



BLESSED HOPE TRANSLATION

Why the *Blessed Hope Translation*?
By Tim Miller

www.blessedhope.life

There are many excellent English translations in the world today. So why this translation? My primary reasons for producing the *Blessed Hope Translation (BHT)* can be summarized as follows:

1. **To Grow as a Student and Lover of God's Word.** One of my favorite verses in Scripture is Job 23:12:

“I have not departed from the commands of his lips; I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my daily bread” (NIV).

I want to be a man who truly does “treasure,” even more than “my daily bread,” the words of the One who so graciously and mercifully made a way for rebellious sinners like me to be spared the punishment of eternal fire and to be included in the glories of the age to come. I knew that doing this project would force me to grapple with the Biblical text at a deep level, and my prayer was that God would use such a project to satisfy the thirst for His Word that I believe He himself had graciously placed in me. God has been kind to answer this prayer. He has not disappointed.

2. **To Grow as a Teacher and Steward of God's Word.** Teaching God's Word is a very high and weighty calling. Consider, for example, the following verses:

“If anyone builds on the foundation [of Jesus Christ] with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, or straw, each builder's work will be plainly seen, for the Day will make it clear, because it will be revealed by fire. And the fire will test what kind of work each has done” (1 Cor. 3:12-13, NET).

“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:18, ESV).

“Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more severely” (Jm. 3:1, ISV).

“My hands have made both heaven and earth; they and everything in them are mine. I, the LORD, have spoken! ‘I will bless those who have humble and contrite hearts, who tremble at my word’” (Is 66:2, NLT)

When I stand before Jesus on the Day of His glorious appearing, I want to hear Him say, “Well done, faithful servant. You trembled at My holy Word. You built on the one true foundation with gold and silver and precious stones. You gave My Word the time and careful attention that it deserves, and you handled it rightly.” My second reason, then, for doing this translation, was to become a more effective and responsible teacher of the Scriptures.

3. **A Desire to Be a Good “Berean.”** In Acts 17:11, Luke tells us that

“the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true” (NIV).

The people among whom my wife and I served in Africa, whom I will call the “Moravians,” have a proverb: “To know something for sure one would even give a she-camel.” The livelihood of most Moravians depends in large part on livestock, and therefore most Moravians place a high value on the herd, which for them typically means sheep, goats, and camels. Female camels are especially prized because of the milk they supply, and because it is they through whose wombs new generations of camels come into the world as a continued source of sustenance. Moravians, however, are also a very curious people, whose eagerness to learn the latest news, or to confirm the truth of some report they have heard, at times borders on obsession—to the point that one might even be willing to give up a precious “she-camel” in order to attain a clearer or more certain knowledge of something.

From the earliest years of my pilgrimage in the Christian faith I was exposed to different streams of the Body of Christ. As stated in the “About Us” section of the BlessedHope.Life website, during my early years I went to Vacation Bible School (VBS) at many different churches each summer. Although most of my memories from this

early season of life have exited my cerebral hard drive, there is one occasion that I still remember. During a snack time at one VBS, I asked one of the teachers what the difference was between this church and the other churches at which I had attended VBS. Although I don't remember the details of her response, I do remember that it seemed evasive. On reflection, it may be that this early exposure to different Christian traditions and denominations, and the curiosity such exposure sparked in me, was actually God sowing some of the seeds that would eventually flower into this project.

During my high school years, I found myself building friendships with Christian youth from different churches and denominations. I also found myself increasingly exposed to theological conflict and differences. Some of my friends, for example, went to churches where speaking in tongues was encouraged, while others went to churches that placed little if any emphasis on tongues or other spiritual gifts. I remember the father of one of my friends stating quite confidently one Sunday morning that the spiritual gifts are no longer for today. I also recall a younger student in my high school telling me one evening at a youth event that he was a "Calvinist."

As the years went on and youthful ignorance gradually gave way to an increasing awareness of some of the key issues that form the boundary lines between different groups of Christians, I noticed that various denominations and traditions often had certain Bible translations that they cherished, as well as those on which they, for various reasons, looked down. The theological gatekeepers of these various traditions were often critical of those translations in which their own doctrinal convictions did not seem to shine through nearly as brightly as they did in the versions that they themselves preferred. What one group championed as the "most faithful translation," another group accused of being "inaccurate." At one point in my life this began to create considerable frustration in me, especially as I myself began to learn new languages and became more familiar with the various levels of complexity involved in translation. I remember a time a number of years ago when I walked into a Bible bookstore and began browsing through different English translations of the Bible. As I skimmed various translations and their prefaces, I began to feel very discouraged and frustrated at the fact that I simply didn't know who to trust. I was disheartened, too, by the fact that there was no way I could afford most of the Bibles on the shelves in front of me. Although

