



**A Practical Theology of  
Bible Translating**

SAMPLE

PAGES

SAMPLE

PAGES

# **A Practical Theology of Bible Translating**

**By Dr. Steve Combs**

**ISBN: 978-1-7339247-9-5**

Published in the USA by  
The Old Paths Publications  
[www.theoldpathspublications.com](http://www.theoldpathspublications.com)

Copyright © 2019 by Steve Combs

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission from the copyright owner, Steve Combs, in writing, except for fair use.

**ISBN: 978-1-7339247-9-5**

All Bible quotations are from the Word of God  
the Authorized Version (the King James Bible),  
Occasionally other versions are used for  
specific purposes and are named.

Published in the United States of America  
By The Old Paths Publications  
<http://theoldpathspublications.com/>

# A Practical Theology of Bible Translating

## Contents

	Major Definitions	7
	Important Abbreviations	11
	Preface by Dr. H.D. Williams	13
	Forward by Dr. Steve Zeinner	15
	Introduction: The Purpose of This Book	17
1	The Division of Languages:	19
	Babel and the Great Need	
2	Inspiration, Preservation	33
3	The First Translator	51
4	The Great Commission	56
5	The Scriptural Definition of Bible	76
6	The Scriptural Method of Bible	84
7	The Scriptural Method Applied	102
8	Translating Bible	114
9	The Qualifications of a Translator	130
10	The Septuagint	135
11	The Traditional Text	167
12	The Received Greek Text, the KJB, and the UBS	200
13	A Short History of Bible	219
14	The Future: Bible	238
15	Unto the Uttermost Part of the Earth	247
<b>Appendices</b>	Introduction to the Appendices and Bibliography	259
Appendix 1	A Bible	260
Appendix 2	Problems of the Greek Text 1 Jn. 5:7; Jn. 1:18; 3:16; Mk. 16:9-20; Rom. 8:1; 1 Tim. 3:16; Jn. 7:53-8:11	264
Appendix 3	A Historical Summary of Unbelief	305
Appendix 4	A Few Passages in the KJB that are Disputed from Greek Mt. 1:1 and 1:17; 21:13; 27:35; Acts	333

## Table of Contents

	19:37; Heb. 10:23; Jude 8; Rev. 21:9	
Appendix 5	Translation Challenge-God or Lord? Acts 19:20	343
Appendix 6	Translation Challenge Judgment, Condemnation, and Polysemy John 5:24	354
Appendix 7	Translation Challenge-Diligent Study 2 Tim. 2:15	357
Appendix 8	Translation Challenge-Faith or Faithful? Rom. 3:3	361
	About the Author	365
	Index	366
	End Notes	372

# Major Definitions

**Allegory or Allegorical Interpretation:** Interpreting scripture as being figurative or symbolical in meaning.

**Alexandrinus:** A 5<sup>th</sup> century manuscript of the New and Old Testaments.

**Alexandrian Text:** A set of Greek manuscripts that associated with Alexandria, Egypt. Vaticanus and Sinaiticus are its most famous manuscripts. The Alexandrian text-type is contained in a very few manuscripts, about 5% of the ancient evidence, but it is held as the most important and accurate text-type by modern scholars.

**Bible:** The Bible is a book that contains the 66 books of Scripture as we have them in the Protestant Canon from Genesis to Revelation. The term Bible comes from the Greek word Βιβλος (Biblos).

**Codex:** An ancient manuscript in book form.

**Critical Apparatus:** The primary source material behind an edition of the Greek New Testament.

**Critical Text:** See **UBS Text**

**Dynamic Equivalence:** A translation method that seeks to produce a translation that affects the modern audience in the same way the original affected its audience. It is a phrase-for-phrase or meaning-for-meaning translation as opposed to a word-for-word translation.

**Exemplar:** In textual criticism, a text used to produce another text.

**Essentially Literal Translation:** A translation method that seeks to translate the exact words of the source text into the target language in such a way that it is correct according to the grammar and syntax of the target language.

**Family:** a smaller division of a nation that is made up of related peoples, but much larger than our “nuclear family.”

**Formal Equivalence:** A translation method that has the same goals as the Essentially Literal method. It seeks to translate all the words, grammar, and idioms of the source language into the closest equivalent words, grammar, and idioms of the target language in such a way that the resulting translation is consistent with the usage,

## Major Definitions

grammar, and syntax of the target language (Also called **Word-for-Word Translating**).

