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Bible Analysis Information

Resources:

Disclaimer: The following books may or may not represent the views of Biblical Christian Solutions in Government, and may or may not coincide with a Biblical worldview as revealed in a straightforward reading of the Bible. The following books may be of interest in studying various evidence and historicity surrounding the text of the Bible and the issues that affect translations of the Bible in general and the New Testament in particular.

Here is a resource that may help you analyze various English translations of God's Word – The Bible:

Metzger, Bruce, The Bible in Translation: Ancient and English Versions (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006)

Bruce M. Metzger (Ph.D., Princeton University) is George L. Collord Professor of New Testament Language and Literature, Emeritus, at Princeton Theological Seminary and the author or editor of numerous volumes. A past president of the Society of Biblical Literature and the Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas, he has made valuable contributions to textual criticism, philology, paleography, and Bible translation. He is ordained in the Presbyterian Church (USA) and has served on committees for three major Bible versions, chairing the NRSV translation committee. (Biographical Information from book)

Note: The above book only covers translations before 2001.

Here are three resources that may help you gain a better understanding of the manuscript evidence for, and historicity of, the Bible - among other facets of evidence concerning historical issues about the Bible and Jesus:

McDowell, Josh, and McDowell, Sean, More Than A Carpenter (Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 2009).

Josh McDowell holds a Master's degree in Theology from Talbot Theological Seminary and is on staff with Campus Crusade for Christ. Sean McDowell holds a Master's degree in Theology and a Master's degree in Philosophy, both from Talbot Theological Seminary. Both men are internationally recognized speakers, and have authored an extensive list of books.

Josh McDowell's studies into the evidence surrounding the reliability of the Bible as an ancient historical document and the evidence concerning the historicity of Jesus and issues surrounding his claims, and the early Christian movement, and Science began while Josh was a skeptic. During this time he set out to disprove, in a scholarly manner; the Bible as reliable, and to disprove the claims of Jesus Christ. His study of evidence brought Josh to place his trust in Jesus. (Biographical Information from book)

Note: The book covers evidence in an introductory manner, and invites the reader to further investigation through the sources in the end notes. Josh McDowell covers much of the evidence in a more full manner in his book Evidence That Demands a Verdict and The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict.

Strobel, Lee, The Case For Christ (Michigan: Zondervan, 1998).

Lee Strobel holds a Master of Studies in Law degree from Yale Law School. Lee served in the capacity of Legal Editor of the *Chicago Tribune*. He was an award-winning journalist for thirteen years at the *Chicago Tribune* and other newspapers. Lee is a pastor and author of numerous books.

Lee Strobel was an atheist, who considered the case closed concerning the divinity of Jesus and the existence of God. He felt that there was "far too much evidence that God was merely a product of wishful thinking, of ancient mythology, of primitive superstition." The book contains interviews from experts in their fields, which outlines the historical and archeological part of Lee's own extensive personal investigation. Lee used his legal training to test the evidence of history for Jesus; his claims, miracles, resurrection, and claim to be God, which finally brought him to change his opinion, and he placed his trust in Jesus in 1981 as a result. (Biographical Information from book - supplemented with information concerning Strobel's capacity as Legal Editor)

Note: The book contains interviews from experts in their fields. For a more than introductory, but less than technical, introduction to the manuscript evidence for the reliability and historicity of the New Testament see Strobel's interview with Dr. Bruce Metzger. The reader can further investigate through the sources in the end notes.

Metzger, Bruce M., The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration, first, second or third editions. The fourth edition with contributions by Bart Ehrman cannot be suggested.

By corruption Metzger is referring to restoring the New Testament in its original state without any human copyist errors. This is accomplished by comparing the many manuscripts to find human mistakes in copying, and then finding the most attested variant between the comparison of all the available manuscripts. See Biographical Information on Bruce Metzger above.

Note: This book is a technical introduction to textual criticism and the manuscript evidence for the New Testament.

Types of Translations, Translation Goals, and Practical Uses:

The Bible was originally written in Hebrew and Aramaic for the Old Testament, and Greek for the New Testament. The New Testament books of Matthew and Hebrews were historically written in Hebrew, but are no longer extent in that form . They come to us in very early Greek copies.

Note: On Matthew originally being written in Hebrew see: Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, from Clement of Alexandria, Book 3 chapter 24; Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, from Papias, Book 3, chapter 39; Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, from Irenaeus, Book 5, chapter 8; Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, from Paneaenus, Book 5, chapter 10.

