

WHY NEW VERSIONS?
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AUGUST 2009

The Holy Bible is a precious treasure. Godly people have paid with their lives for preserving and for translating the Bible from the original languages.

The Bible has been handed down to us in two original languages: the Old Testament in Hebrew and the New Testament in Greek. Many different handwritten manuscripts of the Bible are available. Some manuscripts are older than others; some have different weight and authority. It was recently reported that Codex Sinaiticus, a manuscript found at Mt. Sinai in a monastery is now posted on line.

The Roman Catholic Church created its own translation in Latin. It is called Vulgate and is the authoritative translation for that Church.

In the Middle Ages, due to religious awakening, there was a strong impulse to translate the Bible into other languages. William Tyndale translated the New Testament from Greek into English and for this he was executed by the church hierarchy. For a long time the Roman Catholic Church hierarchy seemed not to let lay people read the Bible in the language of their understanding!

However, with the Reformation came an impetus for translation of the Bible in the English language for Protestants and as a result there came the Bishop's Bible, the Geneva Bible and later the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible.

Since the 19th Century there has been an explosion of knowledge and advances in every field. For example, there has been so much progress in the practice of medicine and in other sciences such as physics, chemistry and biology. No one will dare use 16th and 17th Century medical procedures today. But some devout Christians hold on to old versions of the Bible due to familiarity, tradition and lack of information. Legend has it that one elderly woman clutching her Bible said, "If the King James Version was good for St. Paul, it is good enough for me." St. Paul used the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) and Greek Septuagint (first translation of the Old Testament). The King James Version came much later in 16/17 Century after St. Paul's time in the First Century.

In this article I would like to argue that Christians need to use newer versions of the Bible for the following reasons.

I. Change in English Language

There are great changes in the English language from the King James Version's English versus modern English. A few examples are listed, but there are many more.

| a. <u>KJV Terms</u> | <u>New meaning</u> |
|---|--|
| 1. Suffer Suffer the little children | Allow/let Allow/let the little children |
| 2. Charity (Charity now means donations) | Love |
| 3. Husbandmen Husbandmen in the vineyard | Laborers/workers Laborers in the vineyard |

- | | |
|---|---------------------------|
| 4. Damsel | Girl/young woman |
| 5. Declare | Explain |
| 6. Loose | Free |
| "Woman thou art loosed." This phrase may sound to listeners as though this woman is immoral! | |
| 7. Artillery | Bow and arrow |
| I Samuel 20:4 "Jonathan gave his artillery to his lad." Artillery now means guns not bow and arrow! | |
| 8. Groves | Asherah/Canaanite/Goddess |
| KJV often misunderstood Asherah/Asherim as sacred trees, "groves" in the context(s) where deity is clearly intended. (I Kings 18:19, 2 Kings 23:6) | |
| Archaeological findings, especially some references from an ancient ugarit language and Hebrew inscriptions have helped to clarify this. | |

| b. <u>KJV Idioms</u> | <u>Modern Meaning</u> |
|---|---|
| 1. Gave up the ghost | Breathed his last |
| 2. Had kept his bed | Had been bedridden |
| 3. Set at naught | Rejected |
| 4. One that pisseth against a wall (I Samuel 25:22) | Male |
| 5. Saul went into the cave to cover his feet (I Samuel 24:3) | Saul went into the cave to relieve himself |

Over and above, we are now not used to thou, thee, thine, and the verbs that go with them.

II. Advances and Research into Biblical language; archeological discoveries and historical/anthropological studies.

As it was observed earlier in many fields of knowledge there are great advances due to discoveries and research. (Earlier people accepted an earth-centered universe, but now beyond doubt we know that the sun is the center of the solar system.) In the same way there are great advances in understanding and translation of both Hebrew and Greek languages due to archeological and other discoveries of ancient inscriptions. So scholars in our time have more information and more understanding of ancient biblical text than the translators of old versions like the Bishop's Bible and KJV.

a. More information and understanding of Hebrew and Greek languages.

Many examples of a lack of understanding of Hebrew language can be given (see I. 6). Here I mention just one.

In 2 Samuel 12:14 Nathan rebuked David for his adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband, Uriah, the Hittite. According to KJV, Nathan said to David, "Thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme." The Hebrew is not like that. The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) says "You (David) have despised the Lord."

b. More information and understanding of ancient history, culture, and background information related to the Bible.

For example, it is suggested that the Patriarchs and Matriarchs (Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob) fit better in the early part of the Second Millennium on the basis of their names, wandering way of life and customs.

III. Selection of the text of the Bible is now a science in itself (Textual Research).

As mentioned in the introduction, before the invention of the printing press, the copies of the Bible (in Hebrew and Greek) were handwritten. So many such manuscripts have come down to us. There is a great deal of commonality between the texts of these manuscripts. However, as one can imagine, there are variations also due to the process of copying by different methods, e.g., by hearing or copying from an older copy. The task of scholars is to weigh the various variant readings and choose the best word or phrase or even a passage. The American Bible Society and the United Bible Societies, NY (UBS) produce Greek New Testament editions (now in the 4th edition). Earlier German scholars had produced Kittel's Hebrew Bible (BHK) and they have now produced Stuttgart's Hebrew Bible (BHS). In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries translators followed majority manuscripts without evaluating the age and family of the manuscripts.

IV. Theory and practice of Bible translation (a field of research in linguistics) has also made great advances.

The older versions tried to carry out literal translations, known as the formal correspondence method. Many times words were translated but they may or may not convey the meaning intended by the original authors. For example, if one translates literally the phrase, "it is raining dogs and cats", it will not convey the intended meaning. (See I b). Now in Bible translation the emphasis is on meaning-based translation. For its translation approach the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) follows a general principle, "as literal as possible and as free as necessary."

V. Most importantly, more authoritative ancient manuscripts were discovered after the 16th and 17th centuries. They go back thousands of years, for example, the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran date even before the time of Jesus. Many of these manuscripts were not available in the 16th and 17th centuries (the time of Bishop's Bible, KJV, etc.) Therefore these ancient manuscripts could not be consulted by old time translators of KJV.

Two hallmarks of a good Bible translation are honesty and humility. The translators of the older versions did not take their readers into confidence and did not inform readers about difficulties in translation. The old time translators made the best effort and even did "guess work" in order to offer some kind of translation – even though the original Hebrew or Greek was unclear (no footnotes).

- a. As many older and more authoritative manuscripts were not available to the KJV translators, the manuscript base of KJV is weak (no fault of the translators). It was not intentional, but KJV did not indicate manuscript evidence. For example, according to the oldest and most authoritative manuscripts, the Gospel of Mark ends at 16:8 and the passage 16:9-20 is a later addition (see any new version like New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), New International Version (NIV) or Today's New International Version (TNIV): No snake handling!) So also John 7:53 – 8:11. The passage I John 5:7-8 is not found in any manuscript before the 14th century. New versions are honest about these additions. No copy of KJV gives this information to the readers. KJV text is closer to Roman Catholic Latin text than the Greek New Testament (Kubo and Specht 1983). In addition, when the

modern translators could not ascertain an exact meaning of a word or phrase, they acknowledged it in a footnote. (For example, see 2 Samuel 13:18 NIV note on “ornamented”.)

Originally there were no footnotes, no paragraph divisions or paragraph titles in KJV. There is no help for lay readers to know where a story, episode, or topic begins or ends.

- b. It is surprising to find that the original translators of KJV encouraged their readers to read a variety of translations (versions) and not to rely on any one translation like KJV. In the first, original KJV Bible there was the exhortation, “...variety of translations profitable for finding out the sense of the scriptures” (CEV). These introductory comments are not printed in any modern KJV Bibles, and some preachers push forward KJV as the only translation to read. Those who insist on the use of only very old versions like KJV (400 years old) do not honor the Word of God but human traditions (see Mark 7:8) and a traditional translation! KJV was a monument in English literature in its time (1700’s). However, it is outdated now. As GNB (Good News Bible) translators so eloquently affirm, “the Bible is not simply great literature to be admired and revered; it is Good News for all people everywhere... a message both to be understood and to be applied in daily life.” So new versions like NRSV, NIV and TNIV are better than old versions.
1. Being faithful to the original languages and having utmost concern to communicate the message to new readers, they use contemporary language...easy to understand.
 2. They endeavor to apply/utilize all available knowledge to understand and translate the text of the Bible.
 3. They follow diligently the best principles designed by scholars in the selection of the text of the Bible from manuscripts of the Bible.
 4. Their major concern is to produce meaning-based translations for understanding.
 5. They provide copious footnotes, paragraph divisions, titles, introduction to the books, etc. They are reader-friendly.
 6. They are honest in informing the readers about any issues pertaining to the translation process.
 7. They choose the most authoritative and ancient manuscripts of the Bible.

LESSON

On the whole all new versions attempt to carry God’s message faithfully. Choose a new version you like and you understand and read it faithfully.

For more information, refer to the following books:

1. Kubo and Specht, So Many Versions, 1983
2. Glassman, The Translation Debate, 1901
3. Nida and Rayburn, Meaning Across Cultures, 1981