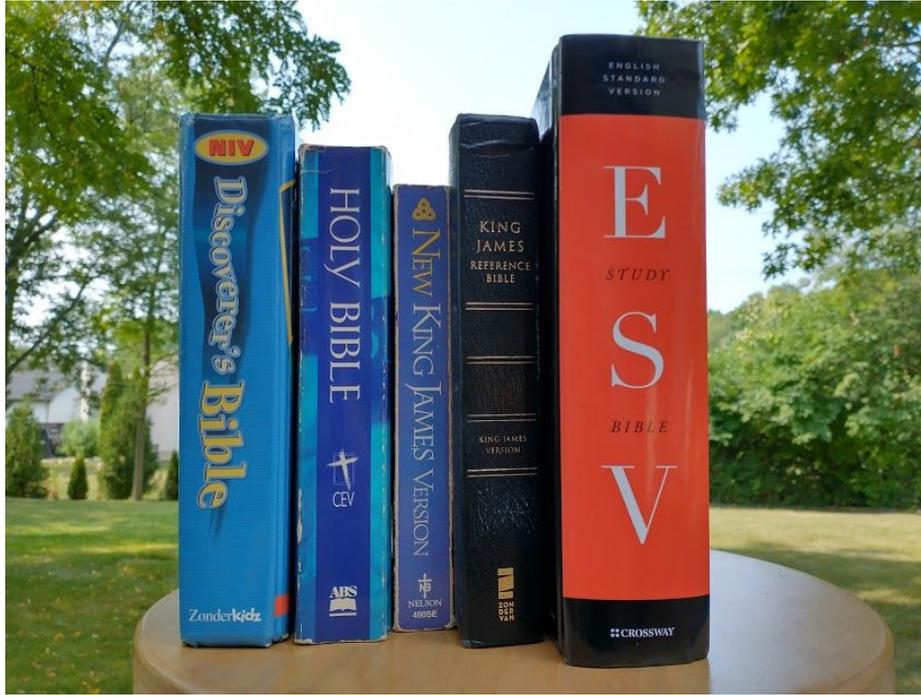


Truth About Translations



by Pastor Scott Estell

Sunday Morning Adult Bible Study



Lesson 1: What Distinguishes One Bible Version from Another?

The Transmission of Scripture

How did you get the Bible you have in your hands? Or on your electronic device? Did it drop from heaven into your lap? Or into your hand? Of course not. The Bible you currently have is the result of a long (going on some 3,500 years), divinely-superintended, providential process commonly called the transmission of Scripture.

The Bible you have is probably written in English. However, the Bible was originally written in Hebrew (the overwhelming majority of the Old Testament), Aramaic (a very small portion of the Old Testament, about 1.5%¹), and Greek (the entirety of the New Testament). Therefore, at some point, a translation had to be made from these original languages into English.

Why are there so many different English translations of the Bible², and what makes them different? In order to answer this question, we must examine the transmission process. Specifically, we need to focus on two key aspects of it: the text of Scripture and the translation of Scripture.

The Text of Scripture

The Text of the Old Testament

Fortunately, there is relatively little debate or disagreement about the Hebrew text of the Old Testament. The primary reason for this is the painstaking, meticulous efforts of the Jewish scribes.³ Because of their great reverence for the sacred text, these scribes made

¹Aramaic is very similar to Hebrew. Aramaic sections of the Old Testament include Ezra 4:8-6:18 and 7:12-26, as well as Daniel 2:4b - 7:28. A well-known Aramaism in the Old Testament is the “writing on the wall” in Daniel 5:25-28. Well-known New Testament Aramaisms include Christ’s words on the Cross, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani” (Mark 15:34); Abba (Romans 8:15); and Maranatha (1 Corinthians 16:22).

²There have been over 1,100 English translations throughout history (from the 7th century AD to 1985). For a listing, see Norman Geisler & William Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, pages 605-635. For a similar listing, but only of Twentieth-century English translations through 1982, see pages 345-375 of *So Many Versions?* by Sakae Kubo and Walter Specht.

³For example, any copy of an Old Testament Hebrew manuscript found to contain an error was discarded (Norman Geisler & William Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, p. 380). The

every effort to ensure accuracy in copying. This was amply demonstrated with the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in the mid-1950s. Among these scrolls were found copies of the Old Testament text that were 1,000 years older than the oldest texts “extant” (known to exist) at the time. When comparison was made between them, it was found that a millennium of transmission had resulted in incredibly few variations.

The Text of the New Testament

When it comes to the Greek text of the New Testament, the story is somewhat different. When all the extant Greek manuscripts (5,600+⁴) are compared, it is discovered that there is (relative to the Old Testament Hebrew manuscripts) quite a bit more variation. As a result, there is much more debate and disagreement about the New Testament text.

Textual scholars generally agree that when all the extant Greek manuscripts are analyzed and compared, they can be categorized into four basic “text types” (based on telltale peculiarities among the manuscripts within each text type): Alexandrian, Western, Caesarean, and Byzantine.

Textual scholars also generally agree that the Alexandrian text type is the most preferable because it is the most ancient (i.e., closest in time to the originals), while the Byzantine is the least preferable because it is the least ancient (i.e., farthest in time from the originals), the assumption being that the younger a text type is (i.e., the farther in time its manuscripts are from the originals), the more time there is for scribal errors to enter into it during the transmission process, while the older a text type is (i.e., the closer in time its manuscripts are to the originals), the less time there is for scribal errors to enter into it during the transmission process.

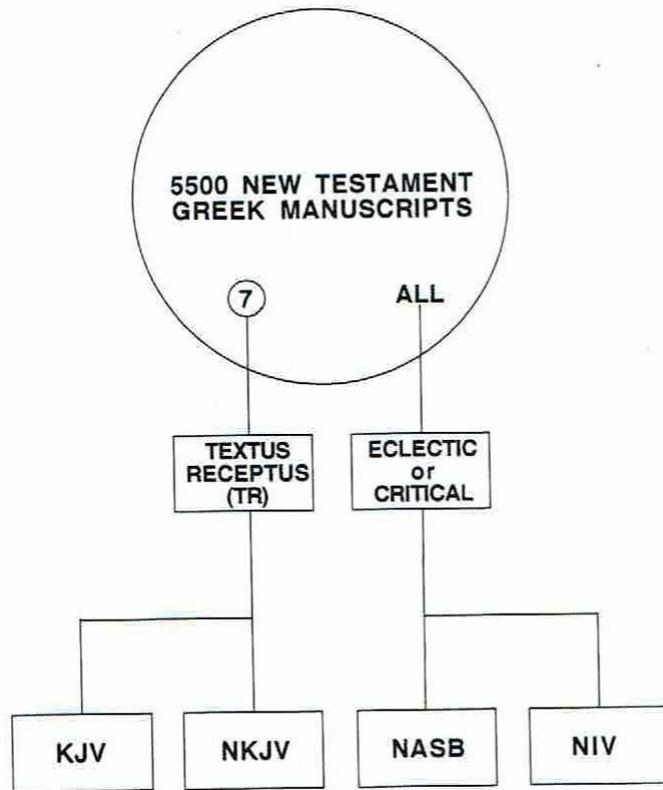
At this point, it would be good to emphasize that the significant differences between these text types are extremely minimal, amounting to 1-2% of the entire text, and that the differences do not affect the meaning of any doctrine.

One of the reasons why there are some variations between English translations is because there are different texts behind them, especially when it comes to the New Testament. For example, the New Testament of the King James Version (hereafter, the KJV) and the New King James Version (hereafter, the NKJV) are based on what is called the “Textus Receptus” (TR for short). The TR is part of the Byzantine family of

most renowned of the many groups of Jewish scribes responsible for the transmission of the Old Testament Hebrew text in successive eras were the “Masoretes,” who labored from 500-1000 A.D. The Masoretes were extremely meticulous in their work. “They ensured accuracy by counting the number of letters in a book, by noting the middle letter, and similar tedious procedures. For example, they noted that the Hebrew letter *aleph* occurred 42,377 times in the Old Testament. If the count in the new copy did not agree with the original copy the manuscript was recopied” (Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, p. 173).

