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The King James Version Today

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Looking Ahead

The King James Version Today

by Ed Hindson



No other book has had so wide an impact on the English-speaking world as the King James Version of the Bible. Over the years of its popularity it went through four major revisions, the last one being in 1769. Most people who prefer the *King James Version* believe they are reading the 1611 original, but they are in fact using the 1769 fourth revision. A simple comparison will show the difference:

KJV (1611 edition):

"Our Father which are in heauen, Halowed be thy Name, Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done as in heauen, so in earth. Giue vs day by day our daily bread. And forgive vs our sinnes: for we also forgiue every one that is indebted to vs. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver vs from euill" (Luke 11:2-4).

KJV (1769 edition):

"Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth. Give us day by day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive everyone that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil" (Luke 11:2-4).

Popularity of KVJ

Since the seventeenth century the *King James Version* has been the most popular English translation of the Bible. It is often called the "Authorized Version" because it was presented to King James of England by the translation committee for his authorization in 1611. It should be noted that the king was not totally pleased with the translation and never did officially authorize it, though the designation has stuck with it ever since.

Designed as a "compromise" translation for use by both parties of the Anglican Church it was eventually accepted by High Church Episcopalians and Evangelical Puritans alike. It was certainly not the first English translation, but it was the first to be widely accepted by both factions of the English Church. However, we should remember that in 1611 it was a *new* translation and some of the old guard of conservative Puritans opposed it violently as a dangerous compromise with Episcopacy. Some branded the *K.J.V.* translators as "damnable corruptors of God's Word." Even the great scholar Dr. Hugh Broughton rejected it, saying: "I require it to be burnt!" preferring his "trusted" Geneva Bible.

Translating the Bible

It has been stated by some that "God only wrote one Bible." While that is true, it was not the King James Version, for it is only one of many English translations. The Bible God "wrote" (through inspiration) was in Hebrew and Greek (with a dash of Aramaic in Daniel and Ezra). The inspiration and inerrancy of the Scriptures applies first and foremost to those original manuscripts. They were later hand-copied to preserve the text and *none* of the originals remain today. We do not have the original documents of the Bible. What we do have are thousands of copied manuscripts (and these contain many variations). God did not see fit to give the original Scriptures in a time when they could be photocopied for perfect reproduction. He also apparently did not allow the originals to survive.

The task of translating the Bible into any language must begin with settling the issue of the text. Which Greek and Hebrew manuscripts should be translated? The original *King James Version* followed the Masoretic Text of the Old Testa-

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ment and the Received Text (*Textus Receptus*) of the New Testament (which follows the basic fourth century A.D. Byzantine Text type). Since over 80 percent of the Greek manuscripts are of the Byzantine type it is often called the Majority Text. Other text types include the Alexandrian, Western, and Caesarean manuscripts. Some argue that since these are generally "older" than the Byzantine texts they are probably closer to the original text. They also note that the older text-types agree more with Bible verses quoted by the ancient church Fathers, and, therefore support the argument that these readings are to be preferred. Others argue that the Byzantine Text is more uniform and homogenous and is the preferred text which has been most popularly accepted throughout the many centuries of church history.

Recent Translations

Major revisions in modern Bible translation began in 1901 with *The American Standard Version*. These were both well received by conservative Christians of all types and caused little or no controversy. However, the obvious liberal bias of the *Revised Standard Version* (1946-52) and the *New English Bible* (1961) set off a violent reaction among Fundamentalists who staunchly rejected both. Later, loose paraphrases were also severely rejected and denounced as corruptions of God's Word.

While conservative Christians were right in their opposition to these dangerous shifts in the methodology of translation, their response, unfortunately, set off a chain-reaction of negative opposition to all Bible translation. Soon denunciations were being made against the *New American Standard Bible* (1963) and the *New International Version* (1978) even though they were done by reputable evangelical scholars who clearly claimed to be born-again Christians.

Ridiculous Rigidity

In a sincere attempt to defend the Bible, the King James Only "cult" sprang up. Some persons made such ridiculous claims that others rejected the K.J.V. out of spite. These unknowing cultists began to say things like:

"The King James English is so inspired it corrects the Greek and Hebrew originals!" Others clung to their 1769 edition thinking it was the 1611 original. One sincere preacher told me that all translations were wrong because "we can't change one word of the Bible." He went on to point out that modernizing "ye" into "you" would add a letter to the Bible and throw off its numerical accuracy. I reminded him that when people use the so-called *King James Version* (1769) they have a "modernized" and "corrupted" text which changes "yee" to "ye"! I urged him to return to the real 1611 original with all of its archaic spellings. Then I showed him my 1611 replica edition and told him the book he had was not the real Bible! Confronted with such inescapable proof, he simply turned and walked away!

A Reliable Translation

Bible translation is a very legitimate enterprise. There would be no English Bible of any kind if it were not for the art of translation. There are still nearly 2,000 languages and dialects in this world that need to have the Bible translated into their tongue. For hundreds of years the Bible was only available in Latin in the Vulgate edition. This one translation was treated by many medieval scholars (as the *King James Version* is by some today) as if it were the only inspired translation. Some actually thought the apostles wrote in Latin! Unfortunately there are still some folk in the English-speaking world who think that the Bible was originally written in English and virtually came down from heaven that way with "printed in Great Britain" stamped inside!

The *King James Version* is only a translation. However, it is one of the finest translations ever made. Its sublime and literary quality is superior to most recent translations. Its adherence to the accepted majority texts makes it the preference of most Fundamentalists. It is without a doubt the most popular translation of all time. While good conservative scholars disagree on the issue of which text is to be preferred, the translators of the *New King James Bible* (1982) decided to go against the modern trend of following the so-called "earlier" readings and re-

tain the Majority Text. Thus, the new translation follows the exact same text as the 1611 edition. It retains the literary beauty and quality of the old *King James Version*.

The *New King James Bible* was totally translated by Bible-believing, born-again Christians who deeply revere the Word of God. Every translator has a clear-cut testimony of faith in Christ. In no way whatever have they attempted to destroy or pervert the Word of God. As a member of the translation team I can testify to the seriousness with which every word was translated so that this version would clearly reflect the intent of the original text.

An Admonition and Appeal

1. We must understand the legitimacy and importance of Bible translation. Martin Luther and the early reformers insisted that the Bible be translated into the language of the people so that every man could understand the Bible in his own tongue.

2. We must not label as "apostate" or "ignorant" those who disagree with our view of the preferred text-types. Good, saved scholars sincerely differ on this issue. That difference does not keep them out of heaven!

3. We need to be patient with sincere preachers and laymen who have no idea that the Bible has passed to us from the original manuscripts to handwritten copies to various text-types and finally into English translation.

4. We dare not be so prejudiced as to think that our English language is superior to all other languages. God did not give the original Scripture in English, but in Greek and Hebrew. There are hundreds of languages into which the Bible has been translated and by which people are coming to faith in Christ. Must they all learn to read the *King James Version* in English in order to be saved? Obviously not! If the K.J.V. were the only "inspired" version, by which version are people saved in Brazil, China, France, or Africa?

5. We must pledge ourselves to the continued translation of the Scriptures until the gospel has been made available to every people, tongue, and nation in the world. Jesus our Lord promised: "And this gospel must be published among all nations" (Mark 13:10). □