

KING JAMES ONLY CONTROVERSY

The King James Version (KJV) *only* controversy can be succinctly stated in the following way: The KJV is the only viable translation because it is based upon the Majority Greek Text (MT),¹ added to this is the fact that God has supernaturally protected the KJV; therefore, all modern translations NIV, NAS, etc., are in error anywhere they disagree with the KJV.

In other words, when a supporter of the KJV only translation speaks of errors in other translations, he means that it does not agree with the KJV; therefore, it is in error. Of course this is an erroneous conclusion, which cannot be supported by the facts, and it is quite misleading to anyone who hears their argument without being aware of the vast textual resources that are excluded from their position. The average person who is not familiar with the vast manuscript evidence or textual criticism, will understand this to mean that translations like NIV, NAS...are not accurately reflecting what was written in the autographs—original manuscripts—of Scripture. However, what the KJV only supporters mean is that these translations do not accurately reflect the KJV, which they believe is equal to not accurately reflecting the autographs.

Let me give the following in order to briefly demonstrate that their conclusions are not based upon Scripture, history or logic.

- I The Basis for the KJV
 - 1 Desiderius Erasmus² Greek Text
 - (1) Erasmus' Greek text is the beginning of what would become known as the Textus Receptus³ (TR) two decades after the publication of the KJV.
 - A He collated it.
 - B He made his best judgment as a classical scholar. Consequently, the Greek text did not fall from heaven.
 - C He accepted some variants and rejected others in order to produce what he considered the best Greek text.
 - D He made textual notes pointing out variants, etc., which is precisely the same thing modern scholars do and are criticized for by the KJV only supporters.

¹ The Majority Text refers to the fact that there are a greater number of Byzantine manuscripts that support the KJV than any other modern translation based on other manuscript evidence including but not exclusively limited to the Majority Text.

² 1466-1536, Dutch humanist, scholar, theologian and writer.

³ *Textus Receptus* is Latin for "received text" (abbreviated TR). The KJV is called the Received Text because it became more popular than other translations and was generally accepted as being genuine or original among the Church of England and other Protestants. It refers first and foremost to Erasmus Greek text, which is the basis for the 1611 KJV.

- E He drew from barely ½ dozen Greek manuscripts in his 1st edition—not counting some he would have examined in England; even with those, it still would have been a small number.⁴
- a It is amazing how well he did with so little.
- F His Greek text went through a number of revisions: 1519, 1522, 1527, and 1535; therefore, when someone defends the Textus Receptus as the only accurate text, one may rightly ask, which text are they defending as the only received text?
- G He made choices about which way to translate words or phrases based sometimes on the Fathers⁵ or a minority of manuscripts. In other words, he used what he thought was the best. This is the same thing that textual scholars do today and something the KJV only supporters criticize. For example;
- a Romans 4:1, the word order was not based on the majority of texts, but the Fathers and the Vulgate.⁶
- b Romans 10:17 he chose to use God instead of Christ, but the Vulgate, a number of the Fathers, and now excellent manuscripts (p46, Alpha) use Christ. He basically guessed stating, “...the voice of God lends more dignity to the words of the Apostle and has a wider application.”⁷
(A) The KJV still includes God
- c Romans 12:11 “serve the Lord” is in his 1st edition but not in the last four. There he chose the rendering “Serving Time”.
(A) This should cause us to ask, “Why did the KJV choose his 1st edition rendering over his next four editions?”
- d Revelation, the last 6 verses are not translated from the Greek, but because Erasmus was pressed for time, he translated them from the Latin Vulgate⁸ into Greek.
(A) Consequently, there were a number of mistakes, and those mistakes continue in the KJV today.⁹
- e Later, new translations from which the KJV drew were from Stephanus and Beza, and both of them used Erasmus text for the basis of their text.
- 2 The KJV is called the Majority Text (MT). However, sometimes:
- (1) They used only *some* of the Byzantine manuscripts.
 - (2) Their text is actually based on a *minority* of the manuscripts that they use; hence, it is not really the majority text.
 - (3) The TR only follows one stream of Byzantine, and at times, it is actually at variance with the majority text.¹⁰

⁴ *The King James Only Controversy*, James White, p.54.

