

King James and Other Versions

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Recently, some controversy has arisen over the issue of Bible versions. While some recommend modern language translations as a way for today's Bible reader to obtain greater understanding of God's Word, others assert that such modern versions are vastly inferior to the King James Version and should not be used. I am one who believes in the validity and helpfulness of some modern translations, and I would like to explain why in this booklet. Let me begin, however, by stating very clearly that I have a great admiration for the King James Version of the Bible. In over 20 years of pastoral ministry, I have used this venerable version almost exclusively from the pulpit. It has been a tremendously popular Bible and has displayed a staying power for nearly four centuries that gives evidence of the blessing of God. Having said that, however, I must take issue with some brethren who insist that, of all the English language Bible versions available today, the King James Version *alone* should be used by English speaking people, to the exclusion of all other English language Bible versions.

This booklet is not intended to be a full scholarly treatment of the subject. Such a task would require a full length book with some rather technical discussions. Instead, It is my hope to present this material in a more popular, easily understood format. For those who desire more in-depth reading, I have included a bibliography of material I have found helpful.

In the debate over which version(s) God's people should use, there are two somewhat related, but nevertheless separate, issues:

1. The issue of the King James Version vs. other English Bible translations.
2. The issue of the ancient Greek manuscripts used as a basis for various translations.

Unfortunately, some have confused these two issues. They are really not the same issue. Each must stand or fall on its own merits.

I. The King James Version vs. Other Bible Translations

A. The Doctrinal Argument

Defenders of the “King James Only” (KJO) position raise a number of doctrinal issues which they believe support their position and argue against the validity of modern translations. These are some of the most serious arguments to consider, because they portray those who support translations other than the KJV as errorists at best, and heretics at worst. Following are some of the most frequently used doctrinal arguments:

1. The Preservation of Scripture (Matt. 24:35)

In Matthew 24:35 Jesus promised that, even though heaven and earth shall pass away, His Words will never pass away. This is a wonderful promise, and throughout the ages God has miraculously preserved His Word from destruction, even though skeptics and powerful rulers have attempted to obliterate it from the face of the earth. However, this promise is taken by some advocates of KJO to mean that any Bible with words differing from the King James Version is heretical. Let us remember at the outset that when Jesus uttered these words, the King James Version of the Bible was an unknown entity (first published in AD 1611). It would not come into existence for over 1500 years. Over that millennium and a half, through times of severe persecution against Christians, God’s promise to preserve His Word was kept faithfully, and it had nothing to do with the King James Version of the Bible. The Bible was originally written in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. God has faithfully preserved His Word as it was given in these original languages. Though the King James Version is an excellent translation, it is but one of many translations of the Bible that have been made over the centuries into many different languages. Jesus’ promise of divine protection pertains to the Bible in the original languages, not to any particular version.

Still, the charge is laid, that the modern versions omit words and even verses (I have heard some claim that there are 146 verses missing from the modern versions!) that appear in the KJV. Surely this proves that the modern versions are part of some grand conspiracy to rob people of the Word of God! In the second part of this booklet, I will discuss the matter of the various ancient Greek manuscripts. Suffice it to say at this point, that among these ancient manuscripts there is a great deal of variation. Scholars who are engaged in the discipline called “Textual Criticism” attempt to analyze these manuscripts in an effort to discover precisely what was the content of the original writings (known as the “autographs”). Some of these ancient manuscripts, through mistakes made in hand copying, contain more words, others contain fewer words. Now it is just as serious a matter to *add to* God’s Word as it is to *take away* from God’s Word (Rev. 22:19). Our standard of measurement, however, should not be a translation that was made over 1,500 years after the Bible was completed. We need to examine the very best ancient Hebrew,

Aramaic and Greek manuscripts in order to arrive at an understanding of what God's Word contains, and *then* we can compare *all* the translations on an equal basis. It is circular reasoning to assume first that only the King James Version accurately preserves the exact words of God, then to compare all others against this standard.

2. The Deity of Christ (John 1:18; etc.)

Another doctrinal issue often raised by proponents of KJO has to do with the Deity of Christ. No Bible doctrine is more precious than this one, and false teaching about this one area of doctrine is a sure sign of a cult (1 John 4:3). It is in connection with this doctrine that some of the most vitriolic charges have been brought against modern English translations. They are accused, for example, of purposely demeaning the Deity of Christ. If it is true that modern translators have purposely translated in such a way as to diminish the Deity of Christ, then they have done a very poor job. The major modern translations in use by conservative, evangelical Christians today all clearly teach the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ. The following is an excerpt from D.A. Carson's book, *The King James Version Debate*¹:

"I suppose that no doctrine is more repeatedly thought to be under attack in the non-Byzantine traditions, according to the defenders of the KJV, than the doctrine of the deity of Christ.... In a recent article Victor Perry discusses the places in the New Testament where the Greek *can* be understood (either by the right choice of witnesses or by the appropriate grammatical interpretation) to call Jesus "God," quite specifically.² In his chart, a simplified form of which I here reproduce, he provides a neat summary of the places in the New Testament where various versions call Jesus "God." A check (✓) means the version in question does directly ascribe deity to Jesus; a cross (X) means it does not.

¹ D.A. Carson, *The King James Version Debate* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979) 64. I have added to this table the last two rows (NASB and NASB mg.) and the final column (Total checks), as well as the question mark (?) which appears twice in the column Rom. 9:5.

² "Problem Passages of the New Testament in Some Modern Translations: Does the New Testament Call Jesus God?" *ET* 87 (1975-76): 214-15.

	John 1:1	John 1:18	Acts 20:28	Rom. 9:5	2Thess 1:12	Titus 2:13	Heb. 1:8	2Pet. 1:1	Total checks
KJV	✓	X	✓	✓?	X	X	✓	X	4
RV	✓	X	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	✓	6
RV mg.		✓	X	X		X		X	3
RSV	✓	X	X	X	X	✓	✓	✓	4
RSV mg.		✓	X	✓		X	X	X	3
NEB	✓	X	X	X	X	✓	✓	✓	4
NEB mg.		✓	X	✓		X	X		4
Moffatt	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	✓	1
Goodsp eed	X	X	✓	X	X	✓	X	✓	3
TEV	✓	✓	X	X	X	✓	✓	✓	5
TEV mg.		X	X	✓					5
NIV	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	✓	7
NIV mg.		X	X	X	✓				5
MLB	✓	X	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	✓	6
NWT	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	0
NASB	✓	✓	✓	✓?	X	✓	✓	✓	7
NASB mg.		X							6

“A number of observations may draw attention to the most important results: (1) Only the NWT omits all specific references to Jesus’ deity; and that of course is predictable. (2) Even James Moffatt and Edgar J. Goodspeed, whose liberal propensities are well-known, manage one and three references, respectively. (3) the KJV accepts only four of the eight as references to Jesus’ deity. (4) The highest number of such references belongs to the NIV [and the NASB, — G.G.], a translation done by evangelicals but based on an eclectic text.”

