
**THE
AUTHORISED
VERSION**

*What Today's Christian
needs to know about
The Authorised (King James)
Version*



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What Today's Christian needs to know about The Authorised (King James) Version

In 1978 a man walked into a Christian bookshop and asked for a King James Version Bible. The salesman was reluctant to sell him one; nobody with any sense used the antiquated King James Version. The salesman gave his sales pitch for the modern versions, but the man remained unconvinced. Finally the salesman used his final tactic: 'You wouldn't wear four-hundred-year-old shoes, would you? Then why use a four-hundred-year-old Bible? Use one of these modern versions; let God speak to you in your own language.'

A number of years have passed, and now that salesman uses the Authorised (King James) Version. He has discovered, as have many today, why after four hundred years the Authorised Version is still the most popular and revered translation available in English, and why, even if it were not the most popular and most revered, it would be the translation he would use and recommend.

Of course, the salesman did not change from his modern version to the Authorised Version simply because tradition dictated that he should, nor solely for seemingly 'spiritual' reasons. Instead he had to be convinced that

the Authorised Version is technically as well as spiritually superior to other translations; and convinced he is.

The Superiority of the Text

The first area in which the salesman needed convincing was that of the superiority of the texts upon which the Authorised Version is based. Modern scholars had told him that the Authorised New Testament was translated from faulty Greek manuscripts.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the development of Biblical studies and the discovery of many manuscripts more ancient than those upon which the King James Version was based, made it manifest, that these defects are so many and so serious as to call for revision of the English translation.¹

F. F. Bruce is quoted as sharing this sentiment.

"The principal defect of the Authorised Version is one for which the translators cannot be held responsible. In the New Testament especially, the text they used was an inferior one."²

The New Testament did not bear this testimony alone. The Old Testament of the Authorised Version, based upon the Hebrew Masoretic Text, was classified as inferior because it did not place ancient translations of the Hebrew text, such as the Greek Septuagint and the Latin Vulgate, on the same level as the Hebrew in translation. This the salesman believed; after all, scholarly men had said it was so.

But then the salesman considered the work of other modern scholars. Many modern scholars, it seems, have trouble accepting that what God said in His Word is true in all of its aspects. Since science has 'proved' evolution, modern man has reinterpreted Genesis to include thousands of millions of years of time to incorporate evolution. Since scholars have studied man to understand how his mind and emotions function, modern man has warped Scripture to incorporate modern psychology—a psychology that denies the sinfulness of man and thus the need for the Saviour. Textual criticism has suffered the same fate at the hands of modern man. No longer is the Bible presumed to be correct and inerrant in all its statements, even down to the individual words. Instead, the Bible is presumed to be just another piece of literature, to be 'corrected' according to the standards held by current scholarship.

On the other hand, the Greek Received Text, upon which the New Testament of the Authorised Version is based, was produced at a time

when men accepted the Bible as the inspired, errorless Word of the living God; whether working on the Greek text itself, or translating that text into English or any other language, they treated it as the very Word of God. They appreciated that through this Book, God was speaking to His people; thus they were careful not to allow theories outside the realm of Christianity to enter into their work. In this day and age, even many who believe in the inerrancy of the Scriptures have accepted theories of textual criticism and translation that are inconsistent with inerrancy.

Principles of Translation

With this basis, the Authorised Version translators entered into the work to which God, through King James, had called them. Because they were translating the very Word of God, they translated as much as possible word-for-word, producing a literal rendition of the Greek. They based the English Old Testament upon the Hebrew Masoretic Text, using the ancient translations of the Hebrew as aids when the Hebrew was obscure, but remembering that these were translations only, and not the language into which God had given His Word to the people of Israel. The Authorised Version translators continued in the textual tradition which the church had used and accepted for hundreds of years. In doing so, they continued the solidarity of both original language texts and also of earlier English translations upon which they based their work.

