

Why We Hold to the KJV

Part 9 – The Unmatched Heritage of the KJV

Text: Isaiah 66:1-2

Introduction:

1. In this lesson we continue the overview of the history of the KJV project. Through it all, we see GOD’S HAND WORKING IN HISTORY to give us this glorious Bible in the English language.
2. Concerning the KJV translators, Dr. David Sorenson writes, “In reading the brief biographies of some of the translators of the King James Bible, two things are evident. First, they were godly men who had given their lives to the work of the ministry. Second, they were biblical linguists without equals. There has never in human history, and certainly not in the English-speaking world, been an assemblage of such a combination of godliness coupled with linguistic skills. It is not uncommon in this day for a young man to go off to Bible college and after two semesters of sophomore Greek come home and announce how the King James translators got it wrong in this or that place. He likely picked up the idea from a professor who had taken two more semesters of Greek than he had. The absurdity of it all is superseded only by the ignorance – and hubris – of the student and his professors. The King James translators were head and shoulders above even the learned translators of modern Bible version.” (*The Faithful Word*, p. 165)
3. Note: The majority of the information below is drawn from David Cloud’s book, “Faith vs. the Modern Bible versions” as well as Robert Sargent’s excellent course entitled “English Bible Manuscript Evidence”.

I. THE KJV TRANSLATORS CONT...

Let’s consider some other important information about the KJV translators.

A. The Gospel they Preached

1. Richard Kilby: “Consider well what He hath done for you. He made you at the first like unto Himself, in wisdom and holiness, and when you were by sin made like the devil, and must therefore have been condemned to hell torments, God sent His only son who taking unto him a body and soul, was a man and suffered great wrong and shameful death, to secure your pardon, and to buy you out of the devil’s bondage, that ye might be renewed to the likeness of God ... to the end ye might be fit to keep company with all saints in the joys of heaven.”
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B. The Objective of their Work

1. "Translation it is that openeth the window, to let in the light; that breaketh the shell, that we 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. Indeed, without translation into the vulgar tongue, the unlearned are but like children at Jacobs well (which was deep) without a bucket or something to draw with: or as that person mentioned by Isaiah, to whom when a sealed book was delivered, with the motion: 'Read this, I pray thee,' he was fain to answer, 'I cannot, for it is sealed'" (Translators to the Reader).
2. We can see that their hearts desire and aim was to faithfully translate the pure word of God into our mother tongue so we could be enlightened by the truth.

C. Their belief in an infallible Bible (from the Translators to the Reader)

1. "It is not only an armour, but also a whole armoury of weapons, both offensive, and defensive; whereby we may save ourselves and put the enemy to flight. It is not an herb, but a tree, or rather a whole paradise of trees and the leaves for medicine. It is not a pot of Manna, or a cruse of oil, which were for memory only, or for a meal's meat or two, but as it were a shower of heavenly bread sufficient for a whole host, be it never so great; and as it were a whole cellar full of oil vessels; whereby all our necessities may be provided for, and our debts discharged. In a word, it is a Panary (pantry or storehouse) of wholesome food, against fenowed [moldy] traditions; a Physicians-shop of preservatives against poisoned heresies; a Pandect (a complete code of laws) of profitable laws, against rebellious spirits; a treasury of most costly jewels, against beggarly rudiments; Finally, a fountain of most pure water springing up unto everlasting life. And what marvel? The original thereof being from heaven, not from earth; the author being God, not man; the enditer [composer], the holy spirit, not the wit of the Apostles or

Prophets; the Pen-men such as were sanctified from the womb, and endued with a principal portion of God's spirit; the matter, verity, piety, purity, uprightness; the form, God's word, God's testimony, God's oracles, the word of truth, the word of salvation... the effects, light of understanding, stableness of persuasion, repentance from dead works, newness of life, holiness, peace, joy in the holy Ghost; lastly, the end and reward of the study thereof, fellowship with the Saints, participation of the heavenly nature, fruition of an inheritance immortal, undefiled, and that never shall fade away.

Happy is the man that delighteth in the Scripture, and thrice happy that meditateth in it day and night." (Translators to the Reader)

2. Note their high and lofty view of Holy Scripture! It is quite a contrast to the majority view in our age of apostasy.
 3. Note their high view of the originals. That was the authoritative basis for their translations. They certainly didn't subscribe to the Ruckman view that they were being inspired to re-write the Bible into English under direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit like the original authors. Without a doubt, God's hand was moving in a most powerful and wonderful way through these men as a part of His work of preservation but that is quite different to ascribing a new act of inspiration to the translators.
- D. Their godly motive. Interestingly, the translators were not paid for their work. Several were awarded with ecclesiastical positions that provided them with an income. Except for one case in which John Harmer was paid 50 pounds, only the 12 men who did the final revision received any direct financial payment. There were given a weekly stipend of 30 shillings for basic expenses as they met in London for the nine-month revision process."
- E. The contrast of the day we live in
1. The day and age we live in is not characterized by that kind of respect for and faith in the Word of God (at least not in the English-speaking world).
 2. The last 150 years has witnessed the greatest assault upon the Bible in history: Modernism, Unitarianism, Evolution, Communism, the Cults, Neo-Orthodoxy, New Evangelicalism.
 3. Most of the great names in the field of biblical scholarship have been affected by the spirit of unbelief, including Joseph Thayer, Samuel Driver, Eberhard Nestle, Gerhard Kittel, Eugene Nida, Kurt Aland, and Bruce Metzger.

