

Common sense facts on the King James Version

I have elsewhere written a long examination of the flaws in the claim that only the Authorised Version (King James Version in the US) is the acceptable translation of Scripture. What I want to do here is simply to lay out some facts about the AV for those who adhere to this claim. I will adopt a Q & A format.

Is there any inspired Bible version?

No; absolutely not. Only the original manuscripts, as written by the apostles and their delegates, are inspired and we do not have these. Bible versions have to adopt a policy as to how to formulate what was in these original manuscripts by examining all the available extant texts. There are various methods of doing this and various families of similar manuscripts, some better than others. Therefore, no Bible version in English is inspired because it is the work of mere men.

So the KJV is not inspired?

No; it is not.

Are the texts it is based upon inspired?

No they are not, being written many years after the original manuscripts. However, we have good reason to believe that the texts behind the KJV and the NKJV are very close indeed to the original texts.

What are these texts?

The NT text of the KJV and NKJV is based upon what is commonly called the Byzantine family of texts. Though there have been various titles for similar types of text, there are today only three main types summarising them all: the Byzantine, the Alexandrian and the Majority texts. The Byzantine family includes the Textus Receptus (Received Text) which is essentially the same as that which lies behind the KJV (though not exactly the same). The actual Textus Receptus edition of the Greek text was published in 1633 some years after the KJV came out, gleaned from the editions of Ximenes, Beza and Stephanus. The Greek text underlying the KJV is based upon the 1549 and 1551 editions of Stephanus and Beza's editions of 1589 and 1598.

The Majority Text is very similar, being from the same family but based upon examining the majority of good available manuscripts, some of which were not available to the translators of the KJV; it contains the text found in most of the Greek manuscripts. It differs from the Received Text in passages where the manuscripts used by the editors of the 16th century Greek editions deviated from the consensus of the majority of manuscripts. No modern translation is based upon the Majority Text but the NKJV indicates in the footnotes where the Majority Text has a different reading.

The Alexandrian family is the text behind the vast majority of modern translations being based upon very old manuscripts claimed to be more accurate. However, in textual matters older is not better. When old manuscripts became worn through use, and therefore subject to being read wrongly, they were destroyed and an accurate copy made by a scribe. Great care and strict rules were followed in making these copies. Ancient manuscripts that avoided destruction for some reason are suspect. Indeed the key manuscripts behind the Alexandrian family contradict each other thousands of times.

There is no single manuscript, which reads precisely as the KJV New Testament; no single, extant Greek manuscript that has all the words exactly as found in the KJV. The idea that the KJV accurately follows a single, ancient Greek manuscript called the Textus Receptus is nonsense. Like modern translators, the KJV translators had to make choices. These choices included mistakes; this is confirmed by the later revisions to the KJV. If the 1611 edition were perfect it would not have been revised.

The KJV not only has places where it does not follow the Greek text, but also many places where it violates Greek or Hebrew grammar, or mistranslates words. Then idea that it perfectly represents the original languages is also nonsense. Some mistakes are ungodly.

Can you give me some examples of these mistakes?

In Acts 19:37 the Greek word 'temples' is translated as 'churches'. In Acts 12:4 the Greek word 'Passover' is translated as 'Easter'. In 1 Kg 20:38 the Hebrew phrase 'bandage over his eyes' is translated as 'ashes upon his face'. There are many examples of paraphrasing to fit current parlance, such as 'God forbid' instead of 'let it not be'.

How many revisions have there been?

The original 1611 edition of the KJV did not have the Textus Receptus available and was based upon the Stephens 1550 text, but did not always follow it. Scrivener reveals 23 passages where the KJV differs from Stephens and Beza jointly. In some cases the source is unknown; six of these are in Revelation.

There have been four major revisions of the KJV text in the last 400 years and several minor ones in 1613, 1629, 1638, 1644, 1664, 1701, 1744, 1762, 1769 and 1850. Some revisions appear to be influenced by the Latin Vulgate.

The idea that the KJV, as we now have it, has always been the same and has not changed since it was made by the original translators is a complete fantasy. It needed revising within two years of publication.

What were these revisions?

The revisions included changes in punctuation, capitalisation, spelling, changes in words, word order and grammar; and the addition and deletion of words. The changes removed the apocrypha and rooted out antique spellings and most misprints. Ussher's chronology appeared from 1701. For KJV-only fanatics, which one is inerrant? The 1611 version included the Apocrypha; are KJV-only enthusiasts going to accept that as Scripture?

The version available now is not the same as that originally published. Even the popular artificial word 'Jehovah' was not in the original as the letter 'J' did not then exist. These revisions also made alterations that do not follow the text used by the original translators.

So what are the best Bible versions?

In my opinion, the best are those which are based upon the Byzantine family of manuscripts. This would limit Bible versions to the KJV and the NKJV. Regarding the best Greek text, my opinion is that this is the Majority Text without any doubt.

What about the Old Testament?

The textual base for the OT of all versions is the Massoretic text of the Hebrew. This was developed a long time after the OT, which was written without vowels, between the 5th-9th century AD. The Massorettes were a family of scribes who put vowels into the text to make the readings clear. No one really doubts the essential accuracy of the Hebrew text.

There is a Greek translation of the OT made in Alexandria in the time just before Christ. This is called the Septuagint (LXX). This has some value in comparing texts but has many differences from the Hebrew text. The apostles often quoted from the LXX.

What about Hebrew manuscripts of the NT?

