

THE ASSEMBLY MESSENGER

Proclaiming the Timeless Truth of the Church to a New Generation of Believers

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Dear Reader

We are not seeking to make our last year of publication a series of controversies, yet it is necessary after our article (04-76) on not turning to the right or the left and as promised therein, to illustrate how an honest, cherished belief of dedicated Christians as to the KJV translation will not hold up to the light of both Scripture and secular biblical history. Thus how careful we must be that we have the sure word of God for whatever we make a doctrinal test for others! If I want to believe and practice something for myself, that may well be fine in many cases, but the minute I attempt to impose it on others, or even preach on it as if it was a biblical doctrine, I tend to fall into the right hand ditch of *legalism* if I don't have clear Scripture on my side. If there was a jury of true believers whose law-book was the Bible in Aramaic, Hebrew and Greek, could the case be proven? Could we likewise prove our case as to *all* our cherished beliefs? In some instances, I firmly believe the answer is "yes, we can." An example is the truth of the Assembly as we have sought to present it for 9 years in the *Assembly Messenger*, even though the overwhelming majority of true believers truly believe we are wrong as to both teaching and practice. But *they* are the ones who can't back up their teachings and practice from God's Word! Yet few will even entertain the question because we all are comfortable in what we've been brought up in and been taught from youth.

Many will agree with what we say below; many will not. For those who agree, perhaps the article will help you help others. For those who don't, I challenge you to find the mistakes in the article that will allow you to continue with your belief and feeling that your fellow Christians, including myself, who use other translations than the KJV are failing God and man and perhaps, even are proclaiming a false Bible and even should be refused fellowship. So let's proceed with our study.

IS THE KING JAMES VERSION (KJV) THE ONLY TRUE ENGLISH TRANSLATION?

For a long time, and especially since more modern English translations have become popular, there has been a number of dear, earnest Christians *very* dedicated to what they believe, who argue for and believe in virtually the inspiration of the King James version (KJV) of the Bible. They have published many pamphlets in sup-

port of the KJV and condemning all other English translations. They compare everything to the KJV and condemn every difference. It seemingly doesn't enter their heads that the KJV might be the translation that is incorrect in these instances!

One wonders what they think of the hundreds of translations of the Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek into other languages which were not done by the same group of people who translated the KJV Bible and may well have used other Greek texts in their translations. If translated back into English, these foreign language translations would not likely agree with the KJV in all points. Do those who so revere the KJV think that only the English-speaking world has God's unadulterated Word? This is a very serious question and should challenge deeply the KJV-only belief.

The Background of the KJV

King James was an Anglican. Nothing I've read indicates he was a believer. In the early 1600's, according to the encyclopedia, the leading clergy of his day asked him to sponsor a new English translation. He responded by appointing 54 scholars (47 who served) who worked for 7 years. The resulting translation published in 1611 was dedicated to King James, hence its name. He had nothing to do with the actual translation, although his high-church views may have had some influence in how certain things were translated. It was without question the best English translation of its day, for which we can thank the Lord. It is also called the *Authorized Version*—not authorized by God, but authorized by King James to be published. Some tell us the term "AV" means the KJV without any North American influence, but in fact, the two terms (KJV and AV) essentially mean the same thing.

The fact is, if we picked up a copy of the first printing of the KJV/AV we would have great difficulty reading it because of word meanings and spelling. For example one of the old words carried still in the KJV is "charity" where all updates and modern translations correctly change it to "love." It was not in this case wrongly translated in 1611, but the meaning of the word has changed, although even today, much giving to "charity" is considered an act of love.

The basis of all the pamphlets supporting the KJV is to compare other translations to the KJV. The going-in assumption is that the KJV is correct, so any deviation from the KJV is error, and those who so strongly support the KJV don't mind using the strongest language in attacking any deviation. Does such strong, non-scriptural language indicate a mere fleshly, emotional response instead of a God-directed response?

The fact is, their assumption can't be sustained! The Greek text for the New Testament used in 1611 was the Stephens Text, 99.99% the same as what has become known as the Textus Receptus (received text). It was the best Greek text of its day, pieced together from many hundreds or thousands of manuscripts.

