

BIBLIOLOGY (77B)

The Bible was given to be understood by all. We admit that great growth occurs when one with the proper gift utilizes it. However, every believer can carefully and prayerfully study the Scripture and expect a great level of understanding.

(Truth #6) - The Spirit's ministry in interpretation **does** coincide with the real spirituality of a person.

A worldly Christian, not yielded to the Lord will not ever be able to grasp God's word fully (I Cor. 3:1-3; Heb. 5:13). The Christian whose life is full of sin is susceptible to inaccurate interpretation. A spiritual Christian has far greater depth and discerning abilities.

(Truth #7) - The Spirit's ministry in interpretation **does not** mean one must not diligently study.

Nothing will ever replace careful diligent study of the word of God. The Holy Spirit works as one carefully studies the Scriptures. As an interpreter carefully studies a passage and meditates and consults other careful works on that passage, God's Spirit begins to unravel His truth.

(Truth #8) - The Spirit's ministry in interpretation **does not** mean the interpreter has no need to consult study helps, commentaries, theologies, Bible dictionaries, etc.

It is often asserted by "devout" people that they can understand the Bible without any help- just them and their Bible. This is nothing more than a "veiled egotism." To think that one is at such a remarkable level that he/she can by-pass all godly learning of all ages, is very foolish and arrogant. God's sovereignty has preserved the writings of some of the most dedicated men of God who ever lived, some of whom laid down their own lives. To ignore them is ignorance.

(Truth #9) - The Spirit's ministry in interpretation **does not** mean the interpreter can ignore common sense and logic.

Clear, systematic thinking is that which the Holy Spirit uses. The more the interpreter thinks clearly about history, geography, culture, and grammar the more accurate the interpretation. For example, if a text reads he went "up" to Jerusalem it may mean elevation, not direction. There will be harmony between clear, concise thinking and the work of the Holy Spirit.

(Truth #10) - The Spirit's ministry in interpretation **does not** typically give sudden flashes of instant, intuitive insight into the true meaning of Scripture. Insight into Scripture requires careful study, thought and analysis. The Holy Spirit does not usurp careful verification and validation, He works in harmony with it.

(Truth #11) - The Spirit's ministry in interpretation **does not** mean all parts of the Bible are equally easy and clear in meaning. II Pet.3: 16 indicates some things are "hard to understand."

(Truth #12) - The Spirit's ministry in interpretation **does not** mean it is possible to understand everything about God comprehensively and completely. Some things will not be known until we see our Christ 'face to face' (I Cor. 13:12). Some of the mysteries of God we will not know until we get to heaven.

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QUESTION #18 - How did we get our Bible in English?

There is a wonderful and mysterious and, we might say, even miraculous chain in bringing the Bible "from God to us." This final question of Bibliology attempts to give some insight into that chain:

The English language is actually a language that stems from the German language. Drs. Geisler and Nix observe, "English...is a sort of tag end dialect of Low German that has developed into a predominant world language." (p.541) Somewhere near the year A.D. 449, the Germans were invited by the British to help fight a war against the Picts and the Scots. A language was developed to enable the Brits and the Germans to communicate, thus this is the early stage of the English language. The language went through three main periods: 1) The early period (A.D. 449); 2) The middle period (A.D. 1100-1500) - literature began to surface in English; 3) The third period (A.D. 1500ff.) - vowel sounds were fully developed.

To systematize the information, we will attempt to put things together chronologically:

1. John Wycliffe (1320-84). John Wycliffe became an opponent to the Roman papacy because he saw the spiritual apathy and moral degeneracy within it. Wycliffe translated the N.T. from the Latin Vulgate into English in A.D. 1380 and the O.T. in A.D. 1388.
2. John Purve (1354-1428). John Purvey was Wycliffe's secretary and he revised Wycliffe's English translation into better English in A.D. 1395.
3. William Tyndale (1492-1536). With the development of Gutenberg's printing press (1453ff.) the first Greek grammar appeared in 1476 and Greek Lexicon in 1492. The first Hebrew Bible was printed in 1488, the first Hebrew grammar in 1503, and the first Hebrew Lexicon in 1506. William Tyndale became the first man to translate the Bible into English from Hebrew and Greek manuscripts. Tyndale has one of the most famous quotes in Church history which came as a result of a dispute he had with a man who said it was better for a man to be "without God's law than without the Pope's." Tyndale gave his famous reply- "I defy the Pope and all his laws; if God spares my life, ere many years I will cause the boy that driveth the plough shall know more of the Scriptures than thou dost." The King James Version is basically a 5th revision of Tyndale's revision.
4. Miles Coverdale (1488-1569). Miles Coverdale was Tyndale's assistant and proofreader. He did not translate directly from Hebrew and Greek as Tyndale did, but what he did do was revise and print Tyndale's English Bible. It was Coverdale who introduced chapter summaries. Coverdale used five sources for his revised English Bible- Vulgate; Pagnini's Latin version of 1528; Luther's German; the Zurich Bible and Tyndale's.
5. Thomas Matthew (1500-1555). Thomas Matthew had also been an assistant to Tyndale. As the English language was changing, he combined Tyndale's N.T. and Coverdale's O.T. into a revised English. His work was done in 1537.

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6. The Great Bible (1539). This English translation is called the Great Bible because of its size. This Bible was done under the direction of Coverdale and was authorized to be used in Churches in England in 1538. This Bible was a distant revision of Tyndale's English Bible.
7. The Geneva Bible (1557). When the persecution broke out in England, Geneva offered refuge to Christians. John Knox was teaching a group of Protestant exiles in Geneva. To meet their needs, they produced an English version of the Bible in 1557. This Bible did four things: 1) It closely followed the Hebrew of the O.T.; 2) It provided notes to a text; 3) It used a smaller page, making the handling of the Bible easier; 4) It divided the Bible into verses for the first time in English. This famous Bible was revised in 1560 and by 1644, had gone through 140 editions.
8. Bishops Bible (1568). This Bible was a revision of the Great Bible mostly translated by bishops of churches, hence its name. It is this Bible that became the official basis for a revision of 1611.

At this point in history, English Bible translation takes a serious twist. Protestants were busy making their own translations into English for use in England and the Catholics were busy making their own translations into English. Thus we may from this point break down our study of the Bible in English into two categories:

Category #1 - The English Bible for the Roman Catholics.

1. The Rheims-Douay (Rhemes-Douay) Version (1589, 1609/10)

Catholic academies and schools were forced to study the Scriptures in Latin. But they were realizing that the Protestants were teaching the Bible in English. The Catholics viewed all of the above English versions as "heretical" and "corrupt". The Rheims translation of the N.T., which was based on the Latin Vulgate was actually a translation of a translation. At a college at Douay an O.T. was published based on the Latin Vulgate in 1609. The N.T. was joined to the O.T., thus forming the Rheims-Douay Bible.

2. The Rheims-Douay-Challoner Version (1749/50)

This is the second revision edition which made a portable, cheap and readable version available to Catholics who spoke English.

3. The Confraternity of Christian Doctrine Version (1941)

This was the first official English Catholic Bible to be published in the United States. Twenty-eight scholars of the "Catholic Biblical Association" used the Latin Vulgate to translate the Bible into English and remove archaic expression from the Rheims-Challoner Version.

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In 1943, Pope Pius 12 decreed that a Catholic translation into English should be done from the original Hebrew and Greek rather than the Latin Vulgate. Confraternity began to produce a New version of the O.T. based on Hebrew and this work was completed in 1969. The New Testament was completed in 1970 and known as the New American Bible. This is not to be confused with the Protestant American Standard Version. This Catholic Bible was the basis for the Catholic ecumenical "Common Bible" (1973) and the "New Oxford Annotated Bible" (1977).

4. The Ronald A. Knox Translation (1944, 1948)

The Confraternity Bible is the official American Catholic Bible and the Knox Version is the official Great Britain Catholic Bible. Most of the work was based on Latin texts.

Category #2 - The English Bible for Protestants.

When James the sixth became James the I of England (1603-1625), he called a protestant conference of churchmen and theologians in 1604 to discuss the status of the Church (Protestant Church). At this conference, "the wheels were set in motion for the most influential single translation of the English Bible that the Protestants were to produce" - The King James Bible.