**Functional Equivalent:** A translation method that is closely related to Dynamic Equivalence. This method seeks to translate words of the source language into words in the target language that serve the same “function” as those in the source. For example, “the lamb of God” could become “the seal of God” in a translation to the Eskimos or “the pig of God” in a translation in Papua New Guinea.

**Idioms:** 1) The peculiar grammatical and syntactical structure of a language, 2) an expression which cannot be understood by the normal meanings of the words of the expression, for example, “keep tabs on,” “the cat is out of the bag,” “kick the bucket,” “hang one’s head,” etc.

**Idiomatic translation:** a translation that does not seek to transfer the words of the source language into the target language. Rather, it focuses on transferring meaning only.

**Inerrant:** Containing no mistakes

**Interpretation:** 1) to determine or explain the meaning of, 2) in a Biblical sense, to translate, to transfer words and meaning from language to another.

**Literal Translation:** a translation that reproduces the words and grammar of the source language exactly in the target language.

**Manuscript:** An ancient hand-written document.

**Method of Translating:** The philosophy and procedure used by a translator to translate the Bible.

**Minuscule Manuscript:** A manuscript written with lower case or cursive letters. Also referred to as **cursives**.

**Mother Tongue:** The first language learned after birth.

**Nation (Also called People Group):** Biblically, a group of people characterized and united based on common ancestry, common language, common laws or customs, and (usually) common area in which they live.

**Palimpsest:** Parchment that has been written on, erased, and reused.

## Forward

**Received Text** (Also called **Textus Receptus**): A printed Greek text of the New Testament in several editions. The first edition was dated in 1516 and the last one in 1881.

**Revision:** A text that has been *changed* for good or bad.

**Scripture:** The written words of God found in the 66 books of the Bible.

**Septuagint:** An New and Old Testament in Greek that is generally assumed by scholars to have first been translated starting about 250 BC in Alexandria, Egypt. Its authenticity is disputed by many. The current form of the "Septuagint" is the Codex B, Vaticanus, manuscript dated about 350 AD and found in the Vatican Library.

**Sinaiticus:** A manuscript of the New Testament, supposedly found by Ludwig Von Tischendorf in the monastery of St. Catherine at the traditional site of Mt. Sinai in 1844. It has been dated in the 4<sup>th</sup> century.

**Source Language:** The Language that is being translated another language.

**Source Text:** The actual written text in the source language used for translation purposes.

**Target Language:** The language into which the translation is being made.

**Target Text:** The writing in the target language produced by the translation procedure.

**Textual Criticism:** The attempt and methods used to restore a text to its original condition.

**Textus Receptus:** See **Received Text**.

**Tongues:** Languages

**Transcribe:** Make a written copy

**Translating:** (Most basic definition) Transferring words from one language into another.

**UBS Text:** A printed Greek text published in the 20<sup>th</sup> century by the United bible Societies.

## Major Definitions

**Uncial Manuscript:** a manuscript written in all capital letters.

**Vaticanus:** An ancient manuscript of the Old and New Testaments dated in the 4<sup>th</sup> century and kept in the Vatican Library.

**Verbal Plenary Inspiration:** The miracle of God whereby He gave the words of Scripture to the world through men. “Verbal” means every word of Scripture is inspired. “Plenary” mean all Scripture, the whole, is inspired.

**Verbal Plenary Preservation:** God has preserved each of the words He inspired (verbal), and He preserved all of the words He inspired (plenary).

**Word-for-Word Translating:** See Formal Equivalence

**Word of God:** the Bible, the Scriptures.

**Words of God:** Each individual word inspired by God.

# Important Abbreviations

A = Codex Alexandrinus  
AD = Anno Dei, Year of Our Lord  
B = Codex Vaticanus  
BC = Before Christ  
BHS = Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia  
Ca. = circa  
CEV = Contemporary English Version  
DE = Dynamic Equivalent  
e.g. = For example  
EL = Essentially Literal  
ESV = English Standard Version  
FE = Formal Equivalent  
FunE = Function Equivalent  
i.e. = that is  
ibid = in the same place  
ISBE = International Standard Bible Encyclopedia  
KJB = King James Bible  
LXX = Septuagint  
MS = Manuscript  
MSS = Manuscripts  
MT = Masoretic Text  
NIV = New International Version  
NT = New Testament  
OT = Old Testament  
p, pp = page, pages  
SIL = Summer Institute of Linguistics  
TT = Traditional Text  
TR or RT = Textus Receptus/ Received Text  
WH = Westcott and Hort

