

Translations of the Bible

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The New Testament says of the Holy Spirit coming upon the apostles on the day of Pentecost: "And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance . . . And they were all amazed and marveled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans? and how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?" (Acts 2:4,7-8).

From the very beginning the word of God was spoken in the native tongues of those to whom it was spoken. Of course, the original language in which the New Testament was written was the language spoken by the common people in the regions around Palestine during the time of Christ and the apostles. This is called the "Koine Greek" or "common Greek."

There are so many *different* translations of the Greek and Hebrew Bible into the English now existing that we sometimes hear the question: How can one tell which translation is correct, and how can we eliminate the confusion that results from variations in these translations? The answer is not as difficult as the cure. We know that there must be some standard text in the original language from which to make these translations. From early copies of the original books of the New Testament, quotations and documents of men who lived in and immediately following the first century, and from the early translations of the work of the apostles into languages that were spoken at the time the Greek was used, we know how a standard Greek text was established. Now from the standard text, as well as the many additional manuscripts that have been found, scholars are able to translate from the original tongue the very words the Holy Spirit gave to those inspired men. We call this translation we have the Bible.

One of the first questions one may ask is why do we need a translation? It is very obvious that most people know only their native tongue, and without a translation of the original language of the Bible into that native tongue, man would not have an accurate knowledge of his duty to God. Very few people today among the common population can speak the *Koine Greek* which the apostles and Christ spoke. This translation from the original Greek into English is essential in preaching the gospel among the nations of the world.

But what if the translators did not translate certain parts correctly, how can we know of these errors? The fact that translations have been made of the original tongue, and we do not ourselves know the original tongue, does not mean that our faith must rest entirely upon the ability and word of the translators. We have the same sources today which they had in making the translations, and we can check for ourselves whether the text is accurate or not. If one does not know the original tongue himself, he can go to lexicons and there get the various definitions of the Greek words as used by the apostles. This is provided by the scholarship of the world, and with their scholarship at stake these men are not likely to mislead in giving the wrong meaning of these words. It is not too difficult for the average man who is spiritual minded to determine whether a translation is true to the original language or whether it is a corrupt, misleading word. This makes it virtually impossible to palm off on the public something that purports to be a true translation when it is not.

The science that studies and determines the meaning of the text and the true source of the original writers is called TEXTUAL CRITICISM. *Criticism* here means to be careful, considerate in judgment; and *textual* here means the text of writing. Thus, textual criticism means "to carefully consider the text of the original writings." This should not be confused with HIGHER CRITICISM, which is that destructive science that tries to explain away the truth of the text. This *science*, if such it can be called, tries to decide upon a rational basis when and how and by whom various books of inspiration were written. All things that do not agree with their reasoning are explained away by rationalism. Textual Criticism is an essential science to determine exactly what is said in the original writings.

We realize that Textual Criticism and Higher Criticism are often used to mean the same thing, and we also understand that Textual Criticism in some areas has invaded other fields and tried to become a study of Theological Doctrines. I simply mean by *Textual Criticism* the effort to establish what was the true meaning of the text as used by inspired men of the first century.

(Part 1)

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