

# A Creationist's Defense of the King James Bible

by Henry M. Morris

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In this day of rapid change, when so many Christians have suddenly started using one of the many modern English translations of the Bible (NASB, NIV, NEB, NRSV, NKJV, etc.), abandoning the long-used King James Version read and loved by English-speaking people of all ages and walks of life for over ten generations, it may be appropriate to answer the frequent question as to why many creationists, including this writer, still prefer to use the latter.

## **The King James Translators**

One reason is that all the fifty or more translators who developed the King James Bible believed strongly in the inerrancy and full authority of Scripture and in the literal historicity of Genesis, with its record of six-day Creation and the worldwide Flood. This has not always been true of those who were involved in producing the modern versions.

The spiritual motivations and convictions of the King James translators are indicated by their fascinating preface, entitled "The Translators to the Reader." The flavor of this impassioned essay can be illustrated by the following brief excerpts:

The Scriptures then being acknowledged to be so full and perfect, how can we excuse ourselves of negligence, if we do not study them, of curiosity, if we be not content with them? ... It is not only an armor, but also a whole armory of weapons, both offensive and defensive; whereby we may save ourselves and put the enemy to flight. It is not an herb, but a tree, or rather a whole paradise of trees of life, which bring forth fruit every month, and the fruit thereof is for meat, and the leaves for medicine. ... a fountain of most pure water springing up unto everlasting life, and what marvel? The original thereof being from heaven, not from earth; the author being God, not man; the Editor, the Holy Spirit, not the wit of the Apostles or Prophets; the Penmen such as were sanctified from the womb, and endued with a principal portion of God's Spirit; the matter, verity, piety, purity, uprightness; the form, God's word, God's testimony, God's oracles, the word of truth, the word of salvation, etc.; the effects, light of understanding, stableness of persuasion, repentance from dead works, newness of life, holiness, peace, joy in the Holy Ghost; lastly, the end and reward of the study thereof, fellowship with the saints, participation of the heavenly nature, fruition of an

inheritance immortal, undefiled, and that shall never fade away; happy is the man that delighteth in the Scripture, and thrice happy that meditateth in it day and night.

Furthermore, the King James translators were also great scholars, as proficient in the Biblical languages as any of those who have come after them. They were familiar with the great body of manuscript evidence then available, as well as all the previous translations. They worked diligently on the project (assigned to them by King James) for over seven years, completing it in the year 1611.

The professional qualifications of the translators were all very high. There were 54 scholars originally assigned to the project by King James, though some died early in the project. There were evidently 47 who were active throughout the project, all of whom were unusually well qualified both academically and spiritually.

For example, John Bois, who kept the most complete account of the proceedings of the translators, was extremely skilled in both Hebrew and Greek. In fact, it is reported by his biographer that he was reading through the Hebrew Old Testament when he was only five years old. He was expert in all forms of Greek, including the Koine Greek of the New Testament, and compiled one of the largest Greek libraries ever. Dr. Bois became Dean of Canterbury in 1619.

Lancelot Andrews, a leader of the Old Testament translators, had been chaplain to Queen Elizabeth. He was fluent in fifteen modern languages, as well as Hebrew, Greek, and the cognate Biblical languages. He served as Dean of Westminster and later as Bishop of Winchester.

Dr. William Bedwell was expert in Latin, Arabic, and Persian, preparing lexicons in these languages, as well as in the Biblical languages. Edward Lively, who died after only a year, had been Regius Professor of Hebrew at Cambridge and had an unequalled knowledge of the Oriental languages. Dr. John Harding was Regius Professor of Hebrew at Oxford. Miles Smith was a noted Orientalist who became Bishop of Gloucester in 1612. He was the last man to review the translation and was selected to write the Translators' Preface.

Dr. Andrew Downes spent forty years as Regius Professor of Greek at Oxford University and was on the final checking committee of the translation. George Abbott became Archbishop of Canterbury in 1611. Sir Henry Saville was Provost of Eton and was a scientist as well as Bible scholar. His works included an eight-volume edition of the

works of Chrysostom.

And on and on. All the translators were great scholars, deeply fluent in the Biblical languages, the cognate languages, the writings of the church fathers, and other relevant materials, as well as accomplished writers in English. It is almost certain that no group of Bible scholars before or since has ever been as thoroughly fit for their task as was the King James Translation Team.

The result of their consecrated labor was that the so-called "Authorized" version eventually displaced all those that had gone before and then has withstood the test of wide usage in all English-speaking countries ever since. To suddenly abandon it in just one overstressed, pseudo-intellectual, largely apostate generation may well prove to be a tragically disruptive decision.

