

# THE GOOD HAND OF THE LORD UPON US

¶ *The translators of the 1611 King James Bible do not support arguments for modern versions against the King James Bible.*



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## **Introduction**

As the King James Bible went to the press in 1611, a dedication was written by Thomas Bilson, and an admonition to the reader was written by Miles Smith. These two works in combination show the intention of the translators in their work, and explain various principles in their labouring to present of the Word of God.

In time, with the rise of modernistic thinking which rejects the superiority of the King James Bible, there has been a deliberate aim by some to attempt use the translators' words against themselves, or to use their ideas to try and counteract the argument that the King James Bible should be retained in priority.

There are, it seems, differences in the way people approach the translators' words. Some exhibit spite against the King James Bible and its supporters, others might be mistaken in their reading, and yet others might be ignorant of these matters.

It could, of course, be possible to commentate upon and analyse both these writings of the translators, but it is more instructional to highlight the main points which support a proper view, and to refute claims which certain modernists make which are against both the words and the spirit of the makers of the 1611 Bible.

These two works are called "The Epistle Dedicatory" and "The Translators to the Reader". Quotations from them here are from the Cambridge Edition.

### **One more exact translation**

The directive of how the translation was to be executed was on the following lines:

One of their instructions being, "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 will permit."

Another, “14. These translations to be used, when they agree better with the text than the Bishops’ Bible: Tyndale’s, Matthew’s, Coverdale’s, Whitchurch’s [Great], Geneva.”

In practice, this meant that the original languages were the basis, as the title page proclaims, “TRANSLATED OUT OF THE ORIGINAL TONGUES: AND WITH THE FORMER TRANSLATIONS DILIGENTLY COMPARED AND REVISED”.

Thus, coming out of the original languages means leaving them behind, and designating former Protestant English Bibles as “former”, which means that such things are replaced or superseded. Thus, altogether, the King James Bible would be supersuccessionary to all forms of Scripture extant in or prior to 1611.

This can be shown by other quotes, where they say, “Neither did we think much to consult the translators or commentators, Chaldee, Hebrew, Syrian, Greek, or Latin; no, nor the Spanish, French, Italian, or Dutch; neither did we disdain to revise that which we had done, and to bring back to the anvil that which we had hammered”, and again, “For by this means it cometh to pass, that whatsoever is sound already, ... the same will shine as gold more brightly, being rubbed and polished; also, if any thing be halting, or superfluous, or not so agreeable to the original, the same may be corrected, and the truth set in place.”

These statements confirm that whatever was agreeable to the original in their judgment, whatever was most bright, sound and correct, was true. And the truth was set. Thus, the truth stands in the King James Bible.

When we come to the wording in the Dedication which states that their work is one more, implying last, and exact, meaning that nothing further can be done, the modernist attempts to alter the entire meaning.

They write, “that out of the Original Sacred Tongues, together with comparing of the labours, both in our own, and other foreign Languages, of many worthy men who went before us, there should be one more exact Translation of the holy Scriptures into the *English Tongue*”.

The phrase “one more exact translation” must mean finality in both execution of making of Bibles, and finality in the exactness of the message communicated in English.

This led them to state, “And now at last, by the mercy of God, and the continuance of our labours, it being brought unto such a conclusion, as that we have great hopes that the Church of *England* shall reap good fruit thereby”.

### **We are poor instruments**

The King James Bible translators were not inspired men. However, this does not mean that God was not able to providentially supply the right men with the right knowledge the right resources at the right time so that they rightly judged what actually was the Word of God.

Those who take the view of humanity being more powerful than God, or that God did not use men in any way, or that error is supreme, are taking a view which was voiced by the Roman Catholic enemies of the translation.

These accusations are voiced by the modernists who are against the King James Bible being used alone.

“So that if, on the one side, we shall be traduced by Popish Persons at home or abroad, who therefore will malign us, because we are poor instruments to make God’s holy Truth to be yet more and more known unto the people, whom they desire still to keep in ignorance and darkness”.

The translators saw their work as making “God’s holy Truth to be yet more and more known unto the people”. This is quite the opposite view of those who are against the King James Bible. They argue that it confounds the sense, and that its hard words are like treacherous rocks waiting to shipwreck people.

It may be that some fall into the other category, who have doctrinal biases which they believe will be undermined, “on the other side, we shall be maligned by selfconceited Brethren, who run their own ways, and give liking

unto nothing, but what is framed by themselves, and hammered on their anvil”.

