

INTRODUCTION.

- A. Scripture text: **Nehemiah 8:8**.
- B. Tonight begins a series of several lessons on English translations of the Bible. Over the next several weeks I will be looking at some of the following subjects:
 - 1. A brief history of the English Bible.
 - 2. Reasons for the new translations.
 - 3. Values of comparing several translations.
 - 4. How to pick a good translation.
 - 5. Some translations to be cautious of.
- C. More specifically I want to spend some time looking at various translations noting the following:
 - 1. Good points.
 - 2. Bad points.
 - 3. Reasons for the translation coming into being.
 - 4. Reactions to the modern translations.
- D. Some of the translations I will be reviewing:
 - 1. The King James Version (1611).
 - 2. The American Standard.
 - 3. The Revised Standard.
 - 4. The New English Bible.
 - 5. The New American Standard.
 - 6. The Living Bible Paraphrased.
 - 7. The Good News Bible.
 - 8. The New International Version.
 - 9. The New King James.
- E. There are some things that I do not want to do in the course of this study:
 - 1. To label one or more translations as completely unacceptable,
 - 2. To label a brother or sister who uses a particular translation as being either a "conservative" or "liberal."
 - 3. To say that a person will "go to hell" for using a particular translation.
 - 4. To get you to change the translation you are now using just because I may prefer another one.
- F. Comments on Nehemiah 8:8. This is essence of translation and interpretation.
- G. Some charge that reading from different translations confuses the reader. My experience is directly opposite to this. I strongly affirm that the practice of comparing translations in careful, prayerful Bible study helps make the meaning clearer. (Kearley, GA, 14)
- H. As I studied further the history of the translation of the Bible into the more than 1,800 languages into which it has been translated, at least in part, I realized clearly that no single authorized translation existed. (Kearley, GA, 14)
- I. We need not worry about the preservation of God's Word. Sir Frederic Kenyon has said, "No fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith rests on a disputed reading. ...It cannot be too strongly asserted that in substance the text of the Bible is certain. ...The Christian can take the whole Bible in his hand and say without fear or hesitation that he holds in it the true Word of God, handed down without essential loss from generation to generation through the centuries." (Kearly, GA, 15)
- J. Dr. Richard Bentley has stated, "The real text of the sacred writings is completely exact, nor is one article of faith or moral precept, either perverted or lost." (Kearley, GA, 15)
- K. With these things in mind we begin our study.

I. TWO BASIC APPROACHES.

- A. There are two basic approaches that scholars in the ancient languages of Hebrew and Greek take when attempting to translate the Bible into another language:
 - 1. First, is Formal Equivalence. This method attempts to translate "the words and nuances (a delicate variation in meaning) of the original as literally possible" provided that clarity is conveyed

in English. This was the disposition of those who worked on the KJV (to some extent), the ASV and part of the NASV. (Jackson, GA, 20,21)

2. Second, Dynamic Equivalence. The DE attempts to convey the meaning of the text "in free and idiomatic English without much regard for the exact wording of the original. Though this method is not totally void of merit, it does present problems. In effect, what happens is, that the translator becomes more of a commentator than a translator." (Jackson, GA, 21)
- B. It is much preferred then, when looking for a translation to read and study from that one finds a group of scholars who espoused the FE approach.

II. REASONS FOR THE NEW TRANSLATIONS.

There are several good sound reasons why these new translations have made their appearance.

- A. First, the last few decades have truly been decades of discovery for Bible scholars. Literally hundreds of Biblical manuscripts, supplying significant text-data for both Old and New Testaments, have come to light. For example the Dead Sea Scrolls. (Lightfoot, 20CC, 24).
Prior to this time (the time of great discoveries) all translations including the celebrated KJV, were based on medieval copies of the Bible instead of earlier ones. (Lightfoot, 20CC, 25)
- B. Second, near the close of the 19th century, a number of papyri manuscripts began to turn up in Egypt. In 1895, the German scholar Adolph Deissmann published his famous Bibelstudie in which he demonstrated that the Greek of the papyri was the kind of Greek found in the New Testament, the Koine, the language of the common man in the first century. Many words that had previously been regarded as "Biblical Greek" were now seen to be words of everyday intercourse. (Lightfoot, 20CC, 25)
- C. Third, new translations are need in place of the outdated language used in the older versions. Bibles such as the KJV were good in their day to put the Bible in the language of the people. But in time the language of the people changes, hence the need to translate again.
- D. Fourth, we must realize that an absolutely literal word-for-word Bible translation is an impossibility for a number of reasons:
1. The word order of the Greek NT is frequently quite alien to the mode of English expression.
 2. Sometimes the literal translation of a Greek word would make no sense to an English reader.
 3. Translating the same Greek word uniformly in all of its possible occurrences is not always possible.
- G. Fifth, there are more words available in the English language now than 50 years ago, 100 years ago, 350 years ago. To have a more exact English rendition, is possible more so now than say 50 years ago. (Jackson, GA, 21)

