

# JOHN WESLEY AND THE BIBLE

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## I. The Bible in Wesley's Devotions

In the rectory at Epworth, where he was born in 1703, John Wesley found that the Bible was the central book, revered beyond any other. As soon as he could speak he was taught the Lord's Prayer, which he used at rising and retiring. Before he could read he was encouraged to memorize brief passages of Scripture. When he reached the age of five his mother taught him his alphabet, and went on to tutor him in reading by means of the Book of Genesis.<sup>1</sup> (Adam and Eve were Mrs. Wesley's foreshadowing of Dick and Jane.) The Bible remained his textbook throughout his youth. Every morning he read a Psalm and a chapter in the Old Testament, every evening a Psalm and a chapter in the New Testament.<sup>2</sup> This pattern of daily Bible reading was one of the things which Wesley did not forsake when at ten years of age he left the parental restraints of Epworth to live at the Charterhouse School in London.<sup>3</sup>

The devotional study of the Bible became even more important at Oxford, and was greatly deepened from the time of his ordination as a deacon of the Church of England in 1725, at the age of twenty-two. He set aside an hour every morning for prayer, and maintained this to his life's end. This is confirmed by the entries in his private diary, which is available to us from 1725-41 (with some gaps), and again from 1782 until Feb. 23, 1791, four months after he had written up the last entry in his Journal, and only a week before his death.<sup>4</sup>

When Wesley entered the word 'prayed' in his diary we must not think that he simply let his mind wander while he tried to recollect the presence of God, nor that he was trying to whip up a religious emotion. He was following a definite method, which included Bible reading, meditation on the passage studied, and prayers both read and spontaneous. The Bible reading itself was usually that prescribed in the Table of Lessons printed with the Calendar in the Book of Common Prayer, as set out by Archbishop Thomas Cranmer in 1549. These twice daily lessons in

both Old and New Testaments entailed reading through most of the Old Testament and much of the Apocrypha once a year, mainly in the biblical order, and reading the New Testament three times a year, except for Revelation, which was omitted entirely.<sup>5</sup> This surely formed the basis of the family prayers at Epworth, as of the communal prayers at the Charterhouse and at Oxford. It seems certain that Wesley read these appointed lessons daily as a curate in Lincolnshire, as he did wherever possible during his ministry in Georgia, and continued to do after his return to England.<sup>6</sup>

Wesley constantly applied the words of the Scripture Lessons to himself and his own situation, as may be seen from a Journal entry on Wednesday, February 4, 1736, when he came within sight of America for the first time: "In the Evening Lesson were these words: 'A great door and effectual is opened.'" He added the comment, "O let no one shut it!"<sup>7</sup> It was perhaps this conviction of the providential relevance of Scripture, allied to the biblical practice of drawing lots when faced with an issue that could not be determined by unaided reason, that led Wesley to the practice known as bibliomancy. Before he interviewed his first Indians in Georgia he opened his Greek New Testament at random, coming upon the passage (1 Thess. 2:14-15) where Paul writes about his speaking to the Gentiles, that they might be saved.<sup>8</sup> Just before he set foot in Fort Frederica he "opened [his] Testament on these words: 'If God be for us, who can be against us?'"<sup>9</sup> Urged by Charles Delamotte to leave Georgia because of the slanders being spread by Sophy Williamson and her husband, Wesley dipped into his Bible, both Old and New Testaments on this occasion, and came upon the texts Prov. 22:10 and Matt. 18:28, which he interpreted as a caution and a prophecy implying that he ought to remain - - which therefore he did for the time being, though three months later he became convinced that he must indeed leave. In the early morning hours of May 24, 1738, before the heart-warming experience that evening, Wesley experienced a sense of spiritual anticipation, and twice opened his Greek New Testament at random, on 2 Peter 1:4, "There are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, even that ye should be partakers of the divine nature," and Mark 12:34, "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God."<sup>10</sup> Small wonder that Wesley continued this practice for some years at least, and that though it became less frequent, it never completely disappeared.<sup>11</sup>

One unusual development of bibliomancy in Wesley's later years was the use of Scripture cards. These were like small visiting

cards, on one side of which was written (or printed) a text of Scripture, and on the other an appropriate verse of a hymn. These cards were apparently shuffled and dealt like playing cards, the players being expected to read and comment upon God's word for them which had come by the chance dealing of a card.<sup>12</sup> Wesley was never content, however, with a casual butterfly sip at his Bible. When he was in his 70's a newspaper correspondent accused him of reading the Scriptures, like other books, too hurriedly. Wesley replied that he did indeed read some books on horseback or in his chaise, but added: "It is not in this manner that I treat the Scriptures: these I read and meditate upon day and night."<sup>13</sup>

