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*“Bridges Christian College exists to cultivate  
the hearts and minds of Spirit-empowered  
leaders for ministry where life and God  
connect.”*

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## Introduction to the Journal

The purpose of the Journal of Biblical Pentecostalism is to bless the church with pentecostal scholarship from the faculty of Bridges Christian College. One part of the journal is exegetical and the other part is more practical in nature. The rationale for such a broad scope is so that there will be literature for the biblical researcher and the ministerial practitioner.

### Mission of the Journal

The *Journal of Biblical Pentecostalism* presents biblical exegesis, ministerial training literature, and research of church history through a Pentecostal hermeneutic.

### Goals of the Journal

This Journal has the following goals.

1. To present exegesis of the Scriptures with a Pentecostal hermeneutic to help the church understand the Bible and its theological principles.
2. To demonstrate the unity of the Scriptures through intertextual interpretation of the Old Testament and New Testament.
3. To apply Scriptural principles to a Pentecostal, practical ministry environment.
4. To present research of the roots and traditions of the Pentecostal movement throughout church history.

### Journal Categories

This Journal will present articles that are separated into the following categories:

1. Biblical Theology
  - This category presents interpretation of the biblical text with a Pentecostal perspective. Various themes and theological principles in the Old and New Testaments will be presented.
  - This section is primarily focused on research on the biblical text.
2. Spirit-Empowered Ministry
  - This category presents articles that provide guidance in modern-day, Pentecostal ministry topics.
  - The biblical text, historical concerns, and Pentecostal doctrines are taken into consideration. The emphasis in this section is on application of the biblical principles to Pentecostal ministry.

# Biblical Theology

- The following section will present articles that exegete the biblical text with a Pentecostal perspective.
  - Various themes and theological principles in the Old and New Testaments will be presented.
  - This section is primarily focused on research of the biblical text.

**THE METHODOLOGICAL FAULTINESS OF THE PASSION  
TRANSLATION: EVIDENCE OF THE TRANSLATOR’S THEOLOGICAL  
IMPORTATIONS IN  
MATTHEW 6:9-13 AND LUKE 1:1-4**

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### 1. Introduction

Recently the Passion Translation has become popularized among Charismatic-Pentecostal circles. The lead translator is Brian Simmons. According to the website, “The Passion Translation is an *essential equivalence* translation. TPT maintains the essential form and essential function of the original words. It is a meaning-for-meaning translation, translating the essence of God’s original message and heart into modern English.”<sup>1</sup> Therefore, according to the previous statement, the text is a translation from the original languages. Moreover, the translation claims to use Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek manuscripts. According to the website:

*The Passion Translation* is not a revision or paraphrase of another existing version of the Bible. It is an entirely new, fresh translation using the original Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic documents. For the Old Testament, Dr. Simmons consulted the Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Bible and Aramaic texts, in conjunction with the Septuagint. A number of Hebrew texts were used, especially the edition known as Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (1977). For the New Testament, he used Novum Testamentum Graece, edited by Nestle and Aland (twenty-seventh edition, 1993) as his Greek base text from which to work, while incorporating insights from the Syriac (Aramaic) Peshitta.<sup>2</sup>

One should also note that the translator does not claim to be a paraphrase or revision but a “fresh translation using the original Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic documents.”<sup>3</sup>

This article addresses the question regarding if these claims are accurate. The claims will be examined via a case-study of the Lord’s Prayer pericope in Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 1:1-4. The following diagrams will show obvious differences between the Passion Translation and the average, modern Bible translation. It compares Matthew 6:9-13 in the Passion Translation and the New American Standard Bible.

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<sup>1</sup> “Translation Philosophy,” The Passion Translation, accessed August 11, 2020, <https://www.thepassiontranslation.com/translation-philosophy/>.

<sup>2</sup> “What textual source materials were used in composing The Passion Translation?” “FAQs,” The Passion Translation, accessed August 11, 2020, <https://www.thepassiontranslation.com/faqs/>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<p><sup>9</sup> Pray like this: ‘Our Father, dwelling in the heavenly realms, may the glory of your name be the center on which our lives turn. <sup>10</sup> Manifest your kingdom realm, and cause your every purpose to be fulfilled on earth, just as it is fulfilled in heaven. <sup>11</sup> We acknowledge you as our Provider of all we need each day. <sup>12</sup> Forgive us the wrongs we have done as we ourselves release forgiveness to those who have wronged us. <sup>13</sup> Rescue us every time we face tribulation and set us free from evil. For you are the King who rules with power and glory forever. Amen.’ (Matt. 6:9-13; TPT)</p>	<p><sup>9</sup> “Pray, then, in this way: ‘Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. <sup>10</sup> ‘Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. <sup>11</sup> ‘Give us this day our daily bread. <sup>12</sup> ‘And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. <sup>13</sup> ‘And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.’ (Matt. 6:9-13; NASB)</p>
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Figure 1

The next diagram compares Luke 1:1-4 in the Passion Translation and the New American Standard Bible.

<p>Dear friend, I am writing for you, mighty lover of God, an orderly account of what Jesus, the Anointed One, accomplished and fulfilled among us. Several eyewitness biographies have already been written, using as their source material the good news preached among us by his early disciples, who became loving servants of the Living Expression. But now I am passing on to you this accurate compilation of my own meticulous investigation based on numerous eyewitness interviews and thorough research of the story of his life. It is appropriate for me to write this, for he also appeared to me so that I would reassure you beyond any shadow of a doubt the reliability of all you have been taught of him (Luke 1:1-4; TPT).</p>	<p><sup>1</sup> Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, <sup>2</sup> just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, <sup>3</sup> it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write <i>it</i> out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; <sup>4</sup> so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught (Luke 1:1-4; NASB).</p>
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Figure 2

As one can see, every verse is significantly longer in the Passion Translation version. The translation differences lead to the following questions: How closely did the translation follow the Greek manuscripts? Are the supposed Aramaic manuscripts that this translation is based on really that different from the Greek ones? Is there even an Aramaic manuscript of Matthew?

### 1.1 Thesis Statement

First, I am thankful for the ministry of the lead translator of the Passion Translation (Brian Simmons)<sup>4</sup>. From what I know, he has been a faithful missionary who desires to see people to come into a relationship with the Lord. Moreover, I appreciate his passion for the gifts of the Spirit in the church and God’s Word. I especially appreciate his dedication to making God’s Word understandable to the masses. These are passions that I share with him.

However, his lack of skill and understanding of textual criticism, the biblical languages, and the biblical background are apparent in this translation. In addition, there is evidence that he imported his theological presuppositions into the text. Unfortunately, these factors make the Passion Translation unreliable for church use and doctrine.

Therefore, this article will prove the thesis that the translator of the Passion Translation imported his theological presuppositions into the biblical text, and by doing so, disregarded original manuscript documentation. This will be demonstrated by showing that (1) the translator went beyond the manuscript evidence, including the Syriac Peshitta, and imported his own words, (2) the translator portrays a poor understanding of the Greek language, and (3) the translator portrays a poor understanding of the cultural milieu of the New Testament.

## 1.2 Methodology and Outline

The following article will approach this topic by doing a textual analysis of Matthew 6:9-13 (The Lord’s Prayer) and Luke 1:1-4 as it relates to the Passion Translation. The original manuscripts were examined in the process of writing this article. In adding, the Greek New Testament (NA28)<sup>5</sup> and the Syriac Peshitta<sup>6</sup> was consulted as base texts to help with translation and syntax. Finally, the cultural background of the New Testament is another primary feature of this study.

The first section of this article will present an evaluation of the Passion translator’s manuscript sources. I will show that while the translator may have consulted the manuscripts, he went beyond the manuscript evidence regarding his additional Scripture verses. The words that he inserted are his own and not based on manuscript evidence. Finally, I will demonstrate the translator's lack of understanding of basic manuscripts by showing that he (1) claims that there is a Hebrew Matthew, and (2) went beyond the textual evidence of the Syriac Peshitta.

The second section of this article will present an analysis of the translator's knowledge of Greek syntax and Greek translation skills. This section will prove that the translator does not possess the expertise nor the linguistic skills to translate the New Testament, or much less, the Gospel of Matthew. Indeed, the section will demonstrate this deficiency by showing that the translator mistranslated basic Aramaic words.

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<sup>4</sup> Since it seems that the Passion Translation was primarily completed by one person, with the possible support of others, I will refer to the translator in this article in the singular and as “the Passion translator.” See “How many translators are working on The Passion Translation? Is this a single-author translation?” “FAQ’s,” The Passion Translation, accessed September 5, 2020, <https://www.thepassiontranslation.com/faqs/>.

<sup>5</sup> Kurt Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> I rely on an older edition of the Old Syriac and a translation of the Peshitta to defend my argument. However, the older versions will more than suffice to prove my point in section 2 of this article. I will use the following version of the Old Syriac as a basis: F. Crawford Burkitt trans., *Evangelion Da-Mepharreshe*, Vol. 1 (Cambridge, at the University Press, 1904). For the Syriac Peshitta, I rely on Murdock’s translation. See James Murdock, trans., *The Syriac New Testament: Translated into English from the Syriac Peshitto Version* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2001).

The final section will highlight the translator's lack of knowledge regarding the Biblical cultural context. Moreover, the section will highlight the translator's disregard for the New Testament's cultural milieu in his translation and his reliance on the Aramaic over Greek. His methodology did not consider that Aramaic and Greek were both prominent languages in first-century Palestine. This is demonstrated by the fact that, in many cases, Jewish intertestamental literature and tombs discovered by archeologists were written in Greek instead of Aramaic.<sup>7</sup>

## 2. The Passion Translator's Manuscript Sources

The Passion translator's importations into the biblical text have no manuscript basis in Aramaic or Greek. The following section will demonstrate the translator's lack of manuscript basis by showing that (1) his claim about the existence of a "Hebrew Matthew" is unfounded, (2) his claim that Luke was written in Aramaic is unfounded, and (3) his claim that he used insights from the Aramaic Peshitta, which is the Syriac Peshitta, is unfounded because he did not follow the original Syriac text.

### 2.1 The Missing "Hebrew Matthew" Manuscript

First, The Passion translator has a footnote in Matthew 6:11 and 6:13 that claims that the translator used a Hebrew Matthean text. Verse 11 in the Passion Translation reads, "We acknowledge you as our Provider of all we need each day."<sup>8</sup> The translator's footnote of this verse states, "Both the Greek and Hebrew Matthew can be translated 'Give us this day our bread for tomorrow.'<sup>9</sup> " Likewise, verse 13 reads, "For you are the King who rules with power and glory forever. Amen."<sup>10</sup> In a similar manner to verse 11, the footnote for verse 13 states, "As translated from the Aramaic, Hebrew Matthew, and most Greek manuscripts."<sup>11</sup> It is clear from both footnotes that the Passion translator claims access to a manuscript of Matthew in Hebrew or some sort of reconstructed text. This claim is very misleading for the reader, because a "Hebrew Matthew" manuscript that predates the Greek, to our knowledge, does not exist. Indeed, if it did exist, it would be a groundbreaking discovery. I am sure that the Passion translator did not intend to mislead the reader; however, these claims highlight lack of proper training in Biblical studies on his part and the other possible translators of the Passion Translation.

The scholarship is in general agreement that the earliest manuscripts of Matthew are in Greek. Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland stated, "There is no longer any doubt that Greek was the

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<sup>7</sup> Archeology has uncovered many tombs or ossuaries in Palestine, dating to the first century. Archeologists have discovered that "There are many ossuary inscriptions from Palestine, two thirds in Greek alone, one tenth in Hebrew (or Aramaic). Since sepulchral inscriptions probably best indicate the language of the common people, it is significant that the vast majority of those published are in Greek." See John E. Stambaugh and David L. Balch, *The New Testament in Its Social Environment*, ed., Wayne A. Meeks (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986), 87.

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 6:11, The Passion Translation, Bible Gateway, accessed August 26, 2020, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=matthew+6&version=TPT>.

<sup>9</sup> See Footnote "J," Matthew 6:11, The Passion Translation, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=matthew+6&version=TPT>.

<sup>10</sup> Matthew 6:13, The Passion Translation, Bible Gateway, accessed August 26, 2020, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=matthew+6&version=TPT>.

<sup>11</sup> See Footnote "N," Matthew 6:13, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=matthew+6&version=TPT>.

language in which all the parts of the New Testament were originally written, although Aramaic Christian texts may have circulated in the period before our Gospels (if an Aramaic tradition ever actually existed in a written and not merely an oral form).” One<sup>12</sup> must consider the point that although the Alands left room for the possibility of an Aramaic, or even Hebrew, manuscript, they still doubted its existence in written form; yet, it is without a doubt that the original Biblical manuscripts that we have access to were written in Greek.