Note: On Hebrews originally being written in Hebrew see: Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, from Clement of Alexandria, Book 6, chapter 14; Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, Book 3, chapter 38.

Just like any other book, the Bible has to be translated. A translation normally takes two main issues into account within it's broader goal of being faithful to the original text. One of the main issues is to be faithful to the grammar and structure of the original text – to carry enough technicality to not lose some important meaning (normally referred to as literal translation). The second issue is to be faithful to meaning, (normally referred to as dynamic translation). A dynamic translation looks to be faithful to the meaning by normally taking cultural details, historical details, and idioms (slang) into account when conveying meaning that a reader from another culture or time would not understand.

If a translation's goal is to be mostly literal and technical in its translation, it will adhere strictly to the grammar and structure of the originating language – sometimes to the detriment of the actual meaning that is suppose to be conveyed. Many times the rendering of a passage may end up reading very unnaturally in English. If a translation's goal is to be mostly dynamic in its translation, it will focus on allowing the reader to gain a sentence for sentence meaning of the way a reader of the originating language would have understood it within their culture and history. Most translation's try to strike a balance between the two. Although, most modern translation's tend to place more emphasis on dynamic translation.

In practicality, translations that place a greater emphasis on dynamic translation tend to be good for reading and allowing the reader to understand the broad meaning of the text in a natural way. Translations that are more technical and literal in adhering to the structure of the originating language are more suited for detailed personal study of specific facets of original wording or structure that may make a difference to the overall meaning of the passage. For instance: in John's gospel Jesus makes a number of references to the divine title "I AM" from Exodus 3:14, but only one of those references comes through clearly in the New International Version (NIV) for instance (John 8:58). It may be difficult to see Jesus as most probably referring to himself using this divine title in John 4:26, 8:24, 8:28, 9:9, 13:19, 18:5, 18:6, and 18:8 in a dynamic translation. In addition, Jesus may also be referencing this title in John 6:20, 6:35, 6:48, 6:51, 8:12, 10:7, 10:9, 10:11, 11:25, 14:6, 15:1. To be fair, a number of these instances are recorded in the foot notes in the NIV. Many important facets of Bible translation (as well as any other type of translation)

are recorded in the footnotes. It is good to check for them as you read.

To learn more about a translation's goals, and the translator or translation committees assumptions and backgrounds, read the introduction pages to the translation of the Bible. In the preface and introductions to the translation the translations goals should be stated, as well as the methodology that lead the translator or translation committee. Here you will be able to see the strengths of a translation, whether the methodology is directed more toward technical or dynamic translation (or a balance of both), and many of the translation's features will be explained (ex. In the NIV preface, it explains how the translators used certain phrases to refer to specific names of God; such as Hebrew YHWH is always rendered as “LORD” in all capital letters).

Note On Manuscript History, and Reading the Bible:

One thing to remember is that while the Bible has overarching themes of God’s plan, purpose, and his acting in lives and history; it is also an anthology of 66 books, written over thousands of years. This means that you don’t have to start at the beginning. Just so you know - very generally; the Old Testament was looking forward to the time when God would send the Messiah to save Israel and the world. The New Testament describes the fulfillment of this in Jesus. I have found that reading the fulfillment first in the New Testament and then going back and reading the Old Testament to fill in the details has been helpful in my life and enabled me to understand the Bible more clearly.

The New Testament is the most well documented source that we have in terms of an ancient historical source. This allows us to see that the Bible has been faithfully copied down and that a faithful translated copy of the Bible is the same as what the early 1st century Christians had. To put this in context: The New Testament has about 5,800 cataloged Greek manuscript copies and fragments which have been uncovered, which range in their date from the first century (contested) or early second century (uncontested) to beyond the invention of the printing press, and were copied in four independent areas of the world over those centuries. The earliest uncontested manuscript being a fragment of John's Gospel (P52) dated to about 100-125 AD, no more than about 25 years after the apostle John's death (about 100 AD). In addition there are many un-cataloged manuscripts and fragments. For example, there are over 50,000 un-cataloged fragments just in the discovery of 1975 in St. George's Tower in Sinai. When all these manuscripts are compared, they are consistent within themselves and offer no major changes. The next best candidate in textual documentation of an ancient historical document is the Iliad. It has 643 manuscript copies. It was composed about 800 BC, and the earliest copies we have are from the second to third centuries AD and beyond. The Old Testament textual sources we have also have a strong textual history, which include texts from the Dead Sea Scrolls that take the text to at least the 1st century AD, with many documents going back as early as about the 3rd Century BC. We can see by examining the texts that the Bible has been copied faithful throughout the centuries.

