

~The King James Version Debate~

These are just a few notes in defense of some translations of the Bible, other than the **KJV**, particularly the **NIV** and the **NASB**. We have no intention of defending all modern translations or paraphrases. In fact, we agree that many of them are bad (just as many older translations are bad). Nor do we wish to attack the KJV or label it as a bad translation. However, it is not perfect - no translation is. For this reason we will be making reference to some problems with and mistakes in the KJV - not to tear it apart, but to show that it (like the NIV and the NASB) has problems.

Two more things should probably be understood before we continue. *Firstly, there is no doctrine (large or small) that is at stake.* So far, we have not been able to find or have shown to us anything that is taught in the KJV but, not taught in the NIV or NASB and vice versa. This is not said to belittle verbal inspiration but it is said to point out that perhaps this issue has been blown out of proportion. It is odd that if (as some claim) Satan is behind the NIV and NASB he has neglected to change any of their teachings.

Secondly, the subject of translations is a pretty difficult subject. It involves things like textual criticism (the process by which the correct copies of the Greek New Testament we have, are distinguished from the incorrect copies), methods of translating, knowledge of Greek and Hebrew, etc. and many other fields of knowledge. All of these are certainly far beyond the capacities of most of us so we should avoid speaking as authorities on them. **John Darby** wrote a lengthy preface to his translation explaining about the difficulties involved in producing a translation in order *"that persons not versed in the matter may not hazard themselves in forming conclusions without any real knowledge of the questions."*

Objections Answered

These are some of the "problems" we are told the NIV and the NASB have. Most of these aren't problems at all. For instance, it is true that the NIV and NASB frequently speak of the "gospel" without explicitly telling us, in the same sentence, which gospel. Yet we cannot see how this reflects poorly on the NIV or the NASB. Rather than spend time showing that many of the following aren't problems at all, we will simply show that the KJV is "guilty" of the same "errors" and say that if someone really objects to these "errors" they had better criticize the KJV as well.

* **"Modern translations speak of 'the gospel' and don't always tell us which gospel (Rom 1:16)."**
So does the KJV. See Mt 11:5; Mk 1:15; 13:10; 16:15; Lk 4:18; 7:22; 9:6; 20:1; Ac 8:25; 14:7,21; 15:7; 16:10; Rom 1:15; 2:16; 10:16; 11:28; 15:20; 16:25; 1 Cor 1:17; 4:15; 9:14,16,17; 15:1; 2 Cor 4:3; 8:18; 10:16; Gal 1:11; 2:2,5,7,14; 3:8; 4:13; Eph 3:6; 6:19; Php 1:5,7,12,17; 2:22; 4:3,15; Col 1:5,23; 1 Th 1:5; 2:4; 2 Th 2:14; 2 Tim 1:10; 2:8; Phm 13; Heb 4:2; 1 Pe 1:12,25; 4:6

* **"Modern translations tell us to 'believe' but don't always tell us what or who to believe (Jn 6:47)."**
So does the KJV. See Mk 5:36; 16:17; Lk 8:50; Jn 1:7; 9:38; 11:15,40; 14:29; 16:31; 19:35; Ac 13:39; 21:20,25; Rom 1:16; 4:11; Eph 1:19; Heb.10:39.

* **"The NASB refers to Christ as being 'offspring' (Lk 1:35)."**

So does the KJV. See Rev 22:16

* **"Modern translations refer to Joseph as being Christ's 'father' (Lk 2:33) and Mary and Joseph as being Christ's 'parents' (Lk 2:43)."**

So does the KJV. See Lk 2:48,27,41

* **"One verse in the NIV is used by cultists to prove that Christ was created (Mic 5:2)."**

The same is true of the KJV. Cultists frequently use Rev 3:14 to try to say that Christ was created. The KJV says that Christ is the "beginning of the creation of God." The NIV says that Christ is the "ruler of God's creation." If we have to reject a translation because cultists can abuse a verse in it, then we have to reject all translations (and the original). This is why there is more than one verse in the Bible.

