

The Inscrutable Question: Development of Koine Greek; Biblical Interpretation: Hermeneutics & Textual Criticism; History of English Translations

- 48- The impact this word has in verifying the principle of inspiration is amplified by the discovery that the New Testament was not written in Classical Greek but Koine Greek. The importance of this discovery is covered in the Introduction of:

Dana, H. E. and Julius R. Mantey. *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*. (Toronto: The Macmillan Co., 1955), 6-7, 9:

The Classical Period. This period embraces the centuries from Homer to the Alexandrian conquests (c. 330 B.C.). In this period the Attic dialect secured supremacy. The ancient Greek literature which has come down to us is predominantly Attic.

The Koiné Period. This period extends from 330 B.C. to A.D. 330. It is the period the Greek language was freely used and understood throughout the civilized world, being spoken as freely on the streets of Rome, Alexandria, and Jerusalem as in Athens. There were four main causes bringing about the development of the Koiné Greek: (1) extensive Greek colonization, (2) close political and commercial affiliation of the separate Greek tribes, (3) religious interrelations, and (4) the Alexandrian conquests.

The Greek of the New Testament

There was a time when the scholars who dealt with the original text of the New Testament regarded its Greek as a special Holy Ghost language, prepared under divine direction for the Scripture writers. When the fallacy of this conception began to grow evident, two opposing schools developed. The Hebraists contended that the Septuagint and the New Testament were written in a Biblical Greek; the Purists contended that they represented variations of the classical Attic. But beginning with Johann Winer in 1825 there came a revolution in the views of New Testament scholarship relative to this matter. As a result of the labors of Adolf Deissmann in Germany, William Moulton in England, and A. T. Robertson in America, all question has been removed from the conclusion that New Testament Greek is simply a sample of the colloquial Greek of the first century; i.e., the Koiné Greek. The inspired writers of the New Testament wrote in the ordinary language of the masses, as might have been expected.

Robertson shows that the progress of opinion among New Testament Greek scholars has been for more than half a century toward the conclusion now universally accepted that the Greek of the New Testament is but a specimen of the vernacular Koiné of the first century. But the complete establishment of the new method is an accomplishment of the twentieth century. The future will countenance no other view of the Greek New Testament.

- 49- The impact of these three underlined sentences have tremendous meaning for those who pursue biblical truth in what have come to be known as doctrinal churches. The importance of the discovery that Koine Greek is the language of the New Testament cannot be overstated. Interpreters up to the late 19th century sought to analyze the Greek New Testament in one of two ways, (1) as a special divinely inspired form of Greek unique to the Bible or (2) it was Classical or Attic Greek.

Work by Deissmann, Moulton, Robertson, and others revealed that the language of the Scripture was the common tongue of the Roman Empire of the first century, the Koine Greek.

- 50- However, Dr. Chafer clearly states that on occasion, in order to stress a supernatural concept, the Holy Spirit would coin a word in the Koine Greek since the language's vocabulary contained nothing that could adequately contribute to the presentation of the idea.

Ibid. 1:78:

It is a fair assumption that this crucial word (**θεόπνευστος / theopneustos** /) is of divine origin being fashioned by God with a view to the elucidation of a conception which is not only foreign to the range of things human, but supreme in the range of things divine. Thus the New Testament writers found a goodly number of words divinely prepared and introduced which were capable of expansion in their meaning in order to convey truths which had been heretofore unrevealed.

- 51- In order to convey to the human mind the principle of inspiration, God the Holy Spirit pulled together the Greek proper noun for "God" and the verb "to breathe."
- 52- This anthropomorphism involves both inhale and exhale. In the exhale, the Holy Spirit communicated to human authors God's complete and coherent message. In the exhale, the human writers of Scripture so wrote that ... God's complete message to man was permanently recorded with perfect accuracy in the original languages of Scripture.
- 53- The direction of the human writers by the Holy Spirit is the subject of another major passage that documents inspiration:

2 Peter 1:21 - No prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, because men carried along by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

- 54- Therefore, the Bible in its entirety is the infallible and inspired Word of God. Under verbal inspiration the Holy Spirit guided the choice of the words used without intrusion of error. Under plenary inspiration, the accuracy of the canon is extended to every portion of the Bible.
- 55- It must be recognized that the content of the Bible remains off-limits to any who have not believed in Jesus Christ for salvation. It contains supernatural information that cannot be comprehended without a supernatural Teacher, namely, the Holy Spirit.
- 56- Consequently, revelation and inspiration only guarantee the veracity of the Bible. However, each person must make the personal decision to believe that Jesus is the Christ before he may delve into the treasures of wisdom and knowledge preserved within its pages.
- 57- In the Church Age the believer may be motivated to submit to the content of Scripture because he becomes convinced of its veracity. However his spiritual growth is dependent upon three other principles.
- 58- These three principles have to do with the transfer of the Word of God from the pages of Scripture to the streams of consciousness of believers:
 - 1) **Interpretation:** This is the duty of a man who has the gift of pastor-teacher. He is to utilize the science of interpretation known as hermeneutics. A summary of biblical interpretation is provided by:

Ramm, Bernard L., et al. *Hermeneutics*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1967), 1-2:

The Protestant ministry is based upon the Word of God as expressed in the inspired canonical literature and as perpetuated in preaching.

One of the most important considerations of the Christian ministry must be the right use of the Word of God.

That theological discipline which takes as its goal the proper interpretation of Scripture is hermeneutics. A solid hermeneutics is the root of all good exegesis and exegesis is the foundation of all truly Biblical preaching. Therefore a sound hermeneutics is an absolute *desideratum* for the minister of the Word of God.

- 2) Because the Protestant pastor views the Bible as the inspired Word of God he must approach his interpretation of the Scripture with a theological frame of reference.
- 3) By seeking the theology of a given passage he applies the principles of hermeneutics to his evaluation of its message.
- 4) We will not discuss the entire subject of biblical interpretation but I do want to emphasize two concepts that help to define our approach at Grace Doctrine Church: (1) consultation of the original languages and (2) the process of literal interpretation.
- 5) One of the respected theologians who has written on the subject of hermeneutics is Dr. Bernard L. Ramm. He addresses the subject the original languages in:

Ramm, Bernard L. *Protestant Biblical Interpretation: A Textbook of Hermeneutics*. 3d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1970), 117:

The great doctrines of our Christian faith can be established in any responsible or competent manner only by the interpretation from the original languages. The interpreter who interprets Scripture only in his modern language is always working with a linguistic veil between himself and original texts. And he never knows how thin or how thick this veil is.

- 6) The best presentation of the original languages for us in the twenty-first century is the amalgamation into a Hebrew and Greek Bible of the most reliable manuscripts extant from the ancient world. The identification of these manuscripts is accomplished under the science of *textual criticism*. On this subject, Dr. Ramm provides helpful information:

Ibid. 7-9:

The conservative Protestant interpreter comes to his text believing in its divine inspiration. The interpreter presumes that the Protestant canon has been demonstrated to be the true content of Sacred Scripture.

After the Sacred Canon has been settled, the next task is to determine its truest text. There is no single manuscript of the Old or New Testament which is *the official manuscript*. There are *manuscripts*. A study of these manuscripts reveals many differences. The first task is to collect all the manuscripts and other materials which will help to determine the true text.

Textual criticism is complicated and difficult. Enormous labors have been spent on collecting, collating, and interpreting the readings. This material is presented in critical editions of the Hebrew and Greek Testaments.

After the most careful scrutiny by scholars of the Old and New Testament texts, it is now evident that the Old and New Testaments are the best preserved texts from antiquity. The number of really important variations of the New Testament that cannot be settled with our present information is very small, and the new manuscripts available from the various caves around the Dead Sea show the remarkable purity of our present Old Testament text.

- 7) One of the controversies that has arisen in England and America has to do with the veracity of English translations. The ability to print Bibles was made possible around 1450 by Johannes Gutenberg's invention of a printing press with movable type. This was followed quickly by the Protestant Reformation and the English translation of the Bible by William Tyndale, both occurring in the early 1500s.

Other translations came quickly thereafter: the Geneva Bible, which became the favorite version of English-speaking Protestants but church leaders in England found it to be unacceptable. They soon provided an alternative that was called the Bishops' Bible.

Both the Geneva and Bishops' Bibles were to be displaced by the "Authorized Version" in 1611. Also known as the King James Version, it became the Bible of English-speaking Protestants for 300 years. Its inception occurred at the Hampton Court Conference in 1604 between Anglican bishops and the Puritans. At that conference, John Rainolds, president of Corpus Christi College, suggested a new translation of the Bible.

King James I agreed to this and commissioned forty-seven language scholars to perform what was formally a revision of the Bishops' Bible. A brief history of the origin of the King James Bible is found in:

Thieme, R. B., Jr. *Canonicity*. (Houston: R. B. Thieme, Jr., Bible Ministries, 1973), 50-53:

Elizabeth, Queen of England, had a beautiful cousin, Mary Stuart, who had returned from France in 1561 to take her rightful place as Queen of the Scots. Scotland was in a state of turbulence: the new faith preached by John Knox swept across the locks; and Catholic Mary was held in contempt. Then Mary unwisely married the Scottish Lord Darnley. This created further antagonism to the Scots because he was Catholic.

