

Trade Mark:
A Translation Study of Revelation 13:15-17

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It is no wonder that over the past half century the Bible has been met with such an active desire from individuals and conglomerates alike to have their hand at translating what has become the most widely printed and distributed book in the world. Originally written in both Hebrew and Greek, the Bible has now been translated into an amazing 2,287 languages. (“Script. Lang. Report ‘01”). No other piece of sacred literature has been translated into quite so many dialects. The Bible also boasts *at least* 100 different English translations alone (Duff). It is understandable that with such an important piece of literature, scholars would try their best to preserve and present the original meaning to anyone interested. But even with that considered, doesn’t 100 different translations seem overboard? Should paid linguistic scholars be given as much credence as those who both lived and painstakingly hand copied the Bible’s sacred teachings? Both points of view have sound arguments, yet I tend to side with those who had the Word engrained in their hearts as well as their minds.

As both an educated Christian and avid book worm, I prefer The King James Version (KJV) of the Bible. The KJV, also known as the Authorized Version, is one of the oldest English versions available. It has traditionally been held to be finished in 1611, but as stated by DiCello, the KJV has “undergone numerous revisions (e.g., 1612, 1613, 1616, 1629, 1638, 1769), with most modern versions following the 1769 edition” (footnote 13). The KJV is a very popular translation of the Bible. Some even go so far as to claim that it is the only true rendition of the Holy Scriptures, even more so than the original Hebrew and Greek texts themselves. This belief is commonly known as King James Onlyism. (DiCello). I personally find this belief somewhat ridiculous for claiming a translation to be more reliable than its original counterpart. I prefer the KJV primarily

for two reasons, the first being simply that it is the oldest translation immediately available, and the second being, as stated in class, its intimate use of the English language.

The primary piece of text I chose to analyze is contained in the King James Version of the Bible. Of all the English translations available, the King James rendition of these few passages stands apart from rest in several significant ways. When compared to some translations, the difference is as minute as a single letter, yet, even this discrepancy makes all the difference the world, especially with today's speed of technological advancement (I will later expand on this idea). Without further ado, the primary text I have selected to analyze is as follows:

15. And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed. 16. And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: 17. And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. (King James Version [KJV], Rev. 13:15-17)

The "he" of the quoted passages is a second beast, which is described earlier in the chapter as having "two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon" (Revelation 13:11, KJV). At first it is not exactly clear who or what this beast really is. But, the imagery provided through simile gives a solid understanding of who this beast at least represents. By describing the beast as having two horns like a lamb, it becomes immediately clear to those that are familiar with the Gospel of John that the beast serves

as a crude imitation to the genuine article; *the* lamb which was sacrificed for the sins of the world, Jesus Christ. Also, the description of the beast speaking as a dragon gives rise to thoughts of that old serpent: Satan. Craig R. Koester explains the scene quite clearly in his book *Revelation and the End of All Things*:

John's characterization of the powers of God and the powers of evil continues . . . On one side of the conflict are God, the lamb, . . . and the Spirit that speaks through the prophets. On the other side of the conflict are Satan, the beast of the sea who brings people to serve Satan, and the beast from the land, who functions as a false prophet. (129)

It is now clear that these two beasts represent Satan and his dominion of evil. While not obvious in this limited selection of verses, the overarching theme of Revelation is that of most sacred texts; the battle between good and evil. The selected verses are but a dip in the alternating highs and lows of a dramatic climax that leaves God and his people victorious. More specifically conveyed here is the theme of Satan forcing the inhabitants of earth into submission to his destructive will, or otherwise be killed.

Not to be missed in verse 15 is the idea that the second beast gives life to the *image* of the first beast, and also causes this image to speak. In the second passage we see that the beast from the land causes everyone, regardless of class, occupation, status etc. to receive a mark in their right hand or forehead; which will be required in order to buy or sell. The wording here is very important, I will elaborate on this upon the introduction of the next translation:

15. He was permitted to give breath to this statue and even make it speak!
Then the statue ordered anyone refusing to worship it must die! 16. He

required everyone--great and small, rich and poor, slave and free--to be tattooed with a certain mark on the right hand or on the forehead. 17. And no one could get a job or even buy in any store without the permit of that mark, which was either the name of the Creature or the code number of his name. (The Living Bible [TLB], Rev. 13:15-17)

Before jumping into a discussion of the differences and similarities of the two translations presented thus far, let me first state that The Living Bible is not really a translation but a paraphrase. A paraphrase differs from a translation in that it usually uses one English version to produce another, paying most attention to the first translator's idea or intention to produce a new *interpretation*; which is meant to be more easily understood. A paraphrase pays little or no attention to the original Hebrew or Greek texts. The Living Bible was completed and sent to press by Kenneth Taylor in 1971. It was published by Tyndale House Publishers, which was founded by Taylor himself.

