

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

## The Beginning of the Independent Baptist King James-only Movement

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**Abstract:** The *King James-only* Movement, a significant factor in many Independent Baptist churches in America, began in print in 1964 with the publication of the book, *Bible Babel*, written by Peter S. Ruckman. Ruckman was a pastor in Pensacola, Florida, who received a PhD from the prestigious fundamentalist school known as Bob Jones University. The movement he began and figured prominently in affected hundreds of congregations, exalting the version of the Bible known as the *Authorized Version* or the *King James Version*. This movement, at least in writing, had no historical precedent prior to 1964, contrary to the movement's own declarations.

A movement began among Independent Baptist churches in 1964 that regarded the *King James Bible* as the very word of God in print, with all other modern translations being counterfeits and frauds. The founder of the movement, and for decades its most outspoken proponent was Dr. Peter S. Ruckman of the Bible Baptist Church in Pensacola, Florida. Dr. Ruckman fired the first salvo in the movement with a book published by his church's bookstore entitled, *Bible Babel*. This book was the beginning of a movement that split many Independent Baptist churches apart and struck at the heart of fundamentalism in America. First published in 1964, the book was reprinted in 1981, revised in 1987, and reprinted again in 1994. There are at present approximately one thousand, five hundred congregations in the U.S. and abroad that hold the *King James Bible* to be their infallible guide in all matters of faith, practice, and doctrine.<sup>1</sup> The central themes of the *King James-only* Movement are that the *King James Bible* (*KJB*), also known as the *King James Version* (*KJV*) or the *Authorized Version* (*AV*), was inspired by God (or in that Bible's expression, "given by inspiration"), no less than the original autographs, or is God's word providentially preserved in English, at the very least, with any Bible translated after 1611 an unreliable substitute or counterfeit.<sup>2</sup>

Dr. Ruckman began in his, "Introduction," to *Bible Babel* an attack on noteworthy fundamentalists who upheld modern Bibles based on the Westcott and Hort Greek text that resulted from the Anglican revision of the *AV* completed in 1881. His diatribe against prestigious fundamentalist schools such as Bob Jones University, Tennessee Temple, and

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<sup>1</sup> "Bible Believers' Church Directory," Bible Believers. Accessed 1.1.2014, [www.biblebelievers.com](http://www.biblebelievers.com).

<sup>2</sup> 2 Tm 3:16 ; Jb 32:8 AV

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Hyles-Anderson was written, not in a scholarly fashion, but in a manner designed to appeal to and be understood by the average church-going Independent Baptist. The central focus of Ruckman's books was his anger at traditional fundamentalism's perceived contempt for the Bible whose authority he accepted without question.

## A BRIEF BACKGROUND OF FUNDAMENTALISM IN AMERICA

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In the late 1800s, a series of meetings of conservative Protestant Christians in America began, some of which, being held at Niagara, New York, resulted in them being referred to as the Niagara Conference. The clergy and laymen that attended these meetings are referred to as, "the founding fathers of fundamentalism."<sup>3</sup> The label, "fundamentalists," was not coined until 1920 to describe conservative Protestants of varying denominations who were actively militant in defending the basics of what they perceived was orthodox Christian belief.<sup>4</sup> The term came from a series of essays published in the first decade of the twentieth century as *The Fundamentals*, provided free to the Christian public.<sup>5</sup> Noteworthy evangelical R.A. Torrey figured prominently among the authors.

Fundamentalists rose to national prominence in their involvement in a judicial proceeding in the mid-1920s that is popularly known as, "The Scopes Monkey Trial," over the teaching of evolution in the public schools. Although it was a legal win for those opposed to evolution being taught, the resultant negative publicity drove fundamentalists further from mainstream America. It resulted in the development of fundamentalist universities such as Bob Jones University, whose faithfulness to the critical text of Westcott and Hort and the inerrancy of the unseen original autographs figured prominently in the origins of the *King James-only* movement.<sup>6</sup> After the 1920s, fundamentalism ceased to be a powerful political movement and retreated from engagement with the majority of the public who did not share its views. By the 1960s virtually all fundamentalist churches were Baptist.<sup>7</sup> The movement rose to prominence again in the 1970s with Jerry Falwell's, "Moral Majority," and the courting of the movement by the 1980 Ronald Reagan presidential effort.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ernest Sandeen, "Toward an Historical Interpretation of the Origins of Fundamentalism," *Church History* 36, no. 1 (March 1967): 72.

<sup>4</sup> James M. Ault, Jr., *Spirit and Flesh: Life in a Fundamental Baptist Church* (New York: Random House, 2004), 372.

<sup>5</sup> Sandeen 77.

<sup>6</sup> Elijah G. Dann, *Leaving Fundamentalism: Personal Stories* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2008) 7.

<sup>7</sup> George Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Erdmans Publishing, 1991), 3.

<sup>8</sup> James M. Ault, Jr., *Spirit and Flesh: Life in a Fundamental Baptist Church* (New York: Random House, 2004), 1 & 6.

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Fundamentalism, as a movement within conservative Protestant churches, was ultimately made possible by the doctrines set forth early in the Reformation by Martin Luther. Robert Glenn Howard pointed out in his 2005 article entitled, "The Double Bind of the Protestant Reformation: The Birth of Fundamentalism and the Necessity of Pluralism," that it was essentially Luther's exchange of the authority to access and interpret Biblical texts from the organization of the Roman Catholic Church to the individual Christian that ultimately allowed for the existence and justification of modern Protestant fundamentalism.<sup>9</sup> Luther expressed a new line of thought in opposition generally accepted Christian belief, that took access to Biblical texts and interpretation of them from the priest or an elite consisting of the educated and gave this to the individual Christian. For Luther, every man was a theologian.<sup>10</sup> Howard's definition of fundamentalism revolves around this notion of the individual's access to divine authority.<sup>11</sup> However, as shown in this paper, the Independent Baptist brand of fundamentalism attempted to restore the authority for interpretation of Biblical texts, although not access to them, to an elite who were not to be questioned. This movement within the Baptist faith tradition, based on this author's personal experience into the worship lives of two contrasting Independent Baptist churches, is characterized by right wing political beliefs, social conservatism, and a sort of hyper-patriotism that equates being a good Christian with being supportive of America's military endeavors. Protestant fundamentalism, as expressed by the typical Independent Baptist church, is an insular ideology that serves a need to be protected from a world that appears threatening and is constantly encroaching on the conservative Christian's view of life, government, and freedom.

## THE FUNDAMENTALIST VIEW OF THE BIBLE

The foundational importance of the Bible in Protestantism was expressed very clearly in the seventeenth century by Anglican divine, William Chillingworth, when he declared emphatically, "The Bible, I say, the Bible only, is the religion of Protestants!"<sup>12</sup> In the nineteenth century, Presbyterian theologian Charles Hodge, in his three volume work *Systematic Theology*, stated in 1873, quoting Martin Luther's 1537 Smallcald Articles, that,

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<sup>9</sup> Robert Glenn Howard, "The Double Bind of the Protestant Reformation: The Birth of Fundamentalism and the Necessity of Pluralism," *Journal Of Church & State* 47, no. 1 (Winter 2005): 96.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>12</sup> William Chillingworth, *The Religion of Protestants: A Safe Way to Salvation* (1638, repr., London: Henry G. Bohn, 1846), 463.

