# WHY WE USE THE KING JAMES VERSION OF THE BIBLE

By Dr. Richard Flanders

Ours is a church that has decided to stick to the old "King James Version of the Bible. The multiplication of "modem language" English Bibles is one of the most important religious phenomena of recent years. It is our view that the production of these new translations has served to undermine the spiritual foundations of our country and weaken the message of her churches. The new versions are not really better than the old one. The abandonment of the King James Bible by churches has not been a good thing. We are going to keep the old Bible for several compelling reasons.

### 1. Theological Reasons

Some new Bibles are dangerous because of the theological bias of their translators. The Revised Standard Version of the Bible was presented to the public as a completed work in *1952.* It was authorized by the notoriously liberal National Council of Churches. The unbelieving bias of the majority of the translators is evident in such readings as Isaiah 7:14.

*"Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold a young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."* (Revised Standard Version)

The difference between this reading and the way the verse reads in the King James Version is very important. The old Bible says that "a *virgin shall conceive, and bear a son."* The liberal bias against the doctrine of the virgin birth of Christ is reflected in the R.S.V. translation of this verse. The word used in the original Hebrew has long been understood to mean specifically a virgin in this context, and is incorrectly rendered "young woman" by the R.S.V. To make matters worse, this liberal version translates Matthew 1:23, "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son." This is a correct rendering of the Greek, but with the incorrect translation of Isaiah 7:14 in the same Bible, the impression is given that Matthew misquoted Isaiah. Not only is the doctrine of the virgin birth undermined in the Revised Standard Version, but also the doctrine of the infallibility of the Bible! No fundamentalist Christian would accept as his standard a theologically liberal translation of the Bible like the R.S.V.

The Good News Bible (or, properly, Today's English Version) was translated by neo-orthodox Richard Bratcher, and purposely replaces the word *"blood"* with the word "death" in many New Testament passages that refer to the blood of Christ (such as Colossians 1:20, Hebrews 10:19, and Revelation 1:5). Bratcher also replaces the word *"virgin"* with "girl" in Luke 1:27. His theological bias ruins his translation. Other versions, such as the Phillips translation and the New English Bible, were also produced by liberal or neo-orthodox religionists. For this reason, we will not use them.

### 2. Textual Reasons

Many in the pew do not know that most of the more than 100 new versions of the Bible are not

translated from the same Hebrew and Greek texts that the King James translators used! When somebody says that the translation of a certain verse in the King James Version is "unfortunate," usually the problem is text rather than translation. In the late 1800's, a committee of British and American scholars began work on a revision of the King James Bible. It was decided by them that the Greek text of the New Testament used in the translation of the old Bible was seriously defective. Although that text represented the New Testament as it had been accepted by most Christians over the centuries, it was spurned because it disagreed with some of the older manuscripts. Almost all of the new versions are actually translations of the new Greek text generated by this committee. This new text is significantly different from the traditional text.

When the reader comes to John *7:53* - 8:11 even in conservative translations such as the New American Standard Bible or the New International Version, he finds the whole story of the woman taken in adultery set apart with lines or brackets. A note is placed in relation to the bracketed section that says something like this:

"The earliest and most reliable manuscripts do not have John *7:53* -8:11."

Something similar is done to the great commission in Mark 16:9-20. What the textual critics of a century ago were saying, and what the new versions are saying, is that a large amount of the New Testament read, believed, preached, and obeyed by most of our spiritual forefathers was actually uninspired material added to the text! If this new textual theory were true, it would be revolutionary news to the church. However, the new theory is still very controversial.

Jesus said, *"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."* (Matthew 4:4). Every man needs every word of God! A man's needs will not be met unless he has received *"every word"* that God has spoken. So said the Lord Jesus. Jesus also said, *"Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.* " (Matthew 24:35) With this promise, Christ assured us that the very words we need in order to live as we should would be preserved throughout the ages, through wars and persecutions and disasters, even through the fiery end of creation!
So-called "textual criticism" is more faith than it is science. If one studies the thousands of Greek manuscripts of the New Testament with the belief that God has preserved His Word through the years, he will come to different conclusions than one who studies the same documents with the belief that such preservation is unlikely. Much of the work is guess work and many of the conclusions are debatable. For this reason, thoughtful conservative Christians will decide that it is safer to stay with the traditional text than to adopt the revised one. The only widely used English versions that are translated from the traditional text are the King James Version and the New King James.