The Living Bible does its job as far as presenting an easily understood interpretation. But because it is only a paraphrase, it differs from the literal translation of the KJV in several significant ways. The first notable difference between these two versions is the mentioning of a "beast". We see in verse 17 of The Living Bible that the word "creature" is used in place of beast. This wording eliminates the many possibilities of what a beast could be and even lends a hint to God's Creation when in fact the mentioned creature is of Satan!

Another difference is the reference in the KJV to the "image of the beast" while the TLB simply calls it a "statue". Again, this eliminates the possibilities of what exactly an image can be. We also see a difference in the means in which the beast/creature gives

life to this image: the KJV says it “had power” while the TLB says it “was permitted”. While the general idea of the King James Version is conveyed by The Living Bible, the differences provide an entirely different scenario if these events were to actually take place. A talking statue reminds me of a hokey amusement park. A talking image reminds me of the television or even the possibilities now capable via the Internet. The two versions agree in the fact that those who refuse to worship the image of the beast (or statue of the creature) will face death.

The biggest and most interesting differences in my opinion are in verse 16. We see that the beast requires everyone to receive a distinguishing mark; it goes on to say in verse 17 that this mark will be required to buy or sell. The interesting part is that, even after several revisions, the King James Version of the Bible is the *only* version that I could find that says this mark will be “in” the right hand or forehead of those that receive it. On the other hand (no pun intended), The Living Bible goes as far as to say that the mark is “tattooed on the right hand or on the forehead.” These two pictures paint a very different series of events.

This difference of only a single letter has never made more of an impact than it has in the last year or two. With the rapidly evolving technologies of wireless communications and the ever-shrinking transistor, the “mark of the beast” has taken on a whole new meaning for many Christians worldwide. Applied Digital Solutions has recently announced an implantable microchip under the name VeriChip. The chip is currently being marketed as a safety device that would allow for the storage and retrieval of pertinent medical information. It has received “trial-run approval by the U.S. Food & Drug Administration” and a Florida family has already got “chipped”. (Black). The

company is currently developing the chip to allow for the incorporation of GPS (Global Positioning System), which will make it a viable tracking device. It is only a matter of time before this new technology merges with that of recent smart card advancements to enable secure payments with a wave of the hand.

Whether or not this technology is in fact the mark referenced in Revelation 13:16 I cannot say. It is definitely not *required* of anyone to buy or sell as of yet. Without the KJV it probably wouldn't have gained so much attention within the Christian community. In contrast, by using the word "tattoo", The Living Bible conjures up thoughts of the Holocaust. I suppose that would leave Hitler or even the Third Reich to be the beast, which makes sense, except for the fact that the tattoo used then wasn't required to buy or sell. Before continuing onto a discussion of verse 17, let me first introduce the third and final translation I will be analyzing:

15. And he was permitted [also] to impart breath of life into the beast's image so that the statue of the beast could actually talk, and to cause to be put to death those who would not bow down *and* worship the image of the beast. 16. Also he compels all [alike], both small and great, both the rich and the poor, both free and slave to be marked with an inscription (stamped) on their right hands or on their foreheads. 17. So that no one will have power to buy or sell unless he bears the stamp (mark, inscription), [that is] the name of the beast or the number of his name.
(The Amplified Bible [AMP], Rev. 13:15-17)

The Amplified Bible is unique in that it is a combination of both literal translation from the original Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic texts and paraphrase based on the

American Standard Version of 1901. It was translated by the Lockman Foundation and published by Zondervan Publishing House in 1965. A system of parentheses and brackets is used to expand on particular word translations in an attempt to clarify their original meanings. The result in wording is a blend of the two versions looked at so far. Similar to both the TLB and the KJV, verse 15 refers to a statue as well as an image of the beast. It also adds the words “bow down” when describing what is required of the beast’s image. This allows for a clearer idea of the submission that worship usually entails. Verse 16 differs from the other two translations in that it describes the mark as an “inscription” or as “stamped.” By far it is the least daunting translation of the three in this regard.

In all translations verse 17 makes it clear that the mark is required to buy or sell (or even get a job in the TLB). But the wording is inconsistent between translations regarding what the mark actually is. The wording in the KJV seems to refer to three things: the mark of the beast, the name of the beast, and the number of his name. The Living Bible refers to the mark itself as either of two things: the name of the beast (creature) or the code number of his name. The Amplified Bible seems to refer to the mark, the name, and the number of the beast as one. From the three translations it is unclear if the mark of the beast, the name of the beast, and the number of the beast are all the same thing. If they are one in the same, then why refer to it in three separate ways? This question reminds me of the idea of the Holy Trinity. Maybe it’s meant to be a mystery.

I can agree that the most important thing for a translation to achieve is to get the message of the original text across. But for the person seeking the absolute word of God,

a paraphrase simply won't do. I have demonstrated how much of a difference one word (or even one letter) can make in translating such an important piece of prophetic text. Whether or not these subtleties prove to make any difference in the future, we can only wait and see. In the meantime it makes for excellent science fiction.

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