## II Bible Study

Much of this may sound at worst extremely superstitious, and at best a very unscholarly approach to the Bible. Certainly Wesley was not an advanced critical scholar of the kind frequently found in our own day - - as occasionally in his. He did believe quite firmly that the Bible as a whole was the inspired Word of God.<sup>14</sup> He was not above the occasional use of proof texts to confirm a teaching or practice. Nevertheless he also warned people about the danger of building their faith upon individual texts.<sup>15</sup> He knew that the key to understanding a text was its context, and that the key to understanding the context was to know more about the period and purpose of the book in which the text occurred. He realized that some biblical books were of more practical importance than others, and that the New Testament must be read in the light of the Old. Like many Bible scholars today, he was convinced of the value of typology, examining the parallels between the two Testaments, as did Jesus himself.<sup>16</sup> He insisted that the Bible should be confirmed and illustrated by reason and by experience, as well as by the traditions of the Church. He also insisted that to understand the Bible fully you must read it in the original tongues, and that you must be alert to possible errors in the text caused by careless scribes.<sup>17</sup>

Even as a boy at the Charterhouse Wesley was proficient in Latin and Greek.<sup>18</sup> And before he entered Oxford as a boy of sixteen he had begun to learn Hebrew under the tuition of his elder brother Samuel.<sup>19</sup> These studies continued at Oxford, and from the time of his ordination in 1725, and especially after the birth of Oxford Methodism in 1729, he increasingly concentrated upon the Bible rather than upon the classics of Greece and Rome.

He used to "spend several hours a day in reading the Scripture in the original tongues".<sup>20</sup> He encouraged his colleagues at Oxford to learn Hebrew, and assisted his father by collating the text of Job for his magnum opus.<sup>21</sup> He came to know the language sufficiently well to quote Hebrew phrases from memory, and even to write them down from memory for his published works, though he was not so letter-perfect as to be free from error.<sup>22</sup> Certainly, however, just as at Oxford he had urged pupils and colleagues alike to learn Hebrew so as to understand the Scriptures in their original tongues,<sup>23</sup> so in later years he prescribed it for the upper classes of his Kingswood School, and even prepared and published for them A Short Hebrew Grammar.<sup>24</sup>

In Greek he was an acknowledged master. When he became a Fellow of Lincoln College on March 17, 1726, he had behind him at least ten years' training and study in classical Greek, and on November 7 that year his colleagues elected him Greek lecturer,<sup>25</sup> although his duties proved something of a sinecure until his return from pastoral service in his father's parish in 1729. At that time also he became a tutor, and the records which he kept of his activities show that he set at least some of his students to read, not only the Greek classics, but also the New Testament. In his official capacity he delivered lectures on the Greek Testament in Lincoln College, on the Gospels in 1730, continuing with Acts and Romans in 1731.<sup>26</sup>

This was coincident with the rise of Oxford Methodism, which began as a study circle rather than as a religious society.<sup>27</sup> The reading of the group concentrated upon the Bible, though without displacing the classics.<sup>28</sup> John Gambold, later a Moravian bishop, describes how Wesley "and his friends read the New Testament together in the evenings, and after every portion of it, having heard the conjectures the rest had to offer, Wesley made his observations on the phrase, design, and difficult places."<sup>29</sup> Gambold added that "one or two wrote these down from his mouth." (One of the notebooks kept during these Bible study sessions has survived, covering most of the Gospels, giving an analysis of each chapter and notes on the vocabulary, grammar, and exegesis of the Greek.)<sup>30</sup> Small wonder that among the many nicknames by which the group was known were "Bible bigots" and "Bible moths". Wesley himself later summarized it by saying, "They were one and all determined to be Bible Christians."<sup>31</sup> All this he had in mind when he wrote, "In 1729 I began not only to read but to study the Bible, as the only standard of truth, and the only model of pure religion."<sup>32</sup> Wesley continued these Greek studies with his Oxford companions in

Georgia, when the group set aside a whole morning hour for Bible study.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, throughout his ministry he maintained that a knowledge of Hebrew and of Greek was essential to a well-equipped minister.<sup>34</sup>

