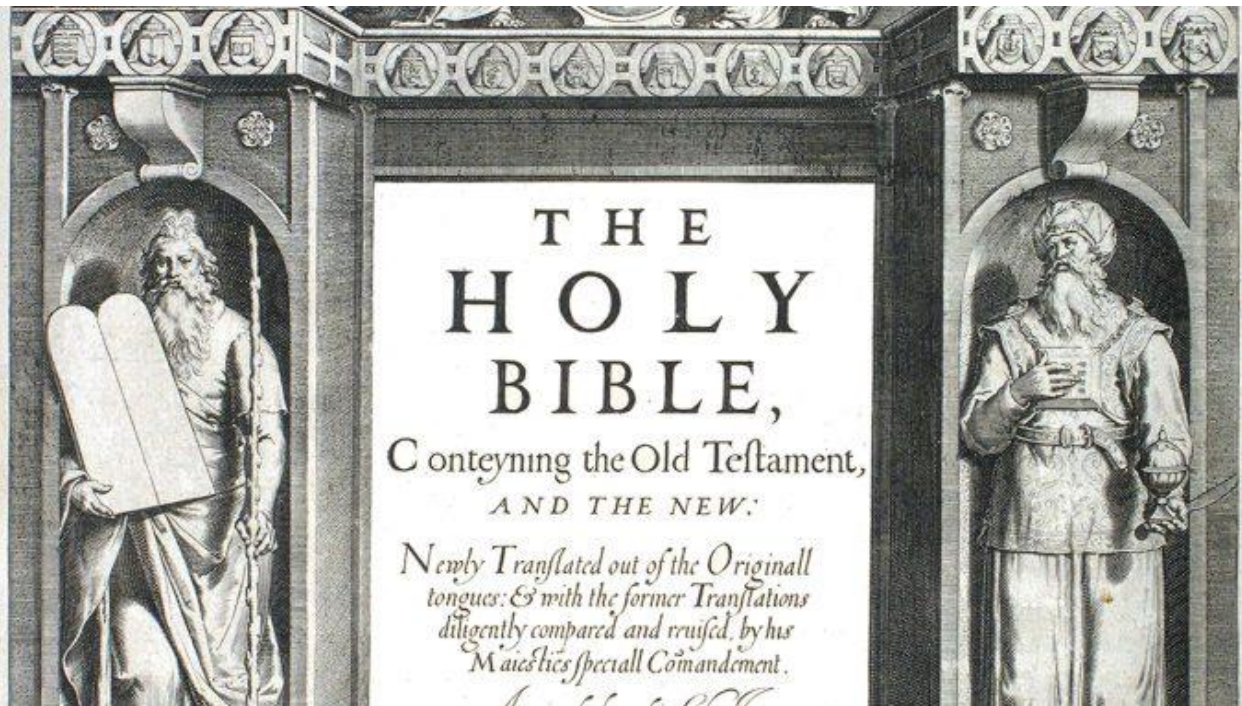


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The King James Only Controversy

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Occasionally, someone will ask me what I think about the King James Only controversy raging in some of the fundamentalist circles of independent Baptist life. Having grown up around many KJV-Onlyers, I can only express sadness that the conservative independent Baptists continue to separate from each other over unimportant matters.

The fundamentalist movement is cocooning itself into a safe web of tradition that will eventually squeeze the very life out of it. It used to be that independent Baptists separated themselves from other Christians over important doctrines, such as the virgin birth of Christ or the inspiration of the Scriptures. Today, the independents are separating, even among themselves, over issues such as Bible translations, music style, and dress.

Rising to the forefront of the fundamentalist squabbles is the King James Only controversy. Some groups are claiming that *this* is the hill on which to die, the main issue by which to tell a fundamentalist from a liberal.

So what is it anyway? The King James Only controversy is essentially a conspiracy theory that claims that all modern translations of Scripture are based on tainted manuscripts and that their translators are driven by a liberal Protestant or Roman Catholic (or even one-

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world government) agenda. This theory manifests itself in various forms, some of which are more extreme than others.