As careful as the Authorised Version translators were to translate word-for-word, there were occasions in which words had to be added in order to give clarity to the English translation. The translators did not just add words indiscriminately; these words were implied by the Greek and Hebrew, although not found in their explicit forms. The translators took care to let the reader of Scripture know that these words were added; they placed the words in italic script rather than in the print of the regular text. Thus the reader could be certain of what was before him in his Bible; he would know that the words in italic script were, perhaps, open to interpretation. This upheld the Reformation doctrine of the 'priesthood of all believers'; each believer-priest has the right and privilege—and responsibility—of interpreting the Scriptures for himself under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The translators took further care in their rendering of the Word of God into English. The Hebrew and Greek use different pronouns to distinguish between 'you' singular and 'you' plural. 'Thee' and 'thou' were not in common usage in the 17th century, but found a place in the Authorised Version in order that the English reader of Scripture could know, as the Greek reader did, that Jesus in His conversation with Peter had said that Satan had demanded to sift the disciples ('you') like wheat, but that Jesus had prayed specifically for Peter ('thee'), so that he could strengthen his brethren (Luke 22.31-32). In this day, many Christians are so ego-centric,

more interested in themselves as individuals than in their place as part of the body of Christ, that they view the pronoun 'you' as always speaking to themselves as individuals. Modern translators condemn the use of 'thee' and 'thou' as antiquated, but these pronouns more correctly render the Greek and Hebrew texts and help eliminate the individualism so fervently held by modern man—and even modern Christians—in the last two centuries. (Note also in this regard the use of 'you' plural in Philippians 2.5.)

The Authorised Version translators were even concerned enough with rendering God's Word faithfully that they left some passages ambiguous. Some grammatical constructions, such as the genitive case, could have two different translations; is Ephesians 3.19 speaking of the Christian's love for Christ, or Christ's for His people? This and other structures the Authorised Version translators in many instances left purposefully ambiguous, because God in the Greek and Hebrew had done so. They left to the expositors the work of interpretation according to sound principles of exposition, as well as to the individual reader of Scripture.

The Doctrinal Distinctiveness of the Authorised Version

The Authorised Version translators held to the doctrines of Scripture, and through them the Authorised Version, whether because of the Greek text used or the form of translation employed,

upholds many of the doctrines that modern versions in numerous places miss. The Authorised Version gives the Lord Jesus His rightful place; both His Godhood and His manhood are upheld (Romans 9.5). It upholds the doctrine of inspiration which is substantially weakened in modern versions (Hosea 12.4; 2 Timothy 3.16). It supports the Virgin Birth of Jesus. It correctly defines and translates passages which teach justification by faith alone, one of the most misinterpreted doctrines in all of the Scripture. These and many others the Authorised Version, as the basis for the faith of Christians for four hundred years, correctly and firmly upholds.

Meanwhile, Bible publishers of today are using the present-day ecumenicalism to boost their sales. Rather than working toward the purity of translation by careful selection of translators, the publishers instead work toward 'oneness'. This 'oneness' takes the form of cooperation with varying groups, groups which are religious but not always Christian. It is no longer unusual to find Roman Catholics, Jews, and Unitarians listed among the translators of modern versions. Many will contend that this makes no difference in the actual translation, that these men and women are translating words which can only mean one thing. But for those with an agenda, there are ways in which to display varying doctrines. Thus one finds modern versions that include the worship of Mary, the idea in places that repentance is not necessary for salvation, or that salvation is through Jesus plus works. This 'oneness' has also

changed the blood atonement from a 'propitiation' (an appeasing of God's wrath against sin through Christ's vicarious sacrifice) to merely an 'atoning sacrifice', as is seen in the way in which some versions render Romans 3.25. These problems were avoided in the Authorised Version in that those outside of orthodox Christianity were bypassed when the translators were chosen. In this way the doctrinal purity of God's Word was safeguarded; of all the adverse comments that have been levelled against the Authorised Version, false doctrine is omitted. The Authorised Version is known for its soundness of doctrine, a soundness that has not changed in four hundred years.

Absence of Modern Embellishments

There are a number of things which modern translations do—and often for which they are known—that the Authorised Version translators avoided. One reason was that the Authorised Version did not need devices in order to find acceptance by this group or that; another is that most of the devices used in modern translations tend toward interpretation. One such device is the addition of punctuation such as quotation marks. True, these help the reader see where conversations begin and end; but where do Jesus's statements in John 3 actually end? Some say at the end of verse 15, some at the end of 17, some at the end of 21; the Greek gives no indication, and neither did the Authorised Version translators.

Another device used by modern translators is the interpretation of the names of God, particularly of what is called the Tetragrammaton, His covenant Name as given to Moses in Exodus 3. The Authorised Version translators were careful to point out the times the covenant Name of God was used by printing LORD all in capital letters. This distinguished the Name from the word 'lord', which is used not only for the true God but also by wives in reference to their husbands, and by slaves to their masters. Modern translators, however, have attempted to change LORD, apparently for no other reason than change. This change has come out as 'Sovereign Lord' and other odd forms, none of which is supported by the Hebrew or Greek texts. The Authorised Version translators knew that the Jews in their reverence for the Name of God had in time lost the pronunciation of the Name; rather than speculate as to the correct transliteration or translation of the Name, the Authorised Version translators simply used a word that well applied to God, capitalised it to differentiate it from 'Lord', and left it at that.

