



## Ralph Woodrow Evangelistic Association

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### KING JAMES ONLY?

A young man we know visited a small church here in southern California. The Bible he carried on that occasion happened to be the *New International Version* (NIV). Being unaware of the “King James Only” controversy, he was puzzled when someone told him the church was planning a “Bible Burning Service.” The purpose would be to burn Bibles (like his NIV) and every other version—*except* the KING JAMES VERSION (KJV)!

I have heard of meetings in which people brought drugs, cigarettes, pornography, and items that were demonic in nature to be burned (cf. Acts 19:19). But a *Bible* burning? This was a new one to me!

Admittedly this is an extreme example; not everyone who is “King James Only” would carry it this far. But this teaching does breed radical and misleading claims: that every version except the King James Version is a *perversion*; that newer translations are inspired by Satan; that they are part of a gigantic conspiracy, promoted by the New Age Movement! I received a letter some years ago expressing the view that those who use versions other than the KJV are in danger of having their names taken out of the Book of Life!

Please be assured that my use of the term “King James Only” is simply for clarification. I am not putting anyone down for using the KJV. I use it myself and have for years. But needless and harmful divisions occur when people insist that *ONLY* the KJV should be used.

The church I attended as a teenager and where I had my first preaching experience, always used the King James Version. But it was not King James *only*. In appreciation of work I did around the church as a teenager, like mowing the lawn, I was given two other translations of the Bible—one by Moffatt and the other by Weymouth—which I still have. I also have a number of other translations.

When I began preaching, the various churches where I ministered used the KJV. I memorized hundreds of biblical verses from the KJV. When I began writing, I used the KJV as a basic text. Because I did not want any to suppose I was misquoting, I was careful to include the “thees” and “thous.” But in time I have come to realize that using wording that is now obsolete really serves no effective purpose.

For centuries the Latin language was used in the Catholic Mass. Parishioners may have learned the meaning of a few phrases like *Hoc Est Corpus Meum*, but much was not understandable. Still, some considered it beautiful and regretted the move to English in many of their churches. In somewhat the same way, people who oppose translations that use present-day English, suppose the old English wording of 400 years ago is somehow better, even though it is sometimes confusing and less clear! It seems the *principle* of using words that can be easily understood would apply here (1 Cor. 14:19).

People who believe that *ONLY* the KJV should be used, fail to recognize that men like Peter, Paul, and Jesus himself did not always use the *same* version! The following references from the KJV—a few of many examples—confirm this point:

When Isaiah 53:7 is quoted in Acts, it says: “...as a sheep before HER shearers is dumb” (Acts 8:32). But when we turn to Isaiah 53:7 it says, “...like a lamb dumb before HIS shearer.” One says *her*, the other says *his*.

When the writer of Hebrews refers to Genesis 47:31, he says that as Jacob died, he “worshipped, leaning upon the TOP OF HIS STAFF” (Heb. 11:21). But when we turn to Genesis 47:31, it says he “bowed himself upon the BED’S HEAD.”

When Paul quoted Isaiah 28:16, he wrote: “Whosoever believeth on him shall not BE ASHAMED” (Rom. 10:11). But when we turn to Isaiah 28:16, it says: “He that believeth shall not MAKE HASTE.”

There are possible explanations regarding these differences, but our purpose here is to simply point out that the New Testament writers *did not always use the same version*. This is beyond dispute. In these examples, they quoted from the Septuagint, whereas the Masoretic text was used for the King James translation of the Old Testament.

Tracts have been circulated that claim modern translations have “left out the blood atonement, the virgin birth, and the deity of Christ!” If this were true, we would oppose these also. But claims like this are misleading. If a particular verse is in question, one can easily compare the KJV in Bibles that feature four or more translations, the KJV and others, in side-by-side columns.

A common criticism is that some versions have left out things that are in the KJV. But what if another version has something not found in the KJV? For example, the KJV does not use the word “God” in the book of Esther. But the Septuagint does! “For so Mordecai had charged her to fear GOD, and to keep his commandments, as she did when with him” (Esther 2:20). On this basis one could argue: The KJV left GOD out of the book of Esther!

