BLESSED HOPE TRANSLATION

What Is a “Faithful” Translation?

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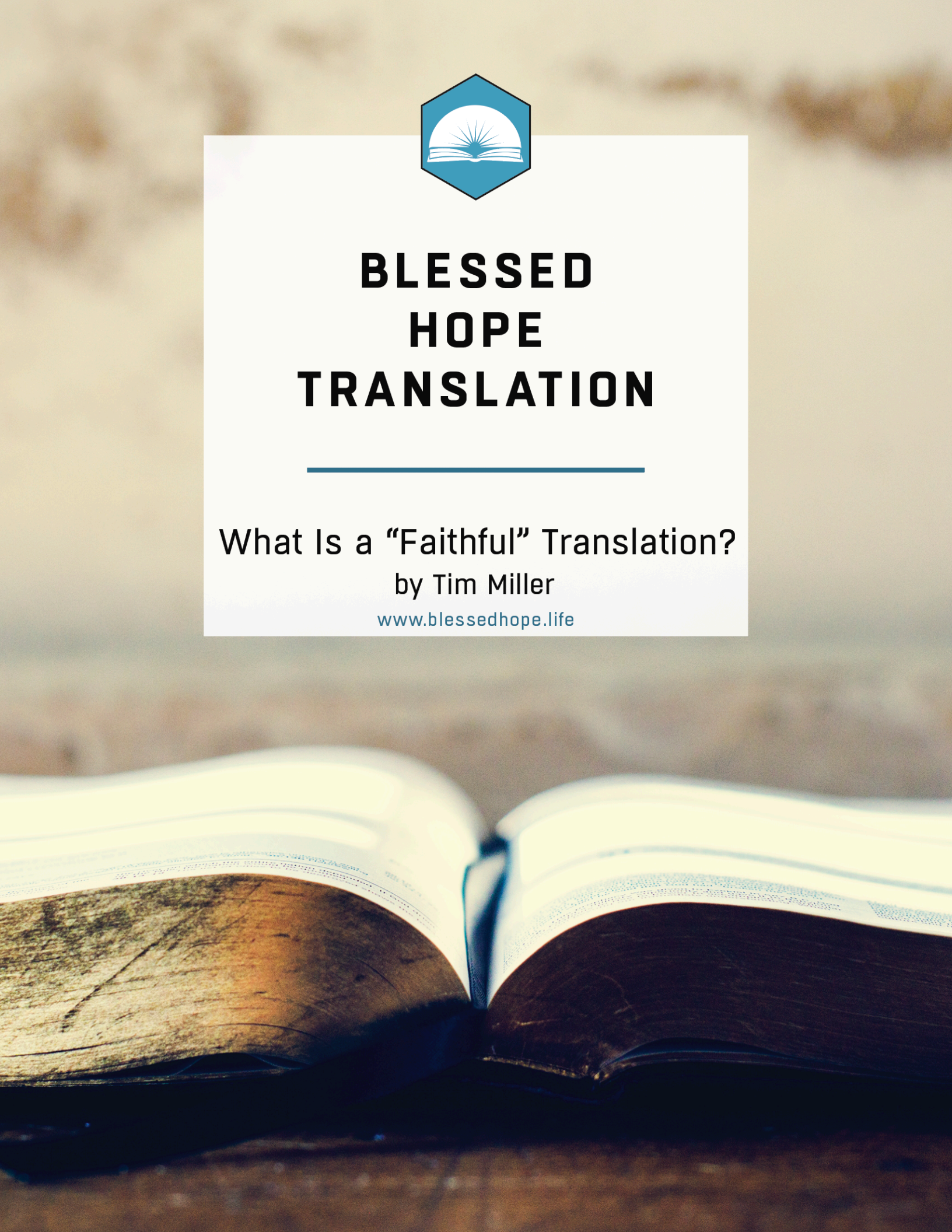

Introduction

Several years ago, after I had begun working on the *Blessed Hope Translation*, I went into the bookstore of a certain ministry. On display in one part of the store were several English Bible translations. As I was browsing through some of the different translations, one of the store workers, a young woman probably in her early twenties, came up to me to see if I needed any help. At one point as we were talking, she began giving her opinion about which of the translations on display she thought were best. She then went on to highlight one particular translation that she did not like. It was a "bad" translation, she stated casually and matter-of-factly, without offering me any reasons, as far as I can remember, as to why she considered one translation to be so sound and another so dissatisfactory. The young woman was very kind, and I have no doubt that she was genuinely trying to be helpful. And of course, she had no idea that right then I myself happened to be in a season of "eating and breathing" translation. In the moment I felt it best for me to bite my tongue. I, after all, had done the very same thing many times myself. How often had I made offhand—if not exaggerated or overly confident—assertions in regard to matters of whose true complexity I was unaware? I do not know if this store worker still holds the same view as she did that day; the Lord knows that my own perspective on quite a number of things has certainly shifted since then. I do know, however, that the question, "What makes for a 'good' or a 'legitimate' or an 'accurate' or a 'justified' or a 'faithful' or a 'trustworthy' or an 'acceptable' or an 'authorized' Bible translation?" is a difficult one, the dispute over whose answer, at various junctures of history, has even cost some godly people—such as William Tyndale in the sixteenth century[1]—their lives. It is this challenging question to which we now turn our attention.

What Is a "Faithful" Translation?

It is not uncommon to find English translations, along with those who endorse them, making some rather bold claims to translational "faithfulness" and "fidelity":

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[1] J. D. Douglas, Philip Wesley Comfort, and Donald Mitchell, eds., *Who's Who in Christian History* (Wheaton, Ill: Tyndale House, 1992), 683–4.

Decades after the vision was cast, the New International Version (NIV) has become one of the most widely read Bible translations in contemporary English. That's because the NIV delivers the very best combination of accuracy and readability. It's true to God's Word and true to the reader.[2]

Fidelity to Scripture is the first priority of the New International Version (NIV). The NIV translators bring a wealth of experience in the original Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic languages of the Bible. The result? An accurate, reliable translation of God's Word you can read and understand (bolding original).[3]

The NIV will now continue to be at the forefront of modern English Bibles as the best translation for both public and private use. **It combines accuracy and readability better than any other translation** (bolding original).[4]

The updated NIV will be my next Bible of choice. Its **balanced approach to translation** that values equally fidelity to the languages and meaning of the original texts is just what we need (bolding original).[5]

Some translations are accurate to the original but tend to be clunky and hard to read. Other translations are easy to read but stray away from important precision. Bible translation should never compromise on accuracy or readability. The Christian Standard Bible (CSB) translation team is passionate about ensuring that ancient truths are communicated to a modern audience as faithfully and clearly as possible.[6]

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[2] "About the NIV Bible Translation," *Biblica*, July 15, 2016, accessed May 28, 2019, https://www.biblica.com/niv-bible/.

[3] "The NIV's Commitment to Accuracy," *Biblica*, July 25, 2016, accessed May 28, 2019, https://www.biblica.com/niv-bible/niv-bible-translation-accuracy/.

[4] "NIV Bible Endorsements," *Biblica*, July 26, 2016, accessed May 28, 2019, https://www.biblica.com/niv-bible/niv-bible-endorsements/.

[5] Ibid.

[6] "Why the CSB?," *CSB*, n.d., accessed May 28, 2019, https://csbible.com/about-the-csb/why-the-csb/.

I am deeply grateful for the Christian Standard Bible, because it is rigorously faithful to the original languages without sacrificing clear readability. This translation will help believers and non-believers around the world be able to read, understand, memorize, obey, and proclaim God's Word.[7]

The ESV represents a new level of excellence in Bible translations—combining unquestionable accuracy in translation with a beautiful style of expression. It is faithful to the text, easy to understand, and a pleasure to read. This is a translation you can trust.[8]

The ESV is a solid translation… that is faithful to the text and clear to the mind and ear. It is a pleasure to commend it.[9]

Teaching biblical truth demands extreme fidelity to the original text of Scripture. However, a translation of the Bible need not sacrifice English clarity in order to maintain a close correspondence to the source languages. The goal of the ISV therefore has been both accuracy and excellence in communication.[10]

The ISV Is Accurate|It's quite possibly the most insightful version of the Bible you will ever read.[11]

I have not been a fan of the modern translations, but the ISV is a refreshing exception! Terrific! It is truly the most readable and accurate English language translation of the Bible ever produced.[12]

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[7] "Endorsements," *CSB*, n.d., accessed May 28, 2019, https://csbible.com/about-the-csb/endorsements/.

[8] "Endorsements | ESV.Org," *ESV Bible*, accessed May 28, 2019, https://www.esv.org/translation/endorsements/.

[9] Ibid.

[10] "ISV_Features_and_Benefits.Pdf," n.d., accessed May 28, 2019, https://www.isv.org/downloads/ISV_Features_and_Benefits.pdf.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

On one level, one can certainly understand why translations such as these would want to make such boasts on their dustcovers and websites. What translator or sincere follower of Jesus, after all, wants to be guilty, or to be perceived as being guilty, of translational adultery? I myself have been blessed in some way by most of the translations referenced here, and by many others—on whose behalf similar statements are often made—that are not. I am thankful for the hard work and careful thought that has gone into all of them. However, the certitude with which such claims are sometimes put forward needs to be tempered by a recognition of the fact that a faithful translation can often take different forms, depending on the kind of translation "house" that a translator sets out to build.

Translation: Like Building a House

When someone builds a new house, there are many different kinds of trades and skills that must come together if the house is to become what the future owner envisions. Without a good electrician, the house will be without power; without a good plumber, the house will have no running water; without a good roofer, the house *will* have water, though in all the wrong places! Most houses, moreover, share certain basic features: Walls, ceilings, roofs, a bathroom, places to cook and eat and sleep, etc. In other respects, however, houses may differ from one another quite significantly: Some are one-story homes, others have multiple tiers and levels; some have basements, some don't; some are big, some are tiny; some move on wheels, some remain in place; some have brick exteriors, others siding. What, then, constitutes a "good" house? On the one hand, not many people are going to want to live in a house with large holes in the ceiling, or toilets that are constantly backing up, or wires that are poorly run and connected. Most would consider this to be a "bad" house. On the other hand, some people might consider a five-story, neon-green glow-in-the-dark castle, with Gothic pink shutters and year-round Elmo Christmas lights, the epitome of all housing glory, while others would regard such a habitation as the blemish of blemishes on their otherwise respectable neighborhood, an obnoxious threat to the value of their own homes—surely a homeowner's association meeting is in order! In the minds of both castle-lover and castle-hater, a "good" house certainly means more than good toilets and safe wiring. As a father of five, the main thing that I myself tend to care about these days is the number of bathrooms.

