

## The Bible and Translation

URL for handouts, readings, and extra resources: <http://jlharmon.com/seekers-class>

**Nov 1** - Week 1: Why and How? (Why read the Bible? How does translation work?)

**Nov 8** - Week 2: Which? (Which translation should I read? Hint: It depends.)

**Nov 15** - Week 3: But what about... (Did Paul really write those words? Do I need to learn Greek? What's the Septuagint? ...etc.)

### Why read the Bible?

Protestant Reformation: *sola scriptura* – The Bible is the supreme authority for doctrine and practice. People don't need priests to tell them what God says; the words of the Bible are sufficient. (cf. *prima scriptura* – Wesleyan, Anglican, Catholic, Orthodox)

Even if we don't ascribe inerrant authority to the Bible, it is still a library of stories about people encountering the divine.

And the Bible has profoundly shaped Western literature and thought. Reading the Bible is essential for engagement with Western culture.

*At the very least*, we can ask “why did people write this down?” and “why did the text endure?”

### How does translation work?

Translator as a lens: Translators try to make the original text clear and accurate in the new language, but there are still distortions.

Where can distortion occur?

- Culture
- Genre
- Language specific issues

How do translators clear up distortions?

- Prioritize one aspect (eg. clarity) over another (eg. word-level accuracy)
- Translator's notes
- *Different translations for different uses*

### Questions

What do we think Bible translators should strive for? Accuracy at the word level? Clear modern language? Keeping genres the same?

What does taking the Bible “seriously but not literally” look like?

## Be a translator!

You're translating Psalm 23 into the language of a group of people who live on some islands in the Pacific. They are fishermen, subsistence farmers, and pig raisers. They live in a tropical climate and have never seen a sheep. However, with the current globalization of Western culture, they are somewhat familiar with animals and topics outside their daily life, so there are loan words for things like "sheep".

Psalm 23 (NRSV)

1The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

2He makes me lie down in green pastures;

he leads me beside still waters;

3he restores my soul.

He leads me in right paths

for his name's sake.

4Even though I walk through the darkest valley,

I fear no evil;

for you are with me;

your rod and your staff—

they comfort me.

5You prepare a table before me

in the presence of my enemies;

you anoint my head with oil;

my cup overflows.

6Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me

all the days of my life,

and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD

my whole life long.

What is most important about this psalm? Is it the words that are important here? The form? The message? Can you even separate the message from the form?

How would you go about translating this psalm for the people in the description above?

**Next week:** English Bible translations and how to choose one. If you have time, read the interview with Daniel B. Wallace on different English translations and translation theory.

<http://www.christianpost.com/news/renowned-new-testament-scholar-on-bible-translation-what-to-read-why-and-myths-to-avoid-part-3-88756/>