A popular book that claims all translations are wrong except the KJV, cites some places in which the KJV says “Jesus” and the NIV says “he.” It gives the impression that the KJV honors Jesus, and the NIV tends to minimize him. *But* there are other places in which the NIV says “Jesus” and the KJV says “he.” It is simply a case of sentence structure. When it is all studied out, the word “Jesus” appears 983 times in the KJV, but *1,275 times in the NIV!*

In the KJV, the following three New Testament verses are presented as *quotations* from the Old Testament, yet we do not find them anywhere in the Old Testament of the KJV!

“He shall be called a Nazarene” (Matt. 2:23).

“The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy” (James 4:5).

“The labourer is worthy of his reward” (1 Tim. 5:18).

We don’t believe the men who quoted these verses—Matthew, James, and Paul—made them up! *So*, either what they quoted was not in the Old Testament manuscripts available at the time the KJV was translated; or, they could have quoted from another version, or simply paraphrased biblical principles without using the exact wording. Even within the KJV very few quotations from the Old Testament are verbatim.

When we see letterheads or bumper stickers that say, “We use the Bible that GOD uses—the Authorized King James Version of A.D. 1611,” the question comes to mind: What Bible did God use before 1611? The fact is, there were translations by Wyclif and Tyndale, and other English versions including the Cloverdale Bible, the Great Bible, the Bishop’s Bible, and the Geneva Bible—all *before* the KJV. Like it or not, the KJV was a “revised version.” The Pilgrims rejected it in favor of the older Geneva Bible!

We should keep in mind that even if the KJV were an absolutely perfect English translation in A.D. 1611, it would not be perfect now. The reason is obvious: In 400 years many words vary or change in meaning. Here are some examples:

In the KJV, we read about a person coming into a church service wearing “GAY clothing” (James 2:3). The Greek word translated “gay” is *lampros* which (like “lamp”) simply meant *bright*—in this case bright clothing—nothing more. But if we took the word “gay” as it is commonly used today, it could have a homosexual meaning.

A lovely description of spring is worded this way in the KJV: “The winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the TURTLE is heard in our land” (Song of Solomon 2:11,12). *We* think of a turtle as a slow-moving, shelled reptile, that is without voice. But when the KJV was issued,

the word turtle meant a turtledove. The voice of the turtledove was the soft, purring sound it makes. Whether translated as turtle (cf. Jer. 8:7) or turtledove (cf. Gen. 15:9; Lev. 12:8) it is the same word in the Hebrew.

In the KJV wording, Paul told the Corinthian Christians, “Stand fast in the faith, QUIT you like men, be strong” (1 Cor. 16:13). Almost identical wording is found in 1 Sam. 4:9: “Be strong, and QUIT yourselves like men.” The word “quit,” as used here, is obsolete. Today we would say: “Conduct yourselves like men” or “be brave like men.”

In the KJV we read that a delegation of Israelite leaders was sent to a woman named Huldah, who lived “in Jerusalem in the COLLEGE” (2 Kings 22:14; 2 Chron. 34:22). Evidently four hundred years ago the word “college” had a different meaning than today. The Hebrew word so translated simply means *second*. The newer versions, including the NKJV, translate it “second quarter” or “second district” of Jerusalem. She was not living in a college dorm!

This delegation, sent by Josiah the king, consisted of the High Priest and national leaders. What was their purpose for going to Huldah? They went to her in order to *inquire of the Lord!* She was a prophetess. It is all spelled out in 2 Kings 22 and 2 Chron. 34. God’s message through her was timely for that country, the people involved, and the king himself. That message is now part of the Bible! Those who suppose that God does not speak through women, *take note!*

Because Paul and others were on a *ship*, when the KJV says “they fetched a COMPASS” (Acts 28:13), some suppose they used an instrument with a little needle pointing to magnetic north. But what *we* call a “compass” had not even been invented at that time! This expression simply meant to circle around, to compass (cf. Josh. 6:4; 2 Sam. 5:23; 2 Kings 3:9).

In the KJV we read: “The letters were sent by POSTS” (Esther 3:13). This sounds strange to us—we might think of *fence* posts. But, even today, we call a letter carrier a “*Postman*” and he works at the “*Post Office*.” On the other hand, the word *mail* (which *we* would associate with the post office), in the KJV, refers to *armor* (1 Sam. 17:5)!

In the KJV we read: “...thou knowest all the TRAVEL that hath befallen us” (Num. 20:14; cf. Lam.3:5). Unlike the way we use the word “travel” today, this is more closely linked with travail or *hardship*, as in the newer translations.