### **Which New Translation Could Replace It?**

This is not a new question. As a matter of fact, there have been no less than 120 English translations of the complete Bible published since the King James, as well as over 200 New Testaments. Even in my own lifetime there have been at least 45 Bibles plus about 100 New Testaments, and I have tried to use at least 20 of them.

My wife and I were given an American Standard Version for a wedding present when we married in 1940, and I later bought a Berkeley Version, then a Williams, and a Phillips—each time hoping the latest might be the best. I was especially pleased when the Revised Standard Version was finally marketed in 1952 with great publicity. Each time I was disappointed, however, and soon went back to the KJV. Later came the Amplified and the Expanded and the Basic English and the Living Bible and many others. I even studied some of the older translations (Alford, Weymouth, Goodspeed, etc.).

Each of these provided interesting variations in wording, as well as updating the archaic expressions and old-style English, but something always seemed missing, so I continued using the King James in my writing and speaking, and God continued to bless its use, in spite of its Elizabethan-age English.

But other new translations kept on appearing. The New English Bible, Good News for Modern Man, the Anchor Bible, New American Standard, New International Version—even the New King James Version. There were numerous others, most recently one called the New Living Translation.

On one of these—the New King James Version—I was even a member

of the North America Overview Committee, reviewing the proposed translation of Genesis in particular, even though I cannot read Hebrew. The men who worked on the NKJV were, so far as I know, all godly men committed to Biblical inerrancy, and some of them, at least, to literal creationism, and I believe it is probably the best of the modern translations. Even so, after trying to use it and endorse it, I finally went back to the "old" King James, convinced that it is still the best, in terms of poetic majesty, spiritual power, and over-all clarity and reliability.

Therefore, even if one really feels keenly that he ought to switch to a modern translation, how does he decide which? How can he decide which, if any, most nearly preserves the inspired, authoritative Word of God? After all, God did say that His Word had been "for ever settled in heaven" (Psalm 119:89) and had given sober warning to any who would presume to supplement, delete, or distort any of the words of Scripture (Revelation 22:18,19; II Peter 3:16).

### **Is God the Author of Confusion?**

For a long time, the "official" English version used in each Bible-believing church was the King James, with the others used for reference study by teachers and pastors. Now, however, confusion reigns. Congregational unison reading is no longer convenient, and church members often don't even bring their Bibles to church. The pastor preaches from one version and the people in the congregation each have their own, so they can't follow the pastor anyway, and thus many just listen, and soon forget.

Scripture memorization, which has been an incalculable blessing in my own Christian life, is almost a lost art these days. I remember back in 1943 when Dawson Trotman, founder of the Navigators, first got me and others in our Gideon Camp back in Houston, to start memorizing Scripture, he used to stress that the verses should be quoted "word perfect," with their respective "addresses" cited fore and aft. But such meticulous attention to the very words of a Scripture verse becomes anomalous when even the supposed authorities all disagree on what it says, so why bother? In addition, the musical phrasing in the King James makes it easier to memorize than the more ponderous English of the modern versions.

And what becomes of our long-cherished belief in verbal inspiration? If it's only the "thought" that counts, then the words are flexible. Yes, but then the thoughts themselves easily become flexible also, and the translators can adjust the words to make them convey whatever thought they decide may have been intended. But precise thoughts

require precise words, and that was the principle guiding the KJV translators.

Another fast-vanishing form of Bible study is that of comparative word studies, comparing the various usages and contexts of a given key word or phrase as it occurs throughout the Bible. This has been a highly fruitful means of obtaining many precious insights into the mind of the divine writer who inspired all of them. A given word may have been rendered in various ways by the King James translators, of course, but they have assured us (in their preface) that this was always done very carefully and in accord with context and the known range of meanings carried by the word itself. A Bible student may easily discern and compare all of these—usually with real blessing to his mind and heart—even without knowledge of Greek and Hebrew, simply by using one of the complete concordances based on the King James translation (Strong's or Young's). But this type of study is far more difficult, if not practically impossible, with most modern versions in which the translators have often either resorted to paraphrasing the supposed thought of the writer, or even to using their own interpretation of what they think he should have said.

One can only wonder—and speculate—about why our ecclesiastical leaders have felt it necessary to keep producing so many new English translations all the time. The Bible, of course, is the best selling book of all time, and we can only hope that publishing profits and royalties don't have anything to do with this unnecessary proliferation. Anyway, in spite of the rising popularity of many modern versions, there are still more King James Bibles and Testaments being printed and distributed today than any other.