Clearly, to charge that the translators of the NIV and the NASB seek to demean the deity of Christ is a hollow argument. The translators of these two versions were godly men and women who had a desire to make God’s Word available to people in

language they could understand, while at the same time being accurate both in translation and in theology.

3. One Truth, One Faith (John 14:6; Eph. 4:5; Jude 3)

Some KJO proponents defend their position by claiming that since there is only *one* truth and *one* faith, there should therefore be only *one* version of the Bible. My response to this argument is similar to that in point #1 above. Why should we insist that the *one* Bible we accept be one that was translated over 1,500 years after the Bible was completed? Ultimate Biblical authority comes from the original Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. Insofar as any translation accurately represents the original, it, too, is authoritative. Obviously, there are some very bad translations available to the public. For example, the Jehovah's Witness Bible, *The New World Translation* does a particularly bad job of translating portions of Scripture that support the Deity of Christ. There are also some very good translations of the Bible, of which, the King James Bible is one such example. Other good translations also came from the efforts of godly men who had a desire to make God's Word available to people in understandable language. When Jesus said, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life," no one had ever heard of the King James Version. When Jude referred to the faith which has been "once for all delivered unto the saints," the original New Testament in Greek was not even yet finished, to say nothing of the King James Version or any other translation. When Paul wrote to the Ephesians that there is "one faith, one Lord, one baptism," he was not referring to a Bible version. God's truth is unchangeable. He has revealed that truth to us in the Hebrew/Aramaic Old Testament and in the Greek New Testament. Thankfully, godly men, including the KJV translators, over the centuries have always sought to make that truth available to other men in their own native languages. But to insist that the King James Version is the only valid translation, just because there is only one truth and one faith, completely misses the point of these Bible passages.

4. The Blinding of Men's Eyes by Satan

One reason given in favor of modern translations, is that they make the Word of God more easily understood, because the modern reader struggles to understand Elizabethan English. In 1611, when the original King James Version came out, it was at that time a modern version. Its language was easily understood by English speaking people, because it represented the vernacular language of their day. But today, that language is no longer the vernacular. Modern English speakers struggle with "thee," "thou" and many other archaic expressions.

Some defenders of the KJO position, however, say that it is not necessarily a bad thing that people have difficulty understanding the Bible. After all, they claim, the Bible itself says that Satan has "blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them" (2 Cor. 4:4). Satan, of course, accomplishes this task quite without our help! It may be Satan's desire to blind men's minds to the Gospel, but our desire should

be to make it more readily understandable. In the same passage just quoted, Paul characterized his ministry as being a “manifestation of the truth” (ver. 2), where the word translated “manifested” means “disclosure, announcement, the open proclamation of the truth.”³ This ought to be our desire — to “disclose,” “announce,” “openly proclaim” the truth of the Gospel — not keep it hidden in archaic language almost 400 years old.

B. The Pragmatic Argument

In addition to the doctrinal arguments presented above, defenders of the KJO position give numerous practical reasons in support of their contention. Below are some of the more common practical reasons given:

1. So Many Versions, So Much Confusion

If you walk into any modern day Christian book store, you are likely to be faced with an almost bewildering display of different Bible translations. Defenders of KJO point out that this can create confusion in the mind of a newly saved Christian. The “babe in Christ” is likely to wonder why it’s necessary to have so many different Bibles. This uncertainty may create an impediment to faith for one so young in the faith.

In reply, let me relate an experience I had early in my Christian life. I had been a Christian for perhaps a few months, and had spent a great deal of my time eagerly reading my King James Version Bible. At one point, I had a question about the meaning of a certain verse of Scripture. When I asked a Christian friend for some help, he responded by saying, “Well, see what it says in the Greek. Maybe that will help.” I was astonished at his reply. I remember asking him, “What do you mean by the *Greek*?” My friend explained to me that the Bible was originally written in Greek and Hebrew, then he proceeded to show me how to use the Strong’s Concordance to look up the original Greek word and its definition. It was the first time I had ever realized that the Bible had not been originally written in Elizabethan English. For all I knew before then, Jesus Himself spoke using “thee” and “thou.” That was a revolutionizing experience for me that resulted in a hunger and thirst to learn more about this marvelous Book, and how I could use tools to help me learn more about the meanings of the original Greek and Hebrew words. One of the best tools available is a wide variety of Bible translations.

Unfortunately, you and I were not born in the first century, a time when we might have spoken the original languages of the Bible. Nevertheless, just because we were raised as English speaking people does not mean that we have to fool ourselves into thinking that only the English language, or only one Bible version in the English language, has the blessing of God upon it. Multitudes of modern English speaking people have been tremendously blessed by the availability of numerous Bible

³ Arndt, William and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* — electronic ed. of the 2nd ed., rev. and augmented (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979; Published in electronic form by Logos Research Systems, 1996) *q.v.* fanevrwsin.

translations. Most pastors I know regularly consult a number of translations when they are preparing their sermons and Bible study lessons (to do less would be irresponsible).

While one may be surprised, or even alarmed, at first discovering that there are numerous Bible translations available, that is no reason for us to give him a false security by hiding these translations from him. Let the modern English speaking Christian have as many Bible study tools available to him as possible, that he might be “approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed” (2 Tim. 2:15).

2. The Public Reading of Scripture

Admittedly, one disadvantage of having numerous Bible translations among the membership of a church is that during public worship, the members of the congregation may not all be reading the exact same words. This makes responsive reading or reading in unison especially difficult, but there are ways to work around this difficulty. To be sure, one may regret the complexity of our modern age and long for more simple times when every one had the same version and responsive readings could be done more easily. But I have been in churches that used predominantly the New King James Version or the New American Standard Version, and since it was predominantly used among the membership, responsive readings were not a problem. Still other churches have provided either pew Bibles, hymn books with responsive readings, or even Scripture portions printed in the bulletin. There are certainly ways of working around this difficulty. And when we remember that the first Christians did not even have their own private copies of the Bible, but had to content themselves with *hearing* the word of God as it was read by their preacher, then certainly we have little right to complain about the presence of a variety of translations among the church membership.

3. “But I just *like* the good old KJV.”

Of all the reasons in favor of the King James Version, this is probably the most sensible one. Many have grown up on the KJV; they have memorized verses from this venerable old Bible; their fondest memories are tied up in experiences that had to do with this particular translation. It is widely acknowledged that the King James Version is a literary masterpiece. As a piece of English literature, it has an elegance, flow, and meter that make it especially suitable for public reading and memorization.

