

# **The Incomparable King James Bible**

**by Shaun Willcock**

In the year 1611, an English version of the Bible was published, more accurate than any English version that had ever been produced before it, or that has ever been produced after it: the Authorized or King James Version. There are those who would challenge that statement; but not one could ever prove it to be false. The evidence supporting it is simply overwhelming.

This being so—that the King James Version is the most faithful, most accurate translation of the Word of God into English—no other version of the Bible in English should be used by the Christian who loves the Word of God, and who desires to read it and study it in its purity and entirety. Unlike the King James Version, the many modern versions contain serious errors, omissions, and additions, and should be rejected. Why settle for less than the best? Why, in fact, be satisfied with an incomplete, inaccurate version, when a complete and accurate version is available? It is important not to be misunderstood. We are not claiming that the King James Version is divinely inspired, as some critics of our position often attempt to lead others to believe. We are well aware that there are certain heretics who make such a claim.

We are not to be numbered amongst them. Let our position be emphatically clear: “All scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2 Tim. 3:16): “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. 1:21). Holy men such as Moses and David and Isaiah and Paul and Peter and others wrote by divine inspiration. Their writings were perfect, free of all error. Miraculously inspiration applied only to the original writings, and not to the copies of those writings that were made in subsequent centuries.

However, in addition to the divine inspiration of the scriptures as originally given, the Christian must hold firmly to another doctrine, without which the first would be of no use whatsoever: and that is the doctrine of the preservation of the Holy Scriptures! That the Lord has promised to preserve his Word is a certainly taught as that he gave the original writings by inspiration, Jesus said, “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away” (Matt. 24:35). Peter wrote of “the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever...the word of the Lord endureth for ever” (1 Pet. 1:23-25), and he was quoting Isa. 40:8. If there was no preservation of the Word of God, of what use would its inspiration have been? If the Lord has given the original Scriptures by inspiration, this would have been of benefit to those believers who originally had them; but of what use would it have been to believers of later ages? For the original manuscripts have long since perished! They have rotted away. We, therefore, would not have the Word of God today, if it were not for the fact that the Lord has kept his promise to preserve his Word for ever.

Now, how has God’s Word been preserved? A the various books of the Bible were

circulated (Col. 4:16); 1 Thess. 5:27), they were copied, and the copies were copied, and so on. And in the multiplication of copies the Word of God was preserved. This is not to say that there were no corrupt manuscripts circulated as well. Just as there were (and are) false teachers among the churches (2 Pet. 2:1), so there were (and are) false copies of the Scriptures among the true. And yet all Scripture is preserved within the body of manuscripts. This brings us to the subject of the text of God's Word.

This article, of necessity, can only deal with all these matters very briefly. Much more could be said on each point. There are, in fact, essentially only two texts of the Greek New Testament: the true and the false. There are over 5000 Greek manuscripts that have been discovered to date. Of these, over 90%, perhaps as many as 95%, contain essentially the same text. This text has been called various things, but for brevity's sake we shall call by perhaps its most well-known name, the Received Text. In the early sixteenth century, this text was printed for the first time, and disseminated throughout Europe. This Received Text is the TRUE text of God's Word. How do we know?

Just as the Lord led his Church to accept only the truly inspired books of the Bible as genuine, and to reject all others, so he guided his Church to make multiplied copies of the true manuscripts. Corrupt copies were also produced, but not in such large quantities. They were recognized for what they were, and rejected. And for this reason, the text found, for the most part, in the vast majority of manuscripts is the TRUE text of the Word of God. It is true that manuscripts containing this text are not as ancient as those containing the other text, and some critics contend that the oldest manuscripts are automatically the best; but this is not so. The manuscripts containing the true text would have been used far more than those containing the false one, and would have eventually fallen apart; so that a manuscript may be very old simply because it was not very accurate, and consequently not much used. The antiquity of a manuscript is one of the factors to take into consideration in order to ascertain whether a particular reading is the genuine one or not, but it is not the only factor. The number of manuscript witnesses to a particular reading, the variety of evidence from different places in favor of a particular reading, the context of the reading, various internal considerations, etc., are all factors which have to be taken into consideration. And in these respects, the Received Text is found to be far superior to the other text, the text of a very small minority of manuscripts.

Now we come to the subject at hand: the superiority of the English version of the Bible known as the King James Version over all other English versions either before or after it.