* **"The KJV exalts Christ more than the modern versions."**

• **Jn 1:18** - NIV, NASB call Christ God, but the KJV doesn't

• **Titus 2:13; 2 Pe 1:1** - NIV, NASB call Christ God but the KJV speaks of Christ and God as being two different people

• **Rom 1:3** - KJV says that Christ was "made" (created?)

• **Lk 1:35** - KJV calls Christ a "thing". We believe that He was a person before birth, not a "thing". Also see Rom 8:26 where the KJV calls the Holy Spirit "it". We believe that the Holy Spirit is also a person - not just an "it" like the cultists believe.

* **"Most modern translations don't use the reverent 'thee' and 'thou' when addressing God."**

"Thee" and "thou" aren't used as terms of respect in the KJV. They are used to distinguish the second person singular from the second person plural. As such, "thee" and "thou" are used whenever the second person singular is used, no matter who is being addressed. Certainly Christ would never show reverence to Satan (the very idea is blasphemous) and yet He addressed Satan as "thee" (Mt 16:23; Job 1:7,8). Greek doesn't have special pronouns for God; Hebrew doesn't have special pronouns for God; not even the KJV has special pronouns for God. If no one in the Bible (including the Lord Jesus) used special pronouns for God, why should we? How dare anyone suggest it is irreverent not to do so, since that would be accusing Christ of irreverence! Now there are those who realize this and yet, undaunted by the fact that they have no biblical support for their tradition, still insist that we use "thee" and "thou" when addressing God. They say this is because "you" is ambiguous (it can be singular or plural) and therefore to use it (they claim) is to leave doubt as to whether we are praying to one God or to many. All we will say is that it is both astonishing and pathetic to see the lengths some Christians will go to in making ridiculous accusations against their brothers in order to justify their traditions rather than submit to the Word of God alone. If they insist on claiming that we are addressing a plurality of Gods clearly all rational, charitable discussion has ceased.

* **"Westcott and Hort [the men behind much of the textual criticism that has been used in the production of more modern translations] were liberals."**

Argument ad hominem is a common method of attack for people who have nothing substantive to say. Westcott and Hort were certainly far from perfect, but the same can be said about Calvin, Luther, Wesley, etc. And modern versions do not slavishly follow Westcott and Hort anyway. If it were logically valid to reject their work because they were not theologically perfect (and it isn't), we would certainly have to reject the KJV as well since Erasmus (the man behind much of the Greek text of the KJV) never left the

Roman Catholic church. (We might also point out that if Westcott or Hort had ever written some of the things that the translators of the KJV wrote in their dedication, KJV'ers would be vilifying them as blasphemers. After all it is the Lord Jesus whose appearance is "as of the Sun in his strength", not King James.)

*** "Newer translations don't have the majesty of the KJV."**

At the risk of sounding flippant, neither did the originals. The New Testament was not written in majestic Greek, but in everyday Greek. If anything, this lack of "majesty" makes newer translations more accurate.

* It is true that many modern translations and paraphrases are bad, but so are many older ones. And attacking the Living Bible or others is not a valid way of criticizing the NIV or the NASB.

*** "Modern translations are paraphrases - they aren't literal like the KJV."**

The ASV, the JND and the NASB are more literal than the KJV.

*** "The NIV had people from several denominations on the translating committee. This distorts the translation."**

We cannot see where this is worse than having all of the translators from one denomination, the Church of England.

*** "Modern translators leave out many words, phrases and verses that are in the KJV. The Bible tells us not to take away from God's Word (Dt 4:2; Rev 22:18,19)."**

Those verses also tell us not to add to God's Word. If those words, phrases and verses were not in the original, then modern translations are faithful and it is the KJV that is unfaithful. It ought to go without saying that the reason these verses are not in the NIV or NASB is that the people behind those translations don't believe they were in the original. We might also point out that the NIV and NASB have removed a substantial chunk of the original **KJV - the Apocrypha**. We cannot see how supporters of the KJV-only position can unhyprocritically say that it isn't acceptable to remove words, phrases and verses from the KJV but you can remove whole books. Finally, the KJV "leaves out" important words as well.