But it is important to remember that when the KJV first came out, it was not universally accepted by English speaking Christians. A number of other good English translations had preceded the KJV, and many Christians looked askance at this newcomer on the block. In fact in 1620, some nine years after the appearance of the KJV, the Pilgrims who fled from persecution by the English religious

authorities, took with them, not the KJV, but an earlier translation, known as the Geneva Bible.⁴

Then, too, we are now living at a time when many adult Christians have known nothing in their entire Christian experience but the New International Version (twenty-one years old) or the New American Standard Bible (thirty-nine years old).

C. The Historical Argument

Having touched briefly on some matters of both doctrine and practice, I would like to deal with the historical perspective. In the entire two-thousand year history of Christianity, the appearance of the King James Version of the Bible is relatively recent. Sadly, many Christians who love their Bible are ignorant of its remarkable history. Here I sketch a brief history of the origin, early copying, and subsequent translation of the Bible.

1. Hebrew for the Jews, Aramaic and Koine Greek for the world

One might profitably ask, Why did God choose the languages He did for the revelation of His Word? It is instructive to consider which portions of the Bible are written in which languages. I remember when I first learned that the Bible was written in a language other than English. I was told that it was originally written in Greek and Hebrew (I only learned of the Aramaic portions years later). I was not told which parts corresponded to which languages. Naturally, I assumed that the book of Hebrews must have been written in Hebrew. I was wrong, of course. Hebrews happens to have been written in Greek!

Broadly speaking, the Old Testament was written in Hebrew, the New Testament in Greek. There are a few portions of the Old Testament that were written in Aramaic (about one fourth of the Book of Ezra, 4:8-6:18 and 7:12-26, and the middle chapters of Daniel, 2:4b-7:28), a language very similar to Hebrew, but used by the Babylonians, rather than the Israelites. The reason that most of the Old Testament is written in the Hebrew language is because Hebrew was the language of the Israelites, and most of the Old Testament is addressed to the Israelites. Interestingly, the Aramaic portions of the Old Testament have to do with the Gentile nations, and God used the chief language of the Gentiles at that time for this part of His revelation. In the New Testament era, relatively few Jewish people any longer spoke Hebrew. Alexander the Great, through his world wide conquests, had introduced Greek as the universal language in the civilized world. The New Testament addresses not only the Israelites, but all the people of the world. Thus it stands to reason that God would use the universal language of the day for His revelation to the people of the world. In every case, God used language well suited to the people He was addressing, language easily understandable to His target audience. It seems to me that we ought to continue this approach and make the Bible available to people today in their own common language.

⁴ David Ewert, *A General Introduction to the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), p.195.

2. The Septuagint

Some three hundred years before Christ was born, the large Jewish community in Egypt found themselves without a Bible in their own language. These Jews were part of what was known as the *Diaspora* — Jews who lived outside the land of Israel. In these foreign lands, the Jews learned to speak and read whatever local language their neighbors used. In time, Diaspora Jews lost the ability to read their Bible in their own Hebrew language. When the Babylonians invaded Israel in the 7th century BC, they dispersed the Jews throughout the Babylonian empire. Other Jews fled to Egypt in an attempt to avoid the tyranny of the Babylonians (see Jeremiah 41-44). “The heyday of Jewish colonization in Egypt dawned when Alexander the Great founded Alexandria in 332 B.C.. Practically from the first, Jews formed a very important element in the population of this great commercial and cultural capital.”⁵ It was in Alexandria that Greek speaking Jews composed a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. This translation became known as the *Septuagint*,⁶ and eventually became the standard Bible used by Greek speaking Jews throughout the Roman Empire in the first century. The Septuagint represents an effort on the part of godly Jews to make the Bible available to their countrymen in language they could understand. The New Testament itself contains numerous quotes from the Septuagint.

As a translation, the Septuagint is good, but not perfect. In some places it is better than in others. Nevertheless, the apostles did not hesitate to quote from it in the New Testament when it suited their needs. On other occasions, the authors of the New Testament chose to translate directly from the Hebrew. The significant point to note here is that the apostles felt free to use a less than perfect translation for clarity’s sake, but they could still quote it as the authoritative Word of God.

3. The Vulgate

One of the great paradoxes of history is seen in the story of what happened to the Latin Vulgate. By the fourth century, fewer and fewer people in the Roman Empire were speaking the Greek language, as Latin increasingly prevailed. Jerome, one of the few Christian leaders of his day to learn both Greek and Hebrew, undertook the translation of the entire Bible into the Latin language with the encouragement of the Roman bishop Damasus (bishop from 366-384). Jerome’s desire was to give the people a Bible in language they could understand. Up to this time, a number of unofficial Latin translations had appeared, but they were of varying value, some better, others worse. Especially lacking in the value of most was that the Old Testament had been translated from the Greek Septuagint, rather than from the original Hebrew. Jerome was a man uniquely prepared by God to provide a good translation in contemporary language to the people of his day. This Bible version

⁵ F. F. Bruce, *The Books and the Parchments* (London: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1950) p.142.

⁶ “Septuagint” is Latin for “seventy”, arising from the traditional account of this translation having been made by 72 Jewish scholars over a period of 72 days.

became known as the “Vulgate” (Latin for “common”) because it gave the people the Bible in their *common* language — Latin.

The reason the Vulgate’s story reveals such a great paradox of history has to do with what became of the Vulgate centuries later. Just as the Vulgate became necessary because a day came when people no longer spoke Greek, so a day came when people no longer spoke Latin. As the Roman Empire declined, western Europe became carved up geographically by the feudal system which led to a number of different languages being spoken throughout “Christian” lands (Germanic, Frankish, Anglo, Saxon, Celtic, etc.). By this same time, the Roman Catholic church had developed a very complex hierarchical system comprised of a priesthood, bishops, deacons, and a number of monastic orders. This perversion of Biblical Christianity taught that only priests were authorized to interpret the Bible, and that the common man was incapable of rightly interpreting the Word of God. For this reason, the Catholic authorities authorized only the Vulgate and forbade the translation of the Scriptures into common languages.⁷ Thus, the “Vulgate” (*common*) Bible became the assurance that no one had the Bible in his *common* language! The period of time during which this was the case is known in history as the “Dark Ages.” They were truly dark, because the Bible, God’s light, was withheld from people. It was not that there were no Bibles anywhere, only that the common man could not understand the only Bibles that were available. Could it be that those who would deprive people today of modern language translations are unwittingly committing the same grave error as the Roman Catholic authorities of the Dark Ages?

4. Martin Luther and the German Bible

Throughout the Middle Ages, Roman Catholicism pretty much ruled the day in western civilization. The common man was denied access to God, unless it was through the approved channels of the church. As we have seen in the previous section, one way the Catholic church accomplished this was by keeping the Bible from being translated into the common language.



