

HIS SIGWORK - Principle No. 8 of 10

Original Languages and Bible Translations

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Original Languages

The Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew with a few spots of Aramaic in the books of Daniel and Ezra. The New Testament was originally written in Greek.

No original documents exist, but only thousands of copies called manuscripts. They were produced by hand and copied repeatedly for over 1,400 years for the New Testament and longer for the Old Testament.

The thousands of early New Testament manuscripts are consistent and, therefore, can be trusted. However, later manuscripts began to show inconsistencies after being copied over and over, and biases being inserted. It is important therefore, to study Scripture using Bible translations that are based on the early manuscripts in order to receive God's Word in its purity.

For more good information about this topic, please read "How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth" by Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart.

The meanings of Hebrew and Greek words are rich! Most often, one English word cannot convey their full meanings. But, good news! – We don't have to become Hebrew or Greek scholars to understand their fuller meanings. We can easily learn from a good Hebrew/Greek dictionary in order to ponder their truth and be amazed and changed by their beauty! Many of the **Shale Fragments** Scripture studies and devotional writings are based on my exploration of the wealth found in the Hebrew and Greek words in the Bible.

The Beauty and Integrity of the Bible

Nothing gets me more excited than sharing what God has taught me in Scripture in a way that magnifies its beauty so others can receive its life-changing message! As I've studied the rich meanings of the original Hebrew and Greek languages, I continue to see beautiful progressions and connections in the Bible that compel me to organize and convey their beauty.



I not only have a passion for the beauty of God's Word, but for the integrity of its translation. I know that people can be encouraged by reading paraphrased and modern translations of the Bible; they can help people see things in our modern culture that they would not otherwise see. However, these translations should be considered next to those that have been diligently translated from the earliest manuscripts in order to see the accurate intent of the passages, as well as to see the beautiful connections that run like gold threads throughout the entire Bible. Let me give two examples:

Example 1 – Psalm 1:4

When the original words of Scripture are substituted for the sake of our “being able to relate to it,” we often miss these gold-thread connections that tie the entire Bible together as a whole and that WOW us when we find them! Furthermore, these threads let us know that a Master Orchestrator wrote the Bible through the hands of many individuals who didn’t know each other and who lived hundreds of years apart! Each writer didn’t know that God would inspire them all to use the same pictures to convey His message!

As an example, one translation changes the words of Psalm 1:4 from

The wicked are not so, but they are like **chaff which the wind drives away.** to
You’re not at all like the wicked, who are mere **windblown dust.**

In Scripture, there is a big difference between **chaff** and **dust**. The word **chaff** conveys the original concept intended for this verse and connects this verse with all the other verses about chaff in Scripture. The author’s purpose is to convey a separation of two entities – the grain from the chaff, the excellent from the worthless, the edible from the inedible, and in this case, the wicked from the righteous. Again, these concepts are missed when we substitute our own words for the original text. (See these other verses about chaff – Isaiah 17:3 and Job 21:18).

Also, the *winnowing floor* is an important concept in Scripture (see Matthew 3:11-12). A winnowing floor is a place where the useless chaff is separated from the valuable grain. This process of separation on a winnowing floor is also found throughout Scripture and teaches something very different than blown dust.

As I said previously, the picture of the separation of chaff and grain is one of many pictures in Scripture that let us know that One Author wrote the Bible through the hands of many individuals over hundreds of years.

Example 2 – Matthew 5:2

Matthew 5:2 is a verse written by Matthew that comes just before Jesus’ message on the mount. Of Jesus, Matthew says,

He opened His mouth and began to teach them, saying,

- The original Greek puts the words in this order:
And opening the mouth of Him, He taught them saying,
The Bible version I most often use (New American Standard Bible – NASB) translates closely to the original order.
- Some modern versions pare the verse down and reorder the words, like this:
He taught, or He began to teach them,
After all, doesn’t it mean the same thing? Why the words “opened His mouth”? Doesn’t everyone open their mouth to talk? Isn’t that redundant?

The answer is, “No.” Matthew was inspired by God when he wrote his account of the life of Jesus. In 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Paul wrote, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” Every word in Scripture is there for a reason.