### 3. Philosophical Reasons

Christians ought to be interested in having the very words of God, since this is what Jesus said we need! The King James Version is a translation that seeks what scholars call "formal equivalence" to the original text. Others, however, seek "dynamic equivalence." The "formal equivalence" approach seeks to express in English the meaning of the *words* in Greek. The "dynamic equivalence" approach seeks to express the *meaning* of the writer in modern idiom. Anyone who takes seriously our Lord's admonition in Matthew 4:4 will want a "formal equivalence" translation. Several of the new versions do not offer this to us. The so- called "Living Bible" does not even pretend to be a translation of the words. Copies of this book clearly identify it as a "paraphrase" of God's Word. Dr. Kenneth Taylor wrote the Living Bible, and freely admitted

that it was his paraphrase of the Scriptures. In other words, he was putting the Bible into his own words. When a pastor reads John 3:16 to his congregation Sunday morning, that is one thing. When he rephrases it in his own words in order to explain what the verse means, that is another thing. Preachers make it clear when they are reading God's Word and when they are paraphrasing it. It's acceptable to paraphrase the Scripture in explaining it, but it is unacceptable to confuse the paraphrase with the actual Word! The Living Bible is not a Bible; it is Dr. Taylor's paraphrase of the Bible. Please keep in mind the distinction. Sadly, the result of Dr. Taylor's paraphrasing was not always very helpful even though he claims to hold "a rigid evangelical position" in his theology. For example, in I Samuel 20:30 of the early editions, he introduced vile profanity into Holy Writ without warrant from the original text!

The very popular New International Version is a "dynamic equivalency" translation. Its "rival" among "conservative" modem versions is the New American Standard Bible, which is a "formal equivalency" translation (but of the new text). The looseness of the NIV's translation is admitted by the publishers and well-known. The scholars who did the translation believe that it is possible and beneficial to put into English what the writers of scripture *meant* rather than what they actually *said.* One great problem with this approach is the element of *interpretation* that is introduced into the *translation* process. To translate is to put it into English. To interpret is to explain what it means. Experts will say that all translation involves some interpretation even when this is not the object of the translators. However, much more interpretation will go on when the composers of a new version try to convey the thoughts rather than the words. Advertising for the New International Version has often included references to the translation of Job 36:33. Promoters of the N.I.V. ask us which version we would rather read.

*"The noise thereof sheweth concerning it, the cattle also concerning the vapour.* "(King James Version)
"His thunder announces the coming storm; even the cattle make known its approach." (New International Version)

Without question, the NIV reading is clearer. However, which translation represents more accurately the meaning of the Hebrew words in this verse? The truth is that this is a hard verse to read and understand *in Hebrew* as well as in the King James Version! Any good technical commentary will tell you this. The New International makes it clearer than the original Hebrew! Actually, the NIV *interprets* for us what the translation committee *thinks* the passage means rather than what it says. The King James Version tells us what it says and leaves to us, as much as possible, the business of interpreting what it means. This is an important distinction. If we let the translators interpret the Bible for us, we might as well let the priest do it! Our belief in the Priesthood of Believers calls on us to reject highly interpretive versions.

### 4. Cultural Reasons

Proverbs 22:28 says,

*"Remove not the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set."*

In the spirit of the fifth commandment, we are to honor the traditions given to us by the previous generations of our people. Of course, if such tradition contradicts Scripture, we are to reject it in favor of what the Bible says.

*"Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?"*

We never elevate tradition to the same level of authority as Scripture. But we should give our forefathers "the benefit of the doubt." We should also be careful to preserve all we can that is truly Christian about our culture.

The King James Version of the Bible has played an important and unique role in the development of American culture. It could be said that the foundation of our society was Holy Scripture. The theology of the Bible influenced the ideas behind our Constitution. The language of the King James Bible was scattered throughout our early literature. The revivals that formed and changed our culture resulted from the preaching of Bible texts. For many years, Americans knew a certain amount of Scripture by heart. Many or most could quote at least part of the Twenty-Third Psalm, and recognize the Beatitudes, the Ten Commandments, and parts of the Sermon on the Mount when quoted. But now the influence of the Bible has waned significantly. One reason for the decline of Biblical influence has been the loss of a standard version of the Bible.

For most of our first two hundred years as a nation, the King James Version *was* the Bible to most Americans. Even after so-called "modem" versions became popular, the King James Bible continued to be the version memorized, quoted, and publicly read most often. With the demise of the old Bible, our country has been left without a standard text of Scripture. Who can quote the Twenty- Third Psalm any more? Who knows how to repeat the Christmas story? The question always arises: "Which version?" Everybody realizes that our nation's spiritual and moral foundations have been crumbling, but few have understood how the multiplication of Bible versions has contributed to the decay. We will stick with the King James Version out of concern for our country's future, if for no other reason! Why should conservative Christians join in the mad movement to throw away the standards that made our country good? Our Constitution is jealously guarded against change by an elaborate and difficult amendment process. If it takes two-thirds of Congress and three-fourths of the states to change one sentence in the Constitution, why should the churches be so willing to accept great changes in the Bible without serious and extensive "due process"?