**There are three things to look for in a Bible version:**

- 1. Is it based on the true text of God's Word?**
- 2. Is it an accurate translation of the true text?**
- 3. Is it the best translation of the true text available?**

Let us take up each one of these matters separately, and in this order: for if a particular Bible version is based upon a faulty, corrupt text, it does not matter how

accurately it is translated: it is a faulty, corrupt translation. It cannot be otherwise. And if it is based on the true text, but is inaccurately translated, it does not matter that it is based on the true text: it is an inaccurate translation. And if it is based on the true text, and is accurately translated, but there is a more accurate version available, why should the Bible-loving Christian settle for anything less than the very best translation available?

Firstly, then, a Bible version must be based upon the true text of God's Word. That text is the Received Text. This was the text that was the basis of the entire Bible translation work carried out in Europe at the time of the Protestant Reformation and afterwards, when the Bible was placed in the hands of the common man. This is the text that underlies the King James Version. The King James Version was used by the overwhelming majority of the English-speaking people the world over until the year 1881. In that year, a new English version was published. This was known as the Revised Version, and it was the first of a long line of new Bible versions in English that have been published from then until now: versions which have caused immense confusion among professing Christians. The reader will probably be familiar with the names of at least some of them: the Revised Standard Version, the New American Standard Version, the New International Version, the Good News Bible, the Living Bible, etc, etc. Almost without exception the versions that have been published since 1881 have been based, not upon the Received Text, but upon another, corrupt text: a text found in only a very small percentage of all extant Greek manuscripts.

If a version is based on a corrupt text, the very foundation is faulty, and no Christian should use that version. Let the reader not think that the differences between the texts are minimal, or insignificant! They are neither. The corrupt text is drawn primarily from two manuscripts, the Vaticanus and Sinaiticus manuscripts. Let the reader comprehend something of the differences between the Received Text and the false text by a consideration of the following: it has been calculated that in the Gospels alone, Codex Vaticanus differs from the Received Text in the following particulars: it omits at least 2877 words, adds 536, substitutes 935, transposes 2098, and modifies 1132. This adds up to 7578 divergences. As for the Codex Sinaiticus, it is even worse, with 9000 divergences. And a great many of the differences are very serious indeed, affecting vital doctrines of the faith.

Secondly, a Bible version, even if based on the true text as the King James Version is, must be an accurate translation of that text. If the translation itself is faulty, it matters not that it was based upon the true text! When the King James Version is closely examined, however, it is found to be an extremely accurate, faithful translation of the Word of God into English. This fact has even been recognized by its enemies. The King James Version translators were men of exceptional ability, among the most learned men of that age or of any other, expert in Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic, and other ancient languages. One of them was well at home in twenty languages! They approached the Word of God with reverence, with fear and trembling, and with great care. They produced a word-for-word translation, a literal rendition of the Hebrew and Greek texts into English. And in addition, their translation was eminently readable, easily committed to memory, a melodious and graceful translation. They took the true text, and they translated it

faithfully, carefully, lovingly and reverently. The result was a Bible version of unsurpassed accuracy and beauty.

Thirdly, a Bible version may be an accurate translation of the true text, as indeed the King James Version is; but it must also be ascertained whether or not this version is the best translation of the true text available in English. If, after all, a more accurate version is available, it would make sense for Christians to use that version in preference to the King James Version; for it makes perfect sense to use the most accurate version available.

It can safely be said, however, that a better English version of the Bible has never been produced. Of this version one declared: “If accuracy and strictest attention to the letter of the text be supposed to constitute an excellent version, this is of all versions the most excellent”—and this testimony is true. Through the centuries its superiority has been acknowledged by many men well able to judge of such matters.

The King James Version was not the first English version based on the Received Text. Before it made its appearance in 1611, other versions were published. Tyndale’s Version, Coverdale’s Version, the Great Bible, the Geneva Bible, and the Bishop’s Bible, were some of the versions that appeared in the sixteenth century. They were all based on the true text, and carefully translated; but without any doubt whatsoever the King James Version superseded them all.

This author has read through and made a study of, Tyndale’s 1526 New Testament, Matthew’s 1537 New Testament, and the 1557 Geneva New Testament. And he can testify that, while all three are extremely accurate, none of them are as accurate as the King James Version. They contain errors not found in the King James Version. These errors are not numerous, nor are they as serious (when taken as a whole) as those found within the modern version; but the King James Version is a definite improvement over them all. It was the crowning achievement in the translation of the Bible into English.

