

Apostolic Position on Bible Versions

"But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations of the obedience of faith:"

Romans 16:26

The unique character of the Scriptures sets their entire existence apart from that of humanly conceived documents. Their uniqueness extends not just to the autographs (original writings) but to copies and translations. The gracious influence of God over His Word did not end when the original penman ceased his work; it extends even to our day.

It is certainly possible that a corrupt manuscript can be made and a poor translation rendered. Indeed, this has often been the case. But God has a sovereign manner of minimizing the influence of His perfectly preserved and correctly translated Word.

If only the original manuscripts were inspired and without error and it be wrong to copy or translate the autographs, then we do not have the word of God today. Few people at any point in history would have had access to the autographs.

Probably not even the apostles ever saw the entirety of the infallible Scriptures, for at no time were the original manuscripts collected into one volume.

If only the un-translated Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek form the inerrant Word, then few people will ever have access to the Word of God.

But it is abundantly testified in Scripture that the preserving influence of the Holy Spirit¹ would extend to copies and translations (See Psalm 12:6-7).² When Jesus commanded His disciples to go teach all nations, inherent in His command was the implication that His Words could be translated into the tongues of all the people of all ages and still remain His Word.

Early History of Translations

The traditional date for the translation of the Septuagint is around 250 BC. The work is said to have been done by seventy-two Jewish Scholars in Alexandria, Egypt. This would place the Septuagint as the earliest translation of the Old Testament. There is some question as to the validity of this date, since this historical reconstruction rests upon such scant evidence, namely the so-called *Letter of Aristeas*. It has been suggested, with no little support, that the Septuagint is actually a post-Christian document.

At any rate, Jesus gave His approval to the Hebrew Scriptures in use at His time. Not once did He suggest that the current Scriptures were any less than the inerrant Word of God.

Archeological work done in the late 1940's at Masada unearthed copies of Old Testament books which could definitely be dated as prior to AD 70. In all probability, their date was earlier than that, almost assuredly dating from AD 35-40. The content of the scrolls was identical, even to spacing, to the presently accepted Hebrew Masoretic text.

As quickly as the New Testament books were written and distributed to their various recipients, they began to be copied by devout believers.

But this multiplication of copies in the Greek was insufficient as the gospel soon reached non-Greek speaking peoples. It thus became necessary for the New Testament books to be translated into other languages.

Syriac was the first language into which the New Testament was translated. This was followed by Egyptian, Ethiopian, Armenian, and old Latin translations. The earliest of the translations date to within fifty years of the death of the Apostle John.

The Scriptures were translated into the Germanic, or Gothic, language about AD 350. This was the forerunner of the English language. Shortly thereafter Jerome translated the Bible into Latin, and his work became known as the Latin Vulgate. This was for many centuries the official Bible of the Roman Catholic Church. Jerome's was the last translation rendered from the original languages until the Byzantine Empire fell to the Turks in 1454.

Middle History of Translations

In 1378, John Wyclif, with a deep burden that the common man should be able to read the Scriptures in his own language, translated the Latin Vulgate into English³. He was rewarded for his efforts by excommunication from the Roman Catholic Church.

The powerful and persuasive influence of the Roman Church resulted in a bill being introduced to the English Parliament to forbid the circulation of English Scriptures. The penalty for possession of a handwritten copy of the banned work was frequently martyrdom. A century elapsed before another English translation of the Bible was rendered.

Exactly one hundred years after the death of Wyclif, William Tyndale was born. Well educated (he knew seven languages) and devout, he spearheaded an effort unsupported by the Church of England to translate the New Testament from the Greek into English.

Hebrew and Greek manuscripts had been unavailable to Wyclif, but they had been brought back to the west by Christians fleeing from the Byzantine Empire at the impending threat of the Turkish invasion. The Eastern church had for many centuries carefully preserved these manuscripts in the original languages while the Western Roman church contented itself with the Latin Scriptures. As a result of the return of the ancient manuscripts and their copies, interest was renewed in the study of Hebrew and Greek.

In 1476 and 1503, respectively, the first Greek and Hebrew grammars were published. The first published Greek New Testament was released by Erasmus in 1516. A Greek scholar, Erasmus had available to him the best of the old Greek manuscripts. It is essentially this text, reflecting the vast majority of Greek manuscripts, that we have today in the Majority Text (also known as the Received Text, the Textus Receptus, the Byzantine Text, or the Traditional Text, with few variations).

When the exiled Tyndale translated the Greek into English, he used the Textus Receptus. Martin Luther did the same when he translated the Scriptures into German.

In the year of 1536, Tyndale was strangled and burned at the stake with a prayer on his lips: "Lord, open the King of England's eyes".⁴ His Prayer was answered three years later when the Church of England authorized the translation of the Great Bible. This had been preceded in 1535 by the private printing of the Coverdale Bible. Matthew's Bible (Matthew was a pseudonym for a reformer martyred during the Catholic Queen Mary's reign) appeared in 1537. All of these works, and others, were basically revisions of Tyndale.

When Queen Elizabeth ascended the English throne, the reformers returned to England from Geneva, Switzerland, and brought with them the Genevan Bible. This translation was for sixty years the dominant English Bible. It was the first to be divided into verses and to omit the Apocrypha.

When Elizabeth died in 1603, a distant relative, King James of Scotland, emerged as the heir to the throne. As his entourage wended its way from Scotland to England, he was presented with the Millenary Petition, signed by some 1,000 ministers. Among other things, the petition requested the king to authorize a new translation of the Bible.

Each of the previous translations had its disadvantages: the Great Bible was so called because of its tremendous size, and this made its widespread use impractical; the Genevan Bible, translated under the oversight of John Calvin, included marginal notes offensive to those who held the divine right of kings; Coverdale had made no claim to being the scholar Tyndale was, and his translation was from the German and Latin rather Hebrew and Greek; the Bishop's Bible was an inferior translation.

In January, 1604, a conference of bishops and Puritan leaders convened at Hampton Court in the presence of King James. Dr. John Reynolds, himself a Puritan, was the spokesman. The king agreed to the request to authorize a new translation, and by the end of July had appointed fifty-four of the greatest scholars in all of England to the task of translating. King James charged that the translation be an exact rendering of the text.

The plan adhered to by the translating committee was detailed and demanding. Each verse of Scripture was gone over fourteen times to gain the maximum expertise of each scholar. Although a vast pool of learning and scholarship was represented by the committee, the translating input was not limited to this. Many learned men were drawn into the project in their particular area of expertise.

The purpose was to give the best rendering of the original languages and to this end previous translations and commentators were carefully consulted, including Chaldee, Hebrew, Syrian, Greek, Latin, Spanish, French, Italian, and Dutch. The translation was carefully, reverently, cautiously and expertly worked and reworked. The result was that the translation released in 1611 is still considered the masterpiece of the ages, even by its detractors.

Recent History of Translations

In keeping with Christ's command to go and teach all nations, the Holy Spirit¹ has continued to motivate the translating of the Scriptures into the various languages of the world. The same Hebrew and Greek text which was translated in the Authorized Version has now been translated into nearly 900 other languages. God's Word is thus available to men and women everywhere who desire to know Him.

Modern English Translations

While there are today some twenty-five English translations which have received some degree of acceptance, it has been said that there are only two Bibles from which to choose. How can such a simplistic statement be made? The answer is fundamental: there are but two basic texts from which translators work, especially in the New Testament. While they have been identified by various titles, they are simplistically known as the Majority Text and the Minority Text. These two Greek texts differ in no fewer than 6,000 places. They cannot both be completely accurate. The question is which text is the Word of God?

- *Majority Text.* The Majority Text (Textus Receptus, Received Text, Traditional Text Byzantine Text) is that from which the King James Bible was rendered. It is the first Greek text published by Erasmus, who worked from manuscripts which represented this textual tradition. There are some 5,225 Greek manuscripts extant today; 80-90% of them are in agreement. This is, of course, why the label "Majority Text" has been given⁵.

The Minority Text. The Minority Text (Westcott-Hort, Nestle, Nestle-Aland, United Bible Societies Greek New Testament) is that from which virtually every English translation since the Revised Version of 1881 has been rendered. While it differs from the Majority Text in some 6,000 places, translations from it into English have an even more pronounced variance. There are some 36,000 differences between the English of the KJV and RV. This includes entire passages, verses, portions of verses and single words left out or in some cases added

While the Majority Text is represented in thousands of Greek manuscripts, the Minority Text is formed essentially by five manuscripts.⁶ The most important of the five are Codex Sinaiticus (Aleph) and Codex Vaticanus (B). When these two manuscripts differ, which they do in thousands of places (it is easier to find a verse where they differ than where they agree), preference has traditionally been given to B.

The first edition of this new, minority text was created by the eclecticism of Westcott and Hort, the two chief translators on the committee to produce the Revised Version of 1881. They had collaborated on the text prior to beginning the work of translation, using the recently discovered Aleph and B.

The translating committee was dominated by liberal and unbelieving churchmen. It included a Unitarian minister who rejected the deity of Christ and rejoiced at the new rendering of 1 Timothy 3:16. Both Westcott and Hort were sympathetic with Romanism. Another member did not believe the Pentateuch was the work of Moses, and that the word of God dwelt in many sacred books other than the Bible.

Westcott and Hort had three rules by which they determined, as they compared Greek manuscripts, which reading was most likely to be the original:

- The hardest reading was preferred.
- The reading from which it was most likely that other readings could have developed was to be preferred.
- The shorter reading was to be preferred.

In short, they did not approach their task with a consciousness of the possibility that God had preserved His Word in the vast majority of manuscripts. Rather, they *assumed*, with no proof that scribes down through the years had simplified and smoothed out readings and conflated (added together) readings from various manuscripts. If, therefore, a reading was smooth and natural, it was suspect. If a manuscript was discovered which had a shorter reading (that is, it left out words) it was thought to be closer to the original. The faulty text thus created has remained, in its essential elements, the Greek text from which many translators today work. It is the text seen in the Revised Version, the American Standard Version, the Revised Standard Version, the New American Standard Bible, the New International Version, the New English Bible, Today's English Version, the Amplified Bible, Moffatt's New Translation, and the New Testament in Modern English (Phillips).

The question is very basic: Do we believe God preserved His Word to all generations, as He promised in the great majority of manuscripts, or do we believe God's Word has been rediscovered within the past century and a half, after having been lost for 1500 years, and that it exists in a mere handful of manuscripts of clumsy workmanship?

Why We Prefer the King James Version

Nearly every new translation takes from the Scripture.

As previously mentioned, the Minority Text differs from the Greek of the Majority Text in some 6,000 places. Some of the more remarkable examples would include John 7:53-8:-11; Mark 16:9-20; John 3:13; John 5:4; Acts 8:37; Matthew 17:21; 18:11; 23:14; Mark 11:26; 15:28.

Nearly every new translation makes subtle changes which affect important doctrines. In many cases the Minority Text does not simply delete a word; it changes a word. This results in definite attacks on fundamental doctrines. Some of the striking examples include: Luke 23:42; John 3:16; 6:47; 6:69; 9:35; Romans 1:16; 14:10; Colossians 1:14; 1 Timothy 3:16.

Some translations are doctrinally biased.

The most notable example of this is the *New World Translation*, the official Bible of the Jehovah's Witnesses. While it is supposedly translated from the same eclectic text as the other newer translations, it is further corrupted by strained attempts to make the Scriptures agree with the doctrinal position of its publisher. One glaring example of this bias is John 1:1, "the Word was a god". This mistranslation is not attested to by any legitimate translator, including even the most liberal. Were it not for the Watchtower's publication of Benjamin Wilson's *Diaglott*, his work would have fallen into disuse long ago.

Nearly every new translation adds to the Scriptures.

Despite the theory that "shorter readings are to be preferred," most new translations adopt longer readings where the Minority Text does so. A notable example of this is 1Peter 2:2, where new translations imply that we grow into salvation.

Some of the new "translations" are, in reality, paraphrases.

A paraphrase is not a translation at all, but a rewording of a translation. The most popular today is *The Living Bible*. In this publication, Kenneth Taylor paraphrased the American Standard Version, the American edition of the Revised Version of 1881. Many of its renderings are merely his comments and opinions without any attempt to be scholarly. This paraphrase should be rejected by Christian people and used only as a commentary, if at all.

Some translations have condensed the Holy Scriptures.

The *Reader's Digest Bible* clearly deletes with the editorial pen much of God's Holy Word. While the result no doubt makes interesting reading, it cannot be called the Holy Bible. Jesus said men must live by *every* Word that proceeds from the mouth of God. No human being, regardless of his skill at editing human documents, is qualified to practice on the inspired Scripture.

Some translations have changed meanings.

The new "non sexist" reader published by the National Council of Churches blatantly and with no textual authority eliminates what is considered to be sexist readings in the Holy Scriptures. In a forced effort to eliminate the male image of God presented in the Bible, John 3:16 becomes: "For God so loved the world, that God gave God's only Child, that whoever believes in that Child should not perish but have eternal life." God is no longer the Father but the "Father (and Mother)".

The King James Version is the accepted Bible for use in the United Pentecostal Church.

On May 15, 1953, the Illinois District Conference of the United Pentecostal Church adopted a resolution rejecting the use of the Revised Standard Version in our churches. This resolution was submitted to the General Conference of the United Pentecostal Church International and adopted. A portion of this resolution read: "BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we continue to accept the King James Version of the Bible as the most accurate translation of the Scripture to be used in our churches and among our people."

Although there has been no official statement on the many new translations rendered since the RSV, the same faults which caused us to reject the RSV cause us to reject all the modern speech versions which have followed its example. In addition to the fact that the new translations follow essentially the same Greek text in the New Testament as that followed by the RSV, we can say of the new translations as our brethren did of the RSV: "...many of the fundamentals of our Christian faith and doctrine have been changed and are very misleading...the majority of the ...translators...are proven to be modernists and liberal scholars...there is no evidence that they hold to the literal complete inspiration of the scriptures".⁷ God continues to honor the King James Bible wherever it is believed and preached. It is the popular standard by which every new translation is compelled to compare itself.

It is possible that a new, accurate updated version could be made from the same text as the King James Version. Indeed, the King James Version was revised in 1629, 1638, 1762 and 1769. In 1982, Thomas Nelson Publishers published its attempt of an updated version with the New King James Version.⁸

We continue to preach the Word with confidence that in the King James Version we actually have the Scriptures. We believe we can hold the Book in our hand and say, "Here is the Word of God!" We are unmoved by the skeptic who points with glee at supposed "contradictions" and discrepancies.

We feel as did the learned Robert Dick Wilson, master of forty-five languages. As he stood before his classes at Princeton Theological Seminary in its conservative days, he would say, "The things I do not understand in the Bible I put down to my own ignorance".

Footnotes:

¹ Today's "user-preference" of "the Holy Spirit" rather than "Holy Ghost" shows strong influence of modern versions, which most all new versions change from the KJV-"Holy Ghost".

² The grammar in Psalms 12:7 lends to the preservation of God's word in vs. 6 and not the poor and needy in vs. 5. This Psalm clearly contrasts the words of God against the words of the ungodly.

³ Wyclif translated from the *Old Latin Bibles or Old Vulgate* into English, not Jerome's Latin Vulgate. (Thomas Weisser)

⁴ The King was Henry VIII.

⁵ "The Received Text...Bible [Mss and mss]...that agree with each other. This accounts for over 5,600 of the 5,700 discovered [GK] texts, plus ancient translations." *Why They Changed The Bible: One World Bible for One World Religion* by David W Daniels - Footnotes # [90]; "...nearly all the words of the NT enjoy over 99% attestation from the extant Greek Mss/mss." (Floyd N. Jones; *Which Version is the Bible*, page x)

⁶ Scholars claim the Minority Text (five manuscripts) are the oldest and theorize, therefore, closest to the original. The foundation for this theory is that only the original copies (autographs) are inspired, thus all copies after the original are corrupt, hence, the oldest manuscripts would have less mistakes or corruptions. This is simply a theory they have made up and insist is an indisputable fact. There is no biblical or historical support for such a doctrine; in fact, the Bible references *numerous* copies of both Old and New Testament books as scripture and declares these copies are inspired! While there are many corrupted texts, this does not mean all of them are. Scholars of every stripe acknowledge these five Mss are among the worst corrupted texts, but most Scholars today are in lockstep to the "inspired original autographs only/oldest is best" doctrine which overrides the problems of its corruptions. By much evidence, the KJV was correctly translated from all the oldest & best manuscripts (Majority Text) and using the best English words to accurately convey, in context, God's words from Hebrew & Greek.

⁷ Underlines added for emphasis.

⁸ The 1629, 1638, 1762, and 1769 updated font styles, corrected printer errors and the like. The text was not changed. The 1769 edition is the one most printed today. The 1982 NKJV modernizes English and *veers* from the Received Text in numerous places.

Bibliography: The Bible its Origin and Use-Word Aflame. The Search for the Word of God. A Defense of the King James Version by Daniel L. Segraves; Pentecostal Herald, Dec. 1980; Bible Origins, UPCI. Text in this tract used by permission: D.L Segraves; www.upci.org

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