### III. Preaching the Bible

Although Wesley's Bible studies and Bible lectures were largely academic in their setting, there is no disguising their pastoral purpose. Let us read from the Oxford Methodist notebook his exegesis of the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:9-13:

O Father (infinitely good), who art in heaven (infinitely powerful), may thy being, goodness, and power be known and loved by all creatures. To this end may thy kingdom of grace be established; and lead us to thy kingdom of glory, by inuring us, whilst on earth, to do thy will gladly and perfectly, as the angels in heaven: (1), to do thy will, and nothing but thy will; (2) to do all things thou willest, only in the manner thou willest; (3), to do those things in this manner, only because thou willest. Give us this day (for the morrow we are not careful) our daily bread, bodily and spiritual; and forgive our offences against thee, as we forgive those who have offended us--in the same proportion as we forgive them; and suffer us not to be tempted above our power, or to fall when tempted.<sup>35</sup>

Worthy of closer research is the way in which his sermons frequently developed from the Lessons appointed in the Prayer Book. This was true in Georgia.<sup>36</sup> It was equally true in his closing years, as shown by many entries in his Journal, both on Sundays, for which the Prayer Book appointed separate lessons,<sup>37</sup> and on weekdays.<sup>38</sup> In Temple Church, Bristol, in 1788, he preached on the controversial subject of exorcism, not because George Lukins had recently been exorcised in that church's vestry, but because the question arose in the Second Lesson -- though undoubtedly he realized its topical significance.<sup>39</sup> Of course Wesley did occasionally preach on important contemporary subjects, and sometimes turned events of the moment to spiritual advantage, as when he preached "during a violent storm of rain on those words, 'As the rain cometh down from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth and maketh it bring forth and bud; . . . so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth.'"<sup>40</sup> And like most itinerant preachers he used some favourite texts and sermons over and over again, both for

their proven value and because their familiarity entailed less pressure upon him in times of fatigue. Nevertheless the regular public and private reading of Scripture remained a prolific source of sermon topics.

Wesley's call to the ministry both channelled his use of the Bible and underlined its importance. This can be seen in his Address to the Clergy (1756), in which he first set out the demands of this high calling, and then challenged both himself and others with those demands:

Have I such a knowledge of Scripture as becomes him who undertakes so to explain it to others that it may be "a light in all their paths"? Have I a full and clear view of the analogy of faith, which is the clue to guide me through the whole? Am I acquainted with the several parts of Scripture; with all parts of the Old Testament and the New? Upon the mention of any text do I know the context and the parallel places? Have I that point at least of a good divine, the being a good textuary? Do I know the grammatical construction of the four Gospels? Of the Acts? Of the Epistles? And am I a master of the spiritual sense (as well as the literal) of what I read? Do I understand the scope of each book, and how every part of it tends thereto? Have I skill to draw the natural inferences deducible from each text? Do I know the objections raised to them or from them by Jews, Deists, Papists, Arians, Socinians, and all other sectaries . . .? Am I ready to give a satisfactory answer to each of these objections? And have I learned to apply every part of the Sacred Writings as the various states of my hearers require?<sup>41</sup>

Almost uniformly his own sermons sprang from careful Bible study, and comprised mainly a specific text (or longer passage), with an argument carried forward by means of scriptural phrases and illustrated by scriptural examples.<sup>42</sup> Always, however, they were more than biblical exercises: they were designed to solve human problems, to enrich human living. He approached the Bible not simply as a scholar, asking, "What does the Bible say?" but as a preacher, asking, "What does the Bible say to my condition and that of my fellows?"

In 1746 Wesley began to gather together a summary of his teachings on sin and salvation, and later upon other subjects intimately related to the life of a Christian, in eight volumes of sermons, as well as other discourses published separately, some of which went through many editions. His whole approach is revealed in some sentences from the preface:

I design plain truth for plain people. Therefore, of set purpose, I abstain from . . . even the show of learning, unless in sometimes citing the original Scriptures . . . . I mean to speak, in the general, as if I had never read one author, ancient or modern - - always excepting the inspired . . . . I am a spirit come from God and returning to God . . . . I want to know one thing, the way to heaven . . . . God himself has condescended to teach the way: for this very end he came from heaven. He hath written it down in a Book. O give me that Book! At any price give me the Book of God! I have it. Here is knowledge enough for me. Let me be homo unius libri [a man of one book<sup>43</sup>]. Here then I am, far from the busy ways of men. I sit down alone: only God is here. In his presence I open, I read his Book; for this end, to find the way to heaven. Is there a doubt concerning the meaning of what I read? Does anything appear dark or intricate? I lift up my heart to the Father of lights: "Lord, is it not thy word, 'If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God?'"<sup>44</sup> . . . I then search after and consider parallel passages of Scripture, "comparing spiritual things with spiritual",<sup>45</sup> I meditate thereon, with all the attention and earnestness of which my mind is capable. If any doubt still remains, I consult those who are experienced in the things of God, and then the writings whereby, being dead, they yet speak. And what I thus learn, that I teach. I have accordingly set down in the following sermons what I find in the Bible concerning the way to heaven, with a view to distinguish this way of God from all those which are the inventions of men. I have endeavoured to describe the true, the scriptural, experimental religion, so as to omit nothing which is a real part thereof, and to add nothing thereto which is not.<sup>46</sup>

Wesley preached thousands of sermons to all kinds of people, converted and unconverted, in all parts of the British Isles. Always they began in the Bible, and ended in people's minds and hearts and consciences and wills. He summarized his approach to biblical exegesis very simply: "The general rule of interpreting Scripture is this: the literal sense of every text is to be taken, if it be not contrary to some other texts; but in that case the obscure text is to be interpreted by those which speak more plainly."<sup>47</sup> This principle he had set forth in a sermon as early as 1727,<sup>48</sup> and very rarely departed from it. There are a few instances, however, where he does seem to be slipping from these high standards of scrupulously exact exegesis. In his sermon, Catholic Spirit, he used a text whose obvious meaning had nothing to do with his subject - - in other words he spiritualized it.<sup>49</sup> His sermon, The Almost Christian, was based on Acts 26:28, but Greek scholarship makes it quite clear now that King Agrippa did not really

intend to say to Paul, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian", but "By a little persuading you would make me a Christian." Yet the traditional phrase of the 1611 version had so sunk into Wesley's mind that he seems not to have been able to shake it off, and for fifty years after publishing his sermon he continued to favour this same translation.<sup>50</sup> It seems at least possible that in this instance and others a critical blind spot was brought into operation because his gaze was so firmly fixed on the preaching potential of the traditional translation.<sup>51</sup> There is another possible explanation, however, for other instances, if not this.

Wesley's interpretation of the Bible, both in study and in pulpit, was governed by two major principles. One was the narrow mechanical one, seeking the literal meaning of a specific text, within its narrow context.<sup>52</sup> The other was a broader spiritual one, attempting to discover its meaning in the context of the Bible as a whole. This was brought into play when he interpreted difficult texts in the light of plain texts, or when he sought for the spiritual meaning behind the literal meaning. It was erected into a major principle termed "the analogy of faith" - which was how he translated Romans 12:6, "the proportion of faith". Wesley saw a general plan of salvation running through the whole Bible, a "grand scheme of doctrine . . . touching original sin, justification by faith, and present, inward salvation." His note on Romans continues: "There is a wonderful analogy between all these . . . Every article, therefore, concerning which there is any question, should be determined by this rule; every doubtful Scripture interpreted according to the grand truths which run through the whole."<sup>53</sup> Thus he maintained that it is impossible to prove the doctrine of predestination from the Bible, because this is in fact attempting to prove that God is not love, which is against the whole tenor of Scripture.<sup>54</sup>

#### IV. Teaching the Bible

Wesley's pastoral call involved not only preaching the Bible, but teaching it. He conducted thousands of Bible study sessions in Methodist society meetings, when instead of taking a scriptural text for analysis and application he would give a running commentary upon a Psalm or a parable or a chapter of Scripture. This kind of thing had been an important part of his ministry from the beginning, witness his testimony that even on week-



