

## THE PREFACE TO THE KING JAMES VERSION AND THE KING JAMES-ONLY POSITION

by  
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When the King James Version of the Bible came off the press of Robert Barker in 1611, it contained an eleven-page preface entitled “The Translators to the Reader.”<sup>1</sup> This preface is primarily a defense of the new translation, but it also provides important information about the translators’ views on the subject of Bible translation as well as giving the purpose for their new version. It is most unfortunate that this preface is no longer included in modern copies of the KJV, especially since the viewpoints expressed in the preface are clearly at odds with the modern King James-only movement. Because of the importance of the preface and its value to the current debate, it has been printed in full at the end of this essay. The purpose of this essay is to analyze some of the arguments used by supporters of the King James-only position in light of the preface.

### THE KING JAMES-ONLY POSITION

Various views of the KJV and the Greek text behind it (Textus Receptus<sup>2</sup>) are sometimes designated King James-only. However, not everyone who prefers the KJV over more modern translations should be classified as strictly King James-only in the sense discussed in this essay. Excluded from this discussion are those who simply prefer the KJV over other versions but do not make it a test of fundamentalism or orthodoxy. Their preference may be based on a variety of concerns but is gen-

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<sup>1</sup>A. S. Herbert, *Historical Catalogue of Printed Editions of the English Bible, 1525–1961* (London: British and Foreign Bible Society, 1968), p. 132.

<sup>2</sup>See my “Erasmus and the Textus Receptus,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 1 (Spring 1996): 35–53.

erally related to the Greek text behind the NT of the KJV.<sup>3</sup> That is, those who on text-critical grounds believe that either the Textus Receptus or the Majority Text is superior will naturally prefer the KJV over most modern versions.<sup>4</sup> This position is only marginally King James-only at most. It has sometimes been suggested that this position be termed “only King James.”

The true King James-only position argues that the KJV is the only English version that should be used today because it is the only one that can truly be called the Word of God. Some in this camp make it a test of fundamentalism or orthodoxy. This position takes two basic forms.

### Ruckmanism

The King James-only position is often associated with the name of Peter S. Ruckman of Pensacola, FL. He is, without question, the most extreme example of the King James-only position.<sup>5</sup> For instance, Ruckman holds that the KJV is superior to the Greek text from which it

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<sup>3</sup>Many other factors have influenced the continued use of the KJV. Since it is the Bible that has traditionally been used in fundamental circles, its continued use maintains a continuity with past fundamentalists. Sometimes its use is simply a matter of expediency in order to maintain unity within a church or other organization, or to avoid having to deal with the modern translation debate. The superior literary qualities of the KJV are often alluded to (e.g., Henry M. Morris, “Should Creationists Abandon the King James Version,” *Back to Genesis* (June 1966): c). After years of usage and memorization, many are understandably reluctant to give up the KJV.

<sup>4</sup>Zane Hodges, the father of the modern Majority Text movement, in one of his first articles, argued for the continued use of the KJV on textual grounds (“The Greek Text of the King James Version,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 125 [October–December 1968]: 334–45). Of course, the Majority Text and the Textus Receptus are not identical—Dan Wallace has counted 1,838 differences (“Some Second Thoughts on the Majority Text,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 146 [July–September 1989]: 276). But they are much closer to each other (better than a 99 percent agreement) than to the text behind most modern versions (i.e., the United Bible Societies or Nestle-Aland texts), so that Majority Text supporters would naturally prefer the KJV. Wallace has counted 6,577 differences between the Majority Text and UBS<sup>3</sup> (=NA<sup>26</sup>). Of course, it must be said that many Majority Text supporters now prefer the *New King James Version*, which is also based on the Textus Receptus but has the additional advantage of marking, in the footnotes, instances where the Textus Receptus and Majority Text differ. There is no English translation of the Majority Text.

