

Why We Use the King James Bible:

Modern Versions - The Textual Theory

In our last section we mentioned the huge success and strengths of the King James Version of the Bible. We also pointed out the linguistic weakness it carries because of its age. We will now turn our attention to the modern versions of the Bible by addressing three fundamental aspects that set all modern versions apart from the King James era translations: textual theory, translation methods, and post-publication revisions.¹ The first aspect we wish to address is the aspect of textual theory.

The King James Version of the Bible and all its predecessors (that used Greek manuscripts) used copies of the Greek manuscripts that had been carefully copied and maintained by the Christian church for over one thousand years. These manuscripts had been copied at various far-flung geographic locations and at times hundreds of years apart, but when collected were found to be in very close agreement, a marvel of God's ability to preserve His word and the respect Christians of those centuries had for the word of God. These texts, collected and copied into a complete scholarly reference copy of the Greek New Testament, became known as the *Textus Receptus* or *Received Text*, a reference to the divine inspiration of the text.

For hundreds of years after the translation of the King James Version, these texts were universally considered to be the Greek text of the Bible. It was not until the late 1800's that a new theory of religion and textual origins upset the apple cart and became the primary motivator for the translation of modern versions.

In 1830 Charles Lyell's groundbreaking work *Principles of Geology* took the revolutionary ideas of James Hutton and "proved" that the current earth was the result of slow, natural geologic processes. The academic world was electrified by these new ideas, and by 1850 a young man by the name of Charles Darwin was hard at work on an even more revolutionary volume, now known as *The Origin of Species*, that would answer questions as to how living things could have evolved without God. In the heat of this era, "critical" thinking about religion was just bursting out into what would later be termed "higher criticism," an attempt by scholars to prove that the Bible is at best a fanciful pack of lies cobbled together by ignorant religionists.

In this climate of scholarly unbelief (thought of as religious enlightenment), two English scholars at Cambridge University proposed a new theory of Christianity. Would not religion start as a contradictory collection of half-baked ideas that would be gradually

revised into a cohesive system of doctrine over the centuries? Granted, their theory was not too far off in relation to religion in general. But having abandoned the direct input of the divine, they applied the same theory to the most popular religion of the time, Christianity, which they both claimed. Thus removing the work of divine inspiration, they considered Christianity to be a gradual evolution of ideas from primitive to well-developed.

The theory fit the spirit of the age perfectly, but being scholars, they realized their work would not be respected without evidence. (Little did they know how eager the world was to embrace such ideas.) Thus since none of the current evidence available to them supported their theory, they were overjoyed with a new find in the Middle East of two partial manuscripts now known as Aleph (also called Sinaiticus) and B (also called Vaticanus). These manuscripts fit the bill exactly. They were sloppy, contradictory, and had been copied and edited by at least ten different authors. They were peppered with scientific and archaeological errors. They also were thousands of words shorter than other Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. On the surface, this seemed to be a perfect find, the logical evolutionary predecessor to the Bible.

Both Westcott and Hort were competent Greek scholars. Neither of them could actually have been fooled by the texts as we will soon see; however, the opportunity was just too good to pass up. It was sufficient evidence to get their theory broadly accepted and gain them much esteem in a scholarly community eager to get the divine out of the world.

Now as to the actual texts, I find it very puzzling that while hundreds of books over the version and text debate are published upholding Westcott and Hort (or perhaps trashing them), only one scholar I know of has turned to the texts himself and seen what Westcott and Hort surely saw when they worked over these manuscripts.² Yes, views of all the pertinent texts in the debate would require access to closely guarded archives scattered over the world as well as a thorough knowledge of Greek, but surely if you were going to write a definitive book on the subject, you would at least want to look at a picture of the texts for yourself. Apparently not. Author after author blandly states grand conclusions about the texts as fact, while never examining the evidence. I actually have a picture of the texts in question, as well as a detailed evaluation by the outstanding Greek scholar, John Burgon. And this is what Westcott and Hort actually saw when they looked at these favored manuscripts.

One hundred fifteen times, the shorter version is not a shorter way of saying something, but a line or couple of lines missed when copying from a more reliable manuscript. Each of these times the missing line or lines started with the same characters as the one above. Apparently a sloppy copyist thought that he had already copied that line. Instead

of proving that this is a more primitive version of the text, this actually proves that the sensible reading of the text existed before these manuscripts.

Two major portions, Mark's resurrection account and John's account of the woman taken in adultery, are left out of these texts. However, neither is left out of both texts and both are referenced by the early church father's writings which predate these texts by over one hundred years. Furthermore, in the case of Mark the section left blank exactly matches the length of the section taken up by the verses in other copies of the text, and in the case of John a companion text includes a footnote stating that the account was saved for a different Sunday's reading. Despite this abundant proof for the early existence of these portions, no modern version resists casting doubt on these two passages.

The scientific and archaeological differences (blatant errors that no self-respecting scholar would publish in a modern text) are written on top of the correct text, showing that the erroneous information couldn't possibly have come first!³

Thus it becomes obvious that what Westcott and Hort billed as a primitive text was not primitive but erroneous. Scholars of their stature could not possibly have heralded the texts as primitive predecessors of the Received Text without being dishonest.

~Joshua Porter

Endnotes

1. This is with the exception of the New King James, which is arguably not a new version of the Bible, but which has its own problems which we will discuss later.
2. This author is the highly-educated scholar, Dean John Burgon, who devoted his life to preserving the integrity of the Word of God. He believed that his extensive study of Greek manuscripts and his clear proofs of error in the claims of Westcott and Hort would turn scholars away from the new theology. Alas, scholars weren't interested in being convinced otherwise. However, his books still stand as the most careful exposé of the Alexandrian texts and clearly counter all claims to the contrary.
3. These errors include the changing of the sun being darkened at Jesus' resurrection to "an eclipse of the sun," which is scientifically impossible at Passover, the changing of Bethesda (whose location had been lost during the Middle Ages) to Bethsaida, and the "revising" of the distance to Emmaus (whose location had also been lost at the time). All these changes have since been conclusively proved wrong, and none of these are included in any modern version. If the text is truly more reliable, why not include them?