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“All Protestants agree in teaching that ‘the word of God, as contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the only infallible rule of faith and practice.’”<sup>13</sup>

Again, this view was affirmed by Baptist theologians in the twentieth century as fundamentalism was moving away from a cross section of conservative Christian denominations and was focused more and more in the Baptist faith tradition. This traditional view of the Bible’s importance in fundamentalism was expressed in an even more extreme manner by Henry Clarence Thiessen in his *Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology*: “It [what he called the true Church] bases its view on the belief that the Bible is the embodiment of a divine revelation, and that the records which contain that revelation are genuine, credible, canonical, and supernaturally inspired.”<sup>14</sup>

The fundamentalist view of the divine inspiration of the Bible had its origins in the Princeton Seminary, in the nineteenth century. In 1879, a doctrine was expressed that insisted that the original autographs of the presumed Bible writers, and those writings only, were inspired by God, inerrant and infallible.<sup>15</sup> All subsequent translations attained to varying degrees of reliability and trustworthiness. This allowed a fallback position from the assault on the veracity of the Bible narrative by German Biblical criticism and the acceptance of Darwin’s version of the theory of evolution to a Bible that didn’t actually exist in reality, as the original autographs were never in one Bible, and were themselves not extant so they could not be questioned. The mark of fundamentalism in America was a conservative, literal approach to scriptural interpretation and a belief in the divine inspiration of the original autographs with translations being trustworthy but not perfect. It reduced divine inspiration to mere transmission from God to writing on a single occasion.<sup>16</sup> Presbyterian Pastor Archibald Alexander Hodge, son of Princeton Seminary theologian Charles Hodge, wrote in 1863 that what the Bible calls, “given by inspiration,” is **revelation**, while inspiration referred only to the process of writing an infallible and inerrant document.<sup>17</sup> That this did not include any translation is apparent. American Baptist minister and author Dr. Wayland Hoyt, speaking at a conference held on Biblical inspiration in Philadelphia in 1887, said, “But neither for version nor for manuscripts is Inspiration to be claimed. Inspiration is only to be claimed for the primal

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<sup>13</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (1873, repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1940), Kindle edition, ch. 6.

<sup>14</sup> Henry Clarence Thiessen, *Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1949), 79.

<sup>15</sup> Sandeen, 74.

<sup>16</sup> Kern Robert Trembath, *Evangelical Theories of Divine Inspiration: A Review and Proposal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 15.

<sup>17</sup> A.A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology* (New York: Robert Carter & Bros, 1863), 68.

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sacred autographs ...We affirm Inspiration and authority of the *original Scriptures*, the *sacred autographs*, but not of the copies or versions."<sup>18</sup>

## THE ANGLICAN REVISION OF 1881 AND ITS AMERICAN COUNTERPART

Added into the mix was the effort to revise the *AV* completed by the Anglican Church's Bishops Westcott, Hort, and company in 1881, unrelated either to the Niagara Conference or the Princeton Seminary's thoughts on the inerrancy and infallibility of the original autographs. New manuscript discoveries of a non-Biblical nature that were believed to shed light on the original Bible languages and dissatisfaction with the perceived archaic English of the *Authorized Version* led to the Anglican Church's 1881 Revision of the *King James Bible*. The Revision was the first effort in two hundred and fifty years with any Anglican Church authority behind it to revise the *King James Version*.<sup>19</sup>

Plans for a revision of the *AV* were in the works since at least 1820, when Anglican Bishop Herbert Marsh, in a lecture on the interpretation of the Bible at Cambridge, published in 1828, called for it as necessary.<sup>20</sup> This struggle to have the idea of a revision seen through happened in fact, even though many, such as philologist and pioneering American environmental conservationist, George Perkins Marsh, said that a multitude of Bibles would result from such a revision, dividing Protestantism and causing more harm than good.<sup>21</sup> The Revision committee, laboring for over a decade, published its work in 1881. The Revision efforts consisted of an English committee headed by Anglican bishops Westcott and Hort, and an American committee headed by Bible scholar and historian, Philip Schaff.

The resultant *Revised Version* of the Bible and its American counterpart, the *American Standard Version*, were not so much revisions of the *Authorized Version* but new versions

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<sup>18</sup> Wayland Hoyt, "Questions Concerning Inspiration," In *The Inspired Word: A Series of Papers and Addresses Delivered at the Bible Inspiration-Conference, Philadelphia* (1887, ed. by A.T. Pierson. New York: Anson D.F. Randolph & Co, 1888), 14, 15. The predominant Bible in use at that time, the *King James Bible*, says in 2 Timothy 3:16 that all scripture is given by inspiration and in the only other place where inspiration is mentioned, Job 32:8, states that God's inspiration gives men understanding. Peter, writing in 2 Peter 3:15, said that Paul wrote by the wisdom given to him, both understanding and wisdom implying God's revelation of Himself to the writers as well as the wisdom to write. In Jeremiah 36:32 the originals, being burned in a fire, are rewritten, with the addition of many words, so the question of God inspiring only the original autographs is apparent. Which originals? Also, in 2 Timothy 3:16, "all scripture," is not likely referring to original autographs as it is highly unlikely Timothy had access to the original autographs of Moses' more than one thousand year old writings but to only copies and translations.

<sup>19</sup> David S. Schaff, *The Life of Schaff: In Part Autobiographical* (New York: Charles Scribner & Son, 1897), 354.

<sup>20</sup> Herbert S. Marsh, *Lectures on the Criticism and Interpretation of the Bible* (London: J. Smith, 1828), 279.

<sup>21</sup> George P. Marsh, *Lectures on the English Language* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1885), 549.

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of the Bible based on an entirely new background text for the New Testament and a departure from the traditional Old Testament text. The effort did not escape criticism. John Burgon, a noted expert on Greek language and manuscripts, panned the revision efforts in writing in 1883. He wrote, "... 'the New Greek Text,' – which, in defiance of their instructions, the Revisionists of the 'Authorized English Version' had been so ill-advised as to spend ten years in elaborating, - was a wholly untrustworthy performance: was full of the gravest errors from beginning to end..."<sup>22</sup> Philip Schaff, the head of the American revision committee, acknowledged that one reason for the difficulty the new text had in being favorably received was that "for the great mass of English readers King James' Version is virtually the inspired Word of God."<sup>23</sup>

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Nevertheless, fundamentalists in America took to the new versions of the Bible quite readily. Evangelist R.A. Torrey wrote that, in his estimation, "the Revised Version is manifestly much more exact," than the *Authorized Version*.<sup>24</sup> It was not until another contributor to *The Fundamentals*, lawyer Philip Mauro, began to express serious reservations about the *Revised Version's* background text in the early 1920s that fundamentalism began to break down into two camps on the Bible translation issue. One camp followed the Westcott-Hort Greek text (representing the Alexandrian line of manuscripts) and the Bibles that flowed from it such as the *Revised Version*, the *American Standard Version*, and later the *Revised Standard Version*, the *New American Standard Version*, the *New International Version*, etc., with the second camp using and uplifting the *Textus Receptus*, in English the *Received Text*. This was the traditional textual line of manuscripts, called the Byzantine, that were the background texts for the *Authorized Version*, with that Bible version simply being considered, not inspired, but the most trustworthy translation of an inspired Greek text. Although the Old Testament text was also different it was not usually the subject of much argument until later. Both parties felt that their version of the Greek text was representative of the originals, which only were given by inspiration of God. Translations were reliable, trustworthy, or, in the case of the *Authorized Version*, the best, but most definitely not inspired by God and merely the devoted work of skilled and faithful translators. The battle within fundamentalism was not over the authority of the Bible but over the question, "What is the Bible?"