There is no secret involved in understanding the Bible. Like any other document, it is meant to be read and taken plainly. Just like anything else you read, it will clue you in to whether it is using figures of speech to strengthen a point or truth. The Bible talks about belief in Jesus. We

tend to think of belief as being a mental ascent. The Greek word for belief, trust and faith are the same word (pisteuo – last letter is a long O or Omega; in Greek: πιστευω). To believe or have faith means to trust with your life and actions. We see the connection between the root of the words faith and trust in English by the synonyms faithful and trustworthy. We see Jesus explain this understanding in the book of John chapters 14 and 15. In Luke 8:15, as well as John 14 and 15, Jesus says that we are to hear God's word, retain it, and then by God's help, apply it in our lives.

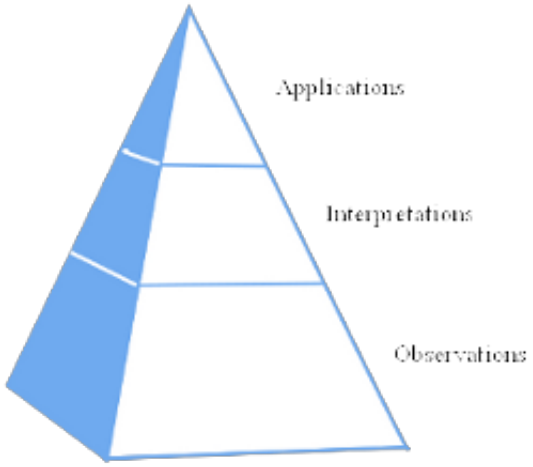
Tools for Cultural, Historical, and Background Information:

Because of the historical, cultural, and other background differences, it is always good to have Bible Dictionary on hand to look up questions that arise as you read. A Bible dictionary is setup similar to a regular dictionary - with the article topics in alphabetical order. Some Bible dictionaries also have an index for those topics that do not have their own article, but may be described in another article.

While a literal translation, which is very faithful to the exact wording and structure of the originating language, can be helpful for detailed study, there are also a few other resources that can help in detailed study of the Bible. An Interlinear (the originating text listed above coupled with an English translation glossary word under the originating word) coupled with a Lexicon (a dictionary of the originating words listed by their Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek symbols described and defined in English) can be of great help to get behind exact meanings in the originating language. Another resource is Strong's Concordance, which allows you to look up an English word and find it each time it occurs in the Bible. Strong's also has a small Hebrew / Aramaic / Greek dictionary in the back of the concordance that gives a general meaning to the originating words found in a passage of the Bible. Strong's keys each English word to a number. The number corresponds to a number next to the originating word in the small Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek glosses listed in the back of the Strong's concordance. In this way you can do something that is similar to looking words up in an Interlinear and finding the corresponding entry in the lexicon - although the glosses in the Strong's concordance are less exacting in their definitions than in a lexicon.

A Bible Commentary can be helpful when you find you are having a difficult time deducing the meaning from the passage. While commentaries can be helpful, it should be recognized that they are not the Bible. Many commentators conflict in their estimation of certain passages. This does not change the meaning of a Bible passage, it only reflects that individuals have varying knowledge about the Bible and background, and some have agendas to defend which may or may not be actually present in the meaning of a passage. But, commentaries can be very helpful in giving background information which in turn sheds light on certain passages. Commentaries can also be very helpful for comments on passages where after studying you still have questions. In the case of comments, I find it has been helpful to check the notes in multiple commentaries. Comments should be evaluated against the text of the Bible to determine if the explanations are actually present in the text.

Further Note on Reading and Studying the Bible:



When reading a passage in the Bible to study what it means, it is helpful to begin with observations. Ask the “who,” “what,” “when,” “where,” “why” (where it is an observation) and “how” (where it is an observation) questions. Let us imagine we are building a pyramid. The observations would be the foundation of the pyramid. Sometimes the observations will be unclear, confusing, or perplexing. This is normally a cue that some information is being assumed by the author that is not common knowledge in our culture, or that a word needs to be looked up in a lexicon or dictionary. This is a place to look up cultural, historical, or background information that is not common to our culture using a Bible dictionary, and possibly a commentary if not found in the Bible Dictionary.