### **Which Version Best Renders the Original Manuscripts?**

Even many King James Bibles now have added footnotes referring to what are said to be "better manuscripts" which indicate that certain changes should be made in the King James text. The most famous such changes are the omission of the last twelve verses of Mark and the first eleven verses of John, chapter 8, but there are many other important omissions, as well as some additions and many word changes that have been incorporated in these new versions, with the implication that all these changes have been derived from these "better" ancient manuscripts.

But what are these better manuscripts and are they really better? The whole subject of New Testament criticism is too complex to discuss here (or for me to try to discuss anywhere!), but it is significant that almost all of the new versions of the New Testament are based mainly

on what is known as the Westcott-Hort Greek text, or some modification thereof (such as the Nestle-Aland text), whereas the King James is based largely on what is known as the Received Text (also called the Textus Receptus or the Majority text or the Byzantine Greek text). As far as the Hebrew text of the Old Testament is concerned, the King James is based on the Masoretic text, while the modern versions rely somewhat on the Masoretic but also on the Septuagint, the Latin Vulgate, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and various others, especially the Kittel Hebrew reference text, *Biblia Hebraica*, and the footnotes in his "Stuttgart" edition.

The Masoretic text was compiled from the ancient manuscripts of the Old Testament by the Masoretes, who were groups of Hebrew scholars dedicated to guarding and standardizing the traditional Hebrew text as "handed down" (the basic meaning of "Masoretic") from the earlier Hebrew scribes, who had in turn meticulously copied the ancient Hebrew manuscripts, scrupulously guarding against error. There seems no good reason why the Masoretic Text as preserved and codified in its present form by about 600 A.D., which has served as the basis for the King James translation, should not continue to be accepted as the most accurately preserved Old Testament portion of the Bible.

Most scholars agree that neither the Greek Septuagint nor the Latin Vulgate are comparable to the Masoretic Text in general accuracy or reliability. As far as the Hebrew text changes proposed by Rudolf Kittel are concerned, it is worth noting that Kittel was a German rationalistic higher critic, rejecting Biblical inerrancy and firmly devoted to evolutionism. The Dead Sea Scrolls were produced by a heretical Jewish sect called the Essenes, but for the most part they do agree with the standard Masoretic Text.

The two men most responsible for modern alterations in the New Testament text were B. F. Westcott and F. J. A. Hort, whose Greek New Testament text has largely replaced the traditional Textus Receptus in modern seminaries, especially as revised and updated by the Germans Eberhard Nestle and Kurt Aland. All of these men were evolutionists. Furthermore, Westcott and Hort, although they were Anglican officials and nominally orthodox in theology, both denied Biblical inerrancy, promoted racism, and even dabbled in spiritism. Nestle and Aland, like Kittel, were German theological liberals.

Westcott and Hort were also the most influential members of the English revision committee that produced the English Revised Version of the Bible, published in 1881. The corresponding American revision committee which developed the American Standard Version of 1901 was headed by another liberal evolutionist, Philip Schaff. Most new

versions since that time have favored the same manuscripts and assumptions as did those 19th century revisers. Schaff was twice tried for heresy by his denomination and taught at the very liberal Union Seminary. As chairman of the revision committee, Schaff not only was greatly influenced by Westcott and Hort, but also by the Unitarians Ezra Abbot and Joseph Thayer, of Harvard, as well as other liberals whom he placed on the committee.

Furthermore, the changes adopted by the Westcott-Hort (or Nestle-Aland) Greek texts were predominantly based on two old Greek manuscripts, the so-called Sinaiticus and Vaticanus texts, which were rediscovered and rescued from long (and well-deserved) obscurity in the 19th century. Since these are both supposedly older than the more than 5000 manuscripts that generally support the Textus Receptus, they were accepted as "better." This was in spite of the fact that they frequently disagreed with each other as well as with the Textus Receptus and also contained many serious and obvious omissions. The Vatican manuscript, for example, leaves out most of Genesis as well as all of Revelation, in addition to the pastoral epistles of Paul, 33 psalms, and over a third of Hebrews.

The fact that these two manuscripts are older obviously does not prove they are better. More likely it indicates that they were set aside and not used because of their numerous gross errors. Thus they would naturally last longer than the good manuscripts which were being used regularly and thus wore out sooner.

