

Walking in the Shoes of a Translator

When translators consider the ancient Greek or Hebrew words of the Bible they must choose from a number of options. I'll use a verse from ancient Greek manuscripts (Matthew 9:7) as an example for the first two options.

καὶ ἐγερθεὶς ἀπῆλθεν εἰς τὸν οἶκον αὐτοῦ

(1) **Translate.** The word "translate" means to "carry the meaning" from one language to another. A translator chooses one meaning from a group of others that are listed in a dictionary. Bible readers are not told what the other options may have been or why one was selected instead of another.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
καὶ	ἐγερθεὶς	ἀπῆλθεν	εἰς	τὸν	οἶκον	αὐτοῦ
And	he arose	departed	to	the	house	of him.

(2) **Transliterate.** The word "transliterate" means to the "symbolic representations" of a word from one language to another. A translator simply replaces each letter, or symbol in some cases, of the original word with equivalent letters from the language into which the translation is being made.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
καὶ	ἐγερθεὶς	ἀπῆλθεν	εἰς	τὸν	οἶκον	αὐτοῦ
KAI	EGERTHEIS	APELTHEN	EIS	TON	OIKON	AUTOU

If readers are not familiar with the meanings of the Greek words, the above transliterations have no meanings. Names of people and places are usually transliterated because they have no meanings attached to them. However, for other words, especially "theologically loaded" words, the dictionary meanings may be replaced by "theologically engineered" meanings. In Mark 1:4 you will find the word βαπτίζων which is transliterated "BAPTIZON" and ends up in your Bible as "baptize." It means to "completely immerse." You "baptize" your dishes every time you wash them. For religious groups that define "baptism" as "sprinkling," the standard dictionary meaning creates a theological problem, but the transliteration doesn't.

Below is an example from Mark 1:1 in which translators used both of the above options, plus a third -- substitution. Pay close attention to what they did.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Ἀρχὴ	τοῦ	εὐαγγελίου	Ἰησοῦ	Χριστοῦ	[υἱοῦ]	[θεοῦ]
Beginning	of the	good message of	Jesus	Christ	[son of]	[God]
Translation	Translation	Translation	Substitution	Transliteration	Translation	Translation
Older MSS	Older MSS	Older MSS	Older MSS	Older MSS	Added	Added

Below is the King James translation:

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

If we transliterated word number 4 it would be IESOU or in its root form IESOUS. This word had to go through Latin before making it into English as "Jesus." Research clearly indicates that his Hebrew name was "YESHUA." I have always found it interesting that no one called him "Jesus" for 1,500 years.

Word number 5 is a transliteration of a very common Greek word "CHRISTOS" and its translation is found in any Greek dictionary – "anointed." The original author probably included a definite article with it, which would clearly reveal that it was a very well known Jewish title – "The Anointed One."

You may have also noticed that word number 3 is translated "good message," but many translators chose to use the word "gospel," which is one of those "theologically loaded" words that has been used in Christianity for centuries.

Words number six and seven were not in the ancient manuscripts, but were added centuries later. Since their meanings in English are so familiar, most readers never consider the possibility that they could mean anything else. When viewed in their chronological and textual context, with the title "The Anointed One," it is clear that they are also a well known title – "The Son of God." It was the exclusive title for the "King of the Jews." Many Bibles do not reveal that words six and seven were not in the ancient manuscripts. When we put all of the pieces together a much more accurate translation of Mark 1:1 is –

Beginning of the good message of Yeshua the Anointed One.

(3) **Ignore**. In the Genesis 22:1 you will see that Hebrew is written from right to left and is unlike either English or Greek that is written from left to right. In the Hebrew language prefixes and suffixes may be added to words, so a translator must use several English words to translate one Hebrew word.

8	7	6	5
אַבְרָהָם	אֶת־	נִסָּה	וְהָאֱלֹהִים
Abraham	**	tested / tempted	and the god

Word number seven is the sign for a direct object and it has no equivalent in English, therefore it not translated or transliterated. Word number 5, however, is a different matter. It is transliterated as "VEHAELOHIYM," which consist of two prefixes added to a root word.

Prefix 1	Prefix 2	Root Word
VE	HA	ELOHIYM
and	the	god

In most translations you will find "and God," but that is not what the meaning of the word. There are no capital letters in Hebrew, so the word ELOHIYM is translated as "God," "god," or "gods." I know this creates some controversy, but if we follow the normal rules of translation, its primary meaning is "god." Therefore, the translation should be – "And the god said . . ." If a specific god is indicated, the name of that god will be specified in the context?

Just a few verses later, Abraham is asked why he didn't bring an animal to sacrifice. Notice how word number 3 is used in his answer (22:8) below:

5	4	3
לוֹ	יִרְאֶה	אֱלֹהִים
to him	will see	a god

Word 3 is transliterated "ELOHIYM." Compare it with the transliteration of word number 5 in verse 22:1 above -- VEHAELOHIYM [VE (and) +HA (the) +ELOHIYM] – and the differences are very clear. An accurate translation of Abraham's reply to his son is – "A god will provide . . ." He simply doesn't say which god.