SAMPLE

PAGES

## Preface

The study of translating is one of the most important hermeneutical topics in modern times, and probably one of the most neglected. Why? Because there are so many issues that have clouded the exegesis of Scripture and the critical concerns in this area of Theology. Dr. Steve Combs has opened the door to these matters, so that they may be comprehended in a precise, unambiguous way. A careful reading of this book will assist translators around the world to come to a knowledge of what God expects from those handling His Words “to make them known,” just as:

*“[H]e established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children.”*  
(Psalm 78:5) [my emphasis, HDW]

Man cannot and should not assume that he can establish the “rules’ for how to “*make them known,*” because God has “*hast magnified [His] word above all [His] name*” (Psalm 138:2f), and the following verse indicates how high He has exalted His name.

*“To the chief Musician upon Gittith, A Psalm of David.  
O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! who hast set thy glory above the heavens”*  
(Psalm 8:1)

Therefore, as you would expect, God has not left us without instruction as to how His Words are to be translated, a topic which Dr. Combs has thoroughly explored.

In my opinion, the call by God to translate the Words of God is one of the highest, most important callings a believer can have. And even though the task is daunting, God gives the Holy Spirit who guides, instructs, encourages, and indwells. The Lord knows the burden of successfully translating His Words is enormous, but he

## A Practical Theology of Bible Translating

says, "...I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." He will be right there through the entire process.

Yes, there is a process. There are procedures and methods that will keep the Spirit-filled translator on a path that will magnify His Words. The theological principles are not just necessary, they are imperative. The definition of translate is:

"from Latin *translatus* "carried over," serving as past participle of *transfere* "to bring over, carry over" (see transfer), from *trans*" across, beyond" (see trans-+*latus* "borne, carried" (see oblate(n.))" ([www.etymonline.com](http://www.etymonline.com))

This is what Dr. Combs' book is about, "carrying over" God's Words into another language, according to God's principles and not man's thoughts or ideas. No one should begin translating until he has read this book. I have personally been interested in this area of theology for many years and have written articles such as, "The Interpretation of Parables," "Producing an Accurate and Faithful Translation," "Principles of Translating," and two books, "*The Septuagint*," and "*Word For Word Translating of the Received Text*" concerning some of the issues Dr. Combs has thoroughly laid out in this treatise. May God bless his work, and may it have wide distribution. I believe it will be a classic in the years to come.

**H. D. Williams, M.D., Ph.D., President**

**The Old Paths Publications, Inc.**

Cleveland, GA

[www.theoldpathspublications.com](http://www.theoldpathspublications.com)

[TOP@theoldpathspublications.com](mailto:TOP@theoldpathspublications.com)

February 2019

# Forward

**By Dr. Steve Zeinner**

**W**hen opportunity lends itself to seeing someone read or hear God's Words for the first time in their mother tongue it is a moment in time that will never be forgotten. It has been God's will and purpose that all nations and peoples of the earth know of His wonderful love and gift. From the early church to present-day, great effort and sacrifice have been made to translate His Words into the languages of the world. Dr. Combs passion to see all nations know of his savior was evident as we met many years past.

It is with great joy that I share with you the impact Dr. Steve Combs has made over the years and around the world. His qualifications to author this book are evident by his extensive research and teaching of translation. He has spent many years consulting with translators, studying and gleaning from the scriptures. My first encounter with Dr. Combs was on the subject of Bible translation and the need for a ministry to address the complex issues surrounding it. I have traveled the world with Dr. Combs watching him teach and consult with Bible translators. He has modeled the importance of using Biblical principles to produce a faithful, accurate and true translation of God's Word. His tireless efforts and dedication in writing about this vital topic have been years in the making. You will be inspired, challenged and enlightened by this must-read book.

**Dr. Stephen Zeinner**

**Director**

**Bearing Precious Seed Global/Global Bible Translators**

SAMPLE

PAGES

# Introduction

## The Purpose of This Book

---

*The Lord gave the word: great was the company of those that published it. (Psalms 68:11)*

*Declare ye among the nations, and publish, and set up a standard; publish, and conceal not: (Jeremiah 50:2)*

*And the gospel must first be published among all nations. (Mark 3:10)*

*And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. (John 8:32)*

---

**T**his book is written to teach the *Biblical doctrine of Bible translating* and to make some practical applications of it. It is not about translating the Bible into another English version. This book explains what the Bible says about translating it into the more than 7,000 languages of the world. The Bible has a lot to say about this subject

There are plenty of theories about how to translate the Bible. There are books that explain these theories from a linguistics point of view, but not usually from a strictly theological viewpoint. In fact, they can't all approach the theories theologically, because the theories contradict. They cannot all be true. Therefore, they can't all be Biblical, because "*Thy word is truth*" (Jn. 17:17). Since the Bible is truth, there can be only one truth. In this book, I have tried to make the Biblical truth clear.

