

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

By Dr. John Weldon

The Bible is clearly the most important book of human history. Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote that the “best and wisest of men” have born witness to its great influences in civilization, law, science and morality and “have declared it to be beyond compare the most perfect instrument of humanity.” Patrick Henry said it is “worth all other books which were ever printed,” and Kant stated, “The Bible is the greatest benefit which the human race has ever experienced.”¹

Not surprisingly, then, no subject is more important for the Christian than the Bible. Every Christian who reads it knows that the Scripture claims to be the divinely inspired and inerrant Word of God. This means that the inspired Scriptures comprise God’s very own words to us and that they do not contain even a single error. The Lord Jesus Christ told us this when He stated, “Thy word is truth” (Jn. 17:17, KJV). The Scripture itself declares it is “perfect,” “very pure,” and “sacred” (Ps. 19:7; 119:40; 2 Tim. 3:15, NASB).

We are told by God Himself that the Scriptures can never be destroyed; they are irrevocable. The Apostle Peter emphasized that “the living and abiding word of God” is “imperishable” (1 Pet. 1:23, NASB). Jesus said, “The scripture cannot be broken” (Jn. 10:35) and “heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away” (Mt. 24:35, KJV), for “it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of the letter of the law to fail” (Lk. 16:17, NASB). The Prophet Isaiah cried out, “The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand forever” (Is. 40:8, KJV).

So, how did we get our Bible, this most influential book in human history? God Himself directly inspired those who wrote it. The Apostle Paul emphasized, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God,…” (2 Tim. 3:16, KJV), while the Apostle Peter told us the process by which such divine inspiration occurred. Those specific individuals who actually wrote “the very words [*logia*] of God” (Rom. 3:2, NIV) were “holy men of God [who] spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Pet. 1:21, KJV). As the NIV puts it, “prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet. 1:21). Here, Peter employs a highly instructive word, *pheromene*, which was used of a ship carried along by the wind. As Edwin A. Blum points out, this Scripture “remarkably clarifies the cooperation of the dual authors of Scripture.”² The Holy Spirit filled the original writers of Scripture and “carried them along” in the direction He wished so that even though such men actually **wrote** the words of Scripture, they were the very words that God Himself inspired and wanted to be written down for all posterity.

Thus, the position of the Christian church for twenty centuries has been that **only** the original writings by the inspired authors, those who first penned the 66 books of the Bible, are the actual, authentic Word of God. In other words, collectively, as soon as these individuals stopped writing, the Bible was complete and divine revelation ended. From that point on, in order to have God’s Word, Christians had to make **copies** of the original, divinely inspired manuscripts.

Today, even though we do not possess the original autographs (the actual parchments or papyri that Scripture was first written on), and even though variant readings (copyists’

differences) exist for about 1–2 percent of the Bible, we can still know that the copies, collectively taken, give us one hundred percent of the original manuscripts. In the small area where differences among copyists do exist, textual critics of the Bible attempt to determine the most probable original reading. However, even this 1–2 percent of the text affects no Christian doctrine or belief.

Nevertheless, many Christians today claim that the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible is really the **only** Bible God wrote and further, like the original writings or “autographs” of Scripture, that only it is inspired and inerrant—i.e., without error.

To the contrary, most informed people know that the KJV Bible was first published in 1611, and that subsequent printings or editions corrected a number of translation errors (this occurred in 1612, 1613, 1616, 1629 [This version was the first to omit all the apocryphal books although most editions retained them until the 19th century.], 1638, 1660, 1683, 1727, 1762, 1769, and 1873). What this means is that each one of these versions differed in certain places from the previous edition. The KJV Bible we use today is actually based primarily on the major revision completed in 1769—158 years **after** the first edition.³ In fact, the KJV translators faced the exact same criticisms that translators of modern versions have faced.

Those who defend the King James Version Only (KJVO) as the inerrant Word of God make several assumptions. For example, we know today that the KJV Bible was produced from a half-dozen relatively late manuscripts selected by Erasmus who used them in 1516 to write the Greek text employed by the King James translators—who themselves placed critical notes and variant readings in the first edition. Actually, they used Erasmus’ text as it had been revised by Stephanus (1551) and Beza (1589–1598). Yet KJVO writers assume that these manuscripts were somehow divinely inspired and preserved from all error. Out of the hundreds of carefully copied Old Testament Hebrew manuscripts and the thousands of New Testament Greek manuscripts, only a small portion of these manuscripts were actually divinely inspired and protected in order to produce the King James Bible. Obviously, those who defend the King James Version only must claim to know **which** of all the manuscript copies were inspired and **which were not**. On what basis do they make such a claim?

The problem with this assumption is that there is not a shred of biblical or other evidence to substantiate it. No Scripture in the KJV Bible even hints that this scenario might be true. (So, if the King James Bible **is** our only authority, shouldn’t we accept the implications of what it does **not** say, as well as what it does say?)

We think a different approach is more prudent. Rather than assume that only one family of manuscripts has been divinely inspired and protected, the evidence tells us that no single manuscript or family of manuscripts is 100% perfect. Why? Because copyists’ errors exist in **every** manuscript we possess and this can be proven merely by looking at them. Even very careful copyists always make a few mistakes. But if no manuscript is perfect, this is also true for Bible translations.

(to be continued)

Notes:

¹ Frank S. Mead, *The Encyclopedia of Religious Quotations* (Revelle, 1965), pp. 25–30.

² Edwin A. Blum, “The Apostles’ View of Scripture,” in Norman Geisler (ed.), *Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1980), p. 49.

³ Jack P. Lewis, *The English Bible From KJV to NIV: A History and Evaluation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1984), p. 39.