⁴W. Edward Glenny (contributor to the book, *One Bible Only?*, p. 77) puts the precise number at 5,656, of which 59 are a complete text of the New Testament.

texts. Translations such as the New American Standard Bible (hereafter, the NASB), the New International Version (hereafter, the NIV), and the English Standard Version (hereafter, the ESV), on the other hand, are based upon what is called the “eclectic” text. The eclectic text is derived from all the extant manuscripts, but relies primarily upon the Alexandrian family of texts.⁵ Notice the following chart:



The Translation of Scripture

A second major consideration when it comes to the differences between English translations is the translation approach each translation takes. Basically-speaking, there are two approaches that are taken.

⁵There is a third type of Greek text called the “majority” text (sometimes equated with the TR, but wrongly so; according to W. Edward Glenny, contributor to *One Bible Only?*, p. 81, the TR and the majority text differ in approximately 1,800 places). However, since there has never been an English translation made from the majority text (though the NKJV was originally going to be), it is not a focus of this study.

The “Literal” Approach

The literal approach (also called “formal correspondence” or “formal equivalence”) seeks to translate word-for-word (as much as possible). It attempts to say *what* the original text says by retaining *how* it says it. This approach is more of a conservative one in that the translator does less interpreting (“less” because every translator must do some degree of interpretation). However, in the estimation of some, such translations do not do a good enough job of communicating the meaning of the text to the reader. Examples of literal translations include the KJV, the NKJV, and the NASB.

The “Dynamic” Approach

The dynamic approach (also called “functional equivalence” or “dynamic equivalence”) seeks to translate thought-for-thought. In contrast to the literal approach, the dynamic approach results in the translator doing more interpreting of the text. The degree to which this occurs in a dynamic translation makes some uncomfortable with this approach. An example of a dynamic translation is the NIV. A paraphrase (the Living Bible is a prime example) is an extreme form of the dynamic approach. The following chart shows where some of the English translations fall in the spectrum of literal vs. dynamic:

Comparison of Versions by Translation Technique

<u>Formal Correspondence</u>	<u>Functional Equivalence</u>	<u>Free</u>
ASV KJV RSV NASB NKJV NRSV	NIV NAB	JB GNB REB NEB Phillips LB BBC

Supporters of the dynamic approach contend that such translations are superior because they are more readable/understandable, as the following chart illustrates⁶:

Readability Levels of Major Versions of the NT

<u>Version</u>	<u>Grade Level</u>
International Children's Bible (ICB)	3.9
Today's English Version (TEV)	7.3
New international Version (NIV)	7.8
Living Bible (LB)	8.3
New English Bible (NEB)	8.5
New King James Version (NKJV)	9.1
Phillips (PNT)	9.6
Jerusalem Bible (JB)	10.1
Revised Standard Version (RSV)	10.4
New American Standard Bible (NASB)	11.3
American Standard Version (ASV)	11.6
King James Version (KJV)	14.0

⁶W. Edward Glenny (contributor to *The Bible Version Debate*, p. 115) gives the following reading levels: The New Living Translation (NLT) 6.3; NKJV 7.0; NIV 7.8; The Living Bible (LB) 8.3; the KJV 12.0.

One of the reasons why there are some variations between English translations is because there are different translation philosophies behind them.

Other factors to consider in regards to what has been mentioned in this lesson include:

- The nature of the Hebrew language. Originally, the Hebrew text of the Old Testament did not have any spacing between the letters--everything ran together. At some point, the Jewish scribes undertook the painstaking task of separating the text into individual words. This involved some degree of subjectivity. Consequently, there may be differences in the wording of Old Testament texts (and, consequently, in the renderings of English translations) based on where one thinks the divisions should be made. Consider the following English examples: GODISNOWHERE and HAVEYOUEVERSEENABUNDANCEONATABLE.

Also, Hebrew essentially has no vowels. To compensate for this, the Masoretic scribes inserted vowel “points” into the consonantal text. However, as the English example, BD shows, which vowel you choose to insert drastically changes the meaning of the word in question. Fortunately, the surrounding context usually proves to be conclusive.

- The nature of the Greek language. Greek is a highly “inflected” language. The way a Greek word is inflected (the peculiar way its ending is spelled) usually tells the translator how to translate it. Sometimes, however, there is more than one legitimate option. Based on the context, the translator must make a subjective decision. This is one reason why it is good to own a translation that has marginal notes that indicate other legitimate grammatical options.
- The “semantic range” of words in a language. Words in Hebrew and Greek, as with any other language, have a “semantic range,” meaning that a particular word can mean many different things, depending on the way it is used in a particular context. Translators must make a subjective decision as to which meaning in a word’s semantic range is the appropriate one to use.⁷
- The fact that language changes over time. A particular English word can become obsolete or can change significantly in meaning over the course of time.

⁷This fact is not only a factor in differences between versions, but also differences within a particular version. W. Edward Glenny (contributor to *The Bible Version Debate*, p. 116) points out that in the KJV the Hebrew word, *dabar* is translated with 84 separate English words.

Lesson 2: The Translation Controversy (Part 1)

Review

In our first lesson, we discussed the reasons why English translations of the Bible differ from one another. These reasons can be summarized as follows:

- The Greek text behind the translation. Translations such as the KJV and the NKJV are based on the Textus Receptus (TR), while translations such as the NASB, NIV, and ESV are based on the “eclectic” text (Reminder: These texts are identical in the overwhelming majority of places. Where they disagree, most of the time the disagreement is insignificant. Significant disagreement amounts to 1-2% of the entire text, and none of the disagreements affect the meaning of any significant doctrine.⁸). The TR is based on only 7 Greek manuscripts, while the eclectic text takes into consideration all 5,600+ extant manuscripts (though it does give priority to the Alexandrian family of manuscripts).
- The philosophy of translation. Translations such as the KJV, NKJV, NASB, and ESV take a more “literal” (word-for-word) approach, while translations such as the NIV take a more “dynamic” (thought-for-thought) approach.
- The nature of the original languages. Both Hebrew and Greek are of such a nature that at times a translator must make a somewhat subjective decision between two or more grammatically legitimate options. Thus, even when the Hebrew or Greek text behind the various translations is identical (the overwhelming majority of the time), the translations may differ depending on which option the translator opts for.
- The changing nature of the English language. Even though the KJV and the NKJV are based on the same Greek text (the TR)⁹ and employ the same

⁸“Of those variants which significantly affect the meaning of the text none of them affects the overall doctrinal content of Scripture or touches on any moral commandment or article of faith which is not clear elsewhere in Scripture” (W. Edward Glenny, contributor to *The Bible Version Debate*, p. 97).

⁹They are not, however, based on the same Old Testament text. The Old Testament of the KJV was based on the second Rabbinic Bible, produced by Jacob ben Chayyim in 1524-1525, while the Old Testament of the NKJV was based on the 1967/1977 Stuttgart edition of *Biblica Hebraica*. Though very similar (one textual scholar, Daniel Wallace lists only 8 places where there are significant differences), these two texts are not identical.

philosophy of translation (the “literal” approach), there are differences between the two. The reason is obvious. The current edition¹⁰ of the KJV reflects the English spoken in the latter stages of the 18th century, while the NKJV reflects the English spoken in the latter stages of the 20th century.¹¹ Hebrews 12:8 is a prime example of how modern English translations resolve the problems outdated translations sometimes create.

What is the Controversy?

Over the past half century or so, a new and untrue teaching has arisen, claiming that the King James Version is the only inspired English translation; therefore, all other English translations (because they differ from the KJV to various degrees) are corrupt. This movement is commonly called the “KJV-only” movement.¹² Proponents have included

¹⁰The KJV has undergone several changes since it was originally produced in 1611. Minor corrections were made in 1612, 1613, and 1616. Major revisions were made in 1629, 1638, 1762, and 1769. A study by the American Bible Society at the end of the 19th century found 24,000 changes in the KJV since 1611 (according to Edgar Goodspeed, referenced by W. Edward Glenny, contributor to *The Bible Version Debate*, p. 59, the 1769 edition of the KJV, the edition in use today, differs from the 1611 edition in 75,000 details). Of the 24,000, it was determined that 1,493 of the changes affected meaning. Of the 1,493, it was determined that 0 of the changes affected doctrine.