This is also a **practical** theology. A practical theology is an **applied** theology; applied to *real world* circumstances rather than left to *concepts* only. I have tried to focus on "what the Bible" says, but I have not left it there. I have tried to apply the theology to practice and to history. In the Bible, we find the basic principles of Bible translating. God expects us to take what we learn from His Word and apply it to our lives, circumstances, practice, culture, and methods. As the Scripture says, "*He that handleth a matter wisely shall find good: and whoso trusteth in the LORD, happy is he*" (Prov. 16:20).

## A Practical Theology of Bible Translating

Where will we find greater wisdom than the Word of God? We must learn His truth and believe (trust) His truth and follow it.

One application I have made is to the method and practice of Bible translating. Another application is the most extensive. A translator of the Bible must be certain that the text he is translating is the true text of Scripture. To a great many translators active today, the matter of choosing the *right* source text is a non-issue and they are not concerned. They should be. We will answer to God if we have translated a text He did not choose.

There are three major Greek texts that are used for Bible translation. They are all three different. The first and oldest is the Received Text (TR). The second is the United Bible Societies Greek Text and it differs from the TR over 8,000 times. The third is the "Majority Text," which differs from the TR around 1,500 times. There are two different Hebrew Texts of the Old Testament and a Greek text called the Septuagint.

A translator *must* make a decision between the three. How is he to do that? The decision cannot be made without extensive information and insightful spiritual discernment. I have tried to give the potential translator and concerned Christians the information they need. This is an immense issue. Christians want to know all that God has said, so, a translator must translate the true words of God.

I have tried to stay as close to the teaching of the Scriptures as I can. May God bless you and teach you as you read. May God burden your heart about the need of Bible translating around the world. *Every people should have every Word of God in their own language.*

# Chapter One

## The Division of Languages: Babel and the Great Need

---

---

*6 And the LORD said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.*

*7 Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.*

*(Gen. 11:1-9)*

*26 And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation;*

*27 That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: (Acts 17:24)*

---

---

In Genesis 11, we find the historical story of the tower of Babel. The significance of this story goes way beyond the rebellion of man and God's way of dealing with that rebellion. Of course, God had commanded them to replenish the earth (Gen. 9:1). To do this they had to scatter, but they chose another way. They remained together and determined to build a name for themselves (Gen. 11:1-4). They became rebels against God. The symbol of their rebellion was the tower (Gen. 11:4). The strength of their unity was the fact that they all had only one language (Gen. 10:1).

In order to force them to separate according to their nations, God confused their language (Gen. 11:7-8). They couldn't understand one another anymore so they had no choice but to gather into smaller groups according to each group's common language. There is no doubt that the languages were divided based on ethnic relationships. Each related family migrated together in the same direction to the same place. For example, the Hebrew word for Egypt is *mitsrayim* or *Mizraim*, as it is in the KJB. According to Scripture and tradition, Mizraim, one of the sons of Ham (Gen. 10:6), led his family

## A Practical Theology of Bible Translating

group into the land of the Nile and founded Egypt. The same was true of the others. The confusion of languages split the united descendants of Noah into major family groups led by the grandsons and great grandsons of Noah, listed in Genesis 10. Each family had a common language and each family founded a nation.

*These are the families of the sons of Noah, after their generations, in their nations: and by these were the nations divided in the earth after the flood. (Gen. 10:32)*

Each group went its own way with its own language. From there languages continued to multiply and diversify naturally, so that now the world has over 7000 languages that can be traced to a few great language families.

*It is important to understand that the diversity of languages is God's will and part of God's plan.* This is clear from Acts 17:26. God Himself *"hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their (the nations) habitation."* The dispersal of the nations and the confusion of languages were supernatural and unchangeable.

