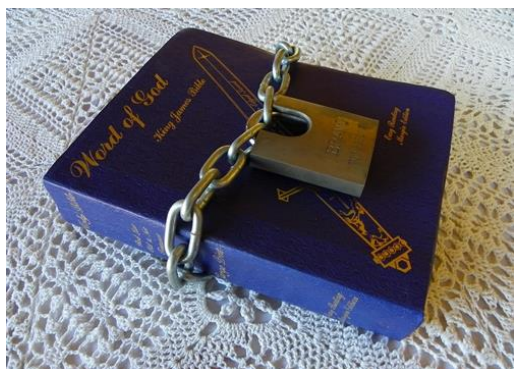


HOW ACCURATE AM I READING THE BIBLE TEXT?

GERRIE MALAN



The past decade has seen me focusing on the question of correct context in my own Bible study, and of course, in the process in my writings. I have dealt many times with the necessity to read the Scriptures against the background of the cultural, historical, literary, theological and geographical context of the time each book in the Bible was written. Let there be no doubt about the many errors preachers and teachers have been presenting as Biblical truth because they have read the Bible not only through Western eyes, but contemporary Western eyes and mindset.

The fact that the books in the Bible were written by some 40 writers over a period of approximately 1400 years many centuries ago and on three continents seems to have been lost completely along the way. Add to that the errors and consequently also differences found in Bible translations.

Lately, the fact that we so often even err in our reading of the translations, has been turning around and around in my mind. This short article is the result and I only hope that it will stimulate every reader to focus anew on what the written word is really stating – and I am not referring to obvious twisting of Scripture portions. Also, I will simply be pointing out discrepancies and not enter into deep theological discussions, as that is not the purpose of this little article.

It is a sad indictment of the Christian “scholarly” world that even the dating of Bible books, for example the Revelation, has been manipulated to suit popular contemporary teachings.

EXAMPLES TO ILLUSTRATE IN PRACTICAL TERMS

1. John and the Island of Patmos

We have been taught and I sincerely believed so until quite recently, that the Book of Revelation was written by the Apostle John during his incarceration on the Island of Patmos. The written word, however, says otherwise and this struck me between the eyes when I recently read the introductory verses again:

- *“I John, (...) WAS in the isle that is called Patmos (...)”* (Revelation 1:9, KJV).
- *“I, John, (...) WAS on the island called Patmos (...)”* (HCSB).
- *“I, Yochanan, (...) I HAD BEEN exiled to the island called Patmos (...)”* (CJB).

The text shows that when John was writing down the Revelation, his sojourn on the island of Patmos lay in the past – it was not present tense. One may ask whether that has any significance? My answer is, “definitely,” as it opens the door for wrong interpretations, as it has done.

As a matter of interest, my search for where John was when he wrote the Revelation found strong indications that he was in Ephesus at the time. Given the sequence of the seven congregations specific letters were addressed to, with Ephesus the starting point, it seems to be a plausible position.

2. The Lord's day/Day of the Lord

Verse 10 presents another problem, but this time depending on the translation one is using:

- *"I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, (...)"* (Revelation 1:10, KJV).
- *"I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, (...)"* (HCSB).
- *"I came to be, in the Spirit, on the Day of the Lord; (...)"* (CJB).

The first two similar versions indicate that it was the Lord's day and, on this day, John was in the Spirit. The traditional interpretation is that the day involved was what we know today as Sunday, or the Israelite Sabbath according to some commentators. However, neither of these days are called "the Lord's day" elsewhere in the Bible. On that day, John was in the Spirit. The Complete Jewish Bible's text gives a different picture if one reads it carefully. That version would suggest that John experienced the Day of the Lord while he was in the Spirit – a spiritual visionary experience, in other words. In this case the Day of the Lord (Note the capital letter in Day) seems to refer to the Great Judgment Day that Hebrew prophets foretold centuries earlier (see Malachi 4, for example). The content of the Revelation certainly points toward this understanding.

3. Mark of the Beast

The past decades have seen many debates and publications on the mark of the beast noted in Revelation 13:16 & 17. The popular contemporary version is a microchip implantation in one's hand.

- *"And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or on their foreheads: And that no man might buy or sell, save he had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name"* (KJV).

This King James text clearly provides **three options** of the mark: a mark of some kind, the beast's name, or the number of his name. But now consider the following two text versions:

- *"And he requires everyone – small and great, rich and poor, free and slave – to be given a mark on his right hand or on his forehead, so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark: the beast's name or the number of his name"* (HCSB).
- *"Also it forces everyone – great and small, rich and poor, free and slave – to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead preventing anyone from buying or selling unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of his name"* (CJB).

According to these text versions there are **only two options**: the name of the beast or the number of his name. Even if one believes there is an end-time scenario to come, this text seemingly leaves no opening for the popular idea of a microchip implantation?

4. Divorce

Let us consider the discussion of some Pharisees with Jesus about divorce (Mat 19:3):

- *"The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?"* (KJV).
- *"Some Pharisees approached Him to test Him. They asked, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife on any grounds?'"* (HCSB).
- *"Some P'rushim came and tried to trap him by asking, 'Is it permitted for a man to divorce his wife on any ground whatever?'"* (CJB).

Now I must admit that most people will probably understand "for every cause, on any grounds, and on any ground whatever" to mean they are asking if there were any approvable or just cause for

divorce. But this is not what the text is presenting, and no, it does not have a deep spiritual implication. You see, some spiritual leaders of the Jews had over time diluted the divorce laws to such an extent that any ground whatever was deemed good enough. The Rabbi Shammai camp tried to conserve the ancient conservative view of divorce. The followers in the Rabbi Hillel group had a much more liberal view. This was diluted even more by Rabbi Akiva (Akiba), who allegedly taught that even if a man thought his wife was not an acceptable cook, it was enough reason for divorce.

What seems to be something quite straightforward and simple to the Western mind, actually had very specific reference to the terminology used in the different divorce rules. The Pharisees did not care about the truth. They were trying to force Jesus to align himself with one side – taking up a divisive position, in other words.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

We could move into all kinds of theological discussions regarding each of the above examples. As I noted, that is not the purpose of this short article. I simply wish to show that we can so easily miss the true meaning of the Bible text if we neglect to focus carefully on even apparently uncomplicated portions of text. Such neglect has been responsible for the teaching and preaching of so many philosophies instead of the Biblical truth over centuries.

In considering the principle(s) brought to the fore in this article, one is faced once again by two important questions as a point of departure in our Bible study and understanding of the Bible message: (1) Does truth matter? (2) What is the truth?

For more detailed discussion of the critical importance to read the Bible text within its true context, you are welcome to download our free e-book, *Rightly Divide The Word*, from our website: www.hoseaconnection.org.

THE BIBLE VERSIONS QUOTED

KJV: STAMPS, D.C. (General Editor). 1992. *The Full Life Study Bible, King James Version*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan.

HCSB: *Holman Christian Standard Bible*. 2003. Nashville, Tennessee: Holman Bible Publishers.

CJB: STERN, D.H. 1998. *Complete Jewish Bible*. Clarksville, Maryland: Jewish New Testament Publications, Inc.

13 November 2018.