

# God's Word Should Be Understood

**Series: The Bible & Translations**

**Speaker: Matthew Black**

**Text: 2 Peter 1:16-21**

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**Introduction:** Open your Bible to **2 Peter 1:16-21**. Tonight we are going to talk about how important it is to understand the Bible when we pick it up.

## **Imagine...**

Imagine what it would be like if we had only one copy of the Bible in our church, and it was hand written. Most people until the invention of the printing press (fairly recently) did not have a complete Bible. The early Christians actually would borrow a short book of the New Testament or a portion of some part of the Bible. They would “check it out” as a library book today, for a short time, and then circulate portions of the Bible through the congregation.

As we consider tonight why a careful modern translation of the Word is needed, I want us to look at **2 Peter 1:16** to consider why we need to understand the Bible. This point is obvious to all of us tonight. The Bible is God's Word.

But we are going to see tonight that God did not write the Bible in English or Spanish or Chinese. God moved holy men to give us the Bible, which happened to be in Greek, and Hebrew, and a very small portion of Aramaic.

## **Is There Double Inspiration?**

We all understand that no translation of the Bible in any language is double inspired. Human beings come together and take what God has already written, and they translate it the very best that they can. If it was “double inspired” teachers of the Word of God could never say, “This word would be better translated: fill in the blank”.

Languages change. Word meanings change. Tyndale knew this. We are going to find out a little later that the King James Bible translators knew this. The King James Bible in its first 158 years of existence was revised *eight* times to get the language as precise as possible so that the greatest amount of people could understand it in their language.

## **Guttenberg Printing Press**

Before our day of great learning, the great majority of believers did not have the privilege of Bible study tools. The people had to be able to understand it the first time they read it, because for the majority of people, since they were poor, they did not own a Bible. Today we have the privilege of having a Strong's Concordance and an English dictionary and a thousand other tools we can use to study God's Word. We are blessed are we not? But the majority of Christians had to be able to understand the plain Word of God just by reading it because books were unbelievably expensive.

In fact in 1455, upon the invention of the Guttenberg printing press, the first lot of Bibles were ever published, and only 180 were put in print. One Bible was so expensive that even wealthy individuals could not afford one, so most copies were likely purchased by state churches and some monasteries. So it was important that the Word was *understandable*.

### **From Greek /Hebrew to Your Language**

Now of course, Peter and Paul and John knew nothing of the English language. It did not exist. As it developed, men tried to put the Word of God into our language, just like we've tried to put it in Spanish, and Swahili and thousands of other languages. Men do their best. If translations were double inspired, then we would have no need of revisions. As I said the KJV went through ten revisions.

You see God inspired the Word of God in Greek and Hebrew and Aramaic. The Word of God in the original languages has been translated into thousands of languages, and each translation—every single one has undergone several revisions. Ultimately, it is so carefully translated that there are no controversies or improvements. Let's be thankful for missionary scholars around the world that put God's Word into the everyday language of the people.

It's important that when we translate God's Word that we make it understandable because it is God's Word! That's what Peter says in 2 Peter 1.

### **Scripture Reading Exercise**

Before we get there I want to do a Scripture reading exercise with John chapter 1. So please turn there. I'm going to read out of three different Bibles tonight.

- Read passage in Greek. **JOHANAS 1:1-2**, “εν αρχη ην ο λογος και ο λογος ην προς τον θεον και θεος ην ο λογος 2 ουτος ην εν αρχη προς τον θεον”.
- Read passage in Spanish. **JUAN 1:1-2**, “En el principio era el Verbo, y el Verbo era con Dios, y el Verbo era Dios. 2 Este era en el principio con Dios.”.
- Read passage in English. **JOHN 1:1-2**, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 The same was in the beginning with God.” - KJV

I just read to you God's inspired Word in Greek. For most of you that did you absolutely no good! Then I read it in Spanish. Some might have understood. But you were blessed were you not, when I read it in English?

We need to understand the Bible because it is God's Word. That's what Peter says. I'm reading from the English Standard Version of the Scriptures tonight.

Look over at **2 Peter 1:16-21**, “For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. 17 For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” 18 we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain.

