

Not A Bible Translation of "Psalm 1"

Description

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Trent Wilde Blog

Not A Bible Translation of "Psalm 1"


Most translations blur distinctions between words.

...stuff about **language** and **translation principles**.

What about male-centric language?

Should words be translated consistently?

Content Words vs. Function Words



Poetry is meant to be pondered. It contains more treasure than what is apparent on the surface. Uncovering the hidden gems takes some time and effort, but this is no drudgery to a lover of

wisdom. There is delight in discovery and elation in exercise.

If you savor meaningful contemplation and value moral insight, the poem known as “Psalm 1” is a mine worth digging. Many have given it a surface survey (a casual read-through), but this isn’t sufficient to gain its true value. It requires some digging. The reason for this is not just because it’s poetry but also because it’s ancient and was written in a language that nobody speaks anymore. This means that for most of us, our only way to access a poem like Psalm 1 is through translations. This doesn’t necessarily bury its gems so deep that we can’t reach them, but it does add a layer of soil. In straightforward terms, this means there are a few things we need to be aware of regarding translations that we wouldn’t have to worry about if we were all reading ancient Hebrew.

First, it’s important to remember that when we’re reading a translation, we’re not reading the words the author chose; we’re reading the words a translator chose in an attempt to create a reflection of the original poem in the language into which it is being translated. The particular words chosen can make a big difference in the degree to which the original is reflected, especially for something as nuanced as poetry.

Another factor to be aware of is that the vast majority of English translations of Hebrew scripture are either directly based on, or influenced by, earlier translations. Most translations are indebted to the King James Version (1611), and the KJV itself is largely indebted to the translation work of William Tyndale from almost a century earlier. I recommend taking a look at [this family tree of English Bible Translation](#); it shows that there has been a lot of revising of earlier work but not a whole lot of brand new work during the past 500 years of English Bible translation.

What is even more remarkable is the fact that this rather conservative method of producing revisions has been so controversial – even to the point of burning new translations in some instances (which, again, are just revisions). When people grow up hearing the Bible a certain way, they often don’t like it changed – at least not much. And if people don’t want something “too” different, most publishers don’t think it’s worth it to produce something “too” different. All this to say, the incentives for keeping English Bible Translations relatively the same are pretty strong. This is important to know as a reader of translations since it informs you that the reason things are worded the way they are in your Bible might not owe to it being the most accurate reflection of the original; it might owe more to it being within the parameters of the long-established tradition of translation.

But there is value in approaching these ancient texts with a fresh slate. Our knowledge of Hebrew has grown a lot during the past 500 years, and the English language has changed a lot too. There are words that have entered the English language within the past 200 years that are capable of more accurately reflecting certain ancient Hebrew terms than were the available English words of an earlier time. But by the time some of these words entered English, the translation tradition was already established.

So, this has all been leading to the fact that I just finished a fresh translation of Psalm 1. This translation is not a revision of previous translation work but rather a whole new attempt to create an English reflection of the Hebrew poem. What exactly was my process? This isn’t the place to explain the process in full, but here’s some of it: I started with studying the passage in Hebrew in order to fix my mind on the ideas conveyed in the original without respect to what any translation

says. Then, I did a thorough investigation of each word by examining its occurrences throughout ancient Hebrew literature in order to understand its nuances and why an author might have chosen it over alternatives. I also considered the syntax of each clause and how it differs from, and is similar to, other clauses in which the same words or the same grammatical forms occur. And it was also necessary to study the grammatical forms themselves. In choosing words, I looked carefully for the English word whose range of meaning most closely matches the range of meaning of the Hebrew word. Sometimes the best choice was a common translation equivalent, and sometimes it wasn't. Also, there were circumstances in which the best way of reflecting the Hebrew was to create a new English word by modifying an existing English word in recognizable ways. For example, I created "errorists" by modifying "error" in the same way that the word "terrorists" is created by modifying "terror."

If you've been following the blog for a while, you probably know that I've been translating various ancient Hebrew texts, and you might know that I'm calling my translations "Not A Bible Translation." You can learn more about it by checking out previous posts like [Who May Travel Into Yahweh's Tent](#) and [Jeremiah Against Orthodoxy \(Ancient and Modern\)](#). Psalm 1, however, is the first "Not A Bible Translation" that I consider complete. This doesn't mean it can't be improved upon or that it won't be updated or revised; it just means that I went through the complete thorough process for every aspect of the translation. All of the other texts I've translated so far I consider to be preliminary translations.

I believe this translation provides a better English reflection of the Hebrew original as compared to other available translations. As such, it should help you as an English reader to more fully understand the poem (again, through giving it all the thoughtful contemplation that a poem like this deserves).

Beyond providing a translation, it can be very helpful for a translator to explain why they translated a text in the way they did. I'll do that in upcoming posts. And in addition to explaining the translation, I'll also explicate the meaning and lessons of the poem.

For now, though, I'll leave you with the poem itself. While it is known today as "Psalm 1," it was obviously written before it was placed in a collection with other psalms, and so calling it "Psalm 1" treats it as a part of a later collection rather than as the individual poem it was when it was composed. Ancient texts were frequently named after their first word or words, so we'll call this poem "Cheers For The Man" since that's how it begins.

One last thing; it doesn't read like something written in Standardized English. And, of course, it wasn't written in Standardized English. Remember, its first language isn't English, so it speaks with a bit of an accent and a Hebrew-like manner of expression. Enjoy!¹The wording here slightly differs from what you will hear in the podcast version since the translation has been updated since this post and the corresponding podcast were initially published. The written version here is the most up-to-date.

Cheers for the man who
ain't done gone in the counsel of wrongdoers,
and in the way of errorists ain't done stayed,
and in the residence of talkers ain't done resided.

But only in the direction of He Who Do His Thing his delight,
and in his direction he patter by day and night.

And he do his thing as a tree transplanted upon streams of waters,
who put forth his fruit in his time,
and his upgrowth not wither,
and all that he work he advance.

Surely not the wrongdoers!
But only as the chaff that a gust waft away.

On this, surely, wrongdoers not stand up in the adjudication,
or errorists in the cojunct of rightdoers,
As He Who Do His Thing does know the way of rightdoers,
while the way of wrongdoers vanish.

Note: The podcast episodes corresponding to most of the earlier posts on this blog matched the blog post quite closely in terms of content. But I've changed how I'm going about the podcasts now (I'm now talking more freely about the same subject as the blog post rather than creating an audio version), which has resulted in the content matching less closely. So, if you want to make sure to get everything on the subject, I recommend listening to the corresponding podcast episode using the podcast player above. And to get all the new episodes as they come out, follow the podcast by clicking "Follow" in the podcast playing or [find more options for following the podcast here](#).

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