(4) **Add a word or words that are not in the ancient text.**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
ἐγὼ	δὲ	λέγω	ὕμῖν	ὅτι	πᾶς	ὁ	ὀργιζόμενος
I	but	tell	you	that	everyone	-	being angry with

9	10	11	12	13	14	15
τῷ	ἀδελφῷ	αὐτοῦ	ἐνοχος	ἔσται	τῇ	κρίσει
the	brother	of him	liable	shall be	to the	judgment

Above is Matthew 5:22a and below a literal translation of it:

"But I tell you that everyone angry with his brother shall be liable to the judgment . . ."

Let's see how the King James translators translated this verse:

"But I say unto you, `That whosoever is angry with his brother **without a cause** shall be in danger of the judgment. . ."

As you can see by comparing the above translations with the King James Version, the King James translators inserted the words "without a cause," which are not found in the ancient Greek manuscripts.

(5) **Substitute.** A great deal of the confusion in our religions has been caused by the choices translators made about how they would handle the name of the most important god in the Hebrew Bible -- יהוה. Below is Genesis 12:1a.

4	3	2	1
אַבְרָם	אֶל-	יְהוָה	וַיֹּאמֶר
Abram	to	YAHWEH	And he said

Hebrew dictionaries make it clear that the name of the god is "YAHWEH," but that is not what you will find in our English translations. Notice how the King James translators translated word number two, which is underlined.

"Now the LORD had said unto Abram . . ."

The words "LORD," "Lord," and "lord" appear 7,836 times in the King James Bible. Since the word יהוה appears 6,007 times in the Hebrew text, there are other Hebrew words that are also translated by the same word. KJV translators use "LORD" (all letters capitalized) to indicate this distinction, but many readers overlook this. It is common for readers of the New Testament, in which there are numerous references to Jesus as "Lord," to project that meaning into the way they read their Old Testament. If translators simply used the name of the most important god of the Hebrew Bible, instead of substituting a completely different word, our understanding of the Old Testament would improve dramatically.

Below is an example of how translators have made it impossible to understand an event that was very important to the author of the words of Genesis. It is found in Genesis 12:8.

16	15	14	13	9	8
לַיהוָה	מִזְבֵּחַ	שָׁם	וַיִּבֶן	אֵל	בֵּית
to Yahweh	an altar	there	and he built	El	house of

Compare our translation below with the one in your Bible.

And he moved from there to a mountain on the east of the House of El, and pitched his tent, the House of El on the west, and Hai on the east. And there he built an altar to Yahweh, and called upon the name of Yahweh.

Yahweh promised Abram that he would be given the land of Canaan. His first stop, upon arriving in that land, was just outside of the House of El. El was the chief god of the Canaanites. The scene painted by the ancient author is very clear – "Abram arrives and declares that Yahweh is taking over El's land!" However, by using "Bethel" for words eight and nine, and "LORD" for word sixteen, the original scene is completely lost to readers of English translations.

Conclusion. Every translation of any Bible is exactly that – a translation. Translators have to make thousands of decisions as they choose which words millions will read in their translations, which are called "the Bible." This very familiar term is misleading because it implies that there is just one Bible. The fact

of the matter is that there are many books which are all called 'the Bible -- but they are not all identical. Some contain different books. Even when Bibles share the same books, the words found in those books are not all the same. There are many Bibles that have different books, different words and different meanings.

The books of the Jewish Bible are found in most Christian Bibles, but they are arranged in a different order and called the "Old Testament" instead of the "Tanakh." The Roman Catholic Bible contains books that are not found in either Jewish or Protestant Bibles. Since the Jewish Bible was around for hundreds of years before the Roman Catholic Church existed, Catholics added books to the Jewish Bible. Over a thousand years later Protestants removed some of them.

If someone asks if you believe in "the Bible" or if "the Bible" is the "Word of God," shouldn't you find out which Bible they mean? Obviously, the answers of a Jew, Catholic or Protestant could be very different. As we have seen, even answers from members of the same groups could be different depending on which translations they use. As I pointed out above, the word "baptize" meant "immersion," not "sprinkling." It should also be understood that, since the New Testament wasn't created until over a century after the crucifixion, no reference to "the Scriptures" in it refer to the books of the New Testament.

In this "Information Age" there is no reason for Bible readers not being aware of the facts and history of the most important book in America. We call this journey "understanding our biblical heritages." Being aware of the decisions that determined which books would be included or excluded from our Bibles, how those books would be arranged, which manuscripts for each book would be selected for translation, and why specific translations were selected over others, is not only an exciting journey, it is empowering spiritual experience.

Viewing any translation as if its words were the original words that were written by their original author not only a huge mistake, it has been the cause of many religious conflicts. Families have been divided and groups polarized against others because human decisions were wrongly believed to be "the word of God." Shouldn't we give credit where credit is due instead of just blindly accepting what we are told, without learning the facts? *I am sure that God would appreciate it!*