I loved Jesus with all my heart and desired to faithfully adhere to his teaching, as one who happened to be born in a twentieth-century evangelical landscape seemingly embroiled in constant controversy over this thing or that, I found myself increasingly willing to question denominational “sacred cows,” and increasingly skeptical of claims for and against different English translations, most of which seemed exaggerated to me. As I entered my early thirties, my desire to give a fair hearing to different theological perspectives and translation philosophies—without an academic degree at stake if I were to disagree with some group’s cherished doctrine, without monetary dependence or denominational politics being used to pressure my conclusions or choices in one direction or another—became so strong that I was now ready to give up a “she-camel” in an effort to be a good “Berean.” This translation is the result. This, then, is my third reason for this project.

At this point I think it important to say that as a result of this “she-camel,” my love and appreciation for the broader Body of Christ has only increased, as has my respect for various translation philosophies and English translations, most of which I consider to be at least adequate, though more often than not excellent, within the contours of their stated purposes, goals, and priorities. At the same time, all denominational loyalties have been obliterated. It is Jesus of Nazareth of whom I am a disciple and to whom I will give an account on that Day, not Paul or Peter or Apollos (1 Cor. 1:12)—or John Calvin, for that matter, or John Wesley, or Billy Graham, or the Pope, or John McArthur, or Mike Bickle, or Elisabeth Elliot, or Francis Chan, or Oral Roberts, or William and Catherine Booth, or Bill Johnson, or Albert Mohler, or John Piper, or David Stern, or N.T. Wright or any other leader or teacher or scholar who, like me, is destined to turn back into dirt (if they have not already) apart from being alive at the Lord’s return (1 Th 4). I am very thankful for such leaders and have certainly been blessed in different ways by their hard work and respective labors in the gospel. Insofar as they follow the example of the Messiah, they are worthy of emulation. God is my witness that I pray with genuine concern for these I have mentioned and for others whom I have not, and for the respective movements and streams that they represent. At the same time, I refuse to let the noise and hype of modern celebrity-Christianity turn my eyes away from the one whose own eyes are “like blazing fire” (Rev. 2:18, NIV) and whose feet are “like shining bronze” (Rev. 2:18, NCV), who “searches minds and

hearts” (Rev. 2:23, NET) and will “repay each of you [us, too!] according to what you [we, too!] have done” (Rev. 2:23, TEV). God has mercifully used this project to help me keep my eyes on His Son in the midst of the empty chatter of a Facebook-Twitter generation that seems to always be clamoring for three-minute videos and higher-speed data and “CliffsNotes” (to quote my friend Richee Parks) in the knowledge of God. Though this project was very difficult and stretched me to the limits in many ways, I wouldn’t have traded it for anything.

4. **Meeting a Growing Demand in Our Ministry Context.** In Acts 24:14-16, Paul declares:

“However, I admit that I worship the God of our fathers as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that agrees with the Law and that is written in the Prophets, and I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man” (NIV).

Even though I went to many different churches growing up, I cannot remember a single sermon in which I heard a preacher talk about the “resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked,” or make mention of the fact that the hope of believers is in fact a Jewish hope rooted in the promises of the Hebrew Scriptures. Most of the preachers I heard simply talked about “going to heaven when we die.” What a shock it was, then, when I first learned—in my college philosophy class of all places(!)—that the Biblical hope is not the soul’s escape to an ethereal realm at death, but rather the resurrection of the dead at the Second Coming. The idea that “salvation” means the soul’s escape from the body at death (i.e., death=a friend and a liberator), rather than human beings coming up from the grave bodily in context to a real event in real time and history at the end of the age when Jesus returns (i.e., death=an enemy and foe to be overturned), it turns out, is actually a Platonic concept (i.e., it had its roots in the philosophy of the ancient Greek philosopher Plato, rather than the Bible). Through a series of twists and turns in church history, this type of thinking eventually became clothed in Biblical language, even though under the surface, at the worldview level, it was unbiblical. I am part of a

ministry network called the Daniel Training Network (DTN). One of our goals at DTN is to help believers work through these types of worldview issues. In the couple of years leading up to the beginning of this project, there seemed to be a growing interest among a number of those impacted by DTN in a translation that consciously kept an eye out for Platonic incursions into the Biblical hope. A fourth reason for launching into this translation project, then, was to try to help “scratch” what seemed to be a growing “itch” in our ministry context, although in a way that would not devalue, but rather honor and appreciate, other English translations and the hard work that our brothers and sisters in different parts of the Body of Christ have invested in them.