Martin Luther

The Middle Ages came to a close with the onset of the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century. Martin Luther, an Augustinian monk and professor of Bible at Wittenburg, Germany, came to the realization that there were two fundamental errors in the theology of Roman Catholicism: the requiring of works for salvation, and the elevation of church tradition to the same level of authority as the Bible. From this realization

⁷ One such example can be seen in the decisions of the 1408 synod of clergy at Oxford which “forbade anyone to translate, or even to read, a vernacular version of the Bible in whole or in part without the approval of his diocesan bishop or of a provincial council. This prohibition was one of thirteen provisions passed by the synod against Lollardy [John Wycliffe’s followers]; they are generally known as the “Constitutions of Oxford....” (F.F. Bruce, *The History of the Bible in English* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1978] p.21.

came the two great watchwords of the Reformation — *sola fides* and *sola scriptura* (“faith only” and “The Scriptures only”).

In 1521 Luther was summoned by the Roman Catholic officials to a formal assembly in Worms, Germany, so that he might recant his views. Luther refused to recant, almost certainly assuring his condemnation and arrest as a heretic. But before he could be arrested, friends kidnapped him and secreted him away to Wartburg castle for his protection. While in Wartburg, Luther spent his time translating the Bible into the German language.⁸ It was his conviction that God’s people should have the Bible available to them in their own common language. This sentiment was followed by virtually every leader of the Protestant Reformation, and soon Bible translations were appearing in most of the western European countries, including England, where a young man by the name of William Tyndale produced an English language translation at the cost of his own life.

The lesson we learn from this era is that godly men have historically recognized that purity in the church is always tied to the common people of God having the Bible available to them in the language of their common tongue. As long as the Bible remained obscure, they needed someone to tell them what it meant. But when the Bible was rendered into understandable language, as individual believer-priests (see 1 Peter 2:5), the people of God were able to approach God with individual liberty, and worship God according to conscience. The concepts of individual soul liberty, freedom of conscience and the priesthood of the believer ran contrary to the controlling and domineering practices of the Roman Catholic church, but they were the liberating concepts that brought western Europe out of the Dark Ages.

5. The English Bible

Since we are English speaking people, of great interest to us is the Bible in our own language. Of course, we should not lose sight of the fact that neither the Bible itself nor Christianity originated with English speakers. As pointed out above, the original inspired documents of the Bible originated in Greek, Aramaic and Hebrew, over 1,500 years before the King James Version of the Bible arrived on the scenes of history. Neither was the King James Version the first English language version of the Bible to appear. The story of the Bible in English is one of the most interesting episodes in history.

a) Wycliffe



John Wycliffe

Prior to the 14th century several portions of the Bible had been translated into English, but no English translation of the *entire* Bible had been made. It was John Wycliffe (1330 - 1384) and his disciples who first translated the whole Bible into the English language. When we say “English” language, it should be noted that the English of Wycliffe’s day was quite different than the English of today. For

⁸ He began with the New Testament, translating in 1521-22 from Erasmus’ recently published Greek text. The Old Testament came out in parts, the Pentateuch in 1523, the Psalter in 1524, the entire Bible by 1534.

example, Hebrews 1:1 in Wycliffe's translation reads as follows, "Manyfold and many maners sum tyme God spekinge to fadris in prophetis, at the laste in thes daies spak to us in the sone."

Wycliffe lived long before the Protestant Reformation (c. 1517). The only church known in England at that time was the Roman Catholic church, and it was to the Roman Catholic church that Wycliffe belonged. What led this 14th century Roman Catholic cleric to translate the Bible into English? Quite simply, it was Wycliffe's conviction, contrary to the teachings of his church, that, "each man was God's direct tenant-in-chief, immediately responsible to God, and immediately responsible to obey His law [i.e. the Bible].... But if every man was responsible to obey the Bible ... it followed that every man must know what to obey. Therefore the whole Bible should be accessible to him in a form that he could understand."⁹ This Scriptural doctrine led John Wycliffe to disobey the leaders of his church and make the Bible available to his people in their own common tongue.

Wycliffe's translation was made over 200 years before the King James Version. That is a long period of time, but it is not nearly as long as the time that has transpired between the publishing of the King James Version and our own day.

b) *Tyndale*

Wycliffe was condemned by the Roman Catholic authorities, and as many copies of his Bible as possible were collected and burned. The Constitutions of Oxford, passed



William Tyndale

in 1408, forbade the further translation of the Bible into the English language upon pain of death; as a result, it was over 100 years before any Englishman dared to undertake this dangerous venture. After graduating from Cambridge in 1522, William Tyndale, while translating Erasmus' "The Christian Soldier's Handbook," came to the conclusion that it was the duty of every Christian to study the New Testament and make it the final court of appeal in questions of life and doctrine. This was very similar to the conclusion that Wycliffe had reached years earlier. So, armed with this Scriptural conviction, Tyndale, in opposition to the Constitutions of

Oxford, purposed to translate the Bible into the English tongue. On one occasion he was heard to say to the local Roman Catholic bishop, "I defy the Pope and all his laws.... If God spare my life, ere many years I will cause a boy that driveth the plough shall know more of the Scripture than thou dost."

If you are wondering why people didn't simply bring back the Wycliffe Bible, the answer is threefold: (1) Between Wycliffe's day and Tyndale's had come the invention of the printing press. All copies of Wycliffe's Bible had been made by hand, and there were very few in existence; (2) Wycliffe had not learned either Greek or Hebrew, and it is extremely unlikely that he could have had access to any Greek or Hebrew manuscripts anyway. Thus, his Bible had been translated entirely

⁹ Bruce, *History of the Bible in English*, pp. 12-13.

from the Latin Vulgate; (3) The English language had changed considerably during the years between Wycliffe and Tyndale. Wycliffe's Bible seemed almost as foreign to Tyndale's England as it does to us. Clearly, a new translation was called for. Tyndale, at the expense of his own life, gave us the first printed Bible in the English language. On October 6, 1536 William Tyndale was burned at the stake by authorities of the Holy Roman Empire for his "crime" of providing the English speaking people with a modern language translation of the Bible.