KJV Only Arguments

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1. The King James Version is based on the “Majority Text” over against the modern versions that are based on the corrupt “Alexandrian Texts.”

Response: Most of the Byzantine texts used by the King James translators come from the 11th and 12th centuries. We have since discovered many older and more reliable manuscripts, which are closer to the original writings of the Bible authors. By comparing the earlier manuscripts to the later ones, we can see how the flourishes and additions of scribes can corrupt a text over time, leading us to believe that many of the “Alexandrian manuscripts” are closer to the originals and the majority of Byzantine texts altered. If the controversy were truly a textual issue, one wonders why the Greek scholars in the KJV camp have not come up with a modern English translation based on the texts they deem “inspired.” The textual issue is actually a smokescreen which hides the true reason for rejecting modern versions: any update of the KJV is considered tampering with God’s Word.

2. The modern translations attack the deity of Christ by removing references to his lordship.

Response: The Byzantine texts have the additional “Lord” and “Christ” added to the name of Jesus in many places where the older, more reliable texts do not. These are most surely the results of ambitious scribes, seeking to show reverence to the Savior or simply making mistakes in copying manuscripts. There are many examples where the deity of Christ is made clearer in modern translations than in the KJV. ([Jude 4](#), [Phil. 2:6-7](#), [Acts 16:7](#), [1 Peter 3:14-15](#), [John 14:14](#))

3. Heretics, occultists and homosexuals were on the translation committees of modern versions.

Response: This is an all-out attack on the character of faithful believers who have sought to use their linguistic skills in offering an accurate translation of the Scriptures. The biblical linguist B.F. Westcott is consistently attacked, due to negligence in confusing him with the spiritualist W.W. Westcott. If there is anyone whose salvation should be questioned due to their “fruit,” it would be some of the extremist KJV Only advocates, whose polemic, vicious rhetoric is not becoming of a believer in Christ.

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4. The modern translations delete verses from the Bible.

Response: Based on the older and more reliable manuscripts, the modern translations have simply sought to reflect what was contained in the original manuscripts. It is just as serious to add to Scripture, as it is to take away from Scripture. The starting-point for KJV Only advocates is that the KJV is the standard to which all other translations must bow, which is also the position they seek to prove. Thus, they employ circular reasoning that will not allow them to see any other position as possibly correct.

3

5. The 1611 Authorized Version is the preserved Word of God in English.

Response: No one today reads from the 1611 version, which also included the Apocrypha. The 1769 revision is the most common version of the King James translation, and this one includes thousands of differences compared to the original.

6. The modern translations promote a “works-salvation.”

Response: Virtually all of today’s cults (excepting the Jehovah’s Witnesses) prefer the King James version over the rest, including the Mormons, who also preach a “works-salvation.” Of course, this does not negate the worth of the King James version, but we could use this argument if we were to employ the same tactics of the KJV Only crowd. Compare [Revelation 22:14](#): Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. (KJV) Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. (ESV) If we were to use the KJV Only logic, we could assume on the basis of this verse that the King James translators were conspiring to take us back to the chains of Catholicism, while the ESV translators are translating faithfully God’s Word. Of course, this would be a ridiculous assumption, but it is the kind of reasoning that KJV Only advocates employ. Even John R. Rice, the founder of the (now KJV-Only) Sword of the Lord admitted in Our God-Breathed Book – The Bible that the KJV renders [Revelation 22:14](#) incorrectly and that the ASV is more accurate here.

7. The newer versions include footnotes which offer different renderings of certain words or verses. These footnotes confuse the reader and undermine the doctrine of inspiration.

Response: The 1611 King James Version also included thousands of footnotes which offered different readings for different verses. We should be grateful for today’s translators, who in the spirit of the King James tradition, have been intellectually honest when rendering exceptionally difficult verses about the limits to their knowledge.

Conclusion

Like with anyone who expounds a conspiracy theory, it is usually fruitless to try to reason

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with the KJV Only crowd. One should seek to prod these brothers and sisters to a correct understanding with love and patience, realizing that most efforts will be spurned and may turn out in vain.

Written by Trevin Wax, © 2007 Kingdom People blog.



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