¹¹Linguists commonly classify the English language into several distinct periods: Old English (also called Anglo-Saxon) from 450-1150 A.D., Middle English from 1150-1475 A.D., and Modern English from 1475 A.D. to the present (Modern English can be further subdivided into Early Modern English from 1475-1780 A.D. and Late Modern English from 1780 A.D. to the present).

¹²At the extreme of the movement are those who contend that it is only the original edition of the KJV (the 1611) that is inspired; therefore, all later editions of the KJV (because they differ from the 1611) are corrupt. A leading proponent was Peter Ruckman, who went so far as to contend that the 1611 KJV is superior to the Greek text behind it; therefore, when the two differ, the English is to correct the Greek. In his book, *The Christian's Handbook of Manuscript Evidence*, Ruckman states on page 126: “Mistakes in the A.V. 1611 are advanced revelation” (cited in “Sense and Nonsense in the Translation Debate,” a workshop presented by Dr. David Doran on October 22 at the 1999 Mid-America Conference on Preaching, held at Inter-City Baptist Church in Allen Park, MI).

James Jasper Ray, David Otis Fuller¹³, Jack Hyles,¹⁴ Peter Ruckman (see footnote 12), David Cloud, D. A. Waite, and Gail Riplinger (author of the 1993 book, *New Age Bible Versions*¹⁵).

Why is This a Controversy?

Simplistically-speaking, the reason why there is a translation controversy is because KJV-only proponents have made it one. Advocates of the position sincerely believe that the Bible Itself is under attack by modern translators and their translations. Is this really the case? In order to answer this question, several underlying issues need to be explored.

The Doctrine of Inspiration

Inspiration may be defined as the supernatural influence whereby the Holy Spirit caused men to compose and record (2 Peter 1:21) without error (Psalm 12:6) the very words (1 Corinthians 2:13) of God's choosing (2 Timothy 3:16) as found in the original manuscripts (1 Corinthians 14:37) of Scripture. The key phrase in this definition (as far as the translation controversy is concerned) is the last one: IN THE ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPTS. The orthodox definition of inspiration has always included this qualifier. Technically-speaking, translations are not directly inspired; they do, however, partake of inspiration in a derivative sense, to the degree to which they accurately reflect the originals. KJV-only advocates fail to make this distinction. Believing the KJV to be inspired in a direct sense, they make it the basis of comparison, rather than the originals.

¹³Douglas Kutilek, contributor to *One Bible Only?*, pp. 44-46, shows how both Ray and Fuller were heavily influenced by Benjamin Wilkinson, a Seventh-Day Adventist, to whom Kutilek traces the origin of the KJV-only movement. Kutilek (p. 44) describes Wilkinson's 1930 book on the topic, *Our Authorized Bible Vindicated* as "full of misinformation, inaccuracies, defective reasoning, and distortion."

¹⁴Hyles went so far as to equate the KJV with the "incorruptible seed" of 1 Peter 1:23, concluding that if someone was not led to the Lord by someone using a KJV, the person led to the Lord was not really saved.

¹⁵Riplinger's degrees were in home economics and interior design. See Dr. Sam Schnaiter's (at the time a Bob Jones University faculty member) devastating critique of Riplinger's book in the Fall 1997 issue of the *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal*. See also pages 95-109 of James White's 1995 book, *The King James Only Controversy*. Commenting on Riplinger's book, one reviewer has exclaimed: "This is beyond doubt the worst book I have ever read" (Robert Morey, cited in Schnaiter, p. 122).

At this point, one may object, “But we don’t have the originals, so how can we compare our translations with them?” Though it is true that we do not have the original *manuscripts* (also called the “autographs”), we do have the original *words*. Why can I say this?

The Doctrine of Preservation

God has promised to preserve His Word (see, for example, Psalm 119:152, 160, Isaiah 40:8, Matthew 5:18, 24:35, and 1 Peter 1:23-25). Taking God at His Word, by faith we can have confidence that every word (even every letter--Matthew 5:18!) of Scripture has been preserved. The issue is not that the Bible is preserved (both sides involved in the debate believe so), but how and where It is preserved. The Bible answers the “that” question, but is silent regarding the “how” and “where” questions. KJV-only advocates believe that the “how” is miraculous and that the “where” is in the Hebrew and Greek texts behind the KJV, instead of providential and among the totality of manuscripts.¹⁶

At this point, it would be good to introduce one of the bones of contention in the entire debate, namely what is called “textual criticism,”¹⁷ which KJV-only advocates disdain. Because no two manuscripts are exactly alike,¹⁸ every translator must do textual criticism. When Erasmus produced the TR (the Greek text behind the King James), he did textual criticism. The KJV translators did textual criticism. Contrary to what some might think, a textual critic does not “criticize” the Bible, as if standing in judgment over It (hence, textual criticism is a form of “lower criticism,” as opposed to “higher criticism”); rather, he seeks to compare manuscripts in order to ascertain which reading most likely is the original one (“criticism” in this sense merely means the exercise of judgment). While it is true that there is a small degree of subjectivity involved, textual critics work from an objective set of universally-accepted principles. Thanks to textual

¹⁶“The Scriptures do not teach that God has perfectly preserved every word of the original autographs in one manuscript or text type. ... God has providentially preserved His Word in and through all of the extant [known to exist] manuscripts, versions, and other copies of Scripture” (W. Edward Glenny, contributor to *One Bible Only?*, p. 121).

¹⁷Textual criticism is “the study of the copies and translations of any written composition of which the autograph (the original) is unknown for the purpose of determining as closely as possible the original text” (W. Edward Glenny, contributor to *One Bible Only?*, p. 76). “Textual criticism, also called ‘lower criticism,’ is concerned with recovering the original text of a literary document. By it, scholars attempt to seek and eliminate errors by using plausible explanations for emendations that have crept into the text. Through the study of numerous manuscripts, principles of textual criticism have been formulated that are applied to many different sorts of literary works” (Norman Geisler and William Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, p. 435).

¹⁸According to Daniel Wallace (referenced by W. Edward Glenny, contributor to *One Bible Only?*, p. 76), the most similar Greek manuscripts disagree 6-10 times per chapter.

critics, we now have both a Hebrew and Greek text closer to the originals than ever before.¹⁹

When it comes right down to it, the underlying reason there is a translation controversy is because KJV-only advocates have an unorthodox understanding of inspiration and preservation. Other likely contributing factors include: 1) The fact that modern English translations have surpassed the KJV in sales; 2) The age-old resistance to change all of us have to one degree or another. If modern versions do, indeed, change the Bible, then they ought to be categorically rejected. When it comes to nearly all modern English translations, however, this is simply not the case; and 3) The perception that use of a modern version results in compromise, a *non sequitur* (which version you use is not one of the fundamentals of the faith).

Should This be a Controversy?

The translation issue is a non-issue. It has historically been so, at least as far as mainstream fundamentalism is concerned.²⁰ KJV-only advocates are the ones who have made it an issue. One's position regarding translations should not be a matter of separation (unless one is separating from one who holds aberrant beliefs regarding the inspiration and preservation of Scripture, as many KJV-only advocates do--see above).

¹⁹Admittedly, the fact that we do not know with absolute certainty every single word of the original may be troubling to some. However, “even when the accuracy of a reading in the original *text* cannot be known with 100 percent accuracy, it is possible to be 100 percent certain of the *truth* preserved in the texts that survive. It is only in minor details that any uncertainty about the textual rendering exists, and no major doctrine rests on any one minor detail” (Norman Geisler and William Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, p. 44; emphasis theirs).