This is proven by the fact that the earliest manuscripts that contain Matthew 6 are dated to the fourth century C.E.<sup>13</sup> These manuscripts are majuscules (early Greek script), and they are Codex Sinaiticus (GA 01),<sup>14</sup> Codex Vaticanus (GA 03),<sup>15</sup> and Codex Washingtonianus (GA 032),<sup>16</sup> and each of them are in Greek, not Hebrew. Also, the earliest papyrus<sup>17</sup> fragment of Matthew is P104 (second century), and it contains eight verses of Matthew chapter 21.<sup>18</sup> P104 is also in Greek and not in Hebrew.<sup>19</sup> Clearly, the Passion translator’s claim that he translated from “Hebrew Matthew” is unfounded since textual critics have not discovered a Hebrew manuscript.

The only evidence of a possible “Hebrew Matthew” is found in early church tradition. The early church historian, Eusebius (C.E. 265-339), stated, “Matthew also having first proclaimed the gospel in Hebrew, when on the point of going also to other nations, committed it to writing in his native tongue and thus supplied the want of his presence to them by his writings.”<sup>20</sup> Eusebius also quoted the early Christian Papias (C.E. 70-163) as having said, “Matthew composed his history in the Hebrew dialect, and everyone translated it as he was able.”<sup>21</sup> Even though this seems to indicate that there may have been a “Hebrew Matthew” text, the foundation for the evidence is brittle at best. Especially since there is no Hebrew text that scholars have discovered despite Eusebius’s comments. Moreover, the lack of such a text would make it difficult to determine the Hebrew syntax in which the text was written if one attempted a reconstruction from Greek into Hebrew. Thus, one would have to assume what the text looked like, which would err on the side of baseless assumptions. Also, based on what the the Passion translation’s rendering of the Greek, it seems that a reconstruction from Greek into Hebrew would be beyond the scope of the Passion translator’s skill level. It is safer and more accurate to rely on the Greek texts that we actually have.

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<sup>12</sup> Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament: An Introduction to the Critical Editions and to the Theory and Practice of Modern Textual Criticism*, Trans., Erroll F. Rhodes (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1987), 52.

<sup>13</sup> “Manuscript Search,” “Matthew 6,” The Center for the Study of New Testament Manuscripts, accessed August 26, 2020, <http://www.csntm.org/Manuscript>.

<sup>14</sup> Matthew 6:1, Codex Sinaiticus, The Center for the Study of New Testament Manuscripts, accessed August 26, 2020, [http://www.csntm.org/manuscript/View/GA\\_01?filter=1&OSIS=Matt.6.1](http://www.csntm.org/manuscript/View/GA_01?filter=1&OSIS=Matt.6.1).

<sup>15</sup> Matthew 6:1, Codex Vaticanus, The Center for the Study of New Testament Manuscripts, accessed August 26, 2020, [http://www.csntm.org/manuscript/View/GA\\_03?filter=1&OSIS=Matt.6.1](http://www.csntm.org/manuscript/View/GA_03?filter=1&OSIS=Matt.6.1).

<sup>16</sup> Matthew 6:1, Codex Washingtonianus, The Center for the Study of New Testament Manuscripts, accessed August 26, 2020, [http://www.csntm.org/manuscript/View/GA\\_032?filter=1&OSIS=Matt.6.1](http://www.csntm.org/manuscript/View/GA_032?filter=1&OSIS=Matt.6.1).

<sup>17</sup> The earliest New Testament Greek manuscripts were written on a papyrus material.

<sup>18</sup> D. C. Parker, *An Introduction to the New Testament Manuscripts and Their Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 318.

<sup>19</sup> P104, Matthew 21:34-37; 43-45, Institut Für Neutestamentliche Textforschung, accessed August 26, 2020, <http://ntvnr.uni-muenster.de/manuscript-workspace?docID=10104>.

<sup>20</sup> Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book 3, trans. C. F. Cruse (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 89.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

Therefore, it is evident that the Passion translator is making assumptions that are not grounded in fact. My concern is that these footnotes could mislead the average reader who is unaware of the manuscript evidence, and they could unwittingly believe that a Hebrew text exists. It is not that one never existed, but to our knowledge, Matthew's Greek text is the earliest manuscript, and it is a responsible practice in textual criticism to consider the earliest manuscript as a base text for a translation.

## 2.2 Luke's Original Manuscript

As in the case of "Hebrew Matthew," the Passion translator once again makes an indefensible claim in a footnote of his translation. The translator adds unique Scripture to Luke's prologue (Luke 1:1-4). The text reads:

I am writing for you, mighty lover of God, an orderly account of what Jesus, the Anointed One, accomplished and fulfilled among us. Several eyewitness biographies have already been written, using as their source material the good news preached among us by his early disciples, who became loving servants of the Living Expression. But now I am passing on to you this accurate compilation of my own meticulous investigation based on numerous eyewitness interviews and thorough research of the story of his life. It is appropriate for me to write this, for he also appeared to me so that I would reassure you beyond any shadow of a doubt the reliability of all you have been taught of him.<sup>22</sup>

The claim that Luke had a revelatory encounter with Jesus at the end of verse 4 is quite shocking. When compared with the average modern-day translation (see Luke 1:1-4 diagram comparison above), one will see that this additional information does not exist in the majority. Once again, we are faced with the issue of finding the textual sources that the Passion translator used to translate the text this way.

The Passion translator claims the following in a footnote of v. 4, "Translated literally from the Aramaic text. The Greek text uses the same term for 'coming from above' found in John 3:31 and 19:11. Luke is revealing that the Lord Jesus appeared to him and authorized him to compile his inspired Gospel."<sup>23</sup> This claim leaves the impression that Luke initially composed his Gospel in Aramaic. There is no evidence for this. In fact, Luke's prologue contains some of the best Greek in the entire New Testament. James R. Edwards states, "Luke prefaces his Gospel with a formal introduction composed in the best Greek in the NT, which differs perceptibly from the language and style of the remainder of his Gospel. Luke's introductory dedication bears similarities to introductions of other academic Hellenistic works, especially in history and science."<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Luke 1:1-4, The Passion Translation, Bible Gateway, accessed August 26, 2020, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=luke+1&version=TPT>.

<sup>23</sup> See Footnote "E," Luke 1:1-4, The Passion Translation, accessed September 1, 2020, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=luke+1&version=TPT>.

<sup>24</sup> James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2015), 23, <http://www.questia.com/read/126367603/the-gospel-according-to-luke>.

The earliest manuscripts of Luke are in Greek and not in Aramaic. P4 is one of the earliest manuscripts of Luke that dates to the third century, respectively.<sup>25</sup> When one examines P4, he or she will see that it is in Greek, not Aramaic.<sup>26</sup> No Aramaic New Testament manuscript of Luke predates the Greek ones, according to scholarship.

Finally, the scholarship is in general agreement that, at the moment, the most valuable manuscripts for translation are the Greek ones due to they being the earliest attestation to the original text. Roger Omanson and Bruce Metzger explain that the three sources for reconstructing the original text into English are (1) the Greek manuscripts, (2) Latin and Syriac translations from the Greek text in the second and third centuries, and (3) the testimony of early church fathers who quoted the texts.<sup>27</sup> However, they explain that out of the three sources, “The most important are the Greek manuscripts themselves.”<sup>28</sup>

Therefore, it is evident that the earliest manuscripts of Luke are not in Aramaic. However, there remains the question of the Passion translator's use of the Syriac Peshitta, since he claims that he used insights from the “Syriac (Aramaic) Peshitta.”<sup>29</sup> The next section will examine those claims further.

### 2.3 Matthew and Luke According to the Syriac Peshitta

The Greek manuscripts were translated into the Syriac and Coptic language in the late second century C.E.<sup>30</sup> The Old Syriac was the earliest, and it was probably prepared around the close of the second century.<sup>31</sup> The Syriac Peshitta was probably prepared, according to Metzger, around the start of the fifth century.<sup>32</sup> Interestingly, the Peshitta only contains 22 books of the New Testament, leaving 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude, and Revelation untranslated from the Greek.<sup>33</sup> This was probably due to canonical issues, but we do not have the space in this article to address that. However, I am curious as to how the Passion translator rendered Revelation with insight from the Peshitta if it did not contain that book? In either case, I will show in the following section that the Passion translator portrays a poor understanding of the Aramaic and Syriac language due to translation errors. Moreover, I will also demonstrate that he went beyond the Syriac text to insert his thoughts into Luke, which are not found in the Peshitta.

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<sup>25</sup> Parker, *An Introduction to the New Testament Manuscripts and Their Texts*, 321.

<sup>26</sup> P4, Luke 1:58-60, 62-75, 75-80; 2:1, 6-7; 3:8-20, 20-38; 4:1-2, 29-32-34-35; 5:3-8, 30-39, 6:1-4, 4-16, Institut Für Neutestamentliche Textforschung, accessed September 1, 2020, <http://ntvmr.uni-muenster.de/manuscript-workspace?docID=10004>.

<sup>27</sup> Roger L. Omanson and Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament: An Adaptation of Bruce M. Metzger's Textual Commentary for the Needs of Translators* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), xii.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> “FAQs,” The Passion Translation, accessed August 11, 2020, <https://www.thepassiontranslation.com/faqs/>.

<sup>30</sup> Aland and Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, 52.

<sup>31</sup> Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 69, <http://www.questia.com/read/90273144/the-text-of-the-new-testament-its-transmission-corruption>.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

The following diagrams will provide a comparison of Matthew 6:9-13 in a translation of the Syriac Peshitta and the same passage in the Passion Translation. The bracketed words are bolded for emphasis.

<p>9 In this manner, therefore, pray ye: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name: 10 Thy kingdom come: They will be done; as in heaven, so on earth: 11 Give us our needful bread, this day: 12 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors: 13 And bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, 14 and the glory, for ever and ever: Amen (Matt. 6:9-14; Syriac Peshitta).<sup>34</sup></p>	<p>9 Pray like this: ‘Our Father, dwelling in the heavenly realms, may the glory of your name <b>[be the center on which our lives turn]</b>.<sup>10</sup> Manifest your kingdom realm, and cause your every purpose to be fulfilled on earth, just as it is fulfilled in heaven.<sup>11</sup> We acknowledge you as our Provider of all we need each day.<sup>12</sup> Forgive us the wrongs we have done as we ourselves release forgiveness to those who have wronged us.<sup>13</sup> Rescue us every time we face tribulation and set us free from evil. For you are the King who rules with power and glory forever. Amen’ (Matt. 6:9-13; TPT).</p>
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Figure 3

The diagram illustrates that the phrase “be the center on which our lives turn” is an additional thought and phrase that is not present in the Syriac Peshitta. The thought could be implied, but it is not present in the text. I will address the Greek text in section 3.1.

The next diagrams will compare Luke 1:1-4 a translation of the Syriac Peshitta with the same passage in the Passion Translation. Once again, bracketed words are bolded to highlight the additions by the Passion translator.

<sup>34</sup> James Murdock, trans., *The Syriac New Testament: Translated into English from the Syriac Peshitto Version* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2001), Matthew 6:9-14.

<p>1 Since many have been disposed to write narratives of those events, of which we have full assurance, 2 as they delivered them to us, who from the first were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word; 3 it seemed proper for me also, as I had examined them all accurately, to write out the whole, methodically, for thee, excellent Theophilus: 4 that thou mayest know the truth of the statements, which thou hast been taught (Luke 1:1-4; Syriac Peshitta).<sup>35</sup></p>	<p>Dear friend, I am writing for you, mighty lover of God, an orderly account of what Jesus, the Anointed One, accomplished and fulfilled among us. Several eyewitness biographies have already been written, using as their source material the good news preached among us by his early disciples, who became loving servants of the Living Expression. But now I am passing on to you this accurate compilation of my own meticulous investigation based on numerous eyewitness interviews and thorough research of the story of his life. <b>[It is appropriate for me to write this, for he also appeared to me so that I would reassure you beyond any shadow of a doubt the reliability of all you have been taught of him]</b> (Luke 1:1-4; TPT).</p>
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Figure 4

The additions in the Passion Translation for Luke 1:1-4 is quite startling. Indeed it is claiming that Luke had a revelatory experience with Jesus. I will address this in more detail in section 3.3, but for now, one can see that the addition is not reflected in the Syriac Peshitta. Therefore, the Passion translator is clearly importing his own theological presuppositions into Scripture. In the case of Luke's prologue, the addition introduces historical information about Luke that, for some reason, is not present in manuscripts nor translations dating to the Syriac Peshitta.

It seems that the Passion translator added text that is not represented by the Syriac Peshitta. Also, he made some basic Aramaic translation mistakes. In either case, the translator's claim to reliance on the Syriac Peshitta is moot since he imported additional Scriptures and thoughts outside of the scope of the Peshitta. Now we turn to the Passion translator's rendering of the Greek text.

### 3. The Passion Translator's Greek Rendering

The Passion translator portrays a poor understanding of Greek translation and syntax in the Passion Translation. I will demonstrate that, as in the case of the Syriac Peshitta, the Passion translator also disregarded Greek syntax and contextual considerations when he rendered the text. Namely, he added additional material that is not represented by the Greek text. I will prove this by a presentation of the Passion translator's rendering of (1) the last clause of Matthew 6:9, (2) the Passion translator's rendering of  $\sigma\alpha\mu\alpha$  (*šā-mā*) in Matthew 6:9, and (3) his rendering of  $\alpha\nu\omega\theta\epsilon\nu$  (*anōthen*) in Luke 1:3.

