



6) Chapters 7 & 8

Introduction

After the summer break let's take a moment to review some of the things we've discovered in the first half of this year. In our first five sessions we've looked at half a dozen or so words and phrases where the original Greek has some significant depths that are easily lost in translation, as well as many more smaller details.

A couple of small points

i) Do you remember our discussion in the first session and several times since, of the range of meanings of *pisteuō* – from simply believing what someone says right through to life-changing faith and commitment? And how the Greek of John's gospel signals that range of meaning by the prepositions (or lack of them) that follow the verb?

A good example of the weaker end of the spectrum of belief/faith comes in today's chapters:

“Then Jesus said to the Jews who had **believed in** him, ‘If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples .. but now you are trying to kill me.’ [8.31,40]

The English “believed in” is the same as the word used of the disciples (at the Wedding of Cana and in many other places) .. but what a difference a preposition makes in the Greek! Here there is none .. just a simple dative case!

ii) Because Greek doesn't use pronouns unless it has to (‘I love’ is *phileō*, not *egō phileō*), when it does use them we need to look for the meaning that's easily lost in translation:

“They said to him, ‘**We** are not illegitimate children; we have one father, God himself.’” [8.41]

This is part of a complicated and rather acrimonious, discussion between Jesus and his hearers about spiritual pedigree. By slipping in the grammatically-unnecessary pronoun ‘we’, the Jews are making an implicit dig at Jesus ... whose parentage (portrayed by Luke for example as a divinely-arranged virgin birth) was obviously known to be suspect. And the phrase they use is not literally ‘illegitimate’ but *ek porneias* – “as a result of sexual immorality”.

A crucial four-letter word

We've come across this before in this course, and here in chapter eight we find the clearest example of the use of *egō eimi* as the divine name ... by a complicated process representing the Hebrew ‘tetragramaton’ (four-letter word) YHWH.

It begins with two succinct examples:

“... you will die in your sins unless you believe that **I am he**.” [8.24]

“ ‘When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realize that **I am he** ...’ [8.28]

Both these phrases “I am he” translate the Greek *egō eimi* – I AM.

But it's at the end of the chapter that Jesus makes the point most unambiguously:

Jesus said to them, ‘Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham **was, I am**.’ So they picked up stones to throw at him .. [8.58,59]

They weren't intending to stone him for bad grammar, but for blasphemy. Not only does ‘I am’ (*egō eimi*) allude to the divine name (YHWH), but the word ‘was’ and the word ‘am’ are from entirely different verbs in Greek – *genesthai* and *einai*. The former, *genesthai* (applied to Abraham), is the usual word for humans' being born and dying – we get our English word ‘generation’ from it. The latter, *einai* (applied by Jesus to himself), speaks of eternal existence.

Exactly the same contrast is made in the first chapter of the Gospel – “the Word was, but through him all things came into being”. And the thought echoes Psalm 120 – “Before the mountains came into being ... from age to age you are.” No wonder the people thought that Jesus was claiming to be divine – but the huge difference between the two verbs has been entirely lost in translation.

Next time

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