The Sinaitic manuscript was reportedly rescued from a wastebasket in a monastery on Mount Sinai by another German evolutionist theologian, Friedrich Tischendorf. The Orthodox monks evidently had long since decided that the numerous omissions and alterations in the manuscript had rendered it useless and had stored it away in some closet where it had remained unused for centuries. Yet Tischendorf promoted it widely and vigorously as representing a more accurate text than the thousands of manuscripts supporting the traditional Byzantine text.

A similar mystery applies to the famous Vatican manuscript, which had been kept in seclusion in the Vatican Library since 1480 or earlier, though no one seemingly knows for sure when it was originally written or how it was acquired by the Vatican. Tischendorf learned of its existence and again was instrumental in promoting its antiquity and superiority to the Textus Receptus.

There are a few other old manuscripts, even including a few old fragmentary Greek papyri, whose textual character seems to conform

more to the Sinaiticus and Vaticanus readings than to the Textus Receptus. These all have been traced, by liberal and conservative scholars alike, to a probable source in Alexandria, Egypt, in the second or third century. At that time, Alexandria was a great center of both philosophical and theological scholarship, including a relatively large population of both Jews and Christians.

The most influential man among the Christian community of Alexandria was the learned Origen, and it is believed by many that he was largely instrumental in developing the so-called "Alexandrian" text of the New Testament, of which the Vatican and Sinai manuscripts are representative, in contrast to the "Byzantine" text type, from which the Textus Receptus has largely come. Some even think that Origen may also have been involved in developing the final form of the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament.

With all his immense learning and zeal, however, it is sad that Origen's views of theology and Biblical interpretation were heretical in respect to numerous key doctrines. Like modern theistic evolutionists, he felt constrained to harmonize Christianity with pagan philosophy, especially that of Plato and the Stoics. This led him into excessive allegorization of Scripture, especially Genesis, and into denigrating the actual historical records of the Bible, even that of the bodily resurrection of Christ, as well as the literal creation of the world.

Whether or not Origen and his associates were first responsible for the differences in the Alexandrian text from the Byzantine, the fact remains that significant differences do exist, and that practically all modern English translations have been heavily influenced (via Westcott/Hort, etc.) in favor of the former, whereas the King James translation has its basis primarily in the latter.

In most cases, the differences are minor, but it is true that far too many do involve significant watering down of even such basic doctrines as Biblical inerrancy, the perfect divine/human nature of Christ, and the Trinity. On the other hand, they certainly do not eliminate these doctrines, so it is still happily possible to discern all these doctrines and to find the true gospel and way of salvation in almost any of the new texts or translations.

In any case, one of the serious problems with almost all modern English translations is that they rely heavily on Hebrew and Greek manuscripts of the Bible heavily influenced by liberals, rationalists, and evolutionists, none of whom believed in the verbal inspiration of the Bible.



Are we to believe that God would entrust the preservation of His eternal Word to men such as these? Would He not more likely have used devout scholars who believed in the absolute inerrancy and authority of the Bible? We must remember that the Bible is not like other books. It was divinely inspired, and both academic integrity and spiritual discernment are required in its transmission and translation.

### **What About the Archaic Language in the King James?**

The beautifully poetic prose of the King James is a great treasure which should not be lost or forgotten. It has been acclaimed widely as the greatest example of English literature ever written. Apart from a few archaic words or words whose meaning has changed, which can easily be clarified in footnotes, it is as easy to understand today as it was four hundred years ago. That is why most laymen today, especially those without higher education, still use and love it. These modern translations commonly tend to use long words and pedantic rhetoric, but the King James uses mostly one and two-syllable words. Formal studies have always shown its readability index to be 10th grade or lower. There is nothing hard to understand about John 3:16, for example, or Genesis 1:1, or the Ten Commandments, in the King James.

There are some sections of the Bible, of course, whose teachings are quite complex in the original language and thus a faithful translation should preserve that same complexity (after all God inspired it that way), but all the basic histories, doctrines, and precepts are easy to understand by anyone who can read at high-school level. Many sections can easily be read by children as soon as they learn to read at all. In fact, in earlier times here in America, children were actually taught to read by means of the King James Bible.

It is also noteworthy that the King James was produced during the period when the English language and literature (as well as knowledge of other languages by English-speaking people) had reached their zenith of power and expressiveness. That was the age of Shakespeare, for example. Modern English, on the other hand, has become merely a decadent remnant of its former beauty and clarity.