The Authorised Version translators could also have capitalised pronouns referring to Deity, but they did not. The main reason for their not doing so is that these pronouns are not capitalised in the Greek and Hebrew texts. They also realised that doing so would be another form of interpretation. In Psalm 37.23, for example, will the Lord delight in the man's way, or the man in the Lord's? It has been rendered both ways

in modern versions. If one capitalises the pronouns in the verse, he ends the ambiguity; but his interpretation might not be the correct one.

A particular problem, found in the New Testament, is the capitalisation of pronouns referring to the Lord Jesus Christ. Some modern translations avoid capitalising pronouns referring to Jesus when the speaker does not seem to believe in the deity of the Lord (Matthew 16.18). This they do to aid the reader in understanding the motives and thoughts of the speaker; but how can one know the heart and mind of a man who has been dead for two thousand years? Regardless, however, of what the speaker thought of Jesus, those thoughts did not make Him any less God. Any capitalisation of pronouns can have the same effect, because often the capitalisation is done on the interpretation of the translator, and that interpretation may be incorrect. It should also be noted that some modern translators, either because they were inconsistent or because they themselves do not recognise Jesus's deity in Messianic passages of the Old Testament, fail to use capital letters when they would be needed (see Psalm 2.7, 45.6-7). Once they begin this kind of interpretation, they must be 100% correct in their assessment or avoid the use of capitalisation altogether.

In this vein, too, is the Authorised Version's consistent use (as mentioned above) of 'thee' and 'thou', as opposed to the modern tendency to use the singular form of the pronoun only in prayer.

As with the capitalisation of pronouns, too often it is the deity of the Lord Jesus that is affected, and that usually detrimentally. Jesus is God; it must be considered, then, how He should be addressed, whether during His days upon the earth, or after His resurrection, or in His pre-incarnation ministry as revealed in the Old Testament. The problem arises, however, as to whom some pronouns refer. The Authorised Version translators were careful to show relationships between pronouns and their antecedents—the words to which the pronouns refer—but only when the Greek and Hebrew did so. Otherwise, the Authorised Version translators left the ambiguity, and left it to the reader to study and meditate on the passage to gain understanding. They also left pronouns such as ‘who’, ‘he’, ‘she’, and ‘they’, in the text rather than substituting the name of the persons to whom the pronouns refer. Many translations substitute a name for an unclear pronoun; this, however, is not only a form of interpretation (and sometimes misinterpretation), but is also unfaithfulness to the Greek and Hebrew texts which have the pronoun rather than a noun. Thus, the Authorised Version translators remained with the words given by God to His people.

One Bible for all of God's People

The Authorised Version translators were careful to translate what was before them. Additionally, they did not seek to translate for a particular group, as those in modern times who aim at Americans with a primary school education, or

Britons with tertiary education, or the deaf, or children. Many of the world's Bible societies and Bible publishers follow the idea of translating for certain social or demographic groups of people with only portions and pieces of the Word of God. Thus, selections aimed at target groups are the new norm for modern translators. ‘According to Eugene Nida, the American Bible Society's executive secretary for translations, a complete Bible does not achieve an equivalent effect nearly so well as does a selection.³ This is not what the translators of the Authorised Version had as their translation theory. The Authorised Version was translated for God; it is His Word, and that is why and how it was translated. Thus the Authorised Version is majestic in style, literal in translation, literary in form.

The translators were careful...to write Biblical English ultimately belonging to no period. This they partly achieved by a superb cadence, the artful placing of words, especially monosyllables, in patterns that enter the ear easily, and linger permanently in the mind and heart. No other translation memorises so well.⁴

All these things the Authorised Version translators did, and these things continue to be used in copies of the Authorised Version printed today. Thus the salesman has, and can provide for others, the same faithful, literal translation of the Word of God that has made such a great impact upon the world during the past four hundred years.

The salesman, however, also found spiritual reasons for using the Authorised Version. One of these is the role of the church in translation. The Authorised Version translators were scholars in their respective fields. But more than that, they were men of God, committed to the doctrines of the Scriptures and to the correct translation of those Scriptures. Too often translation today is not done by men respected by the church who are doctrinally sound, but by men who rest more upon their academic standing. These men do not work under the watchful eye of the church; instead their translation is done under the auspices of publishing companies. Today there

is an artificially produced conviction resulting from marketing techniques and imposed on the churches from without. This wholly modern consensus maintains the Bible publishing industry must now determine the texts of Scripture.