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<sup>22</sup> John William Burgon, Preface to *The Revision Revised* (1883 reprint, New York: Dover Publications, 1971), xi.

<sup>23</sup> Philip Schaff, *A Companion to the Greek New Testament and the English Version* (New York: Harper & Bros, 1883), 413.

<sup>24</sup> R.A. Torrey, *What the Bible Teaches* (New York: Fleming H. Revell & Co., 1898), 1.

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## THE INDEPENDENT BAPTIST BRAND OF FUNDAMENTALISM

The Independent Baptist movement, as opposed to Baptist churches within organizations such as the Southern Baptist Convention, consists of individual churches that are zealously autonomous, practicing what is called “believer’s baptism,” where new congregants are immersed in water not long after their public profession of faith.<sup>25</sup> Independent Baptists are fundamentalist in viewpoint and fiercely right-wing politically, dispensational in theology, and premillennial in eschatology. The latter statement is very important in order to understand how the Independent Baptist of the twentieth century is separated from conservative Baptists of the nineteenth.

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The typical Independent Baptist church is independent except when it cooperates informally with others for missionary and evangelistic purposes. It is relatively isolated, as a result, in sharp contrast to Baptist churches in the nineteenth century. As Jon Butler pointed out, after the disestablishment of state churches Protestants in America substituted denominational authority for state authority.<sup>26</sup> At least two factors influenced Independent Baptist autonomy; a reaction against the denominational power of the nineteenth century, and a reaction against the graying boundaries of Baptist dogma, caused by the cross-denominational nature of the influential religious societies of the 1800s.

The Reverend J.R. Graves of the nineteenth century Landmark Baptist movement laid the groundwork for the church autonomy of the modern-day Independent Baptist Church. In his work defining his own movement he noted that, in his view, the church was a local organization only, answerable only to Christ and no conference or assembly of men higher than itself.<sup>27</sup> In fact, the person widely held as the father of the Independent Baptist movement, J. Frank Norris, was very against the denominational control of the Southern Baptist Convention. He called the convention leaders, “denominational despots,” and insisted that, “No set of men on the face of the earth has a right to even suggest what the local church should do, much less dictate to it.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Bill J. Leonard, “Independent Baptists: From Sectarian Minority to ‘Moral Majority,’” *Church History*, Vol. 56, No. 4 (Dec., 1987), 505.

<sup>26</sup> Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 268.

<sup>27</sup> J.R. Graves, *Old Landmarkism: What is it?* (1880, repr. Texarkana, TX: Bogard Publishing, 1980), 25.

<sup>28</sup> George L. Norris, “The Laborer Has Rested from His Labors, But the Work He Did Still Lives On.” *Memorial for J. Frank Norris*, J. Frank Norris Historical Society, vol. IV, no. 3, October 23, 1972.

[http://jfranknorris.org/books/1972\\_Memorial\\_for\\_J\\_Frank\\_Norris.pdf](http://jfranknorris.org/books/1972_Memorial_for_J_Frank_Norris.pdf)

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The dominant eschatology of conservative Baptists and most evangelical Protestants in America in the nineteenth century was postmillennial.<sup>29</sup> The postmillennial view had Christ returning at the end of a thousand year reign of glory of Christians' creation during which Christianity became the dominant religion of the world while the premillennial view, and the view of the early church for its first four hundred years, was that Christ would return first to establish His millennial reign and rule for a thousand years.<sup>30</sup>

Another important difference between the Independent Baptist of the twentieth century and the conservative Baptist of the nineteenth, including the Landmark Baptists, was their view of the importance of the local pastor. Traditionally in Baptist churches the congregation held sway and power while Methodist churches practiced clerical authority, where the preachers held complete authority over the congregation.<sup>31</sup> This concept, called pastoral authority in the Independent Baptist churches, moved the authority over virtually all matters regarding everything from interpretation of the scriptures to how money was spent from the congregation to the pastor, who was usually referred to as the "man o' God," not to be challenged.<sup>32</sup>

These remarkable changes to traditional Baptist polity began with the reign of the man given credit as the father of the Independent Baptist movement, J. Frank Norris, of Fort Worth, Texas. Founder of the nation's first Protestant megachurch with several thousand congregants in Fort Worth, Texas he went on to pastor a church in Detroit, Michigan, as well, leaving the Southern Baptist fundamentalist tradition due to his concerns over their "liberal" attitude. Norris organized disaffected Baptist churches into what eventually became the World Fundamental Baptist Missionary Fellowship. He also founded a school named Fundamental Baptist Bible Institute which eventually became the Arlington Baptist College. One of Norris' protégé's, Beauchamp Vick, and other pastors broke away

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<sup>29</sup> James H. Moorhead, "The Erosion of Postmillennialism in American Religious Thought, 1865-1925," *Church History* 53, no. 1 (March 1984), 61.

<sup>30</sup> Paul L. King, "Premillennialism and the Early Church," in *Essays in Premillennialism*, eds. K. Neill Foster and David E. Fessenden, (Camp Hill, Pa.: Christian Publications, 2002), 8.

<sup>31</sup> Christine Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 99.

<sup>32</sup> This was further evidenced by the author of this paper's experience in a Southern Baptist church (SBC) between 1986 and 2006, as a member of the convention, where the deacon board, representing the congregation, had the authority to hire and fire a pastor and basically control him. However, in the two Independent Baptist churches at whose services the author was present, one from 2006 to 2008 and the other from 2008 to 2013, the pastors held total dominion over the activities of the congregation. With regard to interpretation of scripture an example would be where in a Sunday night Bible study in the SBC church several people dissented from the pastor's opinion on scripture's meaning as their preferred Bible versions each had different renderings of a verse, each version suggesting a different meaning. The pastor resorted to going to his study to "see what the Greek said." This would not be permitted in an Independent Baptist church, as the pastor was the final authority on what the scripture meant.