<sup>5</sup>However, it must be said that the views of G. [Gail] A. Riplinger seem equally radical (*New Age Bible Versions* [Munroe Falls: A. V. Publications, 1993]). Many of those who hold the King James-only position attempt to disassociate themselves from Ruckman and his beliefs. For example, David W. Cloud, who holds the King James-only position, has written against both Ruckman and Riplinger (*What About Ruckman?* 2nd ed. [Oak Harbor, WA: Way of Life Literature, 1995] and *New Age Bible Versions: A Critique* [Oak Harbor, WA: Way of Life Literature, 1994]).

is translated and even superior to the originals themselves.<sup>6</sup> Ruckman also denies that the original manuscripts were verbally inspired.<sup>7</sup> He believes that the KJV corrects errors in the Greek text<sup>8</sup> and that mistakes in the KJV are advanced revelation.<sup>9</sup> This position is patently heretical and thus utterly foreign to the position of historic fundamentalism.<sup>10</sup>

### Textus Receptus Position

While advocates of the King James-only position would agree with Ruckman that only the KJV is the Word of God, most have rejected his arguments for that belief. Instead, the usual King James-only position is founded on two planks. First, the Textus Receptus is deemed to be the perfectly preserved text of the originals. D. A. Waite, for example, says:

It is my own personal conviction and belief, after studying this subject since 1971, that the words of the Received Greek and Masoretic Hebrew texts that underlie the King James Bible are the very words which God has preserved down through the centuries, being the exact words of the originals themselves. As such, I believe they are inspired words. I believe they are preserved words. I believe they are inerrant words. I believe they are infallible words.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>“Why KJV Is Superior to the Originals,” *Bible Believers’ Bulletin* (October 1981), p. 3. The *Bible Believers’ Bulletin* is published by the Bible Baptist Church in Pensacola, FL.

<sup>7</sup>“Cult Members at Lynchburg, Va. Speak up for Jerry Falwell,” *Bible Believers’ Bulletin* (July 1979), p. 2, and “Hobby Horse of Verbally Inspired Originals,” *Bible Believers’ Bulletin* (June 1981), p. 4.

<sup>8</sup>*The Christian’s Handbook of Manuscript Evidence* (Pensacola, FL: Pensacola Bible Institute, 1970), p. 124).

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 126. Ruckman cites the case of Acts 19:37, where the KJV translates the Greek “temples” (ἱεροσώλους) with “churches.” He admits that the Greek word does mean “temples,” yet he says: “the careful student of the scripture, through long familiarity with the A.V. text, has been surprised more than once by the marvelous undesigned ‘coincidences’ which God the Holy Spirit has inserted in the Bible, without the awareness of the translating committee” (pp. 125–26). He goes on to say that if the translators had not used the word “temples,” “all future application is nullified, for the pagan temples of Diana disappeared with the pagan idolatry of pagan Rome” (p. 125). Ruckman concludes by saying: “Moral: *Mistakes in the A.V. 1611 are advanced revelation!*” (p. 126). Ruckman seems to be saying that though the translation “churches” instead of “temples” is a “mistake” by the translators; nevertheless, it was purposely allowed by the Holy Spirit to make the KJV more applicable to more modern-day situations.

<sup>10</sup>See Rolland D. McCune, “Doctrinal Non-Issues in Historic Fundamentalism,” in this issue (pp. 171–177).

<sup>11</sup>*Defending the King James Bible* (Collingswood, NJ: Bible for Today Press, 1992), pp. 48–49.

This conviction of Waite, while seemingly unreasonable, would not necessarily demand a King James-only position since another English translation, *The New King James Version*, is also based on essentially those same texts.<sup>12</sup> But it is the second plank which results in a *de facto* King James-only stance: the KJV is the only translation available today which accurately translates the preserved Greek and Hebrew texts of the originals. That is, what separates this position from someone who simply prefers the KJV because it is based on the Textus Receptus in the NT (i.e., only King James) is the conviction that no other accurate translation of the Textus Receptus is available, and it is doubtful, if not impossible, that one could be produced today. The NKJV is universally condemned and rejected by Waite and others who espouse this viewpoint.<sup>13</sup> Words like infallible, inerrant, and perfect are generally used of only the Textus Receptus and not the KJV itself; however, those who hold this position are uniform in their belief that the KJV does not contain any errors.<sup>14</sup>

Before examining the arguments of the King James-only position, it will be helpful to briefly summarize the content of the preface to the 1611 edition.

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<sup>12</sup>*The Holy Bible, New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), pp. vi–vii. In the OT the NKJV uses a slightly different form of the Masoretic text—*Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*—instead of the second Rabbinic Bible published by Daniel Bomberg.

<sup>13</sup>E.g., Waite says: “The King James Bible is the Word of God in English and other versions are not” (*Defending the King James Bible*, p. 52). In this same book, Waite has numerous specific criticisms of the NKJV. William P. Grady attacks the NKJV in a chapter entitled “The Cutting Edge of Apostasy” (*Final Authority: A Christian’s Guide to the King James Bible* [Schererville, IN: Grady Publications, 1993], pp. 299–316. See also Thomas Strouse, “Should the ‘New King James Version’ Be the Fundamentalists’ Bible?,” *F.B.F. News Bulletin* (September–October 1983): 2 and (November–December 1983): 2. Of course, Strouse answers, No!

