<https://openoureyeslord.com/2013/06/18/but-the-greek-really-says-why-hebrew-and-greek-are-not-needed-in-the-pulpit-part-1/>

[**“But the Greek REALLY says…”: Why Hebrew and Greek are not needed in the pulpit Part 1**](https://openoureyeslord.com/2013/06/18/but-the-greek-really-says-why-hebrew-and-greek-are-not-needed-in-the-pulpit-part-1/)



***Para la versión castellana, vaya***[***AQUI***](http://razondelaesperanza.com/2013/12/05/pero-el-hebreo-realmente-dice-por-que-no-debemos-hablar-de-los-idiomas-biblicos-en-el-pulpito/)***.***

Come with me to ESEPA Seminary in Costa Rica: we meet at night around a table, and with me are all my advanced students of Greek. Throughout four semesters, we have studied the ancient dialect, *koinē*, and they have found blessings as they read the New Testament in the original.

Tonight, we’ll take a different tack: “I’m about to impart something very important to you,” I alert them. Nodding, they lean forward.

“Here’s the mystical wisdom: (1) With almost no exceptions, whenever I preach, I study deeply the passage in the original language. But, (2) I almost never mention a Greek or Hebrew word from the pulpit. In fact, I go for years without making a peep in those languages.”

I let that sink in.

Then: “If you cannot state in plain, precise Spanish what you have found in the text, then you don’t really understand the passage and you shouldn’t be preaching on it.” Puzzled expressions! Then: “If you lard your sermons with Hebrew and Greek words, please do not tell your people that you studied with me, because I’ll deny that I know you!”

Is this reflective of some inner conflict on my part? Do I devote myself to teach Greek, only to sabotage my efforts? Do I have, linguistically, a “fear of commitment”? Not at all.

“I know in your Bible it says ‘Yes,’ but in the Greek it says ‘No’!”

Many people I know who are excellent students of the Word, some of whom are experts in the original texts, seem to agree that while the languages are vital for sermon *preparation*, there is little need of using them during the *presentation* of a sermon or teaching, unless the audience knows the language. [1]

Now, a confession: In my file cabinet I still have the notes I used to preach my first real “church sermons,” given in the summer of 1978. I recall how I made reference to the Greek in Phil 3:12-14, Gal 6:1-5 and James 1:5-10. I looked up how to pronounce certain words (*baros*, *phortion*) and used them in my messages. I also said that a certain verb was an “aorist” and thus meant a point action (that’s not true, by the way). I got these data from commentaries that I barely understood. The problem there was that I only began to study Greek in the *autumn* of 1978. I look at those notes now and blush to the roots of my hair, first because I used the Greek wrongly, but second because I had presumed to speak about matters I knew nothing about. I might as well have been trying to explain differential calculus to the congregation.

A lot of people say of their pastors that, “He gets right into the Greek words, and shows how the English translations can’t capture what the original says.” I’m sad to see a definition of “expository” preaching as sermons studded with ancient words, as if one cannot expound the Bible in modern English. Plus, my personal observation is that *One’s use of Greek (or Hebrew) is inversely proportionate to one’s actual understanding of that language*. I am no expert in Greek, but I can say that for me, the more years that I have studied the language, the less I find myself referring to them in a message.

In church, I am regularly put in a tight spot (not in the church I attend, by the way). A preacher will make some statement about the Greek language, one that makes me cringe because it’s incorrect or poorly applied – it’s like a chemist hearing that *water is composed of helium and nitrogen atoms.*But then the preacher will look at me for confirmation: “Pro*fess*or Shogren, isn’t that correct?” What am I to do? I can’t say Yes, but I’m not going to say No either. Usually I give a mysterious, Mona Lisa smile and wait for it to blow over.

We are supposed to follow the example of the apostles when we preach, and they rarely used foreign terms. For example, in 1 Cor 1:30, Paul adapts the text of Jer 9:24, “Let the one who boasts, boast in this…” Can you imagine Paul saying, “Now in the original Hebrew, the verb for ‘boast’ is *hālal*, which in the *Hithpa’el* means ‘to boast, to make one’s boast in’”? And why doesn’t he do so? It’s because Paul’s goal is to explain in the language of his hearers what it means to boast about oneself and why we should center our existence on God instead. What kind of benefit could come from brandishing the Hebrew word, especially when it sheds no further light on God’s truth? (In a later post, we will consider when it might be useful to introduce an ancient term).

There are other, theological reasons, for preaching in clear English: **the law of love; the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers; the doctrine of the reliability of Scripture.**

**1) The Law of Love.** The second great commandment is that we love our neighbor as ourselves. People who are loving are not “arrogant, boastful” (1 Cor 13:4); they follow the precept, “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.” Using Greek or Hebrew in a sermon *could be, in some cases,*a signal that we are trying to elevate ourselves over the others of God’s flock; some humble people also refer to the original text, and this is between the individual and the Lord. Beyond this, we should remember that the more we speak in Greek, the less the congregation is edified: to paraphrase the apostle, “In church I would rather speak five clear words in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in Hebrew, Aramaic or Greek.” Why? Because to the extent that the reader doesn’t know the language, there is no communication, and the hearer is not “built up” (see 1 Cor 14:16-19). If we don’t build up the Other, then we are not acting in love. And love drives us to the sweaty mental and spiritual work of translating our findings into plain English.

**2) The Doctrine of the Priesthood of the Believer.** (I have written on this topic [HERE](https://openoureyeslord.com/2017/10/27/what-me-a-priest/#more-9311)). Peter said that “you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 2:5); Paul said that for each believer “your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God” (1 Cor 6:19). We do not have a priesthood as Israel once did. The pastor, then, must not signal by his language that he is “clergy” and the rest are “laypeople,” who should follow the message that he has brought up from some dark wells of learning. Another application of this doctrine is this: when he preaches, the pastor is not only teaching the congregation, he is also teaching them *how* to study the Word. We never want to leave anyone with the idea that, “I can never really grasp the Bible the way that the preacher does.” The purpose of original languages is to inform the preacher from Monday through Saturday, not to awe the audience on Sunday. [2]

**3) The Doctrine of the Reliability of Scripture.** We want to instill in our people that the Word is inspired, reliable and meant to be understood and obeyed. When I preach, I will sometimes say, e.g., “I think the ESV captures this verse better than some other versions,” and point to the context or some other fact, and then leave it at that. But let us avoid the peril when we let the flock in on the “insight” that, “I know it says such-and-such in your English translations, but in the original it *really means…”*The subtext is, as in 2) above, you people need a “priestly expert” to interpret God’s Word to you. Even more dangerously, we might inject into the minds of the congregation a sense of *tentativeness* about whether they should obey what the Bible seems to plainly teach.

I have people come up to me regularly to ask, “What does this verse or word really say in the original?” And you know what the answer is, 95+% of the time? “What it says in your translation is what it says in the original.” An anecdote attributed to the late Howard Hendricks is that he would say, “The word that is translated ‘joy’ here in our English Bibles comes from a Greek word that means…[wait for it!] ‘joy.’” Hats off to Dr. Hendricks; much of this is no more than a chasing of the tail that gets us nowhere fast. [3]

*Note – yesterday I heard a very fine radio sermon on what it means to build up other believers. The preacher said “Build up – which in Greek is oikodomia* – means that we, etc.” Those of us who have some knowledge of Greek already knew the word; most listeners did not. So why mention it at all?

Besides the original texts, I use about 20 English versions, 10 in Spanish, and some from other languages. And they capture the meaning of the original, some better than others, but all reliably. [4] When I wrote my commentary on 1 Corinthians, I invested years in the study of the Greek version, and they also asked me to base my comments on the Nueva Versión Internacional; the NVI is the Spanish version of the New International Version. In the end I concluded, “Wow, the NVI is really solid, I’m impressed with how it represents the Greek text of the epistle.”