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from Norris to found the Baptist Bible Fellowship International and Baptist Bible College.<sup>33</sup>

Fundamentalists were actively militant in defending what they perceived as orthodoxy and combating with a loud voice what they also perceived as the sins of and threats to their ideal society from alcohol, to the Roman Catholic Church, to the mixing of the races, and any other social issue they thought should be brought to the fore. The purpose was to establish a provocative stance by picking a fight. This was even more pronounced in the work of the Independent Baptists. An eyewitness to a Norris' church service while he was fighting charges of murder during the 1920's, socialist reporter Marcet Haldeman-Julius, noted that the Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan in Texas, Lloyd P. Bloodworth, sat on the platform with Norris and gave the opening prayer to the great approval of the congregation as Norris went on to promise, for the evening service, a sermon on, "The Present Menace of Roman Catholicism." She also noted how Norris had been a leader in the fight against the teaching of evolution, even having textbooks in Texas changed to suit his doctrines.<sup>34</sup> Another author, in the same booklet, noted that Norris was virulently anti-Catholic and the Pope particularly was the subject of his verbal abuse.<sup>35</sup> A former church member of Norris' congregation, Charles S. Mundell, pointed out that Norris said to him that it was not important what controversy a preacher started, just that he pick a fight with someone, even if it was over playing croquet.<sup>36</sup>

## SIGNIFICANCE OF THE INDEPENDENT BAPTIST MOVEMENT

The Independent Baptist movement, the most significant branch of fundamentalism started by men like J. Frank Norris, is significant on the international level, national level, and local level, regarding American foreign policy and governing at home. First, on the international level, fundamentalists exerted an important influence on foreign policy toward China and Japan in the buildup to the Second World War. By 1925 there were almost five thousand Protestant missionaries from America living in China. American mission societies spent ten million dollars annually in China and owned approximately forty three million dollars in property. This very vocal group of men and women had a tremendous influence on foreign policy. Missionary opinion was pro-Chinese during the Coolidge administration and there was quite a lot of communication between missionary societies and Washington D.C., particularly directed toward the State Department. There was also a strong component to the religious press in regard to favorable policies toward

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<sup>33</sup> Barry Hankins, *God's Rascal: J. Frank Norris and the Beginnings of Southern Fundamentalism*, (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1996), 30, 91.

<sup>34</sup> Marcet Haldeman-Julius, "J. Frank Norris: The Shooting Salvationist," *A Report of the Rev. J. Frank Norris' Trial*. (Girard, KS: Haldeman-Julius Publications, 1927), 20, 21.

<sup>35</sup> Don H. Biggers, "J. Frank Norris: Salvation Specialist," *A Report of the Rev. J. Frank Norris' Trial*, 69.

<sup>36</sup> Charles S. Mundell, "Some Side-Lights on J. Frank Norris," *A Report of the Rev. J. Frank Norris' Trial*, 79.

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China. Magazines like *The Christian Century* often attacked the Department of State's professionals and particularly the concept of extraterritoriality, where the United States and others were exempt from Chinese law. There was criticism of the Christian missionary influence, but politically the influence of the mission boards could not be denied and no politician dare antagonize them. Newspapermen and editors of scholarly journals such as *The Far Eastern Review* lamented the undue influence of Christian missionaries as being of a fickle nature, and blaming anti-foreign sentiment among the Chinese on overzealous missionary work.<sup>37</sup>

One of these missionaries in China was John Birch, born in Landaur, India in 1918, to missionary parents. Growing up near Macon, Georgia he volunteered for missionary work in China while a student at Mercer University in Macon. Birch became a missionary sent out by the World Fundamentalist Baptist Missionary Fellowship in 1940 to China, after attending the Bible Baptist Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.<sup>38</sup> At the outbreak of the Japanese-American war in late 1941, John Birch had wanted to volunteer as a chaplain. In 1942, by chance, he met General Jimmy Doolittle, who had just crash-landed into China after his famous raid against the Japanese mainland. Birch found the Doolittle raiders, and according to Doolittle's own testimony greatly helped them. Doolittle suggested to General Claire Chennault, of Flying Tigers fame, that the young Independent Baptist be made a chaplain, but as he already had a chaplain and needed someone who knew the local language and could act as an intelligence officer, he commissioned Birch as a 2<sup>nd</sup> lieutenant, and eventually promoted him to captain.<sup>39</sup> Chennault confirmed Doolittle's account, extolling Birch's competence and calling him an "old China hand," and, referring to him as "a Georgia Baptist," praising his worth as an intelligence operative whose dedication was the result of his resolve when he said, "I'll leave China when the last Jap is gone."<sup>40</sup> Robert Welch, although not an Independent Baptist, went on to name the fiercely anti-communist, right-wing John Birch Society after the martyred missionary/soldier, who was executed by Communist Chinese forces just after the war's official end. John Birch became the symbol of America's perceived foreign policy failure and the dangers of spreading communism.

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<sup>37</sup> Charles Callan Tansil, *Back Door to War: The Roosevelt Foreign Policy, 1933-1941* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co, 1952), 66.

<sup>38</sup> Robert Welch, *The Life of John Birch: In the Story of One American Boy, the Ordeal of His Age* (Washington, DC: Henry Regnery Company, 1954), 61.

<sup>39</sup> Carroll V. Glines & General James H. "Jimmy" Doolittle, *I Could Never Be So Lucky Again* (New York: Bantam Books, 1991), 277.

<sup>40</sup> Claire Lee Chennault, *Way of a Fighter: The Memoirs of Claire Lee Chennault*, ed. by Robert B. Holtz (New York: G.P. Putnam & Sons, 1949), 258-259.

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Independent Baptists, as fundamentalists, have also been noteworthy supporters of the nation of Israel, as its very existence fits in with their view of Biblical prophecy and the end times. An important letter exchange between J. Frank Norris and President Harry Truman on this subject is held in the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives in Nashville, Tennessee and on the J. Frank Norris Historical Society website. This position though, has little to do with the fight over Bible versions, so it bears only a passing mention. Moving to the national significance of Independent Baptists and Jerry Falwell, it is apparent to anyone who lived through the 1980s and 90s, as well as the first decade of the twenty first century, that this faith tradition had a part to play in the national debate over many issues.

## NATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE OF INDEPENDENT BAPTISTS

Jerry Falwell graduated from Baptist Bible College in Springfield, Missouri, founded by Norris protégé, Beauchamp Vick. Falwell went on to found the Thomas Road Baptist Church in Lynchburg, Virginia and the *Fundamentalist Journal*.<sup>41</sup> Falwell preached politically-charged sermons throughout the 1980s, and headed the conservative Christian right organization known as the Moral Majority. His focus was not just to influence politics, but to effect a change in the American culture itself in regard to a fundamentalist view of the society. Unlike Norris, who thrived on simply picking a fight and getting his way, Falwell sought to effect his own idea of much needed change in society by political effort and a change in the American public's attitudes.<sup>42</sup> Falwell was the most politically astute of fundamentalists. Authors like Susan Harding acknowledge that while Falwell's actual influence on the political world was debatable, there is no disagreement on how he and his organizations' affected public perceptions of the issues facing the nation.<sup>43</sup> Falwell founded Liberty University and one author called him, "a charismatic idealist who believed that the teachings of his school were crucial to the future of the republic."<sup>44</sup> This was in keeping with the nineteenth century view of the purpose of Christian colleges: to shape national values by training the citizenry rather than merely training clergy.<sup>45</sup> Both Falwell and Norris were traditional fundamentalists in their views on the Bible, and on the perfection of the unseen original autographs. Norris and Falwell

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<sup>41</sup> Leonard, "Independent Baptists," 504, 515.