The Church, as Professor van Bruggen has demonstrated (*The Future of the Bible*, 1978), has abdicated her role as guardian of the Bible and has turned such responsibility over to hirelings who market various, conflicting translations to the confusion and disarray of the Church.⁵

The Authorised Version was translated by the best scholars of the day, but men whose lives also reflected a firm conviction that every word they were translating was true, inspired by

God Himself. These men lived at a time when theology was not so flexible and so influenced by philosophies which demand that nothing is true and everything must be judged by standards established by the world. God in His providence moved the events of the early 17th century to ensure that the accepted English translation of His Word would be free of the unsound philosophies that would plague theology in the next four hundred years.

These men also understood something that seems oftentimes to be lacking in the theories and philosophies of modern-day translators, and even in the thoughts of modern man. As with Martin Luther, the Authorised Version translators realised that they could do nothing without the grace of God. They needed His grace to understand what they were translating, because they were not simply translating words: they were translating God's holy Word. Thus the spiritual and intellectual qualifications of men of God are greatly needed to reproduce God's Word in the English language. There can be no separation between spirituality and scholarship; the two must go hand-in-hand. The translator can lack neither. The translators of the Authorised Version had both.

The Timeless Excellence of the Authorised Version

During the one hundred and fifty years that followed its publication, the Authorised Version saw four revisions to correct its slight inaccuracies (a

great benefit over modern versions, most of which have not even been in publication for fifty years). Since then it has withstood the onslaught of its most demanding critics, both non-Christian and Christian. The Authorised Version has stood the test of time, and today is still the international standard for English translations. It has been used by many missionaries over the past several centuries and in most cases was the translation through which they were saved and through which they were called to the mission field. Thus it has impacted the lives of not only English-speaking peoples, but of millions throughout the world and throughout the centuries.

What is more, the Authorised Version has served to protect the English language from the whims of time and man. While many languages have changed so drastically that literature from a mere hundred years ago is no longer within the comprehension of modern men, the widespread use of the Authorised Version has kept the works of great authors such as Shakespeare and Bunyan within reach of men, women and children throughout the English-speaking world. Without a literary standard, the miles of ocean that separate America from Britain would no doubt have given rise to such language changes that the two nations would be more separated than they are now. The use of the Authorised Version on both continents, and indeed wherever English is spoken or read, has played a major part in solidifying the language throughout the world.

With the decline in use of the Authorised Version also comes change in the entire structure of worship used by the church for centuries. Hymns of praise and worship as well as the Psalms, which draw from the majestic language of the Authorised Version, are falling into disuse in favour of choruses and 'Scripture' songs which take a verse, often torn from its Scriptural context, and repeat it over and over mindlessly: this rather than the concentration required by the Psalms and the great hymns written by godly men of past eras. As with the use of modern versions, it is argued that modern songs are easier to understand; but it must be noted that with such ease of understanding also has come a lack of meditation and thoughtfulness to which God in His Word has called His people (Joshua 1.8).

Falling into disuse also are the great creeds which reflect the true Christianity of the Reformation. To those familiar with the Authorised Version, the phrasing of the creeds of the Apostles and Nicea, the great Westminster and London and other confessions—indeed, all the works of our forefathers in the faith—are splendid aids in understanding the Scriptures. But to those who have abandoned the Authorised Version, these as well as the thousands of Bible dictionaries, concordances, encyclopaedias, commentaries, word studies and lexicons are often closed books, as are the works of the Puritans, of Luther and Calvin, of the Hodges and Spurgeon and all of the other great men of God, whose lives displayed a holiness and piety

which the lives of modern writers—and modern Christians—so often lack.

The Authorised Version and the Modern World

Indeed, in a day in which Bible publishers proclaim that we now have God's Word in an English form that anyone can read and understand, it is amazing how little impact these Bibles seem to have on the lives of their readers. Few are the men and women whose chief joy is to meditate upon God's Word. Often the pulpits of the United Kingdom and the United States seem bereft of men who know and love God's Word; the men—and even women, it should be noted—who now presume to preach, find their subjects and inspiration in the newspapers and the world around them rather than in the Scriptures. Many believe that, because the church in the English-speaking world has abandoned the principles of translation which reflect reverence for God and His Word in favour of translations which, by the world's standards, 'communicate', this has given rise to extremes in topical preaching and the relevancy preaching that addresses 'felt needs' rather than God's standards. Today preaching revolves around the emotional needs—true or perceived—of the congregation rather than true, God-centred exposition of the Word of God.