<sup>14</sup>Thomas M. Strouse says: “The KJV is the Word of God in the English language. It has no errors in it because it carefully reflects the original language texts closest to the autographa. The AV, like all translations, has ‘language limitations,’ but these are *not* errors (*The Lord God Hath Spoken: A Guide to Bibliology* [Virginia Beach, VA: Tabernacle Baptist Theological Press, 1992], p. 23). David W. Cloud, however, does describe the KJV as being “perfect” (*For the Love of the Bible* [Oak Harbor, WA: Way of Life Literature, 1995], pp. 9, 184). In personal correspondence (8/5/96) he explains: “I do believe the AV is perfect in the sense that it is from the right text and that it is an accurate translation and that it has no errors.” Waite says, specifically, that there are no “translation errors” in the KJV (*Defending the King James Bible*, p. 246). Waite refrains from using words like “inspired” and “inerrant” in characterizing the KJV. However, many in the King James-only camp are not so restrained in their language. Wallace A. Miller, for instance, insists that the “Authorized 1611 Version is the preserved, inerrant, inspired, and perfect word of God in the English language” (*The Revelation of God to Man* [Cincinnati, OH: Published by the author, 1992], p. 79). The language of Miller is commonly found in tracts and booklets supporting the KJV.

## SUMMARY OF THE PREFACE

The preface begins by noting, along with examples, that all new endeavors of whatever kind will commonly face opposition. This is also true for persons who attempt to change and improve anything, even if they are important people like kings. However, the greatest opposition and severest vilification is reserved for those who modify or change the current translation of the Bible, even if that translation is known to have defects.

Next there follows a long section praising Scripture, noting its great value and divine origin. But the perfections of Scripture can never be appreciated unless it is understood, and it cannot be understood until it is translated into the common tongue. Translation is therefore a good thing. Thus, God in his providence raised up individuals to translate the Old Testament into Greek. The Septuagint, though far from perfect, was still sufficient as the Word of God, such that the apostles quoted it in the NT. Also to be commended are the Greek versions of Aquila, Theodotion, and Symmachus, as well as the Hexapla of Origen. Both testaments were then translated into Latin, culminating in Jerome's Vulgate. Finally, the Scriptures were translated into many tongues, including English. However, the preface observes, the Roman Catholic Church has generally not allowed the Scriptures to be rendered into the common tongues. Recently, they have produced their own translation of the Bible into English<sup>15</sup> though they seem to have been forced to do it against their better judgment due to the number of Protestant English Bibles available.

The preface then returns to the problem of opposition to the new translation, and translations in general, by answering several objections. The main argument against the new translation questions the need for it, that is, since there had already been a number of English translation of the Bible, why is there need for another? If previous translations were good, there should be no need for another; if they were defective, why were they ever offered in the first place? The answer is, of course, that "nothing is begun and perfected at the same time." While the efforts of previous English translators are to be commended, nevertheless, they themselves, if they were alive, would thank the translators of this new translation. The previous English Bibles were basically sound, but this new translation affords an opportunity to make improvements and corrections.

The translators argue that all previous English translations can rightly be called the Word of God, even though they may contain some

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<sup>15</sup>The Rheims-Douay Version of 1609–10.

“imperfections and blemishes.” Just as the King’s speech which he utters in Parliament is *still the King’s speech*, though it may be imperfectly translated into French, Dutch, Italian, and Latin; so also in the case of the translation of the Word of God. For translations will never be infallible since they are not like the original manuscripts, which were produced by the apostles and their associates under the influence of inspiration. However, even an imperfect translation like the Septuagint can surely be called the Word of God since it was approved and used by the apostles themselves. But since all translations are imperfect, the Church of Rome should not object to the continual process of correcting and improving English translations of the Bible. Even their own Vulgate has gone through many revisions since the day of Jerome.