There is no "original" Greek or Hebrew text or even "original" individual Greek or Hebrew manuscripts — no *autographs* directly from the biblical writers. In the 19th century six of the leading and widely respected Christian biblical Greek scholars edited the Stephens/Textus Receptus text, bringing in the thousands of manuscripts found since 1611, and this is available to us in the form of a Greek-English interlinear translation under various titles, with notes from these above editors. The New King James Version (NKJV) relies somewhat on this edited text, but mainly on what is called the "*Majority Text*" — a Greek text based on the *majority* of the available manuscripts. Simply put, when there are differences in the thousands of individual manuscripts, the majority rules. Although this sounds good, many believe it is not a good assumption because the general quality of the manuscripts isn't considered, and there are lots of poor quality manuscripts. The New Scofield KJV, with its thousands of word changes and updates from the traditional KJV, relies heavily on the edited Stephens text.

Another Greek text that many experts like and consider to be the best and "most prominent modern critical text of the Greek New Testament," but those who support the KJV don't like it, in the strongest of language, is called the *Nestles' Text*, based on the so-called *Alexandrian Text*. The *New American Standard Bible* (NASB) and the more loosely-translated *New International Version* (NIV) rely heavily on the Nestles' Text. But the fact is, there is *very little* difference between all these Greek texts. Most differences come in translation. And none of the texts or translations is perfect, although God has seen to it that no major doctrine of Scripture is made uncertain due to differences in texts.

John Nelson Darby (JND), William Kelly and Frederick W. Grant (FWG: *Numerical Bible*) relied on an *eclectic*

text; that is, they sought the spiritual meaning of the Greek and Hebrew, and thus chose the text that best gave it, while considering the accuracy of the text in general. Their great God-given insight into Scripture has made biblical scholars of many denominational persuasions rely on the accuracy of the English translations of these three men. JND also gave a translation in French and German. The eclectic-text approach is becoming increasingly popular among serious students. That's why, although otherwise obscure, the JND "New Translation" is found on many computer Bible text programs. It surely seems it would be a better approach to compare *all* translations to the interlinear texts and translations such as the JND.

Some Details

Now for a few specifics using headlines from one pro-KJV pamphlet. 1 Timothy 3:16 says "God" in the KJV, but 6 out of 6 editors, FWG and Nestles say the word should be "*who* was manifest ..." JND and the Majority Text retains "God," but with a note saying "who." JND strongly supports "who" in his note. In Luke 2:33, 4 out of 6 editors, and the Nestles Greek text, and Darby all use "*His father* and mother ..." Although Joseph was not biologically the Lord's father, for earth, Mary and Joseph *were* the Lord's parents (Lk.2:41,48). The vast weight of evidence is that the KJV is wrong, although its translation might seem more "correct." All six editors remove "who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" from Romans 8:1 as does JND and Nestles. It is correct in verse 4. All six editors remove "through His blood" in Colossians 1:14, as do the other Greek texts. While it is a true fact, the fact is found elsewhere and translators have no right to add in their own thoughts, even if doctrinally correct, where they think something might clarify the actual inspired wording. In this regard think of all the times in 1 Corinthians 14 the KJV has "*unknown tongue*" where there is no Greek word in any manuscript for *unknown*. The true meaning is *foreign languages*. Perhaps that is what they meant to portray, but by their word added, they have given great support to the unscriptural "tongues" movement of today which relies heavily on that added word.

As to there being "lies" in other translations, the reference is Mark 1:2-3. The Greek text varies here. The Majority Text and Darby in a note prefers "in the prophets," but acknowledges "Isaiah the prophet." See Isaiah 40:3. Six of 6 "Stephens" editors add "Isaiah the prophet." So translations other than the KJV aren't "lying" in how they translate Mark 1 (as the pamphlet accuses them of), but there are major manuscript differ-

ences here, but no doctrinal harm is done either way it is translated.