²⁰See pages 171-177 of Dr. Rolland McCune's article entitled, “Doctrinal Non-Issues in Historic Fundamentalism” in the Fall 1996 issue of the *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal*. “... [N]o evidence exists that previous generations of fundamentalists or evangelicals have used the translation issue as a hallmark of authentic faith” (Douglas McLachlan, contributor to *One Bible Only?*, p. 12). “Making adherence to one manuscript tradition or to one translation *a test of orthodoxy* has never been a tenet of truly Biblical Christianity” (J. Drew Conley, contributor to *God's Word in Our Hands*, p. 71; emphasis his). The early-twentieth century set called *The Fundamentals* quoted from the American Standard Version of 1901 more than any other translation (John Hutcheson, contributor to *God's Word in Our Hands*, p. 19), about half the time (Keith Gephart, contributor to *God's Word in Our Hands*, p. 189). For the perspective of various leading lights in relatively recent church history, including many early fundamentalists, on this issue, see Appendix A at the conclusion of this lesson.

A person should not leave a church over this issue. Why? Because there are honest differences of opinion over which text-type is superior (Alexandrian or Byzantine)²¹ and which philosophy of translation is superior (“literal” or “dynamic”). One can firmly believe in the orthodox understanding of the doctrines of inspiration and preservation, while at the same time preferring one of the modern English translations over the King James, or vice versa. Furthermore, Scripture is silent regarding the how and where of preservation. As Sam Schnaiter (*Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal*, Fall 1997, p. 115) states: “The Bible clearly tells us that it is inspired and that it is preserved; it says nothing of which textual family best preserves it or which translation best expresses its original statements. To say otherwise is to give nothing more than one’s own opinion.”

²¹“Paleographers” (those who specialize in dating manuscripts) have deemed the Alexandrian text-type (the one behind nearly all modern translations, such as the NASB, NIV, and ESV) to be several centuries older than the Byzantine text-type (the one behind the KJV and the NKJV). Textual scholars theorize that the older a manuscript is, the superior it is (less time for scribal errors to be introduced into the text). Accordingly, most textual scholars prefer the Alexandrian text-type to the Byzantine text-type. However, there are some who interpret the data differently, theorizing that the Alexandrian manuscripts, though earlier, were deemed corrupt and, therefore, set aside (thus being preserved because they were not worn out by use), while earlier copies of the Byzantine manuscripts do not exist because they were worn out by use (D. A. Carson, in his *The King James Version Debate*, p. 47, refutes this theory). Another reason why textual scholars prefer the Alexandrian text-type is because its readings tend to be shorter and more difficult than those of the Byzantine text-type. The assumption is that, as the transmission of the text proceeded over time, well-meaning scribes sought to make texts more intelligible by smoothing out difficulties and inserting words into the text.

Appendix A

“We know of no Fundamentalists ... that claim the King James as the best English translation. Those in the main stream of Fundamentalism all claim the American Revised of 1901 as the best English translation” (Richard V. Clearwaters).

“Let it be stated further in this definitional connection, that the record for whose inspiration we contend is the original record--the autographs or parchments of Moses, David, Daniel, Matthew, Paul or Peter, as the case may be, and not a particular translation or translations of them whatever. There is no translation absolutely without error, nor could there be, considering the infirmities of human copyists, unless God were pleased to perform a perpetual miracle to secure it” (James M. Gray).

“No one, as far as I know, holds that the Authorized Version, or any English translation of the Bible, is absolutely infallible and inerrant. The doctrine held by me and by many others who have given years to careful and thorough study of the Bible is, that the Scriptures *as originally given* were absolutely infallible and inerrant, and that our English translation is a *substantially* accurate rendering of the scriptures as originally given” (R. A. Torrey; emphasis his).

“A perfect translation of the Bible is humanly impossible. The words in one language do not have exactly the same color and meaning as opposite [corresponding] words in another language, and human frailty and imperfection enter in. So, let us say, there are no perfect translations. God does not inspire particular translations” (John R. Rice).

“I do not hesitate to say that there is no mistake whatever in the original Holy Scriptures from beginning to end. There may be, and there are, mistakes of translation; for translators are not inspired” (Charles Spurgeon).

“To claim, therefore, inerrancy for the King James Version, or even for the Revised Version, is to claim inerrancy for men who never professed it for themselves; is to clothe with the claim of verbal inspiration a company of men who would almost quit their graves to repudiate such equality with Prophet and Apostle” (W. B. Riley).

“I do not say that those who wrote copies of the original Hebrew and Greek Scriptures were incapable of making mistakes, and never left out or added a word. I lay no claim to the inspiration of every word in the various versions and translations of God’s Word” (J. C. Ryle).

“Inspiration is affirmed, of course, only of the original documents, now no longer extant. Many mistakes may have been made by copyists, and some interpolations by officious scribes and translators are fallible” (A. T. Pierson).

“There are other good translations in the midst of all the bad ones. Unfortunately, there are no perfect ones, including the Authorized Version, as evidenced by the many corrections and amendments that have been made through the years” (Bob Jones, Jr.).

Lesson 3: The Translation Controversy (Part 2)

Taking the KJV-Only Advocates to Task

As pointed out in the previous lesson, at the root of “KJV-onlyism” is a fundamental misunderstanding of the doctrines of inspiration and preservation. Consequently, KJV-only advocates make the KJV the basis of comparison, rather than the original Hebrew and Greek manuscripts. Not surprisingly, therefore, most of the arguments they put forth for the KJV and against modern translations are guilty of the logical fallacy called “begging the question.” Assuming that the KJV is the standard (the thing in question), they compare the modern versions to it (rather than to the originals), declaring the modern versions to be in error because they differ from the KJV, rather than making the originals the standard and comparing the KJV (as well as any other translation) to this standard.²²

Using, then, the same logic as the KJV-only advocates, what prevents me from pontificating²³ with an equal degree of authority that one of the English translations upon which the KJV is based²⁴ (such as, for example, the Bishop’s Bible of 1568) is the standard and that, therefore, the KJV is corrupt because it differs from The Bishop’s Bible?²⁵ Furthermore, if the KJV can supersede a previous translation, why can’t a later version supersede the KJV? Also, did English translations prior to the KJV cease being the Word of God after 1611?

²²“ . . . [O]ne of the main problems with KJV Only writings . . . [is] the consistent use of terms like ‘omitted,’ ‘deleted,’ and ‘removed’ There is no effort to determine the *original* text because the KJV is *assumed* to be the standard by which all others are to be judged” (James White, *The King James Only Controversy*, p. 156; emphasis his).

²³“... [A] salient question needs to be answered. Who crowned the King James Version as the only Bible an obedient Christian can use?” (John Hutcheson, contributor to *God’s Word in Our Hands*, p. 3).

²⁴According to J. Drew Conley (contributor to *God’s Word in Our Hands*, p. 48), there were 8 other English translations of Scripture available when the KJV was produced. The KJV translators relied heavily on these translations. According to Mike Harding (contributor to *God’s Word in Our Hands*, p. 343), only 31% of the KJV is new translation.

²⁵“Why is the KJV the standard? Why not the Geneva Bible [the Bible of the Pilgrims], or the Bishop’s Bible, or the Great Bible? Could we not choose any one of these earlier English translations and then make up page after page of comparisons showing how the KJV ‘altered’ this or ‘changed’ that? Certainly we could” (James White, *The King James Only Controversy*, p. 128).