The language or Mother tongue of a people is a special language. It is a part of their soul. Each of the nations of Genesis 10 had their own language and it was very special and unique to them. It was part of their ethnic identity. It was in their hearts. The Jews, which nation God formed later in history, are an example of this. The Jews had been dispersed from the holy land for centuries after the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the temple in 70 AD. They spoke the languages of the countries to which they traveled. Even in Paul and Peter's time, the Jews living outside Israel spoke those languages (Acts 2:5-13). Yet, when the Jews returned to Palestine and re-established the nation of Israel in 1948, they returned to their historic heart language, Hebrew. This desire for the mother tongue, the heart language, is characteristic of every Biblical nation. For example, Ghana, West Africa, has adopted English as its official language. However, in central Ghana, in the Brong-Ahafo Region, the Brong people still speak Twi, their mother tongue and heart language. After the languages in Genesis 10 were divided, the nations were also divided and God led them to their habitation, their land. <sup>1</sup>

## The Division of Languages

### The Date of Babel

The events of Genesis 11, took place soon after the great flood of Genesis 6-9. For reasons of simplicity, we will use Archbishop Ussher's chronology, which seems to be approximately accurate. The flood ended, according to Ussher, in 2348 BC. So, when did the division of languages take place? An indication of that is mentioned in Genesis 10: 25, "*And unto Eber were born two sons: the name of one was Peleg; for in his days was the earth divided; and his brother's name was Joktan.*" Peleg was the great-great grandson of Shem. He was born 101 years after the flood in 2247 BC (Gen. 11:10-19). He lived 239 years and something of world-wide significance happened during his lifetime.

What does it mean that "in his days was the earth divided"? There are two possibilities. First, some scientists have suggested that in his time the continents split apart in what is called *continental separation*. The other possibility is that the division of languages took place in his lifetime. Larry Pierceon commented on this in an article posted on the *Back to Genesis* web site.

Some suggest the continents of the earth were divided at this time. However, this seems unlikely, as such a process would have had to occur within a very confined time period. The resultant geological violence would be overwhelmingly catastrophic—like another Noahic Flood, all over again. Any continental separation thus likely occurred *during* the Flood.

The traditional interpretation, which seems more reasonable, relates this verse to the division of people/nations at the Tower of Babel event in Genesis 11. <sup>2</sup>

The dates of Peleg's life fit nicely into other dates indicated by secular historians about the migration of ancient people. Larry Pierceon explains further.

#### **Babylon begins**

The year was 331 BC. After Alexander the Great had defeated Darius at Gaugmela near Arbela, he journeyed to Babylon. Here he received 1903 years

## A Practical Theology of Bible Translating

of astronomical observations from the Chaldeans, which they claimed dated back to the founding of Babylon. If this was so, then that would place the founding of Babylon in 2234 BC, or about thirteen years after the birth of Peleg. This was recorded in the sixth book of DeCaelo (“About the heavens”) by Simplicius, a Latin writer in the 6th century AD. Porphyry (an anti-Christian Greek philosopher, c.234–305 AD) also deduced the same number.

### **Egypt emerges**

The Byzantine chronicler Constantinus Manasses (d.1187) wrote that the Egyptian state lasted 1663 years. If correct, then counting backward from the time that Cambyses, king of Persia, conquered Egypt in 526 BC, gives us the year of 2188 BC for the founding of Egypt, about 60 years after the birth of Peleg. About this time Mizraim, the son of Ham, led his colony into Egypt. Hence the Hebrew word for Egypt is Mizraim (or sometimes “the land of Ham” e.g. Psalm 105:23,27).

### **Greece gets going**

According to the 4<sup>th</sup> Century bishop and historian Eusebius of Caesarea, Egialeus, king of the Greek city of Sicyon, west of Corinthin Peloponnesus, began his reign in 2089 BC, 1313 years before the first Olympiad in 776BC. If Eusebius is correct, then this king started to reign about 160 years after the birth of Peleg.

Note that Babylon, Egypt, and Greece each spoke a different language. These ancient historians have unwittingly confirmed the extreme accuracy of the biblical genealogies as found in the Hebrew scriptures. The Tower of Babel would have had to have occurred before the founding of these other kingdoms. Babel (Babylon), being in the same region as the Tower, would have been one of the earliest kingdoms, of course.<sup>3</sup>

## The Development of the Nations

The confusion of languages was a necessary part of God's plan as expressed in Acts 17:26-27.