In many ways, the process of Bible translation is similar to building a new home. When God "confused the language of the whole world" in

response to humanity's attempt on the plains of Shinar to "make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth," (Gn. 11:4, 9, NIV), He did an excellent job. Languages and cultures are multi-layered and multi-faceted phenomena—often outright "confusing"—and therefore a variety of tools and skills and materials are needed to "build" a translation that effectively conveys a message from one cultural-historical-linguistic matrix to another. In regard to English Bible translations specifically, there are a number of basic elements that all of them of necessity share: A certain set of symbols, words listed and defined in an English dictionary rather than a French or a German or an Arabic one, certain syntactical limits or preferences, etc. Most people would regard a translation that purports to be an "English" translation, but which does not actually use words that a human being on one of the seven continents would consider English, as a "bad" translation. At the same time, the English language, like all languages, boasts a rich variety of communication devices that stand ready to be utilized by translators in their task. By means of these various "tools" and "materials" at their disposal, different translators may prefer to build different kinds of "houses," depending on their respective goals and priorities. And just as a neon-green castle with pink shutters may evoke glee in some (I imagine in only a few, but who knows?) and scorn in others, so it is, too, with different English versions of the Bible—as a Google search on preferred English translations will quickly reveal. Tyndale in his day was "strangled and burnt at the stake."[13] In our day we prefer death by footnotes and social media.

Differing Blueprints: The Translation Philosophy "Spectrum"

If Bible translation may be likened to building a house, then one's translation philosophy is the house's "blueprint." In the prefaces or introductions of most English translations, one is likely to come across some sort of discussion related to Bible translation theory or philosophy, as part of which reference may be made to two opposite ends of what has come to be seen as a translation philosophy "spectrum" or "continuum."[14] On one side of the spectrum are translations considered to be more "literal" or "word-for-word." The late Eugene Nida, a well-known and influential

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[13] Douglas, Comfort, and Mitchell, *Who's Who in Christian History*, 684.

[14] See, eg, Mark Ward, "Which Bible Translation Is Best? All the Good Ones.," *LogosTalk*, May 4, 2016, accessed May 30, 2019, https://blog.logos.com/2016/05/bible-translation-best-good-ones/; "Translation Philosophy," *CSB*, n.d., accessed May 30, 2019, https://csbible.com/about-the-csb/translation-philosophy/."ISV_Features_and_Benefits.Pdf."

linguist and translator, referred to this type of approach as “formal correspondence.”[15] According to Charles Kraft, “A literal translation attempts to move from the word forms and grammatical structures of the original language as directly as possible into the corresponding words and structures of the receiving language.”[16] The NASB and ESV are translations that most people would regard as falling on this side of the spectrum. Here is how the ESV describes its approach to translation:

> The ESV is an “essentially literal” translation that seeks as far as possible to capture the precise wording of the original text and the personal style of each Bible writer. As such, its emphasis is on “word-for-word” correspondence, at the same time taking into account differences of grammar, syntax, and idiom between current literary English and the original languages. Thus it seeks to be transparent to the original text, letting the reader see as directly as possible the structure and meaning of the original.[17]

One feature commonly cited as a strength of a formal correspondence translation is how it gives English readers some degree of glimpse into the original text:

> It also provides the English Bible student some access to the structure of the text in the original language.[18]

> This type of translation allows readers to identify as fully as possible with the source languages of Scripture and to understand as much as they can of the Bible’s customs, manners of thought, and means of expression.[19]

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[15] Charles Kraft, “Dynamic Equivalence,” in A. Scott Moreau et al., *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions* (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Baker Books ; Paternoster Press, 2000), 295.

[16] Ibid.

[17] “Translation Philosophy | ESV.Org,” *ESV Bible*, accessed May 28, 2019, https://www.esv.org/translation/philosophy/.

[18] Holman Bible Publishers, *Holy Bible: Holman Christian Standard, Dark and Light Brown Simulated Leather Ultrathin, Reference.* (Place of publication not identified: Holman Bible Pub, 2011), vi.

[19] “ISV_Features_and_Benefits.Pdf.”

> Thus it [an "essentially literal" translation] seeks to be transparent to the original text, letting the reader see as directly as possible the structure and meaning of the original.[20]

Critiques of formal correspondence translations include the following:

> Some translations are accurate to the original but tend to be clunky and hard to read…[lacking] readability and clarity…[21]

> "…it can sometimes result in awkward, if not incomprehensible, English or in a misunderstanding of the author's intent. The literal rendering of ancient idioms is especially difficult."[22]

> In some cases, the translation is excessively literal, many of the phrases are unnatural and heavy, and the language is archaic.[23]

> [Formal correspondence translations do not have]…adequate concern for the impact such awkwardness of language will have on the receptors as they strive to determine the meaning.[24]

On the other side of the spectrum are translations considered to be more "dynamic" or "functional" or "thought-for-thought." Nida coined the term "dynamic equivalence" to describe an approach to translation that, in the words of Kraft, "seek[s] to recreate in the receptor language 'the closest natural equivalent' to the source-language message with a view toward stimulating receptors to understand the original meanings and to respond to those meanings as the original hearers would have (Nida and Taber 1969)."[25] The TEV and the NLT are translations that most people would regard as falling on this side of the spectrum. Here is how the NLT describes its approach to translation:

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[20] "Translation Philosophy | ESV.Org."

[21] "Why the CSB?"

[22] Holman Bible Publishers, *Holy Bible*.

[23] "Why the ISV Bible – The International Standard Version Bible (ISV)," n.d., accessed May 28, 2019, https://www.isv.org/bible/why-the-isv-bible/.

[24] Kraft, "Dynamic Equivalence," in Moreau et al., *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, 295.

[25] Ibid.

> **The New Living Translation** uses the meaning-based translation model. Translators start with the source language text and dig beneath the surface to discover the meaning. The translator then searches for the best way to re-express this meaning using words and phrases from the language in which the text is being translated.[26]

One feature commonly cited as a strength of functional or dynamic equivalent translations is their readability and understandability, based on careful attentiveness to the receptor language:

> Strengths of this approach include a high degree of clarity and readability, especially in places where the original is difficult to render word for word. It also acknowledges that accurate and effective translation requires interpretation.[27]

> This approach takes seriously, in a way impossible for literal translations, the large differences between the conceptual worlds languages represent and the structures by which they represent them.[28]

> …the NLT is far and away the easiest to understand of the major English translations.[29]

Critiques of dynamic equivalent translations include the following:

> In contrast to the ESV, some Bible versions have followed a "thought-for-thought" rather than "word-for-word" translation philosophy, emphasizing "dynamic equivalence" rather than the "essentially literal" meaning of the original. A "thought-for-thought" translation is of necessity more inclined to reflect the

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[26] "What Is Meaning-Based Translation? – NLT," n.d., accessed May 30, 2019, https://wpmu.azurewebsites.net/nlt/meaning-based-translation/.

[27] Holman Bible Publishers, *Holy Bible*, vii.

[28] Kraft in Moreau et al., *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, 295.

[29] "Hear What Others Have to Say – NLT," n.d., accessed May 28, 2019, https://wpmu.azurewebsites.net/nlt/testimonials/.

> interpretive opinions of the translator and the influences of contemporary culture.[30]
>
> However, the meaning of a text cannot always be neatly separated from its form, nor can it always be precisely determined. A biblical author may have intended multiple meanings but these may be lost with the elimination of normal structures. In striving for readability, dynamic equivalence also sometimes overlooks and loses some of the less prominent elements of meaning. Furthermore, lack of formal correspondence to the original makes it difficult to verify accuracy and thus can affect the usefulness of the translation for in-depth Bible study.[31]
>
> On the other hand, the limitations of idiomatic translations are also obvious. Such translations frequently tend to cast the words of Scripture into new molds that convey the ideas in a significantly different spirit or emphasis. Idiomatic translations have, in a sense, a commentary built into them; they represent a choice made by the translators as to what the translators think a passage means. For that reason, an idiomatic translation is easier to read but less reliable for careful study.[32]

Some translations claim for themselves, or are at times assigned by others, a place somewhere toward the middle of this spectrum. The NIV, CSB, ISV, and NET Bible typically fall here.[33] Not surprisingly, these translations tend to receive flak from advocates of both translation philosophies. Charles Kraft, for example, a well-known proponent of dynamic equivalence, cites the NIV as an example of a formal correspondence translation,[34] while the translators of the ISV number it among those translations that “lean toward the idiomatic end of the

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[30] “Translation Philosophy | ESV.Org.”

[31] Holman Bible Publishers, *Holy Bible*, vii.

[32] “ISV_Features_and_Benefits.Pdf.”

[33] See, eg, Ward, “Which Bible Translation Is Best?”; “ISV_Features_and_Benefits.Pdf”; “Translation Philosophy.”

[34] Kraft, “Dynamic Equivalence,” in Moreau et al., *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, 295.

spectrum."[35] Apparently, there are some very different ideas out there about what a good translation house looks like.

It turns out, then, that it isn't just store workers who have strong views and opinions on Bible translation. Missionaries, linguists, and scholars of various kinds, too, many of whom have given careful thought to translation-related questions or have even devoted their lives to them, usually have strong conviction on such matters, and at times find themselves (more often than I am sure they wish) clashing and butting heads about what constitutes a "faithful" or "accurate" Bible translation. To some, formal correspondence translations look like an unnatural, five-story neon-green castle that looks nothing like the receptor-language neighborhood around it. To others, however, it is dynamic or functional translations that have too many Gothic pink shutters and Elmo Christmas lights. Which blueprint, however, is "faithful"? Which one is "trustworthy"?

When Has a Translator "Crossed the Line" into Translational Infidelity?

On the one hand, conviction in the area of Bible translation is in one sense commendable and easy to understand. Again, what translator wants to be guilty of committing translational adultery? There is no knowledge on the earth more precious or important than the knowledge of God, and it is this knowledge whose communication is bound up, for better or for worse, in the process of translation. If there is any information or message in the world worthy of passionate conviction and fierce loyalty, it is the message of who God is, what He is like, and what He has done and is doing and will do. On some level, all who desire to see Jesus the Messiah exalted and His gospel go forth effectively, whether they be translators or truck drivers or farmers or pastors or moms or dads or children—or store workers—are right to have strong and even passionate concern in regard to these matters.

On the other hand, the question of what makes for translational "fidelity" is not an easy one, and therefore calls for graciousness, mercy, and humility on the part of all. At what point has a translator actually "crossed the line" and fallen into the arms of one linguistic and cultural milieu in betrayal of another to whom he or she also desires to be faithful? When has a translator built a "bad" house or a "good" house? Is it when the readers of a translation, for example, through no fault of their own, because of a preverbal participle having been rendered as a finite verb, fail to realize

[35] "ISV_Features_and_Benefits.Pdf."

that one verb is actually providing a background and framework for the more important action in the main clause?[36] The ESV, like most English translations, renders the participle πορευθέντες (*poreuthentes*) at Mt. 28:19 as an imperative, since it is most likely a participle of attendant circumstance, and therefore "picks up the mood (imperative in this case) from the main verb."[37] The ISV, however, apparently wanting to signal for readers the lesser importance of the action in the participle with respect to the foreground action in the main clause ("teach"), renders the participle as a dependent clause. Those reading translations like the ESV will know that "go" should be understood imperatively, while readers of the ISV will know that "go" is of less importance than "teach." In this case, who is guilty of translational fornication? Who has built the "good" house and who has built the "bad" one? Is it the ESV who is walking the red-light district at night, or the ISV?

