

GOD'S WORD
WHICH IS THE
BEST TRANSLATION OF THE BIBLE?

Which Bible Version Should I Use?

Glen C. Robertson

WHILE THE PRESENT author was pastoring members of the congregations sometimes asked him,
"Which is the best translation of the Bible? Which one should I use?"

Because of this, after studying the subject, the author can state that he wholeheartedly recommends the **KING JAMES VERSION (KJV)**. Similarly good translations are:

THE BEST TRANSLATIONS OF THE BIBLE:

- KING JAMES VERSION (KJV)
- WEBSTER BIBLE
- YOUNG'S LITERAL TRANSLATION
- JAY P. GREEN'S LITERAL TRANSLATION
- MODERN ENGLISH VERSION

*(Having said that, however, I do recommend using, from time-to-time when needed, other translations, also, to help overcome the difficult-to-understand Old English, etc., of the **KING JAMES VERSION**.)*

WHY THESE VERSIONS?

Because, unlike most modern Versions/Translations of the New Testament, these are based on the **TEXTUS RECEPTUS**, the vast majority of manuscript copies of the original Greek New Testament.

There are more than 5300 hand-written copies of the New Testament still in existence (until the invention of the printing press all Bibles were necessarily, therefore, hand-copied), in whole or in part. This incredibly extensive early record of the Word of God in the New Testament¹ gives us a complete and accurate account of the original text of the New Testament. The study of this is referred to as, "Textual Criticism."

A problem arises, however, due to the fact that, when hand-copying a long document, it is inevitable that the scribe doing the copying will occasionally make mistakes. He might for instance accidentally leave out a letter, a word, or even a line that starts with the same word as a line further down the page. And, unless a later scribe copying this copy realizes what has happened, he will in turn copy the mistakes. So all subsequent copies made from this one will contain the same mistakes. And all copies of copies made elsewhere will contain a different set of mistakes (each set of such copies with similar mistakes is often referred to as a, "Family.") But those mistakes can be discovered, and the correct original text recognized, because, when the families are compared with each other, the incorrect readings in one family will be offset by all the correct readings in the other families combined, so that we know what the original was. And because, even with mistakes, the manuscripts all differ extremely little from each other in 95% of the total, together they are referred to as the, "Textus Receptus," or, "Received Text," or, "Traditional Text," and It has always been recognized as the Word of God as He gave It to us.

13 Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, Is come, He will guide you into all truth: for He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak: and He will shew you things to come.

14 He shall glorify Me: for He shall receive of Mine, and shall shew it unto you.

John 16:13-14 The BIBLE

Therefore among believers, there has never been any doubt as to the text of the Scriptures He gave us. Both the Protestant Evangelical/Fundamentalist churches, and the various so-called, "High Churches," such as the Church of England/Anglicans, Lutherans, Presbyterians, etc., have always used the Textus Receptus/Traditional Text - until the 1800s. The 19th century was a time of great upheaval in the Spirituality of the Western World, much doubt's being cast upon the Spirituality that had been until then commonly believed by the Church and the man on the street.

2 For, lo, the wicked bend their bow, they make ready their arrow upon the string, that they may privily shoot at the upright in heart.

3 If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?

Psalms 11:2-3 The BIBLE

¹ This astounding number of Greek manuscript copies of the NEW TESTAMENT compares extremely favourably to the sparse numbers of surviving copies of secular Greek scholars. For instance a mere 643 manuscript copies survive of HOMER'S ILIAD, 193 copies of SOPHOCLES, 49 copies of ARISTOTLE, 20 copies of TACITUS, 10 copies of ARISTOPHANES, etc.

There is absolutely NO doubt as to the original text of the NEW TESTAMENT (which was originally written in Greek).

New religions were being formed², pretending to be Christianity, new and even heretical “Christian” doctrines were being invented that had never been heard of in the Church³, and physical existence itself was being given new definitions by the likes of Charles Darwin and his ilk. And many in the Church were led astray. So the stage was set to create a doubt that would call into question the very foundation, itself, of the Faith once delivered to us: the very Word of God.

3 Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.

4 For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jude 1:3-4 The BIBLE

For the Protestant, therefore, there are basically two choices of translation types: 1) those versions translated from 95% of the 5300 hand-written copies of the New Testament from the original Greek and 2) those modern translations using the other @5% of the hand-written copies of the New Testament. However, those 5% of the surviving copies (manuscripts) have incredibly gross and glaring mistakes, and, because of them, those manuscripts have been traditionally rejected by the Church. And, of those @ 55 per-verse copies, only two (2) are used most often by the modern Translations. But they are so different from each other that those who treasure those two copies/manuscripts aren't even sure which of them they consider to be more accurate, and those scholars therefore rely on guesswork (they even have a name for their guesswork: “Conjectural Emendation”)! And of such are created our modern, “Translations!” These latter manuscripts, those 5%, (around 55 copies/manuscripts) are older but are preserved because they were recognized to be such poor and inaccurate copies that they weren't used enough to wear them out. Preservation was greatly aided because they originated in the hot, dry climate of Egypt. (And because the hand-copied copies were so expensive – and were copied from sacred Scripture - no one would dispose of them!) Scandalously, however, those latter are the copies used in almost all modern translations of the New Testament, simply because they are older! And it is these that have created the present confusion in the Church: “Which is the best translation of the Bible? Which one should I use?”

