



A Literal Bible Faith by [John T Polk II](#)

*All Scriptures and comments are based on the **New King James Version**, unless otherwise noted.*

The English word "literal" commonly connotes translating from one language into another according to the letter-groupings commonly called "words." If the letters are accurately translated, then the words may be recognizable. In biblical research, no one has exceeded Robert Dick Wilson (Ph.D., D.D., Professor of Semitic Philology in Princeton Theological Seminary) who concluded:

An examination of the Hebrew manuscripts now in existence shows that in the whole Old Testament there are scarcely any variants supported by more than one manuscript out of 200 to 400, in which each book is found, except in the use of the full and defective writing of the vowels. This full, or defective, writing of the vowels has no effect either on the sound or the sense of the words. (p. 69, ***A Scientific Investigation of the Old Testament***, The Sunday School Times Company, Philadelphia, 1926).

The proof that the copies of the original documents have been handed down with substantial correctness for more than 2000 years cannot be denied. (ibid, p. 99)

In view of the exactness with which the proper names of persons and places have been transmitted for 4,000 years and their general agreement in the parallel passages, the presumption is, that the names for God, also, have been rightly transmitted. (ibid, p. 101)

1. In an article of a religious publication, a University Professor leads off his article, "*THINKING BIBLICALLY: 'What a "Literal Translation" means,'*" with:

Since it is impossible to translate letter-for-letter, we generally substitute word-for-word. By 'literal,' then, people mean a translation that comes as close as possible to translating every word of the original. But this is impossible." (p. 13 "***The Gospel Advocate***," February, 2019).

If it is impossible to translate "letter-for-letter," or also "every word of the original" text, then has Jesus failed to keep His promise: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away" (**Matthew 24:35**)? Does "by no means" include copying and translating? And, were His "words" written with letters to be translated?

If translating is an impossible task, then what do these Scriptures mean?

- 1) **Jesus answered each temptation from the Devil with "It is written."** He even quotes **Deuteronomy 8:3** when He said: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God" (**Luke 4:4**). Since none of Moses' original writings existed in Jesus' day, why would Jesus set the example of quoting Scripture from copies of the original when facing the Devil's temptation? If it is impossible to translate "every word of the original," did Jesus mis-translate Moses?
- 2) "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled" (**Matthew 5:17-18**). Though none of Moses' original writings existed in Jesus' day, but only copies, then Jesus was teaching that the very lettering of the copies was to be observed. If not, why not?
- 3) The Professor has made King Ahasuerus more able to translate his letter in foreign languages accurately than God Himself!

Then he sent letters to all the king's provinces, to each province in its own script, and to every people in their own language, that each man should be master in his own house, and speak in the language of his own people" (**Esther 1:22**).

Ahasuerus expected "his letter" when written "to each province in its own script" to be accurately translated and convey his original message. Surely one must re-evaluate any understanding of Scripture that would make a Persian king more able to communicate in different languages than God, Himself!

- 4) Paul taught Christians to completely rely upon the Scriptures in establishing "traditions."

Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come... Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle (**2 Thessalonians 2:1-2, 15**).

According to the Professor's article, how precisely can anyone distinguish between "spirit or by word or by letter" to know what "traditions" were taught by the Apostles?

2. The Professor claimed that: "*The more accurate interpreter is the one who represents the thoughts of the speaker rather than his words,*" (ibid) but this shows ignorance of the Scriptures, themselves!

A) Have you not read Ephesians 3:1-6?

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles-- if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel. (**Ephesians 3:1-6**)

The very argument being made by the Holy Spirit through Paul depends entirely upon gaining understanding by reading the inspired words written in our New Testament! But if it is "impossible" to accurately translate these revelations given through the Apostles, then:

- (1) why did the Holy Spirit inspire it to mainly be written in Greek?
- (2) does the Holy Spirit need to keep translating His words into each person's ears?
- (3) if what was "revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets" in the First Century cannot be accurately translated, I ask, who, in our day, has ever "heard of the dispensation of the grace of God?"

B) What "thoughts" did Paul have that were more accurate than the words he wrote? Have you not read **1 Corinthians 2:12-13**?

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual." (**1 Corinthians 2:12-13**)

"The Spirit who is from God" "freely" gave that which "we" (the Apostles) had "received" so they could "speak." But their expressions were not in "words" of their own choosing, but "which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual" words. If the Holy Spirit selected the very wording of the things Apostles received from Him, was He trusting in man's ability to translate these into the languages of men from then on?

3. The Professor's article concluded with:

Fourth, a literal translation assumes the original text is always perfectly intelligible. But this is not the case...Consequently, most English translations are more literal than the Hebrew text itself! (loc. cit.)

The birth of Jesus fulfilled **Isaiah 7:14** as quoted by Matthew:

So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,' which is translated, 'God with us' (**Matthew 1:22-23**).

The following questions should help clarify the Professor's position:

- (1) Was the original prophecy "perfectly intelligible?"
- (2) Was the original prophecy quoted accurately?
- (3) Was Jesus "God with us?"
- (4) Is this English translation (NKJV) "more literal than the Hebrew text itself?"

Since "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (**Romans 10:17**), and if it is impossible to correctly translate that Word into one's own language, how may faith be certain?

Have I not written to you excellent things Of counsels and knowledge,
That I may make you know the certainty of the words of truth, That you

may answer words of truth To those who send to you?
(**Proverbs 22:20-21**)

This is the same certainty with which the Gospel has been recorded (**Luke 1:1-4**). It is to preserve that certainty that this is written, as Jesus said: "You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God" (**Matthew 22:29**).

The Professor and the religious publication have erred by advocating a position toward the Word of God that means, "Scripture was not accurately given, preserved, nor translated, and, consequently, cannot be properly interpreted." Please re-read Peter's declaration that:

And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (**2 Peter 1:19-21**).

-----John T. Polk II