Finally, the translators state the purpose and plan of the present translation. They have not intended to make a new translation, but to make the best possible translation by improving upon previous ones. To do so they have, of course, carefully examined the original Hebrew and Greek since translation should only be done from the original tongues. Also, they did not work hastily, as did the translators of the Septuagint, who, according to legend, finished their work in only seventy-two days. The translators also availed themselves of commentaries and translations of the Scriptures in other languages. In their work they felt it was essential to include marginal notes, despite the fact that some might feel such notes tend to undermine the authority of the Scriptures. These notes are essential since the translators confess that oftentimes they were unsure how a word or phrase should be translated. This is especially true in Hebrew, where there are a number of words which only occur once in Scripture, and even the Jews themselves are uncertain about their translation. And so, as Augustine notes, a “variety of translations is profitable for finding out of the sense of the Scriptures.” Lastly, the translators observe that, in spite of criticism from some quarters, they decided not to always translate the same Hebrew or Greek word with the same English word and have retained, over the objections of the Puritans, the old ecclesiastical words like “baptism” instead of “washings.”

#### THE PREFACE VERSUS THE KING JAMES-ONLY POSITION

In this section various statements in the preface will be examined in order to demonstrate how the views of the translators differ from and sometimes contradict the beliefs and teachings of the King James-only position.

### Opposition to New Translations

The King James-only movement opposes all new translations. It is thus quite ironical to remember that the KJV itself was once a new translation faced with opposition. Prior to the KJV, there had been many English translations of Bible: Wycliffe (1382), Tyndale (NT, 1526), Coverdale (1535), Matthew's Bible (1537), the Great Bible (1539), the Geneva Bible (1560), the Bishops' Bible (1568), and the Rheims-Douay (1609–10). The first Bible authorized to be read in the Church of England was the Great Bible of 1539. That was replaced by the Bishops' Bible of 1568, which became the second Bible authorized to be read in the Church of England. When King James held his famous conference at Hampton court in 1604, Dr. John Reynolds, who ultimately became one of the translators of the KJV, told the king that a new translation of the Bible was needed because there were errors in the Bishops' Bible. One of his examples was Psalm 106:30, which in the Bishop's Bible read: "then stood up Phinees and prayed." Reynolds argued that the Hebrew should be translated: "Then stood up Phinehas and executed judgment."<sup>16</sup> For this and other reasons, King James consented to a new translation.

The translators anticipated the kind of opposition they would ultimately receive for producing a new translation, so in several statements, primarily at the beginning of the preface, they discuss the problem of hostility to new translations:

Zeal to promote the common good, whether it be by devising anything ourselves, or revising that which hath been laboured by others, deserveth certainly much respect and esteem, but yet findeth but cold entertainment [reception]<sup>17</sup> in the world. It is welcomed with suspicion instead of love, and with emulation instead of thanks: and if there be any hole left for cavil [trivial objection] to enter, (and cavil, if it do not find a hole, will make one) it is sure to be misconstrued, and in danger to be condemned. This will easily be granted by as many as know story [history], or have any experience. For was there ever any thing projected, that savoured any way of newness or renewing, but the same endured many a storm of gainsaying or opposition?<sup>18</sup>

This, and more to this purpose, his Majesty that now reigneth...knew full well, according to the singular wisdom given unto him by God, and

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<sup>16</sup>Ultimately, this became the reading of the KJV. See W. F. Moulton, *The History of the English Bible*, 5th ed., rev. James H. and W. Fiddian Moulton (London: Charles H. Kelly, n.d.), p. 191.

<sup>17</sup>Words in brackets are my explanations.

<sup>18</sup>"The Translators to the Reader," p. 269. Page numbers refer to the reprint of the preface at the end of this essay.

the rare learning and experience that he hath attained unto; namely, that whosoever attempteth any thing for the publick, (specially if it pertain to religion, and to the opening and clearing of the word of God) the same setteth himself upon a stage to be glouted [frowned] upon by every evil eye; yea, he casteth himself headlong upon pikes [spears], to be gored by every sharp tongue. For he that meddleth with men's religion in any part meddleth with their custom, nay, with their freehold [an estate or office held for life]; and though they find no content in that which they have, yet they cannot abide to hear of altering.<sup>19</sup>

Toward the middle of the preface the translators return to the problem of opposition to their new translation by dealing with a specific objection:

Many men's mouths have been open a good while (and yet are not stopped) with speeches about the translation so long in hand, or rather perusals of translations made before: and ask what may be the reason, what the necessity, of the employment. Hath the Church been deceived, say they, all this while?...Was their translation good before? Why do they now mend it? Was it not good? Why then was it obruded [presented] to the people?<sup>20</sup>

We will find the answer to this objection in the next section.

### Superiority of the King James Version

As has been previously noted, the King James-only movement denies that there are any errors in the KJV and insists that it cannot really be improved upon.<sup>21</sup> However, the translators of the KJV recognized that all translations, since they are done by fallible men, are not perfect and can indeed be improved.

