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A Cautionary Word on The Passion Translation of the Bible - Part 2

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In part one of this two part article, we mentioned how we were quizzed about a new Bible translation called The Passion Translation (TPT). We admitted we were not familiar with that English Bible translated by a former missionary named Brian Simmons (b. 1964). Therefore, we did some research, and in this article are presenting our findings and recommendations as to whether we should use it in serious Bible study.

In the first installment we showed how the TPT demonstrates a definite translation bias that supports the views of the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR). The NAR is a loosely aligned group of charismatic leaders, most of whom regard themselves as modern day possessors of the spiritually gifted offices of Apostles and Prophets. In our research we located a good analysis of the TPT by a scholar named Andrew Wilson. We summarize his findings below. (to see Wilson's critique go to: https://thinktheology.co.uk/blog/article/whats_wro ng_with_the_passion_translation)

1. Simmons' Bible version is not a translation at all. It is actually a free-wheeling paraphrase. Wilson states: "The Passion 'translation' inserts all kinds of concepts, words and ideas of which the original gives no hint whatsoever (despite the occasional footnotes which say 'implied by the context')."

2. TPT is translated by only one man. We discussed the problems of a single individual translating Scripture by himself or herself. This is a bad idea because the translators' doctrinal biases are often found in the text. Simmons' version has numerous examples of this problem.

3. Simmons uses a controversial translation methodology utilizing Aramaic translations, believing they reveal the deeper passion in the meanings of the sayings of Jesus and the Scriptures. We indicated that this is a serious error. Bible translators should study texts that most closely reflect the original autographs in the language in which they wrote. Those languages were Hebrew, Koine Greek, and, only in a very few instances, Aramaic.

4. Simmons desires to recover the "emotion of the text" he says is missing in standard translations. This is why he calls it the "passion" translation. This also is a dangerous practice.

In this installment, we offer some sample verses where TPT takes significant liberties with the text. We will do this presentation by contrasting the TPT with the New American Standard Bible (NASB), one of the most highly regarded modern English versions. (From: What is the Passion Translation of the Bible? | GotQuestions.org) (Verses are copied from biblegateway.com online.)

Matthew 10:2

Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; and James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; (NASB)

Now, these are the names of the first twelve apostles: first, Simon, who is nicknamed Peter, and Andrew, his brother. And then Jacob and John, sons of Zebedee. (TPT)

If you look carefully at the verse you will notice the addition of one important word in the TPT: "the first

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apostles." "First" is not in the Greek text and is found in no other standard translations. The word "first" (*protos*) does appear in the verse, but only in reference to Peter. Its unwarranted addition, however, certainly echoes the NAR's belief that there were other apostles after the Twelve, including many who serve God today. (See more on this at Holly Pivac's blog: <http://www.spiritoferror.org/2018/06/important-facts-about-the-passion-translation/7962>)

Mark 1:15:

...and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel. (NASB)

His message was this: 'At last the fulfillment of the age has come! It is time for the realm of God's kingdom to be experienced in its fullness! Turn your lives back to God and put your trust in the hope-filled gospel! (TPT)

This expanded rendering is indicative of Simmons' and NAR's assertions that we are living in the last days in which all of the powers and activities are being revived in preparation for the Lord's coming.

Luke 1:37:

For nothing will be impossible with God. (NASB)

Not one promise from God is empty of power, for nothing is impossible with God! (TPT)

This paraphrase reflects Simmons' and the NAR's belief in modern miracles and signs and wonders, sometimes called "power evangelism."

John 1:1

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (NASB)

In the very beginning the Living Expression was already there. And the Living Expression was with God, yet fully God. (TPT) (see also John 1:3, 5, 14; 1 John 1:1; Luke 1:2)

The translation of *Logos* (Word) as "the Living Expression" is most unusual and is never used in any standard English versions. It is clearly an interpretation by Simmons of his understanding of its meaning, and not a translation.

