

Let the King James Translators Speak

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I confess to loving the King James Version Bible. Like you probably do, I most often use a KJV edition based on the 1769 revision of Benjamin Blayney. However, I do have two copies of the original 1611 edition. I have not been able to learn whether they are Cambridge or Oxford editions. As you are aware, most books have a preface or a foreword or an introduction. These introductions often give valuable information to help the reader understand the book. Both copies of the original King James Bible that I own have the introductory material placed in them by the King James translators. It is a sad and hurtful thing that most of today's Bible publishers no longer include the translators' introductory material in the King James Bibles they print. Since this introductory material is not in the Bibles most of us own and use, the purpose of this article is to acquaint the reader with some of that introductory material provided by the King James translators. The introduction addressed to King James by the translators is brief. But the words addressed to the reader run to eleven pages of small print in my original King James copies. Let us look at some things that the King James Bible translators thought the readers of their Bibles should know. Our quotations are mostly from what they titled, "*The Tranflators To The Reader.*" We have called attention to quotations by using italic type and have kept the old style spelling, inserting [brackets] throughout for clarification of obsolete terms, etc.

First of all the King James translators believed in the Divine inspiration of the Bible. They wrote, "*The originall thereof [original Scriptures] being from heaven, not from earth; the authour being God, not man; the enditer [dictator or*

composer], *the holy spirit, not the wit of the Apostles or Prophets; the Pen-men such as were sanctified from the wombe, and endewed [provided] with a principall [large] portion of Gods spirit...*" Thus they believed what is stated in 2 Peter 1:21: **"For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."** We believe that too!

Second, the translators recognized the importance of Bible translation to ordinary people. They wrote, *"Translation it is that openeth the window, to let in the light; that breaketh the shell, that we may eat the kernel; that putteth aside the curtaine, that we may looke into the most Holy place; that remooveth the cover of the well, that wee may come by [get possession of] the water, even as Jacob rolled away the stone from the mouth of the well, by which meanes the flockes of Laban were watered. Indeede without translation into the vulgar [familiar] tongue [language], the unlearned [those not schooled in Hebrew and Greek] are but like children at Jacobs well (which was deepe) without a bucket or some thing to draw with."* They understood the principle expressed by Brother Paul in 1 Corinthians 14:11: **"Therefore if I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh shall be a barbarian unto me."**

Third, the King James translators had real and valuable insights into exactly what translators can do and what they cannot do. In speaking of the errors that creep into translations for various reasons, they explained why the Old Testament quotations cited by the apostles differed at times from the Septuagint when they quoted it. (The Septuagint is a Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament said to be made by seventy Jewish elders in seventy-two days). The translators wrote: *"...the Seventie [translators of the Septuagint] were Interpreters, they were not Prophets; they did many things well, as learned men; but yet as men they stumbled and fell, one while through oversight, another while through ignorance, yea, sometimes they may be noted [seen] to adde to the Originall [Scriptures], and sometimes to take from it; which made the Apostles to leave them many times, when they [the Seventy] left the Hebrew, and to deliver the*

sence [sense] thereof according to the trueth of the word, as the spirit [Holy Spirit] gave them utterance." The King James translators understood that translators are mere "Interpreters" and not "Prophets" with a new revelation from God. As Baptists today we must regard the King James translators as "interpreters" or "translators" and not "prophets." We cannot regard the King James translators as "prophets" because no prophet of God would have been a member of a idolatrous man made religious organization that taught baptismal regeneration (a false gospel) whose leaders persecuted and killed Baptists, but the King James translators were all members and ministers of the Anglican Church. Old John was the last "revelator." In another place in their introduction to the reader they wrote about the Septuagint again, saying, "*The translation of the Seventie dissenteth [disagrees] from the Originall [Scriptures] in many places, neither doeth it come neere it, for perspicuitie [clarity], gratvitie [seriousness], majestie [dignity or grandeur]; yet which of the Apostles did condemne it? Condemne it? Nay, they used it, (as it is apparent, and as Saint Jerome and most learned men doe confesse) which they would not have done, nor [because] by their example of using it, so grace [approve] and commend it to the Church, if it had bene [been] unworthy the appellation [designation] and name of the word of God.*" This is a most interesting point. They say that even though the Septuagint translation was not perfect and fell far short of the original from which it was translated, the apostles did not condemn it, but rather they used it – though they corrected it in their quotations of it. The King James translators said that use of the Septuagint by the apostles was a recommendation of it to Christians. Little can be said against the Septuagint since the apostles did quote from it – remembering they were able to correct it in certain places because they had the revelatory gift as apostles.

