

Is the King James Version the Only Bible Christians Should Trust and Read?—Part Two

By Dr. John Weldon

No Translation Is Perfect

Despite proponents' claims, the King James Version (KJV) is not inspired by God and inerrant—God did **not** personally write it. The KJV contains translation errors just as every other Bible translation (e.g., in Isaiah 4:5, “canopy” is mistranslated as “defense”; in Isaiah 5:25 “refuse” is mistranslated as “torn”; in Acts 19:2, “when” is mistranslated as “since.”)

Nor can a perfect translation ever be produced. Why? First, there will always be some things we simply don't know and probably never will know. For example, sufficient historical, archaeological or etymological information simply does not exist to determine with one hundred percent accuracy the meaning of certain Hebrew words. Second, the manuscript evidence does not always permit us to determine the correct reading. Third, no individual editor is perfect and no translation committee is perfect, and therefore no Bible is perfect. Every translation, including the KJV, was made by imperfect men who invariably have some degree of deficiency in knowledge or skill, and yes, perceived or unperceived bias in their work, regardless of how thorough, honest and objective they may attempt to be. This is simply the human condition. That is why **all** translations, including the KJV, continue to be corrected in subsequent editions whenever new, pertinent information becomes available. Even so, such corrections are relatively minor.

We should remember that we have only **two** options if we desire that people around the world have access to the Word of God: 1) to have scholarly yet imperfect men produce translations in every language, or 2) to have God inspire an inerrant translation for every language. Since the latter is obviously not the case, translation is our only option.¹

Translations Are Not Equally Competent

We are the first to admit that not all modern versions have equal credibility. Some are quite good, while others are clearly defective and unacceptable. Inferior translations containing obvious liberal or theological bias include the *New English Bible*, *The Jerusalem Bible* and the *New Revised Standard Version*—not to mention the hopeless *New World Translation* of the Jehovah's Witnesses.² On the other hand, “A good translation is based on a great deal of scholarship and examination of virtually all the textual sources. Every attempt is made to ascertain the original rendering. The product of godly scholarship is a highly readable and useful translation which can be trusted on the basis of all the evidence that we have available.”³

This explains why a good, literal, “word-for-word” translation, such as the *New American Standard Bible* (NASB) is necessary for study and exegesis of the Bible. While strict or partial paraphrases, such as *The Living Bible* (LB), are clearly more readable and may be used in personal devotions, such versions should never be used for serious study unless checked against a rigid translation.

However, the very **purpose** of having a readable Bible in one's own language is so that people can read and **understand** what God has said to them. Whether Christians do this through the King James Version, the New King James Version (NKJV), or another good modern translation like the New American Standard Bible (NASB), New International Version (NIV), or Revised Standard Version (RSV) is irrelevant, as long as they **do** understand it. In order to communicate clearly, every translation will lose shades of meaning found in the original languages—but for most of us this is preferable to actually reading Greek or Hebrew. Further, if people **cannot** understand the KJV, then even if charges concerning the alleged “corruption” of modern versions **were** true, Christians might understand **more** of God's Word by reading a good conservative translation they comprehend. Champions of the KJV may forget that “they have been conditioned to its oddities by a lifetime of study”—something not true for millions of new readers.⁴

Unfortunately, the claim that the KJV alone is God's Word has brought considerable division to many churches. In fact, this debate, smoldering within Evangelical ranks for many years now, was inflamed with the publication of G. A. Riplinger's 690-page text *New Age Bible Versions*, which, regrettably, is one long misrepresentation from start to finish.⁵ Even though Riplinger's degrees are in interior design, not biblical studies, theology or history, and even though she is unable to read Greek or Hebrew, many Christians have taken her book as “gospel.”⁶

Not surprisingly then, we have received scores of comments like the one below from dear friends who have become confused on the issue of modern translations: “For some time now I have ...ceased supporting you financially because, although you take a bold stand against the cults and even Roman Catholicism—which everyone else seems to be softening their position on—you also promote very faulty translations such as the NIV and the NASB.”

No one can deny that those who defend the King James Version alone as God's Word are sincere and vocal about their concerns. First, they claim to desire the **complete** Word of God, asserting that **all** modern versions delete God's Word in literally thousands of places, leaving Christians with only an eviscerated text. Second, they claim to desire the **pure** Word of God, alleging that modern Bibles supposedly **mistranslate** God's Word in thousands of places, leaving Christians with only a biased and distorted text that is seriously compromised doctrinally. But in a good conservative translation, none of these charges can be substantiated.

The KJVO Debate Greatly Exaggerates the Issue of Alleged Corruption

D. A. Carson (Ph.D., Cambridge University), author of *The King James Version Debate: A Plea for Realism*, points out that the degree of uncertainty raised by **textual** questions (what is actually in the manuscripts) is a great deal less than the degree of uncertainty raised by how one **interprets** what the manuscripts say. If conservative interpretive difficulties are relatively small, then how much smaller must the textual difficulties themselves be? “In other words, even when the text is certain, there is often an honest difference of opinion among interpreters as to the precise meaning of the passage. Few Evangelicals, I would like to think, will claim infallibility for their interpretations of the Scriptures; they are prepared to live with the (relatively) **small** degree of uncertainty raised by such limitations. The doubt raised by **textual** uncertainties, I submit, is far, **far** smaller.”⁷

It doesn't make a great deal of difference **who** is correct in this debate, the KJVO writers

or those who advocate reliable modern translations. A good translation is a good translation, ancient or modern—period.

What **does** matter is the serious problems and divisions being produced by poor scholarship, as well as the manner in which KJVO promoters often mistreat their Christian brethren. In many cases, both critical thinking and old-fashioned courtesy seem to have disappeared. James White observes, “It is truly amazing how this kind of material can infiltrate churches. It just seems that Christians in this nation feel there is some fundamental conflict between logical, rational thinking and the Christian faith. There isn’t.”⁸

Notes:

¹ “About Those Translations,” *News & Views* (Chattanooga, TN: The John Ankerberg Show), April, 1988, p. 1.

² Jack P. Lewis, *The English Bible From KJV to NIV: A History and Evaluation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1984), passim.

³ “About Those Translations,” p. 5.

⁴ Lewis, p. 53.

⁵ See e.g., James White, *New Age Bible Versions Refuted* (Phoenix, AZ: Alpha and Omega Ministries, 1994), pp. 1–52.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 17–18, 32.

⁷ D. A. Carson, *The King James Version Debate: A Plea for Realism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1981), p. 73, second emphasis in original.

⁸ White, p. 16.