<sup>42</sup> Susan Friend Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalist Language and Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 10.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>44</sup> Dirk Smillie, *Falwell, Inc: Inside a Political, Religious, Educational, and Business Empire* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2008), 137.

<sup>45</sup> Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith*, 279.

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believed in verbal inspiration of the Bible and exalted its perfection in the original Hebrew and Greek.<sup>46</sup>

## SIGNIFICANCE OF THE INDEPENDENT BAPTIST MOVEMENT ON THE LOCAL LEVEL

Fundamentalists' combative nature shapes the pressure they exert on local communities over issues that have national importance. The example revealed here are multiplied dozens of times around the nation as representative of how Independent Baptists affect their communities.

For example, the January 6, 2013 obituary and front-page news article on Pastor Jim Grove of the Heritage Baptist Church in Loganville, Pennsylvania expounded on the effect he had in York County, Pennsylvania from the 1980's until his death. The *King James Bible* was the only Bible preached from his pulpit, as he rejected modern views of the Bible, and held to that Bible as God's word only. After his conversion in 1972 and his "call" to preach he graduated from Baptist Bible College in Springfield, Missouri, created after J. Frank Norris lieutenant, Beauchamp Vick, split from his mentor in 1950 in a dispute over authority.<sup>47</sup> Grove's views eventually changed from the traditionally fundamentalist view of the Bible his school held. Grove founded the now defunct Soul's Haven Baptist Church in Seven Valleys, Pennsylvania and in the early 1980's founded the Heritage Baptist Church in Loganville.<sup>48</sup>

Pastor Grove and his church had fought over the years against evolution taught in the schools, gay rights, abortion, and anything he felt was in opposition to good, Biblical teaching and commands among the public, whether Christian or not. A prominent local Christian pastor who replaced Grove in his pulpit likened him to Christ. A former mayor of York, Pennsylvania, a city of around 40,000 in the late 1900's, was interviewed for the aforementioned news article and commented about how Grove and his followers were always "in your face." Grove was politically active, running for the elected position of Sheriff in York County in the late 1990's, operated a cable television show, *Call the Preacher*, won a \$50,000 free speech lawsuit against the City of York, and, because of his insistence on putting a float featuring aborted baby pictures in the Halloween Parade, changed the sponsorship of that parade from the city to a private firm and the banning of politically motivated expressions in the now privately run parade.<sup>49</sup> Clearly, Grove,

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<sup>46</sup> Doug Kutilek, *J. Frank Norris and His Heirs: The Bible Translation Controversy* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1999), 25.

<sup>47</sup> Leonard, "Independent Baptists," 507.

<sup>48</sup> Kate Harmon, "Pastor Who Pushed Free Speech Dies," *York Sunday News*, January 6, 2013, 1A.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

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like thousands of inheritors of J. Frank Norris' mantle of Godly authority, carried on the tradition.

The ability of one small church of determined and angry fundamentalists, led by a pastor insistent upon some type of protest or social change to cause a stir in a community should not be underestimated. Added to the factual accounts of the efforts of Independent Baptists in one county of one state are the sheer numbers of such congregations able to raise a hue and cry.

Bill Leonard, writing an article entitled "Independent Baptists: From Sectarian Minority to 'Moral Majority'" for the journal *Church History* in 1987, reported that there were approximately 1.4 million members in Jerry Falwell's loose-knit network, The Baptist Bible Fellowship started by Beauchamp Vick, alone. Leonard admitted that Independent Baptists had "been overlooked by students of American religion."<sup>50</sup> However, the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, in its 2008 "Religious Landscape Survey," listed that at that time Independent Baptists, either self-defined in the evangelical tradition or non-specified, constituted nearly 3% of the U.S. population.<sup>51</sup> Political intent, willingness to express that intent publicly, and sheer numbers make the Independent Baptist faith tradition a significant factor in American life, particularly on the local level.

## PETER RUCKMAN'S BACKGROUND

Peter Ruckman's autobiography: *The Full Cup* provided a great deal of valuable information about his background and insights into his combative nature. Ruckman was the son of a U.S. Army officer whose father and grandfather were both graduates from West Point and who rose to the rank of Colonel by the time World War II began.<sup>52</sup> Peter Ruckman himself became an officer in the U.S. Army and taught hand to hand combat during World War II although he never saw any actual fighting. During his service time he experimented with Buddhism and after his military service he began the process of becoming a Roman Catholic. This ended with his conversion to fundamentalist and Baptist religious beliefs in 1949.

He was drawn to the staunchly fundamentalist Bob Jones University (BJU) in 1949. Ruckman was "saved" by a preacher using a *King James Bible*, but found that at Bob Jones University, that Bible's accuracy and credibility were downplayed, although it was used in public services. He also realized that BJU preferred the Westcott-Hort Greek Text,

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<sup>50</sup> Leonard, "Independent Baptists," 504.

<sup>51</sup> Pew Research Center, "Religious Landscape Survey," Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 12. <http://religions.pewforum.org/pdf/report-religious-landscape-study-full.pdf>.

<sup>52</sup> Peter S. Ruckman, *The Full Cup: A Chronicle of Grace* (Pensacola, FL: Bible Baptist Bookstore, 1992), 1.

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which is also known as the Critical Text. As he became more acquainted with the school's teaching, he found himself more at odds with their philosophy. Finally, although he chose to stay and get his PhD, he accepted that staunchly fundamentalist BJU was too liberal, in his mind, in what they regarded as the words of God.

Ruckman eventually became a pastor for Baptist churches in Pensacola, Florida and developed a ministry of chalk drawings and evangelistic preaching, eventually leading the Bible Baptist Church on JoJo Road. He published *Bible Babel* in 1964, manifesting his utter contempt for the traditional fundamentalist view of the Bible. In 1965 he founded the Pensacola Bible Institute to train preachers in his doctrinal views. Ruckman's church bookstore produced thousands of cassette tapes, books, and eventually CD's and MP3's that became very popular as the controversy he started continued to grow and many churches adopted his point of view.

## BIBLE BABEL

The opening salvo of the *King James*-only Movement was an attack on the belief that only the original autographs were inspired. This original Bible containing the original manuscripts of the authors, of course, never actually existed, in fact. It was more of an ideal, as no one has ever claimed that there was a Bible anywhere at any time in history that contained the original writings of Moses and Paul. Attacking several prominent fundamentalist Baptists, Ruckman exclaimed, "The term 'Word of God' used by Bob Jones, Jr., Bob Jones III, Robert Sumner, Custer, Neal, McCrae, Newman, Panosian, Wisdom, Alfman, Prince, Price, and John R. Rice is never a reference to any book that anyone on earth has ever read."<sup>53</sup>

The primary manuscripts referred to in most modern Bible versions as the oldest or the best are principally the *Codex Vaticanus* and the *Codex Sinaiticus*. These manuscripts are known as Alexandrian text type, and were assigned the most authority by the Westcott-Hort Greek text translators. This text has been the basis for virtually all other Greek texts used for Bible translating for more than a century.<sup>54</sup> Ruckman referred to those fundamentalists who followed the Alexandrian textual line of manuscripts as expressed in the Westcott-Hort Greek text and the Bibles produced from it as the, "Alexandrian Cult."<sup>55</sup>

One of the characteristics of Dr. Ruckman's writings was his strong anti-Catholic bias. Ruckman viewed a Roman Catholic conspiracy behind the newer Bible translations. He

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<sup>53</sup> Peter S. Ruckman, *Bible Babel* (Pensacola, FL: Bible Believer's Press, 1964), ii.