19 And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, 20 knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. 21 For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

[Prayer for Guidance]

### **The Goal of the Bible is to Lead People to Faith in Jesus**

Why did God give us the Bible? According to the Apostle Peter, the Bible, it is given to us that we might know Jesus. Peter says he saw Christ’s glory revealed in the Mount of Transfiguration. And he makes a comparison between God’s voice from heaven and the written Word of God. Peter says as a result of hearing God’s voice from heaven, the Bible became a “more sure” word of prophecy. All that is written in the Bible about the coming of the Lord Jesus is confirmed! It is “more sure”. You can depend on it. God confirmed it from heaven.

The Bible gives us His plan of pardoning rebels and making them sons through God’s Beloved Son. The Bible is important because it brings us to Jesus and convinces and convicts us to come to Jesus. What would you do without Jesus? There are many outside our doors who either do not have a Bible or do not understand the Bible they have, and cannot come to Jesus. We all want to make sure that every person can know Jesus Christ!

We need people to meet Jesus. We need to meet Jesus. This is the point of our owning the Word of God. In this book we come to find Jesus.

Getting born again is the same spiritual experience as Peter had physically in the Mount of Transfiguration. Through the Word of God we can become “born again” and see Christ in all His glory with our spiritual eyes.

### **The Bible is a More Sure Word of Prophecy**

Peter tells us that we have a revelation that was confirmed by God’s voice from heaven. God promised His Son in the Old Testament Scriptures, and when God spoke from heaven and said “This is My beloved Son”, He was confirming that we can depend on the Scriptures that promised we could be saved through Jesus. We should give our lives to the Scriptures.

### **The Bible Prepares us for the Most Important Day**

Peter that we have God's Word that we can depend on. **Verse 16**, "For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty."

The Bible not only tells us that Jesus is coming—and God confirmed that this was the Messiah at the Transfiguration (as well as at His baptism). He's also referring to the future "coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (**verse 16**). In other words, we need to depend on the Bible so that we can be on the correct side of the battle when Jesus comes again! The only way is to carefully read what the Bible says about Jesus and come to Him in repentant faith, having our sins forgiven, and live in the power of our new birth.

### **We can Trust the Bible because it is Not an Invention by Man**

Now notice what Peter says about the Bible in **verse 20-21**, "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation." It does not come "from the prophet's own knowledge or invention".<sup>1</sup> Contrasted with the false teachers that Peter is opposing in this letter, who did indeed come up with "cleverly devised myths" that came from their own imagination.

Peter is contrasting the fact that the Word of God came directly from God, attested to at the Mount of Transfiguration by the *voice of God*.

**Verse 21**, "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."

I want to ask you a question – was the Bible written by God or man? If you say God, was it dictated without human personalities and influence? If you say man, then obviously we could not call it "God's Word". So which is it? Peter answers that.

### **"Moved by the Holy Ghost"**

Peter says these men were "moved by the Holy Ghost" (**verse 21**) There is a word picture in this phrase. It has the idea of being moved or carried along, "as in a ship before the wind, be driven (Acts 27:15, 17...2 Pet. 1:21; Sept.: Job 17:1)."<sup>2</sup>

### **Indestructibility of the Bible**

We are convinced of the indestructibility of the Scripture. It is forever settled. The Bible is inspired—plenary, verbal inspiration. Every part of it and every Word. The 66 books that we call the Bible.

God's Word is preserved. **Isaiah 40:8**, "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever".

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<sup>1</sup> Adam Clarke, comment on 1 Peter 1:20.

<sup>2</sup>Zodhiates, S. (2000, c1992, c1993). *The complete word study dictionary : New Testament* (electronic ed.) (G5342). Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers.

**Isaiah 55:11** So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.

Matthew 24:35, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away”

Psalms 119:89, “For ever, O LORD, your word is settled in heaven.”

Where is it settled? But we must ask where? In heaven, but may we ask, where is it settled on earth? Is it preserved in this translation or that translation?

### **Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary’s Statement**

DBTS made a statement that mirrors all the major statements of faith in church history.

