



DISCIPLE DEVELOPMENT MONTH

Biblical studies 1: Bibliology
“Why you can trust the Bible as God’s Word”
Teacher: Professor Russ Glessner

A Survey of Basic Teaching Concerning The Holy Scripture

Week 3 || January 21st, 2024

Additional comments on canon, recognition, and preservation:

God’s Providence in guiding His people to gather and preserve the Holy Writings is evident in the narratives of Ezra (7:14) and Nehemiah (8:1-18). Even though Jerusalem and the Temple had been destroyed (586 BC), the documents of the Hebrew Bible were well-preserved. During the 400 years in which prophecy ceased, there was a reverence and appreciation for Scripture. This led to what would be named the Septuagint (LXX, 70 translators), the Greek translation of the Hebrew (and Aramaic) Scriptures. Why Greek? Because Jewish people were gradually moving from conversing in Hebrew to Aramaic and then to the common language of the ancient Near East, conquered by Alexander the Great, Koine (common) Greek. Jesus and his disciples likely conversed in Aramaic, Hebrew, and Greek. The Gospels, Acts, Letters, and Revelation of the NT were written in Greek and were then spread throughout the ancient Middle East.

The **Hebrew Bible** is amazingly well preserved. Its text had been very well preserved by traditionalists called Masoretes (8th cent AD). When the Dead Sea Scrolls were found (1946-56) and their texts analyzed, those texts confirmed the accuracy of the text of the current Hebrew Bible. [One of the premier Dead Sea Scrolls scholars of our era was and is Martin Abegg, Jr., a graduate of Northwest Baptist Seminary!] The **Greek NT** is very well authenticated: As churches began to spread and grow, NT Writings were copied and translated into other important languages. These included Latin (Vulgate), Syriac, Coptic, Georgian, Ethiopic, Slavonic, and many more. The writings of the early Church Fathers contained vast numbers of quotations from a wide range of Scripture. Despite complex discussions regarding which Greek text or texts may be best, a reader of Scripture may be confident that whatever Greek NT text or translation one uses, *no belief or teaching of faithful, orthodox, evangelical Christianity is in any way at risk.*

The integrity of NT texts in number, date, and geographical range is excellent:

Cesar’s Gallic War (58-56 BC) 9 or 10 manuscripts (mss), oldest 900 years later

Roman History of Livy (59 BC – AD 17) 20 mss, 4th cent AD

Histories of Tacitus (AD 100) of 14 only 4+ survived

Annals of Tacitus of 16 10 survived with 2 partially, only 2 mss, AD 900, 1,100

The History of Thucydides (460—400 BC) from 8 mss, AD 900

The History of Herotodus (480-425 BC) similar to Thucydides

Greek NT manuscripts: 125 AD, III-IV & onwards, partial or whole, 5,800+ mss

David S. Dockery. Christian Scripture. Broadman & Holman, 1995, p. 80 (F. F. Bruce).

Translation

Scripture

Nehemiah 8:8; Daniel 5:5-29; Mark 5:41; John 1:38, 41; Revelation 5:8-10; The Septuagint (LXX)

Concept

Translation of the Scripture involves transferring the meaning of the Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic (in a few passages) texts as originally written into one of the many target languages or dialects of people groups so that these people can understand God's Word clearly.

Additional comments on translation:

There is a Latin pun which states, “The translator is a traitor.” That is, of course, a teaser! Translation may be very faithful to the meaning of the original text (autograph) or, to some degree, may miss the author’s intent, for various reasons. Translation may be difficult because of ambiguity in the text uncertainty concerning the author’s intent. Translation is a complex process and for the biblical text requires skill and dedication. What is foundational is this: **the goal of translation is understand what the original author (writer) intended to communicate and to bring that meaning into the target language in an accurate and understandable way.** Bible translation philosophy ranges between various levels of “formal equivalence” and “dynamic or functional equivalence.” One approach is primarily literalistic (word for word, literal) and the other is primarily “thought for thought” (bringing out a more contemporary meaning with similar “impact”). Realistically, translation works along a “continuum” of balancing many factors, not an “either-or” approach. The CSB opts for what it calls “optimal equivalence,” which, of course offers a perfect balance between the two main concepts of translation! “In practice, translations are seldom if ever purely formal or dynamic but favor one theory of Bible translation or the other to varying degrees. Optimal equivalence as a translation philosophy recognizes that form cannot always be neatly separated from meaning and should not be changed . . . unless comprehension demands it. The primary goal of translation is to convey the sense of the original with as

much clarity as the original text and the translation language permit.” Quotes from the Christian Standard Bible (CSB, 2017, v-vi).

Personal experience: While teaching Ephesians and the Thessalonian Epistles as Bible classes at NBS on several occasions, I decided to produce my own translation of the Greek text for the class. The process was very challenging and involved a different kind of labor, forcing me to wrestle with the full translation process (different than simply engaging in interpretation and exposition). I found myself energized with the process and forced to greater precision of thought. To counterbalance this, Jack Willsey and I once taught a class at the seminary on “English Exposition of the New Testament.” This was intended to illustrate the value of engaging carefully with a good English translation, such as the NASB. That process had high value and was well-received. This should not be an unusual concept and practice. Additionally, I have known personally several missionary translators and the nature of their decades-long projects of translating the Scriptures into the Bangla/Bengali and Wolof languages. Numerous such labors are supported by organizations such as Wycliffe and SIL and many more.

As time allows, I will offer comments on the English translations, versions, and paraphrases which are listed in the appendix to these notes. Each one has value and one’s personal preference should count highly. There is great value in listening to the Scriptures read—an option on certain Bible applications. Clearly, some plan for reading the Bible is essential, with the main goal being regularity and an earnest, prayerful desire to hear God’s message.

Observation

Scripture

Ezra 7:10; Psalm 119; Acts 17:10-12; 2 Timothy 2:15

Concept

The message of the Bible must be read and studied carefully and thoughtfully, if it is to have personal value.

Value from the Bible comes from trusting the Lord to help one carry out the process of carefully observing and studying the Scripture. Its value is accessible to all who desire it—the child as well as the experienced scholar.

Small Group Questions:

1. How fresh and new is your reading of Scripture? What do you do when that reading seems strange, irrelevant, curious, horrific, or contradictory? Or when it produces wonder, amazement, awe, excitement? Do you ever weep or shout at the wonder of what you are reading?
2. What would your response be to someone who demeans the Bible, raises significant questions about it, or offers examples of errors or problems in the Bible?
3. Many fellow-believers are suffering for Jesus Christ around the world. My nephew-by-marriage was taken prisoner by the Taliban in Afghanistan and has been mostly isolated and without a Bible for 16 months. How would you survive in that situation?
4. What examples could you give of occasions where you have changed your lifestyle, behavior, speech, or attitude towards certain people groups, because of the Bible's influence?
5. What are your three favorite books in the Old Testament? The New Testament? Why?