<sup>54</sup> Eldon Jay Epp, Foreword to *The Greek New Testament* by B.F. Westcott & F.J.A Hort (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007), xii.

<sup>55</sup> Ruckman, *Bible Babel*, iii.

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accused modern translators and fundamentalists of attacking the Reformation Bibles by using Roman Catholic translations. He wrote that “The readings of the ASV and the NASV are the readings of Jerome’s *Latin Vulgate* where they match the *Jesuit Rheims Bible* of 1582.”<sup>56</sup> It is interesting to note that the authorities he mentions after that statement as having revealed this information decades before his writing were not devoted to the perfection of the *King James Bible* as he was. In fact, one important author, Dr. Edward F. Hills, expert in textual criticism, graduate summa cum laude from Yale and graduate of Westminster and Columbia Theological Seminaries, as well as Harvard University, published his tome, *The King James Version Defended*, in 1956, which although often quoted by *King James*-only advocates, only went so far as saying that “it is not absolutely perfect, but it is trustworthy,” while upholding the *Textus Receptus* over the text produced by the Anglican Revision.<sup>57</sup> Ruckman’s accusations implied that the traditional fundamentalist was an agent of Rome as he noted, “the FACT that the ASV and the NASV (as well as the RSV and the NRSV) are in line with the official Bible of Rome; they are not revisions of the *King James Version*,” and referred to anyone who promoted those Bibles as a, “PAPIST.”<sup>58</sup>

Ruckman went on to accuse the Anglican revisionists of being, “Puseyites,” a reference to Anglican divine, Edward Pusey, which meant to Ruckman that they were part of the contingent of nineteenth century Anglicans who desired reunion with the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>59</sup> The conflict within the nineteenth century Anglican Church regarding that church’s relationship to the Roman Catholic Church resulted in several defections of Anglican clergy to the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>60</sup>

Ruckman’s “Introduction” to *Bible Babel* concluded with Ruckman’s take on the controversial verses of Psalms 12:6, 7 in the *King James Bible*, stating that they established a doctrine of God’s promise to providentially preserve His words, while other students of the Bible believe those verses refer to the protection of the poor and needy mentioned in verse 5.<sup>61</sup> This would become one of the pillars upon which the *King James*-only

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid. The ASV referred to the *American Standard Version* of the Bible and the NASV referred to the *New American Standard Version*, the first not as popular as the second came to be in fundamentalist circles.

<sup>57</sup> Edward F. Hills, *The King James Version Defended* (1956 Reprint, Ankeny IA: Christian Research Press, 1984), 184. See Ruckman references to Hills in *Bible Babel* on pages 4, 75.

<sup>58</sup> Ruckman, *Bible Babel*, v. The RSV refers to the *Revised Standard Version* of the Bible and the NRSV is a reference to the *New Revised Standard Version*.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Peter B. Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context: Anglican High Churchmanship, 1760-1857* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>61</sup> Ruckman, *Bible Babel*, vi. Medieval Jewish scholar, Aben Ezra, is often quoted as an authority who insisted that verse 7 refers to the words while eighteenth century Bible commentator, theologian, and pastor, John Gill, alluded to Ezra’s stand on the verse referring to the preservation of the words but

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Movement would rest. The insistence that God not only gave words by inspiration as noted in 2 Timothy 3:16, but that these words were preserved by God throughout the centuries in faithful copies and translations was fundamental to the movement's justification.<sup>62</sup> His arguments for the authority of the *King James Bible* also included his statement that the translators rejected Roman Catholic readings in many verses, that the translators made no effort to uphold Roman Catholic doctrines such as Mary's perpetual virginity, and that at the time of the translation no minister of any pulpit that believed in the Trinity (the three part personage of God) denied the deity of Jesus Christ.<sup>63</sup>

Dr. Ruckman did not express the most radical version of the *King James*-only believers' belief: that foreign language versions should be translated directly from the *King James Bible*.<sup>64</sup> Translating into foreign languages directly from the *King James Bible* had been a practice in some historical contexts in America, but was hardly a universal position among late twentieth century *King James*-only adherents. Ruckman acknowledged that it was acceptable for missionaries to use foreign language versions that were based in the same Greek text that the *Authorized Version* was, even if their publication preceded that version, and even if there were differences in the wording - an allowance he refused to grant to versions newer than the *King James*.<sup>65</sup>

Ruckman made several other points in his polemic against modern Bible versions which included the *KJV* translators' use of italics when they inserted words that were not present in a Greek manuscript for the purpose of grammatical sense, or inserting a word found in Hebrew but not present in a Greek text that quoted a Hebrew verse. Ruckman complained that many modern versions did not include italicized words which, to him, made the translators of the *AV* more honest and trustworthy.<sup>66</sup> Another point Ruckman made was the lack of a copyright for the *KJV*, which is something that modern Bibles carry in that, presumably, one would have to get the publisher's permission to copy large parts of their work. The "crown copyright," which the *King James Bible* carries, does not

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denied it himself. Noteworthy Bible commentator, Matthew Henry, of the eighteenth century, also held the position that the verse was not referring to preservation of words.

<sup>62</sup> William P. Grady, *Final Authority: A Christian's Guide to the King James Bible* (Knoxville, TN: Grady Publications, 1993), 321. Gail Riplinger, *In Awe of Thy Word: Understanding the King James Bible, Its Mystery & History Letter By Letter* (Ararat, Va.: A.V. Publications, 2003), 7.

<sup>63</sup> Ruckman, *Bible Babel*, 3. However, the *King James Bible* agreed with the *Douay-Rheims Bible* of the Roman Catholic Church (New Testament published in 1582 and Old Testament in 1609-10) in its inclusion of 1 John 5:7, one of the verses confirming the Trinity (also see 2 Corinthians 13:13; Matthew 28:19). This verse is not found in the modern critical text.

<sup>64</sup> Peter Heisey, "The Value of Making a Bible Translation from the King James Holy Bible," (Worcester, UK: Time for Truth Christian Literature, 2013).

<http://www.timefortruth.co.uk/content/pages/documents/1332198960.pdf>

<sup>65</sup> Ruckman, *Bible Babel*, 2.

<sup>66</sup> Ruckman, *Bible Babel*, 19.



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affect its use or reproduction.<sup>67</sup> To Ruckman and his followers, these arguments against modern Bible versions bolstered the *AV*'s credibility.

