

Lesson Two

Learning How Words Work

A goal that every reader of the Bible should have is to determine what the words they are reading meant to the original author and the audience to whom he or she was writing. This is not a simple task. As a matter of fact it may be impossible in some cases. There are, however, guidelines that one may use to ensure the highest possibility of accuracy. This is what we call **learning how words work**.

Biblical Heritage Guideline #7

A word is one or more symbols or sounds with an attached bundle of associations. The associations are a product of the Source's culture, historical time period, geographical location, and personal experiences.

Learning how words work allows us to see beyond the cultural blinders that we have worn all of our lives. We have been acquiring words, along with the bundles of association provided by our culture, all of our lives. So have many others, otherwise, without this process, communication with one another would be impossible. It is those shared bundles of associations that combine to create our languages.

Sometimes the symbols or sounds are very familiar because they make up our native language, but other times they are unknown. We can look at or listen to them, but since we have not bundles of associations to attach to them, they have no meaning. It is very much like attending an estate sale and finding an old safe that is about to be suctioned off. The auctioneer points to it before the bidding begins, and tells everyone no one has been able to open it. It could be completely empty or there could be a valuable treasure locked inside. All the bidders can see, feel, knock on, even smell the safe; but until someone is able to unlock the door no one knows what the previous owner placed inside it. Words that come from different cultures, historical time periods, geographical locations and were written by people with very different life experiences are like that safe. The BHC Linguistic Method of Bible Study will provide a combination that will most accurately unlock them.

Millions of Bible readers have been speculating about what the words of their Bibles mean for centuries, but have not possessed the combination that would unlock their meanings. Translations of the various Bibles make the possibility of discovering the ancient authors' meanings very difficult. In most cases, the words the translators chose are words that you have been using all of your lives. You had bundles of associations for the familiar words long before you read them in a Bible. Your meanings come from your culture, time period and geographical location. You may have an inventory of personal experiences that are also linked to certain words – love, faith, trust, evil, hate, etc.

Biblical Heritage Guideline #8

The better you prepare yourself to look at the words of your Bible through the eyes of the ancient authors, the more accurately you will be able to understand what they originally meant.

Let's put this guideline to use with the words of the lesson. I am the **Source** (author) and you are the **Receptor** (audience). Even though you are reading this in English, there is a possibility that they may mean different things to us. So, let's begin by making sure we have the same bundles of associations.

Vocabulary

- (1) **Language** - Language names and classifies things and people in terms of their significance of behavior. If we have not been taught or have not learned a specific meaning of a word or phrase, we will be unaware of it and what it represents.
- (2) **Source** - The writer or speaker of the words.
- (3) **Signal** - The symbols (words) written or sounds spoken.
- (4) **Receptor** - The one to whom the Source was writing or speaking.
- (5) **Successful Communication Experience** - The Source and Receptor have the same bundles of associations for the Source's Signal.
- (6) **Unsuccessful Communication Experience** - The Source and Receptor do not have the same bundles of associations for the Source's Signal.

The Basic Communications Model

A Source sends a Signal to a Receptor.

Example:

Bill (Source) sends an e-mail (Signal) to Jane (Receptor).

If Jane understands the message exactly as Bill intended, then this was a Successful Communication Experience. If Jane does not understand the message as Bill intended, then this was an Unsuccessful Communication Experience.

Biblical Heritage Guideline #9

The Source's meaning is the correct meaning and is the standard that must be used to test any translation or interpretation of the Source's words.

Any belief or doctrine that bases its authority on words recorded in any Bible must first pass the test of being a Successful Communication Experience.

Words are like secret codes. As we have already discussed, words are of no value unless someone understands them. For example, what does the word "tneckstor" mean to you? I am sure you recognize the symbols (letters) -- **t-m-e-c-k-s-t-o-r**. I am also pretty sure that this word doesn't mean anything to you. At least I hope it doesn't, because I just made it up. Without an attached "bundle of associations" it is meaningless. There is nothing inherent in the symbols or sounds of a word. If two or more people agree to switch specific bundles of association of certain words they could still communicate successfully. They could switch the bundles of association for the words "tomato" and "cow," but if someone heard them talking about picking "big red cows off the vine," they wouldn't have a clue!