Once you have made the observations, you want to now move to interpret what the passage is meaning. Now you ask the “why” (where it is an interpretation) and “how” (where it is an interpretation) questions. In order to interpret correctly, your interpretations must be grounded in the more numerous observations. In our pyramid Illustration, these questions would be built on top of the observations layer. There are less interpretation questions because they rely on the more numerous observations. Someone should be able to ask you “where do you see that interpretation in the passage,” and you should be able to point out the observations that have lead you to the conclusion you are drawing.

Last you want to now ask yourself what this means for your life – how should this be applied to your life. This question needs to be grounded in the previous interpretations that are built on the more numerous observations. The application to your life should be a conclusion from the interpretations and observations taken as a whole. The application question(s) is/are the apex of the pyramid, resting on the more numerous interpretations, and even more numerous observations.

Note on Assumptions, Materialism, and Study Notes:

It is good to be aware, where possible, of the biases or assumptions of a translator or the majority of translators to a translation committee. Again, these assumptions are sometimes given in the preface or introduction to the translation. Other times translator notes, which are published either accompanying or apart from the translation, can be a great source in seeing the rational for translating. Translation committees are normally composed of many translators and Bible scholars from a wide variety of

theological beliefs in order to guard against translating toward a particular theological doctrine where that doctrine is not necessarily the plainest sense and meaning of the text. Where the plainest meaning of the text reveals a specific doctrine, then of course it is faithful to translate the passage as such. If there are misrepresentations in a translation, this is not an issue of accuracy or faithfulness of the Bible, only of a translation. Translations like this are normally understood within scholarship to not match the meaning of the original languages. Many cult groups that maintain an authority (like a book giving "another revelation," or the writings of a specific society or teacher) greater than the Bible, and/or that the Bible has some type of deficiency, themselves introduce changes into their translations of the Bible, which are not supported by the manuscripts of the original languages, in order to accommodate their own doctrines.

In certain circumstances, a whole culture has been influenced by a certain teaching. In this case, that teaching can affect the majority of a translation committee and/or the study note commentators, and the assumptions they approach a passage with. An example of a teaching that has affected American culture would be the worldview of Materialism.

The philosophy of Materialism has had an influence in Western culture over the past 150 years. This has not left Christianity untouched. In certain circles it has produced a compromising of the straightforward meaning of God's word in order to accommodate a quasi-Materialistic worldview. Materialism in itself, as a very generalized definition, looks to to explain how things exist by a material means only, rather than allowing for a spiritual means or creator. Materialism is the worldview that is the foundation for the concept of Evolution. Some theologians in the 1800's, 1900's, and also today tried, or currently try, to accept certain facets of Evolution while retaining foundational realities revealed in the Bible. This blending of a Biblical worldview with a worldview that is opposed to the truth revealed by God in the Bible is called syncretism. This syncretistic blending produces an inconsistency with the plain meaning of the Biblical text. It also allows people to come to the Bible with their theories and look for support, rather than have the Bible define the truth as God has revealed it to us. It needs to be understood that the Bible, and not its critics, nor even theologians, is the source of God's Word and revelation to us about every facet of this life, and what comes after this life. The Bible sets itself forward in this manner, and is confirmed over thousands of years of history by which God confirmed his messages given through prophets by supernatural acts. The events of these prophecies and prophets, are corroborated internally in the historical records of the Bible as well as externally by extra-biblical history sources (sources outside the Bible).

Translators and translation committees are committed to a translation that is faithful in its meaning and conveys the meaning of the original text. Yet, since many options can exist for the wording within a faithful translation, the translators bias in regards to materialism may allow for a reading that does not necessarily negate the Bible's declarations but does allow for certain theories to be read into the Bible. This is particularly true for the first three chapters of Genesis.

The place the biases, or assumptions, of specific theological doctrines show up out-rightly are in study notes that accompany the Bible's text. First, it needs to be understood that these study notes are commentary and are not part of the Bible. Second, there are passages that directly convey a certain theological doctrine or distinction, and in this case a study note pointing this out would be faithfully

commenting the straightforward meaning of the text. Some of the Biblical scholars who translate and write the study notes hold to a theistic-evolution worldview of the first three chapters of Genesis rather than the straightforward meaning revealed in the passage of six literal days of creation thousands of years ago.

