

# Finer Grounds

## Can We Trust Our Bibles? (Part 4)

Over the last several weeks we have been taking an in-depth look at the reliability of the Bibles we use. We have looked at the Bible's internal claims of inspiration and the internal proofs that it really is inspired, we have looked at our Old Testament Bible and how it has been reliably preserved over thousands of years, and we looked at the New Testament and how our New Testament Manuscripts have been providentially preserved for us. Today, we will conclude this study with a look at our modern translations. Sure, texts have been preserved for us, but are our modern translations accurate to the originals?

What would you think of a man that was so hated that his ashes were dug up 54 years after his death, burned, and then thrown into a river? What if you heard of a man who was strangled to death at the stake and then had his body burned? What if I then told you that both of these stories are true, and happened to real men? What would you think of these men? Would you think them heathen men who must have committed great atrocities against others? The names of these men are John Wycliffe and William Tyndale, and their heinous crime was translating the Bible into the common language and disagreeing with the established religious leaders.

**What do you think of men who would defy legality to translate the Bible?**

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**How does this fit with Romans 13:1?**

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Most of us alive today do not read Greek or Hebrew, so if it were not for God's providence through men like Wycliffe and Tyndale, we would not have the blessing we often take for granted of having multiple English Bibles on our bookshelves at home. So how did this process happen?

**What would men like Wycliffe and Tyndale think of the way we treat our Bibles today?**

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As we have already seen, both the Old and New Testaments have been providentially preserved over thousands of years in a fulfillment of Mark 13:31, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away."

All of the original Biblical texts were either in Hebrew, Aramaic or Greek. Most of us know this, but what you may not know is that later on, many Latin translations became available as Latin (the language of the learned) became one of the most prominent languages. Even in England most Bibles were written in Latin, and many religious services even today are conducted in Latin.

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Up until the 1300's many small portions were translated into Anglo-Saxon and Middle English such as Aldhelm's translation of the Psalms in 709 A.D. and Bede's translation of the Gospel of John in 735 A.D., however, the entire Bible was still not available for the average person.

Wycliffe changed all of that in the 1300's. He had the, "peculiar," idea that the common man was worth something, and needed to be able to read the Bible for himself. So with this belief he began to translate the Bible from Latin into English. He completed his work about 1382. This was the very first English translation of the Bible.

The Lollards (known as the poor priests) were a group of people who followed Wycliffe and his thinking, and they began to take Wycliffe's translation into the streets to teach the people. This is what paved the way for what we refer to today as the Reformation movement.

**Do we as Americans appreciate our religious freedom?**

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**How can we better use our religious freedom to further the cause of Christ?**

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**Do we have the dedication to furthering the Gospel demonstrated by some of these men?**

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In the 1500's Tyndale (who is known as the father of the English Bible) studied under the scholar Erasmus at Cambridge. He became determined to translate an English Bible not from the Latin as Wycliffe had done, but straight from the original text. Because of this determination he became an enemy to the church of England and was forced to flee England. Tyndale is responsible for many phrases still found in our Bibles today such as, "love," instead of, "charity," and, "repentance," instead of, "penance." He also gave us phrases such as, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand," (Mt. 3:2), "The salt of the earth," (Mt. 5:13), and, "Meek and lowly in heart," (Mt. 11:29) by translating from the original text rather than Latin. His work was not perfect and some changes had to be made, but it was a tremendous work, especially for the time. In October 1536, Tyndale went to the stake for his refusal to give in to the Church of England. As he died he cried out, "Lord, open the King of England's eyes."

Even with the Church of England's efforts, Tyndale had succeeded and it was too late to stop change from happening. In 1535 Miles Coverdale published his translation based partly on Tyndale's translation, and it was the first to circulate through England without official interference. A friend of Tyndale's, John Rogers, also published a version known as, "Matthew's Bible," in 1537. In this same year, The Great Bible was produced and edited by Coverdale. This was the first English Bible authorized to be read in religious assemblies, and King Henry VII saw that it was placed in every church in the land. People flocked to their places of worship simply to be able to

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read the Bible for themselves. In fact, their desire to hear and read God's word was so strong that the priests complained that all the people wanted was to hear God's word rather than an actual sermon.

This religious freedom was not to last, however. In 1560 Queen Mary reinstated the persecution of all non-Catholics. Many Christians were driven out of England and found safety in Geneva, leading to the translation of the Geneva Bible. (Sometimes called the, "Breeches Bible," due to its translation of Gen. 3:7 where it says that Adam and Eve, "sewed figge tree leaves together, and made themselves breeches.")