5. **Fresh Insights into NT Greek.** In 1 Corinthians 1:4-5, Paul expresses his thanks to God for enriching the Corinthians “in speech and knowledge of every kind”:

“I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind...” (NRSV).

One kind of knowledge with which God has enriched the Body of Christ over the last 10-20 years, and for which I myself am deeply thankful to the Lord, is that of new levels of clarity into New Testament Greek, resulting from the hard work and labors of a number of excellent linguists and scholars. I have been particularly blessed and influenced by the work of Steve Runge and Stephen Levinsohn. When the Lord directed me to their scholarship in the earlier phases of this project, I was so impacted that I felt it even more imperative to produce a translation that consciously and systematically took their work into account. I have been in correspondence with Dr. Levinsohn over email for several years now, working through a number of detailed questions in relation to his “Bible Analysis and Research Tool (BART) Display Enhanced for Discourse Features.”¹ Words cannot express how thankful I am for how he and Steve Runge have prioritized making the insights of a specialized and often intimidating field accessible to the broader of

¹ “BART Displays | Scholars,” accessed May 23, 2019, https://scholars.sil.org/stephen_h_levinsohn/bart.

Body of Christ. This, then, constitutes my fifth reason for embarking on the challenging venture of Bible translation.

6. **Making God's Word Freely Available.** In 1 Corinthians 9:12, Paul tells the Corinthians:

“...we endure anything rather put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ” (NRSV).

In a recent text message, a friend of mine who is part of a ministry that reaches out to people of a certain non-Christian religious group wrote:

“We are working on a discipleship phone app that would help people work through all the commands of Jesus ‘teach them to obey all I have commanded’...So we are going to list the commands of Jesus and corresponding scriptures for people to work through with a discipler....We need a Bible translation. The main ones are not being easy to work with. They won't give rights to more than 1200 words. We want to add more scripture chunks to each command of Jesus than just one or two verses.”

My point in citing my friend's text is not to set the stage for a diatribe against certain translations and publishers for their chosen copyright procedures or for selling their Bibles, or to accuse their motives. Though I, too, can certainly relate to the kind of frustration reflected in my friend's words (see reason three above), we are exhorted in Scripture to “judge nothing before the appointed time,” but to rather “wait till the Lord comes,” because “he will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts” (1 Cor. 4:5, NIV). I have heard some very harsh accusations leveled at various English translations in regard to the business aspects of publishing. We must be very careful, however, not to make sweeping generalizations or pronounce condemning verdicts against our brothers and sisters in Christ. I do not have a personal relationship with the people who make such decisions, nor am I the one before whom they will give an account on the Day of the great audit, when every human heart will be parsed like a perfect middle/passive

indicative—the results, in this case, being eternally relevant at the time of the speaker. However, my friend’s words, and Paul’s, too, do serve to highlight a sixth reason why I decided to pour forty-five percent of my married life (as of 2020) into this project: To produce a translation that is available to the world free of charge, in the hope that it might somehow help the gospel go forth more effectively, without hindrance or obstacle. Freely we have received, freely we give (Mt 10:6). The electronic version of the *BHT* is completely free online or via the *BHT* app. If people want a printed copy, they can either download a print-ready PDF and print it on their own, or order a print-on-demand copy at cost only. I myself will not make any profit from a printed version; my hope is that this will keep the cost of a printed version to a minimum. The *Blessed Hope Translation* is licensed under Creative Commons, and so people are free to copy and distribute it (noncommercially, please) in any medium or format they like.

7. **A Sense of Divine Leading.** In 2 Thessalonians 1:11, Paul says,

“So we keep on praying for you, asking our God to enable you to live a life worthy of his call. May he give you the power to accomplish all the good things your faith prompts you to do” (NLT).

This brings me to my seventh and, in my mind, the most important, reason for producing the *Blessed Hope Translation*: I believe with all my heart that it was at the direction of God, and at the prompting of a sincere faith, that I set out on this journey that I now know could only have been accomplished by His power. If you have ever seen the movie *Evan Almighty*, you may recall how God called Evan to build an ark by surrounding him with Genesis 6:14 at every turn. This is similar to what it was like for me in the Summer of 2011 in regard to translation. Though the reasons listed above certainly were important factors in my decision to do this project, there is no way I could have persevered in it without a sense of conviction that I was in fact carrying out an assignment that had been entrusted to me by God. Of course, hearing God’s voice is sometimes more of an art than a science. Still, it is better to err on the side of obeying and following through on what you genuinely believe to be a prompting from God (so long as it does not violate the teaching of Scripture, of course)

than to push it out of your mind or resist your conscience, even if it does turn out in the end that it really was more of your own idea than His. God knows the heart, and He is pleased with those who sincerely desire to discern His voice and obey Him. God's many acts of miraculous provision over the years, along with His constant faithfulness to give strength in times of weakness and doubt, were much needed confirmations along the way that I had not lost my mind in embarking on this difficult project. Any good that has been or that may be accomplished as a result of the *BHT* is by His power and His power alone. Any weaknesses or shortcomings, however, fall on me alone. God have mercy on me.