⁵ The Fathers refer to the Church leaders of the first few centuries of Christianity. Some of them walked with the apostles. They wrote voluminously and quoted the Bible repeatedly. Consequently, they are a great resource for textual scholars.

⁶ White p.58.

⁷ Ibid p.58.

⁸ Latin Vulgate is the official text of the Catholic Church. Jerome produced the Vulgate in the 4th century, and it became the text upon which most if not all translations were made until Erasmus.

⁹ White p. 64.

A Hence, the TR is in reality its own text; moreover, it is often found not only in disagreement with modern critical texts but with the MT as well; therefore, referring to the KJV as the MT is misleading.

B Unfortunately, errors in Erasmus' text continue today in the KJV.

- (4) Few, if any, of the MT are early manuscripts.¹¹
- (5) KJV is not the same as Erasmus, Stephen or Beza
- (6) To believe that the TR (from which the KJV comes) is infallible, one must believe that God inspired Erasmus, Stephanus and Beza or at least providentially protected them from error. Of course, this is not supported by the facts mentioned in this synopsis.
- (7) Today's KJV does not have textual notes¹², but the 1611 and some of its successors, as well as Erasmus, did.
- (8) In light of these facts, if it is to be the KJV only, then one may justifiably ask which KJV since the KJV of today is not the same as the 1611 or others since then.

II History of the Received Text (RT)¹³

- 1 When Jerome made the Latin Vulgate in the 4th century, he was severely criticized for being new and radical and referring to variants in texts.
- 2 When Erasmus made a Greek text because the Latin had errors and a Greek text would be better, he was criticized for changing Jerome.
- 3 God using the Vulgate for 1000 years was seen as the sure sign that it is right
- 4 Now, KJV only supporters say the same thing against those who do not support the KJV only position. Their position causes them to summarily reject the host of new textual discoveries made since the translation of the KJV.

(1) So they conclude:

A God could not have let us have a Bible all this time that was not the best; therefore, the KJV is the best.

B God has used the KJV for 400 years; therefore, we should continue to use it.

a However, these arguments are not historically supported in light of the aforementioned facts; a fortiori, Number 1 is actually an unprovable assumption and number 2 is non sequitur—the conclusion does not logically follow from the premise.

(2) If the NIV survives for a hundred years or more, shall we one day have an NIV only movement?

III Conclusion

- 1 The KJV is a wonderful translation, which God has used among the English-speaking world more than any other. We are all, in one way or another, beneficiaries of the KJV.

¹⁰ White p.64.

¹¹ *Introduction to the Bible*, Geisler and Nix, information is found in the discussion of the KJV.

¹² Textual notes are common in translations like the NAS....They are there to let the reader know there is some uncertainty concerning the reading of the original.

¹³ The KJV is called the Received Text because it became more popular than other translations and was generally accepted as being genuine or original among the Church of England and other Protestants. It refers first and foremost to Erasmus Greek text, which is the basis for the 1611 KJV.

- 2 If you choose to use a KJV, you have a good translation; although, I would say it is not the best.
- 3 The lofty and poetic language and style of the KJV serve as constant reminders that one is holding the Word of God.
- 4 However, to stand in the long tradition of translations, which is the genesis for the KJV, one should:
 - (1) Recognize the value of textual scholarship
 - (2) Recognize the value of recent manuscript discoveries
 - A Calvin, Luther and others who used the TR did not reject others, but they used it by default. It was all that they had available.
 - (3) Realize that one can legitimately choose the KJV as their favorite translation, but it is illegitimate to claim that the KJV is the only accurate translation and all others are perversions