Or could it be that we're looking for the adulterers in the wrong part of Mt. 28:19? Perhaps it is the *New Century Version*, or David Stern's *Complete Jewish Bible*, on whose linguistically flirtatious necks we should let the guillotine fall? True, both of these translations bring out the implied mood of the participle, and therefore, in this respect, from the perspective of other translations who do the same, are able to resist the translational lusts of the flesh (the ISV, though, with eyebrows raised, isn't so sure). Still, the NCV, apparently doubting whether most people in its target group will actually understand what a "disciple" is, uses "followers" instead of "disciples" in Mt. 28:19. "Hmm," Jimmy-John translation-reader wonders to himself. "Granted, 'followers' does sound pretty close to 'disciples.' Still, my Bible says 'disciples,' and it has Dr. John Doe's endorsement, not to mention that of every church within a ten-mile radius. 'Followers' smacks a little of translational backsliding. I'd better warn the masses through Twitter." Stern, meanwhile, writing with a mostly Jewish-background audience in mind, uses "talmidim" instead of "disciples" at Mt. 28:19. Most believers in Messianic synagogues know exactly what "talmidim" means, and their hearts are strengthened as they read Stern's translation of Mt. 28:19 in their Messianic service one Saturday. Jack, however, an English-speaking Gentile who knows nothing about Jewish culture, who is also a relatively new believer and a Michael Jordan want-to-be, is bewildered

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[36] See, eg, Steven E. Runge, *Discourse Grammar of the Greek New Testament: A Practical Introduction for Teaching and Exegesis*, Lexham Bible reference series (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers Marketing, 2010), 128–9.

[37] "NET Bible : The Biblical Studies Foundation," accessed May 30, 2019, https://bible.org/netbible/, Mt. 28:19.

when he comes to Mt. 28:19 in the *Complete Jewish Bible.* "Talmidim?" he asks himself. "What in the world is that, and how do we make people into them? I know! Talmidim sounds a bit like Kareem, so does it seem to me too extreme or obscene to conclude that talmidim is a lean, mean basketball-shooting machine on the Olympic Dream Team? That's it! I've figured it out! I knew I was called to play basketball and be a coach! I need to tell everyone on Facebook about my new revelation!" In these obviously-exaggerated-and-yet-in-some-ways-too-often-true scenarios, who has fallen into translational transgression? Is it the NCV and its translators that are involved in a linguistic affair, or Stern and the CJB, or both? Or could it be that both of these translations are, in fact, "faithful" when considered within the framework of their own stated goals, objectives, and target audience?

Now let's assume that after lengthy deliberation and discussion, the jury decides that the ESV, ISV, NCV, and CJB, though forced to make concessions based on a host of different factors tied to the confusion of languages that God himself caused, are not, in fact, guilty of translational adultery and therefore worthy of the death penalty. Though by no means perfect, they still have great potential to edify some English speaker somewhere on the earth, and therefore should be published. But what about other translations? What would the jury say, for example, about some of the translation decisions made by Bruce Olson, a missionary to the Motilone Indians of Columbia and Venezuela? Olson writes:

> One day Bobby [a Motilone] asked me whether we could make the Bible so that the Motilone people could understand it for themselves. They wanted to know more about Jesus…
>
> How do you tell a primitive tribe about things like grace when they have no such word in their vocabulary? Sometimes I would try to adapt a Christian idea to the Motilone culture. I already had had success with the word *faith*, which I had related to suspending your hammock from Christ, and the word *incarnation*, which I had related to the legend about the Motilone who became an ant. If my new effort was a good one, Bobby would say so. Other times he would say, "No, that's not right, Bruchko. Jesus is not like that," and I would have to try again.
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> …The Motilones…always use names that have a meaning. There are no names like Kent or Kim that are names and nothing more. So Bible characters had to be given names

> that made sense. Abraham became the "Man Who Knows God," John the Baptist became the "Announcer" and "Jungle Dweller," and Jesus became "The Only Son of God With Us."[38]

Wait a minute…true, most Christians would heartily agree that Abraham did in fact "know God," and that John the Baptist did in fact have a very important "announcement" to make. Most would agree, too, that Jesus is the "Only Son of God" who was and is "With Us." Still, did Olson go "too far" in translation? Is the translation "Announcer" for John the Baptist an example of translational fidelity or harlotry? What would the jury conclude about this translation of Mt. 3:13: "Then the Only Son of God With Us came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by Jungle Dweller"? What verdict would they issue concerning this rendering of Gal. 2:20: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by suspending my hammock from the Son of God"? Perhaps it is a good thing that Olson did his translation work before the internet age and hidden away in the jungles of South America, safe from the crossfires of Twitter-bullets and translation politics further to the north. "Guilty!" shouts the jury. "Not one Greek lexicon lists 'hammock-hanging' as a gloss under πίστις (*pistis*—'faith')!"

While Olson, then, flees the courtroom and hides out in the jungle with the Motilones, whose lives, despite the translational adultery of the man who risked his own life to bring them the gospel, have been radically changed by The Only Son of God With Us, a warrant is issued for the arrest of a group of translators known as the "Corn-spitters." I once heard a professor recount the struggle some translators had while trying to figure out how to translate the Biblical concept of forgiveness into a language for which there were no easy, word-for-word options available to them. In the end, the translators decided to use a local custom as a basis for translation, namely, that of people spitting corn at one another's feet. I later learned that it was the Shilluk language to which the professor was referring. Robert Bratcher and Nida state:

> In some instances figures of speech conveying the meaning of forgiveness are highly specialized in form and cultural significance. In both the San Blas ('to erase the bad heart') and in Juarez Zapotec ('to repair the peace of heart') the emphasis is upon the guilt felt by the sinner rather than upon the sins, certainly a perfectly valid viewpoint. In the Shilluk language

[38] Bruce Olson, *Bruchko* (Lake Mary, Fla: Charisma House, 2006), 148–9.

> forgiveness is expressed as ‘spit is returned to the ground for us by God’ or more idiomatically ‘God spit on the ground in front of us.’ This is an expression arising from the requirement that the plaintiff and the defendant, upon the conclusion of a trial and the termination of punishment or the payment of fines, spit on the ground in front of each other to signify that the case is finished, forgiveness has been accomplished, and the accusations can never come into court again—a very apt analogy to God’s forgiveness.[39]

Mt. 6:14, for example, would thus read: “If you spit corn at people’s feet when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also spit corn at your feet.” Now if someone were to get on their Bible software and look up Mt. 6:14, the words “spit,” “corn,” and “feet” are not going to come up. At this point, some might feel the need to go online and warn the Body of Christ about the dangers of the new, “over-interpretive” translation that is going around. The blog post might read something like this: “Corn-spitting Heretics Trample the Word of God under Their Feet by Encouraging People to Spit Corn at One Another’s.” While Shilluk-speakers, then, begin spitting the corn of forgiveness at each other’s feet by the power of Jesus’ intercession at the Father’s right hand, the “Corn-spitter” translators, on getting wind that back home their translation has been spit outside the boundaries of orthodoxy, flee to the jungle to join Olson.

Indeed, when has a translator built a “bad” house? At what point has a translator “crossed the line” into translational infidelity? Is it when the readers of a translation actually understand what they are reading? Is it when a Greek participle is rendered as a finite verb in the receptor language? Is it when a translation fails to capture a point of emphasis or signal a shift in topic? If, as it is asserted in the introduction of the HCSB, “accurate and effective translation requires interpretation,”[40] at what point, by whose decree, and according to which blueprint does a translator, in doing that which is required, become guilty of the licentious act of “over”-interpreting? Is it when a translation does not say what I or my denomination or my tradition want it to say? Is it when a certain translation renders a verse in a way different from the translation I grew up on? Is it when a certain rendering seems to fly in the face of some point in Calvin’s

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[39] Robert G Bratcher and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Translator’s Handbook on the Gospel of Mark* (London; New York; Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1961), 13.

[40] Holman Bible Publishers, *Holy Bible*, vii.

Institutes or Wesley's *Forty-Four Sermons*? Is it when a translator actually attempts to do in English what *must* be done in scores of other languages around the world if the Bible is to be faithfully translated? Consider the words of missionary and translator Dave Brunn:

> On one hand, it might be safer for a translator to leave [a] phrase ambiguous because we do not know for sure which meaning Paul intended. On the other hand, if hundreds or even thousands of other languages require that an interpretive choice be made, is it wrong to do the same thing in some English versions? If preserving the ambiguity of the Greek genitive were a requirement of faithfulness and accuracy, wouldn't God have made sure that every language in the world was capable of fulfilling that requirement?
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> If the only faithful translation is one that is primarily word-focused like the NASB, ESV or KJV, then most of the world's languages cannot have a truly faithful translation [because they're not in the Indo-European language family like Greek or the Afro-Asiatic family like Hebrew]. That would mean the majority of languages designed by God are inherently deficient, unable to communicate spiritual truth in a way that is faithful to the original (parenthetical statement inserted by author quoting Brunn).[41]

At what point has a translation transgressed and become *too* literal or *too* dynamic or *too* idiosyncratic? Who are we to bring into the temple courts and throw before Jesus' feet with the accusation, "Teacher, this translator was caught in the act of rendering Greek participles as participles in English, and translating 'propitiation' and 'sanctification' according to their actual meaning—in a way that people who don't have time or money to go to seminary can actually understand! Our denominational board commands us to stone such people. Now what do you say?" How do you think Jesus would respond to this question? Given the God-orchestrated differences between languages and the many translational challenges to which they give rise, I imagine He would answer in a manner similar to the way He does in John 8:7: "There are different ways for people to put a roof over

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[41] Dave Brunn, quoted in Mark Ward, "Which Are More Accurate: Literal or Non-Literal Bible Translations?," *LogosTalk*, March 29, 2017, accessed June 3, 2019, https://blog.logos.com/2017/03/accurate-literal-non-literal-bible-translations/.

their heads. If any one of you has the perfect house, let him be the first to throw a stone."