Though Tyndale's Bible was much more understandable to the English speaking people of his own day than Wycliffe's Bible would have been, it still seems a bit strange to us today. Consider Hebrews 1:1 in the Tyndale Bible: "God in tyme past diversly and many wayes, spake vnto the fathers by Prophetes: but in these last dayes he hath spoken vnto uv by his sonne." And Tyndale's 1534 version of the Lord's Prayer reads:

O oure father which arte in heven, halowed be thy name. Let thy kyngdome come. Thy wyll be fulfilled, as well in erth, as it ys in heven. Geve vs thisdaye oure dayly breede. And forgeve vs oure treaspases, even as we forgeve oure trespassers. And leade vs not into temptacion: but delyver vs from evell. For thyne is the kyngedome and the power, and the glorye for ever. Amen.

c) "Authorized" English Bibles before KJV

Tyndale's Bible was greatly loved by the English people, but it had one drawback: it's author had been condemned and executed as a heretic! What many desired was an English Bible that had the stamp of approval of the British government. A series of such "authorized" versions came forth, beginning remarkably even before Tyndale's execution. In succession, the English people saw the publication of Coverdale's Bible (1535) authorized by king Henry VIII, Matthew's Bible (1537) licensed by Henry VIII, The Great Bible (1540) authorized by Henry VIII at the instigation of Thomas Cromwell, and the Bishop's Bible (1571) authorized for the English churches at the Convocation of Canterbury while Elizabeth was queen.

d) The Geneva Bible (1560)

Mention should be made here of the Geneva Bible. During the reign of Mary Tudor, England reverted to Roman Catholicism, with many reformation minded ministers and scholars being persecuted for their faith, while others fled to Protestant Geneva. In exile, these reformers undertook a fresh translation of the Scriptures. It is generally agreed that the Geneva Bible was the best English language translation to date. It was not completed until after Mary had been dethroned and Elizabeth restored the Church of England to a more Protestant persuasion. Indeed, when the Geneva Bible was finally published it contained a title page dedicating the work to the Queen, although she never officially authorized it.

Probably the chief reason the Geneva Bible was not accepted by the English monarchy was the strongly Calvinistic influence seen in its many explanatory notes. Both Elizabeth and her successor James I had strong feelings against Calvinism, and the presence of these notes prejudiced them against this excellent

translation. However, many English Christians took a strong liking to the Geneva Bible. In fact, in 1620, nine years after the publication of the King James Bible, the Pilgrims brought with them to America, the Geneva Bible, in preference to the King James Version.¹⁰

e) *The King James Version (1611)*

After the Bishop's Bible, the King James Version was the next in the series of translations to be authorized by the English monarchy. The original publication contained a preface entitled, "The Translators to the Reader," not normally found in modern editions of the King James Version. In this preface, we can see the attitude of the translators themselves toward this new translation. They said, in part:

Truly, good Christian Reader, we never thought from the beginning that we should need to make a new translation, nor yet to make of a bad one a good one; ... but to make a good one [i.e. the Bishop's Bible] better, or out of many good ones one principal good one, not justly to be excepted against.... If you ask what they had before them, truly it was the Hebrew text of the Old Testament, the Greek of the New.... These tongues ... we set before us to translate, being the tongues wherein God was pleased to speak to his Church by his Prophets and Apostles.... neither did we disdain to revise that which we had done, and to bring back to the anvil that which we had hammered: but having and using as great helps as were needful, and fearing no reproach for slowness, nor coveting praise for expedition, we have at length, through the good hand of the Lord upon us, brought the work to pass that you see.

It appears that the translators saw their work as a continuation of the revising process that had been going on through previous translations referred to as "many good ones." There are some modern day KJO proponents who promote the idea that the translators of the King James Version were divinely inspired, and that their translation is therefore perfect. If this were the case, it seems quite unlikely that they would have included the above remarks in their preface.

d) JAMES I OF ENGLAND AND THE PURITANS

In 1603, James VI of Scotland succeeded Elizabeth to the throne of England, and became known as James I. During the latter years of Elizabeth's reign, Puritan leaders in the Church of England had been unsuccessful in securing the queen's approval for further Biblical reforms. They saw in James an opportunity to institute these reforms and thus bring the Church of England more into line with Scriptural teaching. At their earliest opportunity, these Puritan leaders presented James with a list of such reforms. James, due to his rejection of his strict Calvinistic upbringing, was highly suspicious of the Puritans, and denied them every request but one, that was for a newly authorized translation of the Bible. At the time the request was made, the Geneva Bible was immensely popular with the English people, but it lacked official sanction. James particularly disliked the Geneva Bible

¹⁰ David Ewert, *A General Introduction to the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), p.195.

for at least two reasons: (1) Its explanatory notes were definitely Calvinistic in theology; (2) Certain other notes, though not particularly Calvinistic, James held to be “very partial, untrue, seditious, and savouring too much of dangerous and traitorous conceits.” What were these seditious, dangerous and traitorous notes? Specifically, James mentioned two: Exodus 1:19 which suggested that the Hebrew midwives were right to disobey the Egyptian king’s orders, seen by James as a threat to his own ability to exercise the “divine right of kings,” and that on 2 Chronicles 15:16, which stated that King Asa’s mother should have been executed, and not merely deposed, for her idolatry. On the latter of these, “...it is supposed that James’s suspicious mind thought that this might react unfavourably upon the memory of his own mother, Mary Queen of Scots.”¹¹ Thus, James approved a plan whereby a committee of Anglican scholars would undertake a new edition of the Bible that was to be made without any explanatory notes of any kind.

ii) THE TRANSLATION COMMITTEE

The Translation Committee was composed of six panels of translators (47 men in all). Three panels were responsible for the Old Testament, two for the New Testament, and one for the Apocrypha. Two panels convened at Oxford, two at Cambridge, and two at Westminster. After the work of these panels was completed, their work was reviewed by a smaller group of 12 men, two from each panel, and finally sent to the printer. The entire process took about two years, nine months. James specified the following rules to guide the new translation: (1) The Bishop’s Bible was to serve as the basis; (2) Proper names were to correspond as closely as possible to those forms in common usage; (3) Ecclesiastical words (such as “church” “baptize” etc.) were to be kept rather than translated (“congregation” “immerse”); (4) The only marginal notes permitted were those which either explained Hebrew and Greek words, or were cross references; (5) Words added to complete the sense were to appear in distinctive type; (6) Existing chapter and verse divisions were to be retained; and (7) New chapter headings were to be supplied.

iii) “Translators to the Reader” Preface

I have already made reference to the Translators’ Preface. The translators reveal some interesting insights about this translation. For example, many who originally objected to the KJV did so because it introduced so many changes to the older English version. The translators expressed surprise that revision and correction should be considered faults. “The whole history of Bible translation in any language, they say, is a history of repeated revision and correction.”¹²

One of the reasons for having new translations today is that we have a better understanding of Biblical Hebrew and Greek than scholars had in 1611. The modern sciences of linguistics and comparative philology have vastly increased our

¹¹ Bruce, *History of the Bible in English*, p. 97.