As a side note, the understanding of a literal day, rather than a series of evolutionary periods, is taken from information such as: Adam lives through the remaining day 6, and through all of day 7, and yet died at 930 years old; our work week being taken from the six days of creation and the sabbath day in Exodus 20:9-11; and that the plain meaning of the creation passage in Genesis was understood this way through history until the rise of evolution. The understanding of thousands of years, rather than billions, for the earth's and universe's beginnings are taken by counting the dates up from Genesis through the genealogies and histories recorded in the Bible (there is one section between Israel's return from the Babylonian-Persian exile to the time of Jesus which can be accounted for by either the Prophesy in Daniel 9:20-27 and/or by historical sources outside the Bible from this period of History; and a second section from the time of Jesus' early disciples to the present which is also accounted for by historical sources outside the Bible from this span of History). In addition, the Hebrew civil calendar places the date at 5,771 years from creation (September of 2010). I have not seen an ancient calendar that ever proposed billions of years from creation. Rather, they pass down to us a history of thousands of years. The whole concept of Natural History, from an evolutionary lens, came quite recently (in comparison to world history), and came from the philosophy of Materialism.

To show the inconsistency that can exist in study notes, using a view point that could be used to accommodate materialism and theistic evolution, here are two study note / commentary passages on the same passage in Genesis 1 showing the opposite conclusions. This points out that a person should be aware that though commentaries and study notes can be very helpful, they are not to replace the authoritative and straightforward text of the Bible in revealing the truth about the world.

For example, one newer contemporary translation (New English Translation) - in its study notes (which they acknowledge are not part of the Bible) – asserts the following on the topic of creation in Genesis:

“In the beginning. The verse refers to the beginning of the world as we know it; it affirms that it is entirely the product of the creation of God. But there are two ways that this verse can be interpreted: (1) It may be taken to refer to the original act of creation with the rest of the events on the days of creation completing it... (2) It may be taken as a summary statement of what the chapter will record, that is, vv. 3-31 are about God’s creating the world as we know it. If the first view is adopted, then we have a reference here to original creation; if the second view is taken, then Genesis itself does not account for the original creation of matter. To follow this view does not deny that the Bible teaches that God created everything out of nothing (cf. John 1:3) – it simply says that Genesis is not making that affirmation. This second view presupposes the existence of pre-existent matter, when God said, “Let there be light.” The first view includes the description of the primordial state as part of the events of day one. The following narrative strongly favors the second view....”

Yet, the earlier Bible Scholars C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch point out the exact opposite is necessary in the structure of the sentence (that is that the passage refers to God's original act of creation and there was not

pre-existent matter).

"'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.'... This sentence, which stands at the head of the records of revelation, is not a mere heading, nor a summary of the history of the creation, but a declaration of the primeval act of God, by which the universe was called into being. That this verse is not a heading merely, is evident from the fact that the following account of the course of the creation commences with ו (and), which connects the different acts of creation with the fact expressed in ver. 1, as the primary foundation upon which they rest.... The following verse cannot be treated as subordinate, either by rendering it, "in the beginning when God created..., the earth was,' etc., or 'in the beginning when God created … (but the earth was then a chaos, etc.) ….' The first is opposed to the grammar of the language, which would require ver. 2 to commence with והארץ היתה; the second to the simplicity of style which pervades the whole chapter, and to which so involved a sentence would be intolerable, apart altogether from the fact that this construction is invented for the simple purpose of getting rid of the doctrine of a creatio ex nihilo [creation from nothing].... ראשית in itself is a relative notion, indicating the commencement of a series of things or events; but here the context gives it the meaning of the very first beginning, the commencement of the world, when time itself began." Keil, C.F. and Delitzsch, F., Commentary on the Old Testament: translated from the German by James Martin (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985)

The plain meaning of the passage is to establish not only that God created the heavens and the earth, but to give the actual account of beginning - of the creation of all things. In addition Proverbs 8, John 1, and Colossians 1:16-17 do not give a hint of a creation in which matter is pre-existent. The only reason to create such a construct is for the allowance of different constructions of theistic-evolution, which in itself (evolution) is founded on a worldview (materialism) that expressly can never allow for a spiritual creator. It is fair for the reader to be aware of this reality, realizing that just because a certain theory "fits" into a specific translation, it would be dishonest to the Biblical text to approach the Bible this way. Instead it is best to allow the Bible text, within its context, to lead us to conclusions.

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