#### 3.1 The Last Clause of Matthew 6:9

<sup>35</sup> James Murdock, trans., *The Syriac New Testament: Translated into English from the Syriac Peshitto Version* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2001), Luke 1:1-4.

The Passion translator went beyond the Greek text in his translation of Matthew 6:9. This is especially seen in the last clause. Other parts of the translation are not exactly accurate, but I will mainly address the last clause. The following section will show that the Greek text does not represent this rendition.

The following passage is Matthew 6:9 from the NA28 Greek edition, along with my translation underneath the Greek text. The table on the right will show the additions made by the Passion translator. All of the words in brackets are his additions that are not found in the Greek, and the ones that I want to highlight in this article.

<p>Πάτερ ἡμῶν ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς.<sup>36</sup>  ἀγιασθήτω τὸ ὄνομά σου.<sup>37</sup></p> <p>“Our Father, who is in the heavens, hallowed is your name.”<sup>38</sup></p>	<p>The Passion translator renders Matthew 6:9 as the following, “Our Father, <b>[dwelling]</b> in the heavenly realms, may the glory of your name <b>[be the center on which our lives turn]</b>” (TPT).<sup>39</sup></p>
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Figure 5

The Passion translator’s addition of “dwelling” is not as concerning as “be the center on which our lives turn.” This is an additional thought that Jesus had not expressed. The act of hallowing the Lord’s name in this context was relevant for the present-day hearers, but the emphasis is placed on revering the Lord’s name as higher than all other names.<sup>40</sup> Craig Keener explains, “Hallowing God’s name was the ‘most characteristic feature of Jewish ethics,’ along with its opposite, profaning the name.”<sup>41</sup> The Passion translator’s addition seems to draw attention away from the fundamental concept of honoring the Lord for who he is and its eschatological orientation that looks to the return of Jesus.<sup>42</sup>

This orientation of honoring God’s name is also illustrated by the ancient Aramaic Jewish prayer, the *Qaddish*.<sup>43</sup> No one is exactly sure how old the prayer is, but it may have undergirded the prayer of Jesus.<sup>44</sup> One German translation of this particular prayer based on the Cairo Geniza text. The translation reads: “Groß und geheiligt sei sein großer Name!”<sup>45</sup> Or “Great and holy is

<sup>36</sup> The Didache and the middle Egyptian tradition has a textual variant with an alternative that makes “heaven” singular rather than plural. It is of no consequence for this article.

<sup>37</sup> Kurt Aland et al., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th Edition (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012), Mt 6:9.

<sup>38</sup> My translation.

<sup>39</sup> Matthew 6:9, The Passion Translation, Bible Gateway, accessed September 3, 2020, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=matthew+6%3A9&version=TPT>.

<sup>40</sup> Craig Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 219.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution*, Second Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 104.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Andreas Lehnardt, *Qaddish: Untersuchungen zur Entstehung and Rezeption eines rabbinischen Gebetes* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 2002), 23.

his name!”<sup>46</sup> The point is that the Passion translator is introducing ideas that are not present in the Greek text, nor are they even present in Jewish thought. Indeed, many Jews in Jesus’ day understood the importance of honoring God’s name and not profaning it. Craig Blomberg states, “Close parallels appear in the standard Jewish Kaddish prayer and remind us that many Jews were not guilty of the hypocrisy warned against here.”<sup>47</sup>

The insertion of “be the center on which our lives turn” seems to muddy the meaning of what the text is supposed to convey. Honoring the Lord, no doubt, involves our very lives, but the first part of the Lord’s prayer emphasizes worship directed to God because of His glorious nature. In other words, the emphasis here is on the magnificence of the Lord’s name and not the life of the worshiper. Not only that, but as far as the textual evidence is concerned, Jesus never said, “be the center on which our lives turn.” C. Clifton Black summarizes the point nicely when he explains, “In the Bible one’s name is no mere label but the repository of one’s peculiar essence (Gen 2:19, Gen 32:28). In Ezekiel, God ‘hallows’ the divine name—sets it apart, consecrates it, sanctifies it—to demonstrate supreme divinity over all other gods and authorities: that “ ‘the nations shall know that I am the Lord (Ezek 36:22-27).’<sup>48</sup> ”

Therefore, the Passion translator seems to lack skill with translating Aramaic and Hebrew terminology. In the following section, we will see that the translator misappropriated the Hebrew word for “name” in Matthew 6:9 to make his case for his addition to the text.

### 3.2 ܫܡܐ (šā-mā) in Matthew 6:9

In the footnote of Matthew 6:9, the Passion Translator incorrectly confused Hebrew and Aramaic terminology. This will be shown by presenting the proper translations of the Aramaic and Hebrew nouns for “name.”

Regarding the term “name,” the Passion Translator states the following in a footnote of Matthew 6:9:

An alternate reading of the Aramaic text. The Aramaic word for “name” is *shema* (the Hebrew word, *shem*), a word with multiple meanings. It can also be translated “light,” “sound,” or “atmosphere.” Placing a light, like a lantern, in an enclosed space magnifies that light. This is the meaning here of God’s name being made sacred and magnified as we focus our lives on him. The Greek is “treated as holy.”<sup>49</sup>

The issue with this footnote is that *shema* (ܫܡܐ) is not the Aramaic word for “name.” Rather, it is the Hebrew verb for “hear” or “obey.”<sup>50</sup> According to *The Theological Wordbook of the Old*

<sup>46</sup> My translation.

<sup>47</sup> Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, vol. 22, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 118–119.

<sup>48</sup> C. Clifton Black, “The Lord’s Prayer (Matt 6:9-13/Luke 11:2-4),” Bible Odyssey, accessed September 5, 2020, <http://www.bibleodyssey.org/passages/main-articles/lords-prayer>.

<sup>49</sup> See Footnote “A,” Matthew 6:9, The Passion Translation, Bible Gateway, accessed September 4, 2020, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=matthew+6%3A9&version=TPT>.

<sup>50</sup> R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, Volume 1 (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), 2412.

*Testament*, the basic meaning of *shema* (שמע) “is that of perceiving a message or merely a sound.”<sup>51</sup> The idea of *shema* being understood as “light” is curious and not found in this dictionary (TWOT) nor the BDB.<sup>52</sup> The *Shema* (שמע) in Judaism is a part of their covenantal creed in Deuteronomy 6:4-9, and it begins with the command to “Hear” or *shema* (שמע)!<sup>53</sup> The exhortation is for Israel to hear the words or commands of the Lord. There is no discussion regarding “light.”

The translator is correct that the Hebrew noun for “name” is *shem* (שם). Where the translation is incorrect is the rendering of the Aramaic word for “name.” The Aramaic noun for “name” is similar to Hebrew, since it is its close cousin, and it is *šūm* (ܫܘܡ). The difference between the Hebrew and Aramaic noun is the vowel underneath the *š*. However, both nouns mean the same thing, “name.”

I am unsure if the misappropriation of *shema* was a typo, but it is not the Aramaic word for “name.” Yet, this error is not as shocking as the one committed in the following section where I address ἄνωθεν in Luke 1:3.

### 3.3 ἄνωθεν (*anōthen*) in Luke 1:3

The addition to Luke's prologue that suggests that Luke had a revelation of Jesus to authorize him to do a translation is considerably shocking. As a reminder, the following is the addition by the Passion Translator that is not present in the Syriac nor Greek: “It is appropriate for me to write this, for he (Jesus) also appeared to me so that I would reassure you beyond any shadow of a doubt the reliability of all you have been taught of him.” This is a claim that has no basis in fact. This is not to say that Jesus did not appear to Luke, but there is no evidence in Scripture that confirms this revelatory meeting. Moreover, this also does not take away from the fact that Luke's Gospel is inspired by the Holy Spirit (2 Tim. 3:16), but once again, the issue at hand is whether this event happened in the way that the Passion translator is making it seem.

Thus, this section will demonstrate that the Passion translator added this information because of his mistranslation of one Greek word in Luke 1:3, ἄνωθεν. Moreover, he mistranslated the word based on a lack of understanding regarding the importance of contextual influence on Greek translation.

According to the Passion translator, the word ἄνωθεν should be rendered “from above” in Luke 1:3. In a footnote of verse 3, he argues, “The Greek text uses the same term for ‘coming from above’ found in John 3:31 and 19:11. Luke is revealing that the Lord Jesus appeared to him and authorized him to compile his inspired Gospel.”<sup>54</sup> It is correct that ἄνωθεν is rendered as “from above” in John 3:31 and 19:11, yet, Greek terminology is always defined by its immediate

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 1033.

<sup>53</sup> Shaye J. D. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, Second Edition (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 75.

<sup>54</sup> See Footnote “E,” Luke 1:1-4, The Passion Translation, accessed September 1, 2020, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=luke+1&version=TPT>.

context. Just because it can be rendered one way in John does not necessarily require that it have the same meaning in another passage. One may also translate ἄνωθεν as “from the beginning.”<sup>55</sup>

In Luke’s prologue, it is consistent with the rest of his work to render ἄνωθεν as “from the beginning.” This is due to the fact that Luke is explaining the process whereby he obtained his information concerning Jesus. I. Howard Marshall comments:

Luke means that he has thoroughly investigated all the facts (πᾶσιν) in the light of the available evidence. This claim is qualified by two adverbs. ἄνωθεν (Acts 26:5) can mean ‘from the beginning’ or simply ‘for a long time’. It may refer, therefore, to the scope of Luke’s investigation (stretching back beyond the ‘beginning’ of Jesus’ ministry (1:2) to the birth stories), but more probably it refers to Luke’s lengthy researches.<sup>56</sup>

To further illustrate this key linguistic point, ἄνωθεν is also used by Luke in Acts 26:5, where the context is determining that the word should be understood as a period of time and not “from above.” In Acts 26:5, Paul stated, “since they have known about me for a long time (ἄνωθεν), if they are willing to testify, that I lived *as* a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of our religion” (NASB). Robert Stein also explains, “The adverb *anōthen* goes with ‘have investigated’ and can be translated either ‘for some time past,’ indicating the length or duration of his research, or ‘from the beginning,’ which would designate the extent of Luke’s research.”<sup>57</sup> Likewise, Walter L. Liefeld explains that ἄνωθεν in Luke’s prologue, “Here in its relation to historical research, it has a temporal sense.”<sup>58</sup>

Another important note of literary context is that the adverb ἄνωθεν relates to the preceding phrase ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς (“from the beginning”) in Luke 1:2.<sup>59</sup> The Greek text reads “ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς αὐτόπται καὶ ὑπηρέται γενόμενοι τοῦ λόγου, 3 ἔδοξεν καὶ μοι παρηκολουθηκῶτι ἄνωθεν.”<sup>60</sup> It will be important to pay attention to the underlined words to see how they are arranged contextually.

The only other time in Lukan writing that this type of literary arrangement takes place is, once again, in Acts 26:4-5. The text in the Greek is “τὴν ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς γενομένην ἐν τῷ ἔθνει μου ἐν τε Ἱεροσολύμοις ἴσασι πάντες [οἱ] Ἰουδαῖοι 5 προγιγνώσκοντές με ἄνωθεν.”<sup>61</sup> This is at Paul’s defense before King Agrippa where he states, “4 ‘So then, all Jews know my manner of life from my youth up, which from the beginning (ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς) was spent among my *own* nation and at Jerusalem; 5 since they have known about me for a long time (ἄνωθεν)” (NASB).

<sup>55</sup> William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 92.

<sup>56</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1978), 42–43.

<sup>57</sup> Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 65.

<sup>58</sup> Walter L. Liefeld, “Luke,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Volume 8*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 822.

<sup>59</sup> Stein, *Luke*, 65.

<sup>60</sup> Kurt Aland et al., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th Edition (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012), Lk 1:2–3.

<sup>61</sup> Kurt Aland et al., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th Edition (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012), Ac 26:4–5.

The correct way to translate Luke 1:3, based on the Greek context, is “it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write *it* out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus” (NASB).

Thus, the Greek literary context in the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts indicates that “from the beginning” or a passage of time is the intended meaning when ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς precedes ἄνωθεν in the text. However, I caution the reader to recognize that this particular literary arrangement is germane to Luke’s material, and it may not be the case in other places of the New Testament. My area of expertise is in the Synoptic Gospels and, more specifically, Matthew, so I will not attempt to make an overarching statement that argues for this literary meaning in every area of the New Testament. Indeed, the different New Testament authors have different Greek nuances. Context always determines meaning and interpretation. So the context of Lukan material reveals the nature of what he means when he uses ἄνωθεν. The Passion translator's mistake is that he assumed that John’s Greek is the same as Luke's. In fact, for the sake of argument, ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς does not precede ἄνωθεν in John 3:31 and 19:11; thus highlighting the different literary arrangement in John and Luke’s Gospels.

This proves that it is crucial to understand the principles of biblical literary context and Greek syntax. It is evident that the Passion translator disregarded such considerations, and as a result, introduced an entirely new thought into the biblical text that has been absent from many, if not all, modern translations. I at least find that the additions to Luke 1:1-4 in the Passion Translation are not in the New American Standard Bible, New International Version, English Standard Version, and the King James Version.