For example "through Jesus Christ our Lord" in Jude 25.

*** Along the same lines as the previous objection, pointing to differences between the KJV and modern translations proves very little that isn't already known by everyone and proves nothing that is relevant to this topic.**

It does not prove that modern translations are imperfect, it only proves they are not the KJV (as most people can guess, without the KJV scholars to tell them). It only proves that at least one of the translations is wrong in that verse. The KJV might be wrong, the modern translation might be wrong or they both might be wrong. To criticize modern translations because they differ from the KJV is begging the question. We already know they differ from the KJV - that is why we use them. The question is, do they differ from the Word of God?

*** "The KJV was followed by tremendous revival, so we know it is God's translation."**

Have the modern translations been followed by revival?" The fact that God uses something has no bearing on whether or not He approves of it. He used an evil spirit, Assyria, Judas' betrayal of Christ, and many other things that we wouldn't dare suggest He approves of. (We could also point out that this could be argued the other way. We could say, "Look how many cults use the KJV!" since more cultists use the KJV than all modern translations combined.) We aren't saying that God doesn't approve of the KJV, but we are saying that even if we accept the assertion that it was followed by revival and modern translations haven't been, it certainly wouldn't prove the KJV is better. Finally, if this argument were valid, it would

mean that the KJV would be better than the originals since much of the original didn't produce immediate revival (e.g. Jeremiah)

* **"Look at all the liberalism that has come into the church. And most liberals use a modern translation."**

Of course this hardly proves that modern translations are responsible for liberalism. Most liberals are young. Does this mean that young people should be avoided? We would also add that this, too, can be argued both ways. Liberalism (which generally involves taking away from God's Word) is no worse than legalism (which generally involves adding to God's Word). And most legalists use the KJV!

* **"The KJV is the easiest translation to memorize."**

To begin with, this is a completely subjective statement. Whereas it may be easier to memorize for some people, it is much harder to memorize for others. This is merely a personal preference which some people have and it conflicts with the personal preferences of others. We suggest that those who really love the truth will stick to objective truth rather than imposing their personal, subjective, preferences on others. (We might also point out that the people who make this claim are people who have heard and used the KJV all their lives. Of course it's easier for them to memorize! If they had grown up on the Living Bible they would find it easier to memorize. Certainly that wouldn't mean that the Living Bible is the best Bible!) Secondly, even if it were true that the KJV was absolutely the easiest translation to memorize rather than just being easier for those raised on it, what would that prove? Are we expected to believe that the easier something is to memorize the more accurate it is? It seems to us that most people in Canada have found "Frosty the Snowman" easier to memorize than Psalm 119. Does that mean that "Frosty" is more accurate? Most Christians find Psalm 23 easier to memorize than 1 Chronicles 3. Does that mean Psalm 23 is more accurate?

* **"You're putting your faith in scholars, not in God."**

It is surprising how frequently this objection comes up. What is even more surprising is that if one continues talking to the person who offers it, it isn't long before they are quoting a scholar of their own to criticize modern translations. The fact is that a reader of the NIV or NASB is no more putting their faith in scholars than a reader of the KJV. As we will see later, the various Greek texts behind the KJV were compiled by "scholars" and the KJV was translated by "scholars." Why is it okay for the KJV to be assembled and translated by scholars, and for its supporters to have libraries of KJV-only books written by their scholars, yet not acceptable for the NIV and NASB to be assembled and translated by "scholars?" As happens all too frequently in this debate, there are apparently two sets of rules.

Other Problems

One particularly annoying habit of many KJV-only people is to show why the KJV is better than a modern translation in a particular verse, and then proceed to make smug, patronizing comments about modern translations. Do we accept this reasoning anywhere else in life? If a teacher is marking two tests and one student answers question 3 incorrectly and the other one answers it correctly, does he then conclude that the second student has a better overall test? Of course not! He marks the entire test for both students and compares the overall result. We suggest that this is what we should do with translations. *We should see which one is most often correct.* We agree that there are errors in modern translations and so showing us that the KJV is better in a particular verse proves nothing that we don't already know. But there are many verses in which the modern translation is better than the KJV. The question is, which one is most often correct? The following is a list of some problems in the KJV. People may object that some of these objections are unfair and are based on deliberately misinterpreting the KJV or not giving it the benefit of the doubt, but we include the objections anyway since they are similar in form and content to the arguments used by KJV-only people.