This is a fallacious claim made by modern Jewish Root heretics. There were no original Hebrew texts for the NT.

Why was the KJV made?

The KJV did not arise from a consensus of desire by evangelical Christians. It was a specifically political move by King James I. Now James I was no saint but a political manipulator, despot and homosexual. Reformed (Calvinist) evangelicals had a Bible that completely satisfied them in the Geneva Bible which was very Calvinistic.¹ It was not only a good translation made by Reformed theologians but was also filled with very useful notes explaining the text. It was this Calvinistic emphasis that James wanted to suppress. He wanted a political compromise that was less rigid than the Geneva but more acceptable to Puritan evangelicals than the hated Bishop's Bible of 1602. However, the KJV was, in reality, a revision of the Bishop's Bible, politically engineered to keep the peace and published in 1611.

Was not the translating team all godly saints with a spotless reputation?

One translator, Richard Thomson, was an alcoholic who 'drank his fill daily' while working (GS Paine, *The Men Behind the KJV*; Baker Book House, 1979, p 40, 69).

Why has the KJV become acceptable?

Originally it was not. The Geneva Bible continued to outsell the KJV until a prolonged propaganda effort by the crown managed to get the KJV to sell better. Indeed, the Bible taken by Puritans to America was the Geneva not the KJV and 144 editions appeared between 1560 and 1644. Eventually, James prohibited the printing of the Geneva Bible.

What the KJV had going for it was its lyrical quality coupled with being an elegant, straightforward and accurate translation.

You have mentioned mistakes in the KJV, can you give me some more examples?

There are a great many and it would be tedious to list all the verses and types. I will restrict myself to groups of errors and simply list them.

- It translates the same OT texts differently: e.g. Gen 15:6 in Rm 4:3; Gal 3:6.
- It translates the same Greek phrase differently: e.g. Rm 12:19 and Heb 10:30 quoting Deut 32:35; or Heb 3:11 and 4:3 quoting Ps 95:11; or Mk 15:33 with Lk 23:44 as 'whole land' but then 'all the earth'.
- It translates the same word differently: e.g. Rev 4:4 'seats' then 'thrones'.
- It translates different words the same: e.g. 'sword' in Rev 1:16 *rhomphaia* - a large sword, a kind of long sword worn on the right shoulder and Rev 6:4 *machaira* a large knife, used for killing animals and cutting up flesh or a small sword as distinguished from a large sword.
- It uses archaic and obsolete language such as: 'fetch a compass' for 'circle behind them', or 'they cast the same in his teeth' for 'reviled him'.
- It uses archaic words that are not understood today, such as: 'agone' for 'ago', 'angle' for 'fishhook', 'besom' for 'broom', 'rude' for 'unskilled'. There are over 800 of these.

¹ The *Geneva Bible* [NT 1557, OT 1560] was the first to use verse divisions, Roman (modern) type and *italicised* words to designate words not in the original text. It had copious Calvinistic notes, a Bible dictionary and was a favourite of the Puritans; this was the most accurate Bible to date.

- It often mixes up proper nouns and common nouns such as translating the place Bethel as 'house of God' or in Jud 15:19 'the hollow place that is in Lehi' becomes 'an hollow place that was in the jaw'; 'No-Ammon becomes 'Populous No'.
- There are many wrong words, such as 'avenging' instead of 'leaders' (Jud 5:2); 'the plain' instead of 'terebinth tree (Gen 12:6).
- There are many mistaken translations, such as calling the Holy Spirit 'it'.

There are many more mistakes but this is sufficient.

What other problems are there that should be mentioned?

The KJV is hard to read; pure and simple! Its readability level is 18-years old presuming a complete education (i.e. having attained A-levels); this is a technical judgment meaning that anyone under that age will find it very difficult to understand. The whole point of a translation is to make the Bible easy to understand. This is not serving the church properly. The original KJV translators said in their original preface, '*But we desire that the Scripture may speak like itself, ... that it may be understood even by the very vulgar [common]*'.

Another problem is that the last six verses of Revelation were back translated into Greek from the Latin Vulgate since no manuscript was available for them when the KJV was produced? Also the KJV has, in Acts 9:6, half a verse found nowhere except in the Vulgate, 'And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him?'

KJV-only advocates strongly (and correctly) argue that we should not add words to Scripture, yet the KJV repeatedly does this, such as adding 'Saint' to Matthew, Luke etc. in the book titles. 'Saint is not in the Greek originals. The KJV also adds mythical names to Hebrew words, such as 'satyr' for 'goat', 'unicorn' for a 'wild ox' or 'cockatrice' [in heraldry a two legged dragon with a cock's head] for 'viper'. It also calls 'demon's 'devils' with no warrant.

What is your final conclusion?

There are no perfect Bible versions; all of them have faults. There are no perfect translating teams; all of them have faults. There is no inspired Bible translation; only the originals were inspired by God. No one has the right to demand that another believer follow their choice of Bible. If a believer uses a translation other than the KJV they do not sin.

The best Bible translations are those which accurately translate the original language literally and not with dynamic equivalence (paraphrase). Good literal translations include the NASB and RSV but these are based upon Alexandrian manuscripts and the theories of Westcott and Hort (who developed the Revised Version and set the standard for modern versions).

The purpose of translations is to make God's word clear to ordinary people, and this was the motivation of the KJV translators. Since the KJV is not easily understood today, they would insist upon a new revision in modern English if they were alive now. Thus the NKJV is the best available translation.

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