Therefore, this section has demonstrated that not only did the Passion Translation go beyond the original Greek, but it disregarded contextual principles that determine the meanings of the words in the text. Clearly, if there is no textual or exegetical basis for the insertions of thoughts, then this is evidence that the Passion translator imported personal theological presuppositions into the biblical text. We call this eisegesis in hermeneutical terms.

#### **4. The Passion Translator’s Consideration of Biblical Background**

The Passion translator evidently did not consider the cultural milieu of the New Testament in his translation. One example outside of the Gospels is found where the Passion translator renders Revelation 1:8 as “I am the Aleph and the Tav.”<sup>62</sup> This contrasts with how translators usually render the text “I am the Alpha and the Omega” (NASB). The Passion translator chose to use the first and last consonants of the Hebrew alphabet rather than following how the text was actually written, that being the first and last consonants of the Greek. The issue with this translation decision is that it assumes that people in Asia Minor (the recipients of the Book of Revelation) spoke Hebrew more often than Greek. Of course, the cultural context implies that the Book of Revelation was written to Greek speakers. Craig Keener explains:

Although Jesus spoke Aramaic, that was not the language of Jews in Asia Minor, Greece or Rome, areas to which most of the New Testament is addressed. It is not the language of our

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<sup>62</sup> Revelation 1:8, The Passion Translation, Bible Gateway, accessed September 1, 2020, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=revelation+1&version=TPT>.

Greek New Testament (with a few snippets of Aramaic words or phrases here and there), which Christians take to be canonical. Scholars are virtually unanimous on these points because a massive quantity of inscriptions, graffiti and other sources from antiquity renders them beyond dispute.<sup>63</sup>

Granted, while the choice to use Hebrew or Aramaic consonants instead of the original Greek is strange, it still conveys the same meaning; thus, it seems that there is no harm done doctrinally. However, the Passion translator's change presents another opportunity for the untrained and uninformed reader to come under the impression that Revelation was originally written in Hebrew or Aramaic or primarily written to Hebrew and Aramaic speakers. Unfortunately, this assumption is not true nor accurate regarding the background context of Revelation's audience. Indeed, it is highly unlikely that a Hebrew or Aramaic manuscript circulated among the first-century churches of Asia Minor, where cities like Ephesus and Pergamum were known for their Hellenistic influence.<sup>64</sup> John Stambaugh and David Balch explain, "In the Greek world, Jews spoke Greek like everybody else... Papyri found in Egypt and Jewish inscriptions found throughout the empire also make it clear that the Diaspora Jews used Greek for nearly all communications, personal and official."<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, Wayne Meeks states, "It is no accident that all the documents of the New Testament and virtually all other extant writings from the first two centuries of Christianity were written in Greek."<sup>66</sup> Later, when Christianity spread from Greco-Roman cities into the villages, the New Testament would have to be translated from Greek into Aramaic and Syriac, resulting in the Peshitta.<sup>67</sup>

This type of misinformation in the Passion Translation is not okay to promote to biblical readers. Once again, I am sure that this misinformation is not intentional, but it is another example of inexperience in Biblical studies on the Passion translator's part. Personally, I prefer to know what the biblical text said and what type of cultural nuances (when Scripture highlights nuances such as this one) were relevant to its original audience.

While Revelation 1:8 may not present significant doctrinal or factual challenges, the Passion translator's additions to Luke 1:1-4 do. This harkens back to the previous section's points concerning how the Passion Translation handles Luke's Greek text. Therefore, the following section will show that the Passion translator's premise that Luke was written in Aramaic completely disregards the background context of his Gospel, which was written in Greek for a Gentile audience. The final section will explain that the Greek language was the dominant trade language in the first-century Mediterranean world, and thus, it makes sense that Luke would have written in Greek.

#### 4.1 Luke's Aramaic or Greek Audience?

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<sup>63</sup> Craig Keener, "Brief Comments on the Passion Translation," Bible Background: Research and Commentary from Dr. Craig Keener, accessed September 1, 2020, <https://craigkeener.com/brief-comments-on-the-passion-translation/>.

<sup>64</sup> Bo Reicke, *The New Testament Era: The World of the Bible from 500 B.C. to A.D. 100* Trans., David E. Green (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), 37-41.

<sup>65</sup> Stambaugh and Balch, *The New Testament in Its Social Environment*, 50.

<sup>66</sup> Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 15.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

Luke, more than likely composed his Gospel for a Gentile, Greek-speaking audience.<sup>68</sup> The following examples demonstrate this. Luke explains that the “Festival of Unleavened Bread” is called the “Passover” (Lk. 22:1).<sup>69</sup> Luke substitutes “lawyer” (Lk. 11:52 NASB) for Matthew’s “scribe” (Matt. 23:13).<sup>70</sup> Finally, Luke’s genealogy (Lk. 3:23-37) goes all the way back to Adam instead of Abraham (Matt. 1:1-17) to demonstrate that the Gospel is for the whole world, not just Israel.<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, regarding the recipients of Luke’s Gospel, I. Howard Marshall states, “That he wrote for an urban church community in the Hellenistic world is fairly certain.”<sup>72</sup> Joel B. Green explains that the audience of Luke’s Gospel “would have included followers of Jesus who were Greek-speaking Jews, Gentiles and God-fearers.”<sup>73</sup> These Greek-speaking Jews were more than likely familiar with the Greek version of the Old Testament Scriptures.<sup>74</sup>

It is also likely that Luke’s audience was Greek because he accompanied Paul on his journey to Rome (Acts 20:7-28:16). Luke is also mentioned as a companion of Paul’s in Colossians 4:14 when he wrote that epistle. N. T. Wright argues that Paul probably wrote this letter from Ephesus.<sup>75</sup> Another suggestion is that Paul wrote Colossians from an imprisonment in Rome.<sup>76</sup> Either way, this would mean that Luke was more inclined to a Greek-speaking audience than a strictly Aramaic one.

#### 4.2 Greek in First-Century Palestine

While Aramaic was undoubtedly spoken often in first-century Palestine, there is no doubt that Greek was the primary trade or business language. Archeological discoveries and historical data have made this evident.

Everett Ferguson explains, “Although Palestine was multilingual in the first century – Greek, various Aramaic dialects, Hebrew, and some Latin – Greek was clearly the language of choice in order to disseminate a message as widely as possible. Therefore, all the New Testament was written entirely in Greek.”<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, the fact that much of the Jewish literature for first-century Palestine had to be translated into Greek indicates that the vernacular of the people required Greek translations. For example, the second century B.C.E. apocryphal work, First Maccabees, had to be translated into Greek.<sup>78</sup> *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, a work written in Hebrew

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<sup>68</sup> Gary M. Burge, Lynn H. Cohick, and Gene L. Green, *The New Testament in Antiquity: A Survey of the New Testament Within Its Cultural Contexts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 196.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 197.

<sup>72</sup> Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 33.

<sup>73</sup> Joel B. Green, “Gospel of Luke,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, Second Edition, ed. Joel B. Green (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 550.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> N. T. Wright, *Colossians and Philemon: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 12, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 38

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>77</sup> Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, Third Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 135-136.

<sup>78</sup> Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, 31.

by a Jewish sage around 200 B.C.E, was also translated into Greek by the first century C.E.<sup>79</sup> Flavius Josephus (C.E. 37-100) composed his works, *The Antiquities of the Jews* and *The Jewish War*, in Greek.<sup>80</sup> According to Shaye J. D. Cohen, there is also evidence that a fresh Greek translation of the Old Testament was in production in Qumran<sup>81</sup> by the first century C.E.<sup>82</sup> The point is that while Aramaic was a prominent language in first-century Palestine, the existence of Greek translations at least proves the point that there were many Greek-speaking Jews in first-century Palestine.

The biblical evidence also points out that there were Jews who spoke Greek, not only in the diaspora (Gentile world) but in Palestine. This is shown in John 19:19-20, where the *titulus* above Jesus' head on the cross was written in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek. The text states, "19 Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It was written, 'JESUS THE NAZARENE, THE KING OF THE JEWS.' 20 Therefore many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, Latin and in Greek" (NASB). The text reveals that there were multiple languages in first-century Palestine. In addition, while the Jews certainly spoke Hebrew, Greek was also popular in Galilee, according to D. A. Carson.<sup>83</sup>

Likewise, while Jesus primarily spoke Aramaic, there is a plausibility that he spoke Greek. The area where Jesus grew up, Nazareth, was on the same trade route as a very Greek city, Sepphoris.<sup>84</sup> It is possible that Jesus became acquainted with the Greek language. In addition, there were many situations in the New Testament where Jesus possibly conversed with someone in Greek. For example: (1) Jesus had a conversation with a centurion (Matt 8:5-13), (2) Jesus had a conversation with a Samaritan woman (John 4:4-26), (3) Jesus had a conversation with a Canaanite woman (Matt 15:21-28), and (4) Jesus had a conversation with Pilate (Matt 27:11-14; Luke 23:2-4; John 18:29-38).<sup>85</sup> All of these instances were situations where Jesus quite possibly had to speak Greek to converse with his Gentile contemporaries. If anything, there is evidence that society in Palestine was quite multilingual. Aramaic was probably used on a daily basis, Hebrew was used for religious worship, and Greek was used for business and trade.<sup>86</sup>

Therefore, the Passion translator incorrectly presupposed that Luke wrote his prologue (Luke 1:1-4) in Aramaic. On the contrary, Luke's prologue is well-known for having some of the best Greek in the entire New Testament. Aramaic was spoken in the first-century Mediterranean world, but the existence of Greek and the tremendous Hellenistic influence necessitated the production of the New Testament in the Greek language. Archeological and biblical evidence is

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Where the Essene community possibly lived, and where supposedly, the Dead Sea scrolls were maintained. See Florentino García Martínez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated: The Qumran Texts in English*, Second Edition, trans. Wilfred G. E. Watson (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), xxxii.

<sup>82</sup> Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, 31.

<sup>83</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: InterVarsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 610.

<sup>84</sup> Stanley E. Porter, "Greek of the New Testament," in *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, eds., Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 433.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> G. R. Stanton, "Hellenism," in *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, eds., Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 472.

hard to ignore. Thus, the Passion Translation requires more background research into the Mediterranean world's cultural milieu in the first century.

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this article argues that the Passion translator imported theological concepts not found in the original manuscripts or text, thereby committing eisegesis. This based on the following points: (1) the translator makes claims about the original manuscripts that could potentially mislead the readers, (2) the translator went beyond the Syriac Peshitta, (3) the translator went beyond the Greek text, (4) the translator did not correctly translate the Greek syntax nor take into consideration the biblical context, and (5) the translator did not take into consideration the background context of the original recipients of the New Testament.

As I inferred before, I am most comfortable with Matthew's Greek, and I would be greatly intimidated if I was going to attempt to translate the entire New Testament. Indeed, it takes scholars many years to master even one book of the New Testament. For that reason, I commend the Passion translator for his attempt. However, my research on the Passion Translation has led me to conclude that he lacks the skill and biblical training necessary to present a trustworthy translation.

There is nothing wrong with new translations, as long as they stay true to what the biblical writers initially said. In this case, I recommend that the Passion Translation undergo a reworking that involves scholars who truly understand the original languages and can keep individuals accountable to staying true to the original message of the Bible, rather than importing thoughts and ideas that were not original to Jesus nor the New Testament writers.

Regarding whether the church and the seminary should use the Passion Translation in its current state, my sentiments align with Craig Keener's, who states:

This pervasive dependence on Aramaic throughout makes the Passion Translation unreliable. It could be revised, with a great deal of effort, by going back through it and correcting any dependence on Aramaic by translating solely from the Greek text. Barring such revision, however, one cannot recommend it for devotional or other use, because the level of distortion is too high.<sup>87</sup>

Therefore, the Passion Translation in its current state is unreliable and untrustworthy. I understand that no translation is going to make everyone happy, and some prefer to read the words of Jesus and Luke in multiple translations, but it is a slippery slope when a single translator adds theological presuppositions that were not introduced by Jesus or the Gospel writers.

As a pastor and Bible college professor, my responsibility, by God's grace, and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, is to ensure that those I teach and mentor are reading and understanding a Bible that most accurately conveys what was originally written (Jas 3:1).

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<sup>87</sup> Keener, "Brief Comments on the Passion Translation," accessed September 5, 2020, <https://craigkeener.com/brief-comments-on-the-passion-translation/>.

## THE CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW OF THE GOD OF CREATION VS THE EVOLUTIONIST WORLDVIEW OF ACCIDENTAL CREATION

Richard H. Miller, Ph.D.

The debate over humanity's origin ignites contentious arguments between Christians and human secularist and even between Christians. This complex topic impacts one's worldview in many ways. The foundation of one's faith begins with God and Creation. If a person fails to understand the God of Creation, how can a person accept the Bible as God's special revelation? The issue also impacts a person's understanding of God's essential attributes. This essay considers the following: 1. Can any theory "prove" God's existence or His initiation of the creation? 2. Can a biblical interpretation of Genesis 1-3 allow for multiple theories of creation to be considered? 3. Which worldview has greater probability? 4. How should a Christian reconcile Scripture and science?

