

A CLOSER LOOK AT SOME TRICKY SCRIPTURES

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We do need Bible translations! But they are not perfect — sometimes they don't understand aspects of God's Plan. Sometimes they're trapped in **traditional understanding** from their denominational background.

So ... **sometimes a poor translation can cause us to misunderstand a scriptural passage**. Then again ... sometimes ... a translation may be okay — and we still misunderstand the passage anyway! 😊

Today I thought we'd look at a few popular or well-known scriptures that we often misunderstood — or misapplied — and see if we can understand them better. It may be trickier than they look.

Regrettably some of these are abused by preachers ... who use them to deceive or to mislead.

One of the worst offenders.

Proverbs 23:7

7 **For as he thinks in his heart, so is he.** (*"He" being a specific person*)

I have heard this misapplied hundreds of times! "Be careful what you think about all day long ... the Bible tells us '**As a man thinketh in his heart ...**'"

A very popular self-help book published in 1903: "**As a man thinketh**" (James Allen)— about the power of thought.

Ignoring the Bible for the moment. There is truth in the assertion that what we focus on all day long will have some effect on our thinking — even our lives.

However ... **that's not what Proverbs 23 is referring to at all.**
The verse is being **ripped out of context** — and usually misquoted — to seek Biblical support for a **psychological** principle.

Not handling the Word of God truthfully.

- (i) **Not “As a man thinketh in his heart” — but as “he” thinketh ... a specific person ... not just a general comment.**

The key to all scripture is context.

Many Proverbs are single verses. But some spread over several verses.

- (ii) **CONTEXT:**

Proverbs 23:1-3

1 When you sit down to eat with a ruler,

Consider carefully what is before you; *(he might be out to take advantage of you — be cautious)*

2 And put a knife to your throat

If you are a man given to appetite.

**3 Do not desire his delicacies,
For they are deceptive food.**

This is a warning to us. When you dine with someone important or influential — be vigilant. He may come across as generous and friendly — but it's what's in his heart that counts. And he may be out to take advantage of you.

Proverbs 23:6-8

**6 Do not eat the bread of a miser,
Nor desire his delicacies;**

7 For as he thinks in his heart, so is he.

“Eat and drink!” he says to you,

But **his heart is not with you.** *(To your face he is nice — but he is stingy and doesn't like you at all)*

**8 The morsel you have eaten, you will vomit up,
And waste your pleasant words.**

This Proverb has nothing to do with what you and I think about all day long. It's a warning about flatterers ... deceivers ... people out to exploit us.

The way they appear may be a friendly façade.

Compare:

Psalms 55:19-21

19 God will hear, and afflict them,
Even He who abides from of old.
Because they do not change,
Therefore they do not fear God.

20 He has put forth his hands against those who were at peace with him;
He has broken his covenant.

21 **The words of his mouth were smoother than butter,**

But war was in his heart;

His words were softer than oil,

Yet they were drawn swords.

David is lamenting about the bad person whose words were smoother than butter — but were drawn swords. His words would mislead you. Be careful around people.

Isaiah 9:6-7

6 For unto us a Child is born,
Unto us a Son is given;
And the **government** will be upon His shoulder.
And His name will be called
Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (*Names of Jesus*)

7 Of the increase of His **government** and peace
There will be no end,
Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom,
To order it and establish it with judgment and justice
From that time forward, even forever.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.

If you've been through some churches — you know all about Government.

Government is the number 1 doctrine. If you don't submit to God's Government (ACTUALLY — THE CHURCH'S GOVERNMENT!!) — the Lake of Fire awaits!!

Nothing is more important than Government?

If it's so important ... there must be hundreds of Bible verses? Well — in the NKJV — in the whole Bible — the word "Government" only appears twice!!

And ... Government isn't even a good translation!

The passage is talking about Jesus the Person — His qualities and attributes. His right to rule. **Not some universe-wide Governmental hierarchy.**

The Hebrew for "Government" is Misrah: appears only here ... in the Bible. Alternative translations aren't "Government" — but — "dominion" ... "princely power".

Isaiah 9:6-7 (NET)

6 ... **He shoulders responsibility**...

7 ... **His dominion will be vast** ... *(No mention of an hierarchy)*

Isaiah 9:6-7 (YLT)

6 ... **the princely power is on his shoulder** ...

7 ... To **the increase of the princely power**, And of peace, there is no end ...

So ... if someone's trying to aggressively push the Government of God on you ... and maybe using these verses — BE ON GUARD. **(The word "Government" only appears twice in the NKJV and 4 times in the KJV — and it never means a government hierarchy!!)**

How about:

Hebrews 13:17

17 **Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive**, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.

We have probably all heard this. **“God’s Government in action”**.

(I remember once ... the congregation being told that if we didn’t attend a Church social after Sabbath we were rebelling against the Government of God).

The word for “obey” is the Greek word “Peitho” — mostly translated as “to be persuaded”.

“Those who rule” = the Greek word “Hegeomai” = those who lead you, show the way.

Hebrews 13:17 (NIV)

17 **Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority**,

Hebrews 13:17 (ISV)

17 **Continue to follow your leaders and to be submissive to them**,

So the instruction is to not be stubborn — obstinate. Be open to clear instruction based upon God’s truth — **be “persuadable”**. Good elders will go before you ... to show you the way ... be open to their guidance — as hopefully — they have your interests at heart.