8. **In Retrospect.** Looking back in hindsight, I can now see that in addition to the reasons mentioned above, God also had several other purposes for this project in His own mind when He called me to it, which I could not have foreseen in its earlier phases. I will mention three of them here.

Humility. At different times in my life I have cast some very sharp and heavy stones at various English translations. I now realize how much my condemnations stemmed from pride, arrogance, and ignorance. This project has been one of the most difficult and humbling things I have ever attempted. I now see that I was wrong to so quickly criticize my brothers and sisters in the faith who have worked so hard to see that different segments of the English-speaking world have access to the only message by which any human being can be saved. I wish that my heart been tender enough before God not to have needed so massive an undertaking in order to learn this lesson in humility. Nevertheless, God has been merciful to confront various areas of blindness and hardness of heart through this project. I give Him praise and honor.

Increased freedom from the fear of man. As one might expect in an era blessed by so many English translations, this project has more often than not been met with suspicion or scorn than it has with enthusiasm. "Hasn't that been done before?" I remember one man saying to me with a hint of sarcasm in his voice. Usually the disparagement has been less explicit, though still felt: Raised eyebrows...an expression of indifference...some degree of slight in a

tone of voice. In most cases I have had little choice but to simply bear the awkwardness and remind myself that God's opinion is the only one that really matters in the end. How do I explain to someone (or is it even helpful to try to explain it?), that on a certain passage I have consulted 10-15 well-known English translations, many of which have been signed off by who-knows-how-many PhDs, and yet not one of them used an English device to give extra emphasis to an element that is clearly being emphasized in the Greek text? I cannot tell you how many times I have been in this type of situation. The last thing I want is for people who do not know Greek to lose confidence in their Bibles, or to think that they need some sort of special original-language "gnosis" (secret knowledge) to understand the message of the Scriptures. So, I usually just keep my mouth shut and look like a fool in an effort to prioritize love over knowledge (1 Cor. 8:1). In the end, though, I am so thankful for how God used this process to confront the fear of man in my heart, and to crucify my lust for the praise of mere flesh and blood, whose days, like my own, are ticking down with each passing breath. As the Apostle Paul says, "If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a slave of Christ" (Gal. 1:10, HCSB). Throughout this project there were a handful of saints who never stopped cheering me on. Words cannot express how much their love and support has meant to me.

Strength through my wife's battle with cancer. On Thanksgiving week of 2015, my wife of fifteen years, Emily, was diagnosed with breast cancer. The cancer was spreading quickly, and we had to act fast. At the time, Emily was still nursing our fifth child, Asaph, and we had to wean him immediately. I will never forget that first night lying in bed awake with tears streaming down my face and prayers springing from my lips, trying to comfort my son as he screamed to the point of exhaustion; he didn't understand why his little world was being so abruptly turned upside down. My four girls, for their part, weren't quite sure why Mommy and Daddy kept giving them such long hugs with so many tears. In the season that followed, we "were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life" (2 Cor. 1:8, NIV). It was during this time that I translated Paul's writings. The slow marinade in such life-giving words as "our momentary, light suffering is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison" (2 Cor. 4:18, NET), or "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with

the glory that will be revealed to us” (Rom. 8:18, ISV), was the primary thing that God used to keep me from sinking into utter despair during this time. The casseroles and the kindness that made their way to our home were also a God-appointed source of strength and encouragement; the theological cotton candy and empty advice that sometimes came with the casseroles, not so much. Nevertheless, where the words of even the most kind and well-meaning of people fail, the “word of His grace,” which is so full of life and strength and power and truth, succeeds in “building up” (Ac. 20:32, NASB) those with “tired arms” and “weak knees” (Heb. 12:12, ISV). Of course, I did not know when I started this project that its timeline would include such an intense season of trial. God, however, did. Looking back, I know that this was one of the reasons He had me do this project. This translation, like all translations, is not perfect. It was, however, forged in the fire.

For those who may be curious, it brings me great joy to say that God mercifully spared Emily’s life. As of 2020, there are no detectable signs of cancer in her body. We praise our Master for the riches of His mercy and kindness and grace. To Him be the glory both now and forever into the ages of the ages.



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