A common argument put forth by KJV-only advocates is that the modern translations deny key doctrines. For example, modern versions are regularly vilified for allegedly denying the deity of Christ. The argument typically goes something like this: Such and such a verse in the KJV has “Lord” or “Jesus” or “Christ” (or any combination of the three), while the same verse in one of the modern versions does not. Consequently, the modern versions are accused of “omitting” or “deleting” references to the deity of Christ. The following chart (taken from pages 194-195 of James White, *The King James Only Controversy*) typifies this argument:

Reference	KJV: God’s Word	New Versions
Matthew 4:18	Jesus	OMIT
Matthew 12:25	Jesus	OMIT
Mark 2:15	Jesus	OMIT
Mark 10:52	Jesus	OMIT
Luke 24:36	Jesus	OMIT
Acts 19:10	Lord Jesus	OMIT
1 Corinthians 16:22	Jesus Christ	OMIT
Acts 19:4	Christ	OMIT
1 Corinthians 9:1	Christ	OMIT
2 Corinthians 4:10	Lord	OMIT
Hebrews 3:1	Christ	OMIT
1 John 1:7	Christ	OMIT
Revelation 1:9	Christ	OMIT
Revelation 12:17	Christ	OMIT
1 Thessalonians 3:11	Christ	OMIT
2 Corinthians 5:18	Jesus	OMIT
Acts 15:11	Christ	OMIT
Acts 16:31	Christ	OMIT
1 Corinthians 5:4	Christ	OMIT
2 Corinthians 11:31	Christ	OMIT
2 Thessalonians 1:8	Christ	OMIT
2 Thessalonians 1:12	Christ	OMIT
2 John 3	the Lord	OMIT

Several points can be made in response:

- KJV-only advocates “beg the question” by assuming the KJV to be the standard of comparison.
- The verses in question in the modern versions do not deny the doctrine of the deity of Christ at all (for example, is the deity of Christ really being denied when the NIV and ESV read “our Lord Jesus” instead of “our Lord Jesus Christ,” or when the NASB reads “Jesus our Lord,” in 1 Thessalonians 3:11?). Compare the following chart (taken from pages 45-46 of James White, *The King James Only Controversy*) with the preceding one:

Reference	Nestle-Aland/UBS [the Greek text behind the NASB and the NIV]	Majority Text/Byzantine [essentially the Greek text behind the KJV]
Matthew 4:18	He	Jesus
Matthew 12:25	He	Jesus
Mark 2:15	He	Jesus
Mark 10:52	He	Jesus
Luke 24:36	He	Jesus
Acts 19:10	the Lord	the Lord Jesus
1 Corinthians 16:22	the Lord	the Lord Jesus Christ
Acts 19:4	Jesus	Jesus Christ
1 Corinthians 9:1	Jesus	Jesus Christ
2 Corinthians 4:10	Jesus	Lord Jesus
Hebrews 3:1	Jesus	Christ Jesus
1 John 1:7	Jesus	Jesus Christ
Revelation 1:9	Jesus	Jesus Christ
Revelation 12:17	Jesus	Jesus Christ
1 Thessalonians 3:11	Jesus our Lord	our Lord Jesus Christ
2 Corinthians 5:18	Christ	Jesus Christ
Acts 15:11	Lord Jesus	Lord Jesus Christ
Acts 16:31	Lord Jesus	Lord Jesus Christ
1 Corinthians 5:4	Lord Jesus	Lord Jesus Christ
2 Corinthians 11:31	Lord Jesus	Lord Jesus Christ
2 Thessalonians 1:8	Lord Jesus	Lord Jesus Christ
2 Thessalonians 1:12	Lord Jesus	Lord Jesus Christ
2 John 1:3	Jesus Christ	the Lord Jesus Christ

- “The door swings both ways.” There are verses where the KJV “omits” or “deletes” these designations (for example, in Matthew 24:36, the NASB, NIV, and ESV include the words, “nor the Son,” while the KJV “omits” them; in Romans 8:34, the NASB, NIV, and ESV read “Christ Jesus,” while the KJV “omits” “Jesus”). Is the KJV denying the deity of Christ when it does so?
- The deity of Christ is overwhelmingly affirmed in modern translations. As a case in point, the combination, “Lord Jesus Christ” is found 64 times in the NASB and 61 times in the NIV.²⁶ In fact, the modern versions are actually stronger and clearer in affirming the deity of Christ than the KJV (Is it any surprise, therefore, that the cults like to use the KJV to validate many of their arguments?²⁷), as the following charts indicate (the first is taken from page 197 of James White, *The King James Only Controversy*, the second from page 64 of D. A. Carson, *The King James Version Debate*):

Comparison Chart of Passages on the Deity of Christ			
Reference	NIV	NASB	KJV
John 1:1	Clear	Clear	Clear
John 1:18	Clear	Clear	Absent
John 20:28	Clear	Clear	Clear
Acts 20:28	Clear	Clear	Clear
Romans 9:5	Clear	Ambiguous	Ambiguous
Philippians 2:5-6	Most Clear	Clear	Least Clear
Colossians 1:15-17	Clear	Clear	Clear
Colossians 2:9	Clear	Clear	Ambiguous
1 Timothy 3:16	Absent	Absent	Clear
Titus 2:13	Clear	Clear	Ambiguous
Hebrews 1:8	Clear	Clear	Clear

²⁶D.A. Carson (*The King James Version Debate*, p. 63) aptly comments: “One must conclude, therefore, that if a heretic changed the particular passage in order to suppress some specific doctrine, then he was singularly incompetent if he did not systematically change all the other places in the document that supported the same doctrine.”

²⁷“Anyone who has spent a great deal of time sharing the gospel with people who deny the deity of Christ, such as Jehovah’s Witnesses, knows that using a modern translation such as the NIV makes one’s work much easier” (James White, *The King James Only Controversy*, p. 196).

2 Peter 1:1	Clear	Clear	Ambiguous
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Note: In the following chart, ✓ indicates a direct ascription of deity to Christ, while X indicates the lack of it.

	John 1:1	John 1:18	Acts 20:28	Rom 9:5	2 Thess 1:12	Titus 2:13	Heb 1:8	2 Pet 1:1
KJV	✓	☐	✓	✓	☐	☐	✓	☐
RV	✓	☐	✓	✓	☐	✓	✓	✓
RV mg.		✓	☐	☐		☐		☐
RSV	✓	☐	☐	☐	☐	✓	✓	✓
RSV mg.		✓	☐	✓		☐	☐	☐
NEB	✓	☐	☐	☐	☐	✓	✓	✓
NEB mg.		✓	☐	✓		☐	☐	
Moffatt	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	✓
Goodspeed	☐	☐	✓	☐	☐	✓	☐	✓
TEV	✓	✓	☐	☐	☐	✓	✓	✓
TEV mg.		☐	☐	✓				
NIV	✓	✓	✓	✓	☐	✓	✓	✓
NIV mg.		☐	☐	☐	✓			
MLB	✓	☐	✓	✓	☐	✓	✓	✓
NWT	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

A corollary contention of KJV-only advocates is that the translators of the modern versions are theologically aberrant. While it is true that the translators of modern translations were not fundamental Baptists, neither were the translators of the KJV. The KJV translators were Anglicans! As such, they believed in such unbiblical doctrines as sprinkling (the reason they transliterate instead of translate the Greek verb, *baptizo*, rendering it “baptize” instead of “immerse”; note: this same problem is found in modern translations), infant baptism, and baptismal regeneration. Furthermore, Erasmus, the compiler of the Greek text behind the KJV (a text that later came to be referred to as the TR), was a lifelong Roman Catholic.²⁸

Another problem for the KJV-only advocates is the fact that the KJV itself has undergone a number of revisions (see footnote 10). So, when KJV-only advocates claim inspiration for the KJV, this begs the question: Which KJV? If it is the current one (based on the 1769 revision), the question then becomes: Which edition, the Cambridge or the Oxford (there are 700 variations between them)? If it is the 1611 edition, the question then becomes: Which 1611? There were two editions published in 1611, with 216 variations between them! And when it comes to the TR, the Greek text underlying the KJV, the question likewise becomes: Which TR? The TR has gone through more than 25 editions.

Perhaps the most devastating blow to the KJV-only movement is the words of the King James translators themselves. The earliest editions of the KJV included an eleven-page preface entitled, “The Translators to the Reader.”²⁹ Here are some revealing excerpts from that preface:

“Zeal to promote the common good, whether it be by devising anything ourselves, or revising that which hath been laboured by others, deserveth certainly much respect and esteem, but yet findeth but cold entertainment [reception] in the world. It is welcomed with suspicion instead of love”

“Was there ever any thing projected [presented], that savoured any way of

²⁸Mike Harding (contributor to *God’s Word in Our Hands*, p. 361) documents how Erasmus denied the fundamental, orthodox doctrines of the verbal, plenary inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture. Martin Luther once called Erasmus “a scoffer, a disguised atheist, and enemy of all religion.”

