



5) Chapters 5 & 6

Nothing much has been ‘lost in translation’ by most of the English versions of these two chapters – but as always there is a wealth of small detail that reading the narrative in the original Greek brings to the surface. So this month’s session is a little different, as we look more briefly at several of the verses.

5.24 “Anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has **eternal** life.”

Like most of our verses today, this is accurately translated – but it misleads many people because of the unhelpful translation of the King James version, which here and elsewhere usually translates *aiōnion* as ‘everlasting’. Often, as here, that’s not too ‘wrong’ – though there are occasions, for example in talking of punishment, when it probably is. But it rather misses the point: that the life God offers is the life of the ‘new age’ – the new ‘æon’ as in the Greek word *aiōnios*. It’s the quality rather than the quantity of life that’s being stressed.

5.27 “The Father ... has given him authority to execute judgement, **because** he is the **Son of Man**.”

Now, what is this “Son of Man”? It’s a phrase that Jesus often uses to describe himself .. but what’s it mean? Whole books have been written about it, but two explanations predominate. [We’ll discuss this – including its use of the article and capitalization, its gender-inclusiveness, its general reference and its allusion to Daniel 7. 13-14.] Something lost in translation in this particular verse is that, uniquely in the Gospels, the article (‘the’) isn’t there in the Greek – it reads “a Son of Man”. Does this perhaps make a difference?

The little word “because” hides a puzzle in the Greek. When the gospels were first written, not only was there no punctuation, but neither were there any spaces between the words. Most of the time that’s no problem to a practised eye – but occasionally it’s confusing. So in this verse we don’t know whether John meant *hoti* (‘because’) or *ho ti* (“on what”) – which confuses further the possible meanings of “Son of Man” here.

5.42 “I know that you do not have the **love of God** in you.”

[We’ll discuss possessive and objective genitives – does it mean “your love for God” or “God’s love for you”?]

6.6 “He said this to **test** him, for he himself knew what he was going to do.”

[We’ll discuss *peirazō* and the Lord’s Prayer; and the role of editorial insertions, noting also for example ‘the Lord’ in verse 23.]

6.10 “Jesus said, ‘Make the **people** sit down.’”

Can you guess how the King James version translates this? (The Greek is *anthrōpous*, not *andras*.) What difference does this make here and elsewhere to (i) the meaning of the passage and (ii) how listeners hear it?

6.11 “Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had **given thanks**, he distributed them ..”

[We’ll discuss *eucharistō*, comparing it to the Synoptics’ *eulogeō*. *Klasma* (verse 12) is used by the Didache of the Communion bread]

6.15 “When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he **withdrew** again to the mountain by himself.”

This gives us an opportunity to discuss textual criticism. Most texts read *anechōrēsen* (‘went up’), but some read *pheugei* (‘fled’). [We’ll discuss external evidence – the ‘genealogy’ of the manuscripts, their date and character, their geographical distribution, weighing not counting them – and internal evidence – transcriptional and intrinsic probabilities.]

6.20 “He said to them, ‘**It is I**; do not be afraid.’”

Can you remember our discussion in the first session about *egō eimi*?

6.33 “The bread of God is **that which** comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.’

[We’ll discuss genders and their occasional theological significance.]

6.54 “Those who **eat** my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life ...”

An interesting little one to finish with. The verb *trōgein* was originally used of animals, not people, feeding ... and even in New Testament times retained a rather coarse feel to it – to ‘gnaw’ or ‘munch’! Why might John have chosen this word, rather than the more refined *esthiein*?

Next time

We’re looking at chapters seven and eight. Bring your questions and comments to the meeting!