The reality, as I hope has by now been demonstrated, is that different translations can take different forms and follow different blueprints and yet still legitimately be called "faithful," depending on the criteria according to which they are evaluated. As much as we may not like to admit it, the task of faithfully transferring concepts and ideas from one cultural-linguistic milieu into another often looks more like a rubber band than it does a cookie cutter. Like cookie cutters, rubber bands do have boundaries and limits; if stretched far enough, they break. Unlike cookie cutters, however, it is by being pulled, stretched, and wrapped, depending on what it is that needs to be secured or held together, that rubber bands fulfill their purpose. In the same way, translational fidelity may mean different things at different points in the translation process, as Daniel Wallace points out:

> Anyone who has learned a second language knows that a word-for-word translation is impossible much or most of the time. Idioms and colloquialisms in a language need to be paraphrased to make sense in another language. Even the KJV translators realized this. In a couple of places in the Old Testament, the Hebrew text literally reads, "God's nostrils enlarged." But, the KJV translates this as, "God became angry"—which is what the expression means. In Matthew 1:18 the KJV says that Mary was found to be with child. But the Greek is quite different and quite graphic: "Mary was having it in the belly!" In many places in Paul's letters, the KJV reads, "God forbid!" But the original has neither "God" nor "forbid." Literally, it says, "May it never be!" (as most modern translations render it). Therefore, when we speak of a translation being faithful to the original, we need to clarify the question: Is it faithfulness to form? Or, faithfulness to meaning? Sometimes faithfulness to one involves lack of fidelity to the other. There are problems with each of the translation philosophies. The KJV, with its attempted fidelity to form, does not make sense in some passages. (In 1611, these instances did not make sense either). Likewise, The NASB often contains wooden, stilted English…A formal equivalence translation lets the reader interpret for himself or herself. However, the reader often does not have the background information or the tools to interpret accurately. The net result is that he or she runs the risk of misunderstanding the

> text, simply because their translation was not clear enough. On the other hand, a functional equivalence translation is usually clear and quite understandable. But if the translators missed the point of the original (either intentionally or unintentionally) they may communicate an idea foreign to the biblical text.[42]

Over the years I have had various degrees of interaction with a range of different languages outside of my native English. In each of them the "rubber band" must be stretched in different ways to communicate effectively. On some occasions faithfulness in communication means stretching the rubber band in one way, while in other contexts it means stretching it the opposite way. Translators, therefore, find themselves in a constant dance of give-and-take as they work through multiple decisions at every juncture:

> Every Bible translation involves approximately 327 gazillion decisions about word choice, word order, textual criticism, assonance and consonance, meter, theology, tradition, typography, the current state of the target language, and numerous other factors. Someone, somewhere, is going to dislike just about every choice of any significance—particularly if it is an innovation overturning an established tradition. As the KJV translators say, "So hard a thing it is to please all, even when we please God best, and do seek to approve ourselves to every one's conscience."[43]

Indeed, on this side of the translation process, I can certainly relate to the KJV translators here. Knowing that you are engaging in a work that, despite all your best and most diligent efforts, is bound to make somebody from some group—even those you respect most—snorting mad, can evoke some very lonely and vulnerable feelings. Still, it remains true that there is simply more than one way to build a good house. The house to which we go, moreover, for our morning devotions, may be quite different from the ones on whose porches we sit for scholarly study, outreach, or children's Bible clubs:

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[42] Daniel B. Wallace, "Choosing a Bible Translation," *Christianity.Com*, accessed May 31, 2019, https://www.christianity.com/bible/choosing-a-bible-translation-11631126.html.

[43] Mark Ward, "What a 400-Year-Old Bible Preface Can Teach Us about Translations," *LogosTalk*, September 29, 2017, accessed June 3, 2019, https://blog.logos.com/2017/09/400-year-old-bible-preface-can-teach-us-translations/.

> What's the best Bible translation? If you've been a Christian for very long at all, you've probably heard or maybe even asked this question. But what if it's the wrong question? What if we shouldn't be asking "Which translation is best?" but "Which translation is best *for the task at hand*?" Which English Bible translations are most useful for evangelism? How about for close study? How about for shaking you out of a Bible-reading stupor? How about for reading in big chunks? How about for teaching children and other poor readers? How about for expository preaching?[44]
>
> To the question: Which translation is best?—There can be no singular answer. I suggest that every Christian who is serious about studying the Bible own at least two translations. At least one formal equivalence (word-for-word) translation and one functional equivalence (phrase-for-phrase) translation. It would be even better to have two good functional equivalence translations because in this type of translation, the translator is also the interpreter. If the translator's interpretation is correct, it can only clarify the meaning of the text; if it is incorrect, then it only clarifies the interpretation of the translator![45]

Every translation has chinks in its armor, and, more times than it would probably like to admit, falls short of its own goals and stated ideals. Though one house might be better than another house in some respects, the opposite may be true in others. Outside of certain common-denominator elements that must be present for a work to be considered a translation in some sense, the shape a particular translation takes depends in large part on the translator's blueprint, goals, priorities, and target audience. In light of these things, what kind of "house" can readers expect when reading the *Blessed Hope Translation*?

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[44] "How to Choose the Right Bible Translation for the Task," *LogosTalk*, December 21, 2017, accessed June 3, 2019, https://blog.logos.com/2017/12/choose-right-bible-translation-task/.

[45] Wallace, "Choosing a Bible Translation."

The Blessed Hope Translation

When readers step through the door and walk into the *Blessed Hope Translation*, here are some of the key things they should know about the design and décor of this "house" situated in this little corner of cyberspace:

A. An Integrative Approach

Like a number of other English translations, I have attempted an integrative approach. It is my conviction that each translation philosophy has its own strengths and weaknesses, and is, therefore, worthy of being utilized at different times in the translation process. Most translators, I believe, would be quick to agree with me on this. The real challenge in translation is trying to decide when to call in the plumber and when to call in the electrician. On the one hand, I share a number of the values and concerns, including a commitment to rigorous and sound exegesis, that cause many Bible scholars to favor more formal translations, many if not most of which have the seminary or another formal academic context as their womb. On the other hand, the fact that the organizations and ministries "with actual expertise in translating," such as the United Bible Societies or Wycliffe Bible Translators, "virtually all subscribe to a dynamic equivalence approach, though they sometimes use different names for it,"[46] speaks for itself. I, like those who have labored faithfully in these ministries, also place a high value on clarity, effective communication, readability, and comprehensibility.

In some respects, the *Blessed Hope Translation* almost certainly falls on the formal correspondence side of the translation spectrum. I agree with the statement that "formal equivalence can achieve accuracy to the degree that English has an exact equivalent for each word and that the grammatical patterns of the original language can be reproduced in understandable English."[47] There are times when English and Greek are similar enough to one another as to be capable of accomplishing certain tasks in similar ways, and there are times when the gap between the two languages, or between the cultures to which the two languages are tied, is so wide that different devices must be used in order to communicate effectively. In cases where the former is true, I tend to prefer the formal end

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[46] Kraft, "Dynamic Equivalence," in Moreau et al., *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, 295.

[47] Holman Bible Publishers, *Holy Bible*, vi.

of the spectrum when it comes to a number of discourse features and certain aspects of grammar and syntax. Left- and right-dislocated elements, forward-pointing devices, topical switches and other points of departure, and the relationship between clauses are examples of areas where I have chosen to translate more "literally." If Paul uses what modern English grammarians would consider to be a run-on sentence in Greek (as in Eph. 1, for example), I am perfectly fine rendering it as a run-on sentence in English. In my opinion, this actually gives readers a small glimpse into a bit of Paul's oratory style, and perhaps even his personality. Is a run-on sentence always "unnatural" English? In some contexts, and among some groups of English speakers, the answer might be "yes" or "usually"; in other contexts, however, and among more gabby groups of Anglophones, it might be, "Is there any other kind of sentence?" Based on a host of factors—age or education, for example, or regional linguistic quirks—different groups of English speakers will have different opinions about what makes for natural English. For someone in Texas, "ya'll" may sound perfectly natural; in New York, perhaps not so much. Whatever the case, it remains true that run-on sentences are just as possible in English as they are in Greek. Especially in situations where a Biblical author is making nuanced points and arguments, the exegete in me likes to see a closer correspondence when certain points of overlap between Greek and English allow for it. There are times, in my opinion, when Greek in English clothing doesn't look half bad.

On the other hand, for as many times as I have opted for a more formal rendering, there are just as many that I have decided to use a meaning-equivalent. One of the reasons why a formal, word-for-word translation does not, indeed *cannot*, work in so many, let alone all, situations, is that many listeners or readers of a translation do not have automatic cognitive access to the conceptual files needed for adequate understanding:

> A formal equivalence translation lets the reader interpret for himself or herself. However, the reader often does not have the background information or the tools to interpret accurately. The net result is that he or she runs the risk of misunderstanding the text, simply because their translation was not clear enough.[48]

Language and translation are in some ways like "apps" on a computer or a smart phone. If an app has been downloaded on someone's phone, then

[48] Wallace, "Choosing a Bible Translation."

when someone taps on the icon, the app opens up and begins to function and operate. The same is often true of words, language, and communication. If I go up to some American university students and say, "Yesterday I went to Best Buy," chances are high that they will immediately know what I mean. They have all experienced the passage of time from one day to another, and therefore the word "yesterday" activates a certain time app that has already been downloaded in their minds. These students, as embodied beings distinct from other embodied beings in a shared social matrix, almost certainly have some conception of first-person identity; the "I" app has already been downloaded, and therefore they don't have to pause the discussion to try to figure out what I mean when I use the word "I" in speech—it wasn't Joe or Bill or Fred Flintstone who went to Best Buy, but this funny-looking bald guy who is standing in front of them. As beings who share a spatial arena with other creatures and things, the "to" app has likewise been downloaded, and therefore, when I use this preposition in a sentence, a directional concept should kick into motion in their minds. As for "Best Buy," since my listeners are Americans and students who, in today's world, most likely own a laptop and cell phone, this app, too, has probably been downloaded onto their cognitive hard drives—whether through an advertisement, a conversation with a friend, a personal visit to a Best Buy store, or some other way. Because all these apps have already been downloaded in the minds of my listeners before their conversation with me, when I say to them, "Yesterday I went to Best Buy," all of the apps immediately open up and effective, or at least adequate, communication takes place.

The same might not be true, however, in another context. If I am sitting down talking to some nomads in a remote part of Africa and say to them, "Yesterday I went to Best Buy," the apps "yesterday," "I," "went," and "to" have probably been downloaded in their cognitive framework just as much as they have in that of the American students, since there are certain areas of human experience that are far more likely to approximate one another across cultures. In the case of these four words, a word-for-word translation will probably get the job done. The same is not true, however, of "Best Buy." If these nomads have never been to the United States, seen a Best Buy advertisement, or walked into a Best Buy store, nothing is going to "open up" when I say the words "Best Buy." How, then, might these nomads respond to this situation? Perhaps they will stare at me with a blank look on their faces. Perhaps they will smile and nod their heads as they assign an entirely different meaning to my words. If they are curious, they may say, "Best Buy? What is that?" In other words, what does "Best

Buy" *mean*? At this point, I will proceed to go beyond my original two words "Best" and "Buy" to download the Best Buy app for them: "Oh yeah, Best Buy is a store in America that sells electronics, like cell phones and laptops." At this point, they might say, "Oh, well why didn't you just say so?" On the other hand, if the apps "cell phone" and "laptop" have themselves not yet been downloaded (highly unlikely in today's world, even among nomads!), then I would need to download those apps as well. In this situation, failure to use a meaning-equivalent results in ineffective communication. The Biblical authors themselves were aware of this: "But you say, 'If a man tells his father or his mother: Whatever benefit you might have received from me is Corban' (that is, a gift committed to the temple)" (Mk. 7:11, HCSB). Apparently, Mark knew that many of his readers still needed a download of the Corban app.