²⁹The preface has been reprinted in its entirety in the Fall 1996 issue of the *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal*. This issue also includes an article by Dr. William Combs showing how the preface dispels many of the arguments put forth by KJV-only advocates.

newness or renewing, but the same endured many a storm of gainsaying or opposition?”

“Whosoever attempteth any thing for the publick, (specially if it pertain to religion, and to the opening and clearing of the word of God) the same setteth himself upon a stage to be glouted [frowned] upon by every evil eye; yea, he casteth himself headlong upon pikes [spears] to be gored by every sharp tongue.”

“Many men’s mouths have been open a good while (and yet are not stopped) with speeches about the translation so long in hand, or rather perusals of translations made before: and ask what may be the reason, what the necessity, of the employment. Hath the Church been deceived say they, all this while?”

“. . . [A]s nothing is begun and perfected at the same time, and the latter thoughts are thought to be wiser: so, if we building upon their foundation that went before us, and being holpen [helped] by their labours, do endeavour to make that better which they left so good; no man, we are sure, hath cause to mislike us; they, we persuade ourselves, if they were alive, would thank us.”

“. . . [W]e do not deny, nay, we affirm and avow, that the very meanest [worst] translation of the Bible in *English* set forth by men of our profession . . . is the word of God: as the King’s speech which he uttered in Parliament, being translated into *French, Dutch, Italian, and Latin* is still the King’s speech, though it be not interpreted by every translator with the like grace, nor peradventure [perhaps] so fitly for phrase, nor so expressly for sense, every where.”

“The translation of the *Seventy* [the Septuagint, a translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek] dissenteth from the Original in many places, neither doth it come near it for perspicuity [clarity], gravity, majesty; yet which of the Apostles did condemn it? Condemn it? Nay, they used it . . . which they would not have done . . . if it had been unworthy the appellation [designation] and name of the word of God.”³⁰

“Truly, good Christian Reader, we never thought from the beginning that we should need to make a new translation, nor yet to make of a bad one a good one . . . but to make a good one better, or out of many good ones one principal good

³⁰When in the New Testament Christ and the apostles quote from the Old Testament, they often [according to David Ewert, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, p. 77, about 80% of the time] quote from the Septuagint, a translation (and an imperfect one at that)! If Christ and the apostles had confidence in their translation, so should we.

one”

“Some peradventure [perhaps] would have no variety of senses to be set in the margin, lest the authority of the Scriptures for deciding of controversies by that show of uncertainty should somewhat be shaken. But we hold their judgment not to be sound in this point.”³¹

W.B. Riley, longtime fundamentalist leader, summed it up so well when he once said: “To claim, therefore, inerrancy for the King James Version . . . is to claim inerrancy for men who never professed it for themselves; it is to clothe with the claim of verbal inspiration a company of men who would almost quit their graves to repudiate such equality with prophet and apostle.”

³¹The 1611 KJV contained 6,637 marginal notes in the Old Testament, 767 in the New Testament. The translators of the NKJV, recognizing the problems with the TR (the Greek text behind both the KJV and the NKJV), included marginal notes giving alternate readings. This is one of the reasons KJV-only advocates disparage the NKJV. D.A. Waite, a leading KJV-only proponent, called the NKJV “diabolical” because it does so (quoted in Dr. David Doran’s 1999 MACP workshop entitled, “Sense and Nonsense in the Translation Debate”). Is the 1611 KJV also “diabolical” because it did so?

Lesson 4: The Translation Controversy (Part 3)

So, What's Wrong with the King James?

Unfortunately, KJV-only advocates have forced their opponents into the unenviable position of having to honestly evaluate the King James Version itself and point out its shortcomings. Why is this unpleasant task necessary? Because many Christians are being subtly misled to place their faith in a translation of the Bible, rather than in the Bible Itself. Why is this so insidious? Because once someone realizes (this presupposes open mindedness and teachability, neither of which many KJV-only advocates are known for³²) that there are errors in the KJV³³, his confidence in the inerrancy of Scripture (having been misplaced in a translation) is shaken, to say the least.³⁴

Textual Errors³⁵

The Greek text behind the KJV is the Textus Receptus (or TR). The origins of the TR go back to the early 16th century Roman Catholic scholar named Erasmus.

In 1515, Erasmus traveled from England (where he had been on faculty at Cambridge) to Basel, Switzerland for the purpose of working with a printer named Johann Froben to

³²“In my experience, it is next to impossible to reason with such a person, for facts are not the issue. Their belief in, and one might well say worship of, the King James Version of the Bible becomes the central aspect of their religious faith” (James White, *The King James Only Controversy*, p. 4).

³³See “Errors in the King James Version?,” an article by Dr. William Combs in the Fall 1999 issue of the *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal*.

³⁴“Thus to attribute either direct inspiration or miraculous preservation to any translation or reproduction would appear to deny verbal inerrancy, given the inevitability of these mistakes. This seems to create the anomaly of affirming both a miracle (inspiration or preservation) and a non-miraculous result (erroneous versions)” (Dr. Rolland McCune, “Doctrinal Non-Issues in Historic Fundamentalism,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal*, Fall 1996, p. 177).

³⁵Much of the following information was gathered from an article by Dr. William Combs in the Spring 1996 issue of the *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* entitled, “Erasmus and the Textus Receptus.”

publish a set of annotations on the New Testament of the Vulgate (the Latin Bible of the day). Once Erasmus got to Basel, however, he was pressured into making an entirely new translation of the New Testament into Latin (rivaling the Vulgate).

Once Erasmus consented to this, he realized the need to compile a Greek text to undergird his translation. However, since this was not his original intention, he did not bring any Greek manuscripts with him to Basel. Consequently, he had to rely on manuscripts locally available in Basel. He found only 7 (the oldest of which was an 11th century manuscript).³⁶

Only one of the 7 contained the book of Revelation. Unfortunately, this manuscript was missing the last 6 verses (22:16-21). Erasmus decided to add them by translating from the Latin of the Vulgate back into Greek and admitted he had done so. Not surprisingly, the last 6 verses of Revelation in the TR have some readings which do not exist in ANY extant Greek manuscript containing these verses!

A similar phenomenon occurs in:

- Acts 9:5-6 (the longer reading of the TR in verse 5 is found in only 1 extant Greek manuscript of this verse, a manuscript from the 14th century, while the longer reading of the TR in verse 6 is not found in ANY extant Greek manuscript of this verse; both were included in the TR because Erasmus thought the Vulgate was correct in having them)
- Revelation 16:5 (Beza, whose 1598 edition of the TR is the basis for the KJV, replaced the Greek word for “holy one” with the Greek word for “shall be,” even though 1) there was--and still is--NO extant Greek manuscript of this verse that contains the word for “shall be” and 2) every edition of the TR and every English translation before then read “holy one”)
- Revelation 17:8 (the copyist who made Erasmus a fresh copy of his one manuscript containing Revelation mistakenly replaced the Greek words for “and

³⁶According to Bruce Metzger (cited by W. Edward Glenny, contributor to *The Bible Version Debate*, p. 49), Erasmus described his Greek text as “thrown together rather than edited.” Baptist Greek scholar, A. T. Robertson (cited by Keith Gephart, contributor to *God’s Word in Our Hands*, p. 169) once said: “If Erasmus had known that he was working for the ages, instead of getting ahead of Ximenes [who was at the same time seeking to produce the first ever Greek New Testament text], he might have taken more pains to edit his Greek Testament.” Erasmus (cited by Mike Harding, contributor to *God’s Word in Our Hands*, p. 381) once said: “I frankly admit that there are many things [in my New Testament] that could have been dealt with in a more learned fashion, and it is undeniable that my attention flagged and I was nodding in some places.”

shall come” with the Greek words for “and yet is”; EVERY extant Greek manuscript containing this verse has the words for “and shall come”)

- A similar phenomenon occurs in the TR at Revelation 15:3, which includes words not found in ANY extant Greek manuscript. Revelation 17:4 even contains a Greek word never seen before (W. Edward Glenny, contributor to *The Bible Version Debate*, p. 67).