* **Heb 4:3,5** - the KJV misquotes Ps 95:1. The NIV, NASB don't.

* **Eph 1:13** - the KJV says that the sealing of the Holy Spirit occurs after salvation. Is this the second blessing?

* **Jn 3:16** - the KJV says that those who believe in Christ "should not" perish. We know people who have been seriously worried by this rendering since it conveys a lack of certainty (as in "Don't worry about the voyage, sir. The Titanic is an amazing vessel. You shouldn't have any problems."). The NIV says "shall not", thus properly conveying absolute certainty.

* **1 Pe 3:20** - the KJV says that Noah was saved by the water. Actually, Noah was saved by the Lord, in the ark, through the water.

* **Jn 13:10** - the KJV fails to distinguish between "bathed" and "washed."

* **Ac 12:4** - the KJV translates the Greek word "pascha" as "**Easter**" (a concept which had no bearing on Christianity at the time of the writing of the book of Acts) instead of "Passover" like it is translated in the other 28 occurrences of that word in the NT. *The NIV, NASB correctly translate it as "Passover" consistently.*

* **Jn 10:16** - the KJV translates the Greek word "poinnee" as "fold" when it should be "flock" as it is translated every other time it occurs in the NT. This is particularly misleading when the real Greek word for "fold" is already used (and translated "fold") in the same verse, leaving people with the idea that it means the same thing. The NIV, NASB correctly translate it as "flock" consistently. The whole point of the verse is that instead of being held together in a fold (the walls being the laws and regulations of Judaism), believers are now one flock and held together by the Shepherd. People who use the KJV only would likely miss this "gem."

* It is more than a little difficult to believe that we have discovered no useful manuscripts since 1611. It is worse to suggest that nothing more has been learned about Greek and Hebrew since 1611.

* *The words "who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit"* in Romans 8:1 are an unwarranted addition to the gospel. As Ironside has said, "It is man's innate aversion to sovereign grace, I am certain, that brought these qualifying words into the text of the common version [KJV]. It seemed too much to believe that freedom from condemnation depended on being in Christ Jesus and not upon our walking after the Spirit."

* **Isa 45:7** - the KJV says that God creates evil. This misleading translation can easily give people the wrong idea that God is the author of sin.

* **1 Cor 14:4**; etc. - the unwarranted insertion of the word "unknown" (the honest translators left in italics) before "tongue" has led (actually misled) many people to the conclusion that the tongues in 1 Corinthians are some kind of heavenly babbling. Since the translators of the KJV didn't also insert the word "unknown" in Acts 2, this has allowed charismatics to claim that the tongues of Acts 2 and 1 Corinthians are different, a claim which is fundamental to the tongues movement since clearly the tongues of Acts 2 were real human languages, not babbling (Acts 2:6). The NIV and NASB make no such unwarranted insertion, thus teaching that the tongues of Acts 2 and 1 Corinthians were the same kind.

* **Ex 20:13** - the KJV gives the sixth commandment as "Thou shalt not kill!" This has been the source of a

great deal of ridicule and damage by liberals since some use it to assert that God and the Israelites were hypocrites (since they killed thousands of their enemies) and some use it to assert that capital punishment is wrong. The NIV and NASB translate it as "You shall not murder." This removes all basis for these criticisms. It is also consistent with the original since Hebrew (like English) has different words for "kill" and "murder" and it is the word for "murder" that is used in Ex 20:13.