In the above discussion on different translation philosophies, I briefly summarized some of the more common criticisms brought against various approaches to Bible translation. Since many if not most of the evangelical groups of which I have been a part or with which I have interacted over the years are those that tend to be prejudiced against non-formal translations, here I want to briefly address what is probably the most common criticism brought against meaning-based translations: The "dangers…of overinterpretation."[49] According to the ISV, "idiomatic translations" are "less reliable for careful study" because they have "a commentary built into them" and try to "'help' the reader by 'interpreting' the text":

> Further, the Committee on Translation opted not to insert theological biases or preferences into the translation of the text of the ISV. If the meaning of a portion of text was ambiguous in Greek, Hebrew, or Aramaic, the translators opted to reflect the ambiguities as ambiguities rather than to "help" the reader by "interpreting" the text….
>
> …On the other hand, the limitations of idiomatic translations are also obvious. Such translations frequently tend to cast the words of Scripture into new molds that convey the ideas in a significantly different spirit or emphasis. Idiomatic translations have, in a sense, a commentary built into them; they represent a choice made by the translators as to what the translators

[49] "ISV_Features_and_Benefits.Pdf."

> think a passage means. For that reason, an idiomatic translation is easier to read but less reliable for careful study.[50]

I have been truly blessed by the ISV, and I feel a genuine gratitude in my heart for those who invested their time, skill, and scholarship in producing it. Nevertheless, I must be honest and say that claims such as these make me feel extremely frustrated. Not only are they in large degree subjective and exaggerated, but they also border on dishonest. The ISV is just as "interpretive" as any other translation. Consider, for example, some of the rich "commentary" that comes through the ISV's rendering of Php. 2:6-7:

> [6]In God's own form existed he,
> And shared with God equality,
> Deemed nothing needed grasping.
> [7]Instead, poured out in emptiness,
> A servant's form did he possess,
> A mortal man becoming.
> In human form he chose to be,
> [8]And lived in all humility,
> Death on a cross obeying.
> [9]Now lifted up by God to heaven,
> A name above all others given,
> This matchless name possessing.
> [10]And so, when Jesus' name is called,
> The knees of everyone will fall
> Where'er they are residing.
> [11]Then every tongue in one accord,
> Will say that Jesus Christ is Lord,
> While God the Father praising.

Many scholars believe that Php. 2:6-11 is some kind of hymn or poem, though not all.[51] The translators of the ISV obviously interpret the passage in this way, and this shines through in their translation—which, in this case, is certainly not a formal translation. Here they are "helping" English readers know that this is probably a hymn. I personally find the translation edifying, creative, and refreshingly courageous in a translation-embattled Western

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[50] Ibid.

[51] "NET Bible : The Biblical Studies Foundation", Php 2:6.

evangelical culture, and I am thankful that the ISV translators sacrificed their time to *help* readers see that Php. 2:6-11 is probably poetic or hymnodic in nature by rendering the passage in a way that many English readers will more readily recognize as poetic. Many hard-working, Jesus-loving people have to fight hard just to get time in the Scriptures each day, let alone swim for hours in the latest commentaries. Thank you, ISV scholars, for using your privileges to serve and *help* the Body of the Messiah.

My point here is not to single out the ISV or to imply that it is the only translation that might do well to moderate some of its claims about itself, but to simply draw attention to the fact that the ISV, too, does what every other translation must do: Make interpretative choices. On this matter I appreciate David Stern's candor and honesty:

> **The Translator and His Interpretations**. This example raises the question of whether the translator should "inject his opinions" into his translation. I cautiously answer in the affirmative, on the ground that it inevitably happens anyhow; so that the translator who supposes he "maintains neutrality," merely channeling ideas from the source language to the receptor language without influencing the result, deludes both himself and his readers. For necessarily every decision as to how to render a word or phrase from another language into English expresses the translator's opinion. A translator ideologically committed to not intruding his opinions does so in spite of himself, but without taking responsibility for it.[52]

Even the claim that some phrase or passage under consideration is "ambiguous" can itself be an interpretative statement: Is a certain passage *really* as obscure as someone claims? Or is it that we are just being exegetically lazy? Or perhaps even a motive check is in order: "If this passage is not in fact as ambiguous as people claim, and yet it means something different from what my colleagues and those who pay my salary say it means, what is going to happen to me?" To be sure, there are times when a good case can be made for the presence of ambiguity. The point, however, is this: A meaning-based or less formal rendering, because of its

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[52] David H. Stern, ed., *Complete Jewish Bible: An English Version of the Tanakh (Old Testament) and B'rit Hadashah (New Testament)*, 1st ed. (Clarksville, Md: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1998) xvi.

commitment to interpretation unto better communication and clearer understanding, has just as much potential to enrich as it does to mislead.

The truth is that interpretation and translation simply cannot be separated, which is one of the reasons translations so often end up becoming the battlefield for theological disputes. In order to see the truth of this, all people need to do is open up a commentary in some Bible software and search for the words “translate” and “translation.” Just now I used my Logos software to search the word “translation” in the *New American Commentary: Matthew.* The search yielded one hundred thirty-nine results, including this comment on Matthew 2:1-2: “But the NIV margin ‘when it rose’ is perhaps a more likely translation and would explain how the Magi’s attention was called to this new celestial feature.”[53] Here we have a particular translation decision, judged to be “more likely,” being employed to explain something about the Magi. Not only do translations have “a commentary built into them,” it turns out, but commentaries, likewise, have translation built into *them*. In the midst of this project I have come across countless examples like this.

The issue, then, is not whether translations are interpretive; they are. What, then, is the real issue? According to the *NET Bible’s* preface, the main issue is the *extent* of interpretation: “*All* translation is interpretation; it cannot be otherwise. But the issue is how much interpretation and how idiosyncratic an interpretation is.”[54] This is a true statement, and I agree with it. Still, the question remains: At what point has a translator actually transgressed into idiosyncrasy or “over”-interpretation unto “over”-translation? Is the translation, “Yesterday I went to an American store called Best Buy, which sells electronic gadgets like cell phones and computers” an idiosyncratic and over-interpretive statement? To American university students, perhaps; I imagine that such a statement might strike many of them as condescending. To nomads in a remote area of Africa, probably not; for them, the statement, “Yesterday I went to Best Buy,” simply does not get the job done. And so here we are full circle: There are different ways to build a house. The issue, therefore, that is in my mind even more important than the *extent* of interpretation, is the *soundness* of interpretation. Is an interpretation sufficiently backed up and *substantiated*? Is there sufficient evidence for me to tell a nomad that “Best Buy” is, in fact, a store “which sells electronic gadgets like cell phones and computers”? If

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[53] Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, The New American commentary v. 22 (Nashville, Tenn: Broadman Press, 1992), 62.

[54] “NET Bible : The Biblical Studies Foundation”, preface.

so, then even though there might be more I could tell them about Best Buy, an adequate and reliable transfer of meaning has taken place. The message has been *faithfully* communicated.

There are no easy answers to these questions. Again, it is not always easy to know when to call in the electrician or the plumber. There are times when the *Blessed Hope Translation* is more literal than the ESV or NASB, and times when it is more dynamic than the NLT or TEV. Like any other translator, I, too, have had to make literally thousands of decisions in attempting to build the house pictured in my mind. Each decision was made on a case-by-case basis. As I hope is evidenced by the thousands of footnotes and other resources on the BlessedHope.Life website, by God's grace I have done my best to be transparent and to substantiate my decisions. When I have used a meaning-equivalent, readers can see exactly where I have drawn my information. There are two things of which I can assure readers with full certainty. First, this translation, like every translation, is certainly not perfect, though I do hope, of course, that it may nevertheless be a source of edification to some person in some way. Second, God can testify that it is with tears, countless prayers, and heartfelt love for the Body of Christ that I have sought to be a faithful steward of this project. Beyond this I will make no further claims. God have mercy on me.

B. Translation Produced by an Individual

The *Blessed Hope Translation* is, as is probably obvious by now, a translation produced by an individual rather than a group or a committee. In the history of Bible translation there have been a diverse range of translations produced both by groups and individuals. Examples of English translations produced by groups include the ESV, HCSB, ISV, KJV, NKJV, NET, NIV, NRSV, and TEV. Examples of English translations produced by individuals include William Tyndale's translation in sixteenth century; *Young's Literal Translation* (1862), translated by Robert Young;[55] *The New Testament in Modern English* (1958), by J.B. Phillips; [56] *The Living Bible* (1971), by Kenneth Taylor;[57] The *Complete Jewish Bible*, by David Stern; [58]

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[55] Robert Young, *Young's Literal Translation* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 1997).

[56] J. B Phillips, *The New Testament in Modern English* (New York: Macmillan, 1982).

[57] *The Living Bible: Paraphrased.* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1971).

[58] Stern, *Complete Jewish Bible*.

and *The Kingdom New Testament*, by N.T. Wright.[59] As one might expect, both individual translations and group translations have their stereotyped strengths and weaknesses.

Perhaps the most commonly cited strength of group translations is that they help guard against theological bias and idiosyncrasy.[60] There is a lot of truth to this claim. When different voices speak into an issue and divergent perspectives are brought to the table, they can and often do have a sharpening and balancing effect on one another. This is as true of translation as it is of marriage, business, or politics. On the other hand, the input of so many voices in the translation process can also be construed as a weakness. At what point does a commitment to offsetting biases simply turn into "mixing water with milk" to make everybody happy? If a certain group is just wrong on some point, any "balancing" that it provides on that point simply serves to obscure and dilute the truth. What if a statement that is quite pointed and strong in the Greek text is blunted in translation because a few people from one of the many denominations represented on the translation committee don't like it? A group dynamic, moreover, does not in itself necessarily ensure a tempering of biases. Some translation committees are so obviously dominated by people from one denomination or theological outlook that even though the translations they produce are technically group translations, the extent to which the shielded-from-theological-bias claim holds true in such cases is probably far more limited. For example, over the years I have had much exposure to Southern Baptists and Southern Baptist teaching. When I embarked on this project, it did not take me long to notice places where some of the theological emphases of this part of the Body of Christ spill onto the pages of the HCSB. Or consider the NET Bible. In its preface it is said:

> A major consideration during the initial planning stage was the size of the translation committee. More than one person should do the work of translation, to avoid the unintentional idiosyncrasies that inevitably result from a single individual working in isolation from a community of colleagues. At the same time, it was obvious to all of us that a smaller group of about 25 scholars who shared a number of basic assumptions and followed generally similar approaches to the biblical text in

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[59] N. T Wright, *The Kingdom New Testament: A Contemporary Translation* (New York: Harper One, 2012).

[60] See, eg, "About the NIV Bible Translation"; "Translation Process – NLT," n.d., accessed May 28, 2019, https://wpmu.azurewebsites.net/nlt/translation-process/.

> terms of interpretive method and general philosophy of translation would be able to work quickly and efficiently. This proved accurate and valuable and the time from the commencement of the project to the posting of the first complete New Testament on the Internet was a remarkable 32 months. The list of translators is included on page 26*.[61]

If someone actually does take the time to go to page 26 and check out the list of those on the translation committee, it becomes quickly apparent what is meant by the committee being made up of scholars who "shared a number of basic assumptions and followed generally similar approaches to the biblical text in terms of interpretive method and general philosophy of translation." The committee is clearly dominated by dispensational scholars. As I will point out below, this is not a bad thing. It is, in fact, in some ways quite commendable.

