

Holy Scripture in Hebrew & Greek – Why Both? – Floyd Nolen Jones, Th.D., Ph.D.

Both Hebrew and New Testament *Koiné* Greek are difficult for English speaking people to become truly proficient. As God desires mankind know and understand Him, as well as what is expected of us, why did He give the Scriptures in two very different languages? One would have been easier for us. Wouldn't that have been better? Though the answer is straightforward, few seem able to give or find it. Isaiah 7:14 furnishes a wonderful illustration.

Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, **a virgin** shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. (KJB)

Rather than “virgin” other versions often have “a young woman”. There is nothing unique or new about a young woman having a baby, yet the verse is supposed to be a sign wherein God is promising deliverance in a most dire situation! Syria and apostate Israel have united against Judah. Thus, the *context* alerts us – something is amiss, beware!

The Hebrew word “*almah*” (עלמה) occurs only seven times in the OT. It should be rendered “virgin” here for although “*almah*” could mean “young woman”, every time it is used in the Old Testament the context demands it means “virgin”. *Alma's* other six occurrences are translated “virgin” in most of the various versions. One wonders why the sudden departure in the verse before us. The miracle was going to be that a virgin was going to conceive!

Furthermore, the New Testament confirms the fact that Mary was a virgin (Matthew 1:23):

“Behold, a **virgin** (Greek = παρθένοϛ; transliteration = *parthenos*) shall be with child and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us”.

Now all languages contain both “weak” & “strong” words. By “weak” is meant a word that has many shades of meaning or even widely different meanings (e.g., the word “cool” in today's English). Such words often defy etymological studies. “Strong” words, on the other hand, are words which have a very limited and narrow meaning – often only one possible sense. Now we can begin to see the manifold wisdom of God in choosing to reveal His Word man-ward in two tongues. Weak words in one, which might lead to confusion, could be covered by strong words in the other with cross references and quotations! The two cover and clarify one another.

Such is the case before us. The “weak” Hebrew word “*almah*” (though we have already shown by its Biblical usage it is not so weak) is covered in the NT by the “strong” Greek word *parthenos*, which can only be translated one way – virgin. Our Father's system has protected us!

Moreover, context is the decisive factor for determining the final connotation of any word or phrase, not the dictionary definition or etymology. Etymology, though often helpful, is not an exact science. It should be used for confirmation – as the deciding factor only with much caution.

The translators of the modern versions are well aware of the incontrovertible decisive nature of *parthenos*; hence, the translation of Isaiah 7:14 into any other word represents a deliberate and willful alteration of the Word of God. In denying the virgin birth of Christ, they are saying:

- (a) Jesus was a bastard, as Mary was unmarried when she conceived;
- (b) Mary was a fornicator;
- (c) God has lied to us in Matthew 1:23 (above);
- (d) Christ was not God, not deity (having a physical father, He was only human); and
- (e) Christ was a sinner, for as a mere man He would then be a descendant of Adam and thereby have inherited Adam's sin nature – as per Rom. 5:12.

The verse placed before us thus far should serve as an excellent barometer for the reader to use in determining whether a given version is trustworthy or not.

A second example should forever drive the weak-word strong-word principle home for us.

Since c.1870 AD scholarship has proposed that the Hebrew phrase *yam suph* (יָם-סוּפִי) recorded in the Holy Writ as the Israelite Red Sea crossing in Exodus 13–15 should be “sea” (*yam*, Strong’s #3220) of “reeds” (*suph*, Strong’s #5488-89) rather than Red Sea. As most modern Bible versions read “sea of reeds”, confusion and doubt as to Bible accuracy prevails among many of today’s pastors, seminary professors, their students, laymen, and even entire denominations.

Now the Hebrew word *yam* does mean “sea”, and *suph* by itself literally *could* mean “reed”. However, often a *literal* translation does not convey that which is intended. We have just seen that sound exegesis dictates that no etymology may take precedence over context. As *suph* also means *seaweed*¹ the dishonesty is exposed; for is it not at least equally conceivable that this sea was originally named for having red *seaweed* causing its color. It has abounded in seaweed (fn.).

Although today little is red, can any prove it had none before or during the 1491 BC Exodus of Israel from Egypt? Really? And why is “reed” insisted upon when, regarding the Exodus, God clarified and settled the matter as New Testament Greek reads Red Sea [ἐρυθρός θάλασσα: transliteration = *eruthros* (red) *thalassa* (sea): Acts 7:36; Heb. 11:29]; not *reed* (κάλαμος = *kalamos*) *thalassa*. Furthermore, this Greek term was used by the LXX (Exo. 15:4), Josephus (Ant. 2.11.1, 2.15.1), & Herodotus (in 430 BC, *Histories*, ii, 8) for “Red Sea”.

Once again in the Holy Writ a weak word, the Hebrew *suph* (יָם-סוּפִי = reed or seaweed), is covered by the strong New Testament Greek *thalassa* (Grk. = θάλασσα), which can only mean “sea”.

Nevertheless, whereas most of today’s scholars correctly agree that Israel fled southward from Pharaoh at Raamses and made their first encampment at Succoth, since around 1870 AD they inexplicably have concluded from Exodus 13:18 and 14:2 that Israel left Succoth and turned around going northerly along a narrow strip toward the Mediterranean coast. Five shallow marshy water-filled depressions lay along this pathway (Great Bitter lake, Little Bitter Lake, Lake Timsah, Lake Ballāh, Lake Menzaleh) and the academicians have almost unanimously agreed that one of these was the “Red Sea/Reed Sea” Moses led Israel thru.

Overseen by Egyptian Muslim archaeologist, the locations of Etham (the 2nd encampment) and Mt. Baal-zephon (Exo. 14:2, 9, only c.820 ft. high) have been misplaced northward toward the Mediterranean Sea. Further, they have so placed a “Migdol” that cannot be the biblical Migdol. The motive for these errors is undoubtedly for the purpose of making the Hebrew Bible (our Old Testament) appear wrong in order to give the Koran increased status.

Though there are many, we mention only one obvious problem with this scenario. They either put Baal-zephon *west* of Lake Ballāh or the southern extent of Lake Menzaleh; yet Exodus 14:2-3 & 9 has its Baal-zephon by a sea & Israel shut in by it and a wilderness. But there is no wilderness to the west of these Lakes! West of it is Goshen, Raamses, and the Nile delta. Their location for Baal-zephon is much too far north. The wilderness is on the *east side* of these lakes and also below them to the *south* – simply look at a physical or topographic map. They have failed: etymology 101, geography 101, logic & Bible 101, and to grasp the *suph* compared to *thalassa* significance.

¹ *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, Funk & Wagnall, Vol. 10 (1905), p. 345. Gesenius, *Lexicon*, 1979, Baker Book House, p. 5479.