A few more examples. *Lucifer* (Satan) means “bright morning star” or “shining one.” After all, he evidently was God’s greatest creature. So the NIV uses the meaning of the name in its translation of Isaiah 14:12 instead of the name Lucifer. This may cause confusion, but can’t be called an intentional, serious error, although I prefer to let the biblical student search out the *meaning* of names and not make the *meaning* of the Hebrew name become the translation. The KJV itself does this in Ezekiel 38:2-3; 39:1, undoubtedly unintentionally. The word “chief” is the meaning of “Rosh” and the KJV translates these verses as “*Chief* prince of Meshech and Tubal.” But the verse is better translated, “Prince of Rosh (Russia), Meshech and Tubal ...” as used in JND and pointed out in the New Scofield KJV margin. It makes this prophecy concerning the future of Russia (currently the Russian Republic) much clearer.

The word “hell” is taken out of all translations other than the KJV in many locations, to the great anger of those who support only the KJV, *simply because it is not in the Greek!* Where the Greek word is *Gehenna*, “hell” is correctly translated as *hell* in these non-KJV or modified-KJV translations (and in the KJV). But the KJV erroneously often uses the English word “hell” where the translation ought to be “*hades*” — a Greek word brought directly into English, meaning either “unseen” or “all-receiving.” “Hades” is far from being the same thing as “hell.” It’s a study in itself!

Then, Darby translates Luke 11:2-3, “Father, Thy name be hallowed; Thy kingdom come; give us our needed bread for each day; and remit us our sins ...” This is in line with most of the editors and with the Nestles Greek text. The KJV has probably added extra wording, although it is in the Majority Text (which tends to follow the Textus Receptus).

As far as whole verses removed, Acts 8:37 (on baptism) has virtually no manuscript authority except for a few late manuscripts. 5/6 editors leave it out. So do Darby and Grant. So does every other Greek or English text I could find, except it’s in the NKJV, although its own Greek-English interlinear leaves it out. Same with the last 15 words of 1 John 5:7, etc.

The fact is, by the honest use of all the Hebrew and Greek texts available today, the KJV equals or exceeds the NIV as two of the most inaccurate, misleading translations around, although in either case we’re only talking about perhaps 1-2 percent of the entire text. The

many thousands of word-changes in the KJV-version of the New Scofield Reference Bible have brought the accuracy of that version to exceed the accuracy of NIV and about equal the NKJV, at least in my opinion.

But many people who would never claim its perfection are very comfortable with the KJV and prefer to use it because they have been brought up with it and learned verses from it. They know where the errors are, or have marginal notes that make the needed corrections. We have no quarrel with these people. One reason I use the NKJV is it maintains the flow of the KJV and most of its words, thus not confusing those who are following with KJV Bibles. As we’ve said, the New Scofield KJV has improved its accuracy to essentially the same as the NKJV by changing thousands of words, and thereby has also improved its readability to some extent.

But even though they are over 100 years old, there still are no translations as accurate as the JND and the FWG *Numerical Bible*. It’s too bad William Kelly didn’t do a full translation because he was *the* elite Hebrew and Greek scholar among so-called “brethren.” But he evidently felt there was little he could improve on since JND already had published an outstanding translation. Many of Kelly’s commentaries contain his own very accurate translation.

I personally use the NKJV, as I’ve said, because it is less offensive to those who love the KJV, and also because it is in modern English. It grates me to use incorrect English: “Him that cometh” simply shouldn’t be used if one wants to communicate across a broad age-band, when “He who comes” is just as correct, doctrinally. This example could be multiplied hundreds of times. Think, for example, of the KJV’s “Quit you like men be strong” (1 Cor.16:13). The NKJV says, “Be brave, be strong.” The little more word-by-word NASB says, “Act like men, be strong.” To this day I wouldn’t understand the KJV if I hadn’t looked up the word.