4. Even in the 1800s, Charles Philpot, leader of the Gospel Standard Baptists, warned that most of the biblical scholars “are notoriously either tainted with popery or infidelity.”

II. THE TRANSLATION PROCESS

- A. Each part of the Bible went through four major winnowing processes and was examined at least 14 times.
- B. What is unique about the KJV in distinction to the other European translations of that era was that it was the work of 47 men as opposed to the work of one or two men (e.g., Luther and the German Bible).
- C. Archbishop Bancroft, who was appointed to oversee the work, organized the translators into six companies (what we would call “committees” today)
 1. Each individual first translated the assigned portion.
 2. The individual translations were then considered by the entire committee.
 3. When a company completed its translation, it was sent to the other companies for review
 4. The companies were authorized to seek help from any scholar in the land.
 5. When the companies were finished with the translation a 12-man review team went through the entire Bible again.
 6. Finally, a two-man team prepared the Bible for the press.
- D. One author notes, “As the number of companies was six, and the numbers in each company varied from seven to ten, it follows that every several part would be examined **at the least fourteen times distinctly; many parts fifteen times, and some seventeen**” (prologue to *The English Hexapla*, 1841).
- E. The translation began in late 1604 and early 1605 and the final draft from the committees was probably in late 1608. In 1609 the delegates from the committees met in Stationers’ Hall in London and reviewed the whole work for nine months. In 1610-11 Miles Smith and Thomas Bilson put the finishing touches to the translation, wrote the Translators Preface, and prepared the Bible for the press.

III. THE FINISHED PRODUCT WAS A MASTERPIECE

- A. Even Roman Catholics gave grudging praise to the KJV, recognizing it as the bulwark of Protestantism in the English-speaking world.
 1. “Every sentence, every word, every syllable, every letter and point, seem to have been weighed with the nicest exactitude; and expressed, either in the text, or margin, with the greatest

precision...It may serve as a lexicon of the Hebrew Language, as well as for a translation." Alexander Geddes, 1786. Alexander Geddes was a Scottish, Roman Catholic theologian who helped translate the Old Testament of the Catholic Bible.

2. "Who will say that the uncommon beauty and marvelous English of the Protestant Bible is not one of the great strongholds of heresy in this country? It lives on the ear like a music that can never be forgotten, like the sound of church bells, which the convert scarcely knows how he can forego. Its felicities seem often to be almost things rather than words...It is his sacred thing, which doubt never dimmed and controversy never soiled; and in the length and breadth of the land there is not a Protestant with one spark of religiousness about him whose spiritual biography is not in his Saxon Bible" (Faber, quoted from John Eadie, *The English Bible*, II, p. 158).

B. Quotes from Protestants and other authors in praise of the KJV.

1. "In the English version published in 1611, occur many specimens of an edition truly gigantic, of uncommon skill in the original tongues, or extraordinary critical acuteness and discrimination." Matthew Poole, 1669
2. "The translators have seized **the very spirit and soul of the original** and expressed this almost everywhere with pathos and energy." Adam Clarke, 1810
3. "... it is exceedingly doubtful, whether a translation has ever been made from any ancient book, Greek, Latin, or Oriental **which in point of faithfulness to its original can be compared with this**. ... to attempt to supplant it by a 'new version,' or to introduce any material alterations, would be like 'gilding refined gold'..." John Dowling, 1850
4. "They [the KJV translators] were deeply penetrated with a reverence for the word of God, and, therefore, they felt themselves bound by a holy constraint to discharge their trust in the most faithful way. Under this divine constraint they were led to give us a translation **unequaled for faithfulness to the original, and yet at the same time clothed in the purest and simplest English.**" Joseph Philpot, 1861
5. "It is **a well of English undefiled**. ... It has the divine touch, even in its diction, which lifts it above the limitations of locality and time, and makes it valid and living for all the ages. ... The English Bible is still fresh and mighty, even if it has archaic or obsolete words. It has

waxed old, but it has not decayed.” William Muir, 1911 (*Our Grand Old Bible*, pp. 131, 192, 238)

