

A Study Concerning Versions

Introduction.

1. Many brethren have gone on record attacking virtually any version of the Bible except the King James Version (KJV), American Standard Version (ASV), or possibly the New King James Version (NKJV).
 - a. Foy Wallace Jr. in *A Review of the New Versions*.
 - b. Dorris and Donnie Rader in *Searching the Scriptures*.
2. In my opinion this attitude reflects prejudice rather than genuine knowledge of how translations are made and should be judged.
3. This morning I want to deal with two separate but related questions: is the KJV the only version, and if not, which translation is the best.

Discussion.

I. The KJV Only Position

- A. Explained: There are three basic categories of KJV advocates...
 1. The "I just like it better" group. Prefers the KJV because raised on it, pretty language, memorization, etc.
 2. The "I like the text better" group. Prefers the KJV because it is based on a particular Greek text which they believe is superior to that of other translations.
 3. The "KJV is inspired" crowd. Radical element which believes God inspired the translation of the KJV, formula KJV alone = word of God alone.
- B. Before proceeding, let me offer three questions that I believe refute the KJV only is the word of God only position:
 1. If so, does that mean that before 1611, people had no accurate translation of the Bible to use?
 2. Which KJV? Been revised several times.
 - a) First edition had "then cometh Judas" in Matt. 26:26. Another edition ommitted "not" in the seventh commandment (adultery).
 - b) Revisions in 1613, 1629, 1638, 1769, 1873.
 - c) So which one is the inspired one?
 3. If the KJV alone is the word of God alone, does this mean that those who do not speak English do not have any source for the word of God?

II. A Brief History of the English Bible

- A. The original documents
 1. The Bible states that it was written by men who were inspired by God to

ensure every word is just what He wanted (1 Cor. 2:13).

2. The Bible only makes the claim of inspiration for what these men wrote, not future copies or translations.
3. These original documents are called "autographs." We do not possess any of the autographs.

B. Manuscript copies

1. Just because we do not have any of the autographs, we should not feel helpless. We have copies of those documents.
2. Literally thousands of copies of the NT have been discovered through archeology, etc.
3. These manuscript copies can be checked against one another to make sure they are accurate.

C. Manuscript families

1. Illus. with having high school class write down the Pledge. Only one got it right, several made the same mistake. Some forgot "under God," other forgot "indivisible." So there was three categories of copies of the Pledge.
2. There is overall agreement between all the MSS, but there are a few differences.
 - a) One estimate is that the only substantial differences comprise merely 1/1000 of the NT.
 - b) In other words we have 98.33% of the NT MSS in basic agreement.
 - c) The differences do not affect any major doctrine (cf. Acts 8:37).
3. Just like there were categories of different readings of the Pledge, there are categories of variations of the NT text, which are called "families" (one group has Acts 8:37, another does not).
4. There are two basic families:
 - a) One family consists of MSS that are the oldest. Named for region they were predominant, called "Alexandrian."
 - b) Another family consists of much more recent MSS, but much more plentiful, called "Byzantine."
 - (1) If you were to ask what the majority of texts said at any one verse, the answer would more resemble that BYZ family. This is what is called the "Majority Text."
 - (2) A man named Erasmus in 1516 put together an edition of the Greek NT, using the handful of MSS available, which were BYZ. So his text was also very similar to BYZ. Later revised (1633), and the publisher claimed it was "the text which is now received by all," in Latin, *textus receptus*. "Thus the term 'Textus Receptus' never referred to any scholarly or official judgment on the merits of the text, but

was only a bit of publisher's advertizing." (Phil Roberts, "Shall We Return to the King James Version", in *A Tribute to Melvin D. Curry, Jr.*, p. 156).

D. Translations

1. The basic issue of translation is which text family should we follow: the older, closer in time to the original, or the majority, which are much more removed in time from the originals.
2. The KJV (and NKJV) followed the BYZ family. All other major translations follow the earlier family (such as the ASV).
3. History of the KJV:
 - a) AD 400 Bible was translation into Latin by Jerome, called Vulgate.
 - b) AD 1382 John Wycliffe translated the Vulgate into English
 - c) AD 1525 - 1537 William Tyndale made the first translation from the original languages into English (completed by Miles Coverdale).
 - d) AD 1568 The Bishop's Bible was published, revision or earlier Geneva Bible, slanted toward Church of England.
 - e) AD 1611 King James Version "The scholars were instructed to follow the Bishop's Bible as the basic version, as long as it adhered to the original text, and to consult the translations of Tyndale...Coverdale, as well as the Great Bible and the Geneva Bible when they appeared to contain more accurate renderings of the original languages." Philip W. Comfort, *The Complete Guide to Bible Versions*, pp. 47-48.
 - f) This review clearly proves that the KJV was not inspired, did not consider itself the only translation, etc.

III. *Problems With the KJV*

A. Archaic language

1. Ex. 19:18; Luke 17:9; 2 Cor. 8:1; 2 Cor. 6:12; 1 Thess. 4:12; 1 Peter 3:1; Phil. 4:6; 2 Thess. 2:7; Psalm 18:26; Gen. 39:8.
2. Ironically, the most outspoken proponents of a translation in the common vernacular were the KJV translators! "But how shall men meditate in that, which they cannot understand? How shall they understand that which is kept close in an unknown tongue?... it is necessary to have translations in a readiness. Translation it is that openeth the window, to let in the light; that breaketh the shell, that he may eat the kernel; that putteth aside the curtain, that we may look into the most Holy place; that removeth the cover of the well, that we may come by the water, even as Jacob rolled away the stone from the mouth of the well, by which means the flocks of Laban were watered [Gen 29:10]. Indeed without translation into the vulgar tongue, the

unlearned are but like children at Jacob's well (which is deep) [John 4:11] without a bucket or something to draw with; or as that person mentioned by Isaiah, to whom when a sealed book was delivered, with this motion, "Read this, I pray thee," he was fain to make this answer, 'I cannot, for it is sealed.' [Isa 29:11]

- B. Poor translations
 - 1. Know what words mean based on archeological discoveries, most of which have been made centuries after KJV.
 - 2. Ex. Isaiah 65:11; 1 Kings 10:28.
 - 3. Other translations are just bad decisions because they put the Bible in conflict:
 - a) 1 Cor. 11:24
 - b) Acts 9:7; 22:9.
- C. Doctrinal bias
 - 1. Ecclesiastical language: 1 Tim. 3:1
 - 2. Easter in Acts 12:4
 - 3. Calvinism in Heb. 6:6

IV. Which Translation Is Best?

- A. There is no such thing as a perfect translation.
 - 1. Simple reason is there is no possible way to put every single word of one language into perfect correspondence in another language.
 - a) French "j'ai le cafard," "I have the cockroach." For us, "I have the blues."
 - b) Finding such equivalents can be difficult.
 - 2. And bias can always creep in to varying degrees (NASB slightly premillennial, etc).
- B. Kinds of translations:
 - 1. Literal, word for word: KJV, NKJV, ASV, NASB.
 - 2. Thought for thought: NIV, NLT.
 - 3. Paraphrase: Amplified, Living Bible
- C. So:
 - 1. Detailed word studies, compare ASV and NASB.
 - 2. For pleasurable reading, the NIV and NLT.

Conclusion.

- 1. Any standard translation can get you to heaven.
- 2. Too worried: illus. with LXX vs. Hebrew Matt. 21:16; Psalm 8:2.