¹² Bruce, *History of the Bible in English*, p.101.

understanding of the vocabulary of Biblical Hebrew. The translators acknowledged their limitations in this area when they wrote,

There be many words in the Scriptures, which be never found there but once (having neither brother nor neighbour, as the Hebrews speak), so that we cannot be holpen by conference of places. Again, there be many rare names of certain birds, beasts, and precious stones, etc., concerning which the Hebrews themselves are so divided among themselves for judgment, that they may seem to have defined this or that, rather because they would say something, than because they were sure of that which they said.

In the next section of this booklet, I will be discussing the matter of original language texts which stand behind the various translations. But here it might be worth mentioning that some KJO proponents criticize modern translations for having listed variant textual readings. This concern is not a new one. In fact there were variant readings in existence in 1611 as well. The KJV translators criticized Pope Sixtus V for his ruling that no variant readings should be put in the margin of his edition of the Latin Vulgate. In the translators' words, "We know that Sixtus Quintus expressly forbiddeth, that any variety of readings of their vulgar edition, should be put in the margin, ... but we think he hath not all of his own side his favorers, for this conceit. They that are wise, had rather have their judgments at liberty in differences of readings, than to be captivated to one, when it may be the other."

IV) AN ANGLICAN AND AMILLENNIAL TRANSLATION

As fine a translation as the KJV generally is, it should not be forgotten that it was made by fallible men. There *are* places in the KJV where the theological bias of the translators is evident. One of the most obvious is their use of the terms "baptize" and "baptism." These are terms which literally mean "immerse" and "immersion," but the KJV translators could not render them literally without contradicting their own church's theological position. The Anglican church practices both infant baptism as well as sprinkling as the mode of baptism. A literal translation of these terms would contradict these practices, so, in this case, the translators chose allegiance to their church over literalness in translation.

Another theological bias can be seen in the way the KJV translators dealt with certain passages predicting Christ's millennial reign. The theological position of the Anglican church in 1611 was definitely amillennial. Dr. Northrup has written:

Few believers are aware of how much the theological presuppositions of the translators of the Old Testament in the King James Version have affected the clarity of their translation of great passages that prophesy concerning the glorious future of the nation and of the land of Israel. We tend to ignore the fact that these translators were of the theological persuasion of the English Catholics, the identity of the Episcopalian church. As a result, we remain unaware of the fact that their amillennial theology required them to think of

any eschatological passage that spoke of the future of Israel as a passage that somehow spoke of the future of the church.¹³

Some mistranslations noted by Dr. Northrup include the changing of a future tense to a past tense in Psalms 2:6, mistranslations of Hebrew verb themes in Psalms 2:7, and numerous examples throughout Isaiah 24.

v) THE NUMEROUS EDITIONS

One final note regarding the King James Version should be made. One frequently hears KJO proponents refer to the “1611” King James Version as the authoritative version of the Bible. While it is true that the King James Version was originally published in 1611, it should be acknowledged that the King James Bible underwent three revisions in quick succession in 1611, incorporating more than 100,000 changes. In succeeding years, numerous other revisions were made. Most of these changes are very minor, but it does raise the issue of which version should be considered as authoritative? In fact it is extremely difficult to obtain an original 1611 version of King James.

As an example of the kinds of changes introduced, in the first edition the closing words of Ruth 3:15 are rendered “and he went into the city,” while in subsequent editions it is translated, “and she went into the city.” This is more than merely a typesetting error. The change actually reflects a difference in the Hebrew manuscripts; some say “he” others have “she.” The King James translators originally selected one manuscript tradition, then later realized they had originally been in error and opted for a different Hebrew text.

Another significant difference in the successive editions of the King James Version is seen in that the original 1611 version contained the Apocrypha, as well as the Old and New Testaments. Most recent editions of the King James Version omit the Apocrypha, since it is not considered to be inspired.

II. The Ancient Manuscripts Behind the Translations

The preceding section has focused principally on the matter of translation, and whether there should be modern translations in order to update the archaic language of the King James Version. A distinct, but nevertheless related, issue has to do with the Hebrew and Greek manuscripts that stand behind the various translations. There is very little disagreement among Bible scholars regarding the original Hebrew/Aramaic text for the Old Testament. The generally accepted text is known as the “Masoretic Text” which has been preserved through the ages by the Jewish community. The real issue surrounds the original text of the New Testament. There are essentially three major positions taken today among conservative Bible scholars about which text best represents the original.

¹³ B. E. Northrup, Th.D., “The Impact of the Translators’ Theological Presuppositions Upon the Accuracy of Their Translation Work,” an unpublished paper presented to the Grace Theological Society, Redding, 1999.

Textus Receptus In 1611 there were relatively few Greek manuscripts of the New Testament available to scholars, but certain scholars had studied the few that were known and put together the best complete Greek New Testament they could. There were, in fact, at least 5 different editions of the Greek New Testament available to the King James translators (and to the translators of the English Bible who preceded them, as well): Erasmus' edition, the Complutensian Polyglot, Beza's edition, the Stephanus edition, and the edition promoted by the Elzevir brothers. All of these versions go broadly by the name *Textus Receptus* (TR), Latin for "received text."¹⁴ No one knows precisely which text or texts were used by the King James translators, and there are several hundred differences between them all. The Trinitarian Bible Society, one of the strongest promoters and defenders of the *Textus Receptus*, states: "... the AV was not translated from any one printed edition of the Greek text. The AV translators relied heavily upon the work of William Tyndale and other editions of the English Bible. Thus there were places in which it is unclear what the Greek basis of the New Testament was."¹⁵ F. H. A. Scrivener (1813-1891) attempted to reconstruct the exact Greek text used by the King James translators by beginning with the KJV and comparing it with the known TR editions. Scrivener's text probably comes closest to representing the exact text used by the King James translators, but he could not be 100% sure that he had the exact text in every place. Scrivener's text is also referred to today as the *Textus Receptus*. Again, from the Trinitarian Bible Society: "There are approximately 190 differences between the Scrivener text and the Beza 1598. There are 283 differences between the Scrivener text and the Stephanus 1550."¹⁶

Majority Text Since the seventeenth century, hundreds of Greek manuscripts have come to light. These manuscripts come from all regions of the ancient Roman empire and are dated from as early as the end of the first century, all the way up to the fifteenth century. Some manuscripts contain the entire Bible, others only portions of the Bible. Some differences exist in the text between all these manuscripts.¹⁷ In determining the original text of the Bible, one approach consists of always accepting the majority reading; that is, where several different readings exist among the manuscripts, the number of manuscripts supporting each reading is counted, and the reading with the greatest manuscript authority is chosen as the preferred reading. The text established in this way is referred to as the "Majority Text." Many feel that the Majority Text best represents the original text of the New Testament.

¹⁴ The expression comes from an advertising blurb for the Elzevir's text. An English translation of their claim is, "This is the text received by all."