The Scots had become Calvinistic in their beliefs and resented Mary's Romanism and the influence of her French court. The people were determined that never again should the Roman Church be allowed to gain and hold political power in their nation. Mary was forced to abdicate in favor of her infant son, who then became James VI of Scotland.

James was reared a Protestant. He was taught Calvinistic theology, Greek, Latin and Hebrew. Quite a student, he could discourse on theological subjects in both English and Latin. When Elizabeth died, she left no heirs, thus ending the House of Tudor. James VI was brought down from Scotland and crowned James I of England, beginning the reign of the House of Stuart.

The year was 1603. The Puritans were in revolt against the established church. One thousand Puritan preachers had gathered to write a petition. They beseeched his Majesty and Parliament for a change in the established church service and removal of the sign of the cross. The petition became known in history as the Millenary Petition because of the thousand signatures affixed to it. It resulted in the Hampton Court Conference on January 14, 1603, over which King James presided. It was during one of the endless debates that the leader of the Puritans, John Rainolds, said, "May your Majesty be pleased, that the Bible be new translated, such as are extant not answering to the original."

On July 22, 1604, the King announced that he had appointed fifty-four men to make the new translation. How did he select the scholars? His only requirement was that they must be good linguists. Half of them were Hebrew experts and the other half experts in Greek. The list included Anglicans and Puritans, believers and unbelievers. Of those selected, seven men died before the work was begun. Actually, only forty-seven men worked on what we call today "The Authorized" or "King James Version of the Bible."

- 8) The development of English translations has continued until this day and made necessary by the discovery of older manuscripts. Within fifteen years of the publication of the King James Version, Codex Alexandrinus was discovered in Turkey. It dates to the fifth century and contains most of the New Testament. Since then over 5,000 manuscripts of the Bible have been discovered that are more ancient and more accurate than those that had been used as the basis for the Authorized Version. Major among these were Codex Sinaiticus in 1844, a complete New Testament manuscript dating back to the fourth century, and greater accessibility to the fourth-century manuscript, Codex Vaticanus.
- 9) These led to the development of better translations such as Dr. Henry Alford's *New Testament for English Readers* in 1869. German philologist, Dr. Karl Lachmann, disregarded the bulk of later manuscripts and concentrated on those of earlier date.

- 10) B. F. Westcott and F. J. A. Hort established the principles for the science of textual criticism. In 1881 their two-volume work, *The New Testament in the Original Greek* was published and relied heavily on the codices Alexandrinus and Vaticanus.
- 11) These breakthroughs led ultimately to a revision of the Authorized Version, undertaken in 1870. This followed the resolution adopted by the Upper House of the Convocation of the Province of Canterbury. The completed Revised Bible was published in 1885. It was published in the United States in 1901 as the American Standard Version. It was updated in 1971 and published as the New American Standard Bible.
- 12) However it should be noted, that of over 5,000 extant New Testament manuscripts and fragments, when compared to the Textus Receptus, the manuscript used for the translation of the King James Version's New Testament, there is less than one percent difference.
- 13) In addition to the work of these men we must also mention philologists Adolf Deissmann and Herman von Soden. Their research resulted in important advances toward our complete understanding of the Koine Greek. It was Deissmann who discovered in the late 1800s that the Bible was not written in Classical Greek but Koine, the common language of the Roman Empire.
- 14) The end result of these scholars' research imposes great responsibility upon both pastors and believers in the twenty-first-century church. Pastors today have available to them the closest possible replication of the original manuscripts and a complete analysis of literally every word in the Old Testament's Hebrew and the New Testament's Koine Greek.
- 15) I would mention several research volumes that I am privileged to have in my library that are the result of these philological discoveries and developments:

William F. Arndt and F. Wilber Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*.

G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren. *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. 11 vols.

Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon*.

Adolf Deissmann. *Bible Studies: Contributions Chiefly from Papyri and Inscriptions to the History of the Language, the Literature, and the Religion of Hellenistic Judaism and Primitive Christianity*.

_____. *Light from the Ancient East: The New Testament Illustrated by Recently Discovered Texts of the Graeco-Roman World*.

R. Laird Harris (ed.). *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. 2 vols.

Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann. *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*. 3 vols.

Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. 10 vols.

Ceslas Spicq. *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*. 3 vols.

Joseph Henry Thayer. *The New Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*.