### *Can Any Theory "Prove" God's Existence or His Initiation of Creation?*

Since the time of Plato, philosophers have debated this concept, "How does one obtain knowledge?" Naturalist believe that knowledge can only be revealed through the natural senses and only the physical world is knowable.<sup>1</sup> Since God transcends the physical world, the philosophical naturalist rejects the existence of God. They do not see, hear, or touch God so they reject His existence. This philosophical argument lacks the ability to consider any metaphysical existence. Since the metaphysical realm remains beyond the human experience, how can humanity resolve this complex question which has been debated since the beginning of human inquiry. Karl Popper's principle of falsification provides Christian philosophers an even playing field with the agnostics, atheists, and evolutionist. Secular humanists see Popper's philosophical principle of falsification as a tool to defeat Christianity's core beliefs in God and His hand in creation.

Referring to himself as an agnostic and an advocate of critical realism, Popper gained an early reputation as the chief exponent of the principle of falsification rather than verification. In the early 1930s, he set forth powerful criticisms of logical positivism's attempt to label as meaningless all talk of ethics and metaphysics. But for almost two decades, Popper's criticisms went either ignored or misinterpreted by all except a few careful readers. By contrast, in the past four decades, an increasing appreciation of his critique has helped us to better understand the phenomenal growth of scientific theory and the close relationship between science and the humanities.

In his books *Objective Knowledge* and *Conjectures and Refutations*, Popper demonstrates brilliantly the roles of myth and metaphysics in the scientific enterprise. Myths represent our human need to expand the horizon of explanation and to find our place in the vast scheme of things. Emphasizing the importance of boldness of imagination in fulfilling this need, Popper suggests that Democritus' early theory of atoms began as a myth born of a daring imagination. . . . Falsification. Perhaps the major contribution made to science by Popper

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Nash, *Life's Ultimate Questions: An Introduction to Philosophy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 38.

emerges from his argument that the job of scientific experiment is to seek evidence not to support a proposed theory but, rather, to refute it.<sup>2</sup>

So what does this mean for a Christian's worldview? Popper's brilliant principle maintains that if one cannot falsify a theory, that theory cannot be proved. So let's apply this principle to God or creation. God's existence cannot be falsified; therefore, His existence cannot be proved. At first this proposition seems contrary to Christianity's worldview. But wait, the principle applied in reverse, God does not exist cannot be falsified; therefore God's non-existence cannot be proved. The resulting propositions offset each other. Neither proposition has a tactical advantage. One's belief in God becomes as valid as one's non-belief in God.

Skeptics and Believers. Those who call themselves skeptics sometimes quote W. C. Clifford: "It is wrong, always and for everyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence." Unfortunately, Clifford gives no rational hint as to how many pieces of evidence total up to being sufficient. Thinkers strongly influenced by Popper's (and David Hume's) arguments against induction will be skeptical of Clifford's claim. Instead of advocating that we pile up sufficient positive evidence to prove or verify a belief, Popper offers an entire new way to think about testing our beliefs and corroborating them. I confess that I find Popper's epistemology more convincing than either the verificationists and conventionalists, on the one hand, or the dogmatists, on the other hand.<sup>3</sup>

Since, both believers and non-believers lack any tangible scientific knowledge to falsify their opponent's perspective worldview, the debate now rests on subjective intuition and probabilities. I had an opportunity to attend a Evangelical Theological Society regional conference in the early 2000's; the guest lecturer was a professor from Notre Dame University. He specialized in philosophy of probabilities. During his lecture he presented two probability propositions. With 1 equaling always and 0 equaling never, he put forth the following: At any given moment in time the probabilities for

1. Walking on water =  $1.0 \times 10^{-50}$
2. Evolution to occur in nature =  $1.0 \times 10^{-60}$

Astronomers have estimated that the universe contains around  $1.0 \times 10^{24}$  stars.<sup>4</sup> From these estimates the following conclusions can be suggested. Walking on water is 10,000,000,000 (10 billion) times more probable that evolution. If every star had an earth like planet in the goldilocks<sup>5</sup> zone, evolution would need  $1.0 \times 10^{36}$  universes for evolution to occur just once. This number remains a fraction of the real number because by far most stars do not have an exoplanet like Earth. Only a few have been discovered with the potential criteria for life.<sup>6</sup> So what's the point! Evolution requires great faith in the statistical improbable. When I say great

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<sup>2</sup> Joe Barnhart, "Karl Popper: Philosopher of Critical Realism," *The Humanist*, July-August 1996, <http://www.questia.com/read/1G1-18501025/karl-popper-philosopher-of-critical-realism>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.space.com/26078-how-many-stars-are-there.html> (accessed on June 21, 2020).

<sup>5</sup> [https://science.nasa.gov/science-news/science-at-nasa/2003/02oct\\_goldilocks](https://science.nasa.gov/science-news/science-at-nasa/2003/02oct_goldilocks) (June 21, 2020).

<sup>6</sup> Jeffrey Klugger, "NASA May Have Found the Goldilocks Planet of Goldilocks Planets: TOI 700 d," *Time*, <https://time.com/5763768/toi-700-d-goldilocks-planet/> (accessed on June 21, 2020).

faith, you would need to win the Power Ball lottery  $3.3 \times 10^{51}$  times for evolution to occur once. These staggering numbers reveal the cult faith needed by the evolutionists to accept their propositions. The challenge facing the evolution-scientific community requires that they produce a working model of how life came into existence. If as they claim natural conditions resulted in the first life, they should be able to recreate those conditions, which for the last thirty years has been their goal. These experiments to produce synthetic life have failed to deliver this evidence. Even these experiments have relied on life<sup>7</sup> to jump start their attempts. To be truly authentic, only elements and base molecules can be used for these experiments. To be considered a living organism, the organism must be able to reproduce and pass its genetic materials to its offspring, that requires DNA. The creation of DNA resembles computer code but organic and living. Both codes follow a precise routine of operations which result in a solution. So how does DNA code create a human baby? DNA consists of oxygen, nitrogen, hydrogen, carbon, phosphorus, and other trace elements. These elements combine to form molecules which then arrange into DNA; DNA can divide and replicate. Do elements and molecules have innate intelligence? Software lacks intelligence but produces amazing outcomes. DNA represents the most complex biological software ever designed. Computer software has programmers. DNA had GOD. The probability of intelligent design requires less blind faith than evolution. This factor returns the debate to the question, “Does God Exist?” Neither side wins the debate. God cannot be falsified nor can the absence of God be falsified. The choice becomes a measure of faith. Faith in God as the intelligent creator of life and the universe, or faith in the random convergence of elements combining to create life. Both propositions require a leap of faith.

John Wisdom put this issue quite succinctly in a parable. Two explorers once happened upon a clearing in the jungle. The clearing contained many flowers and also many weeds. One explorer said, “Some gardener must attend this plot.” The other disagreed. So they pitched their tents watched, but they did not see any gardener. The believer suggested that the gardener must be invisible. So they set up a barbed wire fence, electrified it, and patrolled with bloodhounds. Still no gardener was found. “There is no Gardener,” said the skeptic. “He is visible and intangible.” retorted the believer. “He has no scent, makes no sound, and comes secretly to tend the garden.” . . . This is the situation for the major propositions of Christian theology. Christian and Non-Christian work with the same facts but disagree on their interpretation. Since Christians, whether theologians or not, cannot explicate the meaning of their propositions (prove their interpretations) by recourse to sensory data, these propositions must be regarded as meaningless.<sup>8</sup>

Erickson removed this parable from the third edition of his sentinel work on Christian theology. The parable, however, is relevant to the question: Can God’s existence be proven? Believers and non-believers cannot resolve God’s existence by verification because He can not be falsified. When an army goes to war, it must engage the enemy with the equipment it has; not the equipment it wishes it had. A Christian must first acknowledge the tools he/she has to combat secular humanism and other anti-Christian forces. By knowing one’s limits, a believer can develop strong propositions to defend one’s faith. Resorting to junk science and wild conjecture only weakens one’s position.

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<sup>7</sup> Alvin Powell, “Taking a Stride Toward Synthetic Life,” *The Harvard Gazette*, March 7, 2009, <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2009/03/taking-a-stride-toward-synthetic-life/> (accessed on June 21, 2020).

<sup>8</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 138-9.

Therefore, the answer to the first question, “Can any theory “prove” God’s existence or His initiation of the Creation?” is NO. This might seem counter intuitive to your faith, but remember the converse is also true. No one can prove God does not exist. The Principle of Falsification defeats both propositions. But the circumstantial evidence that favors the existence of God (who created all) far exceeds the circumstantial evidence used by the evolutionist.

*Can a Biblical Interpretation of Genesis 1-3 Allow for Multiple  
Theories of Creation to Be Considered?*

The interpretation of Genesis 1-3 can be fraught with numerous land mines. After nearly thirty years of teaching Old Testament History and Literature, the experience has taught me that dogma concerning these chapters runs deep for believers. Some hold tenaciously to a literal six day twenty-four hour creation narrative that occurred 6,000 years ago. Some will be more open to other interpretative paradigms. So, prior to considering the interpretative models, I want to remind the reader of the Principle of Falsification. NO THEORY, Christian or Secular Humanist, will survive the Principle of Falsification. No interpretative model can be proved or disproved. Therefore, a believer should select the proposition that best fits one’s theological worldview and stand with absolute confidence that his/her interpretation is as strong as the other person’s interpretation.

Genesis 1-11 provides greater challenges for interpretation than the Book of Revelation. Genesis attempts to answer life’s biggest questions: How did I get here? Who am I? Does God exist? Genesis 1-3 answers the question, “How did humanity get here?” When reading the Old Testament, a person needs to consider the form of literature being considered and how should one interpret the literature. For example, should the text be considered historical or theological, or does one method have precedence over the other. At first, a person might say, what difference does it make? Consider this illustration. Moses attempted to explain how God created the universe and all of life on earth. Did God reveal to Moses the quantum physics required to initiate the Big Bang? If a person makes that claim, it would be absurd. Humanity did not have the scientific knowledge to comprehend the physics behind the creation of the universe, nor do today’s scientists. This reality means that God revealed to Moses that which he could understand. Hence, Genesis 1-3 should never be seen as a scientific road map to the creation event. God revealed the creation account to scientifically deficient people. God’s comprehension far exceeds even today’s smartest scientists. So what is the point of Genesis 1-3? God revealed to Moses that He created the universe and all that exists. This revelation had to make sense to Moses and the Israelites. Circling back to the history or theology question above, theology should always take precedence over science and history. By function, the Scripture teaches humanity about God (theology) with historical connectivity to God’s people. If one accepts this proposition, the theological message supersedes any historical or scientific passages. So what is the theological message of Genesis 1-3?

In Genesis 1:1 Moses declared with absolute confidence, God created all that is.

בְּרֵאשִׁית<sup>a</sup> בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ:<sup>9</sup> <sup>1</sup>

Gen. 1:1 In the beginning *Elohim* (God) created the Heavens and the Earth.<sup>10</sup>

Nearly every time *bara* - he created (Qal. perfect 3rd person sing) is used with *Elohim/YHWH* the passage refers to God creating the universe or humanity. God laid out the process in six days. The interpretation of these six days have lead to many interpretive paradigms. Some interpretive models that have been suggested:

1. Six day 24 hour periods
2. Each day equals a thousand years.<sup>11</sup>
3. The days represent periods of time (possibly millions of years)
4. God created the world and recreated after a cosmic destruction.

Each of these interpretive models has strengths and weaknesses. For example the 6 day 24 hour model has difficulty placing dinosaurs into the creation account. If the Earth's age is only 6,000 years, how did humanity cope with the T-Rex? This journal article would require 50 pages to go through all of the possible creative interpretative possibilities and in the end the complexities would still be unresolved. Why? No model can be falsified; therefore, no model can be proved. So what lesson needs to be learned. The real question that needs consideration must NOT be how God created the universe, but if he did. And since God cannot be falsified, believers need to realize that belief in God and his creative actions represents one of many theories that CANNOT BE DISPROVED. These factors allow any reasonable person to believe in the God of Creation. Whether God took 6 - 24 hour days 6,000 years ago or 4.5 billion years the outcome remains the same. God spoke creation into reality. Fiat Creation credits God with creating something out of nothing. The "Big Bang" theory articulates exactly that, "something from nothing." The Big Bang theory is an effort to explain what happened at the very beginning of our universe. Discoveries in astronomy and physics have shown beyond a reasonable doubt that our universe did in fact have a beginning. Prior to that moment there was nothing; during and after that moment there was something: our universe. The big bang theory is an effort to explain what happened during and after that moment.<sup>12</sup>

What the Big Bang theory proposes does not conflict with Gen. 1:1. Non-believers do not have an explanation for the origin of the Big Bang. Christians believe God initiated the event. Non-believers cannot overcome two undeniable problems. Who or what created the first living entity and what caused the Big Bang. For non-believers these events spontaneously occur without a creative influence or by a designer. Christians believe God caused the events. Ultimately, these factors separate the two camps, believers vs. non-believers.