In the KJV, Jesus is quoted as saying, “SUFFER the little children to come unto me” (Mk. 10:14). “Suffer,” as used today, is a negative, something undesirable. Newer translations simply say “*allow* the little children to come to me,” the obvious meaning.

Paul wrote, “He who now letteth will LET” (2 Thess. 2:7). When the KJV was translated, “let” meant to *hinder*. As Paul told the Romans, he had intended to come to them “but was *let* hitherto” (Rom. 1:13)—he was hindered in coming to them. Today, the word “let” is used in almost an *opposite* sense. If we let someone do something, we allow it—not hinder it!

Some are so locked in to the KJV, they claim even the *italics* were inspired! The King James translators themselves did not

believe this. Unlike today's practice of using italics for *emphasis*, they used italics to show when a word was added to provide a proper sense in English. Unless this difference in the use of italics—then and now—is kept in mind, an italicized word could convey a different meaning. An example is found in 1 Kings 13:27: "And he spake to his sons, saying, Saddle me the ass. And they saddled *him*." If we put the emphasis on "*him*," it would sound like the sons saddled their father!

I once read about a church that conducted a public Bible reading in the town square of their community. Using loud speakers, various individuals, one after another, continued reading the King James Version until they had gone from Genesis to Revelation. I wonder if some readers may have been embarrassed when they read certain words—words that may have been proper 400 years ago, but which now have a crude or vulgar meaning (2 Kings 18:27; 1 Sam. 25:22).

For some of us who grew up with the King James Version, the old English wording—the "thees" and "thous," the "jots" and "tittles"—may not sound that strange. But for others—and a younger generation especially—wording like this does sound strange. It is not the way we talk today. Consider the following wording in one of the best-known chapters in the Bible, John 3: "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth." Is it effective to insist on using words like *bloweth*, *listeth*, *hearest*, *canst*, *cometh*, *whither* and *goeth*?

The old English wording of the KJV, which was perfectly fine at the time, is now cumbersome—like adding the letters *eth* to hundreds of words. Starting with the letter *a*, here are some examples: *abhorreth*, *accuseth*, *acknowledgeth*, *affecteth*, *ailleth*, *alloweth*, *altereth*, *appeareth*, *appeaseth*, *appertaineth*, *ascendeth*, *avengeth*, etc.

How understandable are the following words in the KJV? Could the average person use them in a sentence?

- "...containing two or three FIRKINS" (John 2:6).
- "...under the brim there were KNOPS" (1 Kings 7:24).
- "...set in OUCHES of gold" (Exod. 28:11).
- "...QUICK raw flesh in the rising" (Lev. 13:10).
- "...the man that hath his QUIVER full" (Psa. 127:5).
- "...the REReward of all the camps" (Num. 10:25).
- "...from the SELVEDGE in the coupling" (Exod. 26:4).
- "...they are SOTTISH children" (Jer. 4:22).
- "...and PILLED white STRAKES in them" (Gen. 30:37).
- "...whether it be in the WARP or WOOF" (Lev. 13:48).
- "...we do you to WIT of the grace of God" (2 Cor. 8:1).
- "...green WITHS that were never dried" (Judges 16:7).
- "...my master WOTTETH not what is with me" (Gen. 39:8).

In the following, I list some obsolete words and (in brackets) the way they are better expressed in newer translations:

- "Sweep it with the BESOM [broom]" (Isa. 14:23).
- "The noise of the BRUIT [report] is come" (Jer. 10:22).
- "They dwell...in the CHAMPAIGN [plain]" (Deut. 11:30).
- "The people CHODE [argued] with Moses" (Num. 20:3).
- "The oxen...that EAR [plow] the ground" (Isa. 30:24).

- "The HAFT [handle] also went in" (Judg. 3:22).
- "He hath HOLPEN [helped] his servant Israel" (Lk. 1:54).
- "The city...taken...houses RIFLED [plundered]" (Zech. 14:2).
- "The Lord of SABAOTH [armies]" (Rom. 9:29).
- "He...SCRABBLED [scratched] on the doors" (1 Sam. 21:13).
- "They shall be broken to SHIVERS [pieces]" (Rev. 2:27).
- "As TOUCHING [concerning] the Gentiles" (Acts 21:25).
- "I TROW [think] not" (Lk. 17:9).
- "We WOT [know] not what is become of him" (Acts 7:40).
- "Whither have ye made a ROAD [raid] today?" (1 Sam. 27:10).
- "God...spoke unto me YESTERNIGHT [last night]" (Gen. 31:29).