If the greatest strength of a committee-based translation is also a potential weakness, the same is true of translations produced by individuals. When individuals produce a translation, the greater measure of freedom they enjoy allows them to take more or fewer risks, depending on their approach to translation. Coming back to the house-building analogy, whereas a translation produced by a group is more likely to have neutral colors on the living room walls, a translation produced by an individual is more likely to have darker or brighter colors. If an individual translator is a hard-core literalist, he or she may have few qualms about producing a translation that is so literal that the NASB looks like a dynamic translation. If an individual translator is hard-core on dynamic equivalence, he or she may have few qualms about producing a translation that makes the NLT look formal and stilted. The individual translator, in other words, has greater freedom to build the kind of house he or she likes. As one might imagine, this greater control over the paintbrush has both its upside and downside. If the paintbrush is used well, it may result in an impactful and clear expression of the truth and in a house that many consider to be more beautiful than one of the cookie-cooker houses over in the suburbs; if it is used irresponsibly or flippantly, it can result in a house that many consider to be gawdy and quirky—i.e., idiosyncratic—and in an obscuring—or, even worse, in an outright distortion—of the truth. Consequently, individual translations are prone to evoke more extreme responses in readers, either positive or negative. Consider, for example, the contrast between one

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[61] "NET Bible: The Biblical Studies Foundation," preface.

scholar's glowing endorsement of N.T. Wright's *The Kingdom New Testament* and the two-star review that follows shortly afterward as one continues scrolling down the Amazon.com page:

> Wright's Kingdom New Testament is both faithful and fresh, both lucid and enlightening, both careful and creative. Bringing to bear his wealth of scholarship and a lifetime of study, it will serve us well for many years to come. Enthusiastically recommended.
>
> This translation has the very positives and negatives that just about any single-person translation of the Bible has: It carries too much of the author's bias. When Wright is on target, the translation is wonderful. For instance, so much of Acts and the Gospels are beautifully written and a joy to read (especially for quick reading of large passages). I especially enjoyed the maps throughout Acts to help the reader mentally track along. However, when it comes to Paul's letters, Wright's serious error of translating righteousness as 'covenant faithfulness' distorts the very gospel message itself by incorrectly defining such a key term. 2 Corinthians 5:21, one of the clearest passages on double-imputation, is altered beyond recognition by Wright. Instead of "in Him we become the righteousness of God" he has "In him we embody the covenant-faithfulness of God." If you're a fan of the New Perspective on Paul, you will love this translation. However, I believe the NPP has sadly distorted the gospel in a serious kind of way. [62]

What one person praises as "faithful and fresh… lucid and enlightening… careful and creative," then, another accuses of being marred in some places by "serious error of translating," "incorrect" definitions, and even "distortion" of "the very gospel message itself." In the end, the reviewer reveals that his problem is not simply with Wright's translation, but with the views of a certain school of thought with which Wright is associated and whose interpretive stance finds expression in the translation. The

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[62] "The Kingdom New Testament, EBook: A Contemporary Translation - Kindle Edition by N. T. Wright. Religion & Spirituality Kindle EBooks @ Amazon.Com.," accessed May 29, 2019, https://www.amazon.com/Kingdom-New-Testament-eBook-Contemporary-ebook/dp/B004V5251M/ref=sr_1_3?keywords=NT+Wright+Kingdom+New+Testament&qid=1559144283&s=gateway&sr=8-3.

reviewer's second-to-last sentence, "If you're a fan of the New Perspective on Paul, you will love this translation," is a good illustration of a principle that is generally true in regard to people's likely response to a translation: The greater the proximity of interpretive agreement, the more favorable the reader's response, and vice versa. Because individual translations are sometimes bolder in communicating a particular interpretive stance, the chances are high that at some points readers of the translation are going to experience a degree of interpretive proximity or discrepancy more extreme than what they might when reading a committee-produced translation. When this happens, responses to the translation, too, are also likely to be more extreme: Some love the house while others hate it. Individual translations, in other words, have great potential to make people either really mad or really glad. Everyone, after all, likes that warm-fuzzy feeling of being agreed with.

At the end of the day, then, we are right back to the issue of interpretation and translation. When does a group dynamic actually serve to counter interpretative bias, and when does it actually end up reinforcing it? When does a dialectic between two interpretive viewpoints result in a helpful and warranted "balance," and when does it result in watered-down milk that reduces potential spiritual nourishment for readers? At what point does a decision to put white or tan paint on the living room walls mean "safe" and "trustworthy," and at what point does it mean "our translation has a snooze button built into it"? At what point are individual translators getting too "wild" with the paint brush? Are Kenneth Taylor and J.B. Phillips Picassos whose work should be put in a museum and treated as priceless gifts to the Body of Christ, or are they presumptuous lone rangers who should know better than to try pass their hopelessly biased works of interpretation off as genuine art? Is *Young's Literal Translation* an example of an artistic masterpiece that diligently tries to capture the linguistic elegance of an era gone by, or is it a work that is so square and box-like that it might as well be a hop-scotch pattern sketched out on the ground with sidewalk chalk? Are we to view N.T. Wright as Van Gogh-the-artist because his translation uses bright colors and bold interpretive brush strokes, or should we see him as Van Gogh-the-crazy-man by means of whose eccentric translation he cuts off not only own ear, but everyone else's ability to hear the gospel as well? Again, there are no easy answers to these questions.

Whether produced by a committee or an individual, therefore, no translation is free of interpretive bias and all idiosyncrasy, although some translations, at least theoretically, may be less interpretive or idiosyncratic

than others. Because of this, I myself personally prefer to just know where a person or group stands and then see it come out in translation. Although I might not agree with the interpretive stance reflected in the rendering of a certain verse or phrase, there is a level of integrity in this kind of translation that I can appreciate. There are numerous aspects of the Southern Baptist tradition that I respect and with which I agree, just as there many aspects of the dispensational tradition that I respect and with which I agree. There are also certain matters on which I do not see eye-to-eye with these and other streams of the Body of Christ, thankful though I am for the dear brothers and sisters in the Lord who make them up. There are certain areas of theology in which I agree with N.T. Wright, and there are areas in which I disagree with him quite strongly. Still, a translation's integrity as a *translation* does not depend on my level of agreement or disagreement with those who produced it. If those who are producing a certain translation say they have conviction on certain matters of doctrine and theology, but then compromise on those convictions in the process of translation, then even though I might agree with them on a number of their translation decisions, I will probably have less respect for their work. If a person or group has conviction about penal or substitutionary atonement, or about some aspect of free will or God's sovereignty, or about certain matters of church life and organization, then let them just come out with it in their translation. In the mind of the reviewer quoted above, 2 Cor. 5:21 is "one of the clearest passages on double-imputation." In Wright's mind, however, this is apparently not so clear, and this comes out in his translation. Though one might not agree with Wright's interpretation, and therefore his translation, of 2 Cor. 5:21, the fact that he translates this verse in accordance with his actual interpretive conviction is commendable. Despite my disagreements with him, however mild or fierce, his translation is in this sense "clean." If Wright were to hold certain views associated with the New Perspective on Paul, but then, knowing the ire such views arouse in certain groups, not have the courage to actually reflect those views in his translation, we would now be dealing with issues of duplicity and the fear of man. That, more than some point of disagreement, is what would cause me to throw the translation in a box in the basement. This is not to deny, of course, the importance of carefully thinking through matters of interpretation, theology, and doctrine. It does underscore, however, one of the points made in the previous section: Since interpretation and translation cannot be separated, the question we ultimately need to be asking is whether or not a certain interpretation is sound and can be substantiated. In light of this, I find the comments made in this review to be the more relevant critique:

> Wright's New Testament translation is useful if one is seeking a reference NT to compare with other translations. However, I was disappointed in that given his stature as a New Testament scholar he would have taken more pains to document why he made translation choices (wording and phrasing): For example, in the main instances where he departed from using key Christian terms (familiar from committee translations) he did not document with footnotes what Greek terms he was translating in unconventional ways. This is very important for the reader to be aware of in order to make assessments about his interpretative decisions.[63]

This critique could be fairly applied to a host of other translations just as much as it could to Wright's. Regardless of an individual translator's or translation committee's interpretative stance and the degree to which such spills over onto the pages of their translations, readers need to be given sufficient enough access to the resources and reasoning behind their translation decisions as to be able to evaluate them. Though readers still may not agree with a certain interpretation or the translation decisions that stem from it, I imagine that such transparency would produce, in the hearts of many, some measure of trust and love to go along with the disagreement. And this is good fruit.

Everything that has been discussed in this section applies just as much to the *Blessed Hope Translation* at it does to any other translation. I myself am no different than any other translator. I, too, have certain theological convictions and interpretive conclusions that find expression in the house I have done my best to build; let readers now consider themselves warned. No fine print. I am sure that there are some renderings that may feel idiosyncratic and over-interpretive to some, though perhaps not to all, and certainly not to me. At the same time, I can say with confidence that even though complete objectivity is impossible, on most matters I really have tried, with God's help, to give a fair hearing to different viewpoints. There have been numerous times that I have thought to myself while translating one section of text, "Oh, that is probably going to make group A mad and group B happy," only to find myself saying to myself later on in the very same section, "Oh my, group B is probably not going to like me here, although group A might reconsider having coffee with me now." At

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[63] Ibid.

every turn I have consulted a broad range of translations. On a number of occasions in the process of translating, I felt compelled to alter or modify my interpretive position in ways that I knew would probably bring me flak from groups or individuals whose perspective and agreement I value, even close friends and ministry colleagues. Matthew 24:14 is one example. Although I believe that a significant portion of Mt. 24 is futuristic and does in fact refer to the end of the age, after many hours of staring at Mt. 24:14 in context and cross-referencing parallel passages, I became convinced that οἰκουμένη (*oikoumenē* –rendered as "world" in most English translations) is most likely a reference to the Roman Empire rather than to the entire inhabited earth. As someone who bleeds missions and has run in circles of missions-minded people much of my life, I knew that if I followed the interpretive compass in this direction, I would probably be putting myself at odds with a large swath of mission groups and organizations, many of which use Mt. 24:14 as a rallying point in their efforts to mobilize people to serve among unreached people groups. Still, this is where I felt the evidence was leading me, and therefore it is this interpretation that finds expression in the *Blessed Hope Translation*—with the "inhabited earth" interpretation, though, still represented in a footnote. Of course, the legitimacy or scope of Christian mission does not rise and fall on this one verse; I still bleed missions as much as ever. Nevertheless, I have no doubt that some missions-loving people are not going to appreciate me messing with one of the cornerstone verses of their ministries. Others may like/agree with my interpretation/translation of Mt. 24:14, but then find themselves eager to blot other translational decisions I have made out of the translator's Book of Life. So be it. God knows that I have done my best, and that for any of my interpretive and translational warts, I have done my utmost to maintain a high level of integrity between interpretation and translation in the *Blessed Hope Translation*. He also knows that, by His grace and power alone, I have sought to be completely open and transparent with readers. Not only at Mt. 24:14, but throughout the entire *Blessed Hope Translation*, readers have access to multitudes of online footnotes by means of which I have tried to give them a window into the proverbial "why behind the what." Although this translation is produced by a weak, broken, and quite idiosyncratic individual—a filthy dog would be more accurate, the filthiest of cold-blooded liars and deceivers apart from the atoning blood of the Messiah and the mercy of the God of Israel—the footnotes represent literally thousands of internal conversations with brothers and sisters in different parts of the Body of Christ, with whom I consider it an honor to share a common boast and hope in union with

Jesus the Messiah, the one true King who is returning soon to judge the living and the dead and repay all of us according to our deeds.