Yet for all that, as nothing is begun and perfected at the same time, and the latter thoughts are thought to be the wiser: so, if we building upon their foundation that went before us, and being holpen by their labours, do endeavour to make that better which they left so good; no man, we are sure, hath cause to mislike us; they, we persuade ourselves, if they were alive, would thank us.<sup>22</sup>

Here then is the obvious answer as to why there has been a continuous stream of English translations—translations can *always* be improved upon, and the translators of the KJV would certainly not have objected

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., pp. 271–72.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 279.

<sup>21</sup>See footnote 14.

<sup>22</sup>“The Translators to the Reader,” p. 280.



to good-faith attempts to improve their own work. The preface continues:

Therefore let no man's eye be evil, because his Majesty's is good; neither let any be grieved, that we have a Prince that seeketh the increase of the spiritual wealth of *Israel*;...but let us rather bless God from the ground of our heart for working this religious care in him to have the translations of the Bible maturely considered of and examined. For by this means it cometh to pass, that whatsoever is sound already, (and all is sound for substance in one or other of our editions, and the worst of ours far better than their authentick Vulgar<sup>23</sup>) the same will shine as gold more brightly, being rubbed and polished; also, if any thing be halting, or superfluous, or not so agreeable to the original, the same may be corrected, and the truth set in place.<sup>24</sup>

### The King James Alone Equals the Word of God

The King James-only movement refuses to recognize any other translation in English as the Word of God. Yet, the translators themselves admired the work of previous translators.

And to the same effect say we, that we are so far off from condemning any of their labours that travailed before us in this kind, either in this land, or beyond sea, either in King *Henry's* time, or King *Edward's*, (if there were any translation, or correction of a translation, in his time) or Queen *Elizabeth's* of ever renowned memory, that we acknowledge them to have been raised up of God for the building and furnishing of his Church, and that they deserve to be had of us and of posterity in everlasting remembrance.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Apparently, "authentick Vulgar" is a reference to the first English version permitted by the Roman Catholic Church—the Rheims-Douay Version of 1609–10, which was made from the Latin Vulgate. The Vulgate was declared to be the authoritative Bible of the Roman Catholic Church by the Council of Trent in 1546. Until 1943 all translations in the common tongue were required to be based on the Vulgate. Actually, the translators of the KJV did not have access to the complete Rheims-Douay Version since just a few lines later in the preface they say: "we have seen none of theirs of the whole Bible as yet." The translators did have access to the Rheims NT of 1582. The Rheims-Douay Bible was a revision of the Rheims NT plus the addition of the OT. It appeared in two volumes: vol. one in 1609 (Gen–Job); vol. two in 1610 (Psalms–4 Esdras) [Herbert, *Historical Catalogue of Printed Editions of the English Bible*, p. 128]. F. H. A. Scrivener suggests that certain references in the preface indicate that the translators had seen volume one of the Rheims-Douay Version (*The Authorized Edition of the English Bible [1611], Its Subsequent Reprints and Modern Representatives* [Cambridge: At the University Press, 1884], p. 288, note 1).

<sup>24</sup>"The Translators to the Reader," p. 281.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 280. Interestingly, Scrivener notes that in the preface the quotations from Scripture "are somewhat too loosely given" to always be sure what version is cited; but he concludes that sometimes the Geneva Bible's translation is used rather than the KJV (*The Authorized Edition of the English Bible*, p. 267).

The preface goes on to declare that other translations are also the Word of God, even if they contain minor errors. In fact, they acknowledge that errorless translation is impossible since translators are not like the apostles, who were superintended by the Holy Spirit in their writing.

Now to the latter we answer, that we do not deny, nay, we affirm and avow, that the very meanest [poorest] translation of the Bible in *English* set forth by men of our profession (for we have seen none of theirs of the whole Bible as yet<sup>26</sup>) containeth the word of God, nay, is the word of God: as the King's speech which he uttered in Parliament, being translated into *French, Dutch, Italian, and Latin*, is still the King's speech, though it be not interpreted by every translator with the like grace, nor peradventure so fitly for phrase, nor so expressly for sense, every where....A man may be counted a virtuous man, though he have made many slips in his life, (else there were none virtuous, for *in many things we offend all*,) also a comely man and lovely, though he have some warts upon his hand, yea, not only freckles upon his face, but also scars. No cause therefore why the word translated should be denied to be the word, or forbidden to be current, notwithstanding that some imperfections and blemishes may be noted in the setting forth of it. For whatever was perfect under the sun, where Apostles or apostolick men, that is, men endued with an extraordinary measure of God's Spirit, and privileged with the privilege of infallibility, had not their hand?<sup>27</sup>

The translators then give an example of what they consider to be a translation with numerous defects, yet, in spite of those problems, can still be called the Word of God.

