

DEEP END - HIGHLIGHTS (text not audio)

1 Chronicles 26:18 - The most obscure verse in scripture?

According to some scholars, the most unforgettable and obscure verse in the Bible is 1 Chronicles 26:18. Literally it reads “At Parbar westward, four at the causeway and two at Parbar” (!).

The problem is that we have no idea what Parbar means. It is possibly a word of Persian origin and could mean a colonnade. But we really don't know. Most modern translations simply smooth it out (e.g. the NIV reads: “As for the court to the west, there were four at the road and two at the court itself.”). However, this is simply an educated guess to make the verse intelligible.

Fortunately, no great doctrine is at stake, as it is speaking of the gatekeepers of the city: “Guard was alongside of guard: There were six Levites a day on the east, four a day on the north, four a day on the south and two at a time at the storehouse. As for the court to the west, there were four at the road and two at the court itself.” (vv.16 & 17). You would not even know there was a problem!

This is sad, as we fail to empathize with those hoary headed translators to whom it gave such a headache and kept them awake at night! Conversely, it should remind us to be unendingly grateful for the often unknown scholars who labor with the Hebrew and Greek text, and for the rich variety of translations that we have today.

In biblical times to have a copy of the OT on vellum (scraped calf skin used for the most enduring manuscripts) would cost you the equivalent of purchasing a house today (assuming you were one of the few who could read).

No generation has had what we have today, which makes us accountable to read, study, memorize, meditate, and translate the scriptures with perseverance and passion, not to gain knowledge, but to know Christ and be ignited by his love. As Wesley said about his part in the Great Awakening, “God set me on fire and men came to see the burning”. Amen!