I will conclude this section by quoting Stern, whose words I now picture myself speaking to you in regard to the *Blessed Hope Translation:* "Frankly, I can admit that a team might have done a better job; but I have done the best I can. I hope readers will not be disappointed."[64]

C. Textual Base

The textual base for the *Blessed Hope Translation*, which is a translation of the New Testament only, is the *Nestle-Aland Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27th edition, and the *United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament*, 4th revised edition. This is the textual base used by most modern English translations. Though 28th and 5th editions of these texts, respectively, have now come out, it was with the NA27 and UBS4 that I launched out on this project nine years ago (as of 2020), and therefore I chose to stick with them to the end. These are the texts used by most translation agencies and evangelical scholars today, whose analysis of the manuscripts I trust. The mere fact of majority opinion, however, is not in itself a proof of truth. Therefore, for those who are part of church traditions that are staunchly loyal to the Byzantine text-type, and especially the *Textus Receptus*, I would refer you here to the arguments presented in James White's *The King James Only Controversy*.[65] White addresses most of the relevant issues involved in this debate in a very accessible manner. I would also refer you to the *NET Bible's* footnotes,[66] many of which address text-critical questions.

D. Resources on Which I Have Leaned Heavily

Here I want to briefly mention some of the main resources on which I have leaned quite heavily in producing the *Blessed Hope Translation*.

Of the type of nuts-and-bolts Greek grammars that tend to be used in seminaries today, those most commonly referenced in the footnotes are William D. Mounce's *Basics of Biblical Greek*,[67] David Alan Black's *Learn to*

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[64] Stern, *Complete Jewish Bible*, xvii.

[65] James R. White, *The King James Only Controversy*, updated and expanded 2nd ed. (Minneapolis, Minn: Bethany House, 2009).

[66] "NET Bible : The Biblical Studies Foundation."

[67] William D. Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2003).

Read New Testament Greek,[68] and Daniel Wallace's *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*,[69] although the grammatical scalpel of Blass, Debrunner, and Funk (whose grammar is referred to by many simply as *BDF*),[70] as well that of A.T. Robertson,[71] were also an ever ready source of help in times of syntactical trouble. Also dancing in the back of my mind on a grammatical level throughout the translation process, as seen in the "Verbal Complex Charts" section of the BlessedHope.Life website, were various points that have been raised as part of the ongoing verbal aspect debate, of which one of the most contentious questions is whether or not certain inflections of the Greek verb have a time-marker built into them, or whether time is completely context-dependent.[72] As for discourse analysis, the two scholars by whose work I have been influenced the most, and whose footprints, therefore, wind their way through the footnotes of the *Blessed Hope Translation* from beginning to end, are Stephen Levinsohn and Steve Runge. [73] Their careful attention to the discourse features of New Testament Greek from a linguistic perspective have filled in some very important gaps of understanding: "New Testament Greek grammarians today are twenty years behind Hebrew scholars in applying insights from linguistics to our knowledge of the language."[74] Peter Gentry wrote this ten years ago (as of 2020) as part of his endorsement of Runge's *Discourse Grammar of the Greek New Testament*. As much clarity as Levinsohn and Runge have brought to our understanding of Greek, however, their goal is not, in Runge's words, "to reinvent Greek grammar or to supplant previous work."[75] It is best seen, therefore, as Wallace himself points out, as "a

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[68] David Alan Black, *Learn to Read New Testament Greek*, 3rd ed. (Nashville, Tenn: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2009).

[69] Daniel B Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2008).

[70] Friedrich Wilhelm Blass, Albert Debrunner, and Robert W Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1986).

[71] A.T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Logos Bible Software, 2006); A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933).

[72] See, eg, Constantine R. Campbell, *Basics of Verbal Aspect in Biblical Greek* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2008).

[73] Stephen H. Levinsohn, *Discourse Features of New Testament Greek: A Coursebook on the Information Structure of New Testament Greek*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, TX: SIL International, 2000); Runge, *Discourse Grammar of the Greek New Testament*.

[74] Peter Gentry, quoted on the back cover of Runge, *Discourse Grammar of the Greek New Testament*.

[75] Ibid., xvii.

complement to traditional grammars, rather than in competition with them."[76] I agree. Though it is not always easy to know how to get the descriptive flavors favored by linguists and grammarians into the same cup of coffee (I once read an Amazon review in which a linguist referred to traditional English grammarians as "grammar Nazis"), I have made a far-from-perfect attempt to do so in the footnotes. As for Greek-English lexicons (i.e. dictionaries), there are 10-20 to which I have turned to quite regularly, including *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (better known as *BDAG*),[77] *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*,[78] and *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament*.[79] For those who deal regularly with the Greek text, most of the lexicons referenced in the footnotes will be familiar and easy to recognize.

On the English front, one of the more helpful resources in this project was the *Longman Student Grammar of Spoken and Written English*, by Douglas Biber, Susan Conrad, and Geoffrey Leech.[80] In the earlier stages of translating, I contacted the Linguistics Department at the University of Texas at Austin, a school which is known for its strength in languages. I asked one of the professors if he could direct me to an English grammar whose analytical framework was more linguistic and functional in orientation than the typical English grammar. This was the book he recommended. The book does a great job of outlining and describing a plethora of devices that English uses to accomplish certain communicational tasks. It is in a number of respects an English counterpart to Runge and Levinsohn's work.

As for translator helps, two resources to which I have turned time and time again are the *Translator's Handbook Series*, published by the United Bible Societies,[81] and the *Exegetical Summary Series*, published by SIL

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[76] Ibid., xvi.

[77] Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and William Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

[78] J. P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, 2nd ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989).

[79] George Milligan and James Hope Moulton, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1997).

[80] Douglas Biber, Susan Conrad, and Geoffrey N. Leech, *Longman Student Grammar of Spoken and Written English*, 9. impression. (Harlow: Longman, 2011).

[81] See, eg, Bratcher and Nida, *A Translator's Handbook on the Gospel of Mark*.

International.[82] These resources were designed specifically with translators in mind. As with many of the other resources mentioned above, they have become very good friends over the last few years. In those places where I have chosen to use a meaning-equivalent in translation, these are the two resources to which I have turned the most. This seemed to me quite fitting and appropriate, seeing that it is groups like these that, as noted above, typically have the greatest experience and skill in trying to effectively convey meaning from one cultural-linguistic context to another.

Another resource that is worthy of mention is Randall McGirr's *Ten Ways to Improve Net Testament Translations*.[83] I stumbled upon a review copy of this book while browsing the translation section of David Alan Black's "New Testament Greek Portal" website.[84] This book was an eye-opener for me in many respects. McGirr has some penetrating insights into the way languages work and the implications for translation. Though his critiques of English translations are quite sharp, and perhaps even iconoclastic, at times, many of them are warranted and much needed. I appreciate his candor and boldness. Although I am sure that I have not applied McGirr's ideas and suggestions to the degree that he would like, it was his work that God used to shake me free once and for all from a fear of meaning-based translation. Those who read the footnotes of the *Blessed Hope Translation* will sometimes come across the abbreviation "IT." This stands for "Implicit Text," and its inclusion in the footnotes represents a direct response to McGirr's call for translators to "translate the implicit text."[85] The "Implicit Text" is McGirr's way of referring to those "apps," to return to my earlier analogy, that did not need to be downloaded in the minds of the original recipients of a text, but which are still floating out in the cloud for modern readers of a translation:

> All this information is what linguists call implicit information. And implicit information is always the actual meaning of language codes…. When a translator provides implicit information, it is

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[82] See, eg, Richard C. Blight, *An Exegetical Summary of 1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, TX: SIL International, 2008).

[83] Randall D. McGirr, *Ten Ways to Improve New Testament Translations: The Results of a Linguistic Evaluation*, Review Copy. (Context Scripture Translating, 2011), accessed November 17, 2014, http://context-scripture-translating.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/TenWays.pdf.

[84] "DAVE BLACK'S NEW TESTAMENT GREEK PORTAL: Translation," *DAVE BLACK'S NEW TESTAMENT GREEK PORTAL*, n.d., accessed June 12, 2019, http://newtestamentgreekportal.blogspot.com/p/translation.html.

[85] McGirr, *Ten Ways to Improve New Testament Translations: The Results of a Linguistic Evaluation*, 151.

> information that is truly part of the text. It is there because it was there for the speaker and for the person being addressed. It is what they understood when the word *John* was uttered. Each of them understood *John Smith on Cherry Street in Denver*. That is the *meaning* of the word. A true meaning-for-meaning translation includes this information particularly for someone who does not know what particular *John* the speaker was referring to. It is a translation in which the explicit text (*Hannes soll seinen Vater anrufen*) is expanded to include the implicit text (*John Smith should give his father, Herman Smith, a call with the telephone*).[86]

To translate the statement “Yesterday I went to Best Buy” as “Yesterday I went to an American store called Best Buy, which sells electronic gadgets like cell phones and computers” when talking to nomads who have no idea what “Best Buy” means (see previous discussion) is an example of what McGirr means by “translating the implicit text.”

Another resource by which I was blessed while on the Bible-translation journey is a series of translation-related blog posts written by Mark Ward, an academic editor at Lexham Press.[87] Ward is eager to see followers of Jesus cease from what he calls “Bible Translation Tribalism,” and he does a great job of giving readers some glimpses into the humility-warranting complexities involved in Bible translation.

Although there are many other resources that have been a great source of help to me in the translation process and for which I am very thankful, I will stop here. I do feel it important to say at this point that my reliance on these and many other excellent resources does not mean that their creators would necessarily agree with all of my translation decisions; they almost certainly would not. Though DeWalt produces hand saws, power drills, and sanders, the way this company’s tools are used and applied to different construction projects is out of its control. In many ways the same is true of translation. Both the translators of the TEV and those of the ESV probably turned to *BDAG*, for example, at quite a few junctures while translating, and yet they have built very different translation houses. Any of the people associated with the resources mentioned above or with other resources cited in the footnotes, therefore, can feel free to breathe out. Consider yourselves officially let off the hook.

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[86] Ibid., 153–4.

[87] See, e.g., Ward, “Which Are More Accurate”; Ward, “Which Bible Translation Is Best?”

