

## SABBATH THOUGHT 2026-02-07—WHATSOEVER THINGS ARE TRUE

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

“Finally, brethren, **whatever things are true**, whatever things *are* noble, whatever things *are* just, whatever things *are* pure, whatever things *are* lovely, whatever things *are* of good report, if *there is* any virtue and if *there is* anything praiseworthy—**meditate** on these things.” (Phil. 4:8). This verse is a favorite of my wife. She writes about the beauty in God’s word, which is a blessing because I tend to meditate on the details—like Truth.

So, what is Truth in the Bible? The Bible says that the words of God are Truth<sup>1</sup>; not just His words but God Himself is Truth. He is the “God of Truth”<sup>2</sup> in the same way that He is agape love<sup>3</sup>. The Bible records God’s plan for humanity, a brief history of mankind’s obediences and rebellions, and His prophecies. Today, however, there are no original manuscripts. Everything is a manual copy of copies of copies. No matter how careful the scribes were, errors were introduced. Their works were also translated into other languages, which injects personal bias, misinterpretations, and even more errors. These things can lower one’s confidence in the written word of God. But embedded in all those writings is something unique that ensures its continued existence and accuracy.

Before talking about them, let me take a step back and describe some of the things that can mislead even the most respected theologians. Very few who study the Bible are fluent in ancient Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek. Even linguists struggle with the ancient languages. One example is word meanings. In Hebrew, the word *panteriyin* means a harp or lyre but today it means *piano*. The Koine Greek word *doxa* originally was *judgment* but later came to mean *glory*. Some words do not even have English equivalents. The Hebrew word *chesed* is usually translated *mercy* or *lovingkindness*; however, it is much more than that—it conveys a “covenant loyalty and devotion.” There is also readability. Even modern Jews struggle with the grammar of ancient Hebrew in the same way English readers struggle to read the 1611 King James Bible. No one uses *trou* (think) or *wist* (knew) and, back then, *meat* referred to food in general.

Another difficulty is traditions of men. Ironically, traditions are often more entrenched than truth itself. For example, Martin Luther rebelled against the Catholic doctrines of indulgences, papal authority, veneration of saints, salvation by works, etc.—and rightly so. But then he rejected the books of Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation, among others, because he was not “rightly dividing the word of Truth”<sup>4</sup> and influenced by Catholic traditions. He also thought the author of Hebrews expunged the Law of God so he rejected the solid biblical command for the seventh-day Sabbath. The Catholics even challenged the Protestants on this. They

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. 6:7; 2 Tim. 2:15; 1 Thess. 2:13.

<sup>2</sup> Ps. 31:5.

<sup>3</sup> 1 John 4:8, 16.

<sup>4</sup> 2 Tim. 2:15.

wrote to Protestants, admitting they instituted Sunday worship over the scriptural command, and then accused them of failing to uphold the Lutheran principle of *sola scriptura* (by scripture alone)<sup>5</sup> by not switching from Sunday to the seventh-day Sabbath. Traditions are powerful.

Jesus condemned the scribes and Pharisees for their traditions<sup>6</sup> but exist today. And not just in the Protestant world; Sabbath-keeping church organizations stand on traditions as well. For example, some claim their organization is the only true 'church' even if they grudgingly admit there might be others. But *church* was a deliberate mistranslation in the KJV by Tyndale as a result of evil influence by the Church of England. The underlying Greek word is *ekklesia*, which means "called out ones." It has absolutely nothing to do with a building or organization and the Bible emphatically states that there is only ONE body of Believers<sup>7</sup>.

Every English Bible was translated by groups of scholars. Most Believers have a favorite but some are convinced their chosen Bible is the most accurate. I have even heard some say this about the original 1611 KJV Bible by William Tyndale. Interestingly, he did not translate the entire Bible; it was, in fact, completed by Myles Coverdale. In reality, there is no single author or group of authors that have ever produced an accurate and unerring translation. There are mistakes in all of them. That can raise more doubt—what about the *unknown* errors.

Every translation is a linguistic challenge. All translations must deal with the difficulties of morphology, syntax, and semantics; that is, the mechanics of accurately representing the intended meaning while retaining accuracy. Take this simple example—the prepositions *to* and *for* have different meanings and the presence or absence of the definite article *the* can dramatically change emphasis. Many times these were added for clarity because they are absent in the original language but, if they are subject to interpretation, does the translator get it right? Did "these things happen **for** them as examples" or "these things happen **to** them as examples?"<sup>8</sup> Is it "**the** hour is coming" or "**an** hour is coming?"<sup>9</sup> Hebrew and Greek interlinears and dictionaries can be great aids but most words have multiple meanings so, which one is correct? The Greek word *exousia* generally means *authority* but it can also mean *power*. Revelation 14:8 states, "another angel ... had *exousia* over fire." It is often translated authority but how does an angel have *authority* over fire? Which one is used sometimes comes down to a personal preference of the translator who chooses one definition as the universal word regardless of context. One Bible that was introduced not long ago has this bias.