This phenomenon seems to be a universal characteristic of languages—as well as people, cities, and institutions of all kinds. A period of youthful growth and vigor reaches a zenith and is then followed by a gradual decline and eventual death. Albert Baugh, in a widely used textbook on this theme has said:

The evolution of languages, at least within the historical

period, is a story of progressive simplification. ... Language may reintroduce previously lost complexity but over-all the superfluous and redundant aspects are systematically streamlined from the complex structure of language. (*A History of the English Language*. New York. Appleton Century-Crofts, 1957. p. 10.)

This trend is exactly opposite to any evolutionary concept of language origins, but is analogous to the law of entropy in the physical realm.

With respect to the English language, the authors of a more recent study, companion to a PBS television series, note the literary accomplishments of the Elizabethan period in England as follows.

The achievements of these astonishing years [i.e., 1558-1625, the reigns of Queen Elizabeth and King James I] are inescapably glorious. Elizabeth I came to the throne in 1558 at the age of twenty-five. William Shakespeare, her most famous subject, was born six years later in 1564. Her successor, James I, who gave his name to another famous masterpiece, the Authorized Version of the Bible, died in 1625. During their reigns, about seventy years, the English language achieved a richness and vitality of expression that even contemporaries marveled at. (Robert McCrum, William Cray, and Robert MacNeil, *The Story of English*. New York, Viking. 1986. p. 91.)

These writers call the King James Bible "probably the single most influential book ever published in the English language" (*ibid.*, p. 109). They also make an important observation concerning the beautiful simplicity of the King James Language.

The King James Bible was published in the year Shakespeare began work on his last play, *The Tempest*. Both the play and the Bible are masterpieces of English, but there is one crucial difference between them. Whereas Shakespeare ransacked the lexicon, the King James Bible employs a bare 8000 words-God's teaching in homely English for everyman. From that day to this, the Shakespearean cornucopia and the Biblical iron rations represent, as it were, the North and South poles of the language, reference points for writers and speakers throughout the world, from the Shakespearean splendor of a Joyce or a Dickens to the Biblical rigor of a Bunyan or a Hemingway (*ibid.*, p. 113).

It is no wonder that a Bible translation produced at that special time in

history has (except for changes in spelling and letter form) endured for almost 400 years, meeting the needs and guiding the culture of over ten generations of English speaking peoples. In fact, it has been very instrumental in standardizing the language itself, providing a common bond among its millions of readers, and restraining what would otherwise have been a more rapid deterioration of the language.

We have abandoned today many fine points of English grammar commonly used in 1600. For example, we forget that "thee," "thou," and "thine" were used to express the second person singular, with "you," "ye" and "yours" reserved for second person plural. Today we use "you" indiscriminately for both singular and plural, thereby missing some of the precise meaning of many texts of Scripture. The same applies to the "th" and "st" endings on verbs associated with second-person pronouns; they also contributed significantly to the musical quality of the language, especially as used in the King James Bible.

The translators were not only Biblical scholars, but accomplished writers, and one of the deliberate goals—in fact, a part of their assignment—was to produce a Bible that would "sing" with beauty and power, and would also retain literal faithfulness to the Greek and Hebrew texts, which had themselves been written with majestic musical beauty.

This they did accomplish, most admirably, and modern versions are without exception inferior to the King James Bible in this regard. The King James is also the most reliably accurate of all translations, seeking to translate the words of the original rather than "dynamically equivalent" thoughts. This aspect allows detailed word study and comparisons which are hardly possible in most other versions.

With all these factors in mind, do we not most honor the Lord and His revealed Word by having it read and used in that form of our language which was in use when the English language was at its best, instead of in our modern jargon?

The King James Bible is not inerrant in the sense of the original autographs. Most of us who prefer it agree that some words should have been translated differently. Nevertheless, we find it to be more reliable in general than any other.

One can certainly find the way of salvation in the KJ at least as easily as in any other. All he really needs is, say, Genesis 1:1; Romans 3:23; 5:8; 10:9; and John 3:16; and these verses could hardly be rendered more clearly or powerfully than in the King James. Although its use is

not a test of salvation or spirituality, it will contribute to both at least as effectively as any other version. Once saved, a believer then needs to study the Bible (not just read it) all his life, and the King James Bible is eminently suited for serious study. That is why it has served our needs for over ten generations.

### **Conclusion**

I believe, therefore, after studying, teaching, and loving the Bible for over 55 years, that Christians need to hang on to their old King James Bibles as long as they live. God has uniquely blessed it in the history of England and America, in the great revivals, in the worldwide missionary movement, and in the personal lives of believers more than He has through all the rest of the versions put together.

The King James Bible is the most beautiful, the most powerful, and (I strongly believe) the most reliable of any that we have or probably ever will have, until Christ returns.

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