*He "hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us."*

God's plan included separating the nations. Why? According to Acts 17 there is something about the separation and association with one's own kind that encourages seeking after God. This association includes a group feeling of identity that produces a common way of life and thinking. In today's world, there are many people groups just like this, over 11,000. If God can get a foot-hold in a group like this, the faith of some will encourage faith in others. The specific group will have much of its identity found within its distinct language and through this language they will find a natural wall of protection from the ideas of foreign groups which have a different identity, culture, and language. The gospel itself is, of course, cross-cultural and requires that someone from one culture go to another culture to make it known. However, when this alien, the gospel preacher, arrives in the new group it is necessary that he identify himself with that group and that he become accepted by that group. One of the best ways to do this is, among other things, learning that group's language and communicating with them in that language.

The Jewish first century historian, Flavius Josephus, recorded the results of his research into the early migrations of the nations of Genesis 10. <sup>4</sup> As stated before, the original nations of Genesis 10 separated and dispersed after the confusion of languages. The descendants of Japheth turned north and northwest toward Europe. Early on, they settled from Greece through Asia Minor to the area between and north of the Black and Caspian Seas. Later, they spread all over Europe. Ham's children went to Palestine and Africa. Some

## A Practical Theology of Bible Translating

of Shem's and Ham's progeny stayed in the Tigris-Euphrates valley, while other Shemites traveled west and east toward Arabia and Asia.

These were ethnic groups in that they descended from a single ancestor. The families of Shem, Ham, and Japheth became nations. For example, Asshur, son of Shem, founded Nineveh and Assyria. Gomer and Magog and Torgarmah settled Asia Minor and later migrated north from there. Javan founded Greece and the Philistines came from Casluhim. Nimrod was king over the Akkadians and sought to build the tower of Babel. Canaan was the father of the Canaanites and settled in Palestine. Put is Libya. Cush is Ethiopia. Aram is Syria (Judges 10:6-Hebrew).

These events actually correlate to the sequence of events proposed by historians, although the dates vary somewhat. Secular history records that the first great civilization arose in Sumer, which is the southern Mesopotamian area, in the valley of the Tigris and Euphrates River. This is the area the Bible calls *Shinar*. After the Ark landed on the mountains of Ararat, the descendants of Noah migrated east and south until they were east of Shinar. *"And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there"* (Gen. 11:2). This was the beginning of the civilization of Sumer.

History also records that the King of the city of Akkad (Biblical spelling *accad*) conquered Sumer and founded the Akkadian Empire. His name, according to archaeologists was Sargon I. The Bible says of Nimrod, son of Cush, grandson of Noah *"the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar."* If secular historians are right, Nimrod lived in Accad and conquered the rest of Shinar (Sumer). It is highly likely that Nimrod is one and the same as Sargon I. "Sargon" is said to mean "the King is established" in Akkadian.<sup>5</sup> So, it may be a title rather than a name.

## The Great Need of the Nations

What is a Biblical nation? Charles Turner defines a nation in his book, *Biblical Bible Translating*, by using four criteria: lineage, language, laws, and land. His definition is summarized below:

1. **Lineage:** In Gen. 12:2 God promised to make Abraham a great nation. The nation of Israel was descended

## The Division of Languages

from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Therefore, they had a common ancestry. In Gen. 12:7, God said that He would give the land of Canaan to Abraham's seed. The word "seed" means descendants or lineage. Abraham's son was Isaac and Isaac's son was Jacob and Jacob's sons were the twelve patriarchs who begat the twelve tribes of the nation of Israel. *The nation was primarily a people with a common ancestry.*

**2. Language:** Gen 14:13 calls Abraham a Hebrew. He was called a Hebrew for three reasons. One is that he lived near Hebron at that time; second, he descended from Eber (Gen. 11); third, he spoke a distinct language that became the language of the Hebrew people and was called by that name. A Biblical nation is a people who speak a language that is distinct from others and is generally not understood by people outside the common lineage.

**3. Laws:** A Biblical nation must be bound together in a community governed and organized by laws. God called Israel to receive their law in Ex. 24:12.

**4. Land:** A Biblical nation normally also has a geographic boundary in which they live. In Gen. 12:7, Israel was promised the land of Canaan as an inheritance. Each of the tribes was given distinct geographical portions of that land. <sup>6</sup>

Brother Turner says, "Any group of people who recognize themselves as having a common lineage, who speak a distinct language, who have common laws (written or oral), and who live in a prescribed area of land, are a nation in the sight of God." <sup>7</sup> The Great Commission commands us to take the Word of God to every single one of these nations. That is a much bigger job than simply planting a church within every geopolitical state or country, because most countries have more than one Biblical nation.

