these adjectives to the year 1776. And finally, in Wilson's own terms, if he cannot help Christians to profit from this analysis, all this study was ineffectual. So, for the reader to find *Remaking the World* to be a stimulating, engaging analysis, with suitable reflection for the present, is highly commendable. Despite the vastness of Wilson's goal, his enjoyment in writing this book is evident (291), as he fills his book with a myriad of fascinating historical anecdotes. These narratives heighten the sense of discovery upon reading, and make for an exhilarating but exhausting read. And so, this book comes recommended by virtue of its breadth and depth, all designed to help its reader prosper in this WEIRDER world.

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ABSTRACTS: THE MASTER'S SEMINARY PH.D. DISSERTATIONS (2023)

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THE ESCHATOLOGICAL INFLUENCE OF ISAIAH 59:20–21 AND 27:9 ON PAUL IN ROMANS 11:26–27 SUPPORTING THE FUTURE SALVATION AND RESTORATION OF NATIONAL/ETHNIC ISRAEL

Cherif Arif

The interpretation of Romans 11:26–27 has been controversial throughout church history. Israel's future, her place in salvation history, and her relationship with the church are at the center of the debate. In Romans 11:26–27, Paul supports the salvation of Israel by conflating Isaiah 59:20–21 and 27:9. He points to the coming of a Deliverer, who will bring forth salvation for Israel. The identity of Israel, her salvation, and whether national Israel will be restored to the land are critical, debatable matters.

This study examines Isaiah 59:20–21 and 27:9 in their broad and immediate contexts. The purpose is to explore how Paul understands and quotes these passages in Romans 11:26–27. This dissertation argues that Paul employs the two Isaianic passages in Romans 11:26–27 literally and contextually, as intended by the prophet, to support the future salvation of national Israel and her restoration to the land and to her covenant blessings. Paul and Isaiah are in harmony concerning Israel's future and place in salvation history. Paul does not redefine Israel's identity or modify her eschatological hopes. On the contrary, he confirms both.

Chapters I and II introduce the controversy and offer a survey on the historical interpretation of Romans 11:26–27. The survey covers the Patristic period to the present time. The general purpose of the survey is twofold: a) to trace the thoughts of ancient and modern interpreters on the identity of Israel and what her salvation entails, and b) to identify the degree to which these interpreters have drawn from the theology of Isaiah 59:20–21 and 27:9 to understand Paul's statement, "All Israel will be saved."

Chapter III examines the background, structure, and themes of Isaiah 59 and 27, and explores how these chapters fit within the book. The chapters share similar dominant themes like sin, salvation, and restoration of Israel. They also share similar motifs such as the Isaianic New Exodus, Divine Warrior, and the Zion

Traditions. These motifs expect the coming of Yahweh as a warrior to deliver and redeem Israel, establish His kingdom, and rule from the everlasting city of God, Zion, through a Messianic, Davidic vicar. Isaiah 59 and 27 demonstrate that national Israel's future salvation and restoration are inseparable. Paul conflates these two passages for they both assure that Israel's sin will be taken away and this entails her restoration to the land.

Chapter IV studies Romans 11:26–27 in the context of Romans 9–11 and explains the important role of the remnant motif in Israel's future salvation and restoration. This chapter also shows the significance of the INE [Isaianic New Exodus] hope, its influence on early Jewish writings, and how Paul continues to highlight that hope in Romans 11. By addressing Israel's sin, salvation, and restoration, Paul, like Isaiah, longs for the day when the Redeemer will come to save and restore Israel to the land and to her covenant blessings. Thus, Paul walks in the footsteps of the prophet.

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN AND THE HUMAN INABILITY TO BELIEVE: THE CAUSES FOR AND THE MEANS OF OVERCOMING THE INABILITY

Aleksandr Gurtaev

This dissertation argues that in the Fourth Gospel, the apostle John portrays mankind as universally unable to believe, and thus unable to attain salvation without divine involvement. This inability is connected with one's spiritual origin and nature. The implication of this reality is that entrance into salvation requires a divine enablement that entails the regenerative work of the Triune God.

Although many areas of Johannine theology are very well researched, the concept of human inability—especially with respect to coming to faith in Jesus—lacks attention among Johannine scholars. Therefore, the first objective of this dissertation is to investigate the causes of human inability to believe and the means of overcoming it. Attention is focused on passages that contain the verb δύναμαι with explicit or implicit negation and the complementary infinitive of the verb πιστεύω and its synonyms, which thereby indicate that the unbeliever is unable to change his spiritual condition. This study focuses particularly on John 3:3, 5; 5:44; 6:44, 65; 8:43; 12:39, and 14:17. The second objective is to examine the soteriological implications of this study for prevenient grace, effectual calling, and regeneration, in order to advance an accurate understanding of John's contribution to soteriology with respect to the divine and the human roles in salvation.

There are three parts in this dissertation—introductory, exegetical, and concluding. Part One includes the first three chapters. Chapter One addresses the introductory matters to this study and positions the inquiry in the context of the scholarly literature. Chapter Two analyzes the verb δύναμαι and passages that mention spiritual inability. Grammatical, contextual, and theological criteria are employed in the analysis of the δύναμαι formula. Chapter Three examines the theme of human inability within John's Prologue (John 1:1–18) in light of his purpose statement (20:30–31) in order to connect the concept of human inability with entering into salvation in the Fourth Gospel. Chapters Four to Nine compose Part Two and

investigate the passages that address the question of inability and the means of overcoming it. Part Three includes Chapters Ten and Eleven. Chapter Ten provides an exegetical conclusion of the study. Chapter Eleven overviews the theological proposals with respect to human inability and compares them with the solution argued in Part Two.

Although the issue of inability has puzzled many theologians, too often their solutions are based on the superficial treatment of the biblical data, including the Gospel of John. Moreover, the human inability to believe has been insufficiently discussed by Johannine scholars. This dissertation aims to provide a thorough exegetical examination of the selected passages within the Gospel of John that allude to the human inability to enter into salvation, to clarify John's contribution to the tension between divine sovereignty and human responsibility, and to build a bridge between Johannine soteriology and other theological works on the *ordo salutis*.