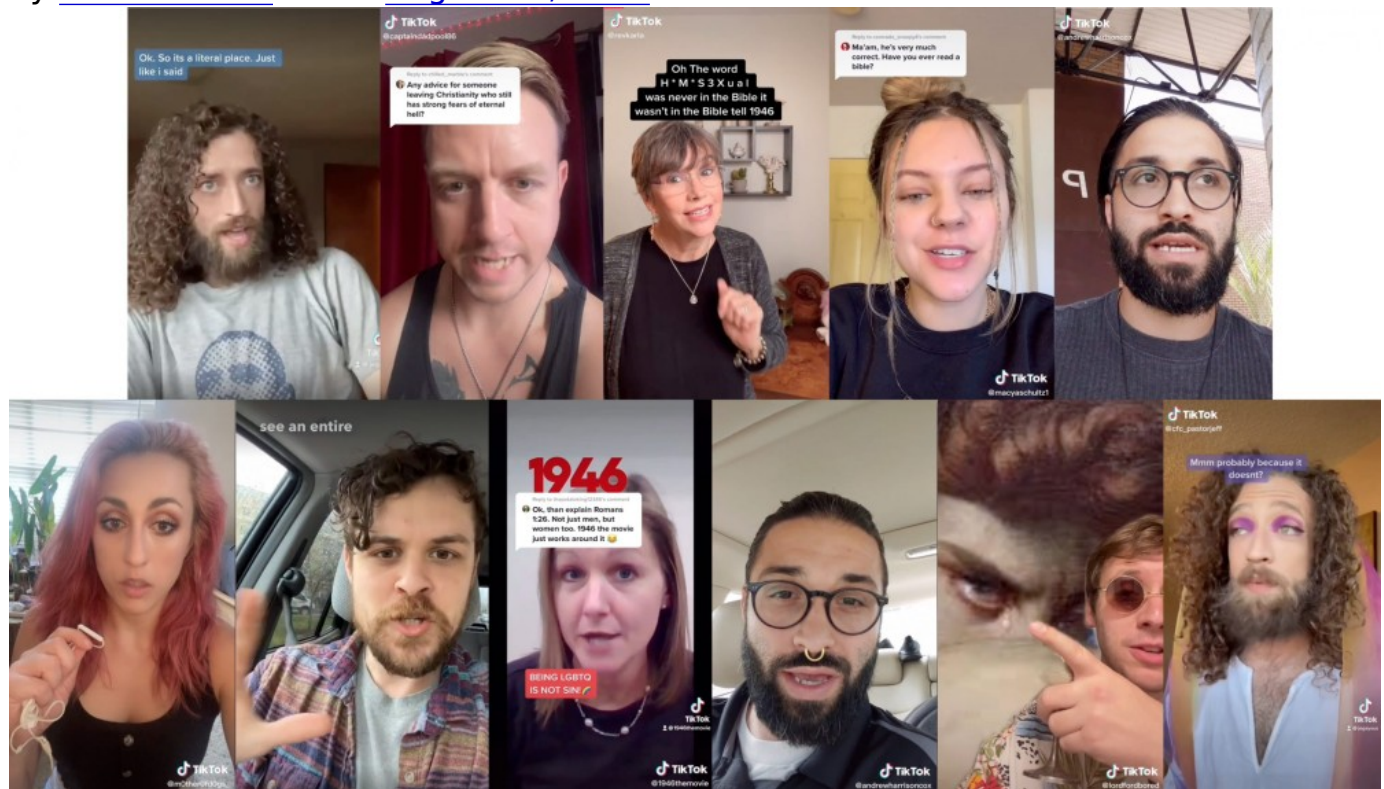


Three of the most mistranslated words in the Bible—according to TikTok

by [Renée Roden](#) in the [August 11, 2021](#) issue



(Video screengrab)

Popular activities for this summer include visiting heavily populated beaches, hanging out indoors with crowds of more than 50, and debating translations of New Testament Greek on the internet.

On TikTok, more than 55 million users have viewed the hashtag #deconstruction—a buzzword chiefly among evangelicals and former evangelicals who are reanalyzing the traditional faith they grew up in. And now a dynamic subsection of creators is using the platform to debunk what they see as dangerous misinterpretations of biblical texts.

Some of the deconstructionists of TikTok are progressive Christian pastors with theology degrees. Others have studied their way out of the churches they grew up in and are now religiously unaffiliated. Still others are sharing scraps of knowledge they have picked up on the internet. But whether atheist, Christian, or somewhere in between, this corner of biblical TikTok is united over a shared nerdy obsession with

getting words right.

Here are three of the most popularly “deconstructed” words on the video platform.

Hell

One of the biggest trends in the biblical translations of deconstructionist TikTok is breaking down the many meanings packed into the word hell.

JeGaysus, a creator with a devoted following of 180,000, offers his literary critique on Gehenna—a word often translated as “hell”—in the guise of a rainbow-scarfed Jesus.

For Jesseca Reddell (Motherofdogs on TikTok), learning more about the different meanings behind “H-E-double-hockey-sticks” was a way to help her get over her fear of eternal damnation if she left her church. “Share with your traumatized friend,” one of her video captions suggests.

Ricky Brock Jr. studied theology in college, and he puts his education to use when he responds to his followers’ questions about the afterlife. In one video, he explains some of the origins of the concept of hell in order to help a commenter overcome their fear.

Homosexuality

The Greek words that are translated in contemporary English as “homosexuality” or “homosexuals” are just as hotly debated as hell among TikTok scholars.

Many creators focus on the Greek word Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 6:9—arsenokoitai. They point out controversies in the history of its translation and the different ways to interpret the word.

Andrew Harrison Cox, who is seminary trained, works at a justice ministry in Florida. His videos point out the gap between the cultural phenomena Paul refers to and how we talk about homosexuality today.

Others provide cultural context to flesh out passages such as Romans 1:26. These biblical deconstructionists of TikTok have landed on a single conclusion: they are in fairly firm agreement that, according to the Bible, homosexuality is not a sin.

Satan

The father of lies provides nearly limitless fodder for TikTok theologians looking to undo what they see as common misconceptions. Creators discuss the different titles in the Bible that have become names for the figure we know today.

Deconstructing the story of the devil also attracts creators who don't normally dedicate their feeds to biblical interpretation or deconstruction content. And some, like Jeff Baker, cofounder and pastor of Chosen Family Church, manage to cram a semester's worth of biblical criticism on scriptural imagery for Satan into a 60-second video.

If you're looking for a crash course in pop biblical criticism, enjoy stoking online arguments over ancient texts, or just hope to learn a little Greek in 60 seconds, maybe open TikTok and start scrolling.

—Renée Roden, Religion News Service