The Bible Through Their Eyes

Why do we call this plant a "tomato" instead of a "cow?" Somewhere back in our history someone assigned the symbols to that plant and a growing number of people agreed by using the word "tomato."

Biblical Heritage Guideline #10

We must determine what a word meant during the Source's historical time period because the meaning of a word may change over time.

Two people can read the same message and come up with two completely different meanings for what it meant. Read the message below and pay attention to the underlined words. See what kind of picture they paint in your mind.

"Do you remember **Mary**? Well, she is still just as naughty as she was the last time you saw her. Some say that would change if she wasn't so nice. She really needs someone to give her some fellowship, to help her get out of that rut. By the way, do you remember **Bill**? Has he always been gay? **Bill** and Tom still go every where together. **Jack** is looking in the magazine as I write this note. We are still looking for a new constable to replace **Abe**. We sure hope the new guy will be as good of a steward as Abe was. I heard you hired **Bob**. Is he a very good chauffeur?"

Write down what the underlined words told you about the people mentioned in the message.

(1) **Mary** –

(2) **Bill** –

(3) **Jack** –

(4) **Abe** –

(5) **Bob** –

Now write down the meanings of the following words.

(1) **naughty** –

(2) **nice** –

(3) **fellowship**

The Bible Through Their Eyes

(4) **gay** –

(5) **magazine** –

(6) **constable** –

(7) **steward** –

(8) **chauffeur** –

Now read the message again, but this time substitute the older meanings of the underlined words that are found below it.

"Do you remember **Mary**? Well, she is still just as naughty as she was the last time you saw her. Some say that would change if she wasn't so nice. She really needs someone to give her some fellowship, to help her get out of that rut. By the way, do you remember **Bill**? Has he always been gay? **Bill** and Tom still go every where together. **Jack** is looking in the magazine as I write this note. We are still looking for a new constable to replace **Abe**. We sure hope the new guy will be as good of a steward as Abe was. I heard you hired **Bob**. Is he a very good chauffeur?"

(1) **naughty** - **poor** (one who has naught)

(2) **nice**- **stupid**

(3) **fellowship**- **to lay down money or goods for a common cause**

(4) **gay**- **joyful, happy, enthusiastic**

(5) **magazine** - **storehouse**

(6) **constable** - **person that works in the stable**

(7) **steward** - **keeper of the pigs**

(8) **chauffeur** - **fireman (person that stokes the fire)**

Now, describe the same people as before, but this time with the "older" meanings for the underlined words.

(1) **Mary** –

The Bible Through Their Eyes

(2) **Bill** –

(3) **Jack** –

(4) **Abe** –

(5) **Bob** –

Did this create a completely different picture in your mind for each person? The words in the message did not change, but the bundles of associations for the underlined words did. Keep in mind that you are readings English words, not words from another language. The older meanings came from a time period that was at the most only a few centuries ago.

Now let's take another look at a word that was used in the above message and is found in the famous King James Version (KJV), which was made in England in 1611 CE; almost 400 years ago! Keep in mind that it was made over a century before the United States became a nation. The word is found in Acts 2:42:

"And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and **fellowship**, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers."

The words from the Book of Acts were originally written over 1,900 years ago in another language by people from a different culture. The oldest copies of the above verse are written in Greek. The English word "fellowship" comes from the Old English word "feolaga" which is borrowed from Scandinavian "felog." Felog is made up of "fe" (cattle or money) and "-log" (a person who lays something down). In 1611, fellowship meant *"to lay down money or goods for a common cause or undertaking; to pool your resources."* In England, at the time of the King James translators, the meaning was "to lay down money or goods for a common cause." Today it means "getting together with others; companionship," which is the way many Bible readers interpret the above verse. Now, look at what happens to the verse when we insert the meaning that was in common use when the King James Version was translated in 1611:

"And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' teachings and laying down their money or goods for the common cause, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers."

Below are more examples of words that have changed over the years in the English language.

(1) **jet** - a solid, dry, black, inflammable fossil substance" or "a spout, spouting, or shooting of water."

(2) **foyer** – a fireplace

(3) **meat** - food of any kind

(4) **holiday** – a holy day

The Bible Through Their Eyes

- (5) **fool** – a tongue-wager
- (6) **senate** - a group of old men
- (7) **broker** - the one who opened the cask of wine
- (8) **intoxicated** – poisoned
- (9) **typewriter** (if you are old enough to remember) - the person typing and not the machine
- (10) **noble** – knowable
- (11) **jest** - a brave deed.