Translation Errors

Isaiah 13:15. The KJV reads “joined” instead of “captured.” NOT ONE extant Hebrew manuscript contains the word for “joined” in this verse.

John 8:21. The KJV reads “sins” (plural) instead of “sin” (singular), even though EVERY extant Greek manuscript has the singular, as does the TR.

Acts 12:4. The KJV reads “Easter” instead of “Passover.” The Greek word for “Passover” is found in EVERY extant Greek manuscript containing this verse and in every edition of the TR. The KJV translators render it “Passover” all 28 other times it is used in the New Testament. The Christian holiday of Easter did not originate until the 8th century.

Acts 19:37. The KJV reads “robbers of churches” instead of “robbers of temples.” The Greek word for “temple robber” is found in EVERY extant Greek manuscript containing this verse and in every edition of the TR. In the first century A.D., there were no church buildings in Ephesus to rob.

Romans 8:16 and 26. The Holy Spirit is called “itself,” rather than “himself,” thus calling into question the personhood of the Holy Spirit.

Hebrews 10:23. The KJV reads “profession of *our* faith” instead of “profession of *our* hope.” The Greek word for “hope” is found in EVERY extant Greek manuscript containing this verse and in every edition of the TR. The KJV translators translate it “hope” each of the 52 other times it is used in the New Testament.

Transmission Errors

Though not as significant as textual or translational errors, transmissial errors (printing errors) have taken place as the KJV has been transmitted through the centuries. Most of these errors were quickly corrected. Some are quite interesting. For example, the “Wicked Bible” (1631) erroneously read in Exodus 20:14: “Thou shalt commit adultery.” The “Murderer’s Bible” (1795 Oxford edition) erroneously read in

Mark 7:27: “Let the children first be killed” (instead of “filled”). Perhaps the most humorous printing error was the one that once showed up in Psalm 119:161, which instead of reading “princes have persecuted me without a cause,” read “printers have persecuted me without a cause.” One such error has yet to be corrected. Matthew 23:24 continues to read: “strain at a gnat” instead of “strain out a gnat.” The Greek verb found in EVERY Greek manuscript and in every edition of the TR has the Greek verb for “strain” or “filter out.” Every English translation prior to the KJV translated the verb this way.

Should We Switch Versions?

It is hoped that what has been shared in these lessons on the translation controversy has convinced you that there is no need to tenaciously cling to the KJV, as if using another English translation for personal or public use is somehow sinful. In fact, there are several good reasons for making the transition to a more recent translation:

- The Old Testament and New Testament texts behind more recent versions like the NASB, NIV, and ESV are superior to those behind the KJV. While the New Testament text behind the KJV (the TR) is based on a mere 7 of the extant Greek manuscripts, more recent versions are based on the totality of the 6,500+ extant manuscripts. Furthermore, in the hundreds of years since the KJV was produced, significant discoveries and advances have been made in textual studies.
- Though such recent versions as the NASB, NIV, and ESV have the same textual basis, the NASB and ESV are better choices because they have a more conservative philosophy of translation (they are more “literal,” as opposed to more “dynamic”) and are more apt to give alternate renderings in the margin (the NIV has been criticized for not doing so enough).
- The most recent edition of the NASB was published in 1995, the NIV in 2011, and the ESV in 2016. The most recent edition of the KJV is essentially the 1769 one. As was pointed out in a previous lesson, the more recent versions have much lower readability levels than the KJV, making them easier to understand, because they were written in contemporary English. The words of Edwin Palmer (cited in D. A. Carson, *The King James Version Debate*, p. 102), chairman of the NIV translation committee, though stark, make the point well: “Do not give them a loaf of bread, covered with an inedible, impenetrable crust, fossilized by three and a half centuries. Give them the Word of God as fresh and warm and clear as the Holy Spirit gave it to the authors of the Bible For any preacher or theologian who loves God’s Word to allow that Word to go on being misunderstood because of the veneration of an archaic, not-understood version

of four centuries ago is inexcusable, and almost unconscionable.” The translators of the KJV concur when they state in their preface: There is “no cause therefore why the word translated should be . . . forbidden to be current.”

Lesson 5: Famous Bible Versions and Translations

Introduction

God has promised to preserve His Word (Psalm 119:152, 160, Isaiah 40:8, Matthew 5:18, 24:35, and 1 Peter 1:23-25). Besides the thousands of Hebrew (3,000+) and Greek (5,600+) manuscripts available today and the tens of thousands of citations of the New Testament contained in the writings of the early church Fathers, another testament to the preservation of God’s Word are the many versions and translations of It produced throughout history. Following is an examination of some of the most well-known.

The Septuagint (LXX)

The Bible of the early church, the Septuagint was a translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek by believers in Alexandria, Egypt for the sake of the many Greek-speaking Jews residing in the Alexandria area. This translation is called by the Greek word (Septuagint) and abbreviated with the Roman numerals (LXX) for seventy, because legend has it that it took seventy-two translators (six from each of the twelve tribes of Israel) seventy-two days to complete the first five books/the Pentateuch (around 250 B.C.).³⁷ The rest of the Old Testament was completed by 130 B.C. In later years, the Apocrypha³⁸ was added to the Septuagint. When in the New Testament Christ and the apostles quote from the Old Testament, the majority of the time³⁹ they quote from the Septuagint, even though the quality of this translation, relatively speaking, is poor. Nevertheless, as David Ewert (*A General Introduction to the Bible*, p. 110) has written: “There is perhaps no version of the Bible that has been so significant in the history of Bible translation as the LXX.”

³⁷Legend also has it that each of the seventy-two translated the entire Pentateuch independently and that when the seventy-two translations were compared, they were found to be identical.

³⁸The (Old Testament) Apocrypha are the 14 (or 15) religious books written by Jews between 250-200 B.C. and 100 A.D. that Protestants have deemed non-canonical.

³⁹Eighty percent of the time, according to David Ewert (*A General Introduction to the Bible*, p. 77).

The (Latin) Vulgate

The Bible of the Middle Ages, the Vulgate (from the Latin word, *vulgus*, meaning “common”⁴⁰) was a translation of the Bible into Latin by the renowned scholar, Jerome (real name: Sophronius Eusebius Hieronymus) at the end of the fourth and beginning of the fifth century A.D. Due to the lack of a standardized, uniform translation of the Bible into Latin at the time, Pope Damasus (pope from 366-384 AD) commissioned Jerome to produce one. Jerome was uniquely qualified for the task, being proficient in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. He began work on his translation in 382 A.D., completing the New Testament (which was a revision of the Old Latin Version) around 391 A.D. and the Old Testament (which was a translation from the original Hebrew) around 405 A.D. After Jerome’s death, the Apocrypha was added to his translation.⁴¹ Though initially vilified by many (such as Augustine), the Vulgate became the Bible of western Christendom for a millennium. In the opinion of David Ewert (*A General Introduction to the Bible*, p. 178): “In the history of Bible translation no version, other than the Septuagint, has had such a profound influence on Christianity.”

Wycliffe’s Bible

The first translation of the Bible into English, Wycliffe’s Bible was the work of John Wycliffe and his associates at the end of the fourteenth century A.D.⁴² Wycliffe’s Bible was translated from the Latin Vulgate, rather than from the original languages. The significance of this translation is captured by David Ewert (*A General Introduction to the Bible*, p. 184): “It is staggering to think that for a thousand years of Christianity in England English Christians had no Bible. All this changed with John Wycliffe (c. 1330-1384).” Today, Wycliffe’s legacy is remembered through the work of the Wycliffe Bible Translators, who seek to translate the Bible into the thousands of languages It has

⁴⁰Jerome’s translation did not come to be called the “Vulgate” until it became the common Bible of the day many years after its completion.