The translation of the *Seventy*<sup>28</sup> dissenteth from the Original in many

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<sup>26</sup>See footnote 22.

<sup>27</sup>"The Translators to the Reader," pp. 281–82.

<sup>28</sup>A reference to the Septuagint (LXX), the Greek translation of the OT, translated several centuries before Christ. Interestingly, Peter Ruckman, who believes the translators of the KJV produced a Bible without any errors, denies that there was any such translation of the OT before the time of Christ. But the translators of the KJV clearly believed that the LXX was translated beginning in the 3rd century B.C. They say in the preface: "It pleased the Lord to stir up the spirit of a *Greek* Prince, (*Greek* for descent and language) even of *Ptolemy Philadelph* king of *Egypt*, to procure the translating of the book of God out of *Hebrew* into *Greek*. This is the translation of the *Seventy* interpreters, commonly so called, which prepared the way for our Saviour among the *Gentiles* by written preaching, as Saint *John Baptist* did among the *Jews* by vocal....Therefore the word of God being set forth in *Greek*, becometh hereby like a candle set upon a candlestick, which giveth light to all that are in the house; or like a proclamation sounded forth in the market-place, which most men presently take knowledge of; and therefore that language was fittest to contain the Scriptures, both for the first preachers of the Gospel to appeal unto for witness, and for the learners also of those times to make search and trial by. It is certain, that that translation was not so sound and so perfect, but that it needed in many places correction; and who had been so sufficient for this work as the Apostles

places, neither doth it come near it for perspicuity, gravity, majesty; yet which of the Apostles did condemn it? Condemn it? Nay, they used it, (as it is apparent, and as Saint *Hierome* [Jerome] and most learned men do confess) which they would not have done, nor by their example of using of it so grace and commend it to the Church, if it had been unworthy the appellation and name of the word of God.<sup>29</sup>

### The King James Version—The Final Authority

The King James-only movement suggests that with the coming of the KJV there was no need for further translation work and that the proliferation of modern versions is harmful to the church. Yet the translators of the KJV faced the same objection. They note that there was nothing unique about their work—it was only a continuation of the process of revision of previous translations and that making improvements in previous translations is a positive thing.

Yet before we end, we must answer a third cavill and objection of theirs against us, for altering and amending our Translations so oft; wherein truly they deal hardly and strangely with us. For to whom ever was it imputed for a fault (by such as were wise) to go over that which he had done, and to amend it where he saw cause?<sup>30</sup>

But it is high time to leave them, and to shew in brief what we proposed to ourselves, and what course we held, in this our perusal and survey of the Bible. 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 better, or out of many good ones one principal good one, not justly to be expected against; that hath been our endeavour, that our mark.<sup>31</sup>

The process of revision did not end in 1611. There have been numerous changes in the KJV itself since then. Modern King James Bibles

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or apostolic men? Yet it seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to them to take that which they found, (the same being for the greatest part true and sufficient) rather than by making a new, in that new world and green age of the Church, to expose themselves to many exceptions and cavillations, as though they made a translation to serve their own turn, and therefore bearing witness to themselves, their witness not to be regarded. This may be supposed to be some cause, why the translation of the *Seventy* was allowed to pass for current" ("The Translators to the Reader," p. 275). Ruckman, however, suggests that the translators *were* in error about their dating of the Septuagint ("King James Version of the Bible," *Bible Believers' Bulletin* (April 1981), p. 4.

<sup>29</sup>"The Translators to the Reader," p. 282.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 283.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 285.