* **The archaic language** of the KJV frequently makes it incomprehensible to some (2 Cor 6:12; Ps 35:15) and many times misleading (1 Cor 4:4; 1 Th 4:15). Words such as "*wot*", "*wist*", "*scall*", "*glede*", "*cotes*", "*ciedled*", "*blains*", "*implead*", "*neesing*", "*wen*", "*tabret*", etc. are more harm than good to most people. For many people, the KJV discourages Bible reading because they can't understand it. Of course as soon as this objection is raised there are those KJV'ers who condescendingly reply with 1 Corinthians 2:14, "the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God." They say (or at least imply) that if you have difficulty understanding the KJV it is because you are either carnal or unsaved. Since the KJV is God's Word, any spiritual Christian will be given special, direct, divine intervention to help them deal with the sometimes incomprehensible language of the KJV. Of course, we have no doubt that without God's illumination we cannot understand His Word, but we do doubt that this means we can choose as incomprehensible a translation as possible and then attempt to twist God's arm into illuminating us. And if it were valid to use this verse with reference to the KJV, couldn't we also use it in reference to the original Hebrew and Greek? Couldn't we then insist that all Christians read the original languages and as soon as someone complains that they don't understand Hebrew and Greek simply say, "the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God. You need to have faith and God will teach you!" Finally let us point out that we have misgivings about any understanding of 1 Corinthians 2:14 which suggests that Paul was thinking about translations when he wrote it.

* **2 Tim 3:16** - the KJV says that "all scripture is given by inspiration of God." This misrepresents the inspiration of the scriptures. People reading the KJV are left with the idea that it was the *writers* of the scriptures who were inspired. In truth it is the *scriptures themselves* that are inspired as the NIV and NASB make clear. Thus the KJV presents a weak view of inspiration.

Greek Text Behind the KJV

The Textus Receptus (TR) is the Greek text behind the KJV. We are often told that the TR is the **Majority Text (MT)**

(1). KJV'ers will point to a reading in the NIV and NASB that has the support of only one or two manuscripts where the KJV reading has the support of fifty or sixty manuscripts and ask how we could doubt that the KJV reading is the correct one. (Apparently they expect us to believe that the majority is always right - a questionable idea indeed in light of passages like Mt 7:13,14!) Some things need to be pointed out concerning the relationship of the KJV to the MT. The TR differs from the MT in hundreds of places.

(2) In fact, Zane Hodges and Art Farstead have published a MT called The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982). This, of course, differs from the TR New Testaments already published.

* Although it is comfortable for the supporters of the KJV to believe, there was no such thing as the TR. Several different editions of the Greek New Testament were referred to as the TR. (**Erasmus'** 3rd edition

of 1522, **Stephanus'** 3rd edition of 1550, **Beza's** 8th edition of 1598 and the **Elzevirs'** 2nd edition of 1633.)

* ***There were several different Greek New Testaments used to make the KJV*** All of these editions went through revisions before and after being used for the KJV. Are we actually supposed to believe that all the revisions made before they were used for the KJV were good and all the revisions made after were bad? On what grounds? And are we also supposed to believe that when the translators had to choose between contradictory passages in the various editions (and there were hundreds of them), they always made the correct choice?! "Well, God providentially allowed them to make all the correct choices." Did He? How do you know? Do you have a Bible verse to support that belief, or are you going by your feelings or the opinions of men?

(3) Why is it that all revisions are fine and good and necessary up to 1611, but all subsequent revisions are evil? What people don't seem to realize is that 95% of the arguments KJV'ers use could be used for any translation. We could claim that the NASB is the perfect Bible and that all the decisions its translators made concerning Greek texts and translations were "providentially guided" by the Lord because God has promised to preserve His Word. And if anyone differed with us we could accuse them of denying the preservation of God's Word or the providential working of God. And we would have just as much to base this on as someone who said it about the KJV.

* Many KJV'ers speak as if the KJV was translated from a vast numbers of manuscripts which were exactly the same. We are presented with a picture of thousands of exactly identical manuscripts on the KJV side and a handful of contradictory, disparate manuscripts on the NIV and NASB side. Of course for this picture to concern us it would have to be true. It isn't. Virtually all of the manuscripts on the KJV side have minor differences and so the translators of the KJV had to engage in textual criticism just like the translators of the NIV and NASB. There may be a larger number of manuscripts in the family of manuscripts that was generally used in producing the KJV than there is in the family of manuscripts generally used in producing the NIV or NASB, but the manuscripts within that family still differ from each other in thousands of places. The manuscripts in the KJV family are not as uniform and consistent as some KJV'ers would like us to believe.