days in Georgia he "read prayers, and expounded the Second Lesson" at 5 a.m. and 7 p.m.<sup>55</sup> He even conducted Bible classes for children,<sup>56</sup> and prepared a collection of Scripture readings for them, with a few brief explanatory notes, entitled Lessons for Children.<sup>57</sup> In speech and in writing he constantly urged upon his followers the centrality of the Scriptures. The Bible should furnish the guide for every man's conscience, his aid in every difficulty, the test of his every speculation.<sup>58</sup> The Scriptures contained the revelation of God and his plan for man's salvation from sin.<sup>59</sup> The Bible, indeed, itself constituted a spiritual source from which God's free grace streamed to men.<sup>60</sup> The very rules of the Methodist societies, Wesley insisted, in spite of their specific emphasis upon the contemporary situation, sprang from the Bible.<sup>61</sup> It was the Scriptures that he indicated as the best model for writing and speaking good English.<sup>62</sup> In private letters, in tracts, in sermons preached and printed, in his monthly Arminian Magazine, without ceasing he set the same standard, "I allow no other rule, whether of faith or practice, than the Holy Scriptures;"<sup>63</sup> constantly he proclaimed the same message, that the Bible was "the power of God unto present and eternal salvation."<sup>64</sup>

The most lasting way in which he accomplished this teaching task, however, was by publishing his Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament. This first appeared in 1755, and he gave personal attention to revising each of the five further editions through which it passed during his remaining thirty-five years. Neither the New Testament translation nor the notes were completely original, but utilized the labours of many scholars and commentators, especially the Latin commentary of the German Lutheran scholar Johannes Albrecht Bengel, who had just died. Wesley turned also to his own Oxford notes upon the Greek text. On the whole the scholarship was sound, and the translation, though based mainly on the Authorized Version of 1611, anticipated by a century thousands of readings which are now almost universally accepted. One example is the use of "love" rather than "charity" in 1 Cor. 13, though Wesley pointed out that in fact he was re-introducing this from still older versions.<sup>65</sup>

Here was no elaborate display of scholarship, however, but a genuine attempt, to a large degree successful, to enable the ordinary reader to understand what he was reading. In his preface Wesley maintained, "I write chiefly for plain, unlettered men, who understand only their mother tongue, and yet reverence and love the Word of God, and have a desire to save their souls." For

their sakes he "studiously avoided, not only all curious and critical inquiries, and all use of the learned languages, but all such methods of reasoning and modes of expression as people in common life are unacquainted with." For their sakes also he followed Bengel in dividing the text into paragraphs according to their subject matter, though without forsaking the traditional numbering of chapters and verses.

The New Testament Notes were received so well by the Methodist people that Wesley was importuned to publish a similar work on the Old Testament, which ten years later he did. This has much less of John Wesley in it, however, being derived almost solely from the notes of Matthew Henry and Matthew Poole. Nor did the three large volumes pass through more than one edition - - indeed some sets remained unsold at his death.<sup>66</sup> Nevertheless it displays features of real value, not least being Wesley's preface. This closes with some advice on Bible reading which reflects Wesley's own practice. Read the Bible regularly, morning and evening, a chapter at a time, preferably one from each Testament, but at least one from the New. Read with the fixed idea of seeking to discover the will of God for you. To that end use prayer both to begin and to end, and during the reading make frequent pauses for self-examination, in order to ponder the relevance of the passage for your own situation.<sup>67</sup>

These lifelong habits of Bible study had saturated Wesley's thought and speech and literary style with Scripture. During his long life he had probably read or heard read most of the New Testament well over two hundred times, and meditated or preached upon thousands of passages thousands of times. Always he approached the Bible in the spirit of a collect from the Book of Common Prayer, and often with the very words upon his lips:

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning, grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of thy Holy Word we may embrace, and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ.<sup>68</sup>

What a challenge such an example constitutes for us today!

