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Edward Hindson
Liberty University, ehindson@liberty.edu

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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 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).

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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 Testament.
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 folks 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 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 retain 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 KJV 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).