Galatians 2:15-21

15 We are Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles; 16 nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified. 17 But if, while seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have also been found sinners, is Christ then a minister of sin? May it never be! 18 For if I rebuild what I have once destroyed, I prove myself to be a transgressor. 19 For through the Law I died to the Law, so that I might live to God. 20 I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me. 21 I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly. (NASB)

15 Although we're Jews by birth and not non-Jewish 'sinners,' 16 we know full well that we don't receive God's perfect righteousness as a reward for keeping the law, but by the faith of Jesus, the Messiah! His faithfulness, not ours, has saved us, and we have received God's perfect righteousness. Now we know that God accepts no one by the keeping of religious laws! 17 If we are those who desire to be saved from our sins through our union

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*with the Anointed One, does that mean our Messiah promotes our sins if we still acknowledge that we are sinners? How absurd! 18 For if I start over and reconstruct the old religious system that I have torn down with the message of grace, I will appear to be one who turns his back on the truth. 19 But because the Messiah lives in me, I've now died to the law's dominion over me so that I can live for God. 20 My old identity has been co-crucified with Messiah and no longer lives; **for the nails of his cross crucified me with him.** And now the essence of this new life is no longer mine, for the Anointed One lives his life through me - **we live in union as one!** My new life is empowered by the faith of the Son of God who loves me so much that he gave himself for me, and dispenses his life into mine! 21 So that is why I don't view God's grace as something minor or peripheral. For if keeping the law could release God's righteousness to us, the Anointed One would have died for nothing.* (TPT)

Even a cursory comparison of these verses in the two translations demonstrates how loosely Simmons took liberties with the texts. Note the words in bold in TPT are not even found in the original text. They are interpretations, not translations.

In the first edition (2013) of the TPT, Simmons translated verse 19 like this:

It was when I tried to obey the law that I was condemned with a curse, because I'm not able to fulfill every single detail of it. But because Christ lives in me, I've now died to the law's dominion over me so that I can live for God in heaven's freedom!

Much of this verse was not found at all in the original text. Apparently, Simmons acknowledged his error and corrected that verse in the second edition.

2 Timothy 4:2

Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. (NASB)

Proclaim the Word of God and stand upon it no matter what! Rise to the occasion and preach when it is convenient and when it is not. Preach in the full expression of the Holy Spirit with wisdom and patience as you instruct and teach the people. (TPT)

This is an example of a verse that Simmons claims to have translated from the Aramaic. It is supposedly more passionate in imploring Timothy to preach the word, but is a poor translation of what Paul actually wrote.

Conclusion

Brian Simmons is probably a sincere follower of Jesus Christ. Nonetheless, his version of the Bible, The Passion Translation, is, in my opinion over the top in terms of its freedom to interpret and extrapolate on what the original texts actually say. Also, it is evident that Simmons' adherence to the doctrines of the New Apostolic Reformation in numerous places have colored his renderings of the text.

In addition, as we indicated earlier, his reliance on Aramaic translations to clarify certain sayings is questionable at best. Other Bible versions based on the premise that the original New Testament language was Aramaic have been produced in the past. One example was the Holy Bible: From the Ancient Eastern Text by George Lamsa (1892-1975). Lamsa was a Turkish Nestorian scholar of ancient Aramaic Bible translations. Several notable cult groups have utilized Lamsa's works to buttress their false teachings including the Way International and the Unity School of Christianity. Though Aramaic passages and sayings are found in the

Old and New Testaments, few biblical scholars accept the notion that the New Testament was originally written in Aramaic. The overwhelming consensus is that only by translating from the best Greek texts can the meanings of the original authors, and of God Himself, be discerned.

Serious students of the Bible desire precise, yet relevant and readable renderings of the Scriptures in English. They want to know what the writers, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, meant by the words they used in their original languages. This is particularly true when attempting to formulate a theological or ethical position. Therefore, it is our conclusion that The Passion Translation, as sincere and well-meaning as its translator may have been, is not a Bible version the serious student of the Bible should employ.

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