

Are You Overinterpreting the Bible?

When studying the Bible, one very important but often overlooked thing is knowing the difference between translation and interpretation. This may not seem significant on the surface, but it is vital if you want to arrive at valid scriptural conclusions. The truth is that no matter what version of the Bible you are reading, it is a blend of translation and interpretation. This in and of itself is not bad, because anytime you translate from one language to another, there is some interpretation needed, if only because not all languages have words for every word and others have many different words for a single word. One example is the Greek word *kurios*, which is translated "Lord" in most Bibles and can mean "lord" as in "master," it can mean "sir" and it can mean Lord as in G-D. One Greek word, three different translations, which require interpretation in order to accurately portray the writer's meaning. An example would be the woman at the well in John 4:11.

(All of the verses I will be using in this article will be from the King James Version.)

"The woman saith unto him, Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then hast thou that living water?" (John 4:11).

In this verse, the word "Sir" is translated from the word *kurios*, while in John 20:28 we see the same word translated as "Lord": "And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God."

These two verses show the same Greek word translated two different ways because of interpretation. In John 4:11, the woman clearly isn't calling Yeshua "Lord." She has no idea who

He is at the time, and we know that because Yeshua actually says to her in verse 10: "Jesus answered and said unto her, 'If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.'"

But in John 20:28, it is clear that Thomas is proclaiming the deity of Yeshua as his Lord.

While some interpretation in translating Scripture is not only needed but important to help readers to understand the intention of the text, too much interpretation can actually do damage to the text and the intended meaning of the words that were written. This overinterpreting can cause the reader to come to invalid interpretations and unbalanced understandings.

Let me provide an example of this. Hebrews 8:13 says, "In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away."

You will notice that in the printed text of Hebrews 8:13 there are two words that are in italics, "covenant" and "is." The reason they are in italics is to identify to the reader that these two words are not in the actual Greek manuscript. These two words were added by the translators to assist the reader in understanding the text. This isn't a problem with adding the word "is" because doing so does not change the meaning of the text. However, adding the word "covenant" does change the context and adding that word will cause the reader to come to a different conclusion than the original language presents.

Let me explain in the book of Hebrews the writer begins in Chapter 4 a discussion of the role of Yeshua as high priest, which continues through Chapter 10. In these chapters, we are told that Yeshua is a priest after the order of Melchizedek:

"Called of God an high priest after the order of Melchizedek" (Heb. 5:10).

“Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made a high priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek” (Heb. 6:20).

“If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, (for under it the people received the law,) what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchizedek, and not be called after the order of Aaron?” (Heb. 7:11).

Then in Hebrews 7:12, we find the first mention of something that is going to change, and the chapter begins to explain the difference between Yeshua as high priest and the Levitical priesthood: “For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law.”

Chapter 8 begins with these words, which continue the same topic that started in chapter 4.

“Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such a high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens” (Heb. 8:1).

Chapter 8 continues to describe the priestly ministry of Yeshua, and the chapter ends with verse 13. In the Greek manuscript, the word “covenant” isn’t in the text. That is because in context, that is decaying, waxing old and ready to vanish away, but this is not the covenant, it is the priesthood. Not convinced? Consider this, the book of Hebrews was writtensome 30-35 years after the death of Yeshua. If this verse is speaking Old Covenant/New Covenant then the New Covenant has not yet come into existence. But the Bible tells us in Hebrews 9:16-17.

“For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise, it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth” (Heb. 9:16-17).

Also consider Galatians 3:14-17:

That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; Though it be but a man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth, or addeth thereto. Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect.

Notice that we are told that when G-D makes a covenant it cannot be disannulled, and the example we are given is the Mosaic covenant coming after the Abrahamic covenant. Likewise, the New Covenant doesn't do away with the Old Covenant.

One more thing to consider is that Hebrews was written somewhere between A.D. 65 and 68, just before the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, and with that destruction, the priesthood vanished away.

So we see that in context, the book of Hebrews is speaking of the transition from the Aaronic priesthood to the priesthood of Messiah, a better priesthood. Yet by adding one word of interpretation to the text, the reader is led to a false conclusion that actually contradicts the teachings of the Bible. {eoa}

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