The Bible also provides us with other names of people groups. In Gen. 12: 3 the scriptures said to Abraham, "*and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.*" We are told in Rev. 5:9, "*And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.*" Here we have references to tongues, families, kindreds,

## A Practical Theology of Bible Translating

and people. What are these? What is the Biblical definition of these people group terms?

The term, *tongue*, refers to languages (see 1 Cor. 13:1-3). The verse says “every” tongue or language. So, in heaven there will be representatives of every spoken language on earth.

The first use of the term, *families*, is in Gen. 10. The Scriptures tell us, “By these were the isles of the Gentiles divided in their lands; every one after his tongue, after their families, in their nations.” If we look in verses 2-4, we find that the sons of Japheth produced seven nations, all of whom are named. In verses 3 and 4, the descendants of two of these sons are named. The descendants of the sons of Japheth were the families that made up the seven nations. In other words, a family is a smaller division of a nation that is made up of related peoples, but much larger than our “nuclear family.” In Gen 36:40-43, we have a description of the nation of Edom. Esau (or Edom) founded the nation and his sons, who are listed, produced the families. Study Numbers 26.

The nation of Israel (all descendants of Jacob or Israel) were divided by tribes (Reuben, Levy, Judah, etc., descendants of Israel), which were finally divided into families (descendants of the sons of Israel). A family can be traced back to a common ancestor and is a group that feels a distinct identity while also being identified as a part of the whole nation (see 2 Chron. 35:5). While different nations usually speak different languages, families within a nation may also speak a dialect of the nation’s language, or they may speak the common language of the nation.

The word *kindred* is similar to the term *family* and refers to related people and can refer to people related across families. “*People*” is a general term for a large group of distinct ethnically related individuals with a distinct identity similar to *nations*.

This is how God looks at the world. Geopolitical countries are secondary. Noah Webster agreed to this definition in his 1828 dictionary.

Nation, as its etymology imports, originally denoted a family or race of men descended from a common progenitor, like tribe, but by emigration, conquest and intermixture of men of different families, this distinction is in most countries lost. <sup>8</sup>

## The Division of Languages

Noah Webster died in 1843. That was about fifty years after the start of the great missionary movement that began with William Carey going to India in the 1790's. Perhaps Webster missed what Carey and others were learning in foreign countries, but he was wrong about the distinction being lost. The great missionary movement has clearly revealed that the "family or race distinctions" have absolutely NOT been lost. They are very much alive in Africa and Asia and South America. The distinctions are very much alive in Europe and North America with the immigration of ethnic groups that identify with one another more than with the political country they occupy.

Jesus said, "*Look on the fields.*" (John 4:24) The original nations of Genesis 10 have divided many times and many families have become nations themselves with distinct languages and families. Modern mission leaders have proposed various ways of looking at the nations in order to clarify the targets for evangelism.

### Finishing the Task

In June 2000, *Mission Frontiers* magazine included an article entitled "Finishing the Task." After it explained how the Gospel has made amazing progress over the previous 20 centuries, it tells us that two billion people (at that time, now it is more) still live outside the influence of the Gospel.

The fact is that the Gospel often expands within a community but does not normally "jump" across boundaries between peoples, especially boundaries that are created by hate or prejudice. People can influence their "near neighbors" whose language and culture they understand, but where there is a prejudice boundary, religious faith, which is almost always bound up with many cultural features of the first group, simply does not easily "jump" to the next group, unless that group desires to adopt the other's culture in preference to its own....If all the members of every church in the world were to bring every one of their friends and relatives within the same cultural

## A Practical Theology of Bible Translating

group to obedient faith in Christ, and they in turn were able to bring all their friends and relatives to Christ and so on, no matter how much time you allow, there would still be billions who would never come to faith. They would be held at a distance from the Gospel by boundaries of prejudice and culture. The church does not readily grow within peoples where relevant churches do not exist. One-third of the individuals in the world live within people groups with no church ...

An ethnolinguistic people is an ethnic group distinguished by its self-identity with traditions of common descent, history, customs, and language ...