The following will sound harsh, but let’s think through what is going on when a pastor constantly “corrects” the English translation: someone who perhaps has had a couple of years of Greek or Hebrew classes, in effect is saying that he could translate the original better than did the editors of the ESV, the NIV, or whichever. To show why that’s a problem, let’s take as an example of how a modern version is produced: a colleague friend of mine was one of the translators for the New Living Translation. He is an expert on the original languages of 1 Samuel, and he and two other scholars of renown worked just on 1-2 Samuel. [5] There was then an editor for OT Historical Books, another for the Old Testament, then style editors, general editors, that is, about 100 people working on the entire Bible: all had lifetimes of highly specialized study, these experts of international standing who were invited to participate in the NLT project. And all of them were committed precisely to this goal: to render in understandable English that which the original languages say! They weren’t ignorant of alternative interpretations; they didn’t “leave out” shades of meaning; rather, they wrote the best that they could determine, *what the original really said*.



I implore my fellow preachers to consider the erosion of confidence they cause when they imply that our Bible translations are not reliable; for many people, that will come across as “Therefore, *the Bible* is not reliable”. [6]

Let me close with a concrete example of a famous preacher, who every week it seems appeals to the Greek or Hebrew. With regard to John 14:16, “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever” he comments:

The Greek word translated “another” may provide a helpful clue in understanding Jesus’ meaning in John 14. There are two Greek words frequently translated “another”: *heteros* and *allos*. Sometimes the biblical authors used those words interchangeably, but sometimes they used *heteros* to speak of another of a different kind and *allos* to speak of another of the same kind… *Allos* is the word Jesus used to describe the Holy Spirit: “another [*allos*] Helper.” That could be His way of saying, “I am sending you One of exactly the same essence as Me.” He wasn’t sending just any helper, but One exactly like Himself with the same compassion, the same attributes of deity, and the same love for them. Jesus had been the disciples’ helper for three years. He had helped them, comforted them, and walked alongside them. Now they would have another Helper – One exactly like Jesus – to minister to them as He had.

What can we say about this?

First: Actually, Greek scholars say that the two words for “other” were differentiated in Classical Greek, but not the Greek of the time of Jesus.

Two: He says, correctly, that “Sometimes the biblical authors used them interchangeably,” or in other words, this might not apply here.

Three: He says, “This could be his way of saying, etc.” Could be? The proof seems slight.

Four: If the Holy Spirit is exactly like Jesus in compassion, deity and love, then these are truths that would have to be demonstrated from this and other passages; the word *allos* cannot in itself bear all this theological weight.

So, couldn’t a preacher make exactly the same point without all this extraneous data? Something like:

In John 14:16, Jesus says that “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever”. Notice that the Lord says “*another* Helper,” meaning that Jesus was a Helper and the Holy Spirit will be another Helper. This wasn’t just any helper, but like Jesus, he is God and he will treat them with the same compassion, love, patience and wisdom that Jesus did. And he would come not as a human being, limited to one space and time, but as Spirit living in each one of them, wherever they went. God would continue to guide and care for them.

With its clearer English, doesn’t this shed light, the same light, on the passage? Plus, it avoids a lot of words the congregation doesn’t know and won’t remember and that really don’t advance their grasp of the Bible; and it opens up additional minutes for deeper application of the truth to our lives:

And today we have that very same Helper in each one of us. Do you get to dreaming once in a while, about how it would have been great to have lived in Galilee and heard and seen the Lord during his ministry? But do you know what? Jesus himself tells us that we have a better help than even the disciples had, one who is always present every minute of the day, every place we go.

*In Part 2 we will see that a lot of what is said about the biblical languages, besides being a distraction, isn’t even true in the first place. In Part 3 we will see how the apostles judiciously used a handful of foreign words – e.g.,* *Amen*, *Hallelujah*, *Maranatha*, *Abba*; plus, there are other crucial words that we might teach our people with great profit, e.g., *echad*; the names of God; *Yeshua;* *logos; Shalom.*

**NOTES:**

[1]  I don’t believe that it requires any “special pleading” to point out that in this blog I regularly refer to Greek, and sometimes post highly technical articles, such as on the verb *periergazomai*in [Were Thessalonians “meddling in divine matters”? 2 Thess 3:11 [Studies in Thessalonians]](https://openoureyeslord.com/2012/11/05/were-thessalonians-meddling-in-divine-matters-2-thess-311/); that is because I am taking into account the readership of OpenOurEyesLord.com.

[2] The most egregious example I know of is the ministry of “Greek expert” R. B. Thieme. He took some Greek courses and went on to build an entire movement based on faulty, fallacious thoughts about the Greek text, used for cultic ends. Those who study the languages, even for a couple of semesters, can overturn most of his so-called insights; see [http://thiemite.blogspot.com](http://thiemite.blogspot.com/).

[3] An extreme example of using Hebrew terms is found in the messianic movement that is sweeping Latin America. Some of these groups are sound, but many are not. A friend told me that in group in Mexico, they don’t call their leader a “pastor” but “*roe*” (row-EH). Why? Because that’s the Hebrew term for pastor; one finds it in the opening of Psalm 23:1 – *Yahweh roi*, “the LORD is my shepherd.”  The problem is that, no-one understands *roe*, and to make sense of it, someone has to say “roe means ‘pastor'” – it’s better in Spanish than in English, since the Spanish “pastor” may mean both a literal shepherd and Christian pastor. So, why bother using the term *roe* at all? My guess is that it implies that by calling the pastor *roe* my group achieves a higher level of authenticity – We are *more Hebrew than thou*.

[4] At the far fringe of the King James Onlyists are those few who argue that the pastor should not bother studying the Bible in other versions nor in the original languages, since the KJV is the inspired, reliable version of God’s Word. The basis for this belief is a notion that God preserved only one version, and that the KJV is “the One.” Among these teachers one should mention Peter Ruckman, the fiery blog [http://www.Jesus-is-Lord.com](http://www.jesus-is-lord.com/), Chick Publications. This is an error of so many facets that we cannot deal with it here.

[5] Click here to see the names of the NLT translation team: <http://www.newlivingtranslation.com/05discoverthenlt/meetthescholars.asp>

[6] The other side of the coin is that we must help our flocks understand the basics of textual criticism, to ease the dismay we feel when we read the footnotes of the Bible to find, “This verse is not in the best manuscripts.” But that is a theme for another post.

1. **thesword7**

[March 8, 2018 at 7:46 am](https://openoureyeslord.com/2013/06/18/but-the-greek-really-says-why-hebrew-and-greek-are-not-needed-in-the-pulpit-part-1/#comment-32352)

I really don’t worry too much about the Greek/Hebrew. For me, being yielded to the Holy Spirit for guidance in understanding scriptures is more important.

Lexicons have been proven to be bias and have pagan and secular definitions added to them. By examining the authors backgrounds, we can see many were not Believers.

Since God promised to preserve His word, He is fully capable of giving us a translation in English irrespective of the fact that the original manuscripts are lost/gone.

God wants His people to understand His word. Remember, He chose simple fishermen over experts of the law and Pharisees. One does not need to be a Hebrew or Greek scholar. Just a teachable heart and yielded to the Holy Spirit for interpretation.

NOTE BY GARY: you wrote two similar comments on this blog, so I combined them and will answer them here. Thanks.

* 1. [**Gary Shogren**](http://openoureyeslord.com/)

[March 9, 2018 at 7:08 pm](https://openoureyeslord.com/2013/06/18/but-the-greek-really-says-why-hebrew-and-greek-are-not-needed-in-the-pulpit-part-1/#comment-32362)

Thanks for writing in, blessings.

Let me answer your points in this order:

You say: 1. “I really don’t worry too much about the Greek/Hebrew. One does not need to be a Hebrew or Greek scholar. Just a teachable heart and yielded to the Holy Spirit for interpretation.”

Gary: As I argue in this same article, agreed: one does not need to be a Hebrew or Greek scholar. But it sure helps those who presume to teach the Bible with depth.

I wonder: Do you really believe that feeling oneself “teachable” is sufficient? I ask, because what you are (apparently) assuming is that those who do not use the KJV exclusively must by definition be “unteachable.” That’s circular reasoning, no?