Fourth, the King James introduction mentions the existence of a multitude of very early translations throughout the Roman Empire. Those first generation Christians: "*...provided Translations into the vulgar [familiar] for their Countreymen [fellow citizens], insomuch that most nations under heaven did shortly after their conversion, heare CHRIST speaking unto them in their mother tongue, not by the voyce of their Minister onely, but also by the written word*

translated." Thus it was through the written Word as well as the preached Word that the Lord's congregations were established in the truth down through the centuries. This is helpful information to the Baptist historian. If the King James translators were correct many of the anabaptist groups had the Word of God in their tongues.

Fifth, it is very interesting that the King James translators viewed even the poorest translations of the Bible as being the Word of God – not as merely containing it. They wrote: "*wee doe not deny, nay wee affirme and avow, that the very meanest [inferior in quality] translation of the Bible in English, set foorth by men of our profession (for wee have seene none of theirs of the whole Bible as yet) containeth the word of God, nay, is the word of God. As the Kings Speech which hee uttered in Parliament, being translated into French, Dutch, Italian and Latine, is still the Kings Speech, though it be not interpreted by every Translator with the like grace, nor peradventure so fitly for phrase, nor so expresly [explicit or clear] for sence, every where.*" It is a fact that many sinners heard the gospel from earlier translations – probably some of them inferior ones – and having heard only these poorer translations were nevertheless converted. People were converted before these men produced the King James translation – and we dare to hope that some have been genuinely converted since even by the use of some of the modern inferior translations of the Word of God.

Sixth, the King James translators did not claim to be making a new translation at all. Rather they thought to be making a better one by revising older translations. They said that they were revising the earlier English translations such as the Bishop's Bible in particular (as ordered by King James) and Tyndale's – whose words make up a great portion of the King James New Testament. The King James translators wrote as follows: "*Truly (good Christian Reader) wee never thought from the beginning, that we should neede to make a new Translation, nor yet to make of a bad one a good one... but to make a good one better, or out of many good ones, one principall [great] good one, not justly [only] to be excepted [objected] against; that hath bene our indeavour, that our marke [goal].*" Their claim to be revisionists is more clearly stated in the long

title to the original 1611 King James Bible which says in part, "*THE HOLY BIBLE, Conteyning the Old Teftament and the New: Newly tranflated out of the Originall tongues & with the former Tranflations dilligently compared and revifed* [revised] *by his Maiestes fpeciall* [Majesty's special] *commandment...*" In this they stated they "compared and revised" the "*former Tranflations.*"

Seventh, the translators spoke of the difficulty of translating and of the need for placing alternative readings in the margins. Today we have an abundance of lexicons for both Hebrew and Greek as well as other helps. In those early days of translation helps were scarce if extant at all. The exact meaning of words had to be determined by the context as well as the usage of the word in other places – even in secular Hebrew and Greek writings. It was and is often difficult to know the correct meaning of some words. The King James translators had this to say: "*Some peradventure* [perhaps] *would have no varietie of sences* [senses or meanings] *to be set in the margine,* [margin] *lest the authoritie of the Scriptures for deciding of controversies by that shew of uncertaintie, should somewhat be shaken. But we hold their judgmet not to be so be so sound in this point... There be many words in the Scriptures* [original texts], *which be never found there but once, (having neither brother nor neighbour, as the Hebrewes speake) so that we cannot be holpen* [helped] *by conference of places* [i.e. comparing usages of words in different places]. *Againe, there be many rare names of certaine birds, beastes and precious stones, &c. concerning which the Hebrewes themselves are so divided among themselves for judgement, that they may seeme to have defined this or that, rather because they would say something, the* [than] *because they were sure of that which they said, as S. [Saint] Jerome somewhere saith of the Septuagint. Now in such a case, doth not a margine* [note in the margin] *do well to admonish the Reader to seeke further, and not to conclude or dogmatize* [be dogmatic] *upon this or that peremptorily* [admitting of no contradiction]? *For as it is a fault of incredulitie* [unbelief], *to doubt of those things that are evident: so to determine of such things as the Spirit of God hath left (even in the judgment of the judicious) questionable, can beno* [be no] *lesse then* [than] *presumption. Therefore as S. Augustine saith, that varietie of Translations is profitable for the finding out of the*

sense of the Scriptures [original texts]: *so diversitie of signification* [meaning] *and sense in the margine* [notes in the margins], *where the text* [original Scripture texts] *is not so cleare, must needes doe good, yea is necessary, as we are perswaded* [persuaded].” The King James translators strongly stated their case for the inclusion of marginal notes in their translation – saying such marginal renderings were “*necessary*.” The translators themselves admitted that some words and names were difficult to translate with certainty and so gave us alternate marginal readings in the original King James Version. We think it a shame that the American public has most often been deprived of the complete work of the King James translators. Americans generally do not have the introductory material or the marginal notes thought to be “*necessary*” by the King James translators.