“We hold that inspiration is a direct miracle of God by which human authors and human languages were employed by God to give human beings His revelation in written form (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:21). It is the original text (words, script, autograph-graphic, 2 Tim 3:16) that partakes of inspiration proper. We do not hold that the Word of God is to be found exclusively in one English translation or any one translation in any other language.”

This goes along with what our Statement of Faith states, as well as what Christians have generally held through the ages.

The Westminster Confession of Faith puts it this way in Chapter 1, Section 8,

“The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old), and the New Testament in Greek (which at the time of the writing of it was most generally known to the nations), being immediately inspired by God, and by his singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentic; so as in all controversies of religion the Church is finally to appeal unto them. But because these original tongues are not known to all the people of God who have right unto, and interest in, the Scriptures, and are commanded, in the fear of God, to read and search them, therefore they are to be translated into the language of every people unto which they come...”<sup>3</sup>

I’ll get into greater detail of the history of the KJV briefly this Sunday night, but the King James Bible at its beginning was a very controversial translation. The Christians at that time were very attached to their Geneva Bible and many opposed the new translation.

The KJV translators were fiercely opposed by many faithful Christians of that time. Yet they wrote in response to them in the Preface of the KJV translation.

Many men's mouths have been open a good while (and yet are not stopped) with speeches about the Translation so long in hand, or rather [comparisons of it with] Translations made before: and ask what may be the reason, what the necessity of the employment: Hath the Church been deceived,

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<sup>3</sup> Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 1, Section 8.

say they, all this while? Hath her sweet bread been mingled with leaven, her silver with dross, her wine with water, her milk with lime?... Was their translation good before? Why do they now mend it? Was it not good? Why then was it obtruded to the people? ...And to the same effect say we, that we are so far off from condemning any of their labours that travailed before us in this kind, either in this land or beyond sea, either in King *Henry's* time, or King *Edward's* (if there were any translation, or correction of a translation in his time) or Queen *Elizabeth's* of ever-renowned memory, that we acknowledge them to have been raised up of God, for the building and furnishing of his Church, and that they deserve to be had of us and of posterity in everlasting remembrance.... Therefore blessed be they, and most honoured be their name, that break the ice, and give the onset upon that which helpeth forward to the saving of souls. Now what can be more available thereto than to deliver God's book unto God's people in a tongue which they understand?

...But how shall men meditate in that which they cannot understand? How shall they understand that which is kept close in an unknown tongue? as it is written, *Except I know the power of the voice, I shall be to him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh shall be a barbarian to me.* The Apostle excepteth no tongue; not Hebrew the ancientest, not Greek the most copious, not Latin the finest. Nature taught a natural man to confess, that all of us in those tongues which we do not understand are plainly deaf; we may turn the deaf ear unto them.... Translation it is that openeth the window, to let in the light; that breaketh the shell, that we may eat the kernel; that putteth aside the curtain, that we may look into the most holy place; that removeth the cover of the well, that we may come by the water, even as *Jacob* rolled away the stone from the mouth of the well, by which means the flocks of *Laban* were watered. Indeed, without translation into the vulgar tongue the unlearned are but like children at *Jacob's* well (which was deep) without a bucket or some thing to draw with..."<sup>4</sup>

Once the translation was completed, it underwent at least 8 revisions (1611, 1613, 1616, 1629, 1638, 1701, 1762, 1769).

Conclusion: **Tyndale Illustration:** One day William Tyndale was having a conversation with a fellow priest about the necessity of having the Word of God in the modern English language. They had the Bible in the Old English of Jean Wyclif (though outlawed), but he wanted to put the Bible in the language of the people.

The fellow priest said to Tyndale that the Bible in the English language was not necessary. As long as they had the Pope's authority, the Scriptures were not needed.

Tyndale's answer was historic. He said, "I defy the Pope and all his laws, if God spare my life, I will make the boy that drives the plough know more of the Scripture than you do." Tyndale said that he would give the ploughboy the Scriptures in a language he could understand. His heart was that the simplest of people, and a child with a basic education could pick up the Scriptures for the first time and read it.

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<sup>4</sup> From the Preface of the original 1611 King James Version of the Bible.

Tyndale's burden is my burden. **Habakkuk 2:14**, "For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea."