

WHAT VERSION OF THE BIBLE SHOULD I USE? THE KING JAMES VERSION: GOD'S RELIABLE BIBLE FOR THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING CHURCH

Most people cannot read the Bible in its original languages. While language barriers can keep people in the dark, translation of the Bible opens the door so that a person can come into the light of God's Word. Therefore translations are absolutely essential for mankind. Apart from the believer's relationship to God, nothing is more important than the Word of God.

In order to have access to the Word of God, there are basically two options. First, we can either learn the biblical languages of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. This is not practical and is nearly impossible for many individuals. Secondly, we can read an accurate translated version of the original text in our own language. God's Word was written originally in three different languages, verifying that God's Word is not to be limited to just one language. We have a legitimate need to make and use translated versions. Whole ministries are dedicated to the ministry of translation so that people can read the Word of God in their own language.

The Bible is by far the world's most printed and translated book. John Wycliffe was the first individual to translate the entire Bible into the English language in A.D. 1382. Over 625 years later, we have a plethora of English Bibles available. Looking through any Christian catalog or bookstore, an overwhelming feeling comes to the believer, "Which Bible should I use? Are all translations equally good?" Disagreement and great debate has arisen over which translation of the Bible in the English language is the best. Many people are confused regarding which Bible version they should use

because there are so many different ones to pick from and many do not say the same thing. These differing versions have, according to Leland Ryken, “seriously undermined people’s confidence in the reliability of the Bible. Translators, of course, did not set out to do this. Their intentions were the opposite—to put people in possession of the Bible as never before. The dream has not become a reality. It is time to count the cost and soberly lament much of what has happened.”¹

In order to understand the debate regarding the various Bible versions, we must be educated and informed on the doctrine of verbal plenary inspiration, basic translation philosophy, and recent manuscript history. The doctrine of inspiration is the first and most important area of consideration. Inspiration deals with the nature of the Holy Scriptures themselves. The foundational cornerstone is accepting the Bible as the Word of God: “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16). The Bible clearly states that it is not the mere words of men, but the very words of God: “For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe” (1 Thess. 2:13). The apostle Peter added, “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Pet. 1:20-21). These verses teach the high and holy view of the Word of God. Christians believe in the infallibility of

¹Leland Ryken, *The Word of God in English: Criteria for Excellence in Bible Translation* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2002), 187.

Scripture as a document from God Himself. The Bible is the Word of God and every word is important. This view is known as the doctrine of verbal plenary inspiration.

The Bible teaching regarding verbal and plenary inspiration is that the words themselves are understood as God-breathed. God gave to men His words, and Jesus Himself stated, “It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4). It is of major importance that the words of God are known. If the words of God are changed, mutilated, or dismissed, we will lose the meaning of the Holy Scriptures. The Bible plainly warns in Deut. 4:2 that, “Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought [anything] from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.” Because of the Bible’s testimony, we can know for sure that the Bible, as it was written, is in the form that God wants us to have it.

The Scriptures are eternal and forever settled in Heaven (Ps. 119:89). Nothing has been lost from the Bible and nothing will ever be lost according to God’s own Word. Words have meaning and the Bible teaches that every word is pure and inspired (Prov. 30:5). God chose specific words to express His truth to the world. Therefore, to abandon the actual words of Scripture, leads to a loss of the biblical text.

The truth of the doctrine of verbal plenary inspiration of the Bible has an important impact upon the translation philosophy of the Bible. Any variance or departure from the very words of Scripture, as given by God and protected by God, will not give to man a good translation, but a faulty one. Only a literal translation of the Bible is in agreement with the doctrine of inspiration. Ryken further stated:

The translator’s view of the nature of the Bible’s inspiration greatly influences his philosophy of translation. The Bible is inspired in such a way that its very

words are inspired [i.e., ‘verbal’ inspiration]; and that inspiration extends to all the words of Scripture [i.e., ‘plenary’ inspiration]. Plenary inspiration means that all parts of Scripture are equally inspired [e.g., history, genealogies, poetry, etc.]. An inspiration that extends to the divine choice of the words can only imply that God is concerned with much more than general ideas. The translator must keep in mind that he is dealing with truth exactly expressed.²

When the Bible is being translated, the verbal plenary inspiration doctrine restricts the translators from imposing false methods, ideas, and philosophies upon their translation. The translator must follow the text. It cannot be the translator’s goal to interpret, explain, or impose his ideas upon the text. Bible teachers and preachers give the exposition and explanation of the Word (Neh. 8:8). The Bible itself rejects the philosophy of any translation that subtracts from or adds to God’s intended truth (Matt. 5:18). The meaning of the Scriptures is to be unaltered so that people know that they hold in their hands the very Word of God. The translator is obligated to express the actual words of the original text as accurately as possible. The understanding of this doctrine provides the only biblical philosophy to translate the Bible.

Let us consider the philosophies of Bible translation. There are two major methods of translation: the dynamic (functional) equivalent and the formal (verbal) equivalent. In addition, there is another approach to translation that is not a legitimate translation philosophy. It is called a paraphrase which is technically not a translation philosophy. A paraphrase rewrites what the translator thinks the text is saying. This method provides the widest possible opportunity for the “translator” to impose ideas on the text. The most popular example of this type of Bible is the Living Bible.

The dynamic equivalent method of translation is an inferior method because it translates a thought for a thought, concentrating primarily upon trying to make the

²Ibid., 135.

passage easier to read. The thought-for-thought translation method does not consider the best English word for the best foreign word. This results in a generalization of the Bible, though not to the extent of a paraphrased Bible. This dynamic equivalent philosophy dominates the new English translations of today, and it has become the standard philosophy of translation. The most popular version based upon this method is the New International Version (NIV). The dynamic equivalent method seeks to reproduce in translation only the sense and meaning of the original, but not necessarily in the same words or grammatical forms. The supposed advantage of translating this way is strong on readability and intelligibility, but in fact it provides a larger opportunity for the translator to stray from the sense of the original. This lack of self-restraint in translation is its fatal flaw. A spirit of license has taken hold with the method of dynamic equivalence. This method takes away from the original author's intended meaning and places a new author's influence upon the Bible. This translation process has negatively impacted the Bible, the church, and the believers because there is no certain consensus on Bible version, and these translations have left the reader confused with so much variety. With this method, the reader does not know where the translators have superimposed their ideas and culture upon the text of the Bible. Therefore, the dynamic equivalent translations have undermined the Bible and its basic teachings regarding itself.

The correct method of Bible translation is the formal equivalent approach because it is a word for word, syntax for syntax, translation. This method takes verbal plenary inspiration seriously and accurately renders the words as given by God within their syntax and grammatical context. The King James Version is the classic example of this method. The goal of formal equivalence is to reproduce in translation, as far as possible,

the grammar and structure of the original. The advantage of translating this way leaves the smallest room for imposing the ideas of the translator upon the text. Transparency to the original text of the Bible is paramount. Obviously, this method is the most reliable method of translation because it is more accurate and faithful to the words of the original text. Most Bible scholars readily admit that the KJV has no equal when it comes to literary style and rhythm. In the book entitled *Which Bible?* David Fuller quotes Benjamin C. Wilkinson's explanation: "The English language in 1611 was in the very best condition to receive into its bosom the Old and New Testaments. Each word was broad, simple, and generic. That is to say, words were capable of containing in themselves not only their thoughts, but also all the different shades of meaning which were attached to that central thought."³

Much has been lost due to the influx of so many different English versions of the Bible. No longer is the church able to read together simultaneously in the worship service and Bible memorization is scarce. Previously, Bible memorization was simplified due to the poetic style of the King James Version. The translators have been so focused on simplifying what the Bible means, that in the process, they have failed to let the reader know what it actually says. These versions based upon poor manuscripts and a wrong philosophy of translation lead believers in all sorts of directions, namely, a lack of respect for the Scriptures and ultimately the author of the Scriptures.

To further understand the version issue we must also be informed of recent manuscript history that provides the basis of our English versions. After all, having the correct translation philosophy will not produce a reliable translation if the text of that

³David Otis Fuller, *Which Bible?* 5th ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Grand Rapids International Publication, 1975), 246-247.

translation is erroneous. Before we can look at which version to use, we must step back to see what sources are being used for the actual translation of the text. If poor or defective manuscripts are used, then a poor version will be produced. There are basically only two reservoirs from which our translations originate. One is a recent and restricted reservoir of manuscripts, and the other is the majority of manuscripts that have been preserved throughout church history. Most of the new English versions are translated from the recent pool of manuscripts.

According to Richard Flanders, the manuscript history can be summed up as follows:

There are two competing approaches to determining the authoritative text of scriptures. There is what could be called the ‘scientific’ approach, which assumes that the wording of the books of the Bible in the original languages was confused and corrupted over the centuries of manuscript transmission. It is then asserted that the original wording can be restored by the use of ‘textual criticism,’ a ‘science’ that has been developed over the past two hundred years.

The scientific approach has given us a ‘critical text’ that relies heavily on readings found in some very old manuscripts as opposed to the readings that have come to us through generations of use in the churches. Of course, there are several ‘versions’ of the critical text, and those who compose these representations of what the Bible says confess serious doubts about some of the readings they include. Most modern English versions of the Bible follow a critical text composed by the scientific approach. This is why they differ so significantly from the King James Version (KJV) in such passages as the account of the woman taken in adultery, the last twelve verses of Mark, the Lord’s prayer, and many important verses.⁴

This textual issue has done extensive damage and has greatly undermined the belief that the Bible is the Word of God. We should not be surprised to realize that most of the modern versions are based upon a scientific method, and Satan has used these

⁴Richard Flanders, *A Consensus on the Bible?* [electronic mail], message to the author, 26 July 2006; accessed 26 July 2006, personal communication.

translations to his advantage to undermine the Bible itself. Dr. Flanders further explained:

The other prominent approach to the text could be called the traditional approach. It is based on the promises of the Bible that God will preserve His Word over the years. Those who follow the traditional approach assume that the wording which has prevailed over time among God's people is the right one. This was the approach of those who gave us the *Textus Receptus* Greek New Testaments printed in the seventeenth century. They sought to continue the use of the text that had been handed down as authoritative since ancient times.

Traditional-text people do not believe that the original wording of scripture was corrupted or lost in transmission. They believe that the right wording was preserved by divine providence. They are happy with the KJV because it is based upon traditional Hebrew and Greek texts. Those with the traditional approach also do not believe that, if the text of the Bible were corrupted in transmission, it could be restored by any 'scientific' method. They disagree with the methods and principles of modern text critics. The correct text of the Bible must have been preserved for us by God, and therefore it will be a 'traditional' text.⁵

This method is supported by the Bible's own testimony regarding the protection and transmission of the Holy Scriptures down through the ages. Jesus said in Matt. 24:35: "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away." Jesus took this one step further in Matt. 5:18: "One jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law." Isa. 40:8 speaks of the Bible's longevity: "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth, but the word of our God shall stand forever." The Bible teaches the providential preservation of itself.

Having examined the Bible itself, the verbal plenary inspiration, the translation philosophy, and the manuscript history, the conclusion is obvious. The finest and most reliable English version available is the King James Version. The King James Version takes verbal plenary inspiration seriously, it uses the best translation philosophy, and it is

⁵Ibid.

based upon the true text of Scriptures. The King James Version is a trustworthy translation and that is evidenced in its long history. A Christian, who holds to the King James Version, will not be led astray. In his work *The King James Version Defended*, Edward Hills states that “the King James Version is the historic Bible of English-speaking Protestants. Upon it God, working providentially, has placed the stamp of His approval through the usage of many generations of Bible-believing Christians. Hence, if we believe in God’s providential preservation of the Scriptures, we will retain the King James Version, for in so doing we will be following the clear leading of the Almighty.”⁶

⁶Edward F. Hills, *The King James Version Defended* (Des Moines, Iowa: Christian Research Press, 1996), 219-220.