Nor do any of the versions produced since the King James Version equals it in accuracy and faithfulness to the true text. As has already been pointed out, almost every one of the modern versions is based on a corrupt text; and so of course we can be sure that all of these are far inferior to the KJV, without even examining them further: the fact that they are based upon a corrupt text is sufficient. But we are considering here, whether or not the KJV is the best translation of the true text available. In recent times a version has been published which is largely based on the true text, and which has gained increasingly popularity in some circles. It is called the New King James Version, and it deserves a brief mention here because some are claiming that it fulfills the three criteria mentioned above: it is based on the true text, the Received Text; it is alleged to be an accurate translation of that text; it is, in fact, alleged to be the most accurate translation of that text, superior to the King James Version.

When the New King James Version is examined, it is found to fall far short with regard to all these criteria. In the first place, although it claims to be based on the text

underlying the 1611 KJV, in a number of places it most certainly does not follow that text, but departs from it; for example, in 1 Cor. 10:6,7, Heb. 10:7, Revelation 14:3, Revelation 5:13, and Rev. 16:5. In the second place, there are numerous changes in the English between this version and the KJV. It has been calculated that there are about 150 changes in the English in just the first eleven chapters of Matthew, suggesting a total of about 30,000 to 35,000 in the entire New Testament, affecting perhaps on average one word in every five or six. In the third chapter of John, there are 222 changes. The NKJV drops all usage of the words thou, thee, thy and thine. This modernization of the English actually affects the accuracy of the translation, because the Hebrew and Greek languages contain distinctions between the singular and plural personal pronouns—distinctions which are not made when the modern you and your are used. The accuracy is affected in such places as Luke 22:31, 32, and Philemon verses 1-3, 20-22, 23, 25.

There are a number of places where the NKJV rendering affects true doctrine. Here are a few: Matt. 20:20, Rom. 4:25, 1 Cor. 1:18, 1 Cor. 8:11, 2 Cor. 2:17, 2 Cor. 5:14, 2 Cor. 10:5, Phil. 2:6, 1 Thess. 5:22, 23, Heb. 2:16, Rev. 19:8. There are many footnotes in the NKJV, indicating manuscript readings which differ with the traditional text, but these merely serve to confuse the reader who is not informed about these issues, and to cast doubt upon the authenticity of the true text at these places.

The above facts, though brief, are sufficient to demonstrate that the so-called New King James Version is not a more accurate translation, but is far inferior to the King James Version. It should be rejected by all lovers of the Word of God in favor of the King James Version.

The King James Version is the most accurate translation of the Word of God into English ever produced; and, we venture to say, no more accurate English version will ever be produced. Firstly, because there is no need for another one. The King James Version, which has served the English-speaking Christians so well for over three and a half centuries, is perfectly capable of doing so for the time that is left before the Lord returns.

Secondly, because in these days of ecumenism, of widespread blindness and heresy throughout the Protestant institutions, there are few whom the remnant of God's people would be willing to entrust with the task.

Thirdly, because even if men could be found, the version they produce would not, now, supersede the King James Version in the hearts and affections of all God's people worldwide. And if it failed to supersede it, we would end up with two versions, causing confusion. This is not the sixteenth century, when one version was succeeding another rapidly—and the people wanted it that way, because they knew it had to be, for the translation of the English Bible was still being perfected. Today, those Christians who use and love the King James Version do not, for the most part, believe that another one is needed. They are perfectly happy with it, knowing that it is the unequalled masterpiece of English versions, upon which the blessing of God has rested for centuries, in the salvation of the lost and edification of the saved.

Once upon a time, English-speaking Christians everywhere used this version, and no other, and the church was the better for it. Alas, those days have now gone! We have a flood of perverted, corrupt versions in use, and yet look at the state of professing

“Christianity”! There can be absolutely no doubt whatsoever that there is a most definite correlation between the flood of false versions, and the widespread doctrinal chaos and ungodliness that everywhere abounds in what goes by the name of “Protestantism” today.

At a time of great need, when Popery is slithering in everywhere, when heresies and cults abound, and when the regions of the east are taking root in the west, many Christians are attempting to meet these foes with blunted swords: versions which although they may contain the Word of God, are not the Word of God in its entirety or in its purity. Oh, let the Christian reader, who uses an impure version, return to the Bible of his spiritual forefathers, the bible upon which the Lord has placed his blessing as on no other; and let the Christian reader, who has cherished and cleaved to his good old King James Version through thick and thin, be encouraged by what has been written here to go on using it with confidence, knowing that it is the Word of God in English.