<sup>9</sup> *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia: SESB Version.*, electronic ed. (Stuttgart: German Bible Society, 2003), Ge 1:1.

<sup>10</sup> All translations by Richard Miller, Ph.D.

<sup>11</sup> KJV 2 Peter 3:8 But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

<sup>12</sup> *Big Bang Theory - The Premise*, <https://www.big-bang-theory.com/> accessed on July 31, 2020.

As a philosophical matter only two choices exist. One choice requires a belief that all that exists resulted from a random convergence of events or the other choice God's hand created all. Each position requires faith, Faith in God or Faith in an accident. Many believers argue about the how. Personally, I avoid attempts to explain theories that cannot be falsified. All creation theories end in non-falsifiable states. Because of that, Christians should focus on the reality of life and existence.

The complexity of human life remains a mystery. Let's consider the human genome; the human creation tops the pinnacle of God's creation. Consider the mystery of how every person begins as two partial strands of DNA combining to produce a unique person. This process defies probability. How does organic material have the innate intelligence to replicate? Some scientists can explain some of how through observation, BUT I have NEVER read an explanation articulating the WHY. Genesis 2:7 provides the answer:

וַיִּצְרֶה יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם עָפָר מִן־הָאֲדָמָה וַיִּפַּח בְּאַפָּיו נְשֵׁמַת חַיִּים וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה:<sup>13</sup>

Gen. 2:7 And the LORD God formed the man (Adam) from the dust of the ground and he breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and the man (Adam) became a living soul.

Not only did God create the material world and all matter, His final creative act becomes the moment when elements become organic molecules and then God animates the raw materials into a living person. This event separates believers from non-believers. Believers see the hand of God in this process and non-believers believe in a convergence of accidents over 3 billion years. Harvard scientist have been attempting for decades to be the first to create a living cell through chemistry. All of their attempts have failed to date. The biggest obstacle has been the creation of cell walls and DNA. Two obstacles which baffle the scientists as to how to create using only the things found in nature (elements, molecules, heat, light, pressure, cold, etc). The natural synthesis of life just does not have what is needed to emerge from dirt into living organisms. Moses's narrative describing the creation of humanity, "GOD breathed into his nostrils the BREATH of LIFE." This creative act brought into existence the human race. For any living creation to be considered "living," the living creature must be able to reproduce and continue with offspring which also can reproduce. Human scientist have not achieved this creative act nor do they have an explanation of how it occurred in nature.

The final genius of God's creation can be found in Genesis 1:26

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ<sup>a</sup> וַיְרִדוּ בְדִגְתַּי הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם<sup>26</sup>  
וּבַבְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל־הָאָרֶץ וּבְכָל־הָרֶמֶשׂ הָרֹמֵשׂ עַל־הָאָרֶץ:<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia: SESB Version.*, electronic ed. (Stuttgart: German Bible Society, 2003), Ge 2:7.

<sup>14</sup> *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia: SESB Version.*, electronic ed. (Stuttgart: German Bible Society, 2003), Ge 1:26.

Gen. 1:26 Then GOD said “Let us make man (Adam) in our image as our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the beast and over all the earth and over all the creeping things of the earth.

The word for “Adam” also means “man” and since God created humanity perhaps the word “man” reflects the reality of Moses’ intent. The interpretation of “in our image as our likeness” has been highly debated. Does it mean intellectual reasoning, spirit form, physical form, etc? This debate will not be settled here, but whichever interpretation one uses, the results remain constant. Humanity has the ability to recognize its place in the universe. Humanity has self awareness and has the ability to question its existence. Perhaps this self awareness best illustrates the gift God has bestowed on humanity. This self-awareness allows for free will. Humanity has the capacity to make decisions to influence outcomes. Science has suggested that the human brain processes 20 trillion computations per second, that rivals the fastest supercomputers ever manufactured. I know this seems preposterous, but think of all that the human brain does: 1. The five senses, 2. Regulates all metabolic body functions (respiration, muscle motor control, endocrine systems, heart rate, temperature control, etc.), 3. New thoughts and recollections, and 4. Creativity. This list represents a fraction of the brain’s functions. No computer can currently compete with the brain’s ability to recognize patterns. Computers ultimately can only determine “yes” or “no” (1 or 0). Since computers rely on mathematic computations, they can never bridge the gap of “Maybe.” Humans can be illogical and can create outside the lines of programming and reprogram as the process requires. Humans can deduce in seconds what supercomputers cannot do in a lifetime. So why? The God who created the universe created a remarkable supercomputer called the human brain. The complexity of the human body defies the logic of the evolutionists who believe humanity resulted from billions of years of mutations. And that entire process depends on a single cell emerging from the primordial soup that somehow developed a cell wall and DNA required for the reproduction and offspring survival. This flawed foundation destroys the theory of evolution. Evolutionists cannot answer this foundational question, “From where did the first living cell come?”

A final consideration about the God of Creation, God exists outside of His creation and by definition cannot be bound by the physical universe and all of its realities such as time and space. One may ask why? God could not create something of which God depends on for His own existence.

What conclusions should be drawn? Christians need to recognize that our worldview of God and His Creation sets forth a more logical and plausible explanation for the existence of humanity. The secular humanists who mock Christians as uneducated and backwards thinkers live in a world deceived by arrogance and human pride.

## **INVERTED WISDOM: A DISABILITY READING OF 1 CORINTHIANS 1:17-30**

Benjamin Coats, M.A.

### **Introduction**

1 Corinthians 1:17-30 explores the contrast between worldly wisdom and God's wisdom, calling the Corinthian Church to look not for wise words and noble speakers, but for God's truth revealed in the foolishness of the message of the cross. The cross stands against intellectual elitism by proclaiming the incongruous message of the crucified Messiah. Paul builds upon Old Testament foundations to declare human wisdom to be under God's eschatological judgment. While this has been taken as a critique of sophists who speak with hollow eloquence, the implications go beyond a critique of rhetoric without content. In this deconstruction of worldly wisdom and values, Paul opens up the Gospel to the marginalized, the oppressed, the uneducated, and those disregarded by the wise social elites of the Greco-Roman world. But what does this passage have to say today? 1 Corinthians 1:17-39 may help understand the role of intelligence and wisdom in the Kingdom of God and may provide insights into how to view those whose intelligence is hindered by conditions such as Down's Syndrome and their ability to participate in Christianity. This study will consider what Paul was critiquing in 1 Corinthians 1:17-30, what he was proposing as an alternative paradigm, and what this paradigm has to say for a theology of mental disability.

### **The Problem of Wisdom**

While seeking a disability reading of 1 Corinthians 1:17-30 will involve application beyond that of the original intent, given the intensely situational nature of Paul's opening arguments in 1 Corinthians, it is necessary to look to the problems in the Corinthian church Paul sought to address with his deconstruction of earthly wisdom. 1 Corinthians 1:17-30 is part of a larger argument spanning from 1 Corinthians 1:10-4:21 in which Paul argues against factionalism, division, and arrogance within the church of Corinth. In following with Greek traditions surrounding sophists and philosophers, the Corinthian Christians had formed factions around their favorite Christian leaders, resulting in factions loyal to Paul, Apollos, Cephas or Peter, and Christ.<sup>1</sup> This form of factionalism was not uncommon in Corinthian life; eloquent sophists and philosophers would gather crowds of followers and establish rival groups vying for prominence, respect, and applause.<sup>2</sup>

Factionalism was just one of many problems facing the Corinthian church. There also appears to have been considerable tension between those of lower social status and the minority

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2000), 144,

<sup>2</sup> Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2010), 88.

or the church who had some measure of wealth and status.<sup>3</sup> The church's wealthy members had likely begun to adopt the Roman patronage system, dominating the poor and recreating the frequently oppressive system of the world around them.<sup>4</sup>

Paul challenges the assumptions that led to these divisions, calling for the Corinthians to think in a way that was contrary to worldly thinking. Rather than focusing on their own advancement or status they were to look to the cross and what it revealed about God's kingdom. They had not been called or redeemed by the ways of the world, and they could not try to apply the world's values to their life in the Church. They needed to reassess how they saw themselves, their community, and how God worked. Divisions are not acceptable as all are in Christ, and neither Paul nor any of his fellow ministers had been crucified for the Corinthians, and no faction had an exclusive claim to Christ.

### 1 Corinthians 1:17 - The Presentation of the Cross

Paul opens his discussion of wisdom by describing the method in which the Gospel was presented to the Corinthians. In 1 Corinthians 1:17, Paul asserts that he had not presented the Gospel with clever speech, but with the proclamation of the Gospel. To focus on clever speech over the Gospel message itself would empty the cross of its power. The phrase “οὐκ ἐν σοφίᾳ λόγου” has generated much debate concerning how best to translate Paul's words and what exactly he was trying to say about the presentation of the Gospel. Is Paul critiquing wisdom that amounts to little more than sophistry and hollow words, or is Paul criticizing words or logic characterized by what the Corinthians called wisdom? It has often been claimed that Paul is criticizing any form of preaching that focuses on hollow rhetoric that obscures or distracts from the core content of the cross.<sup>5</sup> However, given Paul's quick transition to discussing the flaws in what was perceived as wisdom by the world, it is likely that Paul is also concerned with what was being presented as wise and logical, but that did not reflect the teachings of the cross. Paul appears to be arguing a fundamental incompatibility between what the Corinthians saw as wise words and what the content of the Gospel actually offered.<sup>6</sup>

Given Paul's use of rhetorical techniques in 1 Corinthians and elsewhere, it is unlikely that he was criticizing any use of rhetoric in the discussion of the cross, but rather that he is critiquing the idea that rhetoric or wisdom were acceptable metrics for evaluating the message presented. The ability to articulate the Gospel with complex speech and advanced rhetoric cannot be the criteria for evaluating a leader or someone's status within the Kingdom. Further, attempting to impress the audience with rhetoric or knowledge or technical terminology empties the cross of its power. Rather than speaking with complex arguments and advanced knowledge, those communicating the Gospel should focus on communicating the message of the cross simply and clearly. This could allow for those who are not wise by the world's standards can hear the Gospel and be transformed by the power of the cross. This may help address lingering questions

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<sup>3</sup> Ben Witherington, III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1995), 114.

<sup>4</sup> Witherington, III, 114.

<sup>5</sup> Thiselton, 143.

<sup>6</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Revised ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2014), 66.

concerning how the mentally disabled can accept the Gospel message and what level of knowledge they must have to be saved.<sup>7</sup>

### 1 Corinthians 1:18-25 - The Foolishness of the Cross

This discussion of the way Paul presented the Gospel builds into a discussion of how the people of Corinth have received the message. Two distinct groups respond differently to the Gospel; to those who are perishing, the Gospel is received as foolishness, but to those who are being saved, it is received as the power of God. The word of the cross is presented as a direct contrast to the words of wisdom with which the Corinthians were so fascinated.<sup>8</sup> The cross is not grounded in worldly thought, nor could any human conceive of the message of a crucified Messiah by their thinking.<sup>9</sup> The wise despised the message or the cross as foolishness, a mark of weakness fit for slaves and those worthy of shame.<sup>10</sup> Yet this is how God chose to reveal Himself, and those who accepted the message received the cross as God's redeeming power. The distinction between those who are perishing and reject the cross and those who have received salvation through the power of the cross is now the primary distinguishing element in humanity.<sup>11</sup> All other distinctions and factions, whether Jew or Gentile, rich or poor, slave or free, wise or foolish, have all given way to God's distinction made by the cross.<sup>12</sup>

The cross is not merely something human wisdom had failed to anticipate, nor is it something that expanded upon human wisdom, surpassing it merely by going beyond its known limits; the cross stands as the wisdom of a different type.<sup>13</sup> By citing Isaiah 29:14, Paul calls upon Old Testament tradition that anticipated the downfall of the self-proclaimed wise men of the world as part of God's eschatological judgment upon what they thought of as wisdom.<sup>14</sup> This is not a challenge to improve or redirect human wisdom, but rather, God's promise to judge and destroy said wisdom by saving humanity in the incomprehensible inversion of the cross.<sup>15</sup>

The passage continues with a series of rhetorical questions, asking where the wise person, the scribe, or the debater are. Much has been made of this list's specifics, with suggestions that Paul is referring to the Greek philosopher, the Jewish rabbi, and either the sophist or the educated in general,<sup>16</sup> but the rhetorical force of these questions indicates that Paul is declaring the futility of all human learning and wisdom rather than trying to single out specific groups.<sup>17</sup> For all of these,

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<sup>7</sup> For further discussion of salvation in the mentally disabled, see H. Adam Ackley, "The Church, Mental Disabilities, and Adult Faith Decisions: a Wesleyan Inquiry," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 45, no. 2 (September 2010): 7-24.

<sup>8</sup> Ciampa and Rosner, 90.

<sup>9</sup> Craig S. Keener, *1-2 Corinthians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 29.

<sup>10</sup> Witherington, III, 109.