So, why would Matthew choose to write, “He opened His mouth?” Because, throughout Scripture, the phrase “mouth of God” is potent with meaning. Matthew placed these words just before this incredible message, because they link Jesus with God. When I understand this, I’m on the edge of my seat reading everything Jesus is about to say! Let me explain.

In John's vision of Jesus in the book of Revelation, Chapter 1, he describes Jesus' current appearance in heaven in His glorified body (quite a different visual than Jesus standing near the crowd in Matthew 5). Jesus is in the middle of the lampstands clothed in a robe reaching to the feet and girded across His chest with a golden sash. His head and His hair are white like white wool, and His eyes are like a flame of fire. His feet are like burnished bronze, and His voice like the sound of many waters. His face is like the sun shining in its strength. **And out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword.**

A sharp two-edged sword extending from **Jesus' mouth!** Hmm. Why? Following are just a few verses that explain why, and we can draw some beautiful connections:

- When the older Simeon saw Jesus as a baby in the Temple, he blessed Mary and Joseph and said, "Behold, this Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed, and **a sword** will pierce even your own soul to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.
- Hebrews 4:12 tells us that **the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword** and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.
- Ephesians 6:17 tells us that **the sword** of the Spirit is the **Word of God.**
- John 1:14-15 says that the **Word** became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory. Jesus is the **Word.** He Himself is this **Sword.**
- Deuteronomy 8:3 says (and Jesus quoted this in the wilderness) that Man does not live by bread alone **but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord.**

You see, when Jesus opened His mouth – watch out, because a sword was just about to come out, out to the crowd. "Jesus opened His mouth!" It wasn't anyone who was opening his mouth. Jesus said in Luke 6:45, "Out of the mouth, the heart speaks." The truth from God's heart welled up and began to ring out from the mouth of Jesus – the heart of God from Jesus' lips – penetrating through the maze of longing and brokenness in the crowd like the surgeon's sharp double-edged sword, alive and active with healing and saturating life.

Every word, every syllable was like a fountain of living water pouring through the mouth of Jesus. A living river – sharp, powerful, effective, life-changing, cutting out the cancerous thoughts, exposing the false motives, convicting of sin, offering the hope of healing of emotions, relationships, and their bodies – in essence, bringing the kingdom of God into their lives.

The union of Jesus words with each listening heart would tell a story as different as the features on their faces. "Blessed are you who are poor" pierced through the fervent air. "For yours is the kingdom of heaven." The words slowly made their way into the crowd's effort to grasp them.

"Blessed are you who hunger now for you will be satisfied" – an answer that cut through their mediocrity and offered reality to their restless searching hearts.

"Blessed are you who weep now for you will laugh" – a validation and understanding of their pain and loss, a release to express it, and hope for a day with no sorrow.

"Blessed are you when you are hated, excluded, insulted, rejected, because you follow Me. Leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven!" – A promise of fellowship with the Father and great eternal joy!

Conclusion

When we study from translations that stay close to the words of the original manuscripts and when we study key words from those passages, we see clear themes that run throughout Scripture. These connections magnify the beauty of God's Word!

Having reviewed various instances of **mouth** and **sword** and **chaff** and **grain**, we can more fully understand the reason these words are in the text. As we continue to dive deeply into the waters of Scripture, we discover a coral reef exploding with life and beauty!

(For more treasure found in the words **mouth** and **sword**, please see my paper called *The Master Marksman*.)

For your information, I use many translations of the Bible for study, but my current favorite is the New American Standard Bible 1977 Version (reprinted), Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible, because a Hebrew-Greek dictionary is conveniently located at the back of the Bible. The ISBN Number is 978-0-89957-750-0.

*As I said previously, many of the **Shale Fragments** Scripture studies and devotional writings are based on my exploration of the wealth found in the fuller meanings of Hebrew and Greek words in the Bible. I do have a favorite study, the Psalm 4 study that turned into a wonderful retreat experience! It is called *Come Away with Me to a Spacious Place – A Journey from Confined to Spacious*.*