## NOTES

1. John Wesley, Journal, ed. N. Curnock, 8 vols., London, Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, n.d., 3. 37.
2. Frank Baker, John Wesley and the Church of England, London, Epworth Press, 1970, p. 9.
3. Wesley, Journal, 1.466.
4. The last diary entry begins: "4.45 prayed, on business; read; 6.30 prayed, tea, conversed; 7 chaise. . . ." He was visiting a widower in Leatherhead, Surrey, whose wife had been buried four days earlier, and the diary also shows that at noon Wesley preached in Mr. Belson's house to a group of friends and neighbours on Isa. 55:6, "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found." (Journal 8.128, 134)
5. I.e. in the 1549 lectionary, which was revised in 1871, and so now is different.
6. Wesley, Journal, 1.145-6, 149, 184, 209, 379, 383; 2.89, Cf. 299, where the Bristol Newgate lectionary seems different for May 18, though Wesley followed it. Cf. below for Wesley's preaching from the Lessons.
7. Wesley, Journal, 1.145-6.
8. *Ibid.*, 1.161
9. *Ibid.*, 1:192
10. *Ibid.*, 161, 192-3, 472.
11. *Ibid.*, 2.89, 97, 103, 106, 157-8, 175, 201, 290-1, 300, 324, 328, 336, 447 [=1741]. Wesley records how in Ireland in 1787 he preached in a Presbyterian Church, saying: "The Bible in the pulpit lying open, I chose for the subject of my discourse the words which first met my eye, namely, 'When they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both.'" (Journal, 7.287)
12. Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society, 1.15-25; 4.6-8, 40-3; 29.136-8. (A similar development in more recent years is the "Promise Box" of texts on rolled-up slips of paper, to be drawn by chance as the message for some special occasion.)
13. John Wesley, Letters, ed. J. Telford, 8 vols., London, Epworth Press, 1931, 6.303.
14. John Wesley, Works, ed. T. Jackson, 14 vols, London, Wesleyan-Methodist Book Room, n.d., 11.484, etc.
15. Cf. *ibid.*, 5.193-4, and for a warning against individual texts alone, Wesley, Letters, 5.328.
16. Wesley frequently refers directly and indirectly to typology in his Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament. For a summary of examples see John Deschner, Wesley's Christology, Dallas, Southern Methodist University Press, 1960, p. 108.
17. In his preface to the Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament Wesley maintained that he was ready to "make here and there a small alteration" because "the Greek copies" behind "the common English translation" were not "always the most correct." (See Works, 14:236) But cf. Journal, 6.117 for his belief in an inerrant Bible behind the faulty text.

18. An interesting story is told about him and Dr. Henry Sacheverell, a notorious preacher politician, who was not a very good scholar, but whose letter of recommendation Wesley's father sought in order to help John secure entry to Oxford. The tall Dr. Sacheverell glared down at the tiny boy, saying, "You are too young to go to the University; you cannot know Greek and Latin yet. Go back to school." Later John Wesley recounted his reactions: 'I looked upon him as David looked at Goliath, and despised him. I thought, 'If I do not know Greek and Latin better than you, I ought to go back to school indeed.' " John Telford, The Life of John Wesley, London, Culley, 1910, p.30, as from Alexander Knox, but no specific source indicated.

19. Samuel Wesley wrote to his father in 1719, "Jack is with me, and a brave boy, learning Hebrew as fast as he can." (John Whitehead, The Life of the Rev. John Wesley, London, Couchman, 2 vols., 1793, 1796, I.381)

20. Wesley, Works, 7.366. In this he took to heart the words of his father's Advice to a Young Clergyman, which he himself later published (1735, p.23): "The main subject of a clergyman's studies ought undoubtedly to be the Holy Bible."

21. Richard P. Heitzenrater, "John Wesley and the Oxford Methodists, 1725-35" (Ph. D. dissertation, Duke University, 1972), p. 342n, and Wesley's manuscript diary, Feb. 16-20, 1734/5, in Methodist Archives, London.

22. Twice in his Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion, Part I (1745), Wesley reproduced the sound of the Hebrew word correctly, but not its spelling, writing ruach, "spirit", with an aleph in the middle instead of a waw. In quoting Ps. 18: 1, "I will love thee, O Lord", he added the phrase, "from my inmost bowels", erechameka, but used a qoph instead of a heth. (See Oxford Edition of Wesley's Works, Vol. 11, ed. Gerald C. Cragg, 1975, pp. 108, 125.) His Hebrew remained good enough for him to remember the sounds and meaning of words and phrases, and to trust himself sufficiently to use them in an academic context without going to the trouble of checking the originals, but it was not masterly. In his Explanatory Notes upon the Old Testament, in fact, he admits to being conscious of his "very imperfect acquaintance with the Hebrew tongue." (Works, 14.251)

23. Heitzenrater, op. cit., p. 342.

24. Richard Green, The Works of John and Charles Wesley, 2nd ed., London, Methodist Publishing House, 1906, No. 150 (1751).

25. V.H.H. Green, The Young Mr. Wesley, London, Arnold, 1961, p. 114.

26. Ibid., p. 132, and Heitzenrater, op. cit., pp. 97-8.

27. Heitzenrater, op. cit., pp. 337-8.

28. Ibid., pp. 98, 338-41, 344.

29. Whitehead, Wesley, 1.499; cf. Wesley, Works, 8.348, and Heitzenrater, op. cit., p. 97.

30. "Lectiones Grammaticae, Analyticae, Exegeticae", in a handwriting not so far identified - - not that of Ingham, but possibly of John Whitelamb or John Hutchings; there are notes by John Wesley on pp. 3, 74 and 192. See Heitzenrater, op. cit., pp. 344-5 and fig. 17, p. 346.

