The Translation Debate
Goals Tonight

I. Listing Modern Translations

II. Surveying the Modern Translation Debate
Number of English Translations

- The number of translations is difficult to determine. Yet if one includes every translation, paraphrase, and incomplete Bible (meaning only N.T. editions) the number is somewhere around 900 according to the American Bible Society website.

- We will not examine all of these! We will only focus on the top selling, most popular Bible translations, the ones you are most likely to encounter.
Why So Many?

1. The English language changes…

   • “Let” (from “hinder” to “allow”)
   
   • “Prevent” (from “come in front, or meet” to “hinder”)
   
   • “Conversation” (from “lifestyle including words and actions” to modernly only referring to “speech, or words”)
   
   • “Quick” (from “being alive” to “being fast sudden or immediate”)
   
   • “Leasing” (from “lying” to now “a contract between two parties”)
   
   • Meat (from “any sort of food,” to only “animal flesh”)
   
   • Meet (from “useful” to “coming into someone’s presence”)


2. Our understanding of Greek grows...

- Through the discovery of more and more Greek writings from the ancient world, modern scholarship has increased in our understanding of Koine Greek. At one time scholars believed the N.T. coined over 500 words. Yet now we understand that the N.T. probably only coined around 50 words, the rest being a normal part of Koine Greek.

- Example: we now know from the study of Koine Greek, that the phrase “only begotten” does not mean “only one born.” Rather, it was used to describe something or someone as “unique.”
Why So Many?

3. Bible printing is big money...

- The Bible is ALWAYS the best selling book in the world. Many modern translations are the result of printing houses not wanting to pay royalties to print a copyrighted translation. So several publishing houses sponsored new translations (e.g. Zondervan, Tyndale House, Thomas Nelson).

- Yet a new translation must be 10% different than former translations in order to not violate copyright laws.
Modern Translation Debate

- What translation of the English Bible to use, and why, has always been a debate. Even decades before the creation of the King James Bible, this question was a controversy.

- But note first the privilege that we have as English speakers. We have such a wealth of English translations, that we argue over which one is best. Many countries & languages do not have that luxury.
Our missionary friend from India, brother Telien, informed me that N.E. India has over 200 separate language dialects. Brother Telien’s native Indian dialect, Cum, has only one translation available in it.

This translation of the Bible into Cum never consulted the Greek or Hebrew. Rather, this translation is actually translated from the English version “Good News Bible.” Yet for Cum speaking people, this is the only option.
Modern Translation Debate

- The debate about what English translation is best centers around two primary issues.

1. Textual Basis (tonight)

2. Translation Philosophy (next time)
Textual Basis Debate

- Though some arguments pertain to the O.T., the vast majority of the translation textual controversy surrounds which Greeks texts are used in the translation of the N.T.

- The two “text families” most often compared and debated are the Byzantine & Alexandrian text types.
All the early English translations of the Bible that consulted the Greek, beginning with Tyndale to the King James Version, were translated from the Greek text first compiled by Erasmus in A.D. 1516 (with many editions to follow). Martin Luther also used this Greek text in his German translation. This Greek N.T., became known as “the Received Text” or (Textus Receptus).

Erasmus compiled the manuscripts at his disposal, (most sources say 5-7). In fact, Erasmus did not even have a full Greek manuscript of Revelation, so he translated the Latin back into Greek for some portions.
Byzantine Text

- Later, when multiple Greek texts surfaced throughout the centuries the majority of these texts came from the old Byzantine empire. Therefore, the these texts go by the name “Byzantine texts,” or “majority text.”

- When these later manuscripts were discovered, they had incredible agreement with the earlier compiled text of Erasmus (i.e. Received Text).
The Byzantine Texts (a.k.a. Majority Text)

Textus
Receptus
Alexandrian Text

- The Alexandria text type is called this because of its origin in Alexandria Egypt. These texts were largely lost to history after the muslim conquest of Egypt. Yet some of these texts resurfaced in the 1800’s.

- In 1859 a largely complete copy of the N.T. was discovered at St. Catherine’s monastery in the Sinai peninsula, and has come to be known as Codex Sinaiticus. The Sinaiticus, Alexandrinus & Vaticanus Codices sparked renewed interest in the Alexandrian text type.
Alexandrian Text

- In 1881, a new edition of the Greek N.T. was published by Westcott and Hort. This edition was known as “The New Testament in the Original Greek” (a.k.a. The Critical Text).

- This new edition heavily favored the Alexandrian texts over the Byzantine texts, and became the basis for most later Greek N.T. editions and translations. Largely due to this new edition of the Greek text, a flurry of new translations occurred.
Debate Between Them

1. Older is Better (Alexandrian manuscripts date back to the 3-4th centuries A.D. & are more complete manuscripts containing most of the O.T. & N.T. canon. Yet these manuscripts are fewer in number (10-20%), and have greater differences between them)

2. Majority is Better (Byzantine manuscripts date mostly to the 10-14th centuries A.D. & are mostly fragments or copies of books rather than complete Testaments. Yet these texts are much more numerous (80-90%), and have better overall agreement with each other)
The Text Behind Translations

1. The Byzantine (Majority text or Received Text)

2. Alexandrian Text (Westcott & Hort)
Differences Between the Texts?

- Most scholars calculate around 5,000 differences between the Byzantine text type & the Alexandrian text type.
- Even though that sounds like a large number, the texts are in fact in 96% agreement overall.
- Most of the controversy stems from the fact that the Byzantine text type is longer than the Alexandrian.
Differences Between the Texts?


Differences Between the Texts?