III. THE VALUE OF COMPARING SEVERAL TRANSLATIONS.

There is great value in comparing several, good translations when doing Bible study. We may have a favorite translation of the Scriptures (I do!), but let us not ignore the value of comparison when we study.

- A. First, the student will be able to understand the meaning of the original words more accurately. The various translations will give synonymous words and phrases to express the meaning of the original.
- B. Second, comparing will help avoid a legalistic use of Scripture or imposing on the scripture a limited or specific meaning not really intended by God's messenger. Just because some translations say call not man a fool, doesn't make it all right to call him a moron instead.
- C. Third, comparing various good translations helps to protect one from false arguments. The classic being the one of whether or not the "c" in the phrase "church of Christ" should be capitalized. One preacher has gone so far as to say there were two restoration movements, one with

a small "r" and one with a big "r." Of course, in the original Greek every single letter of all the words was capitalized. (Kearley, GA, 16)

- D. Fourth, a comparison will help you to discover genuine mistranslations.
No translation made by a human being is perfect. Look at the NIV--Psa. 51:5 or the NASB--2Tim. 4:8.
- E. Fifth, a comparison helps one discover serious problems related to additions or omissions in the Greek text.
There is controversy over passages such as Jn. 7:53-8:11; Mk. 16:9-20 and Ac. 8:37 (among others). These are not always found in all manuscripts
- F. Sixth, the greatest value is simply to obtain a better understanding of God's Word.
By comparing different translations, you spend more time in the Word! (Kearley, GA, 16)

IV. HOW TO PICK A GOOD TRANSLATION.

If your Bible is quite old and worn from use, or you find it is difficult to understand, then as you look for a new one follow these guidelines.

- A. First, a good translation is based on the best Greek and Hebrew manuscripts available.
- B. Second, a good translation must be clear and intelligible to the reader. People won't spend time in a Bible they can't understand.
- C. Third, a good translation must be idiomatic in its phraseology. The Eskimos have some 26 words for 'snow' and it would behoove the translator to always recognize the idioms of English when translating into English.
- D. Fourth, a good translation must employ a literary style that is suitable to the tone of its message. In other words, don't use 25¢ and 30¢ words when nickel and dime stuff will do.
- E. Fifth, a good translation, above all, must be an accurate reproduction of the original. Read the preface in your Bible, and find out!

V. FOR MORE SERIOUS STUDY.

- A. For serious study in an attempt to understand the meaning of a passage and write about it, I have used and highly recommend this procedure:
 - 1. Begin by examining the passage in the original Greek and Hebrew. The use of interlinear Bibles is helpful here.
 - 2. Examine the passage in Young's Literal Translation and/or Young's Analytical Concordance.
 - 3. Compare the passage in as many translations as possible.
 - 4. Always have the ASV on hand. It is still the most accurate English translation available today.
 - 5. Mark the key words you have studied and look them up in good Greek and Hebrew Lexicon.
 - 6. Check several commentaries to find the most outstanding comments made on the verses in question.
- B. Pray about your studying that God might grant you wisdom (Jas. 1:5).

CONCLUSION AND INVITATION.

- A. After the "mountain of material" I have just covered, let me close with:
 - 1. First, choose for personal study a good solid translation that attempts to faithfully communicate the verbally inspired word of God as precisely as possible.
 - 2. Second, no person should be classified as liberal or conservative simply on the basis of the translation he/she uses.
- B. Next time a look at how our Bible came into being through the ages.
- C. Although this has not been an evangelistic lesson, we do what to give opportunity to come to Jesus to be saved.
- D. Plan of salvation for non-Xians; erring Xians.