

Why We Use the King James Version- *Translational Methods*

Editor's Note:

This is the concluding article in a series of three. In the first one we looked at the King James Bible, and in the second we examined the textual theory behind modern Bible translations. Now we will consider two other problems with modern translations, and then address the question, "What shall we do with the version controversy?"

Translational Methods

The discovery of these "older and more reliable" texts and their compilation into a neat scholarly reference volume by Westcott and Hort served as rallying cry for a new translation of the Bible that would take into account modern scholarship. The idea that we had no English Bible based on the new scholarly findings bothered many forward thinking religionists. Not only had the King James Version not been based on the "better" texts, but it did not include the textual and translational theories of the scholars of "higher criticism." Thus began the race for a "better" Bible.

Many things beyond an erroneous Greek text enter into the development of a modern version of the Bible, and we want to turn our attention to some of these factors now. First, as we already mentioned, modern scholars do not view the Bible the same way as scholars of the 17th century did. In the mind of the modern scholar, not only is there no regard for the text as sacred or divinely inspired, but also there is a clear flavor of disdain for the text and its primitive ignorance. Such an attitude leads to a shading of the translation that is anything but God honoring.

Second, today's translators and publishers are not William Tyndale translating out of a desire to place the Word of God into the hands of every plowboy. They are business people aware that they have a wide denominational audience to satisfy and are walking the tightrope between modern denominational interpretation of the text and modern scholarly opinions about the text. Note how modern translation committees include representatives of every mainstream Christian denomination to critique the text and make sure that it complies with their ideas of what the Bible should say. Do we really want a Bible that reads like a handbook of liberal Protestant doctrine? God forbid!

Thirdly, because of the above factors and a demand to make the text more "readable," no modern translation is anywhere close to being as literal as the King James Version. Even translations billed as "literal" are actually restrained paraphrases of the text. One scholar when asked why the NIV differed from the Greek in a certain place did not counter, "that is what the text says," but, "no scholar would translate it that way." A new set of commentaries I got that compiles writings of the most prestigious scholars of our day is based on the NIV. I find it amusing that many times these scholars comment that

the Greek doesn't say it like this, and then give a literal interpretation of the text that closely resembles the KJV!

On the other side of the tug-of-war, denominational representatives freely change the wording of the text to support their theories on doctrine or interpret ambiguous passages in favor of their preferred views. Many modern translations such as The Message and The New Living Translation make no attempt at being literal whatsoever. They follow the general thought, freely interpreting the details, and might be more properly entitled *My Feelings About the Bible*.

Post-publication Revisions

In addition to the pressures of textual theory and translational methods already discussed, we find the pressures of modern thinking about the Bible being introduced in an even scarier way. Modern versions that have been carefully reviewed by thoughtful churches for doctrinal errors and egregious translational methods are sometimes accepted as suitable versions for Christian use, only to be hit with nasty surprises later. Take the New King James Version as an example. The New King James Version was produced with a very narrow audience in mind. It wanted to skirt the textual controversy and give the conservative Christian community a Bible in modern English (the Bible many people have been longing for). Though influenced by ideas of modern scholarship and over two thousand words shorter than the King James Version, it was closely based on the text of the King James and hews closely to the King James Version in many respects. It was only after the New King James Version was embraced by many conservative Christians that the publishers began slipping changes into the text with successive printings. By far the most disturbing of these changes is the change to 1 Peter 3:3. A key verse for simple, modest, dress became an all out supporter of gaudy attire when the publishers slipped the word merely into the phrase, "Do not let your adornment be [merely] outward." They even placed it in italics showing that it was not in the original manuscripts! Unfortunately, except for the printing number, this "version" of the New King James is not marked as any different from the original version, which is now out of print.

The NIV publishers tried a similar stunt when they tried to slip in a gender less God. That change was a little too large to go unnoticed, but after the changes were withdrawn for awhile, they are now firmly ensconced in the latest edition. Is the Bible really a text solely up to the discretion of the publishers for wording and interpretation? Apparently, they think so.

Such thinking puts all modern versions in jeopardy. Even the most reasonable are vulnerable to later revisions and changes. Is there any hope that we can just keep a certain edition in print? Actually, no. As you are probably aware, all modern versions are copyrighted and remain under the exclusive control of the publisher.

Conclusion

So are modern versions suitable replacements for the King James Version? The answer is a clear no. What is a proper view of modern versions? Since modern versions include much of the text of scripture, they can serve as excellent commentaries for cross-reference and interpretation. We must be aware, however, that they are tainted with man's ideas.

What about the archaic wording of the King James? Indeed, what about the entire version controversy? Why are we, who are so cautious to educate our own children, write our own textbooks, and ordain our own ministers, unconcerned about the preservation of the Word of God? Why are more people not familiar with the English language and its history? Why is no one fluent in Greek or Hebrew? Why are no students being prepared for the great work of the preservation of the Bible? I speak to our shame. We are so far removed from such a thing it seems like a complete impossibility! How could we, the people of God, have let such a thing slide through our grasp and consigned the divinely inspired Word into the hands of the world? may God help us to be lovers and preservers of the truth!

~Joshua Porter