People blocs and ethnolinguistic lists give us a simple way to identify peoples and make the larger body of Christ aware of their existence and the need to reach them. The ethnolinguistic approach stimulates prayer and initial planning for specific peoples leading to serious strategic efforts to evangelize them ...<sup>9</sup>

The term *unreached* needs some definition. The meaning of this term describes the essential missionary task. That is, it tells us what must be done in order for indigenous Christians to finish the evangelization of their own nation. For this purpose we can define *unreached* by rather defining what a *reached* people is. A *reached people* is a people among whom “a viable indigenous church planting movement that carries the potential to renew whole extended families and transform whole societies” has been established. “It is viable in that it can grow on its own, indigenous meaning that it is not seen as foreign, and a church planting movement that continues to evangelize the rest of the people group.”<sup>10</sup>

Many of these people groups do not have a Bible translation in their own language. They cannot read or study the Bible to grow strong spiritually as you can. They cannot quote the Bible to their neighbors in order to win them to Christ, as you can. We take the Word of God for granted, sometimes leaving the Bible lay on a table until it collects dust, but many of these people have no Bible at all. Some have only small portions of the Bible.

## The Great Need of the World

One of the premier organizations compiling people group statistics is the Global Research section of the International Mission Board ([www.peoplegroups.org](http://www.peoplegroups.org)). They have amassed information on over 11,000 ethnolinguistic groups. These nations are listed by continent and by country. Thus, over seven billion people are catalogued as summarized in Fig. 1 as of November 2018.

Continent	Number Countries	People Groups	Population
Africa	58	3037	1,223,824,511
Asia	50	4630	4,539,462,285
Oceania	29	1321	32,665,620
Europe	52	886	765,542,950
Americas	51	1881	1,017,420,570
Total	240	11755	7,578,915,936

Fig. 1 <sup>11</sup>

The information in Fig. 1 varies slightly year by year as research continues, but it represents a monumental effort on the part of this mission support organization. World surveys are still going on; there may be many more peoples out there than we know. The Toulambi people of Papua New Guinea, for example, were first contacted in 1993. <sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, the table gives a very clear picture of the vast job that is worldwide missions.

The following table (Fig. 2) summarizes those people groups listed in the Global Research information who are considered to be *unreached*. These groups fall into one of four categories, 0) no evangelical Christians or churches-no major resources, 1) less than 2% evangelical-no church planting in the last two years-some resources available, 2) less than 2% evangelical-initial church planting in last two years, or 3) less than 2% evangelical-widespread church planting in last two years.

## A Practical Theology of Bible Translating

Continents	Nations/People Grps	Population
Africa	2081	809,504,886
Asia	3347	2,891,924,390
Oceania	137	10,249,000
Europe	762	694,393,225
Americas	758	64,453,260
Totals	7085	4,470,524,761

Fig. 2<sup>13</sup>

These peoples are the “last frontier” of missions. More than one half of the global population lives in unreached nations and families! This doesn't include the unsaved, who live in reached nations. This sad state of affairs is shown to be even worse by the fact that many of these groups do not have any missionary church planting teams of any denomination. Global Research lists people groups among whom there is no active church planting in the last two years, as far as is known. That is categories 0 and 1. The following table (Fig. 3) summarizes those peoples.

Continent	Nations/People Grps	Population
Africa	1252	216,968,886
Asia	2505	682,769,790
Oceania	128	8,281,200
Europe	461	34,231,525
Americas	596	11,407,160
Totals	4942	953,658,561

Fig. 3<sup>14</sup>

This is absolutely incredible! No church planting team for almost five thousand unreached nations and families! Almost 1 billion human beings with little or no gospel preaching! I am reminded of the rebuke given by the Apostle Paul to the Corinthian believers: *“Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame.”* (1 Cor. 15:34). We have been at this task for 2000 years. The job the Lord gave us in Mt. 28:19, *“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations”* is far from fulfilled. All of the peoples represented by Fig. 3 are pioneer mission

## What Does the Bible Teach About *Bible Translating for all nations?*

The Study of translating is one of the most important...in modern times and probably one of the most neglected. This book has opened the door to these matters so that they may be comprehended in a precise, unambiguous way. Man cannot and should not assume that he can establish the "rules" for how to make God's Words known.

*-HD Williams*

I have traveled the world with Dr. Combs watching him teach and consult with Bible translators. He has modeled the importance of using Biblical principles to produce a faithful, accurate and true translation of God's Word. His tireless efforts and dedication in writing about this vital topic have been years in the making. You will be inspired, challenged and enlightened by this must-read book.

*-Steve Zeinner*

***This Book is not just for Translators!***

It will answer questions that many have asked about the Word of God. It will clear up misconceptions the evangelical world has long been under



Steve Combs is Assistant Director and a Global Translation Advisor for Bearing Precious Seed Global Bible Translators.