One of the more interesting arguments that *King James*-only proponents made was Ruckman's declaration that the *King James Bible* exalted Jesus Christ more than modern versions do. In fact, he accused Bible translators of the versions based in the Westcott-Hort Greek text of downgrading Christ's status as God in the flesh. Ruckman accused the translators of the new versions, particularly those published since the *Revised Version*, as not only following the Roman Catholic editions but even following Mormon belief as well as the errors of early church fathers, Eusebius and Origen. He linked modern Bible versions to the doctrines of the Arians who did not believe in the deity of Christ.<sup>68</sup> Ruckman's exaltation of the *King James Bible* included the statement, "We are saying that the *King James Bible* is true to the exaltation of Jesus Christ...[and] puts Jesus up where He belongs in God's sight," insisting that modern Bible versions do not.<sup>69</sup>

As an aside, it is not the intent of this paper to review arguments about translation of individual words and verses, but only to present the general arguments that Ruckman made that started the movement for which he was the principle spokesman for several decades. Arguments about translating individual words and phrases or the scientific credibility of this or that manuscript are not the focus of this study, and it is not the intention here to critically examine Ruckman's arguments.

Ruckman alluded to a book by J.J. Ray entitled *God Only Wrote One Bible*, which, like the Edward Hills book he mentioned previously was not written by a *King James*-only proponent.<sup>70</sup> Ray promoted the *Textus Receptus* above the work of the Anglican Revision of 1881 and insisted that the Bible was preserved in that Greek text from which the *AV* was translated.<sup>71</sup> Ray had plagiarized an earlier book, *Our Authorized Bible Vindicated*, written by Seventh-Day Adventist professor, Benjamin Wilkinson, in which, he, Professor Wilkinson, declared that the, "original Scriptures were written by direct inspiration of God," and that any Bible translated faithfully from the *Textus Receptus* was the, "Word of God."<sup>72</sup> It was a common practice of Ruckman and others in the movement in the beginning to quote as authorities to underscore their own viewpoint those who uplifted the *Textus Receptus* as God's inspired words, even if those authorities did not hold up the

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>71</sup> Jasper James (J.J.) Ray, *God Only Wrote One Bible* (Eugene, OR: The Eye Opener Publishers, 1955), 106.

<sup>72</sup> Benjamin G. Wilkinson, *Our Authorized Bible Vindicated* (Payson, AZ: Leaves of Autumn Books, 1930), 256.

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*King James Bible* as anything but a reliable or the most reliable English expression of that Greek manuscript line.

## WAS THERE A KING JAMES-ONLY MOVEMENT BEFORE *BIBLE BABEL*?

The head of the ASV translating committee and noted Christian historian, Philip Schaff, acknowledged the assumption made by many that the *King James Bible* or *Authorized Version* was virtually the inspired word of God. However, this assumption by some Christians of the authority of the *King James Bible* was based on it being the translation most readily available to them, and not on any understanding of the differences in opinion on the translation of Greek words or manuscript evidence. Still, *King James*-only proponents use any statement about the authority of the “English Bible” in historical context in the same way they quote scholars and laymen who upheld the *King James Bible* as the most reliable translation of the traditional text, as supporting their position. For example, KJV-only believer Joey Faust, in his book entitled *The Word: God Will Keep It! The 400 Year History of the King James Bible Only Movement*, refers to an apocryphal conversation that seventeenth century Protestant noteworthy, John Bunyan, allegedly had with a scholar who insisted that a knowledge of the original languages was essential to understanding the Bible. Bunyan expressed his belief that he had access to the originals through the Bible he used. “‘Then,’ said Mr. Bunyan, ‘so do I believe our English Bible is a true copy of the original.’”<sup>73</sup>

A second example used by Faust was that of the church to which nineteenth century scientist, Michael Faraday, belonged. This church was founded by eighteenth century theologian, Robert Sandeman, the son-in-law of controversial Scottish nonconformist preacher John Glas. Faust uses quotations by Glas from his own works, implying that the Scot was an ardent *King James*-only Pastor and that, therefore, the church founded by Robert Sandeman was an example of an early *King James*-only church.<sup>74</sup> What Glas expressed in his own work in an argument about the value of the original languages was the belief in the predominant English Bible of his time (the *King James Bible*) as an authority in direct contraposition to the Roman Catholic Church giving it equal standing in importance to Protestant people as the Church at Rome was to Catholic. “Or, are you indeed for the people’s believing in your church, instead of their English Bible?” he

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<sup>73</sup> Joey Faust, *The Word: God Will Keep It! The 400 Year History of the King James Bible Only Movement* (Venus, TX: Fundamental Books, 2011), Kindle Edition, chap. 6; Robert Philip, *The Life, Times & Characteristics of John Bunyan: Author of the Pilgrim’s Progress* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1839), 489; Stephen B. Wickens, *The Life of John Bunyan, Author of Pilgrim’s Progress* (New York: J. Collard, 1845), 261.

<sup>74</sup> Faust, *The Word*, ch. 7.

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wrote.<sup>75</sup> The English Bible's presumed superiority to the originals lay in its accessibility to the common man and not to any argument of superior translating methods or abilities or even arguments of manuscript credibility.

While the expression of the superiority of the *King James Bible* to the original autographs, manuscripts, or even languages was based on the fact that the *KJV*, unlike the latter, was available to the common man this in no way implies the same type of perfection the *King James*-only proponents claim for it. The basis for the belief in the authority of the *King James Bible* before the *KJV*-only Movement was expressed very clearly by George Holden in his 1822 work, *An Attempt to Illustrate the Book of Ecclesiastes*, where he advised against any revision to the *Authorized Version* due to the position it held.

While rival scholars would support their several systems with the stubbornness of preconceived opinion, the belief of well-meaning, but illiterate, minds would be liable to be shaken by a change in what they have been accustomed to revere as the standard of their faith. The style and phraseology of the authorized version have become venerable; it has acquired a sacredness of character by being handed down, for two centuries, from father to son, as the Word of God; its very errors are, in a manner, consecrated by the reverential respect of the people; and it is not likely that any superior accuracy would, in the present feverish state of public opinion, compensate for the dangers of innovation.<sup>76</sup>

Ruckman implied in his autobiography *The Full Cup* that J. Frank Norris was a precursor to himself in the *King James*-only movement, but as there are no extant sermons of J. Frank Norris extolling the virtues of the *King James Bible*. It is only because of Ruckman's memory in distinguishing between the types of fundamentalists he met in his work that he wrote, "the Texans were the independent, Premillennial, J. Frank Norris, *King James Bible* crowd. I quickly made up my mind which side of the fence to get on."<sup>77</sup> Kutilek emphatically made the point that based on his own research, J. Frank Norris "ascribed inerrancy only to the original language Scriptures..." and that "he did not believe that the *King James Version* was either a perfect translation or the only acceptable English translation."<sup>78</sup>

The *King James Bible* and its authority in the minds of Protestant believers can be set against the scholarly belief in the authority of original manuscripts and languages based on its common usage. This is not the same thing as saying that the *KJV* is a superior or

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<sup>75</sup> John Glas, *The Works of Mr. John Glas in Four Volumes* (Edinburgh; Alexander Donaldson, 1761), 481.

<sup>76</sup> George Holden, "Preliminary Dissertation." *An Attempt to Illustrate the Book of Ecclesiastes* (London, F.C. & J. Rivington, 1822), ciii.

<sup>77</sup> Ruckman, *The Full Cup*, 192.

<sup>78</sup> Kutilek, *J. Frank Norris and His Heirs*, 41.