⁴¹“Jerome (340-420), the great scholar and translator of the Latin Vulgate, rejected the Apocrypha as part of the canon ... At first Jerome refused even to translate the apocryphal books into Latin, but later he made a hurried translation of a few of them. After his death and ‘over his dead body’ the apocryphal books were brought into his Latin Vulgate directly from the Old Latin Version” (Norman Geisler & William Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, pp. 272-273).

⁴²The New Testament portion was completed prior to Wycliffe’s death in 1384, the Old Testament portion subsequent to his death.

yet to be translated (see footnote 50).

The Gutenberg Bible

The first Bible to be printed, the Gutenberg Bible, named after its printer, Johann Gutenberg (real name: Hans Gensfleisch), was an ornate, middle fifteenth century A.D. copy of the Latin Vulgate.

Tyndale's Bible

The first English Bible to be printed⁴³, Tyndale's Bible was a translation of the Bible into English from the original languages and named after its translator, William Tyndale (1494-1536). "A zeal to place the English Scripture into the hands of the common man burned in Tyndale's soul. After receiving his ordination, he once expressed his frank amazement at the ignorance of the clergy. When a fellow priest resented this observation, Tyndale hotly replied: 'If God spares my life, before many years pass I will make it possible for a boy behind the plow to know more Scripture than you do'" (Bruce Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, p. 268).⁴⁴

David Ewert (*A General Introduction to the Bible*, p. 186) calls Tyndale (rather than Wycliffe) the true father of the English Bible because 1) Tyndale's translation was from the original languages, whereas Wycliffe's was from the Latin Vulgate; 2) Tyndale's translation was printed, whereas Wycliffe's was copied by hand; and 3) Tyndale translated into Modern English, while Wycliffe translated into Middle English (see footnote 11).

Due to governmental opposition, Tyndale had to flee from England to work on his translation. Once he completed the New Testament portion of it, around 1525 A.D., he had to smuggle it into the country. While in the midst of translating the Old Testament,

⁴³Tyndale's Bible, when first printed around 1525 A.D., consisted only of the New Testament. The first complete English Bible to be printed was by Miles Coverdale in 1535.

⁴⁴"Have we forgotten that this was the goal of the martyred William Tyndale--a readable translation that even an uneducated plowboy could understand? Tyndale did not try to keep the Bible in an elevated English style so that it would *sound* like the Word of God. His interest was only in an accurate translation that commoners could read and comprehend" (John Hutcheson, contributor to *God's Word in Our Hands*, p. 28; emphasis his). Paul Downey (contributor to *God's Word in Our Hands*, p. 390) says: "By insisting that all God's people, or even the English speaking world, use the King James Bible exclusively we are in danger of making God's Word unintelligible to the 21st century 'plowboy.'"

he was arrested and imprisoned, but continued translating it until he was martyred by being strangled and burned at the stake on October 6, 1536.

The King James Version (KJV)

Without question the most famous and influential⁴⁵ translation of the Bible into the English language, the King James Version came about as a result of the Hampton Court Conference called by England's newly-crowned King James I (who reigned from 1603-1625 AD), which convened outside of London at the Hampton Court Palace on January 14, 1604. At this conference, the Puritan spokesman, John Reynolds suggested that a new English translation be made in honor of the new king. James was sympathetic to such an idea, because the prevailing English translation at the time, the Geneva Bible⁴⁶ had marginal notes that, in his estimation, encouraged revolution. As a result, he commissioned some fifty Church of England/Anglican men to produce the new translation, a task that began in earnest in 1607. The original edition (which also contained the Apocrypha) was published in 1611.⁴⁷ Revisions were made in 1612, 1613, 1616, 1629, 1638, 1762, and 1769. The edition available today is essentially the 1769 revision.

The Old Testament of the KJV is based on the Hebrew Masoretic⁴⁸ Text, while the New Testament is based on Theodore Beza's 1598 edition of Desiderius Erasmus' "Textus Receptus," a Greek text Erasmus created from seven Greek manuscripts. Its translators also relied heavily on previous English translations, such as the Tyndale Bible (1525)⁴⁹,

⁴⁵"The influence of the AV [Authorized Version, another name for the KJV] on the language and literature of English-speaking people everywhere is inestimable. There is hardly a book or newspaper to this day which does not consciously betray an acquaintance with the language of the AV" (David Ewert, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, p. 204).

⁴⁶"It was the Geneva Bible that the Pilgrim Fathers took with them when they crossed the Atlantic in 1620; to them the KJV was 'a fond thing vainly invented' and they reckoned that 'the old was better'" (F. F. Bruce, "Transmission and Translation of the Bible," in volume 1 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 51).

⁴⁷As is often the case when a new translation is published, the KJV was opposed by many at first: "Critics accused the [KJV] translators of blasphemy and modernism, and called them 'damnable corrupters.' The AV [Authorized Version, another name given to the KJV] was denounced as being unfaithful to the original, and one London clergyman thought it denied the deity of Jesus Christ" (David Ewert, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, p. 203).

⁴⁸The Masoretic Text is named after the most famous group of Jewish scribes, the Masoretes, whose labors from 500-1000 A.D. standardized the text of the Old Testament.

⁴⁹According to F. F. Bruce ("Transmission and Translation of the Bible," in volume 1 of *The*

the Coverdale Bible (1535), the Geneva Bible (1560), and particularly the Bishop's Bible (1568), of which the KJV was to be a revision.

In recent years, the eighteenth century English of the KJV has been updated with the production of the New King James Version (the NKJV). The NKJV was the work of 100+ translators. The New Testament was completed in 1979, the Old Testament in 1982. Like the KJV, the Old Testament of the NKJV is based on the Hebrew Masoretic Text, the New Testament on the Textus Receptus.

The Scofield Reference Bible

The vision of one of the early leaders of fundamentalism, C. I. Scofield, the Scofield Reference Bible was first published in 1909. While Scofield was the chief editor, consulting editors included such early fundamental leaders as James M. Gray and A. T. Pierson. One of its chief financial backers was businessman John Pirie of Carson, Pirie, Scott, & Co. department store fame. This Bible is known for its dispensational notes. It has been called "the textbook of fundamentalism" (Gerald Priest, "History of Fundamentalism" class notes, Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, spring 2003, p. 62b) and "the single most influential publication in Fundamentalism's history" (David Beale, *In Pursuit of Purity: American Fundamentalism Since 1850*, p. 37). The Scofield Reference Bible was revised in 1917. The New Scofield Reference Bible was published in 1967.

The New International Version (NIV)

The most popular of the modern English translations of the Bible, the New International Version was produced by 100+ evangelical scholars from various English-speaking countries and denominations. The New Testament was published in 1973, the entire Bible (including an update of the New Testament portion) in 1978.

The Old Testament of the NIV is based on the Hebrew Masoretic Text, the New Testament on an eclectic Greek text, i.e., one based on an examination of the totality of the 5,600+ extant (known to exist) Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. It is a completely new translation, rather than a revision of previous English translations.

Expositor's Bible Commentary, p. 49), 90% of the New Testament in the KJV is from Tyndale.

In 1996, the NIV (rightly) came under fire for producing a “gender inclusive” translation for children called the NIrV (New International Reader’s Version). In 1998, they produced an update, removing the gender inclusive language.

Conclusion

The Bible is a special book, one that God has providentially preserved through the ages like no other. While this lesson has focused on but a handful of the translations God has providentially preserved, there are myriads more. How blessed the English-speaking world is to have so many of them.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ English is among only a handful (less than 10%) of the languages of the world that have a complete copy of the Bible. According to wycliffe.net (October 2019 figures), there are 7,353 languages spoken in the world, with 698 having a complete Bible; 1,548 with a complete New Testament; and 1,138 having some portions of the Scripture. According to this same source, of the 7.7 billion people in the world, 5.6 billion have a complete Bible, 786 million have a complete New Testament, and 470 million have some portions of the Scripture. The result is that there are 3,969 languages without any Scripture, comprising 252 million people.