1. The King James Version (1611)

At a meeting in 1604, John Reynolds, the Puritan president of Corpus Christi College in Oxford, asked King James I whether he thought it would be good to produce an English Bible that would be acceptable to all people of all churches. James I gave his whole hearted support because it would enable him to have a Bible produced under his reign that would replace the Bishop's Bible and the Geneva Bible. King James believed that kings were appointed by God and had a divine right to rule their people. James saw himself as being "above all religious parties and principles." He saw a new English Bible as being sort of an ecumenical "peacemaker" between various religions, so he supported the project.

The first thing that was done was a selection of men to revise the Geneva Bible. There were six companies of men totaling 54 who were assigned to this project, although only 47 actually did the revision work. Two of the companies met at Cambridge to revise I Chronicles through Ecclesiastes and the Apocrypha. Two companies met at Oxford to revise Isaiah through Malachi, the four Gospels, Acts and the Apocalypse. Two companies met at Westminster to revise Genesis through II Kings and Romans through Jude. Each group was given a set of instructions, which included the various English translations. The actual truth of the matter is the King James Version- **"is not really a version at all."** It was basically a revision of all former English Translations. In a lengthy preface to the 1611 version, Myles Smith says that the translation "actually rested on the immediate predecessors rather than being a new translation of the original tongues."

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Let us remember that a version is a translation of the Bible solely from the original language into another language (See doctrine notes pp.55-56). The King James Bible relied heavily on the English translation done by William Tyndale. When the men working on the project did consult Greek, they consulted the 1516 and 1522 editions of Erasmus' Greek text. They neglected, however, to consult some of the superior manuscripts from the 12th to 15th centuries.

In the original title page of the 1611 King James Bible, we read these words:
"THE HOLY BIBLE, Conteyning the Old Testament, and the New: Newly Translated out of the Original Tongues; and with the former Translations diligently compared and revised, by his Majesties special Commandement."

There is no question that the King James Bible is a good, reliable English translation which has had overwhelming success. Some of the reasons for the success are as follows:

1. The revisers were choice scholars and linguists of their day.
2. The king wholeheartedly supported the project thus affecting both church and state.
3. There were good English translations available (Tyndale, Wycliffe) thus making it possible to "make a good translation better."
4. The religious climate of the day had, as its predominant interest, theology and religion.
5. The organization and cooperation among the translators in various parts of the world created a unified interest in the project.
6. The literary atmosphere of the 16th & 17th centuries was ripe for some lofty project.
7. The Publishers stopped publishing the other translations due to interest and sales and focused on this new work.

In its first year of publication, three editions of the King James Version were published. In the early editions there were several misspellings and unusual readings, some of which are quite humorous. For example, in the 1631 edition the word "not" was omitted from the seventh of the Ten Commandments and instead of the text reading "you shall not commit adultery", it said "you shall commit adultery." When the error was discovered, people quickly called this version of the King James Bible the "Wicked Bible." In the 1717 edition printed at Oxford the chapter heading of Luke 20 which should have read "Vineyard" was misprinted to read "Vinegar." This edition was called the "Vinegar Bible." In the 1795 Oxford edition of the King James the word "filled" was misspelled "killed" in Mark 7:27, thus instead of reading "Let the children be filled first", the text read "Let the children be killed first." This was called the "Murderers Bible." It has been calculated that between 1611 and 1769, misspellings and revisions have been corrected in "at least 75,000 details."

The King James Version is a good English translation. However, we also agree that "those who feel they can escape the problem of translations by retreating into the citadel of the KJV have a zeal for God not in accord with knowledge."

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2. The English Revised Version (1881, 1885).

Most of the revision work done on the King James Bible was not sanctioned by ecclesiastical or royal authority. In other words, King James authorized the Bible of 1611, but when misspellings or errors in translation occurred, scholars took it upon themselves to correct the problems. As a result in the next 200 years there came a desire to have a sanctioned King James Version revised with all corrections.