Now think about the words of your Bible, which were written no less than 2,000 years ago in a different language. Do you think that it would be wise to check their original meanings?

Biblical Heritage Guideline #11

The meanings of some words drop out of use and become unknown to later generations.

Out of sight, out of mind . . . forever? Samuel Johnson, in the “Preface to A Dictionary of the English Language, 1755” wrote the following:

"But what makes a word obsolete more than general agreement to forbear it? And how shall it be continued when it conveys an offensive idea or recalled again into the mouths of mankind when it has once by disuse become unfamiliar, and by unfamiliar unpleasing."

Bible readers must also consider the translators’ culture, historical time period and geographical locations when they read any translation. There may be a big difference in the way a 17th century translation and one from the 21st century, even though both are written in English.

Biblical Heritage Guideline #12

Get the facts about the Bible translation or translations you use.

Who were they? When and where did they live? Why did they make their translation? Who paid for them to make it? Was it printed by a religious institution? What are the core beliefs of that institution? Below is a summary of the history of the King James Version. The points that I felt should be emphasized are in bold type and underlined..

Although Bible revision was not on the agenda, the **Puritan** president of Corpus Christi College, **John Reynolds**, "**moved his Majesty**, that there might be a new translation of the Bible, because **those which were allowed in** the reigns of Henry the eighth, and Edward the sixth, **were corrupt and not answerable to the truth of the Original.**" . . .

In **July of 1604**, **James** wrote to Bishop Bancroft that he had "**appointed** certain learned men, to the number of **four and fifty**, for the translating of the Bible." . . .

The Bible Through Their Eyes

Although fifty-four men were nominated, **only forty-seven were known to have taken part in the work** of translation. The translators were **organized into six groups**, and met respectively at **Westminster, Cambridge, and Oxford**. **Ten at Westminster were assigned Genesis through 2 Kings; seven had Romans through Jude. At Cambridge, eight worked on 1 Chronicles through Ecclesiastes**, while **seven others handled the Apocrypha**. **Oxford employed seven to translate Isaiah through Malachi; eight occupied themselves with the Gospels, Acts, and Revelation**. . . .

Fifteen general rules were advanced for the guidance of the translators:

1. The ordinary Bible read in the Church, commonly called **the Bishops Bible, to be followed**, and **as little altered** as the Truth of the original will permit.
2. The names of the Prophets, and the Holy Writers, with the other Names of the Text, to be retained, as nigh as may be, accordingly as they were vulgarly used.
3. The Old Ecclesiastical Words to be kept, viz. **the Word Church not to be translated Congregation** &c.
4. When a Word hath divers Significations, that to be kept which hath been most commonly used by the most of the Ancient Fathers, being agreeable to the Propriety of the Place, and **the Analogy of the Faith**.
5. **The Division of the Chapters to be altered, either not at all, or as little as may be**, if Necessity so require.
6. **No Marginal Notes at all to be affixed**, but only for the explanation of the Hebrew or Greek Words, which cannot without some circumlocution, so briefly and fitly be expressed in the Text.
7. Such Quotations of Places to be marginally set down as shall serve for the fit Reference of one Scripture to another.
8. Every particular Man of each Company, to take the same Chapter or Chapters, and **having translated or amended them severally by himself**, where he thinketh good, **all to meet together, confer what they have done**, and agree for their Parts what shall stand.
9. As any one Company hath dispatched any one Book in this Manner **they shall send it to the rest, to be considered of seriously and judiciously**, for His Majesty is very careful in this Point.
10. **If any Company**, upon the Review of the Book so sent, **doubt or differ** upon any Place, to send them Word thereof; note the Place, and withal send the Reasons, to which if they consent not, **the Difference to be compounded at the general Meeting**, which is to be of the chief Persons of each Company, at the end of the Work.