31. Wesley, Works, 7.203. The latter title was later used for an English Methodist denomination.

32. Wesley, Works, 11.367. The early contemporary editions of A Plain Account of Christian Perfection (1766), in which this occurs, italicize the word "study".

33. Cf. the phrase "Greek Testament" in Wesley's diary, Journal, 1.190-1, 209-10, etc., and see Baker, John Wesley and the Church of England, p. 40.

34. Wesley, Works, 10.483, 491; cf. Letters, 7.251-2.

35. The phrase "gladly and perfectly" occurs in the Oxford manuscript only, and is not present in the transcription which Wesley made for his Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament.

36. Wesley, Journal, 1.176.

37. Ibid., 6.118, 125 (on the quay at Plymouth, Sept. 1, 1776); 7.384, 397.

38. Ibid., 6.107 (Monday); 7.410 (Monday, a Psalm), 411 (Tuesday), 414 (Monday). There are some problems, however, in checking these and other references with the Calendar, such as the reference to The Lord our Righteousness, ibid., 5.150.

39. Ibid., 7.362.

40. Ibid., 2.229; the text was Isa. 55:10-11.

41. Wesley, Works, 19.490-1; cf. 482-3.

42. Cf. Heitzenrater, op. cit., pp. 377-8.

43. A phrase attributed to Thomas à Kempis. Cf. Jeremy Taylor, Life of Christ, ii. 12.

44. Cf. Jas. 1:5.

45. 1 Cor. 2:13.

46. Preface, paragraphs 3-6. Cf. Wesley, Works, 5.2-4.

47. John Wesley to Charles Wesley, May 10, 1755; cf. Letters, 3.129.

48. Wesley, Works, 7.473, and the manuscript of this in the Methodist Archives, London.

49. The text was 2 Kings 10:15. See Works, 5.492-504.

50. Wesley, Works, 5.17, and see his Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament, upon this text.

51. See the Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society, 27.5-6, for an example of his accepting a doubtful translation because it seemed to resolve a spiritual difficulty in Matt. 28:17, reading "but some had doubted" (i.e. formerly) rather than the correct "but some doubted." Cf. his preference for the Prayer Book version of the Psalms, Journal, 7.114, 265, and the many quotations from this version noted in The Oxford Edition of Wesley's Works, Vol. 11, The Appeals.

52. Wesley, Works, 7.470; 11.429.

53. Although Wesley was familiar with the phrase earlier, his use of the concept as an exegetical principle seems to owe much to Bengel, from whose Gnomon he developed the important note on Romans 12:6. Cf. Works 5.53; 6.276, 289; 7.284; 8.365; 10.490 (An Address to the Clergy, quoted above); 14.247, 253 (preface to the Explanatory Notes upon the Old Testament). See also Henry Moore, The Life of the Rev. John Wesley, 2 vols., London, 1824, 1.450n.

54. Wesley, Works, 7.383. Cf. 6.395, "the plain, literal sense, unless it implies an absurdity."

55. Ibid., 13.305.

56. Wesley, Journal, 1.165-6. At his annual conferences he urged his preachers to form children's societies at whose meetings they could be instructed, and welcomed the Sunday School movement in part because children could thus be "taught a little good manners, at least, as well as to read the Bible" (Journal 7.3).

57. Green, op. cit., Nos. 85, 100, 111, 168.

58. Wesley, Works, 5.136-7; Letters, 2.117.

59. Works, 5.37-52; Letters, 2.44-5; 3.157-8.

60. Works, 5.192-3.

61. Ibid., 8.269-71.

62. Works, 6.187; Letters, 2.44-5.

63. Letters, 1.285.

64. Works, 14.253.

65. Ibid., 7.46-7.

66. See Green, op. cit., No. 234. No fewer than 750 sets remained unsold in 1791.

67. Works, 14.253.

68. The New Testament, with an Analysis of the Several Books and Chapters. London, at the New Chapel, 1790, the Preface, p. ii, quoting the Collect for the Second Sunday in Advent from the Book of Common Prayer. (Cf. Works, 14.306-7.)