Those who love to focus on attacking the doctrine of the divine right of kings, or on child baptism, or on bishopricks, or on other ideas might have no end of empty accusations to make against the King James Bible. Yet, the translators were not interested in making a partisan work, for they described their approach as “honest and Christian endeavours” and they expected “bitter censures and uncharitable imputations.” How remarkable that such accusations still exist today against the king, the translators, their state of Christianity, etc.

The translators did not see themselves as “poor instruments”, but saw themselves in the providential continuum “to make God’s holy Truth to be yet more and more known unto the people”, and clearly identified that the enemies’ real objective was to have the people kept “in ignorance and darkness”.

### **It is sealed**

The King James Bible is not in ordinary English, but it is not incomprehensible either. Especially if the Holy Ghost is present, for He is the one who guides people into all truth.

There are some who claim that the King James Bible is not a translation into present English. They deride it as “Old English”, or as being “archaic”, and other such misnomers.

They even boldly quote the translators, as though they would wish their work to be “updated”, or “made afresh” —

“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 curtain, that we may look into the most holy place; that removeth the cover of the well, that we may come by the water; even as Jacob rolled away the stone from the mouth of the well, by which means the flocks of Laban were watered. Indeed without translation into the vulgar tongue, the unlearned are but like

children at Jacob's well (which was deep) without a bucket or something to draw with".

In reality, the Scripture is spiritual, as Jesus said in John 6:63, and the understanding of it is by study and the right kind of learning. "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." (2 Timothy 2:15).

The translators go on to say, which directly answers the false claims of some against the supposed difficulty or hazards of the King James Bible, "as that person mentioned by Esay, to whom when a sealed book was delivered with this motion, Read this, I pray thee, he was fain to make this answer, I cannot, for it is sealed."

The real problem is the sealing of the book. This is related to the human will.

"Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where *is* the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk *therein*. Also I set watchmen over you, *saying*, Hearken to the sound of the trumpet. But they said, We will not hearken." (Jeremiah 6:16, 17).

"For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with *their* eyes, and hear with *their* ears, and understand with *their* heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them." (Acts 28:27).

### **Make that better which they left so good**

"Yet for all that, as nothing is begun and perfected at the same time, and the latter thoughts are thought to be the wiser: so, if we building upon their foundation that went before us, and being holpen by their labours, do endeavour to make that better which they left so good; no man, we are sure, hath cause to mislike us; they, we persuade ourselves, if they were alive, would thank us."

If the King James Bible makers saw their work as perfecting the former works, as wiser, as built up, as helped and as better than good, it cannot be that this would allow continual revisals of the textual and translational work, so that in time further improvements were possible or commendable.

The term “perfected” clearly means an end, not an allowance or admission for ongoing work, as though the building should never be done, or that perpetual improvement were possible. Their view was that God’s Word, the Scripture, as an entity was finite, and therefore when refined, when purified, it could no longer have any more process done upon it, for the last and final was complete.

### **Diversity of senses in the margin**

The translators stated, “*Reasons moving us to set diversity of senses in the margin, where there is great probability for each*”. Of course, there were always various possibilities of how to translate, but only one was absolutely correct. There was always some (even great) probability for various renderings, but at the end of the process, one and only one would stand in the text as the product and result of the consensus of the translators’ deliberate judgment.

They never stated that they were uncertain as to what actually was or was not the meaning or the Word of God, nor did they imply that such usage would be a way of having a choice between the text and margins as though they were alternates. Simply, what stands in the text was right, and the margins but something alongside to consider, as it may have been the opinion of some historically, or would give another — but clearly not quite correct — meaning.

“Some peradventure would have no variety of senses to be set in the margin, lest the authority of the Scriptures for deciding of controversies by that show of uncertainty should somewhat be shaken.”

There would be a problem if the King James Bible was merely a critical apparatus, where people could continually choose between text and margin as they felt. Indeed, such a method of presentation does have a “show” of uncertainty, but is not actually in practice in any way coming against the sureness of the actual words of the Scripture. It highlights that the translators



had to judge, that they had to decide, and that their deliberations were weighty and powerful, and that we may enter into the fruit of them.