¹⁵ G. W. and D. E. Anderson, "The Received Text: A Brief Look at the Textus Receptus," <http://biz.ukonline.co.uk/trinitarian.bible.society/articles/tr-art.htm>.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Remember that until the fifteenth century all manuscripts had to be hand-copied, as the printing press had not yet been invented.

Critical Eclectic Text The third way that scholars seek to identify the original text is to compare the various qualities of the manuscripts and the readings at any given point. For example, it is generally held that earlier manuscripts are less likely to have errors in them than later manuscripts, since there are fewer generations of copies between them and the original. Other factors are also considered, such as whether the reading appears to be an attempt to correct a perceived error, which kind of error might have been made (an error of sight, of hearing, of memory, etc.), and who the scribe might have been (was he a careful scribe or simply someone making a quick copy for personal use). The Critical Eclectic text examines each variant reading, and tries to select the most reliable manuscript authority for each reading.

A. Autographs, Manuscripts and Versions

In discussing the issue of ancient original language texts, it is necessary first to define some terms.

1. Autograph

We have already mentioned that the Bible was originally written in three languages, Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. The word “Autograph” refers only to the originally written document, not to any copy of that document. So, for example, the autograph of Matthew’s gospel is the document actually written by Matthew on the paper he used and with the ink he used. There is only one autograph for each book of the Bible. Sometimes you will hear the expression “original manuscript” used to refer to the autograph. This is not strictly correct. There are no Biblical autographs in existence today. They have all passed off the scene. What we do have are copies, known as “manuscripts.”

2. Manuscript

The term “manuscript” refers to a copy of an autograph or to a copy of another manuscript. A manuscript is in the same language as the autograph. Therefore, all New Testament manuscripts are in the Greek language, and all Old Testament manuscripts are in the Hebrew and Aramaic languages. The abbreviation for “manuscript” is “ms,” and the abbreviation for the plural “manuscripts” is “mss.” While there is only one autograph for each book of the Bible, there may be very many manuscripts.

3. Version

The first section of this booklet did not deal extensively with autographs and manuscripts, but with translations into other languages. The technical term for any translation is “version.” Bible versions exist in many different languages, Syriac, Latin, Armenian, Coptic, German, Spanish, etc. And, of course, there are many different English versions.

B. Byzantium and the Preservation of the Greek Language

The vast majority of Greek mss. come from the old Byzantine empire, centered in what is now modern day Turkey. The reason for this is that while western Europe increasingly used the Latin language, Greek remained the native language in the east. After Constantine moved the seat of the Roman empire to Byzantium in the early fourth century, there developed first a cultural split, then a linguistic split, and finally a church split between the east and the west.¹⁸ The reason this is important to know in our present discussion is because it explains why the majority of late Greek mss. are from Byzantium, while the earlier mss. tend to come from a variety of areas throughout the old Roman empire. Greek continued as the preferred language for copying the Scriptures until Byzantium was overthrown by the Moslems in 1453. When Byzantium fell to the Moslems, Eastern Orthodox clerics fled west with their precious Greek mss. The arrival of Greek New Testament mss. was undoubtedly a chief factor influencing the Protestant Reformation in western Europe. But it should be remembered that, though these mss. are in the majority, they tend to be from a later period of time and are dependent upon a great number of copies between them and the autographs. Thus, some feel there is a greater likelihood of error existing in these Byzantine mss.

C. Manuscripts Available in the Early 17th Century

When Erasmus put together the first *Textus Receptus* text, he had available to him only five or six Greek mss. In the succeeding years some more mss. came to light, but by 1611 there were still only a handful of Greek mss. known in the west. As more mss. were discovered it became evident that there were also more variant readings with which to deal. Thus we see the hundreds of differences between the six competing *Textus Recepta*. For those who believe that the divinely preserved text is the *Textus Receptus* a reasonable question to ask is, Which one really *is* the *Textus Receptus*? Is it Erasmus, The Complutensian Polyglot, Stephanus, Beza, Elzevirs, Scrivener, or some other construction based on the mss available in 1611?

D. Manuscript Discoveries Since the Early 17th Century

1. Majority Text Manuscripts

Since the 17th century, hundreds of mss. have come to light. The majority of these are of Byzantine origin, where they were faithfully copied over the centuries by Eastern Orthodox monks. Of the Byzantine mss., it should also be observed that the vast majority of them originated late in the Middle Ages, from about the eighth century on. Proponents of the *Textus Receptus* and of the Majority Text view insist that these mss. preserve the original text of the New Testament. But why should these late mss. be preferred over other mss. which, in some cases were copied within

¹⁸ The official church split came in 1054 and resulted in the eastern branch, known to us as the Eastern Orthodox Church and the western branch, which we call the Roman Catholic Church.

a few years of the autographs? Gordon Fee, responding to arguments put forth by David Otis Fuller writes:

... The logical consequence of the position that God's providential care is to be found in the majority of MSS, because they *are* the majority, is that the majority should all be identical and as free from error as the autographs. In lieu of that, [David Otis] Fuller's theology logically demands that at least one MS be identifiable as *the* divinely-preserved and therefore errorless MS against which all others can be checked.

The proponents of the TR, however, are quick to deny that this is their intent — and for good reasons. They also know that no two of the 5340-plus Greek MSS of the NT are exactly alike. In fact the closest relationships between any two MSS in existence — even among the majority — average from six to ten variants per chapter. It is obvious therefore that no MS has escaped corruption. We are reassured, however that these variations are “superficial,” which turns out to be no argument at all. For “superficial” or otherwise, errors exist in the majority text.... If the text has merely fewer errors, then the whole theological argument of divine inspiration demanding divine preservation by the majority is a theological ploy.¹⁹

2. Alexandrian Manuscripts

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, archaeological work in Alexandria, Egypt uncovered a treasure trove of ancient documents from the first seven centuries A.D., some from within a few years of the completion of the New Testament autographs themselves! The dry sands of Egypt had made perfect conditions for preserving these fragile papyrus documents over the centuries. The documents included such everyday items as school lessons, love letters, shopping lists, and sales receipts, but they also included at least a hundred very ancient New Testament mss. These New Testament mss. have vastly increased the raw data from which textual decisions can be made.