<sup>11</sup> Fee, 71-72.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Joel Fredrich, "The Gospel Is God's Wisdom: A Meditation on 1 Corinthians 1:18-31," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 88, no. 4 (Fall 1991): 277.

<sup>14</sup> Ciampa and Rosner, 92-93.

<sup>15</sup> Richard B. Hays, *The Conversion of the Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Israel's Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 14.

<sup>16</sup> Fee, 74.

<sup>17</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians a New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 156.

God has rendered their wisdom foolishness by revealing himself in a way contrary to their wisdom. This wisdom has not just been made to look foolish by comparison; when brought before the cross, humanity's wisdom becomes foolishness and cannot properly be called wisdom at all.<sup>18</sup>

The wise of this world, through the wisdom of God, failed to reach God by means of wisdom. Paul reveals that wisdom is not the path to God. This applies not just to rhetoric and sophistry but also to any form of wisdom flaunted by the world.<sup>19</sup> Through the destruction of human wisdom, God has rendered all persons equal before Him.<sup>20</sup> The distinction of wisdom, training, and intelligence no longer matter as none can bring one closer to God. The equalizing nature of God's decision to save humanity through a crucified Messiah ought not to be limited. It would not be appropriate to see this as equalizing up to the point of mental disability while still seeing disabled persons outside of God's wisdom. God has chosen not to be a god of the accomplished elite, but to be accessible by all, for the path to Him is not by our standards. It is not the rhetoric of the educated or the wisdom of the elite that leads people to God, but the foolishness, or even babbling pointing to the cross that bridges the gap and leads humanity to God.<sup>21</sup>

Because the cross goes against human wisdom, it became a barrier to both Jews and Greeks. To the Jews who expected the Messiah to come with wondrous signs of triumph and deliverance as Moses had delivered them in the past, the message of a Messiah who was crucified by their Roman oppressors was scandalous. It became a stumbling block that led them to their destruction.<sup>22</sup> Meanwhile, Greeks rejected the idea that any God who could be subjected to the humiliation and suffering of crucifixion could be a God worthy of any wise individual.<sup>23</sup> The cross was nonsense by worldly standards, even to those educated in the Law.

While our familiarity with the cross and our numerous theological justifications for how the cross saves us has rendered the message of the cross mundane, the cross was originally a point of scandal and an object of ridicule.<sup>24</sup> While there may be value in grappling with atonement theories, we must also acknowledge that the cross is not meant to be a puzzle to be deciphered in wisdom, but a reversal of human wisdom in which defeat paradoxically becomes victory and shame becomes glory. We may grasp at logical explanations, but the cross is not a matter of human logic. The cross makes no allowances to place intellectual ability as a barrier to entry into the kingdom or status in the kingdom since the cross is not about logic.

### **1 Corinthians 1:26-31 - The Foolishness of Those Called**

Not only was the message not preached eloquently as the Corinthians expect, nor was it simply the contents of the message that went against expectations, but the Corinthians themselves

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<sup>18</sup> Fee, 75.

<sup>19</sup> Keener, 28.

<sup>20</sup> Fee, 76.

<sup>21</sup> Amos Yong, *The Bible, Disability, and the Church: a New Vision of the People of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2011), Location 1337.

<sup>22</sup> Witherington III, 109.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ciampa and Rosner, 99.

reflected the bizarre way God worked. Paul urges them to consider their life situations when they had come to Christ. Not many of them had the signs of wealth and nobility that the surrounding culture assumed would be present in a religion that reflected wisdom. At the same time, much focus has been given to the fact that Paul said “not many” rather than none,<sup>25</sup> this should not distract from the emphasis Paul places on the low status of the Corinthian Church. There may indeed have been some members of the Church that had the marks of social standing and wealth that the surrounding culture expected for a movement to be culturally relevant,<sup>26</sup> but the overall makeup of the Church was not what anyone would have chosen for God's people. The people God had called in Corinth were, to a large degree, nobodies and rejects of the social order who were regarded as foolish, uneducated, and weak. They were the foolish things of the world. God has not aligned Himself with the rich, the powerful, the wise, or the educated, but rather, He has aligned Himself with the have-nots, the poor, the powerless, and the foolish. As Gordon Fee said in his commentary on 1 Corinthians, “By bringing ‘good news to the poor’ through his Son, God has forever aligned himself with the disenfranchised; at the same time, we have played out before our eyes God's overthrow of the world's false standards. Every middle-class or upper-class domestication of the gospel is, therefore, a betrayal of that gospel.”<sup>27</sup>

The pattern of believers outlined in 1 Corinthians 1:26-31 fits with the societal position common for those who experience mental disabilities.<sup>28</sup> Those with mental disabilities are commonly disregarded as powerless, and even some advocating for the inclusion of the mentally disabled into Christian communities do so in a manner that implies that such persons are suitable only as objects of charity.<sup>29</sup> The mentally disabled may not be able to fend for themselves or exert any form of political or social power. Yet this is the exact type of person God has called to receive the message of the cross. Not only can the mentally disabled be included in the Church, if we are to keep to the pattern Paul presents in 1 Corinthians, but they are also the perfect example of the type of person Christ identified with and called through the cross.

God chose these foolish things in order that He might shame the wise and the powerful. This shaming is not merely making them look bad or feel ashamed, but rather, it is an eschatological condemnation of the standards of worldly wisdom and status as well as those who hold to these standards.<sup>30</sup> By not following the cultural expectations, God has condemned those standards and revealed that His values are not like ours. Further, God has chosen the things that are not in order that none would have grounds for boasting. If God were found by wisdom, the one who found Him would have ground for boasting. If only the rich and powerful received God's attention, they would have grounds for boasting. But God has revealed Himself to those rejected by society, to those without traditional signs of intelligence or power, and because it is God's initiative and has nothing to do with us, no one has grounds for boasting.

Verse 30 declares that Christ has become wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption for us who believe. There is a distinction between wisdom and the following three

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<sup>25</sup> Witherington III, 113.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>27</sup> Fee, 86.

<sup>28</sup> Yong, Location 1297-1303.

<sup>29</sup> Joseph J. Kotva, Jr. “Welcoming the Mentally Handicapped: a Case Study in Christian Character,” *Restoration Quarterly* 34, no. 4 (1992 1992): 223-237.

<sup>30</sup> Fee, 87

elements of the list.<sup>31</sup> Wisdom is redefined in Christ as being Christ Himself and His saving work.<sup>32</sup> The three elements of the list that follow wisdom explore how Christ has become wisdom and what that means.<sup>33</sup> Christ has become wisdom, which is nearly synonymous with salvation.<sup>34</sup> The only true form of wisdom is Christ, and those who are wise are not wise or educated according to the world's standards, but those in Christ.

### **Conclusions – Christ Alone**

It is often tempting to soften the blow of Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 1:17-31 by filtering it through a normative perspective that continues to prize wisdom and intelligence. However, Paul is resolute in his assertion that it is not by wisdom that we have found Christ, nor has Christ primarily called the wise and powerful. God revealed Himself through a crucified Messiah, against all logic and wisdom. Christ identified Himself with the powerless and lowly, the shamed and the despised, and in doing so, He condemned the power structures and logic of the world.

Yet, what this world sees as wise God has condemned wisdom through the cross. If wisdom has been condemned and is powerless to bring us to God, then it naturally follows that those who lack the traditional markings of intelligence or wisdom are not at any disadvantage in approaching God. Anyone who can encounter the Spirit may come to God, and this is not a matter of intellect. Some mental disabilities may hinder one's ability to confess or comprehend salvation, but this would not hinder God's ability to transform them into His image through the cross.<sup>35</sup> It is not a matter of intellectual capacity, but one's receptiveness to grace.<sup>36</sup>

Not only can persons with mental disabilities come to God through Christ without the need for wisdom, but they are also made wise in Christ who has become wisdom for us. However, this wisdom is not of the same type as what we would typically call wisdom; it is of a different quality. The wisdom conferred in Christ is wisdom that reflects the cross rather than the wisdom of philosophers and sages. While a discussion of healing mental disabilities and the status of mental disability in the new creation is beyond the scope of this study, whenever discussing such matters, it ought to be acknowledged that God's image of wisdom and knowledge are not like ours, and our eschatological hope is to be conformed to Christ, not to our ideal of ourselves.<sup>37</sup>

1 Corinthians 1:17-31 is a call to re-evaluate how we see wisdom. It questions the value placed on wisdom and learning and champions a new paradigm of evaluating all wisdom through the cross. The most foolish person who has come to the cross is wiser than the greatest intellect of the secular world. This is a call for humility, to renounce our boasts in our intellect, in our education, and in our teachers. If we take Paul seriously, we must acknowledge that even those

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<sup>31</sup> Ciampa and Rosner, 109.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ciampa and Rosner, 109.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ackley, 7-24.

<sup>36</sup> This is not to say that reason and comprehension play no part in salvation, but rather, that God will provide the grace necessary to allow for those with impaired cognitive abilities to approach Him without expecting more of them than they are capable, and the need of such grace is no more a mark of shame than the need of grace common to all.

<sup>37</sup> Yong, Location 1324.

with severe cognitive impairment can be wise in the eyes of God without being so in the eyes of man as God's standards are not ours and reflect an inversion of traditional worldly standards.

## The Role of the Holy Spirit in Forgiveness

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*If a born again, Spirit-filled Christian refuses to forgive a person and dies in an unforgiving state, will that person lose their eternal salvation?*

The second essay in this series was "Forgiveness in the Teachings of Jesus." The essay focused on the Lord's prayer in Matthew 6:12,14, Luke 11:2-4, the Unmerciful Servant in Matthew 18, Sirach 28:1-4, and the Beatitudes of mercy for mercy in Matthew 5:7. In the Lord's prayer, Jesus said, "If you forgive others, your heavenly Father will forgive you, but if you do not forgive others, you will not be forgiven by your heavenly Father" (Matthew 6:14).

Scholars give several possibilities: The first would be, if one does not forgive others who sin against them, they will not be forgiven by God, resulting in loss of their salvation. In the second essay, "Forgiveness in the Teachings of Jesus," the believer who has been born again by faith will not lose their eternal salvation if they refuse to forgive a person.

Forgiveness is a gift from God provided by Christ's substitutionary death on Calvary's Cross. One would not have to forgive others first to receive this gift, which would be unconditional forgiveness. Some scholars would say this unconditional aspect would be the meaning of forgiveness in the Lord's prayer.

The second possibility would be that this failure to forgive is not an eternal sin causing one to lose their salvation. Failure to forgive would not result in eschatological loss of salvation but the possible loss of the close relationship with God, the anointing, and possibly their reward at the Judgment Seat of Christ (I Corinthians 3:14,15).<sup>1</sup>

Scholars maintain in the Lord's prayer, when Jesus said, "if you forgive, I will forgive," is not hyperbole or an exaggerated statement, but the truth. The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant is a parable. However, this parable backed up Jesus' words on forgiveness by the seriousness of the result; the debtor would be handed over to the torturers forever.

There are many different interpretations of what Jesus said. Will one lose their eternal salvation if he/she does not forgive, or only lose their rewards at the Judgement Seat of Christ? In light of the seriousness of not forgiving a person, a Christian has no option but to forgive everyone who has wronged them.

It is one thing to forgive a person for a small offense, but what about an enormous offense? The Covid-19 Pandemic of 2020 has destroyed many people world-wide. Many are angry at God for letting such a terrible plague lose on humankind. Covid-19 is just one of the many problems facing our world and specifically the United States. Rioting, shooting innocent adults, children, and police officers, have increased the anger in America. How does a family forgive a person who has killed an innocent adult, child or police officer?

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<sup>1</sup> R.T. Kendall. *Total Forgiveness* (Lake Mary, Florida: Charisma House, 2007), 93

Several years ago, a man entered Nickle Mines Amish School, killing five girls.<sup>2</sup> The man was a sick individual. How could the families forgive such a horrendous crime? The Amish believe that forgiveness is not an option but a commandment. The people not only forgave the killer, but they invited his wife to the funeral of the girls.

There are times when the victim's families are in attendance at executing a murderer and cheer when the guilty one dies? There are other instances when the family members of the deceased victim forgive the murderer. These family members are allowed to address the killer and forgive him or her. How could a family do that?

One of the greatest sins against humanity is kidnapping children, teens, and adults, drugging them, and selling them into sex slavery, and sometimes death. A former student of this author was raped at a young age. God told her she must forgive! Later her only son was kidnapped outside a ministry for children being only ten years old. The last word she heard from her son was, "Mama, Mama, save me!" She never heard her child's voice again. Later a video was sent to her with her son tied to a chair, having been sodomized. His mother said, "I was angry. I was destroyed, shattered, despondent. I was screaming and crying out to the Lord." The Lord said, "you are to pray and forgive." The mother said, "I cannot forgive."<sup>3</sup>

How could anyone forgive such crimes? The disciples did not understand how they would carry out the world-wide mission that Jesus assigned them, in which forgiveness would be the central ministry. Where would the power to carry out such a task come? This essay will investigate the role of the Holy Spirit in Forgiveness.