**Many in recent times have suggested a desire for Christianity to be the national religion of America. What are your thoughts on this in light of England's actions?**

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From here, it was not long until the Authorized Version of 1611, better known as the King James Version. The King James Version (KJV) accomplished what no other version had been able to do, and provided a translation for both public and private use that was widely accepted.

Translation of the KJV began in 1607, and was translated by a team of 48 Greek and Hebrew scholars. In 1613 a new edition was issued which contained over 400 changes from the original printing. This version has gone through many revisions over the years, but it was the first to establish itself as the translation for English-Speaking people around the world.

The KJV was a tremendous translation of the Bible. It was more accurate to the Greek and Hebrew than any previous translation, as the scholars really attempted to stay true to their scholarship rather than being swayed by their own opinions. The KJV is still available for us to use today, however the primary problem with its use is that few of us are familiar with the Elizabethan English which it is written in.

That being said, there are many today who claim that the KJV is the only version of the Bible we should use. My question then becomes, "Which KJV?" The King James Version has been revised almost 60 times, which revision is the, "authorized," one? Remember, just two years after the original King James Version was printed, a new version was released with over 400 changes.

**Is there Biblical proof for the teaching of King James Only?**

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So what about our modern day translations? Sometimes we overlook the importance of the minor details in our Bibles. However, Maria Fedorovna, wife of Czar Alexander III and empress of Russia, once used a comma to save a prisoner from exile. Alexander's warrant read, "Pardon impossible, to be sent to Siberia." Maria intervened and moved the comma so that the note read, "Pardon, impossible to be sent to Siberia." The prisoner was subsequently released.

How much more important are the details when considering the Scriptures? God has always considered the details to be vitally important. Deuteronomy 18:20, "But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded

him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die.” (See also Galatians 1:6-9 and Revelation 22:18-19). So how does this apply to us today?

While the KJV was a tremendous translation, especially for the time, it also has some weaknesses.

- It contains archaic words which can be a problem for a modern reader. For example, in the KJV, “let,” means to, “hinder,” and, “prevent,” means to, “precede.”
- It was translated from an inadequate textual base, particularly the New Testament. Remember, the Vaticanus, Sinaiticus, and Alexandrianus are the most reliable manuscripts we have, none of which had been discovered when the KJV was translated. This has led to several errors, such as the inclusion of I John 5:7, “For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one.” While this is a biblical teaching, this verse is found in NONE of the ancient manuscripts.

So what about the New King James Version?

- It was published in 1982, and the goal was to update the vocabulary and grammar of the KJV, while preserving the style and beauty of the 1611 version.
- Some of the good things about the NKJV is that it is one of the absolute most consistent word-for-word translations (based on the text it was translated from) that we have today, and it includes the most cross-references.

- Some of the negatives about the NKJV is that it is based on the Textus Receptus, and does not include any information from the more recent manuscript finds.

The American Standard Version

- It is based on a Greek text that is superior to what was used with the KJV.
- Because of advancements in the knowledge of the ancient languages, the text is rendered more accurately.
- Many of the archaic traits of the KJV are found here as well.
- It is so literal to the Greek that the word order does not always make sense.

The New American Standard Bible

- Translated in 1971
- It is very accurate to the Greek and Hebrew
- One of the primary difficulties is an inconsistency in the way verb tenses are translated

The New International Version

- Published in 1973- one of the most popular versions
- Translated into easily readable English
- Has been translated loosely to allow support for many different doctrines
- Some recent editions have gender inclusive language and use female pronouns in reference to God Almighty
- Often uses paraphrases rather than word-for-word translations

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## *The English Standard Version*

- *Published in 2001*
- *One of the most accurate to the Greek/Hebrew text translations*
- *As easily readable as the NIV*
- *Has been translated since the finding of the Dead Sea Scrolls and therefore includes the most reliable manuscripts*
- *Was translated by a team of 100 scholars*

*When choosing a version of the Bible, it is very important to choose one that is a word-for-word translation, rather than a paraphrase. (KJV, NKJV, ASV, NASB, ESV rather than NIV, The Message, etc.)*

*It is also important to choose one that you will be able to understand, and others will be able to understand as you attempt to evangelize.*

***Have you ever wondered how your preferred version was translated?***

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***What are your thoughts on a word-for-word as opposed to a paraphrase or thought-for-thought?***

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***Have you ever considered the negatives to the version of the Bible you prefer?***

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