WHY BIBLICAL STUDIES IS IMPORTANT

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Category: Observations

When you have to study the Bible for a living, it is all too easy to get immersed in the details of the text and to lose sight of the fact that the study of Scripture should lead us to change the way we live. But, the last few days have turned up a great reminder of why we need people who will spend time studying the text of the Bible in minute detail. The press and the internet have been awash with stories of how the first verse of the Bible has been mistranslated for years:

> *The notion of God as the Creator is wrong, claims a top academic, who believes the Bible has been wrongly translated for thousands of years.*
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> *Professor Ellen van Wolde, a respected Old Testament scholar and author, claims the first sentence of Genesis "in the beginning God created the Heaven and the Earth" is not a true translation of the Hebrew.*
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> *She claims she has carried out fresh textual analysis that suggests the writers of the great book never intended to suggest that God created the world -- and in fact the Earth was already there when he created humans and animals. (From the Daily Telegraph)*

Quite why this became such a news story is hard to understand. The fact that one scholar has questioned the meaning of a Hebrew verb is hardly surprising. If you take a look at the Hebrew Bible section on the Biblioblogs list, you will find respected scholars discussing all sorts of Hebrew verbs in minute detail. Clearly, Prof. van Wolde has an excellent publicist who has managed to stir up some controversy and get her views some attention.

In addition, reading the Telegraph (or any of the other newspapers, blogs, tweets and so on which talked about this) might lead you to think that Professor van Wolde had come up with something entirely new and that her views had revolutionised the study of the Bible.Â Clayboy makes the following comments:

> *I have a couple of observations. First, irrespective of arguments over the meaning of â€œbaraâ€ , the question of whether the opening Genesis account describes a creation ex nihilo or the organisation of some already present chaotic stuff â€“ that question has been around for a long time. Second, despite the attention given to the opening chapter of the Bible, this is a long way from being the only place in which ideas of creation are explored. Itâ€™s not even (at least in the form we have it now) the earliest place. Third, no doctrine rests only on a single verse, far less a single word. The Christian doctrine of creation is a rather richer and more pervasive theme of Scripture than a mechanistic understanding of a verb in a fairly carefully crafted polemic retelling of an ancient creation myth.*

You can also find a detailed analysis of the question here or here.

The point of this all, is to say that the church needs people who will devote themselves to serious and detailed study of the Bible if we are not to be carried away on the wave of newspaper and media hype. It is because of this that it is distressing to learn that one of the most respected biblical studies departments in the UK is to close its doors to new students at the end of this academic year.(HT Doug)