At creation, God breathed into man the breath of life, creating man in his image (Gen 1:26; 2:7). This image was tarnished by humankind's sin (Gen 3). God had a plan; his only Son would be born of a virgin and being sinless, would be crucified for the sin of the whole world. Whoever would trust in the Son, Jesus Christ, would never die, but have eternal life (John 3:16).

The disciples did not understand why Jesus had to be sacrificed and were weak, undisciplined, and unbelieving. The accounts of the weakness of the disciples are recorded in (Matthew 28:17), in which they doubted (Mark 16:14), they had a lack of faith (Luke 24:11,2) and instead of following Jesus, went back to what they had known, fishing (John 21)! Jesus had told the disciples that he had to go away so that the helper or comforter, the Holy Spirit, would come (John 16:7).

The disciples could not comprehend what he meant! However, they knew that they must forgive, or they would not be forgiven. This teaching was prophetic as they had seen John the Baptist martyred, would also see their Lord crucified and Stephen, one of their deacons, stoned to death, as well as many persecutions and even their deaths in the future. Forgiveness was going to be at the center of their ministry. Jesus said that forgiveness was not an option but a command. Nevertheless, how could one forgive such atrocities?

An example of forgiveness by the power of the Holy Spirit would be Stephen, a deacon. The account of Stephen's death is a model of forgiveness: "(55) But being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God (60). Then falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, 'Lord do not hold this sin against them!' And having said this, he fell asleep" (died) Acts 7:55,60 NASV).

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<sup>2</sup> Jamie Wilson, *The People Who Forgave a Killer: Amish Culture Says, Forgive or You'll Not be Forgiven*. Science & Spirit, Vol. 19, Issue 1 (Heldref Publications, Washington, D.C., 2008), 1.

<sup>3</sup> Student of Gary Pickens, Name withheld to protect her identity.

These were close to the same words his Lord had uttered from the cross (Lk 23:34). Jesus had become Stephen's role model of forgiveness through the full power of the Holy Spirit. After his resurrection, Jesus met with his disciples:

(19) When therefore it was evening, on the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst, said to them, Peace be with you. (20) And when he had said this, he showed them, both His hands and His side. The disciples therefore rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus, therefore, said to them again, 'Peace be with you'; as the Father has sent Me, I also sent you. (22) And when he had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "receive the Holy Spirit.' (23) If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained (John 20: 19-23 NASV).

This essay will investigate three divisions in the text of John 20:19-23, as it relates to forgiving (1) The Reassurance, (2) the Commission, and (3) the Full Holy Spirit Power.

### **The Reassurance (John 20: 19-21)**

The disciples were together and were afraid that the Jews would come after them, so they were locked away in hiding. Jesus appeared to them and said, "Peace be with You." They must have been overwhelmed! Then Jesus knowing they would need proof he was their Messiah, showed them his nail-pierced hands and his speared side. The disciples were full of joy as they knew he was their Lord, risen from the dead. The second time, probably knowing they were still afraid, he said again, "Peace be with you." (John 20:19-21 NASV).

### **The Commission (John 20:21: Matt 28:18,19)**

Then Jesus told them not to be afraid but concentrate on their mission. He gave them their marching orders: "As the Father has sent me, I also send you (Jn 21:c) 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit (Mt 28: 18b,19).' They were to carry out their mission through the power of the Holy Spirit as he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

"On the first day of creation, out of chaos came creation. Jesus breathed on them, and "out of their chaos of fear, doubt and confusion came a new creation. The once fearful disciples became joyful and courageous proclaimers of salvation in Jesus name."<sup>4</sup>

"The various records of Jesus' missionary mandate have different words and emphasis because they were spoken on different occasions, the disciple's mission is an extension of Jesus'

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<sup>4</sup> Questia, a part of Gale, Cengage Learning. [www.questia.com](http://www.questia.com). *Appearance to the Disciple, Article Excerpt, John 20:19-23*. Contributors: Not Available. Newspaper title: Manila Bulletin. Publication Date: May 15, 2005.

mission.”<sup>5</sup> The main focus of their mission was to be forgiveness," One must forgive to be forgiven (Mt.6:12,14). The disciple's mission was to proclaim the good news of eternal life, help people to repent of their sins, and after receiving forgiveness from God, forgive everyone who had sinned against them.

### **The Full Holy Spirit Power (John 20:22)**

The central focus of this essay is to discover the role of the Holy Spirit in forgiveness. Forgiveness of sins can be more comfortable when the sin is smaller, but it is very difficult, if not impossible when it comes to the murder of a relative, loved one or a friend. “As the mother said earlier of the devastating capture of her son, 'God, I cannot forgive.' How does one forgive such an act against their child?

Traditionally, scholars understand that the Holy Spirit came to reside in believers on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2). What did Jesus mean when he said, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22,23)? Were their two enduements of power, one in John 20 and one in Acts 2?

Jesus' 'breathed on them' – as in Genesis 2:7, Jesus breathes new life into the disciples, and forgiveness is linked to the Gift of the Spirit John 20:23.<sup>6</sup>

Scholars differ in their interpretations of this passage. “G.E. Ladd has asserted that there was only one gift, the one recounted in Acts 2, and that John 20 is ‘acted parable promissory and anticipatory to the actual coming of the Spirit at Pentecost.’”<sup>7</sup> “For Calvin (2.205), the disciples are here sprinkled with the grace of the Spirit, but not saturated with his full enduement of power until Acts 2.”<sup>8</sup>

Some link the Holy Spirit's bestowal into two occasions, one in John 20 and the other at Pentecost at Acts 2. The John 20 bestowal of the Spirit did not change the disciples as they were behind locked doors, afraid of the Jews. Most scholars agree that the Spirit's bestowal in John 20 was symbolic of the Holy Spirit enduement of power that was yet to come at Pentecost.<sup>9</sup> Reception of the Spirit is linked to forgiveness, retention of sins through preaching the Gospel where a person would repent. The forgiveness the disciples were to carry out was a continuation of Christ's ministry.

"Receive the Holy Spirit" was the Spirit that Jewish people associated with spiritual cleansing and often prophetic empowerment. Jesus had promised the Spirit would continue his presence among them (Jn 14:26; 16:13-15). The Spirit was Jesus' agent as Jesus was the Father's agent (16:14). How can we dare to attempt to fulfill God's mission? We must trust him and the power with which he has equipped us.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Ansley Orfila, *Matthew – Acts Vol 1*. Charisma Commentary on the New Testament. (2018, Ansley Orfila, D.Min ISBN-9781797514222) Kindle: Location 20919).

<sup>6</sup> James D.G. Dunn, and John W. Rogerson eds. *John 20:19-31* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans, 2003).

<sup>7</sup> Robert W. Lyon, *John 20:22, Once More*. The Asbury Theological Journal Vol. 43., no. 1 (1988). 75.

<sup>8</sup> D.A. Carson. *Jesus Appears to His Disciples (20:19-23)* Gospel According to John (Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans, 1991. 649.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 652.

<sup>10</sup> Craig Keener, *As the Father sent me, I Send you – John 20:21*. Bible Background Research and Commentary. September 21, 2013.

"This, by implication, stresses the point that Jesus fulfilled his earthly ministry under the full guidance of the Holy Spirit. . . . Jesus imparts to the disciples the Holy Spirit to equip them for ministry."<sup>11</sup>

## Conclusion

The story of PTL, a famous ministry in Fort Mill, South Carolina, has been well chronicled. Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker, the pastoral leaders, were disgraced. Jim and Tammy divorced, with Jim going to prison. In an interview with Larry King, Jim and Tammy said they had forgiven each other. Jim said, "Only God can help people truly forgive and go on."<sup>12</sup> Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker struggled in their organizational ethics, but they believed in the Holy Spirit's full power to forgive.

"Nothing is more counter to that old creation than forgiveness."<sup>13</sup> When one becomes a new creation by trusting in Jesus' finished work on Calvary, the forgiveness of all sins is not an option but a commandment (Matthew 6:12,14; John 20:23).

Scripture does not specify precisely how to forgive. . . . we are not left to our own devices. We have resources by virtue of common grace and special grace: first, we are created in the image of God, second, we have been forgiven by God. . . . we have divine and human resources. . . . the Comforter, the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 1:3, Christ in us the hope of Glory (Colossians 1:27b, we have the mind of Christ (Romans 12:2). We also have the supportive community (the Church) (2 Corinthians 1:3,4).<sup>14</sup>

The conclusion of many scholars indicates that when Jesus said, "Receive the Holy Spirit" in John 20: 22, he was prophesying of the full power of the Holy Spirit that would enter into the disciples and all Christians on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2). The John 20 enduement was symbolic and not the full power, as the disciples were still afraid and were not wholly active in ministry until after Pentecost.

The mother of the son, who was kidnapped, was baptized in the Holy Spirit, and from her past traumas, knew God's power to heal all wounds. She prayed night and day for her son and spoke to the Lord:

Forgive!!!!, Forgive!!!, How many times Lord must I forgive? After fighting in my flesh and denying it for 120 days, the Holy Spirit dwelling and reigning over me. That night I said, Lord I cannot go on! Let me go. I cannot breathe anymore. The Holy Spirit said in union with our Lord God, let me once again breathe for you. Give me back my life. I saw angels picking me up off the floor like I was a puppet, and they were puppeteers. Right

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<sup>11</sup> Petrus Hendrik Dercksen, *Understanding John 20:21-23 from the Perspective of the Johannine Literature*. Master's Thesis, Rand Afrikaans University, November 2002. 44.

<sup>12</sup> R.T. Kendall, *Total Forgiveness*. 146

<sup>13</sup> Roger Vermalen Karban, *Power to Forgive*. *National Catholic Reporter*, vol 48 Issue 12 March 30, 2012. 29.

<sup>14</sup> Everett L. Worthington Jr. and Constance B. Sharp, Andrea Learner, Jeffery R.. Sharp. *Interpersonal Forgiveness as an Example of Loving One's Enemies*. *Journal of Psychology and Theology*. Spring 2006. 19,20.

then, God began to bring me back to Jonah that we are all his children. That morning at three o'clock am, I told our Lord that I forgive all who took my precious child. You see, without the Holy Spirit, this would never be possible. Please let me encourage you. Forgiveness is a process. Trust our Lord God. Surrender your lives to the Holy Spirit... Forgive yourself, forgive others, Love like Jesus.<sup>15</sup> This tragedy happened over eight years ago and this student misses her son every day, as one can only imagine.

Over the past forty years, this author has observed that there is a difference between people who attend church and know about Jesus and those who have a deep personal relationship with him. Salvation is the first step after confessing one's sins and trusting in Jesus alone for eternal life. When the disciples met with Jesus, they knew he was the one who had come to sacrifice himself for their sins and the sins of the whole world. Jesus then told them to wait on the "Promise of the Father" and to wait for the power to fall upon them on the Day of Pentecost (Luke 24:49; Acts 2).

The disciples were weak, undisciplined, and fearful before Pentecost. After Pentecost (Acts 2), they were mighty in word and deed, healing the sick, cleansing the lepers, and raising the dead.

True forgiveness can only come about by the power of the Holy Spirit living in us. From the cross, Jesus said, "Father Forgive them for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34, which was an example to Stephen. As Stephen was being stoned to death, being full of the Holy Spirit said, "Lord do not hold this sin against them" (Acts 7:55-60). Jesus could forgive anything because he had the full measure of the Holy Spirit. Stephen was baptized with the full power of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit's power gave Stephen the ability to forgive his enemies as they stoned him to death.

The disciples would all be martyred except for the Apostle John, who lived out his life on the Isle of Patmos (Rev 1:9). The other disciples would all face the command to forgive those who would kill them (Matthew 6:12,14).

The mission of Jesus' disciples, that is, of us is not judgment of our fellow sinners or restoring order to society or church by vengeance and retaliation. It is to make effective in the world Jesus' work of reconciliation through the forgiveness of sins so that the community of the forgiven can gather around the table of the lamb who has taken away the sin of the world. For this challenging mission we have the gift of Jesus' Spirit; "Receive the Holy Spirit; whose sins you shall forgive they are forgiven."<sup>16</sup>

In order to forgive one must "be like God"<sup>17</sup> as he has forgiven us, we are to forgive others of every sin. To forgive a small sin is hard, but to forgive someone of child kidnapping, sodomy,

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<sup>15</sup> Student of Gary Pickens, Name withheld to protect her identity.

<sup>16</sup> Sandra M. Schneiders, IHM, *Whose Sins You Shall Forgive...The Holy Spirit and the Forgiveness of Sin's in the Fourth Gospel*. The Spirit in the New Millennium. The Duquesne University 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Holy Spirit Lecture and Colloquium, June 12-13, 2009. 34.

<sup>17</sup> John Gavin SJ., *Becoming an Exemplar for God: Three Early Interpretations of Forgiveness in the Lord's Prayer*. Logos: A Journal. A Journal of Catholic Thought & Culture. Logos 16:3, Summer 2013. 142

and murder seem impossible. But when one is totally committed to a relationship with Jesus Christ and is baptized with the Holy Spirit, forgiveness is possible for any sin.