6. The King James Bible is “the Noblest Monument of English Prose.” John Livingston Lowes, 1936
 7. “The Authorized Version is a miracle and a landmark. Its felicities are manifold, its music has entered into the very blood and marrow of English thought and speech.” H. Wheeler Robinson, 1940
 8. “It is the most beautiful of all the translations of the Bible; indeed, **IT IS PROBABLY THE MOST BEAUTIFUL PIECE OF WRITING IN ALL THE LITERATURE OF THE WORLD**...its English is extraordinarily simple, pure, eloquent, lovely. It is a mine of lordly and incomparable poetry, at once the most stirring and the most touching ever heard of.” Henry Louise Mencken (Henry Louise Mencken (1880-1956) was the most prominent American newspaperman, book reviewer and political commentator of his day)
 9. “... not only was theirs the best of the English Bibles; there is, in no modern language, a Bible worthy to be compared with it as literature. ... **They knew how to make the Bible scare the wits out of you and then calm you, all in English as superb as the Hebrew and the Greek.**” Gustavus Paine, 1977 (*The Men Behind the KJV*)
 10. The King James Bible “is still arguably the version that best preserves the literary effects of the original languages.” Harvard University Press, 1987
 11. It is “unquestionably **the most beautiful book in the world**” and “matchless in its literary qualities among all English translations.” Leland Ryken, Wheaton College, 2002
 12. “In the story of the earth we live on, its influence cannot be calculated. Its words have been found to have a unique quality, of being able both to lift up a dedicated soul higher than had been thought, and to reach even below the lowest depths of human experience.” David Daniell, 2003
- C. The Unique English Style of the KJV
- This is an important point as some will argue that the KJV was just reflecting the English of the time, parts of which are now archaic. But in reality, this was not the case. The style was unique and designed to convey as closely as possible, the words and sense of the original languages.
1. “... the English of the King James Version is not the English of the early 17th century. To be exact, it is not a type of English that was

ever spoken anywhere. **IT IS BIBLICAL ENGLISH**, which was not used on ordinary occasions even by the translators who produced the King James Version. As H. Wheeler Robinson (1940) pointed out, one need only compare the preface written by the translators with the text of their translation to feel the difference in style. And the observations of W.A. Irwin (1952) are to the same purport. The King James Version, he reminds us, owes its merit, not to 17th-century English--which was very different--but to its faithful translation of the original. **ITS STYLE IS THAT OF THE HEBREW AND OF THE NEW TESTAMENT GREEK**. Even in their use of *thee* and *thou* the translators were not following 17th-century English usage but biblical usage, for at the time these translators were doing their work these singular forms had already been replaced by the plural *you* in polite conversation” (Edward Hills, *The King James Version Defended*, p. 218).

2. “This English is there to serve the original not to replace it. It speaks in its master’s voice, and is not the English you would have heard on the street, then or ever. It took up its life in a new and distinct dimension of linguistic space, **SOMEWHERE BETWEEN ENGLISH AND GREEK (OR, FOR THE OLD TESTAMENT, BETWEEN ENGLISH AND HEBREW)**. These scholars were not pulling the language of the scriptures into the English they knew and used at home. **The words of the King James Bible are just as much English pushed towards the condition of a foreign language as a foreign language translated into English**. It was, in other words, more important **to make English godly than to make the words of God into the sort of prose that any Englishmen would have written**, and that secretarial relationship to the original languages of the scriptures shaped the translation” (Adam Nicholson, *God’s Secretaries*, pp. 210, 211).
- D. The translators aimed not only for accuracy but also for majesty. “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pasture: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul...” Psalm 23
- E. The KJV significantly improved on the previous English translations (see slides for examples).
- F. Modern versions lack not just the accuracy, they are wanting in power, reverence and majesty! See slides for examples.

IV. THE KJV AFTER 1611

- A. The KJV began to gain ascendancy over the Geneva quickly, and by 1618 the Geneva ceased to be printed in England.
- B. The KJV underwent four revisions between 1629 and 1769. The changes were largely a correction of printing errors, updating of spelling and punctuation, the addition of more italics, and the modernizing of obsolete words. See slides for examples.
- C. The 1769 edition of the KJV is the one that has been published as the standard edition ever since. It is the one that we all use.
- D. Significance of these facts
 1. The KJV has gone through a strenuous purification process. Those who so lightly claim that they can correct it and give a “better rendering” should tread more carefully.
 2. The difference between the 1611 KJV and today’s KJV is minor.
 3. Any idea that the KJV was “given by inspiration” or is perfectly inspired itself is disproved. If it were given by inspiration, it would not have needed *any* sort of correction or refinement because it would have been infallible in every detail.
 4. Those who teach that the KJV is more than an excellent and accurate translation, that it is given by inspiration and inerrant in itself, advanced revelation and such, must show us exactly which edition they are referring to.
 5. Beware of men like Peter Ruckman and others like him who take an extreme position on the KJV. Their position is nonsensical and makes all defenders of the King James Bible look ridiculous.

V. THE AUTHORITY OF THE KJV

- A. The modern translations from the English Revised Version of 1881 to the English Standard Version of 2001 are based on a corrupt Greek text and are influenced by corrupt modernistic scholarship. They are undependable and dangerous.
- B. The KJV is authoritative, not because it was authorized by King James I but because it is an excellent and accurate and beautiful translation of the preserved Hebrew (the Masoretic) and Greek (the Received) Texts. It is dependable. It is powerful and life-changing. It will not lead you astray. It is God’s inspired, infallible, preserved Word in English.

CONCLUSION: Dr. David Sorenson writes, “The King James Bible has been called “the most influential version of the most influential book in the world, in what is now its most influential language.” In the meantime, six billion copies of the King James Bible have been printed which is more than all the rest put together. It is the preserved Word of God in the English language.”