

## The Scholar's Corner

### King James Only? The Controversy over Bible Translations

#### A Short Look at a Crazy Controversy

Sometimes I think that if Christians would just stop murdering their own we might actually come to resemble Jesus as His Body and His Church. I mean, if we are going to accuse someone of heresy or of being in league with the anti-Christ, there ought to be more to it than what scripture translation a person chooses to use! Really!

Some people get all serious and accusatory over this issue and defend the King James as the only inspired translation of the scripture - implying that all other translations are tools of the devil. They spread fear among the Body, claiming to have some inside knowledge about the mind of God on the matter. It's pretty lame if you ask me. I can read the original Greek and Hebrew. So the argument doesn't make much sense to me. Most major translations are very close to the originals, so it is hard for me to understand what all the fuss is about. The differences are minor for the most part.

Most advocates of the King James only version of the Bible are also rabid anti-Catholics, which is rather ironic. You see, the King James version was translated from Greek texts which use the Latin Vulgate version as a corrective. The Latin Vulgate was held in Roman Catholic hands for centuries. It is the Catholic version of the scriptures these KJV advocates defend! Yet these same anti-Catholics prefer the King James version to any modern version where Protestant scholars have actually gone back and found the most ancient texts that had none of the later Latin, Roman Catholic additions [not that there were many]. The point is, would you rather have a text held and passed down through monkish hands, dominated by the Roman hierarchy? Or would you rather have the most ancient Greek texts, untouched by Roman hands? (For a fuller discussion of the textual sources of the KJV click [here](#))

That argument is a bit 'tongue in cheek' for narrow minded individuals, but it should serve its full effect in showing the logical inconsistency of such a blind worship of *a translation* rather than true worship of the One who Authored the originals in the first place.

That does not mean that any modern translation is free of fault or defect. I have disagreements about a few individual verse translations with most modern translations as I do with the KJV, but by and large they are all faithful attempts to communicate the truth of God to us today.

So, a serious person might ask:

*Is there a Bible you recommend that is truest to the original version and good for detailed study?*

The desire to have the most accurate translation of the Bible is commendable and reveals an earnest love of God's Word. I've found that the New American Standard is among the best for literalness. The New International Version is one of the best dynamic translations that may not be as literal but probably communicates the message with a better modern sense of what the original was really trying to say. I've recently started using the English Standard Version, which a more up to date and accurate translation than the Revised Standard, but it has the familiarity of the older King James style.

The question on which is "truest" to the original version is tricky. One problem is that every translation involves interpretation. Rarely does one word have one and only one meaning [denotation]. Usually words have nuances and implications as well [connotations].

In John 1:5, the writer says, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness apprehended it not." The word apprehended can mean, "grasped, understood, captured, or overcome." Which meaning is THE meaning and the only correct one?

The truth is that the original languages are not monochromatic any more than English is. The Greek words can have many meanings. Which English word is chosen will be a matter of interpretation, which will emphasize one or more of the connotations of the original.

Textual criticism is crucial too. Textual criticism is the science of discerning the "original intent" of the author for a particular word, phrase, or sentence. We are learning more about the Greek language nearly everyday and that impacts translation. The question of "the" best is not an easy one as you can see.

Also, while most of the Bible has come to us unchanged, there are thousands of ancient manuscripts, which have slight word variations, and one task for scholars is to try and determine which of the manuscripts are the oldest and most faithful to the original. That is the reason you will see differences between the King James Version, for example, and the New Revised Standard Version.

The King James used Latin translated texts stored by the Catholic Church as its main source of reference to shed light on Greek and Hebrew texts. Recently, scholars have tried to go back to find the most ancient Greek texts. Sometimes they find that a few verses or words in the Latin texts did not exist at all in the oldest Greek manuscripts. Did scribes and monks add explanatory side notes these small phrases that were later copied in as if they were original verses? Many times the differences in translations are a result of this attempt by scholars to find the most original version of the Bible.

So, to answer the question, I would probably get four or five books to start out. I'd get the NIV Study Bible for readability and notes. I would get out a New King James and use Strong's Concordance to look up words in difficult passages. Strong's will give you a number for each word you can then look up in the back and the word will be translated into English with all of its various meanings. I would also get an Amplified Bible, because it will give you many of the various meanings and connotations for the words in the scriptures. I'd also get an interlinear Bible that has the original languages with an English translation below in literal word order. Perhaps a comfortable paraphrase like The Message Bible would give you some colorful points to consider.

But remember what I said that the choice of a single English word to represent a word from Greek or Hebrew will also be a matter of interpretation and not "the only" correct translation. Hope that helps.

<http://www.scholarscorner.com/Critical/kingjamesonly.html>