Gone, too, are the great periods of revival during which God touched the lives of millions. Today, despite the message of salvation going out

to millions through the mass media through translations in easy-to-understand English, there is little conversion of the lost and the revival of spirituality so desperately needed by the church on both sides of the Atlantic and around the world. As the Authorised Version has fallen out of favour, so seemingly has the whole concept of God-sent revival.

One reason for this may be the seeming lack of authority of the modern versions. One excellent feature of the Authorised Version has been its 'ring of authority'. Perhaps it is just from habit, or perhaps something more, but to dignify a statement with 'Thus saith the Lord' carries much more weight than the mere 'God says'. The former seems to carry with it the strength of the prophetic utterances of those whom God used to bring forth His Word; the latter could just as easily have come from the daily newspaper. The Authorised Version, with its majestic English style and its reverence for the original Author, communicates not only words and thoughts, but power and boldness, so needed by the church of our day.

There is a paradox surrounding the Authorised Version. While in one moment proponents of modern versions attack the Authorised Version in any area they can find that does not meet their standards—its language is archaic, its style antiquated—in the next moment they compare their versions to it, using the Authorised Version as the shining standard by which all other versions are to be judged. In those passages from

the Authorised Version most familiar to the world, modern translators tend to conform to the Authorised Version's form and flow. While denigrating the Authorised Version's Greek text, they seek to conform their versions to it by adding verses found in the Received Text but not in the modern critical texts. Thus, while pointing out what they find as the Authorised Version's shortcomings, by their comparisons to it they display the high regard and reverence they realise the English-speaking peoples of the world hold toward the Authorised Version.

Even the enemies of the Authorised Version admit that the Authorised Version translators had a gift for discerning how language is to be used to express truth, much the same as a melody can express the same truth as words—a happy tune with grave lyrics can be painful to the ear and mind; a love song with a pleasingly happy melody enraptures the hearers to identify with the song and express fondness for their beloved ones more readily. The Authorised Version translators not only could translate words correctly, but could phrase those words in such a way that truth is communicated majestically and is remembered.

In the fully spiritual realm, many today are recognising an aspect of the Authorised Version's superiority over other translations that is often dismissed as 'primitive' by modern man. Just as Job's plight is known to be attacks by the enemy of the Faith to discredit

God's servant, so many today see the attacks on the Authorised Version as coming from the enemy. This is not to say that the Authorised Version is to be esteemed above the Greek and Hebrew texts, as some would say who believe the Greek and Hebrew can be corrected to what is found in the English. It is to say, however, that God has richly blessed this translation of the inspired texts for four hundred years, and that the attacks against it—coupled with the modern degeneration, not just of the church as a whole, but of individual Christians—are not mere arguments from scholarly men but attacks, as those against Job by his three friends, from the enemy himself. In light of the state of this modern world, it is not an option that should be overlooked. If true, not only must the battle to preserve the Authorised Version take a more fervent course, but the proponents of the Authorised Version can rejoice in the importance even the enemy of the Faith has placed in this beautiful old translation.

God's Word Unchanging

Thus the Authorised Version stands today as a beacon of light in a world growing darker by the day. As a faithful translation of the true texts of God's Word, it continues strong, proclaiming God's message to a lost and dying world. It stands ever true, unchanged by the whims of man. Now the salesman urges his customers toward the Authorised Version, and for all of the above reasons. He now has a faithful and reliable Bible to offer them; and he does not have to change his argument with each new

translation that is produced by the whims of men. Now, when a man longs for the Word of God, the salesman can hand him a trustworthy Bible and stand upon its Author's statement, 'Blessed are

they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled' (Matthew 5.6).

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Endnotes

1. *The Bible: Revised Standard Version* (n.c., England: William Collins Sons & Co., Ltd., 1952), p. iii.
2. Jakob van Bruggen, *The Future of the Bible* (Nashville, TN, USA: Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers, 1978), p. 21, quoting F. F. Bruce, *The English Bible*, p. 127.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
4. Steve Eng, preface to *The Majority Text: Essays and Reviews in the Continuing Debate*, Theodore P. Letis, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Institute for Biblical Textual Studies, 1987), p. v.
5. *Ibid.*, forward by David Otis Fuller, p. ii.

NOTES