- The debate rages over whether the Byzantine text “added” these words, or the Alexandrian “deleted” them. Both sides posses good arguments.
- Are these differences deliberate? Is there a conspiracy to corrupt the Bible?
- I want to look at some of these differences in order to illustrate that most of these differences are extremely minor, with no real bearing on meaning.
1. Mark 9:44-48 “Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched” does not appear in the Alexandrian texts in verses 44 & 46, however, it does appear in verse 48. Thus translations like the NIV will drop these verses. Versions like the HCSB & NASB will include them, but with brackets.

2. Matthew 27:35 “that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots” is not in the Alexandrian text of Matthew, but it does appear in John 19:23-24 in the same text.
3. Matthew 25:13 “Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.” The underlined phrase is not in the Alexandrian, but is understood by the context, and also stated elsewhere in the Matthew manuscript.

4. Matthew 20:16 “So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.” The last phrase of the verse does not appear in the Alexandrian in this verse, but does appear later in Matthew 22:14.
5. Matthew 8:29 “And, behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time?” The underlined word is excluded by the Alexandrian, but the context makes clear who is being addressed.

6. Romans 8:1 “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” The underlined does not appear in the Alexandrian texts of verse 1, but it does appear in verse 4 of the same passage, leaving the interpretation the same.
7. Mark 7:9 the Byzantine text uses the verb “reject” the commandment of God, while the Alexandrian uses the verb “lay aside.” The two verbs are spelled similarly in the Greek. Though the verb is different, the meaning remains the same.

8. Mark 10:24 “And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answers again, and says unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!” The underlined does not appear in the Alexandrian text, yet the previous verse (v. 23) says “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!” So context retains the meaning.
9. Acts 8:37 does not appear in the Alexandrian texts. “And Philip said, If you believe with all your heart, thou may. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” This is a classic verse on the prerequisite to Baptism, yet this doctrine can still be defended even without this passage.

10. John 5:3-4 “In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had.” This does not appear in the Alexandrian text, and has an asterisk by it in many other texts.
11. Some of the O.T. quotations found in the book of Hebrews are shorter in the Alexandrian texts (Heb. 2:7 & 7:21). Those these quotes are shorter, the Alexandrian retains those words in the O.T. text, which is being quoted.

12. Luke 2:33 “And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him.” The Alexandrian texts says “his father,” rather than Joseph. Though this may be an attack on the virgin birth, the virginity of Mary is extensively discussed in Luke 1 of the same Alexandrian manuscripts.
13. Matthew 17:21 “Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting” does not appear in the Alexandrian text, however, the same statement appears in Mark 9:29.

14. Matthew 18:11 “For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost” does not appear in the Alexandrian text of Matthew, but does appear in the parallel passage of Luke 19:10.
Deity of Christ

- It is often said that the modern translations diminish the Deity of Christ. Acts 3:13, 26; 1 Timothy 3:16; & 1 John 5:7 are the primary texts pointed to.

- However, due to a clearer understanding of Greek, the modern translations are stronger on the Deity of Christ in other passages like John 1:18; Titus 2:13; & 2 Peter 1:1. So the Doctrine of Christ’s Deity is just as strong in most translations as it is in the KJV, yet the passages used to support it may vary.

- The grand exception to this would be John 1:1 in “The New World Translation” by the Jehovah’s Witnesses. This “translation” is an alteration, not a translation!
Differences Between the Texts?

- Most of these differences are extremely minor, with no real bearing on meaning. If a phrase does not appear in one place, it is often restated elsewhere in the same passage, or the same book. Therefore these “differences” should not really be viewed as differences. We are not dealing with apples & oranges, but apples and apples.

- That said, there are 3 highly controversial passages in the N.T., because the entire passage does not appear anywhere in the Alexandrian text.
1. Mark 16:8-20 (sometimes called the longer ending of Mark) is present in most Byzantine manuscripts, some, however, have a marking by it to indicate uncertainty. This passage does not appear anywhere in the Alexandrian text, and it also does not appear in several early translations of Mark into other languages. The passage is probably genuine, however, NO theological concept is dependent upon this passage alone, and all the ideas from these verses are retained elsewhere in the Bible (except for snake handling!).
“17 And these signs shall follow them that believe; in my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; 18 They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.”
The BIG THREE

2. John 7:53-8:11 (the woman caught in adultery) is excluded by the Alexandrian manuscripts. It appears in many Byzantine texts, yet in some manuscripts it appears at the end of John, one manuscript even has it appearing in Luke. A couple early church fathers do seem to allude to this story, however, and the account is rich in O.T. background. So many argue for its authenticity. Yet again note that no major theological concept hinges on this passage alone.
3. 1 John 5:7 “For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.” This verse has very little textual or historic evidence. Erasmus would not originally include this verse because it did not appear in any of his manuscripts. He was pressured to put it in, and was given a copy of 1 John with this verse written in the margin. So he included it in his 3rd edition Greek N.T. Therefore it was translated into the KJV, then retained by the NKJV. Most modern translations do not include this verse. Note the doctrine of the Trinity is not lost without this verse.
Recall our statistics on “Preservation.” Only 1% of the 400,000 variants in the Greek N.T. are worthy of debate. This statistic includes the differences between the Byzantine & Alexandrian text types.

Yet not one of those variants effects any theological concept. So an honest student of Scripture studying a translation from the Byzantine or Alexandrian texts can still arrive at the same theology.
Summary

- Other differences between translations occur because of the translational philosophy. The philosophy of a translation will largely impact the word choices & word order.

- Next week we will deal with this 2nd major area of translational controversy.