

SEVERAL SHORT ARTICLES ON THE BIBLE

Not All Bible Translations are Equal

Not all Bible translations are equal. I was doing some research for my Easter sermon and noticed how significantly different Revelation 5.5 is translated in the New Living Translation (NLT). In the NLT Jesus, the Lion of Judah, is described as the heir to David's throne; whereas, in the KJV, NKJV, NASB, ESV, and others the Lion of Judah is described as the Root of David.

The words "root" and "heir" clearly do not mean the same thing. Now there must be a reason why previous translation committees did not use the word heir or something very similar. Instead, they chose to use root. *Rhiza*, root, in the Greek has a double meaning: it can be talking about that which proceeds before the plant and it can be talking about an offshoot. The root is in the ground underneath the plant- it existed before plant. The root will be growing before you ever see a plant or tree. Likewise, Jesus existed before David- when the word "heir" is used instead of "root" the preexistence of Christ before King David is completely lost.

The idea that Christ came after David and is a descendent of David by blood is not supernatural per se; however, the idea that the one that came after David was before David is special and supernatural and highlights the uniqueness of Christ as God.

While it is true that *rhiza* does at times speak of being an offshoot or branch, it seems best to not interpret the verse in such a way that forces a meaning upon the text; instead, a good word for word translation like the KJV does its best to give the reader a literal rendering—root in this case—and allow the interpretation to be determined through prayer, mediation and additional study.

Herein is the difference between a word-for-word translation (KJV, NKJV, NASB, ESV) and a thought-for-thought translation. The NLT does not make any attempt to be accurate in the word for word rendering of the text. The NIV is somewhere in the middle. Give me a literal translation and let me study the text. At the present time, I can't read the Greek, but I can study the English, can't you?



KJV Onlyism: An Unnecessary Divide

There is a small, albeit outspoken, minority of Baptists who are confused on an important issue. With great conviction, they purport what they believe to be a biblical truth. Unfortunately, they do so with no biblical evidence. This doctrine that they preach with great exuberance has found a name in fundamentalist circles: "King James Onlyism."

This should be of great concern to anyone who is adamant about the authority of the Word of God.

Independent Baptists have consistently been reactionary preachers. When some new evil has found its way into modernity or post-modernity, we have been militant in our stance against it. We are not called "fighting fundamentalists" for nothing. And throughout the years, our stance has often been correct and necessary.

In the last few decades, the Christian market has been flooded with numerous new Bible translations. A few have been very good literal translations. Some have been very poor. It has become imperative that pastors and church leaders clearly teach the difference between the two.

However, some Baptists have decided to forgo teaching the difference between good and poor translations, and have adopted a more severe stance; namely, that the King James Version is the only perfect translation of the Bible.

The KJV only stance is not very old. In my library I have a book by Jack Hyles, a very influential Baptist pastor in the late 20th century. In this book on the study of the Revelation, Pastor Hyles corrects the King James Bible with phrases like “better translated.” The book was written in 1967. Pastor Hyles later changed his position, and in the last two decades of his life, was one of the most vocal leaders of the KJV only charge.

His conversion, and the conversion of many others, to the KJV only position was an overreaction to the introduction of some poor modern translations—the NIV is an example. They were correct in pointing out the errors in the NIV, just as we should be cautious of the TNIV, NLT or The Message. These are paraphrases and should be read as such.

King James Onlyism has evolved since its inception around 30 years ago. In the small Baptist circles where it is perpetuated, it has become something of a litmus test, unfortunately. KJV only churches are known to spend extraordinary amounts of preaching and teaching time defending the honor of their favorite translation and less time on things of more importance, i.e. **the gospel of Jesus Christ**. They routinely break fellowship with other believers over this singular issue, and end up doing more harm than good.

They label anyone who retranslates the KJV into more accurate and clear wording a “bible corrector.” This is both a serious, and usually unsubstantiated, claim.

The point that needs to be understood and emphasized is that the teacher is **not correcting the Bible**—he is correcting the particular word selected by the translation committee.

Furthermore, 400 years have passed since the translators converted the ancient Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic words into the Queen’s English. The English language is a constantly evolving organism. 400 years has produced countless significant changes in our figures of speech, colloquialisms, and common definitions. These changes must be accounted for. That is what a preacher, who wants to accurately teach the inspired Word of God, must do.

And sometimes the Bible teacher must say “No, the translators were not perfect; they were not inspired, and they didn’t get it right.” We are on very dangerous ground when we elevate the translation of a 17th century linguist over the original intent recorded by the Apostle Paul.

John R. Rice repeatedly pointed to Acts 12.4 as a classic example where the translation scholars were not perfect and chose to translate the Greek word *pascha* which means “Passover” as “Easter.”

We can’t go back and ask them why they did this. We know that *pascha* occurs 29 times in the New Testament and 28 of those times it was rendered Passover. We also know that when we examine the same verse in any other Bible it is not rendered “Easter.”

Now this is what it comes down to this for the **reasonable** person—there are only two possible scenarios.