But apart from that, your approach to truth reminds me more of the Mormon system than the evangelical or fundamentalist one. I wrote about this on my blog, just look under “Mormon” and you’ll find it. According to the LDS, to quote “for the true believer, the Book of Mormon is authenticated through prayer, not through facts: the person who sincerely seeks God and asks for him to reveal the truth, will have a spiritual experience of divine confirmation.

To quote the BofM in Moroni 10:4 – And when ye shall receive [the texts on the golden plates], I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost. 5 And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things.

That is, the proper confession of one’s faith would be that “I believe the Book of Mormon to be the true revelation of God, as given to Prophet Joseph, because of the inner testimony that God has given me.” The claim to its inspiration is again non-falsifiable, and when a nonbeliever such as myself points out the conspicuous flaws in the BofM and the Mormon narrative, the problem is taken to be my own lack of faith: I have fallen in with the apostates…”

2. “Lexicons have been proven to be bias and have pagan and secular definitions added to them. By examining the authors backgrounds, we can see many were not Believers.”

Gary: Lexicons are dictionaries. The dictionaries have all relevant definitions in their entries. Well, let’s look at one word, sophia/σοφια, which usually is rendered as “wisdom.” In the Greek literature AND in the Bible, sophia can refer to true wisdom or to false worldly wisdom. According to 1 Cor 1:19, God has destroyed the [false] wisdom of the wise and in 1:20 the wisdom of this world. The main Bauer lexicon says that these verses are “in contrast to God’s wisdom.” Correct? So, Bauer lists all of these meanings, and more, including Jewish and Greek uses of the word. It also lists plenty of references to, to quote, “wisdom that God imparts to those who are close to God.” I can see no reason to object to its analysis of the word sophia.

3. “Since God promised to preserve His word, He is fully capable of giving us a translation in English irrespective of the fact that the original manuscripts are lost/gone.”

Gary: You are making two points, and the second point does not follow from the first. Did God preserve his Word? Sure. We have the Bible, so no doubt there. CAN he give us a perfect English translation? Sure, God is all-powerful, and he can do as he like. DID he promise in the Bible to give us that one perfect version in English? I say no, this version of divine preservation takes a couple of verses and twists them into something they do not say; if a cult did that sort of thing, you and I would immediately call “foul.” Also, is there evidence in the Bible or history that he did? I say no. Your assumption is, I am assuming, that God CAN give us a perfect Bible; here is the King James; therefore, the King James is the perfect Bible.

If there is one and only one perfect translation in English, (1) why not say that it is the Tyndale or Geneva Bibles, which were translated by the Reformers, rather than the KJV of the Anglican church? (2) why not say that, well, God has shown me that, say, the NASB is his perfect Bible? Also (3) I do most of my ministry in Spanish. Is the KJV the perfect version for Spanish-speakers as well? And (4) given that no two of the almost 6000 copies of the Greek NT are alike – that is, each one is unique – which of those copies would you say was THE perfect New Testament for the Greek-speaking church?

4. “God wants His people to understand His word. Remember, He chose simple fishermen over experts of the law and Pharisees.”

Gary: Of course, God wants his people to understand his Word. I have no doubt of that, so I am not sure why you mention it as if I would not. But your facts are off, as the Bible indicates: all of the disciples were at the very least TRIlingual, being able to understand Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic. Those are precisely the three biblical languages. Paul seems to have been expert in Greek and in Hebrew. So, when we say that God chose simple fishermen, we have to say that, God chose people who understood his word thoroughly in the original languages; and that he did not choose the unbelieving theologians. So, I am not sure of your point.

Many thanks for visiting! Gary

* + 1. **thesword7**

[March 11, 2018 at 6:28 am](https://openoureyeslord.com/2013/06/18/but-the-greek-really-says-why-hebrew-and-greek-are-not-needed-in-the-pulpit-part-1/#comment-32363)

No, I never said that those who bash the KJV are unteachable. I merely made the point that ALL born again Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ MUST be yielded to the Holy Spirit for guidance when it comes to understanding scriptures.

There is probably no perfect bible because men have put their hands on it over and over and will most likely do so until we are called home. However, God did promise to preserve His word and He did say it was “settled forever in heaven.” The KJV, coming from the Antiochan stream does make it superior as opposed to all modern versions which stem from Alexandria, the works of men like Origen, the Vaticanus and the Sininaticus, all corrupt. Down to Westcott and Hort who relied heavily on these manuscripts, and all the modern bibles.

* + - 1. [**Gary Shogren**](http://openoureyeslord.com/)

[March 12, 2018 at 1:00 pm](https://openoureyeslord.com/2013/06/18/but-the-greek-really-says-why-hebrew-and-greek-are-not-needed-in-the-pulpit-part-1/#comment-32367)

Hi and greetings! You haven’t left your name, by the way, on your comments here, nor on your own blog; how shall I address you?

You will get no argument from me on the absolute need to rely on the Spirit. However, you have clearly implied that those who relied on the Spirit will choose the KJV (or, I suppose) other versions that depend on the Textus receptus. So, what you said is not simply that we must depend on the Spirit to understand and apply the Bible, but also to know which Bible translation has his approval. This must, necessarily, imply, that those who pick an “inferior” Bible must be depending less on the Spirit than those who choose the KJV.

I must also take serious exception to your language, which I encounter from many KJV-Only people: that if someone does not accept the KJV and only the KJV to the exclusion of all others and to the rejection of all others, then the only possible explanation is that they are KJV Haters and Bashers. That is simply unacceptable, and it reveals less about reality than it does about the psychological mindset in certain teachers, by which they “project” their own black-and-white worldview on to their imagined enemies.

I think, if I might point it out, that you contradict yourself on an important point. First, you say that God’s word is settled in heaven and is “preserved.” Second, you say that the KJV is not perfect. That is a contradiction! Either we have the Bible perfectly preserved or we do not; there can be no relative gradations of “perfection.” You can’t have it both ways!

With regard to families of manuscripts – an idea which scholars have more or less abandoned in recent decades: in fact, during the time when Sinaiticus and Vaticanus were produced, it was the Alexandrian church that was taking the lead through Athanasius and others to affirm the full deity of Christ; at the same time, much of the force to argue that he was “like God in nature but not eternal God” came from Antioch. Here is a good article on how the Alexandrians opposed the North African Arius and other non-Alexandrians: <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/theologians/athanasius.html>

Origen had been dead for a century before this all happened, and so any connection between him and the manuscripts that happened to be copied in his city is pretty much coincidental. It would be like saying that, Well, the modern gay rights movement started in New York City in 1969, and that therefore Pastor Timothy Keller must be pro-gay, because he works less than two miles away, in that same city, a half-century later. It’s simply a meaningless connection.

The hypothesis that all modern Bibles are corrupt because they use manuscripts that survive from Egypt is just that, a hypothesis. The more manuscripts that are discovered, some that were produced far from Alexandria, all tend to line up with the Alexandria manuscripts, even though they were copied centuries earlier. The fact that many Bibles survive in Egypt is also due to climate factors.

The idea that there is a conspiracy to corrupt modern Bibles is, to put it mildly, mythical. It is promulgated almost exclusively by people who have never personally consulted the texts of those manuscripts, but who have copied and pasted the opinions of others, particularly the writings of Dean Burgon from the 19th century. Compare a half-dozen of the videos on this topic on YouTube, and you will see that to a man, they repeat the same “facts” and to a man they do not do their own research in the Bible apart from what they have seen others saying.

But, well and good, as I write elsewhere, I was saved through God’s Word (KJV version) and still read and delight in it, while I also regularly use maybe 25 versions. As always, my hope is that people read God’s word, understand it through the Spirit, apply it through the Spirit, obey, and share it.

Blessings, Gary

**Jed Chandler**

[November 21, 2016 at 2:41 pm](https://openoureyeslord.com/2013/06/18/but-the-greek-really-says-why-hebrew-and-greek-are-not-needed-in-the-pulpit-part-1/#comment-24152)

What about in your personal prayer and thinking about Jesus and God? I sometimes find that a potential shade of meaning in either a Greek or a Hebrew text will expand my conception of the text and my own relationship with God.