Especially helpful is the knowledge that these mss. are dependent on many fewer generations of copies standing between them and the autographs, thus less likelihood that careless errors crept in through hand copying. Modern editions of the Greek New Testament have, not only the vast majority of late Byzantine mss., but also the earlier, but less numerous Alexandrian papyrus mss. However, these Alexandrian mss. have been vilified by some due to heretical teachings that emanated from Alexandria in the early history of the church. It is alleged that these heretical teachings must have influenced these mss., and that they, therefore, contain a corrupt text. But it should be remembered that not all Alexandrian teaching was heretical. In fact for over 3 centuries some of the staunchest defenders

¹⁹ Gordon D. Fee, “Modern Textual Criticism and the Revival of the *Textus Receptus*,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 21/1 (March 1978), 23.

of orthodoxy came from the Alexandrian school. Perhaps chief among these is Athanasius²⁰, the great defender of the deity of Christ at the Council of Nicea (A.D. 325).²¹ Furthermore, it must be recognized that theological heresy was not restricted to Alexandria, Egypt. The theological position of the Eastern Orthodox church, which God used to preserve the Byzantine mss., is rejected by all Protestants as heretical, teaching salvation by works and elevating church tradition to the same authority as Scripture. It seems to me that a fair approach to textual criticism will recognize that there are both good and bad mss. from Alexandria, just as there are both good and bad mss. from Byzantium. Each mss. must stand or fall on its own merits, not simply because it originated in a particular geographic region.

E. The Practice of Textual Criticism

1. Westcott and Hort.

At the end of the nineteenth century, when many mss. discoveries were being made, the science of textual criticism was in its developmental stages. Probably the two best known leaders in this field were B. F. Westcott and F. J. A. Hort. They were convinced that new mss. discoveries showed that the *Textus Receptus* could be corrected in many places. They, and other scholars of their day, developed a system of rules by which ancient New Testament mss. could be evaluated. These “canons of New Testament textual criticism” were applied to the known mss. of their day. Unfortunately, Westcott and Hort became unduly enamored with two mss. in particular — Sinaiticus, a fourth century ms. discovered by Tischendorf at St. Katherine’s monastery at the base of Mt. Sinai, and Vaticanus a fourth century ms. discovered forgotten in the vast library at the Vatican in Rome. The Greek text adopted by Westcott and Hort became the basis for the English Revised Version and the American Revised Standard Version. However, because of their undue reliance on Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, modern textual critics no longer rely on the text adopted by Westcott and Hort. Instead modern textual criticism has opted for an eclectic text, which forms the basis for such modern translations as the New American Standard Bible and the New International Version.

2. The Majority Text Approach.

In the last 20 to 30 years the Majority Text approach has become quite popular in some circles. As discussed above, this approach favors the majority reading at any place where the mss. display variants. Of course, the majority reading is virtually always a Byzantine reading, and, hence, a late reading. This approach does not apply the canons of textual criticism equally to all readings, but simply counts up

²⁰ Other Alexandrian leaders noted for their orthodoxy include: Clement (155-220), Dionysius (d.264), Alexander (d.328), Didymus (309-398) and Cyril (d.444).

²¹ Earl E. Cairns, *Christianity Through the Centuries*, 3rd ed. rev. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996) 128.

the number of mss. supporting each reading. Since the *Textus Receptus* relied on Byzantine mss., the Majority Text is very similar to the *Textus Receptus*, though there are some significant differences as well.²² There are some good arguments made in favor of the Majority Text view. Some of its ablest modern defenders include Zane Hodges, Wilbur Pickering, and Harry Sturz.

3. Ecclecticism.

Most modern English Bible translations are based on what is called an “eclectic” text. That is, a reading is not preferred simply because it is “Byzantine” or “Alexandrian,” nor simply because it is “early” or “late.” Geographical origin, and date are included along with many other considerations in evaluating each variant reading. Thus it is believed that the best scientific judgment can be obtained by a thorough examination of all the mss. This kind of textual criticism is painstaking, but many scholars have given their lives to this task out of a desire to see the Word of God made available today in the best possible form. In the past some textual critics have made some errors of judgment in their zeal for one or another family of texts. Thus Gordon Fee observes:

... one cannot, as Westcott and Hort tended to do with the Egyptians and Hodges with the Byzantine, follow certain MSS wherever they lead.²³

The most up to date representation of the Critical Eclectic Text can be found in the United Bible Society’s 4th edition (which is the same as the 27th edition of the Nestle-Aland edition).

F. A Comparison of Different Manuscript Traditions

So, what is the bottom line in all this debate? Are there serious differences between the *Textus Receptus*, the Majority Text and the Critical Eclectic Text? There are those on all sides of the issue who argue that the differences are indeed truly significant, and have spent much ink casting theological missiles at one another.

I remember taking a class in textual criticism while in seminary. As a class project, the professor divided up much of the New Testament between the students, and had each student study the differences between the *Textus Receptus* and the modern critical eclectic text for his portion of the New Testament. I happened to have the

²² Probably the most famous difference is the so-called *comma Johanneum*, referring to 1 John 5:7. This verse is rejected by both the Eclectic Texts and the Majority Text, while it is found in the *Textus Receptus*. Though this verse certainly contains a clear statement of the doctrine of the Trinity, this precious doctrine does not rise or fall on this text alone. The doctrine of the Trinity is firmly established by many verses throughout the Bible. The truth is that 1 John 5:7 is “found only in eight late manuscripts, four of which have the words in a marginal note. Most of these manuscripts (2318, 221, and [with minor variations] 61,88, 429, 629, 636, and 918) originate from the 16th century; the earliest manuscript, codex 221 (10th century), includes the reading in a marginal note which was added sometime after the original composition The reading seems to have arisen in a fourth century Latin homily in which the text was allegorized to refer to members of the Trinity. From there, it made its way into copies of the Latin Vulgate....” (D. Wallace, “The Textual Problem in 1 John 5:7-8,” <http://www.bible.org/docs/soapbox/1john5-7.htm>).

²³ Fee, “Modern Textual Criticism,” 33.

books of First and Second Peter and Jude. At the conclusion of the project we found that the vast majority of differences (in the high 90 percents) had to do with inconsequential matters such as punctuation, spelling, and word order. Of the few percent that were left, most only slightly altered the actual meaning of the verse, and none altered any point of Christian doctrine. In the small handful of verses where variant readings significantly altered the meaning, no major point of Christian doctrine was seriously impacted by either reading.

I am convinced, beyond any shadow of doubt, that, all other things being equal, if two sincerely born-again Christians were shipwrecked on two separate desert islands, and one had a King James Version Bible while the other had a New American Standard Bible, they would both end up with the same Christianity, the same Christ, the same salvation, the same theology.

I believe the responsibility of determining, to the best of our ability, the original text of the New Testament, is a responsibility that we must take seriously. But, at the same time, I also believe that different approaches to this task can exist along side each other in conservative, fundamental churches. I have seen too many good churches divided over the issue of Bible translations. And I will say quite frankly, that I believe this kind of dissension is only applauded by the enemy of our souls. As long as the devil can keep us busy fighting one another on the issue of Bible versions, he will keep us from reaching the lost with the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. As a friend of mine, who happens to be a King James Only proponent, said, "Ultimately, I don't care so much what Bible a Christian has, as long as he obeys the Bible he has." To that sentiment from a King James Only proponent, I can say a hearty "Amen."

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