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divinely inspired translation not only based on its common usage, but on its presumed perfection and accuracy. Modern Bible versions are translated with the authority and credibility given to the Alexandrian textual line of manuscripts. Ruckman argued that the Syrian or Byzantine textual line, from which the *KJV* was translated, was superior. He claimed that not only was it the dominant textual line of the Middle Ages, but that it represented the Greek Vulgate of the first and second centuries, of which the only examples extant are in the writings of the early church fathers.<sup>79</sup> Ruckman also went into relatively great detail on the differences in the translation of individual words and phrases between the *King James Bible* and modern translations, asserting the accuracy of the former over the latter. Ruckman's arguments then were a far cry from and more complex than simple devotion to a Bible commonly used and revered by Protestants. By this the unique character of the *King James-only* Movement in history is clear: there was no movement of this sort before Ruckman.

Ruckman differed from fundamentalists who extolled the virtue of the Byzantine text as being inspired. Those fundamentalists held the *King James Bible* as it's most accurate and authoritative English representative. Fundamentalist preachers who use only the *King James* may still believe that it is merely the best translation of an inspired Greek text but not bearing any particular stamp of divine inspiration itself. Ruckman challenged that notion.

## SIGNIFICANCE

Why is the *King James-only* Movement significant? With over fourteen hundred congregations of Independent Baptists representing hundreds of thousands of people at the very least declaring themselves in that camp, its very existence limits the influence and political action of the Independent Baptist movement on a national scale.<sup>80</sup> Recent studies have suggested that eight out of ten Americans viewed the Bible as, "either the literal word of God or as inspired by God."<sup>81</sup> This alone makes issues regarding the Bible's authority or which version of the Bible is the authoritative Bible significant. The Independent Baptist faith tradition, without a strong and charismatic leader like Jerry Falwell or J. Frank Norris, is unable to affect politics or social issues on anything but a local level due to the division this movement has caused. Dr. James R. White, an avid opponent of the *King James-only* Movement, lamented in his polemic against it, *The King James Only Controversy: Can You Trust the Modern Translations?*, that he had seen the

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<sup>79</sup> Ruckman, *Bible Babel*, 67.

<sup>80</sup> "Bible Believer's Church Directory," [www.biblebelievers.com](http://www.biblebelievers.com).

<sup>81</sup> Philip Goff, Arthur Farnsley III, & Peter Thuesen, *The Bible in American Life*, (Indianapolis, IN: The Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture at Indiana University-Purdue University, 2014), 2.

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controversy damage many churches.<sup>82</sup> On the other hand, Independent Baptist churches who hold the traditional fundamentalist position on the inspiration of the originals can be draconian in their treatment of members who even question the traditional stance.

In an interview this author conducted with an evangelist sent out from and a sometime preacher for Antioch 1611 Baptist Church in Stewartstown, Pennsylvania, he stated that he had converted to Christianity in 1987 and that five years later, he had the opportunity to teach youth and preach. His church was called Grace Bible Church in New Freedom, Pennsylvania. His pastor only used the *King James Bible* and, as a new Christian, Mr. Kotchenreuter was unaware of other versions. After he had been a Christian for some time, the *King James Bible* controversy came to his church, though. His pastor started to teach a class he attended, and the pastor said that “nobody really had the true word of God...,” but that, “... there were many good translations.” Mr. Kotchenreuter stated that, “even as a younger believer at that time, I felt like that God promised to preserve His word, and He gave us His word, and Jesus said, ‘Heaven and earth shall pass away but my words will not pass away.’” He went on to say, “now, wait a minute, is God, quote, the author of confusion?” Mr. Kotchenreuter said that he began looking into it and studying the matter, then brought it to the attention of his pastor and, “that’s when the controversy started and that’s when the issue came about.” The pastor was teaching that there “were many good versions but nobody had the true word of God, that you can’t trust every word in any Bible but that you could trust the doctrines of that Bible.”<sup>83</sup>

Mr. Kotchenreuter said that in 1998 or 1999, his pastor recommended that his congregation read James White’s book, *The King James Only Controversy*. Kotchenreuter purchased a copy of White’s book as well as books by Sam Gipp and Peter S. Ruckman. He believed, after his review of the Bible version issue, that White’s book was less credible and “full of errors,” and that the authors of the defenses of the *King James Bible* seemed more believable to him.

Mr. Kotchenreuter went on to say that the pressure on the *King James Bible* believers was in the way of treating those believers as being ignorant and unlearned in comparison to the pastor’s education and that he, personally, “firmly believed that the Bible is the word of God and the King James Version, I believe that is God’s word for the end-time English speaking people, and it is the preserved word of God.” Mr. Kotchenreuter completed the

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<sup>82</sup> James R. White, *The King James Only Controversy: Can You Trust Modern Translations?* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1995), iv.

<sup>83</sup> John Kotchenreuter, Interview by Frederick Widdowson. MP3 Recording. Stewartstown, PA. 3.3.2013.

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interview and when asked if he believed that the *King James Bible* was given by inspiration or was the inspired word of God, replied that he did believe that.<sup>84</sup>

The *King James*-only controversy divides a potentially potent and outspoken political and religious movement and limits this movement to local churches acting on local issues. This, possibly, can change if a charismatic individual with national ambitions is granted authority as a spokesman by the media and he can build a bridge between the two groups.

## CONCLUSION

Dr. Ruckman stated his belief that the *King James Bible* was God's inerrant, preserved, and inspired word in English in several ways in his 1964 publication entitled *Bible Babel*. He attacked the fundamentalist doctrine of the inspiration of the original manuscripts only, he called those fundamentalists who followed the Westcott-Hort critical text a "cult", he accused those fundamentalists and the Anglican revisers of the *King James* of being agents of the Roman Catholic Church whose purpose was to subvert the Protestant's faith in the Bible; he uplifted the controversial doctrine that God had promised to preserve His words in the Bible with the implication that those words were contained in the *Authorized Version*, and, among other things, declared that the *King James Version* exalted Jesus Christ more than modern versions of the Bible did.

There is no historical precedent to the movement that Dr. Ruckman started. The authors that he and those who agreed with him quoted often were not *King James*-only. These authors, such as Dr. Edward Hills or J.J. Ray or Benjamin Wilkinson, wrote that the *Textus Receptus* or traditional Greek manuscript textual line, also called the Byzantine text, best represented God's inspired originals, with the *King James* being simply the best translation. Other historical figures, churches, and the general Protestant public believed in the divine authority of the *Authorized Version* because it was available to them in a way that the original manuscripts and languages were not, and that its authority was established by tradition and common usage.

Finally, the *King James*-only Movement, while being birthed in Protestant, particularly Baptist, fundamentalism, was a departure from the traditional fundamentalist view of Biblical inspiration. It was a modern rejection of the doctrine established by the Princeton Theological Seminary and embraced by most fundamentalists regarding the unique authority of the original autographs of the Bible. It also dismissed the Anglican Revision of the *AV* and the modern science of textual criticism as products of the Roman Catholic Church and its supporters in attacking the authority and veracity of the traditional Bible.

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<sup>84</sup> Kotchenreuter Interview.

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The *King James-only* Movement, as such, did not exist in writing before 1964 and the publication of Peter S. Ruckman's *Bible Babel*.

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