* 1. [**Gary Shogren**](http://openoureyeslord.com/)

[November 23, 2016 at 11:30 am](https://openoureyeslord.com/2013/06/18/but-the-greek-really-says-why-hebrew-and-greek-are-not-needed-in-the-pulpit-part-1/#comment-24153)

Hi Jed, thanks!

Interesting – can you share a couple of examples?

I’m sure that’s fine – IF a person really understands the language deeply, and is not simply using a fallacious word meaning, etc. Blessings, Gary

**timtranslates**

[July 13, 2016 at 4:20 am](https://openoureyeslord.com/2013/06/18/but-the-greek-really-says-why-hebrew-and-greek-are-not-needed-in-the-pulpit-part-1/#comment-23965)

I’m going to do a brief talk at my church about English translations of the Bible. I’m no expert – I know no ancient Hebrew or Greek, for instance – but as a professional translator I understand how translation works, so I fully understand why different translations exist. I also want to touch on the topic of preachers saying “But the Greek says,” explaining to them that the Bible translations were the result of a lengthy process involving many scholars trained in Hebrew and Greek, and that we should be very wary of people who have merely looked up a word in Strong’s and said “it also means this.” Almost everyone in the congregation speaks at least two languages, so I can use examples from modern languages that they speak to show that we can deduce the meaning of a word from context.

Anyway, the point of this comment was to ask permission to borrow content from your blog. I’d like to borrow the cartoon above that says “I know in your Bible it says ‘Yes,’ but in the Greek it says ‘No’!,” but I may also want to borrow some of what you’ve written. I’ll give full acknowledgement to anything I borrow, and will include your blog as recommended reading for anyone who wants to investigate further.

Feel free to reply in private.

* 1. [**Gary Shogren**](http://openoureyeslord.com/)

[July 13, 2016 at 3:21 pm](https://openoureyeslord.com/2013/06/18/but-the-greek-really-says-why-hebrew-and-greek-are-not-needed-in-the-pulpit-part-1/#comment-23967)

Hi, yes, by all means, use whatever you’d like! Blessings, Gary

* 1. [**Gary Shogren**](http://openoureyeslord.com/)

[August 16, 2016 at 4:58 pm](https://openoureyeslord.com/2013/06/18/but-the-greek-really-says-why-hebrew-and-greek-are-not-needed-in-the-pulpit-part-1/#comment-24009)

Greetings! I have just published a short article on how people misuse Strong’s dictionary. <https://openoureyeslord.com/2016/08/16/strongs-concordance-a-good-tool-gone-bad/>

[**Moe Bergeron**](http://gravatar.com/moebergeron)

[June 22, 2013 at 10:58 am](https://openoureyeslord.com/2013/06/18/but-the-greek-really-says-why-hebrew-and-greek-are-not-needed-in-the-pulpit-part-1/#comment-2270)

Excellent post Gary! Thank you!

* 1. [**Gary Shogren**](http://openoureyeslord.com/)

[June 22, 2013 at 9:50 pm](https://openoureyeslord.com/2013/06/18/but-the-greek-really-says-why-hebrew-and-greek-are-not-needed-in-the-pulpit-part-1/#comment-2272)

Thanks Moe!

1. **chappymartin**

[June 20, 2013 at 12:31 pm](https://openoureyeslord.com/2013/06/18/but-the-greek-really-says-why-hebrew-and-greek-are-not-needed-in-the-pulpit-part-1/#comment-2261)

I enjoyed this post greatly. I especially like reason #2. Maybe the best way to handle those more helpful words would be in a Bible Study where the focus is on the meaning of a few key words.

I know “agape” should be in there. If I hear another sermon on John 21 where Jesus is disappointed with Peter because he could not bring himself to say “unconditional love” I might pass out!

The lexicons are quite unhelpful with the definition as well as C.S. Lewis, and it was only when I looked up the actual usages that it become clear what it meant most of the time. Only Spicq is helpful – he would say it means most of the time “value” or “hold in high esteem.” I agree, and this makes the most sense. Interestingly “agape” also meant “happy, satisfied.”

But even Spicq is not immune to criticism. At one point in his lexicon he calls “agape” “divine love.” Not helpful.

* 1. [**Gary Shogren**](http://openoureyeslord.com/)

[June 20, 2013 at 3:35 pm](https://openoureyeslord.com/2013/06/18/but-the-greek-really-says-why-hebrew-and-greek-are-not-needed-in-the-pulpit-part-1/#comment-2263)

Thanks for writing in! I have Spicq in my Logos software, and use him often, although he’s not always a help. But neither is TDNT for that matter. I find the NIDNTT the most consistently useful. I’ve also posted a blog advising people not to continue using the Thayer lexicon; e.g., I show that it is the source of much of the confusion about agape.

I agree with you on the John 21 issue, and it happens that I’m going from church to church speaking on that text as we go around presenting our missionary work, see [http://shogrens.com](http://shogrens.com/)

1. [**Gary Shogren**](http://openoureyeslord.com/)

[June 19, 2013 at 10:18 am](https://openoureyeslord.com/2013/06/18/but-the-greek-really-says-why-hebrew-and-greek-are-not-needed-in-the-pulpit-part-1/#comment-2244)

A reader writes in: You say “Sometimes the biblical authors used [synonyms] interchangeably.” If words can be used interchangeably, what is the point of verbal inspiration and historical grammatical interpretation?”

Gary: Verbal inspiration means that the text as we have it, and down to the very word, comes from God. It is fully divine. It is also a human text, in that the authors wrote as did people in 1st century Eastern Mediterranean.

To give one hypothetical example: in one gospel, some saying of Jesus is introduced with the word for “and,” KAI. But in the parallel in another gospel, a synonym is used, DE. In English we probably wouldn’t notice the difference. The words KAI and DE are not absolutely interchangeable, but to a certain extant they are. If you believe in inspiration, you believe that the conjunctions are there by the will of God, but you wouldn’t necessarily decide that there is a hidden or cryptic message when one compares one passage to another – that’s simply not how we read texts, whether modern or ancient, secular or inspired. And if you practice historical-grammatical interpretation, you will probably come to the conclusion that the two words mean the same thing, or close enough to the same thing that it hardly bears mentioning.

As an exaggerated counter-example, sometimes the rabbis would make a big deal out of saying, for example, that a Bible passage had the letter WAW 4 times in one sentence, and 5 times in the following sentence, and draw out some allegorical meaning from that datum. In my opinion, that’s not going to help anyone understand God’s word better.

1. [**Gary Shogren**](http://openoureyeslord.com/)

[June 19, 2013 at 10:08 am](https://openoureyeslord.com/2013/06/18/but-the-greek-really-says-why-hebrew-and-greek-are-not-needed-in-the-pulpit-part-1/#comment-2243)

A friend writes in: In your section regarding “another,” HETEROS and ALLOS. What is the basis for this knowledge? Contextual usage?

Gary: thanks, great to hear from you! Up through the early 20th century, most Bible scholars would begin their study of the New Testament text, not with koinē Greek of the Septuagint and the NT, but in school, where they would study Classical Greek and Latin. For example, we often hear that the entrance requirement for Harvard was a written exam on the Greek text of Ephesians (I don’t know if that was true or not); it would have been a snap for people with a classical education.

The positive side to this is that people would bring a ton of background to their study of the Bible; the negative side is that sometimes the background wasn’t relevant. Some read the Bible as if its Greek was that of the 5th century BC, not the 1st century AD. It would be like reading today’s newspaper after learning the English of Chaucer.

One result was that synonyms that had slight shades of difference in earlier Greek had lost those fine distinctions in biblical Greek. HETEROS and ALLOS are two such words. The preacher in this example does not commit himself wholly to the idea that the words must have distinct meanings, and in my opinion once one concedes that point, it’s not worth bringing up the pair of Greek terms in the first place.