In my own experience, professors taught from textbooks that contained a consensus of knowledge from subject matter experts around the world. No one bought several textbooks by different authors so they could ascertain the 'truth'.

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<sup>5</sup> Catholic Mirror series, *Rome's Challenge*, 1893.

<sup>6</sup> Matt. 15:3-9.

<sup>7</sup> Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 10:17; 12:12-25; Eph. 2:16; 4:4; Col. 3:15.

<sup>8</sup> 1 Cor. 10:11.

<sup>9</sup> John 5:25.

But Bibles are different. Sources differ in antiquity, geographical locations, numbers of texts, etc. However, in general, the most common sources used for the Bibles consist of two or three main texts.

The OT in most Bibles comes from the Masoretic Text or Septuagint. The Masoretic Text was compiled by Jewish scholars or scribes living in Mesopotamia and the Levant (eastern Mediterranean including Israel) during the seventh through tenth centuries AD. The Septuagint, on the other hand, used the oldest manuscripts and was written by Greek-speaking Jews in Alexandria, Egypt in the third and second centuries BC. Even though the Masoretic Text is newer by about 1,000 years, to its credit it was based upon thousands of manuscripts and used a very meticulous and structured system to detect and avoid mistakes. Some books differ in length and some chronologies and lifespans are clearly diverse. In the Septuagint, the timespan from Adam is about 1,000 years older than the Masoretic Text. But the differences are, perhaps, not as significant as one might think. The content is the same and the recently discovered Dead Sea Scrolls give about equal favor to both.

The NT in most Bibles comes from the Byzantine (Syrian) Text or Alexandrian Text. The Byzantine Text was compiled by scribes living in the Byzantine (Eastern Roman) Empire during the fourth through ninth centuries AD. It was based upon 90% of extant manuscripts and later became the basis of the Majority Text and the popular Textus Receptus used in the KJV. The Alexandrian Text, in contrast, used the oldest manuscripts and was written in Alexandria, Egypt during the second to fourth centuries AD. It predates the Byzantine Text by at least two hundred years.

There are, of course, other sources including the Samaritan Text (Torah), Aramaic, Syriac, etc. Do older manuscripts have more 'truth' than newer ones? Does consistency across thousands of writings mean better accuracy than a few older ones? They all have pros and cons; so, how did YOU choose your Bible?

In reality, describing and categorizing the papyri, uncials, and minuscules as well as translations in Latin, Syriac, and Coptic is complex beyond words. It is simplistic and ignorant to suggest that there is only one with the Truth. This bias is preached in many Sabbath-keeping churches by men who do not have the slightest idea about the complexities behind every Bible. I have heard churches proclaim the only true Bibles are from the Masoretic and Textus Receptus. This has been repeated so often it became an established tradition and belief. Ironically, they highlight their ignorance when they sometimes mistakenly claim they prefer the Majority Text instead of the Textus Receptus because they confuse the two. While both were the result of the Masoretic Text, the Textus Receptus used the more recent manuscripts whereas the Majority Text was a compilation of the vast majority that were available. But their main criticism is against those written in Egypt—the Septuagint and Alexandrian Text. However, Egypt is not that far from Israel where, only one or two hundred years after the Septuagint was completed, Joseph, Mary, and Jesus took refuge<sup>10</sup>. Jesus and the apostles almost certainly knew about the Septuagint. Egypt was also home to Jacob and his twelve sons and God prophesies there will be

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<sup>10</sup> Matt. 2:13.

a time when “blessed is Egypt My people” (Isa. 19:25). Moreover, Greek was the common language at the time so the Septuagint was likely an excellent translation of the Hebrew. Does any of this change your view of the traditions of your church?

Other much maligned Bibles by churches are those that were paraphrases, such as the Living Bible or New International Version. While they have limitations and, at times, are influenced by traditions and personal bias, they can be useful for their readability over the rigid word-for-word translations.

For those who might jump to conclusions, I am not suggesting the Septuagint and Alexandrian Text are better nor am I recommending paraphrased Bibles. What I am trying to convey is that the road to Truth can be complex and confusing at times and should not automatically ignore sources that have been rejected by a man or a church organization.

I also think a broad use of various translations is not only useful but wise. It has been 2,000 years since Jesus Christ walked this earth and every manuscript is subject to the imperfections of time and men. So, how did God preserve His Truth? One failsafe was with a multitude of manuscripts created over the centuries and millennia by scribes in various countries located throughout the world. Even though the Romans destroyed Alexandria, the Eastern Roman Empire became a haven for scribes in Constantinople a thousand years later. In the mean time, manuscripts would spread to other nations before the cities were destroyed. It would be nearly impossible to locate and destroy every manuscript that had spread everywhere over the centuries. Hundreds if not thousands of scribes were involved over many centuries in Syria, Mesopotamia, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, and Egypt. Scribes in various countries also had intimate knowledge of local languages and dialects that would be instrumental in accurate translations into other languages. Only God could have directed this—it was brilliant.

