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Translation and Interpretation

Although the Gospel of John was originally written in Greek, Jewish thought and Hebrew linguistics give insight and meaning to the text. Philip Schaff observed, “He [John] writes pure Greek as far as words and grammar are concerned, but he thinks in Hebrew; the Greek is, as it were, only the thin, transparent veil over the face” (*Companion*, p. 67). The veil over the face can be lifted to understand the Greek more clearly. Hebrew culture and linguistics provide many insights. Observe the difference in three texts, comparing the authorized version with the Hebrew Heritage Bible Translation. A translation is more than a mindless, literal copying of words from one language to another. Every translation involves interpretation.

“For the law was given by Moses, *but* grace and truth came by Jesus Christ” (John 1:17, KJV). “For as Torah was revealed through Moshe, grace and truth were intensified more fully through Yeshua the Anointed One” (John 1:17, Hebrew Heritage Bible).

The word “*but*” is in italics in the KJV and does not appear in the Greek text at all. The addition of the word into the translation makes it sound as if there never was any grace and truth in God’s message in the Hebrew Bible. This would eliminate Psalm 103 and many other texts as well. Every careful student of the Bible must recognize grace in Torah and Torah in grace. Jesus did not come to destroy the message of Torah, but rather to intensify its true meaning. A sequential development affirms and strengthens divine revelation, but does not cancel and replace what was already given.

“In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it *were* not *so*, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.” (John 14:2, KJV)

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“Inside my Father’s family there is plenty of room. If this was not the case, I would have told you. I am going to prepare a place just for you.” (John 14:2, Hebrew Heritage Bible)

It is very difficult to understand how a house is able to contain many mansions. The word “mansion” does not appear in Greek. The idea might be better if the words “mansion” and “house” were reversed. Even so, it is difficult to imagine a mansion filled with houses.

The word “house” in Hebrew, often means “family.” It is better to translate family in this context. God’s family is open to receive the believer and disciple of Yeshua. Yeshua is emphasizing that there is plenty of room in the family God. He is preparing a place for His disciples.

“And when he had said this, he breathed on *them*, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; *and* whose soever *sins* ye retain, they are retained.” (John 20:22-23, KJV) “After he had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. For those you release from the force of their sins, they stand released from the power of wrong, and for those you give power to overcome their sins, they will stand with strength to overcome temptation to sin.’” (John 20:22-23, Hebrew Heritage Bible)

The final phrase of the KJV in verse 23 essentially gives the disciples the power not to forgive sins. This has been a church interpretation and sometimes it is related to Matthew 18:18 where binding and loosing is mentioned. The Christian community has the right to hold sins against individuals or to release them by forgiving the sin. This theological interpretation imposes the meaning of an antithetical parallelism.

This translation is most unfortunate. The Greek word *krateo* means “to have power over.” The final phrase is actually only two Greek verbs which could literally be translated, “you have

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power over and will stand with power over.” The idea that you have power to retain sins, that is, not to forgive sins, is carried over from the preceding phrase which literally reads, “For those you release from their sins, they stand released.”

In the study of *krateo* and the meaning of being released from the force of sin, another translation is possible and probably more accurate. The resurrected Lord is breathing the Holy Spirit upon the disciples, much like the creation of humanity where the breath of God brings life from dead clay, or the vision of Ezekiel’s dry bones where the Spirit of God breathes life into the valley of death. New creation and Holy Spirit empowerment is imparted.

The Gospel of John speaks about the power of darkness. It cannot gain mastery over the light. The disciples are being released from the power of sin, and they are given strength to stand and to remain in the strength of the Holy Spirit. In reality, the Greek text is more of a synonymous parallelism.

A better translation makes the text a parallelism in which one phrase reinforces the next. This is quite prevalent in Hebrew. The currently accepted translation, like the KJV, makes the second phrase an antithetical parallelism. First, the sins are forgiven. Second, the sins are not forgiven. This interpretation, which is based on inference, is absolutely wrong. Jesus sent the apostles to forgive sins, not to withhold forgiveness. Jesus did not teach the church unforgiveness. The Holy Spirit was given so that believers would have power to overcome the force of sin.

The first part of the promise is that you are released from the force of sin and you are able to continue experiencing the power of forgiveness. The second part of the verse actually means that you are given power to overcome sin and then you are able to continue to receive power to overcome. The text is a parallelism that reinforces the meaning through repetition and gives

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greater force to the work of the Holy Spirit. Nowhere in the Gospels does Jesus ever teach that a group of spiritual leaders has power not to forgive someone's sins. Jesus did not advocate a spirit of not forgiving. An individual can refuse to forgive a wrong that was done against that individual. But God alone is able to forgive sins. In John 20:23, Yeshua teaches that after receiving the power of the Holy Spirit, the disciple is released from the force of sin and is given power to overcome temptation. The better translation is one that includes the power to overcome temptation to do wrong: "After he had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. For those you release from the force of their sins, they stand released from the power of wrong, and for those you give power to overcome their sins, they will stand with strength to overcome temptation to sin'" (John 20:22-23, Hebrew Heritage Bible).