I would recommend newer word study tools, in particular Louw and Nida’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains; I consulted with it, also the Bauer lexicon, the Liddell-Scott-Jones lexicon, several commentaries, and my own reading of the passage in the original. And yes, context has to have the final word on the question, beginning with the immediate context in John 14-16.

1. [**Gary Shogren**](http://openoureyeslord.com/)

[June 19, 2013 at 9:38 am](https://openoureyeslord.com/2013/06/18/but-the-greek-really-says-why-hebrew-and-greek-are-not-needed-in-the-pulpit-part-1/#comment-2242)

A friend writes in: With respect to “3) The Doctrine of the Reliability of Scripture. We want to instill in our people that the Word is inspired, reliable and meant to be understood and obeyed.” Many times I am perplexed when dealing with textual issues in the course of teaching S.S. classes for fear of instilling doubt in the minds of students regarding the reliability of Scripture. For instance, the end of Mark or the beginning of John 8. But I believe warning students of these types of problems is necessary to make them aware of scoffers and their destructive teachings.

Gary: Blessings! I just added a footnote to mention the issue of textual criticism. I absolutely agree, in this day and age it is imperative that a pastor makes sure his flock understands the basics of this discipline, and also understands why one Bible version differs from another – that is, what is the difference between a relatively literal version and a dynamic equivalence.

1. **Phyllis Palamaro**

[June 19, 2013 at 7:17 am](https://openoureyeslord.com/2013/06/18/but-the-greek-really-says-why-hebrew-and-greek-are-not-needed-in-the-pulpit-part-1/#comment-2238)

Gary, I enjoyed this article. However, for me words like “shalom” and “abba” seem to enhance the message for a Bible study or a brief devotional.

* 1. [**Gary Shogren**](http://openoureyeslord.com/)

[June 19, 2013 at 8:31 am](https://openoureyeslord.com/2013/06/18/but-the-greek-really-says-why-hebrew-and-greek-are-not-needed-in-the-pulpit-part-1/#comment-2240)

Hi Phyllis! I do agree, and in Part 3 I will talk about words which, in my humble opinion, are worth knowing, including these, and Amen, etc. Blessings!

1. **Carrie Bates**

[June 18, 2013 at 8:29 pm](https://openoureyeslord.com/2013/06/18/but-the-greek-really-says-why-hebrew-and-greek-are-not-needed-in-the-pulpit-part-1/#comment-2233)

It’s not as though any of us actually thinks in Koine (or in my case, classical) Greek. As a wannabe rhetorician, I am much more interested in what the writer is doing with the words he chooses. What did he intend his original audience to understand and to do with that understanding? Why was he communicating this? What was the rhetorical situation? To that end, the original Greek may be helpful, but the cultural context is much more helpful.

* 1. [**Gary Shogren**](http://openoureyeslord.com/)

[June 18, 2013 at 10:25 pm](https://openoureyeslord.com/2013/06/18/but-the-greek-really-says-why-hebrew-and-greek-are-not-needed-in-the-pulpit-part-1/#comment-2234)

In the last few decades, cultural background has become more and more key.

1. [**abramkj**](http://abramkj.com/)

[June 18, 2013 at 7:05 pm](https://openoureyeslord.com/2013/06/18/but-the-greek-really-says-why-hebrew-and-greek-are-not-needed-in-the-pulpit-part-1/#comment-2230)

Gary, thank you for these wise words. Good for you for having the insight (and, may I say, chutzpah?) to write it! I hope every preacher with a semester or five of Greek and Hebrew reads this.

* 1. [**Gary Shogren**](http://openoureyeslord.com/)

[June 18, 2013 at 8:22 pm](https://openoureyeslord.com/2013/06/18/but-the-greek-really-says-why-hebrew-and-greek-are-not-needed-in-the-pulpit-part-1/#comment-2232)

Chuztpah – Yiddish, right? 😛 Thanks Abram, always good to see you.

<https://openoureyeslord.com/2013/06/29/but-the-greek-really-says-why-hebrew-and-greek-are-not-needed-in-the-pulpit-part-2/>

[**“But the Greek REALLY says…”: Why Hebrew and Greek are not needed in the pulpit, Part 2**](https://openoureyeslord.com/2013/06/29/but-the-greek-really-says-why-hebrew-and-greek-are-not-needed-in-the-pulpit-part-2/)



“…Okay, wait, so then, hah, hah, so then the second guy says to the first one, ἐκεινος οὐκ ἐστιν ὁ κυῶν μου!! Oh, mercy, that one gets me every time!”

In Part 1, I argued in favor of a sharply minimalist use of ancient Hebrew and Greek words during a sermon, especially if there is no compelling purpose or, worse, if the goal is to impress the crowd: it is a pitiable housepainter who departs the job with his scaffolding still up, hoping you’ll notice how far he had to climb. See [“But the Greek REALLY says…”: Why Hebrew and Greek are not needed in the pulpit, Part 1](https://openoureyeslord.com/2013/06/18/but-the-greek-really-says-why-hebrew-and-greek-are-not-needed-in-the-pulpit-part-1/) and [Part 3](https://openoureyeslord.com/2013/07/13/but-the-greek-really-says-why-greek-and-hebrew-are-not-needed-in-the-pulpit-part-3/).

Now, I believe an interpreter of the Word should invest the time necessary to work through it in the original, just as you would learn Spanish if you were going to teach *Don Quixote*, week in and week out, for the rest of your life. However, in our sermons we should avoid Hebrewfying and Greekitizing, simply because it is rarely of help.

Now we will explore some issues with the Greek language, where the interpretations we hear are simply erroneous. Let’s explore an overarching belief about the Greek language; second, distortions of specific Greek words.

**General Myth-information – “Greek is a kind of super-language. It is the most awesome medium ever for communicating.”**

These quotes or summaries are culled at random from the internet (in italics, followed by my comments):

*Greek was a very precise language with five tenses to enable narrow definitions and the explanation of abstract concepts, especially spiritual and relational, which in other languages such as English just cannot be easily done.*

Those who read any Greek at all know that it is not a fail-safe data transmitter. There are plenty of inherent ambiguities: for example, should Acts 19:5 be translated as baptized “by,” “in” or “into the name of the Lord Jesus”? All are possible in the original; the indistinctness is due to the Greek; English versions are usually more specific.

In John 14:1b, does Jesus say “Believe in God; believe also in me;” or “You believe in God; believe also in me” or even “You believe in God; you believe also in me”? All three are possible in the original Greek; in English versions the translators have to make decisions about what is being said. If John 14 had been originally penned in English, it would have been more exact than the Greek. Again: did Paul say “the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people” in Titus 2:11 or “has appeared to all, bringing salvation”? Both are possible.

Lastly, when it comes to verb tenses, one way in which Greek is more precise is that it retains the subjunctive mood, whereas it is becoming extinct in English, especially in Britain (the giant’s “Be he alive or be he dead” uses the subjunctive; so too “If I were a rich man”). Nevertheless, it’s not difficult to translate a Greek subjunctive into English. What’s more, when it comes to the verb tenses, English, with its 12 outdoes Greek with its 5. **DAVID’S NOTE: Greek has six tense forms, not five!).**

*Every Greek verb scientifically communicates 5, count’em, 5 bits of data!* Since this used to be a favorite claim of R. B. Thieme (see Part 1 of this post), I will quote his comments on 1 Thess 5:17, “pray without ceasing” – “The verb *proseuchomai* in the present middle imperative means ‘pray.’ The gnomic present tense refers to a state which perpetually exists…The dynamic middle voice indicates that the subject, the believer, acts for himself with reference to himself and others.”

First of all, English communicates the same data set: if you know how to use “I am, you are, he is, we are, you are, they are” then you can deduce the same 5 pieces of information from each form.

Second, Thieme is simply mistaken on both counts: the verse is not a so-called “gnomic present,” which is used in a proverb such as “a stitch in time saves nine.” Next, the verb does not have the “middle voice;” he misses the fact that the verb is “deponent”. Thus, Paul is not saying that the believer should pray *with reference to himself in others*; a student with a month or so of Greek instruction would be able to spot this error.