1. A person believes by faith that the translators and everyone who subsequently has been involved in the changes that have occurred with the AV, since 1611, have all been inspired and uniquely led by the Holy Spirit unlike any other group of translators.

Or,

2. These godly scholars made a mistake and should not have selected the word Easter for the Jewish Festival of Passover.

The extreme minority position clings tightly to the first scenario. “Easter” for some reason was

the perfect choice and **not a single group of translators since 1611** have got it right. In this case, the KJV corrects the Greek NT and it is now held in a higher position of authority. The BBC Articles of Faith do not support scenario 1 because the church articles of faith state that the original manuscripts were inspired and we don't have any original manuscripts that contain a Greek word for the holiday "Easter."

Therefore, scenario two is the only position acceptable for BBC. The Bible is perfect, preserved and prized, BUT the translators were not perfect and did not get it right in Acts 12.4.

Passover is the right word and anyone who teaches the holiday Easter is not teaching the Word of God—they may be reading from the Word of God but if they let their people walk away with the understanding of a pagan holiday involving bunnies and eggs, instead, of the correct word Passover—they have not delivered the Word of God.

I Don't Understand what I am Reading

What do you do when you don't understand a verse, passage, parable, narrative, or instruction in your King James Bible or Authorized Version? How do you get a better understanding?

Certainly prayer and meditation is absolutely essential. If you are a Christian, the Spirit of Truth resides in you to guide you in all truth; but should the Christian do anything more than pray and re-read the text over and over again?

What other tools are available to the Christian? What tools should and shouldn't be used? Can the Internet be of any help?

In Nehemiah 8, Ezra sends out men into the congregation to help with the sense and understanding; is there any application to us from this narrative account of what happened 2500 years ago?

On Sunday, Feb. 24, I hope to lead Berean through the field of Nehemiah 8 and glean some very relevant truths for today's Christians from the narrative of Ezra reading the law to the people. If you miss this sermon—go to www.bbcfnc.org and click on the sermon connect icon and watch from the convenience of your home.

Today anyone who speaks ill about a particular rendering of the Hebrew or Greek in the King James Bible is accused of being a "Bible Corrector." This very unfortunate teaching is permeating some corners of the independent Baptist movement.

Somehow and somewhere, someone (and I am really not sure who was the first) began to teach that the translation committee of the Authorized Version was infallible.

This has not always been the case—John R. Rice fought against this obnoxious KJV onlyism that suggests the AV is the authority over the Greek and Hebrew.

Charles Spurgeon stated, "I do not hesitate to say that I believe that there is no mistake whatever in the *original* Holy Scriptures from beginning to end. There may be, and there are MISTAKES of translation — for translators are NOT INSPIRED" [from sermon *The Bible Tried and Proved* MTP Vol 35, Year 1889, pg. 257, Psalms 12:6].

RA Torrey said it like this: "No one, as far as I know, holds that the English translation of the Bible is absolutely infallible and inerrant. The doctrine held by many is that the Scriptures as originally given were absolutely infallible and inerrant, and that our English translation (KJV) is a substantially accurate rendering of the Scriptures as originally given." [Difficulties in the Bible pg. 17].

"Substantially accurate rendering of the Scriptures as originally given" is a great way of putting it and that is why we use the KJV. I would even take it a step further and say an "extremely accurate...." But not perfect.

Fundamentalists have used the KJV Bible to the glory of God for hundreds of years, but it is only within the last three decades that men began to suggest that the KJV translation committee was perfect.

We do not have to use Bible verses to justify the use of the KJV Bible. I will not suggest something that is impossible to prove from the Bible. We know that all translations are not equal and some should not be called a translation.

John R. Rice wrote, “A perfect translation of the Bible is humanly impossible. The words in one language do not have exactly the same color and meaning as opposite words in another language, and human frailty and imperfection enter in. So, let us say, there are no perfect translations” [Our God-Breathed Book — The Bible pg. 376].

Today, some consider all these men of old wrong—completely wrong.

For 360 years of the post-reformation history the AV was not considered infallible, but today some Baptists are teaching that it is—why?

Could someone please show me a church constitution, statement of faith, confession, covenant or any document from before 1960 that states the KJV or AV is a perfect translation or without error as a translation?

We believe that the Bible is the inerrant, inspired Word of God and that it is our final authority in all matters of faith and practice. For reasons of textual reliability, we believe that God has preserved His Word for the English speaking people in the King James Version of the Bible.

Consider the above statement, “for reasons of textual reliability, we believe that God has preserved His Word for the English speaking people in the King James Version of the Bible.”

What about the Spanish speaking people, and the German speaking people, and the Italian speaking people, and the Korean speaking people, and on and on?

Do we have any biblical justification for believing that God preserves His Word in particular languages for particular groups of people? What I have heard presented is that because English speaking people produced the most missionaries and pastors God chose English. With this in mind will He do this again with another people group in the future? What happens when some Asian speaking people group sends out more missionaries or pastors, will God do the same for them?

What single Bible verse would someone quote to defend English over Spanish or Korean?

Psalms 12:6-8 is quoted in some modern church statements of faith.

How do some use Psalms 12:6-8 to suggest preservation in English?

I challenge anyone to find one commentator, one fundamentalist, or one scholar before 1960 that suggests that the correct application and interpretation of Ps 12:6-8 is a promise to preserve the Bible for a particular people group in a particular language.

My issue is not with the KJV—I love it and use it. My issue is with the failure to rightly divide the Word of Truth.

Pastors teaching their people to believe that some Bible verses can be used to support a particular translation are ridiculous, and this should not be happening in a denomination that has strived to be true to the Bible.

I have no issue with calling out translations and pointing to the errors in the modern versions (I do it from the pulpit), but I do have a significant issue with misapplying Bible verses to justify use of a particular version over another—and if the

failure to “rightly divide the Word of Truth” doesn’t bother you—I must ask why doesn’t it?

James 3:1 My brethren, be not many masters [teachers-like schoolmasters], knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.

James 3:1 is the reason I am so passionate about this. Every person who is using the Bible to teach this false doctrine needs to be reminded that we who teach shall receive the greater condemnation.

A Letter from a Preacher

This morning I received an email asking me to direct soldiers who are PCSing (moving) to community X to independent Baptist church XYZ. Obviously before I can make such a recommendation I have to investigate, so I did what I would expect every member of BBC to do. I went to their website and pulled up their statement of faith. I copied what their website said for your review. Item number one dealt with the Word of God. I appreciated that. Communicating one’s stand on the Bible in the beginning is very important. So let’s take a moment and examine this statement and see what we think. Now BBC uses the KJV and believes it to be a very good literal word for word translation of the Bible. Our Articles of Faith makes it clear that the KJV is the Bible we use, but this article of faith from church XYZ communicates a different message. Let me show you what I mean.

Church XYZ

WHAT WE BELIEVE

1. ABOUT THE SCRIPTURES. *We believe that only the Authorized King James Version (1611) is the inspired, preserved, and infallible Word of God.*

First, I have to wonder why are we including the 1611 date? The 1611 AV KJV Bible is not readily available for purchase. It is impossible to get it in a good study Bible. Furthermore, the font types, character variations and different spellings would make it nearly impossible to read and comprehension would be exceptionally low.

Second, why would one include the 1611 date when the 1611 AV KJV was published and distributed with the Apocrypha? It had 80 books not 66 books. Now I know this preacher doesn’t have the Apocrypha in his preaching Bible, and I am sure he does not reference any of the Apocrypha books, but it is important to realize that a direct reference to 1611 implies something. But what is the point of pointing someone to a date that isn’t truly reflective of the Bible the church uses? BBC uses the KJV but not 1611. We use the most recent revision; the Authorized King James Version on my Logos Bible software is dated 1769.

Third, notice what is inspired, preserved and infallible—the 1611 is inspired, preserved and infallible. The translators were inspired, but there isn’t a single Bible verse that justifies this statement. The original authors of the 66 canonical books were the ones inspired. That’s what the Bible teaches. There are NO prophetic references to a time in the future in which God would inspire one particular group of



translators unlike he has or ever will inspire such a group. Be careful joining a church in which the article of faith cannot be substantially supported by multiple scriptural references.

Fourth, the AV KJV is in English. Where is the scriptural support justifying God's exceptional love for English speaking people over and above all other languages? BBC has a Spanish body of Christ within the body of Christ—according to the above statement, only English speaking people have access to the inspired, preserved and infallible Word of God. How can this be? We also have a Korean Pastor in our congregation. Am I to tell him that unless he learns English and has a KJV Bible in his hands as he preaches he too cannot stand on the inspired infallible Word of God? What arrogant position. Where is the Bible proof that God is a respecter of English speaking people above others? Where are the prophetic references indicating God would in the future do something special in 1611 unlike anything he had previously done or would do again with a group of translators? I have heard all the arguments that God has used and blessed the KJV. I will submit to you that German scholars could have said the same thing concerning Martin Luther's biblical translation work in German. You can also be sure that there is a Korean Bible that God is blessing beyond the scope of the KJV in Southeast Asia as His Word is accurately translated into hundreds of languages all over the world, and it is NOT returning VOID.

What about when Jerome translated the Greek NT into Latin—what was that?

What about when Jews translated the Hebrew OT into Greek creating the Septuagint often quoted and referenced by Jesus and the Apostles—what was that?

What about the Tyndale Bible? What about the hundreds upon hundreds of Baptist preachers who use the NASB—are they all also NOT using something that is inspired and infallible? Notice very carefully the statement above uses the word ONLY. ONLY means ONLY.

There are some serious holes in the above statement of faith that should serve as significant red flags.

One must ask what other personal preferences will this preacher attempt to make authoritative as a matter of doctrine without sufficient Scriptural support. If he is willing to do it with his favorite translation, what is going to stop him from doing the same with a particular flavor of music he prefers or what about a particular style of dress—where does it end?

In Galatians 2, Paul confronted Peter to his face. Preachers who are declaring something as Scriptural which isn't must be confronted. A favorite or preferred translation is fine and acceptable, but don't take it too far.