And, “yet for all that it cannot be dissembled, that partly to exercise and whet our wits, partly to wean the curious from loathing of them for their every where plainness, partly also to stir up our devotion to crave the assistance of God’s Spirit by prayer, and lastly, that we might be forward to seek aid of our brethren by conference, and never scorn those that be not in all respects so complete as they should be, being to seek in many things ourselves, it hath pleased God in his Divine Providence here and there to scatter words and sentences of that difficulty and doubtfulness, not in doctrinal points that concern salvation, (for in such it hath been vouched that the Scriptures are plain) but in matters of less moment, that fearfulness would better beseem us than confidence”.

Those who do not believe in a perfect Bible make much of these words, which is quite opposite to what the translators intended. Certainly, the translators did investigate various complexities, wade through controversies, measure doubts, but they did it so that we also might accept what they accepted.

They provided the margin so that we could investigate with the fear of God what was the Word of God, and not have a false confidence, but to make sure that the King James Bible really was right. (In other words, to be sure that the translators really did get it right.)

“Now in such a case doth not a margin do well to admonish the Reader to seek further, and not to conclude or dogmatize upon this or that peremptorily? For as it is a fault of incredulity, 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 be no less than presumption.”

The translators did seek further, as have many Christians over the years, they did not seek and never find, but found that the King James Bible was correct. The opinion arose that it was the best translation in the world. This was no arbitrary, hasty or *a priori* assumption. Things that could be questioned does not mean that the Word of God itself was objected to. Things that needed

to be worked through does not mean that there was never a conclusion. In short, concluding and dogmatizing could, should and was the result of such work, but only after the seeking and study.

The greatest means of knowledge is reliance on the Spirit of God and the conference of Scripture with Scripture. We do not have to know all the intricacies today, for that so many Christians before us have examined and used, that we may easily and openly receive their witness, that the King James Bible is right, that the text is correct, and that the margins do represent but the chaff by the wheat.

Of course, those with an agenda against absolute truth are yet trying to shackle people to the idea that there is no finality, no certainty, and that the margins are somehow casting an ominous shadow upon the Word of God.

### **Variety of translations is profitable**

“Therefore as St Augustine saith, that variety of translations is profitable for the finding out of the sense of the Scriptures: so diversity of signification and sense in the margin, where the text is not so clear, must needs do good; yea, is necessary, as we are persuaded.”

The misapplication of this statement is to commend modern translations for their multiplying of possible senses which might be given. Of course, this is an entirely unhistorical and illogical approach.

The translators were speaking of their time, and of Augustine's. In Augustine's day there was no final translation. In the King James Bible translators' day, there was the making of one, so that the sense could be found out, that is, by them in making it, and by us afterward.

The King James Bible makers had to consult many former works. In doing so, they were gathering out and coming to the conclusion of one correct sense as given in English. They were not in any way arguing for the multiplying of English translations, but the opposite.

Having profited by finding out the sense, they gave it in their main text, and put other variant translations into the margin.

When they said, “the text is not so clear”, they did not mean the English Bible, which is what some people assume. They were talking about the original languages. They had just finished speaking about how some Hebrew words appeared only once, and that even the rabbis disputed the meaning of various words.

While the Hebrew or Greek text “is not so clear”, it was certain that when they gave in English the Word, they also supplied other renderings, which may have had some weight or historical attestation, but were not, in the final analysis, the actual sense.

In this, both the correct sense and the variant senses are always given as translations in English. This variety of translations in English in the King James Bible as a whole work, that is, the text and the margins, was not designed for a state where “diversity” would reign supreme. Rather, while there was diversity, there was only one correct sense, which they show by saying, “finding out of the sense of the Scriptures”. That phrase “the sense” shows the singular, the fact that the sense was standing as the main text which would be read, not the taking in of the margins as yet possible, or as though the case was never, or could never be, resolved.

Indeed, the usage of Christians over the years and their judgment in the reception of the King James Bible shows very clearly that the main text and not the margins are indeed the very sense of the Scripture in English.

How often the margin shows an obviously confused sense, how often it is obviously dubious, how often it is neglected. Surely, these are signs that whatever lays in the margin must indeed be the chaff, and in no way part of the wheat.

We too profit from the variety of the translations, we too profit by finding out the sense. We have the end result of the translators’ labours in the scouring of the variety, we have the exact sense standing before us fixed and whole. We have the total confidence of the receiving of the testimony of the millions who have come before us, who treated the King James Bible words, not the margins, as the Word of God. Therefore, we should rejoice for having the sense, having the profit, the clarity, the goodness, the persuasion.