The upshot is that, the more the preacher refers to the Greek in this fashion, the more damage is being done. Not only is this “insight” mistaken, it positively detracts from Paul’s meaning in the verse.

*“Greek has a huge and highly technical vocabulary.”* In fact, there are only about 5400 vocabulary words in the Greek New Testament; the English language actually has more words than any known language, with 400,000+.  The average English speaker might regularly use 5000 words. Shakespeare used about 29,000 words in his works.

*“Greek has many words and synonyms, each with finely-shaded meanings.”* If someone pulls out as proof that New Testament Greek has two words for anger, *thumos* and *orgē*, remind him that in English we have (thanks Thesaurus.com) “acrimony, animosity, annoyance, antagonism, blow up, chagrin, choler, conniption, disapprobation, displeasure, distemper, enmity, exasperation, fury, hissy fit, huff, etc., etc.”

*“During the time of Christ, the Koine Greek language was the most explicit, precise and unambiguous language the world has ever seen! A veritable peak of human communication by words!”*Such a breathless announcement! But as we have seen, while Greek is excellent and should be studied, this claim is just a myth.

**Specific Myth-information – “The average Greek word conveys more or other information than does your English translation.”**

Evangelical Christians are supposed to disdain “oral tradition.” Nevertheless, there is a large body of folklore about New Testament Greek; it circulates from pulpit to pulpit, from generation to generation. The traditions are disproved and rejected by qualified researchers, but somehow, they refuse to die. I am going to give a brief list of the more common errors; to save space, I’m not going to footnote each point.

*MYTH: The aorist tense is punctiliar, a point in time, once and for all action. Thus, 1 John 2:1 means “My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin even one little sin.” Or Rom 12:1 means “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies once and for all in a point of time as a living sacrifice”.* FACT: the aorist tense simply does not mean a point of time; in these two verses, one deduces what kind of action it is from a careful reading in context. An excellent counterexample is John 2:20 – “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple;” how can an action be a point of time and also go on for 46 years?

*MYTH: doulos means “bondservant” and diakonos just means “servant” and, according to a recent bestseller, this provides the key to understanding the Christian life: Christians are not God’s servants, but his slaves.* FACT: both terms are used of Christians, and their meanings overlap.

*MYTH: Matthew 28:19 does not say “Go and make disciples”, since the word “go” is a participle; and thus, Jesus did not command them to go anywhere. What he said was “As you go, make disciples.”*FACT: this is a technical point – the participle for the word “go” is adverbial to the imperative “make disciples” and therefore is also a command. this means that we are under orders to “go and make disciples” just like your Bible says. **DAVID’S NOTE:** The only imperative in Matt 28:19 is “make disciples,” but in some cases where a similar construction occurs if the participle was not given an imperatival force, then the action indicated would not make any sense. The rule in NT Greek is when a participle is linked with an imperative, the participle should also be given the force of an imperative. In other words, this type of participle picks up some of the imperatival force of the imperative.[[1]](#footnote-1) This rule only applied if a participle precedes the main verb.

This is one of those examples of the phenomenon we saw in Part 1, of preachers who “correct” the English version, stating that the translators did not capture the full meaning of the original Greek. In fact, if a translation such as the ESV or NLT does not translate a verse like Matt 28:19 with “As you go,” it’s because the translators – international-level experts in their field – have heard of the interpretation and found it wanting. John 21:15-17 is a prime example: probably every teaching you have heard on this passage says that “Jesus kept asking Simon Peter if he *loved*(*agapao*) him, and Peter kept replying with a weaker word, that he merely *liked* (*phileo*) Jesus.” “Your Bibles don’t reflect the difference in the verbs!” we hear. But here again, the experts in Greek verbs have made the decision that these two synonyms overlap in this passage and that it’s proper to translate them both as “to love.” That’s not the only way to interpret the passage, but it seems to be best. **DAVID’S NOTE**: Watch Dr./Professor Rob Plummer’s Weekend Edition of his excellent “Daily Dose of Greek” on John 21:15-17: <http://dailydoseofgreek.com/creative-learning/john-21-%E1%BC%80%CE%B3%CE%B1%CF%80%E1%BD%B1%CF%89/>.

Here we might mention Wuest’s word studies and his Expanded Translation, and also the Amplified Version of the Bible. Both of these, which have as their goal the unpacking of deeper meanings, in fact introduce more confusion. Thus, in John 21 the Amplified reads, without justification: “When they had eaten, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these [others do—with reasoning, intentional, spiritual devotion, as one loves the Father]? He said to Him, Yes, Lord, You know that I love You [that I have deep, instinctive, personal affection for You, as for a close friend].” For “Rise, pick up your bed and walk” in Mark 2:9, Wuest has the tortuous “Be arising and pick up your pallet at once and carry it away, and start walking and keep on walking.” Wuest’s rendering is not hinted at in the original text and gives zero help to the English reader.

*MYTH: agape/agapao consistently mean “divine love.”* FACT: they mean love; it could be love by God (1 John 4:10) or Christians’ love (1 Cor 13). Or it could be love for the world (1 John 2:15).

*MYTH: the word for “judgment seat” in 2 Cor 5:10 is bema. But one teacher goes much further: “The*bema*was not a judicial bench where someone was condemned; it was a reward seat [in athletic contests]. Likewise, the Judgment Seat of Christ is not a judicial bench…the Christian life is a race, and the divine umpire is watching every contest.”* FACT: *bema* can also mean “judgment seat,” and it is so used in Acts 18:12, 16 and in Matthew and John’s description of Jesus’ trial before Pilate. This redefinition of *bema* avoids the context of 2 Cor 5:10, which shows that Christians will be tried before their Judge: “each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.” An athlete wouldn’t receive punishment for an “evil” performance on the field.

*MYTH: the word for sin is hamartia, which means “to miss the mark.” Therefore, sin is basically missing the mark of God’s righteousness.* FACT: nowhere in the New Testament does it mean missing the mark, it means an offense against God. See [Is sin “missing the mark”?](https://openoureyeslord.com/2010/12/28/is-sin-missing-the-mark/)

*MYTH: the word for departure in 2 Thess 2:3 is apostasia; it refers to the departure of the church from the earth in a pre-tribulational rapture.* FACT: while the verb *aphistemi* may mean “to depart (physically)”, the noun *apostasia* means religious apostasy or political rebellion; the best explanation of 2 Thess 2:3 is that the Day of the Lord will not come “if there has not first come the Apostasy and the Man of Lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction.” See [What comes before the Day of the Lord: the final “apostasy” or the “departure” of the church? [Studies in Thessalonians]](https://openoureyeslord.com/2011/06/30/what-comes-before-the-day-of-the-lord-the-final-apostasy-or-the-departure-of-the-church/) *DAVID’S NOTE*: I don’t agree with Gary. See Andy Woods’s book *The Falling Away: Spiritual Departure or Physical Rapture?: A Second Look at 2 Thessalonians 2:3* in which he gives 10 reasons why this Greek word means “physical/spatial departure” not a “spiritual departure.”

*MYTH: miraculous healings were becoming less common as early as the AD 60s: the proof is that Paul healed (the verb iaomai)  the father of Publius in Acts 28:8 by the laying on of hands, but that he did not do other healings – the Greek words changes to therapeuo, meaning that Dr. Luke probably treated them with his medicines.* FACT: besides the historical problem of imagining that the governor of Malta didn’t have access to a physician, the truth is that both verbs may be used to refer to miraculous healing or to medicinal treatment.