TABLE 1  
Examples of Changes in the King James Version since 1611

|             | 1611 KJV   | Modern KJV  |
|-------------|--|---|
| Gen 39:16   | until <u>her</u> lord came home                                | until <u>his</u> lord came home                                 |
| Num 6:14    | and one <u>lamb</u> without blemish                            | and one <u>ram</u> without blemish                              |
| Deut 26:1   | which the LORD giveth  | which the LORD <u>thy God</u> giveth                            |
| Josh 13:29  | half tribe of Manasseh   | half tribe <u>of the children</u> of Manasseh                   |
| Judg 11:2   | and his <u>wives</u> sons grew up                              | and his <u>wife's</u> sons grew up                              |
| 1 Sam 18:27 | David arose, he and his men                                    | David arose <u>and went</u> , he and his men                    |
| 1 Sam 28:7  | And his <u>servant</u> said to him                             | And his <u>servants</u> said to him                             |
| 2 Kgs 11:10 | that <u>were</u> in the <u>Temple</u>                          | that <u>were</u> in the <u>temple of the Lord</u>               |
| 1 Chr 7:5   | <u>were</u> men of might                                       | <u>were valiant</u> men of might                                |
| 2 Chr 28:11 | fierce wrath of <u>God</u> <u>is</u> upon you                  | fierce wrath of the <u>LORD</u> <u>is</u> upon you              |
| Job 39:30   | where the slain <u>are</u> , there <u>is he</u>                | where the slain <u>are</u> , there <u>is she</u>                |
| Jer 34:16   | whom <u>ye</u> had set at liberty                              | whom <u>he</u> had set at liberty                               |
| Jer 38:16   | So the king sware secretly                                     | So <u>Zedekiah</u> the king sware secretly                      |
| Jer 49:1    | why <u>then</u> doth their king inherit <u>God</u>             | why <u>then</u> doth their king inherit <u>Gad</u>              |
| Ezek 3:11   | unto thy people  | unto <u>the children</u> of thy people                          |
| Joel 1:16   | Is not the meat cut off before <u>your</u> eyes                | Is not the meat cut off before <u>our</u> eyes                  |
| Matt 12:23  | Is this the son of David?                                      | Is <u>not</u> this the son of David?                            |
| Luke 1:3    | perfect understanding of things                                | perfect understanding of <u>all</u> things                      |
| John 15:20  | The servant is not greater than <u>the Lord</u>                | The servant is not greater than <u>his lord</u>                 |
| Rom 3:24    | the redemption that is in <u>Jesus Christ</u>                  | the redemption that is in <u>Christ Jesus</u>                   |
| 1 Cor 12:28 | <u>helps in governments</u> , diversities of tongues           | <u>helps, governments</u> , diversities of tongues              |
| 1 Cor 15:41 | another of the moon  | <u>and</u> another <u>glory</u> of the moon                     |
| 2 Cor 5:2   | For in this we <u>groan earnestly</u> , desiring to be clothed | For in this we groan, <u>earnestly desiring</u> to be clothed   |
| 2 Cor 11:32 | the King, kept the city with a garrison                        | the king kept the city <u>of the Damascenes</u> with a garrison |
| 1 Tim 1:4   | rather than edifying   | rather than <u>godly</u> edifying                               |
| 1 Pet 2:1   | and envies, and evil speakings                                 | and envies, and <u>all</u> evil speakings                       |
| 1 John 5:12 | he that hath not the Son, hath not life                        | he that hath not the Son <u>of God</u> hath not life            |

are not identical with the original edition.<sup>32</sup> Table 1 gives some examples of the numerous changes that have taken place since 1611.<sup>33</sup> It is well known that there have been a number of revisions of the KJV, and that present editions represent the fourth major revision done by Benjamin Blayney in 1769.<sup>34</sup>

### Marginal Notes

The King James-only movement commonly objects to the marginal readings contained in modern versions. D. A. Waite says:

The diabolical nature of the *New King James Version* shows itself in their printing all the various readings of the Greek text in the footnotes. They print all sides and take their stand in favor of none of them. By so doing, they confuse the readers. The editors have made no decision as to what God's Words really are.<sup>35</sup>

William P. Grady sounds a similar note:

When a study is made of the footnote section in the NKJV, one discovers a classic example of compromise. Understanding the self-centered nature of today's carnal believers, Nelson Publishers decided to let their customers have a literal choice between *three different Greek readings!*...Can you imagine the confusion being wrought among laypeople as they suddenly discover their new responsibilities to become *textual critics*?<sup>36</sup>

But the translators of the KJV were not opposed to marginal notes. In a study of the marginal notes in the 1611 KJV, F. H. A. Scrivener counted 6,637 in the OT, 1,018 in the Apocrypha, and 767 in the NT, for a total of 8,422.<sup>37</sup> The translators argued strongly for their inclusion:

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<sup>32</sup>There is even some debate as to the text of the original 1611 edition since there were apparently two versions printed in 1611, commonly called the "He" and "She" Bibles from their respective readings in Ruth 3:15 ("he went into the city" and "she went into the city"). Scrivener argues for the priority of the "She" edition (*The Authorized Edition of the English Bible*, p. 14). However, most other investigators have concluded the contrary.