Another failsafe was the content itself. Even though the biblical authors had vastly different experiences and personalities, their messages were perfectly aligned. This is “here a little, there a little”<sup>11</sup> encoding. God never changes<sup>12</sup> and His message was unchanged among the many authors over thousands of years. Think of Job and Elijah. Neither contradicts the other even though one was poetic and philosophical while the other did not mince words. Psalms was written by seven named authors but none contradicts the others. The snippets of Truth here and there are all in agreement even though the authors were thousands of years apart. This encoding ensures that Truth from God could never be lost in copying or translation.

The brilliance of God behind creating and preserving His word cannot be overstated. It is also evident in the message itself. The more important topics have a simplicity that is easy to understand, regardless of author or translator. For example, salvation is obedience to the Law of God, which produces agape love that is the motive behind Good Works. History and genealogy, however, are more complex

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<sup>11</sup> Isa. 28:13, 13.

<sup>12</sup> Ps. 102:26; Mal. 3:6; Heb. 13:8; Jas. 1:17.

and harder to understand. The most challenging is prophecy but all three are much less important than salvation. Keeping the most important messages simple ensures it is retained regardless of the language or translation.

Prophecy recorded by the prophets was words and visions from God. Tying the two together is difficult because neither one alone clearly reveals details. Prophecy also seems to get more muddled the farther it projects into the future. Perhaps this was intended by God. Daniel was able to figure out how long they would be in captivity<sup>13</sup> after ancient Judah was taken captive to Babylon by reading scrolls written about 250 years before and the first century Jews knew within a year when the Messiah would be born<sup>14</sup> but no one has yet figured out the biblical end-of-the-age events prophesied 2,000 years ago. Since John wrote Revelation, most probably expected the end to occur within their lifetime because prophecies contain vague references of the times in which we live. Adding to the uncertainty are modern inventions that never existed in biblical times—airplane and car, for example.

But the difficulties in understanding prophecies are also a source of many offenses among brethren who disagree about interpretations. That is why it is so important to remember that God has promised two things: 1) “the Lord GOD does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7), and, 2) “He who has begun a good work in you shall perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6).

The purpose for all this discussion is to emphasize that God has preserved His Truth in His written word in brilliant and stunning fashion. That is so encouraging. It leaves absolute confidence in every work and promise of God, whether they are for salvation, healing, gifts, enduring trials, resisting temptations or in the fulfillment of prophecies. God’s Word is absolute, true, and sure—there is nothing to fear even if we are a little uncertain at times. I also hope this awakens those who rely upon opinions and traditions of men to realize that “the LORD gives wisdom; from His mouth *come* knowledge and understanding.”<sup>15</sup> God’s Word is Truth<sup>16</sup>, not the opinions and traditions of men.

No one, and I mean NO one, understands perfectly all truth. Whether someone learned about God on their own or was taught by others, everyone lacks a perfect understanding of “the way,” just as Aquila and Priscilla<sup>17</sup>. But that is another amazing aspect of the word of God—there is no end to the search for perfection and there is no other book in the world that has the power to change lives like the Bible. People are fallible and too many have let pride prevent them from growing and learning. Do not be reticent to use other translations in spite of what some might say—they are excellent aids to understanding. Do not be afraid to hear alternative views—no one truly knows why they believe without knowing the other side. It is

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<sup>13</sup> 2 Chr. 36:21; Dan. 9:2.

<sup>14</sup> Dan. 9:24-27.

<sup>15</sup> Prov. 2:6

<sup>16</sup> John 17:17.

<sup>17</sup> Acts 18:26.

encouraging when it resonates with our beliefs but, even when they contradict, they can reinforce our understandings or are gifts of corrections:

2 TIMOTHY 3:13-17 But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. 14 But you [*Timothy*] must continue in **the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them**, 15 and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture *is* given **by inspiration of God, and is profitable for [instruction], for [conviction], for correction, for instruction in righteousness**, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Paul assured Timothy he understood Scripture, "**knowing from whom you have learned them**." But he also warned that "... **evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived**." Over the years, I have questioned things and my understanding of some things has changed. Paul said, know "from **whom** you have learned" and be wary of traditions and reasonings of men. Studying God's Word is not at all like any other education. It is difficult and time consuming but there is a reward to those who "diligently seek Him."<sup>18</sup> The Bible has a depth even in the simpler things pertaining to salvation that require a lifetime of study and allowing the Holy Spirit of God to work in us. Let God inspire you; do not let men limit you. Truth, always—and only—comes from God. Remember, also, to ask God to fulfill the prayer of Jesus Christ for us:

JOHN 17:17 "**Sanctify them [set them apart] by Your [God's] truth. Your word is truth.**

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

Steven Greene

<https://sabbathreflections.org>  
[sabbathreflections@gmail.com](mailto:sabbathreflections@gmail.com)

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<sup>18</sup> Heb. 11:6.