*MYTH: a word in Greek has the same meaning of a related word in English: dunamis is “literally” dynamite; Eph 2:10 says we are God’s “poem” (poiema); martus is not just a witness but a martyr; hilaros in 2 Cor 9:7 means that “God loves, literally, a hilarious giver!”* FACT: Dynamite wasn’t invented until 1800 years after the New Testament; *poiema* means “workmanship,” not poem; *martus* in the first century meant a “witness” and only in the following century one who testifies to the point of death, a “martyr.” The adjective *hilaros* is a distant cousin of the English “hilarious,” but it means what all the Bible translations say it means: “cheerful, glad, happy, without reluctance, gracious.” Translating it as “hilarious” is misleading; plus, what in the world would it mean? As someone writes, “When you are hungry and need food, the hilarious giver throws a pie in your face.” A historical note: one of the earliest hymns in our worship is the Greek “*Phos hilaron*;” the English version translates it as “O gracious (*hilaron*) Light (*phos*), pure brightness of the everliving Father in heaven, O Jesus Christ, holy and blessed!” Hear it sung here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MPjVZO0tzqQ>.

*MYTH: the two words for “word” (rhema, logos) don’t overlap; rhema means an utterance or spoken word. This is the basis for the Rhema teaching, better known as the Word of Faith or the Name it and Claim it Movement.* FACT: they often overlap and are used interchangeably; nowhere does the Bible promise that “uttered” declarations must magically come to pass. [1]

In Part 1 of this post I argued that *it is the rare sermon that requires the preacher to mention a Greek or Hebrew word.* Now I would like to conclude with a second affirmation:

It is useful and perhaps even necessary to bring up a Greek or Hebrew word in the case where the listeners have already heard misinformation about the original language. That is, we should bring up the original in order to defuse a false notion and that the listener might unlearn what he or she has heard before.

In Part 3 we will consider where it would be positively helpful to bring up Hebrew or Greek in a sermon.

PS – anyone “get” the joke in the cartoon?

NOTES:

[1] Other words where the flock might arrive with imperfect understanding of the Greek and thus need correction could include the Spirit as Paraclete = “one called alongside of;” *homolegeo* = confessing sin (1 John 1:9) is merely “saying the same thing” as God does about sin; and *metanoia* = simply “a change of mind.” To go further would simply be to multiply examples.

**But the Greek REALLY says…” Why Greek and Hebrew are not needed in the pulpit, Part 2, by Gary Shogren, PhD in New Testament Exegesis, Professor at Seminario ESEPA, San José, Costa Rica**

<https://openoureyeslord.com/2013/07/13/but-the-greek-really-says-why-greek-and-hebrew-are-not-needed-in-the-pulpit-part-3/>

[**“But the Greek REALLY says…” Why Greek and Hebrew are not needed in the pulpit, Part 3**](https://openoureyeslord.com/2013/07/13/but-the-greek-really-says-why-greek-and-hebrew-are-not-needed-in-the-pulpit-part-3/)



In [Part 1](https://openoureyeslord.com/2013/06/18/but-the-greek-really-says-why-hebrew-and-greek-are-not-needed-in-the-pulpit-part-1/) and [Part 2](https://openoureyeslord.com/2013/06/29/but-the-greek-really-says-why-hebrew-and-greek-are-not-needed-in-the-pulpit-part-2/) I offered one individual’s philosophy of Expository Preaching without Ancient Words:

* I use the biblical languages, virtually daily. [1]
* I cannot remember the last time I *did not* study the Hebrew or Greek when I was preparing a sermon.
* I cannot remember the last time I *did* use a Hebrew or Greek word when I was preaching a sermon.
* The better I study the original text, the easier I find it is to explain its meaning in plain English/Spanish.

Preaching: an open Book, not a sealed scroll

The exception is that when I give devotionals to my own Greek students, I will often show how a knowledge of the original languages is helpful. But now let’s focus on the positive, and think of times when it is illuminating to mention the Hebrew or Greek while preaching to a “regular” church audience.

The following list might make a start:

**HEBREW WORDS:**

*Shema* confession in its entirety from Deut 6:4, including the meaning of “one” (*echad*) as unity, not singularity. **DAVID’S NOTE**: See Daniel I. Block’s journal article: "How Many Is God? An Investigation into the Meaning of Deuteronomy 6:4-5." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47:2 (June 2004):193-212, in which he concludes, “The Shema' should not be taken out of context and interpreted as a great monotheistic confession. Moses had made that point in 4:35, 39: 'For Yahweh (alone) is God; there is none beside(s) him.' Nor is the issue in the broader context the nature of God in general or his integrity in particular—though the nature and integrity of his people is a very important concern. This is a cry of allegiance, an affirmation of covenant commitment in response to the question, 'Who is the God of Israel?' The language of the Shema' is 'sloganesque' rather than prosaic: 'Yahweh our God! Yahweh alone!' or 'Our God is Yahweh, Yahweh alone!' This was to be the distinguishing mark of the Israelite people; they are those (and only those) who claim Yahweh alone as their God."

* *Hebrew Names of God*: Adonai *versus* Yahweh, Elohim, Sabaoth, etc.
* *Elohim*: I have heard that Elohim is a type of plural form that requires three persons; grammatically this is very shaky ground
* *Messiah*
* *Feasts* such as *Yom Kippur* and *Hanukkah* and *Pesach*
* *Cherem,*putting something under “the ban” or curse

**LOANWORDS**: a word simply taken over wholesale into another language. These words were taken over into the Greek Septuagint and New Testament and in any language where the faith has spread, including English.

* *Amen* – from Hebrew. Also, Jesus uses it in the Greek to mean “verily, verily” it is with the idea of “this is God’s Truth.” The Catholic NAB leaves it as “Amen, Amen.”
* *Alleluia*, or *Hallelujah*; *Shalom*
* *Abba* – originally Aramaic, but later used in the New Testament, always of God the “Father; also later used in rabbinic Hebrew. And it probably does not mean “Daddy.”
* *Maranatha* from the Aramaic means “Our Lord come,” in 1 Cor 16:22 and also in *Didache* 10.6; it is translated into Greek (and hence, into English) in Rev 22:20. Also, its application to Jesus is extremely important, since shows that from the earliest church, Christians regarded Jesus as Lord.
* *Hosanna, Gehenna*
* Paul probably took over a Hebrew word into Greek with *arrabon*, “first installment” (see 2 Cor 5:5, Eph 1:14).

**GREEK WORDS:**

* [*Apantesis*](https://openoureyeslord.com/2011/05/25/1-thess-417-%E2%80%93-%E2%80%9Cmeet-the-lord-in-the-air%E2%80%9D-in-the-original-greek/)*, [Apostasia](https://openoureyeslord.com/2011/06/30/what-comes-before-the-day-of-the-lord-the-final-apostasy-or-the-departure-of-the-church/)* – click words to see my blogs on these
* *Basileia* – I would give the two senses of the word for “kingdom”, although perhaps not the Greek
* *Christos*
* *Pentecost*
* *Officers of the Church* – *Episkopos, presbuteros, diakonos*
* *Charismata*
* *Mimesis*
* *Apostolos*
* *Angelos*
* *Deity of Christ*: why Christ is called “God” in Titus 2:15 and 2 Pet 1:1, 11; why the Logos is God in John 1:1
* *Singular versus plural* – the King James Version has one advantage over newer translations; in 1611, the English language still differentiated between second person singular and plural pronouns: it’s why there are “thee’s” and “thou’s”. [2]
* *Gender*. If using a version such as the ESV, which is not careful to give gender-appropriate translations, the preacher may have to clear up, “Does this verse speak of men as adult males or men as people?” [3]

In Part 2 we suggested that some words which our people already know and perhaps need clarification – *Parakletos* as “one who comes alongside them” is not the best translation; like the phrase “to pour oneself into someone,” it is common Christianese, but not good English. In this category I would add: *Agape, Rhema, Ekklesia*(which doesn’t mean “called out” [of the world], but more generally an *assembly*, *convocation*, *community*, or *congregation*; see Acts 19:32, 39, 40).

**PERSONAL NAMES:**[4]

“Names today,” we hear, “are just picked because they sound good. But in Bible times, names had meanings, and so by translating the name from the original language, they reveal the real essence of the person or their basic significance in God’s plan.”