Is any purpose served by perpetuating old KJV spelling that is now obsolete? Should we spell the word acquit, QUIT (Exod. 21:19); ago, AGONE (1 Sam. 30:13); attire, TIRE (Ezek. 24:17); happen, HAP (Ruth 2:3); hemorrhoids, EMERODS (Deut. 28:27); milk, MILCH (Gen. 32:15); music, MUSICK (Lk. 15:25); rye, RIE (Exod. 9:32); soap, SOPE (Jer. 2:22); since, SITH (Ezek. 35:6); sneezing, NEESING (Job 41:18); or traffic, TRAFFICK (Ezek. 28:5)? Is this in some way "more spiritual" than using normal, present-day spelling?

There were 47 translators, members of the Church of England, involved in producing the King James Version. As various portions were assigned to them, where one used the spelling "Zion," another put "Sion" (Rom. 11:26). Where one used the spelling "Sodom," another put "Sodoma" (Rom. 9:29). Such differences in spelling are especially noticeable in names. In the following list, the best-known spelling is first, and the different spelling second:

- Elijah is spelled ELIAS (James 5:17).
- Elisha is spelled ELISEUS (Lk. 4:27).
- Hosea is spelled OSEE (Rom. 9:25).
- Isaiah is spelled ESAIAS (Matt. 8:17).
- Jeremiah is spelled JEREMIAS (Matt. 16:14).
- Jonah is spelled JONAS (Matt. 12:39).
- Sarah is spelled SARA (Heb. 11:11).
- Silas is spelled SILVANUS (1 Thess. 1:1).
- Timothy is spelled TIMOTHEUS (1 Thess. 1:1).

One of the aims of the translation known as the *Concordant Bible* is this: if a word is translated a certain way one place, it should be *consistently* translated the same way throughout.

I am thinking just now of a dear man, Robert Henry, who was a friend of our ministry back in the late 60s. I don't know that he had any premonition he would soon pass from this life. But, a couple days before his unexpected death, he wrote a letter expressing his desire that I receive certain books he owned, including his *Concordant Bible*. His widow made sure this happened.

I recall a time when he rode with me to a speaking engagement in Los Angeles. He mentioned how he once had a large Buick automobile. "It could pass everything on the road," he said, "except the gas station!" It may be of some interest to mention that he was the uncle of movie actress Jane Russell.

The concordant principle of *uniform* translation is commendable, but it does not solve all difficulties, for this reason: the *same* word in Greek or Hebrew—as in English—may be used in different ways. For example, the Greek word that is translated “Jesus” (*Strong’s Concordance* 2424) also means Joshua. So, to always translate this word “Jesus” may be technically correct and uniform, but if Joshua is the intended meaning, this distinction *should* be made. After the death of Moses, it was *Joshua* who led the Israelites into the Promised Land. Yet in two places the KJV calls him Jesus (Acts 7:45; Heb. 4:8). The NKJV and other translations have *Joshua*, which is the obvious meaning.

Probably most of us would hardly know about King James had it not been for his involvement in what came to be known as the King James Version. Occasionally some mistakenly call it the “*Saint James Version*.” But there is no indication he was saintly. His reign was not without scandals, and historians are still divided as to whether he was homosexual or bisexual. That he was unfaithful to his marriage appears to be well documented in encyclopedias.

Nevertheless, the KJV that was issued during his reign—despite his personal life, one way or the other—has had a grand history. Multitudes have come to Christ through preaching from a King James Bible. But to insist that this is the *only* version that God uses, is hardly credible.

Suppose a man said to us, “Knowest thou not that thy house burneth?” His warning would be valid and appreciated. But it would also be valid—and more *clear*—if he simply said: “Your house is on fire!”

One writer has said, “I recommend the KJV for any reader who is 350 years old or older. All others would do better with a more recent version.”

The good news is that *any* translation—even with variations in wording or different ways of expressing things—can be used of God to bring people to him who is the Savior of the world, JESUS CHRIST.

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