In 1870, Protestant scholars called for a complete revision that would not only correct any English problems, but would also examine Hebrew and Greek manuscripts to see if the English translation was actually accurate. We must remember that in some cases, the Hebrew and Greek had not been examined by the King James original scholastic team since some were just updating the work of Tyndale. In 1872, a group of Protestant scholars gathered to form some guidelines for this massive undertaking. The guidelines were these:

1. The goal was to introduce as few alterations as possible. If the King James Bible was faithful to the text, the goal was to let it stand.
2. To maintain as best as possible the same language and expressions of the King James Bible and other earlier Protestant translations.
3. Each group had to go over the portion to be revised twice- once to determine the revision and again to determine that the revision was accurate.
4. If a text differs from the Authorized Version, an explanation must be given for the alteration in the margin where the alteration is made.
5. After a revision is made and examined a second time, it may not be changed unless 2/3rds of the Protestant scholars agree to the change.
6. In every instance when a proposed alteration is made which has given rise to discussion, it must be voted on at the next meeting called to vote on the issue.
7. To revise the headings of chapters, pages, paragraphs, italics and punctuation.
8. To contact godly scholars and literary men no matter where they live for their opinion on a problem.

Oxford and Cambridge university presses took care of all of the costs of this project and finally on May 17, 1881 "The English Revised Version of the New Testament" was published and in less than a year nearly 3 million copies had been sold in England and America. On May 22, 1881 the entire New Testament was published in the Chicago Times and Chicago Tribune.

3. The American Standard Version (1901).

In America, Protestant scholars were not completely satisfied with some of the revisions in the English Revised Version but they had agreed not to do anything for 14 years. However, in 1901 the American Standard Version was published. It sought to revise some antiquated terms. For example, the American scholars realized that the Greek did not say "Holy Ghost", but "Holy Spirit". This version won favor in many churches in America and was so sound that it actually was demanded in England and was imported. The American Standard lacked the beauty of the King James, but its readings are more accurate. This version is a distant relative of the King James Bible.

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4. The New American Standard Bible (1963, 1967).

The Lockman foundation decided to revise the American Standard Version because the American Standard Version had become a universally endorsed, trustworthy translation. The translators who worked on the project of producing the New American Standard Bible had three goals: 1) Accuracy of Translation; 2) Clarity of English; 3) Adequacy of notes.

Scholars who worked on this project felt that they had more access to Biblical manuscripts than at any other time in history. Drs. Geisler and Nix observe: "However, the NASB is to date the best relatively literal translation done by a committee of conservative scholars."

5. The New International Version (1973, 1978).

The New International Version is a new translation made directly from original manuscripts. It is not a revision of any English translation. Over 100 Biblical scholars from various English-speaking countries worked on the project with a 15 member general committee making the final editorial decisions.

The goals of the New International version were: 1) Accuracy; 2) Clarity; 3) Literary quality. They replaced the pronouns of "thou", "thee", "thy" and "thine" with the appropriate forms of "you."

6. The New King James Version (1979, 1980, 1982).

In the mid-1970's, Thomas Nelson Publishers sensed a real need to revise the King James Bible. They estimated that 1/3rd of those who read the Bible, read the King James Version. Proponents of the King James Bible recognized that most of the King James Bible had not been actually translated from Hebrew or Greek, but a revision of archaic English. So this project was undertaken. Over 130 scholars worked on the revision. The main goal was to retain some of the beauty of the language of the King James and "to improve the understanding of verb forms and verb endings by bringing them into conformity with twentieth century usage."

For the translation of the O.T. the translators used Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (Hebrew Bible), Greek Septuagint and the Latin Vulgate. What is interesting is the translation of the N.T.. For some reason some of the King James people believe that the Textus Receptus is the best Greek text available and to check with any other Greek manuscript is to follow a wrong path. The irony is those King James scholars who did the translation of the NKJV realized that some of the older Greek manuscripts were better. So they invented a system to include the best readings-

- 1) The "T- Text" (Traditional Text);
- 2) The "M-Text" (Majority Text);
- 3) The "NU-Text" (Nestle-Aland/United Bible Societies' Text);
- 4) The "TR" (Textus Receptus).

The very inclusion of all of these readings will not bring joy to the proponents of the Textus Receptus because it absolutely proves that there are places where readings of other manuscripts are better.