### *5.* Practical Reasons

Believe it or not, some of the features most criticized in the King James Bible are among the best reasons to keep it! For example, consider the "thee's" and "thou's." The King James Version was *not* written in the everyday language of people on the street in 1611. It was written in high English, a very precise form of our language. In modem English, the second person pronoun is expressed with one word, whether in the singular or the plural. That word is "you." Most other European languages have both a singular and a plural pronoun in the second person, as well as in the first and third persons. The first person singular pronoun in the nominative case, for example, is "I," while the plural is "we." The third person singular pronoun (also in the nominative case) is "he," while the plural is "they." Modern English, however, has only "you" for all its second person pronoun uses. High English uses "thou" for the second person singular, and "you" for the plural! In this way, the King James Version lets us know whether the scripture means a singular "you" or a plural "you." "Thou" or "thee" mean one person's being addressed, and "ye" or "you" mean several. This feature often helps us interpret a passage.

We also find the use of italics in the old Bible a great help. The translators italicized words they put into the text that do not appear in the original language. The new translations do not do this. We appreciate the integrity of the ancient scholars in letting us know what was added and what was original, and are disappointed that modern translators have let us down in this area.

The matter of quotation marks is also a question of importance. The King James Version does not use them, because the Hebrew and Greek manuscripts do not have them. The reader determines where a quotation begins and ends by the context, and by all other means of interpretation at his disposal. The new versions do not give us the luxury of deciding the extent of quotations ourselves because they have inserted quote marks according to the translators' interpretations of the various passages. John *1:15-18* and 3:27-36 present examples of places in the Bible where the length of the quotation is a matter of interpretation.

Such features make the King James Version the most helpful translation of the Bible in English for the serious reader. Even the "New King James," which is translated from the traditional texts, denies us the practical help of high English, italicized additions, and the absence of quotation marks.

For all of these reasons, it just makes good sense for conservative, Bible-believing churches to keep the old King James Bible as their standard text. The new versions present too many problems and simply are not fit to replace the English version we have trusted for so long. Let's stick with the King James! The movement to abandon it will move us from clarity to confusion, from authority to anarchy, from faith to doubt May we never make such a move!

# 90 UNFAMILIAR WORDS USED IN THE BIBLE

| | |
|---|---|
| afore = before | aforetime = in times past |
| artificer = craftsman | audience = hearing |
| bewrayeth = betrayeth | bondmen = slaves |
| Cast = throw, put | caul = fat |
| charity = love | chide contend |
| cleave = cling | coast = border |
| conversation = lifestyle | deal = part |
| dearth = famine | discomfit = defeat |
| discover = expose | divers = diverse, various |
| emulation = jealousy | ensample = example |
| ere = before | espied = discovered |
| even = evening | forswear = perjure |
| forthwith = immediately | fretting = festering |
| froward = perverse | graven = carved |
| hearken = listen | heave = lift |
| holpen = helped | husbandman = farmer |
| husbandry = farm | kine = cows |
| let = hinder, lease | list = want |
| mammon = money | meat = food, meal |
| meet = fitting, suitable | mingle = mix |
| minish = diminish | morrow = next day |
| nigh = near | ouch = setting |
| ought = any | pecular = special |
| peradventure = perhaps suppose | privily = privately |
| prove = test, try | publican = tax collector |
| purloining = pilfering, embezzling | quick = alive |
| quicken = make alive | remove = move |
| rend = tear | rereward = rear guard |
| save = saving except | seethe = boil |
| selfsame = very same | shew = show |
| singular = special | sodden = boiled |
| sore = greatly | straightway = immediately |
| stranger = foreigner | strawed = scattered |
| succour = help | suffer = allow |
| tell = count | tempt = test, try |
| terrible = awe-inspiring | throughly = thoroughly |
| turtle = turtle dove | twain = two |
| usury = interest | verily = truly |
| victuals = food supplies | want = lack |
| ward = prison | wax = become |
| whence = from where | wherefore = why or therefore |
| whither = where | wist = knew |
| wittingly = knowingly | wont = accustomed |
| wot = know | wreathen = braided |
| wroth = angry | |