The Bible Through Their Eyes

11. **When any Place** of special Obscurity **is doubted** of, **Letters to be directed by Authority, to send to any Learned Man in the Land,** for his Judgement of such a Place.
12. **Letters to be sent from every Bishop to the rest of his Clergy, admonishing them of this Translation** in hand; and to move and charge as many skilful in the Tongues; and having taken pains in that kind, to send his particular Observations to the Company, either at Westminster, Cambridge, or Oxford.
13. The Directors in each Company, to be the Deans of Westminster, and Chester for that Place; and the **King's Professors in the Hebrew or Greek** in either University.
14. **These translations to be used** when they agree better with the Text than the **Bishops Bible: Tyndale's, Matthew's, Coverdale's, Whitchurch's, Geneva.**
15. Besides the said Directors before mentioned, **three or four of the most Ancient and Grave Divines, in either of the Universities, not employed in Translating, to be assigned by the vice-Chancellor, upon Conference with the rest of the Heads, to be Overseers of the Translations as well Hebrew as Greek, for the better observation of the 4th Rule above specified.**

The Authorized Version, as it came to be called, **went through several editions and revisions.** Two notable editions were that of **1629, the first ever printed at Cambridge,** and that of **1638, also at Cambridge,** which was assisted by John Bois and Samuel Ward, two of the original translators. In 1657, the Parliament considered another revision, but it came to naught. The most important editions were those of the **1762 Cambridge revision by Thomas Paris,** and the **1769 Oxford revision by Benjamin Blayney.**

(This article was taken from the book A Brief History of English Bible Translations by Dr. Laurence M. Vance. [<http://www.av1611.org/kjv/kjvhist.html>])

We now know that John Reynolds, a Puritan, was behind the movement to create an English translation. He influenced King James to undertake the project. In order to more fully understand why he did this we would need to learn more about the Puritan movement and its beliefs and doctrines. It is clear from the above notes that King James wanted to make sure that the translation fit within the official and established faith of England.

The fact that official letters were sent to bishops and priests to urge them to make sure the new translation made it into their hands and the hands of their people made it a very well known and popular translation. Since the Puritans supported this project and they were some of the early pilgrims to the American continent, the King James Version came to the new land with them.

The Bible Through Their Eyes

Review of BHC Guidelines

- (1) The Bible is a book of words.
- (2) In order to accurately understand the words of a message you must learn how words work.
- (3) My belief system will be large enough to include all of the facts. It will be open enough to be tested. It will be flexible enough to change when I become aware of error or new facts.
- (4) Determine whether something is a belief or a fact.
- (5) Our Belief Systems strongly influence our perceptions and determine what we see and how we understand it.
- (6) NO single book is "THE BIBLE." Many books are called "THE BIBLE," but they are not identical. They may have different books and words. Even in the same books the words may differ.
- (7) A word is one or more symbols or sounds with an attached bundle of associations. The associations are a product of the Source's culture, historical time period, geographical location, and personal experiences.
- (8) The better you prepare yourself to look at the words of your Bible through the eyes of the ancient authors, the more accurately you will be able to understand what they originally meant.
- (9) The Source's meaning is the correct meaning and is the standard that must be used to test any translation or interpretation of the Source's words. Any belief or doctrine that bases its authority on words recorded in any Bible must first pass the test of being a Successful Communication Experience.
- (10) We must determine what a word meant during the Source's historical time period because the meaning of a word may change over time.
- (11) The meanings of some words drop out of use and become unknown to later generations.
- (12) Get the facts about the Bible translation or translations you use.

Important points to remember.

- (1) Our cultures play the major role in determining what we see or are incapable of recognizing.
- (2) A translation of the biblical text into our native language is very helpful because it allows us to have access to a text that would otherwise be unreadable. The danger such a translation is that the we already have meaning for many of the words used by the translators, but our meanings may differ significantly from the ancient authors' meanings.
- (3) The meanings for words in our native language may change over time, just as the meanings for words in the ancient author's language could have changed too. We must anchor a words meanings to the time and place in which it was used.

The Bible Through Their Eyes

- (4) Once a meaning drops from popular use it is easily lost in a very short time. One must use specialized linguistic resources to find those meanings.
- (5) It takes a great deal of time and money to produce a translation of any Bible. Those who fund such projects have an agenda. Find out what it was and you will better be able to recognize its influence in the work of the translators.
- (6) Someone had the final word in making the translation. Who was it and what was the standard used to resolve translation and textual problems?
- (7) Many translations have been revised since they were originally made. Find out when they were done and what changes were made.

Comments & Notes