

Why We Use the KJV

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Bible Study - 2 Peter 1:20-21

2Pe 1.20-21 Bib Hist.220.wpd

Pastor Scott Childs - www.northsidebaptistchurch.org.au

Introduction: One of the most important yet most misunderstood topics in Christian circles is that of Bible translations. Why do we use the KJV when there are so many modern translations?

Transition: At this time I want to answer that question and help you to see that our choice of Bibles is more than just a preference.

1. Original Manuscripts

a. Original Bible manuscripts are called "autographs."

- 1) Moses began writing the Old Testament about 1400 BC. Eventually it contained 39 books and was completed about 400 BC. The OT is nearly all in Hebrew with parts of Daniel and Ezra are in Chaldee (i.e., Aramaic). Early writing "paper" was papyrus (plant based) and later "paper" was parchment (skins).
- 2) The New Testament was written in the 1st Century. It was written entirely in Greek and contained 27 books.

b. God gave the Bible by Revelation and inspiration.

- 1) When we say, "God gave the Bible by revelation," we mean he divinely revealed it to man. (2 Peter 1:20-21)
- 2) God then inspired his Word by breathing out his words as men put them in writing. (2 Timothy 3:16)

c. Men have translated and copied the original text.

- 1) Roughly 200 BC the OT was translated into Greek. This translation is called the Septuagint. It follows the Hebrew text fairly closely. It also included 14 Apocryphal books that are not inspired.
- 2) Copying the Bible began early in history. "And it shall be, when he [the king] sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites;" (Deuteronomy 17:18) Joshua also made copies (Joshua 8:32).
- 3) Massorete scribes used extreme care in copying the Hebrew OT beginning about the 1st Century AD.
- 4) New Testament manuscripts were shared by churches. "And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea." (Colossians 4:16) These would not last long and must be copied.
- 5) Jerome translated the Bible into Latin in 382 AD. This is called the Vulgate. Many others translated it too.

2. Surviving Manuscripts

a. All original manuscripts are gone. Only copies exist.

- 1) The total number of manuscripts of the whole or part of the NT is 5,488 (Kurt and Barbara Aland, quoted by Malcolm H. Watts in "The Lord Gave the Word" www.trinitarianbiblesociety.org/site/articles/lordgaveword.asp)
- 2) These manuscripts are divided into four categories (gleaned from www.trinitarianbiblesociety.org/site/articles/lordgaveword.asp)
 - a) **Papyri** - 96 copies, nearly all fragments
 - b) **Uncials** - 299 copies, all in upper-case, 4th Century and later (Aleph and B most popular).
 - c) **Minuscules** - 2812 copies, all in lower-case, 9th Century and later.
 - d) **Lectionaries** - 2,281 copies, Bible portions used in public church reading, 6th Century and later.

b. Surviving manuscripts fall into two major text-types.

- 1) The first is the Byzantine Text-type. The name comes from the Byzantine area (mainly Syria, Turkey, and Greece, where the Apostle Paul ministered). It is also known as the Majority Text.
 - a) About 90% of all surviving manuscripts support the Byzantine type (about 5000 of the 5488).
 - b) Christianity had its strongest roots in the Byzantine area, including Antioch in Syria which was the centre of Christianity after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD. Constantinople was the centre of Greek-speaking world.
 - c) For 1800 years the Byzantine Text-type was the standard Bible Greek text.
- 2) The second is the Alexandrian Text-type. Its name comes from Alexandria in Egypt. It is also called the Critical text or Westcott and Hort text.

- a) This minority text is based on less than 10% of the surviving manuscripts.
- b) Its two chief manuscripts are the **Sinaiticus** (Aleph) [found in a rubbish bin in St. Catherine's monastery on Mount Sinai in 1844] and **Vaticanus** (B) [found in the Vatican library in Rome and studied in 1867]. For more information see www.trinitarianbiblesociety.org/site/articles/lordgaveword.asp
- c) Alexandria was notorious for Arian and Gnostic heresies that denied the deity of Christ.
- d) The Aleph and B disagree with each other more than 3000 times in the Gospels alone. They differ from the Byzantine in over 6000 places. They leave out portions of over 200 verses in the NT, 17 are completely missing. (Cf. Mr 11:26, Lu 17:36, Ac 8:37, 24:7)
- e) Those who have seen them say that these manuscripts clearly appear to have been revised.
- f) In 1881 two Greek scholars, B. F. Westcott and F. J. A. Hort, popularized Aleph and B claiming that they are the oldest surviving manuscripts and therefore the best. Their age is more likely because they were not used and were kept in the dry climate of Egypt.

3. Translating Manuscripts

a. The Byzantine text was the standard before 1881.

- 1) The Catholic Church forbid translation work for years.
- 2) **Wycliffe** translated the Vulgate into English in 1384.
- 3) A standard Byzantine Greek text was compiled by **Erasmus** in 1516. It was called the *Textus Receptus* (TR). Other TR text were compiled by Stephens 1550, **Beza** 1565, **Elzevir** 1633, and **Scrivener** 1894.
- 4) **Tyndale** translated the English NT from Greek in 1526. The **Coverdale** Bible 1535 was the first entire Bible in English from the Greek. The **Great Bible** 1539. The **Bishop's Bible** 1568. The **King James** 1611.

b. The Alexandrian text is acclaimed best since 1881.

- 1) The English Revised Version 1885, American Standard 1901, NASV 1971, NIV 1973 and nearly all other popular Bibles come from this Critical text. (The NKJV 1982 is an exception. It comes from the TR text, but is tainted by footnotes and choice of words that promote the WH text also called the NU (Nelson-Aland Greek NT and the United Bible Societies Greek NT)).
- 2) Many verses and words are left out of modern translations because they are based on the Critical text. Deletions often undermine Christ's deity (cf. 1Ti 3:16).

c. Today we have a dilemma.

- 1) The KJV is the most accurate English translation from the TR text. But, the English of the KJV is nearly 400 years old. Some words have changed meaning many others are no longer in common use. The "thee" and "ye" words, though very important in identifying second-person-plural, are foreign to modern English.
 - a) The NKJV is a fairly accurate translation from the TR text, but it has problems. It does not distinguish second-person-plural. The footnotes promote the NU text undermining the TR and work as a bridge between the KJV and the modern translations.
 - b) All other *popular* versions come from the WH text.
- 2) The solution is not easy if you struggle with English. For study, some Bible software contain KJV2000, MKJV, and Young's Literal translations which are helpful. For comparison you could use the NKJV, but beware of the footnotes. The Defined King James Bible is a possible option, but the editor takes an extremely strong KJV stand. Otherwise, prayerfully use the KJV along with a good dictionary.

Conclusion: I trust that this message will help you better understand the Bible translation issue. Though a majority of the scholars of our day use the Critical text, I strongly believe that the Byzantine text is right because it has 90% manuscript support, better defends the deity of Christ, was the standard text for about 1800 years, and because the liberals and cults don't like it. I encourage you to keep using the KJV.

Song: The Bible Stands, 178

Other sources include: www.greatsite.com/timeline-english-bible-history/, "The Bible Version

Question/Answer Database" David Cloud, www.trinitarianbiblesociety.org