First, it is true that Hebrew and Greek names usually are based on some etymological root. Most famously, “Jesus” is the Greek pronunciation of the Hebrew “Yeshua”: the angel told Joseph, “you shall call his name Jesus, *He-Shall-Save*, for *he shall save* his people from their sins” (Matt 1:21). [5]

Second, most of our readers have names that mean things. In my case, Gary is Germanic for “warrior,” Steven is from the Greek for “crown” and Sjö-gren is Swedish for “sea branch” (?). If my surname unlocks my permanent significance, then it must do so for all my relatives. I could make up explanations as to why Gary and Steven have deeper significance, but I’m afraid it would be no more reliable than mere random chance. [6]

The names of the patriarchs (Abram-Abraham, Sarai-Sarah, Isaac, Jacob-Israel, Esau, the twelve sons of Jacob) were all so designated because of what their names meant; since the Bible text explains that to us, we are not going beyond the bounds of good sense when we interpret their names in the pulpit; the same goes for Melchizedek of Salem. To this we might add Moses, Miriam, David, but not most of the other kings. Peter/Cephas yes; but Andrew (“manly”), Philip (“lover of horses”)? James and John were Boanerges, “Sons of Thunder,” but we are unclear as to how they got that nickname. How about Judas Iscariot, who shares his name (“Yahweh be praised”) with the more commendable Judah the patriarch, Judah Maccabee, and Jude the brother of the Lord?

In Genesis, Adam and Eve have names that mean something, as do Cain and Seth; but Abel’s name (“breath” maybe?) could lead anywhere or nowhere.

Plenty of Bible names are a dead end for the exegete. Barnabas was aptly name; but what about Silas/Silvanus (the latter the name of a Roman woodland god)? Paul would have had three Latin names; the one that we know (“Paulus”) means “little,” and so some see proof that he was a short man. The logic of that soon falls apart, once we remember that like all babies, he received his name while he was *very* short. His name in Hebrew, Saul or Sha’ul, may be related to the Hebrew (“the one asked for”), but who did the asking? It’s entirely possible that he was named for a favorite uncle or benefactor.

The four young men in Babylonian Captivity communicate a message:

* Daniel (Hebrew for “God is my judge”) changed to Belteshazzar (Babylonian name, based on pagan god Bel, as in the story “Bel and the Dragon”)
* Hananiah (“Yahweh is gracious”) to Shadrach (based on name of god Marduk)
* Mishael (“Who is like God?”) to Meshach (possibly “Who is like the god Aku?”)
* Azariah (“Yahweh has helped”) to Abednego (“servant of the god Nabu”)

A preacher might show that, what is significant is not the meaning of each name, but the fact that the Babylonians deliberately tried to erase and defile the Jewish identities of these captives.

The reader might wish to consult <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_biblical_names> which gives long lists of Scriptural names and their possible meanings. For my part, putting aside those names which the Bible remarks upon, I could not find one name in twenty that might possibly convey some plausible coded message; and if the message is not clear, then perhaps the etymology of the name should say nothing at all to the reader.

**PLACE NAMES:**

Place names (toponyms) have meaning if the Bible indicates it is so; beyond that, the preacher should beware. Like proper names, some few are significant, but the majority are not:

*Bethel* means “house of God,” so named by Jacob because of his vision. *Eben-Ezer* means “Stone of Help.” But *Bethlehem*, which is probably “house of bread”? *Beersheba* probably; but *Jericho*, hardly, although Augustine famously used its possible meaning of “moon” to take it as a symbol of our mortality, because like the moon “it is born, waxes, wanes and dies.”

**Conclusion**

Exegesis, if done properly, is hard work. Still, let’s remember that every Sunday we are preaching to people who worked hard all week at their respective jobs, and most importantly, are God’s chosen people. They deserve a message based on the inspired Word, delivered with much prayer, through a Spirit-filled preacher. They deserve holy and loving craftsmanship that is properly sketched out, assembled, sanded, finished and ready for use.

*Thanks for your input: David Gilbert, Fred Zaspel, Fred Putnam, Jimmy Snowden*

**NOTES:**

[1] Just to give an example, this month I’m reading Mark in the Greek and Isaiah in the Hebrew and in the Septuagint, for my daily devotions, in addition to praying through the psalms in English. This is beyond my courses, teaching Greek grammar and the Greek of the General Epistles, plus researching an article on 1 Thess 5. This is hardly anything more than others in my sort of ministry are doing. See [My four decades in the Bible – Part III](https://openoureyeslord.com/2012/12/08/my-four-decades-in-the-bible-part-iii/)

[2] In the Matthean Great Commission, the KJV has “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations…whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always.” Meanwhile, the ESV has “Go therefore” and “behold, I am with you always.” Now, it is clear from the context that Jesus is speaking to more than one person, but it’s worth clearing that up. Jesus said to Nicodemus, “Art thou a master [teacher] of Israel” and then declared, “Ye must be born again.” Nicodemus, singular, is a teacher; then “you”, plural, that is, “all of you Israelites” must be born again. I’ve seen this used as an argument in favor of using only the KJV, by the way, an unconvincing proof.

[3] The NIV 2011 follows the rule that, when the Greek speaks only of males, the English must do so, the same with females, but when the original is generic, it makes that clear. These versions actually give a sharper understanding of the biblical text. Compare the ESV with the NIV 20111:  Acts 1:21-22 ESV – “So one of the men who have accompanied us …one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection.” According to the philosophy of the ESV translators, “men” is an appropriate translation for “men as adult males” AND for “men and women;” hence the reader is left guessing, is Peter calling for a man to be the new apostle, or for a person? In the NIV 2011, by contrast, the women are women and the men are men; thus, when it translates “one of the men,” the reader knows that Peter is speaking of an adult male, not a woman. The same thing happens in Acts 6, when they choose the Seven. ESV – “pick out from among you seven men” – but is it men, or men and women? The NIV is better with – “choose seven men from among you”. As in Acts 1:21-22, the text has the Greek *anēr*, which means *man as male*, not *man as human being*. In passages such as these, when the NIV 2011 says man, you know the Greek is talking about adult males; meanwhile, the supposedly more literal ESV leaves the door open for women apostles and members of the Seven, even though the Greek text does not. The preacher should mention this, unless the church is using a version that is gender-appropriate and doesn’t need a boost from the Greek text. In my opinion, all things being equal, *that translation is better which is self-explanatory with regard to the sex of the person in a verse, and doesn’t require an additional appeal to the Greek*; for example, in the NIV 2011, the men are men, and the women are women. See [Is the NIV 2011 a Satanic, Homosexual, PC Bible? Part II](https://openoureyeslord.com/2012/05/01/is-the-niv-2011-a-satanic-homosexual-pc-bible-part-ii/)

[4] I have taken most of these data from the *New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd edition.

[5] I deal with many Messianic Christians, who argue that we must use the form Yeshua, since Jesus is a pagan name and was never used in the New Testament times. This is wrong for so many reasons; for example, I have used the TLG software to search through all Greek literature from the earliest antiquity through about the 4th century AD: “Jesus” was used only by Jews. Hence, “Jesus who is called Justus” is a Jewish Christian in Col 4:11; he has a Hebrew name in its Greek form Jesus, and a sound-alike Latin name, Justus (“the just one”).

[6] In fact, I happen to know that, like many people, I bear my names simply because my mother liked the sound of them; also, I’ve lately read that “Gary” was popular in the 1950s, but only for a short time, because of the fame of actor Gary Cooper.

**“But the Greek REALLY says…” Why Greek and Hebrew are not needed in the pulpit, Part 3, by Gary Shogren, PhD in New Testament Exegesis, Professor at Seminario ESEPA, San José, Costa Rica**

1. See Hal Freeman, “The Great Commission and the New Testament: An Exegesis of Matthew 28:16-20,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* Vol. 1:4 (1997): 12-20, and Bill Mounce, “Adverbial Participles and Finite Verbs,” [https://billmounce.com/blog/adverbial-participles-and-finite-verbs,](https://billmounce.com/blog/adverbial-participles-and-finite-verbs%2C) and Matthew 28:19 footnote 27 in the NET Bible, < https://bible.org/netbible.> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)