<sup>33</sup>For a much more comprehensive list of changes, see Scrivener, *The Authorized Edition of the English Bible*, pp. 148–202.

<sup>34</sup>Corrections were made in 1612, 1613, and 1616; more extensive revisions followed in 1629, 1638, 1762, and 1769. See Herbert, *Historical Catalogue of Printed Editions of the English Bible*, passim and Scrivener, *The Authorized Edition of the English Bible*, passim.

<sup>35</sup>*Defending the King James Bible*, p. 125.

<sup>36</sup>*Final Authority*, p. 304.

<sup>37</sup>*The Authorized Edition of the English Bible*, p. 56.

Some peradventure would have no variety of senses to be set in the margin, lest the authority of the Scriptures for deciding of controversies by that show of uncertainty should somewhat be shaken. But we hold their judgment not to be so sound in this point....It hath pleased God in his Divine Providence here and there to scatter words and sentences of that difficulty and doubtfulness, not in doctrinal points that concern salvation, (for in such it hath been vouched that the Scriptures are plain) but in matters of less moment, that fearfulness would better beseech us than confidence,...There be many words in the Scriptures which be never found there but once....Again, there be many rare names of certain birds, beasts, and precious stones, &c. 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, as S. *Hierome* [Jerome] somewhere saith of the *Septuagint*. Now in such a case doth not a margin do well to admonish the Reader to seek further, and not to conclude or dogmatize upon this or that peremptorily?...Therefore as S. *Augustine* saith, that variety of translations is profitable for finding out of the sense of the Scriptures: so diversity of signification and sense in the margin, where the text is not so clear, must needs do good; yea, is necessary, as we are persuaded....They that are wise had rather have their judgments at liberty in difference of readings, than to be captivated to one, when it may be the other.<sup>38</sup>

Of the 767 notes in the NT, 35 are explanatory notes or brief expositions, 582 give alternative translations, 112 give a more literal rendering of the Greek than the translators judged suitable for the text, and 37 give readings of different MSS.<sup>39</sup> An example of an explanatory note is found at the word “measures” in Matthew 13:33. The note reads: “The worde in the Greek is a measure conteining about a peck and an halfe, wanting litle more then a pinte.”<sup>40</sup> An alternative translation is found in Matthew 6:2. The text reads: “Therefore when thou doest *thine* alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee....” The margin suggests the translation: “Therefore when thou doest *thine* alms, cause not a trumpet to be sounded before thee....”<sup>41</sup> A more literal translation is found at Romans 7:5, where the text reads: “For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law....” The margin explains that the

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<sup>38</sup>“The Translators to the Reader,” p. 287.

<sup>39</sup>Scrivener, *The Authorized Edition of the English Bible*, p. 56.

<sup>40</sup>*The Holy Bible, 1611 Edition, King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982). According to the title page, this is “a word-for-word reprint of the first edition of the Authorized Version presented in roman letters for easy reading and comparison with subsequent editions.”

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*

Greek word for “motions” is literally “passions.”<sup>42</sup> Finally, in Luke 17:36 is found an example of a variant reading. Beside the words “Two *men* shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left,” the margin reads: “This 36 verse is wanting in most of the Greek copies.” This is the same note which is found in the NKJV. In fact, nine of the thirty-seven textual notes in the 1611 KJV are also found in the NKJV. Yet Waite and Grady castigate the NKJV for doing the same thing the 1611 KJV did.

### CONCLUSION

To borrow a phrase from the preface, any modern version of the Bible “findeth but cold entertainment” among those who hold to the King James-only position. All modern versions are “welcomed with suspicion instead of love, and with emulation instead of thanks...and in danger to be condemned.” But, as has been demonstrated, it is quite evident that the translators of the KJV would not agree with the arguments advanced for the King James-only position. They certainly did not believe that their version was the final authority for the English speaking world. They viewed their work as simply a continuation of the process of revision of English Bibles, not “to make of a bad one a good one;...but to make a good one better, or out of many good ones one principal good one.” While it is generally accepted that the KJV was superior to all previous English versions, there is no reason to believe that the KJV cannot be improved upon after almost 400 years. As the translators themselves say, there is “no cause therefore why the word translated should be...forbidden to be current.”

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid. It is interesting to note that two modern versions, the NASB and NIV, both read “passions” at this point.