

Old Testament Literature

Translations & OT Overview

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Inspiration, Canonization, Transmission, Translation, Textual Criticism, Ugaritic, Dynamic Equivalence, Old Testament Turning Points, Genesis 1

Abstract

In this lecture, Dr. Ted Hildebrandt explores the transmission and translation processes that brought the Old Testament from divine inspiration to modern translations, explaining how scribal variations and translation approaches—such as word-for-word literalism and dynamic equivalence—affect modern Bible versions. He outlines nine major turning points in Old Testament history anchored by key B.C. dates (Abraham at 2000 B.C., David at 1000 B.C., and Malachi at 400 B.C.) to provide a historical framework for scriptural study. Finally, Dr. Hildebrandt introduces Genesis 1, emphasizing that students should focus on the theological message and majesty of God's creation rather than becoming distracted by minor scribal details or scientific debates over the age of the Earth.

Outline

I. Class Announcements and Administrative Business

- A. Quiz preparation details
 - 1. Coverage: Genesis chapters 26–50 focused on syllabus story list
 - 2. Reading: John Sailhamer's "Cosmic Maps" article
 - 3. Reading: Pages in Dr. Marvin Wilson's Our Father Abraham (reflective questions as study guides)
 - 4. Scripture memory verses assigned for the week
- B. Transcription project guidelines for scribes and editors
 - 1. Scribe transcriptions submitted to designated class editors
 - 2. Editors compile and submit final document to instructor via email attachment (.docx)
- C. Special campus lecture conflict
 - 1. Kyle's review session on Wednesday evening (7:00–8:00 PM)
 - 2. Dr. Perry Phillips's lecture on the "Big Bang" and creation (7:15 PM)
 - 3. Instructor plan to video tape Dr. Phillips's lecture for online processing
- D. Course fee payments due before price doubles at week's end

II. Course Overview and the Four Core Processes (God to Us)

- A. Foundation: Philosophical arguments for the existence of God
- B. Process 1: Inspiration (100% Flawless)
 - 1. Definition: God speaking directly to prophets who write down His exact words
 - 2. Historical timeframe: Moses (~1400 B.C.) to Malachi (~400 B.C.) over a 1,000-year period
- C. Process 2: Canonization
 - 1. Definition: Collecting and recognizing authoritative, sacred books over a millennium
 - 2. Historical context: Preservation despite foreign destruction (e.g., Babylonian conquest)
- D. Process 3: Transmission
 - 1. Definition: Copying biblical texts from generation to generation
 - 2. Human element: Scribes made minor human errors in copying without evil intent
- E. Process 4: Translation
 - 1. Definition: Translating ancient texts from Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek into modern languages
 - 2. Linguistic challenges: Nuances and idioms can be lost across different languages

III. Challenges and Theories in Biblical Translation

- A. Modern discoveries and translational errors
 - 1. Example: Proverbs 26:23 in the King James Version (1611)
 - a. KJV text: "potsherd covered with silver dross"
 - b. Historical limitation: 1611 translators lacked full context for rare Hebrew words (hapax legomena)
 - c. Archaeological illumination: Ugaritic tablets discovered in 1948 revealed the true meaning as "glaze" on a mud pot
- B. Problem of archaic English language evolution
 - 1. Example: 2 Corinthians 8:1 ("do you to wit") updated to modern phrasing ("want you to think about")
- C. Major theories of translation compared
 - 1. Word-for-Word Literal
 - a. Maps single words directly between languages
 - b. Limitation: Languages do not align one-to-one; breaks down in poetic genres
 - 2. Modified Literal
 - a. Maintains word-for-word accuracy where possible, adjusting when structure fails
 - 3. Dynamic Equivalence (Meaning-for-Meaning)
 - a. Translates functional meaning and concepts rather than literal words
 - b. Examples: Translating Hebrew hesed as "love," "steadfast love," or "loyal love"
 - 4. Gender-Inclusive / Politically Motivated Translation Approaches
 - a. Modern trends toward modifying gender-exclusive language (e.g., NRSV, TNIV)

b. Instructor critique regarding altering original authorial intent and metaphors

D. Translation comparison using Proverbs 10:5

1. Original Hebrew: Poetic sound play ('oger baqqayitz ben maskil...)
2. King James Version (KJV): "He that gathereth in summer is a wise son" (archaic phrasing)
3. New American Standard Version (NASV): "He who gathers in summer is a son who acts wisely" (word-for-word, less punchy)
4. New International Version (NIV): "He who gathers crops in summer is a wise son" (adds explicit "crops" for agrarian clarity, punchy)
5. New Living Translation (NLT): "A wise youth works hard all summer" (substitutes meaning for metaphor, changes "son" to "youth")
6. The Message (Eugene Peterson): "Make hay while the sun shines, that's smart..." (idiomatic, dynamic equivalence)

E. Methodological conclusions on manuscripts and translations

1. Superiority of modern manuscript evidence compared to past centuries
2. Scribes and translators made human errors, but no core Christian doctrine is affected
3. Inspiration is perfect and flawless; transmission and translation involve fallible humans

IV. Historical Overview of the Old Testament: Nine Key Turning Points

A. Chronological anchoring dates

1. Abraham: 2000 B.C.
2. David: 1000 B.C.
3. Malachi: 400 B.C.

B. The Nine Turning Points

1. Primeval History (Genesis 1–11): Creation, Adam and Eve, Noah and the Flood, Tower of Babel
2. Patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac (Yitzhak / "laughter"), Jacob (Israel and 12 tribes), Joseph
3. Egypt and Exodus: 400-year sojourn, Moses as deliverer, Red Sea crossing, Sinai law
4. Settlement of Canaan: Joshua and Judges (conquest of Jericho, cyclical chaos under judges)
5. United Monarchy (~1000 B.C.): Saul, David (psalms), Solomon (Shelomo / "peace", proverbs/temple)
6. Divided Monarchy: Israel (North, 10 tribes, all bad kings like Ahab) vs. Judah (South, some good kings)
7. Prophetic Era: Prophets called kings to repent; suffered persecution (Jeremiah in cistern, Isaiah)
8. Exile and Dispersion: Northern kingdom fell to Assyria (722 B.C.); Southern kingdom fell to Babylon (586 B.C., temple destroyed)
9. Return and Restoration: Post-exilic return under Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther; rebuilding of Second Temple; Malachi closes OT (400 B.C.)

V. Introduction to Genesis 1: Theological Meaning vs. Speculation

- A. Creation worldview (Weltanschauung): Human dignity as created in God's image
- B. Scientific debate and biblical intent: Scriptural text addresses theology, not modern evolutionary biology
- C. Age of the Earth: The Bible contains no explicit verse defining the exact numerical age of the Earth
- D. Textual transition: Setting up Genesis 1:1 and 1:2 ("formless and empty") for future study of God's majesty over creation