Eighth, the King James translators understood that translation is not mere mechanical word swapping. They wrote as follows on this subject: “*An other thing we thinke good to admonish thee of (gentle Reader) that wee have not tyed our selves to an uniformitie of phrasing, or to an identitie of words, as some peradventure* [perhaps] *would wish that we had done, because they observe, that some learned men some where, have beene as exact as they could that way. Truly, that we might not varie* [vary] *from the sense of that which we had translated before, if the word signified the same thing in both places (for there bee some wordes that bee not of the same sense every where) we were especially carefull, and made a conscience* [were careful or scrupulous], *according to our duetie* [duty]. *But, that we should expresse the same notion in the same particular word; as for example, if we translate the Hebrew or Greeke word once by Purpose, never to call it Intent; if one where Journeying, never Traveiling; if one where Thinke, never Suppose; if one where Paine, never Ache; if one where Joy, never Gladnesse, &c. Thus to minse* [be brief or cut short our comments on] *the matter, wee thought to savour* [taste or smell] *more of curiositie then* [than] *wisedome, and that rather it* [to always use the same word] *would breed scorne in the Atheist, then* [than] *bring profite to the godly Reader. For is the kingdome of God become words or syllables? why should wee be in bondage to them if we may be free, use one precisely when wee may use another no lesse fit, as*

commodiously [handy or serviceable]?" They stated that they were not mechanically bound to one English word for one Greek or Hebrew word.

Ninth, let us consider what the King James translators mentioned last in their introduction. They wrote about their use of old church words. Our research indicates that King James, through the Bishop of London, gave fourteen rules to the translators about how they were to do their work. Rules numbered one, three and four required the translators to substitute certain old church words instead of translating the original words literally. Those three rules are these: 1. "*The ordinary Bible read in the Church, commonly called the Bishops Bible, to be followed, and as little altered as the truth of the original [Scriptures] will permit.*" 3. "*The old ecclesiastical words [religious words used by the Catholic and Anglican priests] to be kept; as the word church, not to be translated congregation, &c.*" and next, 4. "*When any word hath divers [different] significations [meanings], that to be kept which has been most commonly used by the most eminent fathers [old Catholic church fathers], being agreeable to the propriety of the place, and the analogy of the faith [Anglican doctrine].*" In stating that they followed the king's rules, the translators wrote to the reader: "*Lastly, wee have on the one side avoided the scrupulositie [careful correctness] of the Puritanes [Puritans], who leave the olde Ecclesticall words [old Roman Catholic church words] , and betake them [go] to other, as when they put washing for Baptisme, and Congregation in stead of Church...*" Because of this practice sound Baptist preachers down through the four hundred plus years since the King James was translated have had difficulties. They have had to explain the true meaning of those old Roman Catholic words: not only baptism and church, but also other Catholic words such as bishop, deacon, Easter, presbytery, cross, etc. - words that appear in our King James Bibles.

Summing it all up, what we have in the introductory material is a great amount of information which helps us understand the King James Bible. It is a grave loss to us all that this material is no longer included in our Bibles. That loss has resulted in misunderstandings as to what the King James Bible actually says. And it should be noted, that, as far as this preacher is able to learn, none of the popular newer translations remedy this loss. They keep mostly, if not completely,

to the old Catholic words. What a thing it would be if the publishers of modern versions actually translated correctly the Greek words "baptizo," "ekkllesia," "pascha" and "stauros" as well as others. Modern "evangelicals" - including many Protestant Baptists - would probably refuse to buy their Bibles - and their revenues would go down. For the sad fact is that most Baptists do not have an inkling as to the meaning of these Greek words and blithely go about believing Roman Catholic doctrines taught by these "olde Ecclesticall" English words: "baptism," "church," "Easter," and "cross," as well as others. We live in a time where libraries and the Internet make available to us sources so that we can know the truth regarding these and other words. We have no excuse for believing error. Let us rejoice in the freedom that knowing the truth brings as our Lord Jesus said, **"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free,"** (John 8:32). And let us be properly appreciative of the work of the King James Bible translators who told us what they believed and how they made their translation of the Word of God. By means of their own introductory words we can better understand God's Word!