E. Conceptual Bridges between OT and NT

One of my goals in producing the *Blessed Hope Translation* was to build conceptual bridges between the Torah, Writings, and Prophets (the Old Testament) and the apostolic writings (the New Testament). Although it is obvious that the Hebrew Scriptures form the primary conceptual backdrop for the New Testament, because the New Testament was written in Greek and not Hebrew, some of these connections can quickly become obscured depending on how one translates. Take Mt. 16:18, for example: "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it" (NRSV). The NRSV is one of a number of English translations that uses a transliteration in this verse: "Hades." Hades refers to the abode of the dead. In the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament known as the Septuagint, Hades is used to translate the Hebrew word "Sheol." When Jesus refers to the "gates of Hades" in Mt. 16:18, he is referring to the same place from which David and the other Psalmists are constantly crying out for salvation and deliverance (see, e.g., Ps. 18:5, 49:15). I have therefore translated ᾅδης (*hadēs*) at Mt. 16:18 as Sheol. Stern makes a similar decision here. If some readers start off their morning devotions in Ps. 49 and come across the statement, "But God will redeem my life from the power of Sheol" (HCSB), and then later in the morning find themselves in Mt. 16, my hope is that when they come to Mt. 16:18, the way will have been paved for them to more easily make the connection: "Hey, wait a minute, this is the same place that the sons of Korah are trusting God to deliver them from in Psalm 49!" Although rendering Hades as Sheol is not meaning-based in the same way or to the same degree as the NCV ("the power of death") and the TEV ("death"), if someone has spent time reading the only section of the Bible that Jesus himself read, namely the Hebrew Scriptures, then the Sheol app will hopefully have been downloaded on their cognitive hard drives by the time they encounter the word Sheol at Mt. 16:18. If so, then the Sheol concept will open up when they read Jesus' words, in a way that that is less likely with the transliteration Hades. This decision, of course, is tethered to a big assumption on my part; it could be that some who stumble upon the *Blessed Hope Translation* will have never read the Old Testament in their lives. Nevertheless, this example provides a glimpse into one of the main audiences sitting on the pews in the back of my mind as I translated: Those in the Body of Christ who love the Bible and are committed to regular Bible reading, but who for various reasons—raising young children, for example,

or working two jobs just to make ends meet—only rarely have the time or money to dive into extra-Biblical resources.

F. Attentiveness to Discourse Features

As noted above, I have been greatly influenced by the work of Steven Levinsohn and Steve Runge. In the process of translating I have paid close attention to the "discourse features" to which their work has brought much-needed clarity. One example of a discourse feature is the way a certain language goes about giving emphasis (many linguists prefer the term "prominence" to emphasis) to some piece of information. As for Greek specifically, it, too, like every other language, has certain tools and devices that it uses to accomplish the task of assigning emphasis to some element in the flow of discourse. What, then, are the implications for translation? Once we are able to identify the devices that *Greek* uses to give emphasis to certain information, the translator must then identify the devices that the *receptor* language uses to accomplish this same communicational task. In the case of English, the receptor language of the *Blessed Hope Translation*, it, likewise, has at its disposal a wealth of devices capable of signaling emphasis, some of which are similar to those used by Greek, and many of which are not. Cleft-constructions ("It is John who went to town" gives more emphasis to "John" than does the statement, "John went to town"), spacers ("John ate, too, a piece of bread" gives more emphasis to "piece of bread" than does the statement, "John ate a piece of bread, too"), and italics ("John is my *friend*" gives more emphasis to "friend" than does the statement "John is my friend" without any italics), are only a few of the many tools to which English can turn if it wants to emphasize something. Levinsohn and Runge have done a great service to the Body of Christ by giving us a clearer understanding not only of when and how Greek accomplishes the task of assigning emphasis, but of many other discourse features as well. In the *Blessed Hope Translation*, I have done my best to convey some of the dynamic things happening in the Greek text by digging deep into the English toolbox.

G. Attentiveness to Verbal Aspect

Here I want to say just a few things about what in the academic world has become known as the "verbal aspect debate." Verbal aspect has to do with *kind* of action: "But the essential signification of the Greek tense system is the kind of action—whether it is represented as ongoing, finished,

or simply as an occurrence."[88] Perhaps the most contentious issue in the debate is whether time is encoded in verbs in the indicative mood, or whether notions of time are fully dependent on context. Is time signaled, in other words, by verbal inflection or by context—or by both? The traditional view is that Koine Greek does in fact, in Wallace's words, "grammaticalize time."[89] Many scholars today challenge and deny the traditional view, claiming that time of action must be determined solely by context. According to Constantine Campbell, "The nontense position is still in the minority across those who teach and learn ancient Greek. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that among the major contributors in the modern debate, the nontense position is slightly dominant."[90] There are plenty of excellent resources available today that explore the key issues of this debate in depth. Here I will simply say that while I myself do not find the nontense position fully convincing, advocates of the nontense position make some very good points, and the discussion has caused me 1) to be more willing to question traditional renderings of certain verbs; and 2) to pay much more careful and conscious attention to the way certain factors, such as context or lexeme, may be "suppressing" temporal elements that are signaled—according to the traditional view—through verbal inflection: "In our view, the unaffected meaning of the tenses in the indicative involves both aspect and time. However, either one of these can be suppressed by lexemic, contextual, or grammatical intrusions."[91] Careful consideration of the interaction between verbal encoding, lexeme, context, and other relevant variables, then, makes up another part of the DNA of the *Blessed Hope Translation*, as I pray is reflected in the "Verbal Complex Charts" that can be found on the BlessedHope.Life website.

H. Transparency and Footnotes

Transparency is very important to me, and in the *Blessed Hope Translation* I have done my best to give readers an open window into my translation decisions. On the BlessedHope.Life website, readers will find a multitude of footnotes by which they are allowed to see "under the hood" and have a look at why I choose to go in the direction that I did.

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[88] Black, *Learn to Read New Testament Greek*, 15.

[89] Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics*, 505.

[90] Campbell, *Basics of Verbal Aspect in Biblical Greek*, 430.

[91] Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics*, 511.

I. Gender Language

Many translations include in their prefaces some remarks about their stance on gender-inclusive language. On this issue I am, for the most part, in agreement with the translators of the *NET Bible*, and so here I will simply direct readers to the *NET Bible's* preface (https://bible.org/netbible/). This statement in the HCSB preface, furthermore, is also in large part true of the *Blessed Hope Translation*:

> The goal of the translators has not been to promote a cultural ideology but faithfully translate the Bible. While the HCSB avoids using 'man' or 'he' unnecessarily, the translation does not restructure sentences to avoid them when they are in the text. For example, the translators have not changed 'him' to 'you' or to 'them,' neither have they avoided other masculine words such as 'father' or 'son' by translating them in generic terms such as 'parent' or 'child.'[92]

Although words like "father" and "son" do have a range of meaning (there are times when father clearly means "forefathers" or "ancestors," for example, and when "sons" means "descendants" or "children"), and are therefore translated in different ways at different points in the *Blessed Hope Translation,* I have translated third person masculine pronouns in Greek as third person masculine pronouns in English, except in cases where some other context-specific translational consideration pushed me in another direction.

As for the Greek ἀδελφοί (*adelphoi*—traditionally rendered "brothers"), although it is true that in many places where it is used both men and women are most likely being addressed, referenced, or described, in some contexts this is either not the case or is not clear. Furthermore, on a discourse level, there are times when I have chosen to use *adelphoi*—which is one of the more common forms of address used in the New Testament—as a spacer to give extra focus to some other element in a clause or sentence. In these situations, a lengthier rendering like "brothers and sisters" made the spacer, in my opinion, feel a bit too cumbersome and bulky. For these reasons I decided to retain the traditional "brothers" in translation.

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[92] Holman Bible Publishers, *Holy Bible*, viii.

J. Other Miscellaneous Features

Here I want to briefly mention a few other things that people will encounter in the *Blessed Hope Translation*:

1. In places where English readers would not know if the second person singular or the second person plural is being used, or in places where both the second person singular and the second person plural are being used in the same context, a superscripted “s” or “p” is used with the second person pronoun. “ˢYou” means that the second person pronoun is singular, and “ᵖyou” means that the second person pronoun is plural. In contexts in which it is unambiguous whether the “you” is singular or plural, this device may not be used, or may be used to a more limited extent. In the NT epistles, which are typically addressed to groups, readers are informed that the “you” is plural unless otherwise marked by a superscripted “s.”

2. Throughout the translation, headings are drawn from the text itself. My goals in doing this were to 1) whet people’s appetite for what follows by giving them a small taste of what awaits them; and 2) give readers the organizational benefits that headings bring, but without the headings saying more than what is actually said in the text.

3. If something is italicized in the translation, it means that it is being *emphasized* in the Greek text. Although italics are not the only device used in the *Blessed Hope Translation* to give extra focus and emphasis to focal elements, I mention this here so that people know that I am not using italics in the same way as versions like the NKJB and NASB do. In these versions, italics are used to alert readers when a word is “not in the Greek.” This, in my opinion, is unfortunate, not only because it represents an atypical use of italics in modern written English, but also because it often has the effect of breeding unnecessary suspicion. At the end of the day, the main thing this use of italics does is simply tell readers that there are times when English and Greek are different. In the *Blessed Hope Translation*, I have used italics to accomplish the same task for which they are usually employed in modern works of English: To convey emphasis.

The Goal and Prayer

Although there are other features of the *Blessed Hope Translation* house that might be worth pointing out, I think I have said enough. As I hope is reflected in the title chosen for this translation, my overarching goal in producing the *Blessed Hope Translation* has been to make the blessed hope of the gospel, as well as the basis of that hope and the call to holy living with which that hope is inextricably connected, clear for readers:

> For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. (Tit. 2:11, NIV).

Jesus of Nazareth, our Great God and Savior, the King of kings and the Lord of lords…Jesus of Nazareth, the very eternal Word of God, through whom all things came into existence, made flesh…Jesus of Nazareth, crucified in shame but then vindicated in resurrected power and glory on the third day…Jesus of Nazareth, lifted up and exalted to the Father's right hand far above every demon and power and ruler that dares to exalt itself against the one true God and Creator and Judge…Jesus of Nazareth, taking careful note of every single thought and every single motive of every single human being in every single nation of the earth…Jesus of Nazareth, burning with a zeal for justice the tenacity of which no mere mortal could ever comprehend, but also with a love for mercy the greatness of which redeemed mortals now destined for immortality will never stop exalting… Jesus of Nazareth, coming soon on the clouds with the armies of heaven to resurrect the dead and reward His faithful followers and punish those who refused to bow the knee to Him…it is this King before whom each of us will stand and give an account of our lives on that Day; it is this King whose glorious appearing we eagerly await; it is this King by whose gracious mercy and power and life we forsake the wicked ways of this evil age. May God use the *Blessed Hope Translation* to help you fix your eyes on the hope of the gospel.

Father, I come before You in the name of Your Son, Jesus of Nazareth, through the power of the Holy Spirit. I pray for each person who reads or

hears the Blessed Hope Translation. I pray that You would use this translation to strengthen them and root them unshakably in the hope of the gospel. As they read, I pray that Your Spirit would guide them in the truth. Anything in this translation that You consider to be a faithful and adequate expression of Your Word, direct their eyes to those places and let Your holy instruction do its powerful work. At whatever points I have fallen short or not adequately conveyed Your truth, I ask You to have mercy on me and to direct the eyes of Your flock to pastures where they may be established more effectively in the truth. I pray that not one of them would be lost through the difficult times that lie ahead. Thank You, Lord, for Your great love and kindness. Thank You for the mercy of the cross. Thank You for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Thank You for Your faithfulness to every one of Your promises. We love You and we long for the Day of Your appearing, King Jesus. Marantha. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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