There is nothing about “obey your rulers” — as if God’s Church is run by Spiritual Gestapo and we must obey every instruction — no matter how lunatic! This is probably how King James wanted it translated.

Proverbs 29:18

18 **Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint;**
But happy is he who keeps the law.

The KJV often quoted: **“Where there is no vision the people perish”**.

From this ... many talk about the importance of “vision”. “You need a vision of where you’ll be in 5 or 10 years time. **All successful people**

have a vision of where they want to be”. Or ... “This Church needs a vision of what it wants to achieve in the next 5 years — how big do we want to be on the internet ... how many members do we want ... how many countries ... we all need a very clear vision”.

The KJV translation is ambiguous ... it leads to all of this error.

Vision means prophetic vision — an utterance from God.

Many modern translations are similar to NKJV (“no revelation”) ... or ... no prophetic vision.

Proverbs 29:18 (RSV)

18 **Where there is no prophecy ...**

Note also that usually only half of the Proverb is quoted! The second half shows the context — God’s utterances to be heard and obeyed.

You can’t just quote half a verse! You always need to get the context.

What is the most popular Bible verse? John 3:16? The second most popular is:

Jeremiah 29:11

11 **For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.**

I come across this multiple times a week. It is considered to be very inspirational. It appears on posters ... coffee mugs ... tee-shirts.

Even though we may be in difficulties — God’s planning a great end for us?

Well — we can find many Bible verses that show that God will be with us — Psalm 23 tells us that the Lord is my Shepherd ... not to fear in the valley of the shadow of death.

But ... Jeremiah 29:11 is not such a verse! This is an example of text-jacking — robbing a scripture of its context!!

Jeremiah 29:1, 4-14

1 Now **these are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the remainder of the elders who were carried away captive—to the priests, the prophets, and all the people** whom Nebuchadnezzar had carried away captive from Jerusalem to Babylon. *(Here is the background)*

4 **Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all who were carried away captive, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem to Babylon: (they were there for the long haul — settle down)**

5 Build houses and dwell in them; plant gardens and eat their fruit.

6 Take wives and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, so that they may bear sons and daughters—that you may be increased there, and not diminished.

7 And seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the Lord for it; for in its peace you will have peace.

8 For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: **Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are in your midst deceive you, nor listen to your dreams which you cause to be dreamed.**

9 **For they prophesy falsely to you in My name; I have not sent them, says the Lord.**

10 For thus says the Lord: **After seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place.**

11 **For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.** *(KJV: An expected end)*

12 Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you.

13 And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.

14 I will be found by you, says the Lord, and **I will bring you back from your captivity; I will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you, says the Lord, and I will bring you to the place from which I cause you to be carried away captive.** *(After 70 years)*

The letter is to the NATION OF JUDAH in captivity ... verse 11 is not to “Christians” in USA ... Canada ... Australia ... Judah’s false prophets were teaching that they would be going back imminently — “No problemo”!

The prophetic utterance through Jeremiah (Proverbs 29:18) was “settle down ... live your lives — you’re not going anywhere for over 70 years (most of the audience would be long dead). **But ... ultimately God will bring the nation back and restore the temple”.**

Verse 11 was an encouragement.

So the vast majority of those who received the letter — with verse 11 — died as “captives” in a foreign land.

Not quite how verse 11 is used today in the church world.

Philippians 4:13

13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

I can do all things?

Many athletes (in America) have it stamped on their trainers — an “inspirational motto”. It’s on key chains and tee shirts.

But it is not a motto — “Say it 10 times a day and it will help you achieve your dreams or destiny”.

It’s part of a wider context. The Apostle Paul is not dispensing some sort of fortune cookie witty sayings.

Philippians 4:10-13

10 But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity.

11 Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content:

12 I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.

13 **I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.**

Paul was in prison. He's experienced highs and lows in his ministry ... good times and bad. But he's learned to be content — he can deal with anything life throws at him — because he knows that his Lord will give him the spiritual strength to endure and overcome.

In popular usage this verse is just trivialised.

Acts 20:35

35 **I have shown you in every way, by labouring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'** ”

Many churches and preachers apply this to the brethren. **“Give — until it hurts(!) — because you'll receive a greater blessing”.** **Nonsense!**
For money ... Greed?

Paul used this saying of Jesus against the ministry —they're the ones who are to give!

Acts 20:17-21

17 From Miletus **he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church.**

18 And when they had come to him, he said to them: “You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you,

19 serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews;

20 how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house,

21 testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul calls for the Elders to come and meet him — face to face.

Acts 20:28-30

28 **Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.**

29 **For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.** (*Some of you elders are going to use and abuse the brethren*)

30 **Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.**

He gives them a warning. Some will be savage wolves.

Acts 20:33-35

33 **I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel.**

34 **Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me.** (*PAUL WORKED. EARNED MONEY*)

35 I have shown you in every way, by labouring like this, that you (*elders*) must support the weak. **And remember the words of the Lord Jesus**, that He said, '**It is more blessed to give than to receive.**' "

Paul FUNDED HIS OWN WAY ... and his own team!

He is pointing to the elders — what they must do.

A couple of TAKE-AWAYS:

- Be careful of translations — especially if it doesn't make sense or fit in to what you understand God's plan to be.
- Always check context ... don't trust half a verse or even a whole verse. And watch out for text jacking!