And yet, margins should not be prohibited. They are historical. They are a sign as to the reception of the true and the rejection of that which is outside. And they are also yet a stumblingblock to those who willingly will go away from the true, and want to find things which counteract the God's truth.

### **Uniformity of phrasing**

Some attack the King James Bible because it translates the same original words differently at different places, or that it supposedly gives words in English which apparently are not present in the originals, or that modern studies have come up with better understanding of original language grammar (besides all the new manuscripts having been uncovered).

“Another thing we think good to admonish thee of, gentle Reader, that we have not tied ourselves to an uniformity of phrasing, or to an identity of words, as some peradventure would wish that we had done, because they observe, that some learned men somewhere have been as exact as they could that way.”

It is important to understand that the King James Bible translates the sense, not merely individual words. The same words can have shades of meaning, as is the case in English, so is it with the original languages.

If someone says that some word does not appear in the originals, yet is in the King James Bible, they have assumed wrongly that word for word correlation is necessary. In reality, sense for sense correlation is necessary.

The King James Bible makers conceived themselves as acting in such a way as though the original penmen had written in English, and that they saw the destiny of their work, the importance of the words they used, as being choice and fitting. In essence, they knew they were working with “Biblical English”, where each word was infused with a theological meaning, and where it was really God's use of English.

This also explains why certain peculiar words are used in English, of which some are said to be obscure, archaic or obsolete. In reality, the King James Bible exhibits particular and special use of words, and that each word is

necessary and right, and that the English therein communicates most precisely and fully God's message.

### **In bondage to ... words or syllables**

“For is the kingdom of God become words or syllables? Why should we be in bondage to them, if we may be free? use one precisely, when we may use another no less fit as commodiously?”

Some attack King James Bible supporters for their deference to words and jots and tittles, as though it is a pharisaic thing to be concerned with the letter of the Scripture. Yet, we find demonstrated in many verses, as well as historical examples, that concern with words is commendable, and that the words must be kept.

“Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish *ought* from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.” (Deuteronomy 4:2).

The bondage to words and syllables that the King James Bible men spoke of was nothing to do with upholding the English, as some modernists falsely claim, rather, was everything to do with upholding the original languages, which is exactly what the modernists do.

Those who uphold the original languages presently to be in higher authority than the King James Bible are exactly in the realm of being in bondage to words and syllables, and are not free. Freedom never meant using any word, or having ongoing new texts and new translations. This kind of “freedom” is the false liberty of secular humanism. The modernist who does not defer to God's Word in English does so by a doctrine which claims that he and or God is not bound to one Word. This contradicts the Scripture, it contradicts the translators and it obviously contradicts the doctrine of sound King James Bible onlyism.

True freedom is in the reliance upon an English Bible which gives exactly, without hindrance, in English the sense of the originals. Imposing other views and other texts and other translations against the King James Bible is bondage, the result of bondage to false standards. They are false because the

modernists perpetually disagree among themselves as to text and translation, and that they can never arrive to one final one by any sure method. Moreover, no one can point to a final text in the original languages today. The King James Bible is the final form of the Received Text. It is a doubly hard for the modernist to receive this, since they believe that perfect translation is also impossible.

### **To neglect a great fair**

The translators conclude, “It remaineth that we commend thee to God, and to the Spirit of his grace, which is able to build further than we can ask or think. He removeth the scales from our eyes, the vail from our hearts, opening our wits that we may understand his word, enlarging our hearts, yea, correcting our affections, that we may love it above gold and silver, yea, that we may love it to the end.”

They saw the Word as being able to be touched and reached, something that would change with power with the Spirit of God. Their own work was by the Spirit, “which is able to build further than we can ask or think.” They did not perceive how far or high it would grow, but they knew it would.

“O receive not so great things in vain: O despise not so great salvation.”

They imply that their work is “great”.

“It is a grievous thing (or dangerous) to neglect a great fair, and to seek to make markets afterwards”.

Those who abandon the King James Bible, only to seek to make their own work, or to sell their own ideas, or to make for themselves things out of covertness and pride, are surely cursed. This speaks directly against the entire spirit of modern versions, and upon those who have or desire to revise the text and translation of the King James Bible.

And, “a blessed thing it is, and will bring us to everlasting blessedness in the end, when God speaketh unto us, to hearken; when he setteth his word before us, to read it; when he stretcheth out his hand and calleth, to answer, Here am I, here we are to do thy will, O God.”