* **Summing up so far**, the MT and the various TR's differ from each other in hundreds and sometimes thousands of places. And the KJV wasn't exclusively based on any of them! Those who produced the MT, the various TR's and the KJV faced exactly the same problem that modern translators face: minor differences in all of the manuscripts they have available.

* ***There are about a dozen readings in the KJV that are not supported by ANY Greek text (e.g. the words "And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" in Acts 9:6 don't appear in ANY Greek text).***

* We don't have the original manuscripts of the Bible. What we do have are copies. The originals were copied, then the copies were copied, and so on. The NIV, NASB and other versions use manuscripts that are hundreds of years older than the manuscripts used for the KJV. This means that they haven't gone through nearly as many generations of copying and that there is far less room for error.

* ***The early "church fathers" do not quote (unambiguously) the text type on which the KJV is founded.*** This strongly implies that the KJV is based on Greek texts which have changed since the early church,

due to copyist errors. *The NIV and NASB are based on Greek texts which match the writings of the early church.*

What About the Preservation of God's Word?

There are people who maintain that there is only one acceptable translation, and that it is the KJV. They do this by referring to the fact that God promises to preserve His Word. We of course would not dare to deny that God makes this promise. Nor do we have the slightest doubt that this is a trustworthy promise.

But we cannot see how that promise relates to the present topic.

To begin with, we have serious doubts about the interpretation skills of anyone who maintains that "Forever, O LORD, Your Word is settled in heaven" (Ps 119:89) means "Forever, O LORD, Your Word is settled on earth, in English." However, even if this verse (and verses like it) did mean that we would be given a flawless English translation (which they don't), on what grounds are we to accept that the KJV is that translation? There is certainly no verse in the Bible that tells us to use the KJV. So we have Christians who are dividing the people of God not because the Bible teaches that we should use the KJV, but because their favourite scholars teach that.

The King James was largely based on previous translations (as the preface to the KJV says). How is it then that those translations are all "perversions" and yet the KJV is not? If Psalm 119:89 ensures that we'll have a perfect English translation, why did God leave His English-speaking people without one until 1611? On what basis are we to believe that all the English Bibles before the KJV were wrong, and all the English Bibles after the KJV are wrong, and yet the KJV is right? Again, even if one could prove that a perfect English translation exists, they would still have to prove that it is the KJV. And so until they can show us a verse that says, "If thou art English, thou shall use only the King James Version," we maintain that they are energetically propagating something which is merely the doctrine of men.

Moreover, what is the perfect French Bible? German? Russian? Do those people get one, or does God favour English people? And finally, for those who claim that inerrancy applies down to the smallest jot and tittle in the KJV (based on Mt 5:18), let us point out that the KJV of today differs from the KJV of 1611 in words, spelling and typesetting ("jot and tittle") . This means that they had better run out and buy the 1611 version because they, too, are guilty of using a "modern perversion" of the Bible.

Final Thoughts

Firstly, most adamant KJV-only people no doubt consider that they are fighting to preserve the purity of God's truth. *This is, of course, a noble intention, but we have no doubt that many of the Inquisitors felt the same way.* Admirable motives do not ensure that the cause is just. We, too, are concerned about the purity of God's truth and as such, we don't want to see it corrupted by human opinion.

Secondly, most King-James-only people are not merely concerned about this idea, they are obsessed with it. Of course, if they read this they would say that we don't care about the Word of God. We do care about the Word of God. In fact, we probably care about it significantly more than people who treat their personal preferences and traditions as having equal weight with the Word. But we are concerned about Christians who cannot speak three sentences without referring to why we should only use the King James Version.

We are concerned about Christians who spend more time talking about King James than they do talking about the Lord Jesus Christ.