The only true argument that can be raised as to using the KJV is its thee/thou/ye/you. Part of the argument is correct, part incorrect. The “t’s” are singular and the “y’s” are plural. “I say unto thee (singular), ye (plural) must be born again” (Jn.3:7). This is lost in all modern translations. (I would like to see them bold the plural “you’s” in these translations. I’ve suggested it, but have been turned down.) But, to me, this problem is easily overcome by the reader if he has a KJV and a pen. Second, reverence is often argued, but wrongly, in the use of Thee/Thou when referring to God. There is no intended reverence to “thee/thou” since the KJV uses thee/thou of men saved and unsaved, of Christ, of God

the Father, and even of Satan (Job 1:7-8; Zech.3:2; Mt.4:10; 16:23). It was simply how they wrote almost 400 years ago. Nothing special in reverence was meant. It is only in the belief-system of certain individuals, and if they want to speak or write that way, it is perfectly alright, as long as it's not forced on others by preaching or edict.

When there is any question of accuracy I use the JND. For example, as we've discussed several times over the years, the NKJV uses the KJV high-church "rule over you" when speaking of elders. The Greek very clearly is "take the lead among you" — quite a difference! A *ruler* has authority and *orders* certain behavior; a *leader* is a companion who *shows* the right way. His only authority is the moral authority of the Word.

Lesser-Known Modern Translations

The Roman Catholic "new" Bible is pretty good if you ignore its high-church notes. It's called the *New American Bible* (NAB) — not the NASB! Most truth is clearly presented if it were only read and believed.

Many of the multitude of lesser-known translations to hit the market in recent years are so interpretative by the group that did the translation that they are dangerously inaccurate. All translations have to be somewhat interpretative to make Greek-Hebrew idioms clear. Think of translating the English idiom, "You are pulling my leg" into German. We would want them to understand "You're kidding me," not actually pulling on someone's leg. But we would want to use more word-for-word translations for our serious Bible study such as the Darby, Grant, NASB and NKJV translations, somewhat in that order. The NASB, although generally very good in my opinion, relies too much on the Alexandrian (Nestles) text. For example, in John 1:18, "Only begotten God ..." hardly makes sense. Only 1 of the 6 Stephens-text editors say "God." The Majority Text says "Son," but the Nestles Text says "God."

I encourage everyone to get a JND translation and use it for serious study. It's money well spent! Also please buy one or two Greek-English texts and some reference books. My favorite two reference books (if I had to have only two) are Vine's *Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* and Strong's *Concordance with Dictionary of Hebrew and Greek Words*. Another helpful but less known reference book is Smith's *Greek-English Concordance of the New Testament* where the Greek words (which are tied to the Strong's Concordance numbering system) are put in a spread-sheet format, giving for each Greek word, the Bible books where it is found

down one side and the various English translations of that word across the top. The cells contain the actual references (like 11:3; 14:10). Another excellent reference work which Bob and I can highly recommend for its doctrinal accuracy is Morrish's "New and Concise Bible Dictionary." "Unger's Bible Dictionary" is more modern and more complete than Morrish in *historical* fact.

Although I know its popularity and ease of reading, and although it is mostly fine, one needs to be very careful in making a serious doctrinal stand based on the NIV (just as one has to be careful of doing the same with the KJV). It is the most interpretative of the four most-used translations in conservative Christianity (the KJV in its various forms, NASB, NKJV and NIV). Would you eat at a hamburger place if you knew one out of every thousand hamburgers cooked there was contaminated with E-coli bacteria? Would you argue, "Most of these hamburgers are perfectly good and *very* tasty"?

Please stay far away from paraphrases such as the *Taylor Living Bible*. One wants what *God* says, not what man *thinks* God said. In this case, and with most of the other "modern" translations, it may be like one out of ten-to-a-hundred hamburgers are contaminated, in my opinion. One needs to be *very* careful with God's Word!

Conclusion

I'm happy to be reasonably familiar with the KJV. I was brought up with it. Although some of the more modern translations now have their own comprehensive concordances, much of the classic and very reliable reference material is KJV-based. Also, we owe a debt of gratitude to King James and his editors who brought out the best English translation some 400 years ago, and millions have been saved and strengthened and have lived godly lives through reading it and its revisions down through the centuries. But God has allowed many more manuscripts to become available over those 400 years. I am very thankful for the upgrade made to the KJV text by the editors of the New Scofield Bible. But I consider it an irrational, non-scriptural belief that the KJV in any form is virtually inspired—the inerrant Word of God for the English-speaking world. All rational evidence is to the contrary.

RPD