In the course of his studies on the subject this author has penned a small book on this history of New Testament Textual Criticism (as introduced above). In the following few pages the author quotes verbatim passages from his book, with original sources cited. For the most part, technical passages (referring to Biblical Textual Criticism, the study of the Greek New Testament) have been omitted from the following further introduction in order to briefly answer the question of *Which Translation of the Bible is Best*. For a more in-depth examination of Textual Criticism, and a history of the Textual Criticism of the New Testament, the present author invites the reader to examine his thesis which follows this present essay and introduction to the subject, a few passages of which, he quotes below:

² http://Micaiah.com/endurance_intro_02.htm

³ <http://Micaiah.com/escape.htm>

A SUMMARY OF THE SUBJECT, AND A FURTHER INTRODUCTION TO:

WHICH VERSION?

An Examination of New Testament Textual Criticism And Which is the Best Bible Version

... Not content to simply provide the world with what they hope is a better translation, our modern Bible translators have often delivered scathing attacks on the manuscript source of the **KING JAMES (AUTHORIZED) VERSION** of the Bible, which they are hoping to supplant. A financial motive for attempting to corrode the practical monopoly of the **AUTHORIZED VERSION (KJV)** has been taken to the extreme of placing in doubt the credibility of the Book Which for three centuries has been the source of faith for the English world, and similarly so, in the respective languages of all of Europe. Custom dies hard, so questioning the reliability of the well-used will be less successful in converting one from that Version to another than it will be in placing doubt on the Word of God as a whole!

Financial gain, however, is but one reason the Greek text of the **AUTHORIZED VERSION (KJV)** has been questioned. Perhaps the main reason for the attack has come from a change in Evangelical thought. To date, over 5300 manuscripts (mss) of the Greek New Testament are extant (known to be in existence.) Of these 5300, 95% agree in being word-for-word identical, or very closely so (although no two manuscripts are exactly alike.) The oldest of this main group of manuscripts date from about the ninth century. There are, on the other hand, a comparative handful of manuscripts (out of some 5300), about 55 manuscripts that do not even agree very often, in wording, among themselves, or, of course, with the 95%. They are usually older than the other group, though, and are for this reason the only ones accepted by many critics today, as being representative of the original New Testament. The founders of that bias (and the present leaders of the group following them) did/do not believe in the verbal inspiration of the Bible, and often had even lower regard for it; hence, their bias.

Nor is uncertainty and doubt restricted to these secular-thinking modern critics. Wilkinson, about the innovative Revised Version of 1881:

Previous to this there had been only two types of Bibles in the world, the Protestant and the Catholic. Now Protestants were asked to choose between the true Protestant Bible and one which reproduced readings rejected by the reformers.⁴

⁴ Fuller, Which Bible?, p. 304.

So the present controversy between the King James Bible in English and the modern versions is the same old contest fought out between the early church and rival sects; and later, between the Waldenses and the Papists from the fourth to the thirteenth centuries; and later still, between the Reformers and the Jesuits in the sixteenth century.⁵

That situation persists today, with confusion reigning as to whether or not we have the Bible God gave us, and, (if we have), as to which it is. The English-speaking world has lost a resounding common Text that shored up faith and lived in the memory of millions.⁶

Philip Mauro:

The consoling facts in that regard are: (1) that the vast majority of the variant readings are so slight (a mere question of a single letter, or an accent, or a prefix, or a case ending) as not to raise any question at all concerning the true sense of the passage; and (2) that the sum of all the variant readings taken together does not give ground for the slightest doubt as to any of the fundamental points of faith and doctrine. In other words, the very worst Text that could be constructed from the abundant materials available would not disturb any of the great truths of the Christian faith.⁷

Sir Robert Anderson spoke, quoting Bentley:

‘Choose (out of the whole MSS) as awkwardly as you will, choose the worst by design out of the whole lump of readings, and not one article of faith or moral precept is either perverted or lost in them. Put them into the hands of a knave or a fool, and even with the most sinistrous and absurd choice, he shall not extinguish the light of any one chapter, or so disguise Christianity but that every feature of it will still be the same.’⁸

No one perversion of the Holy Scriptures can in any way destroy any important or life-giving teaching contained therein - no true doctrine is confined to just one passage. Notice, however, the qualifier in Mr. Mauro’s statement: “fundamental points... .” It is true that attempts were made, in the early centuries, to minimize the extent of true doctrine given in the Scriptures. Full advantage of these perversions has been taken by many today who would attempt the same thing, and coincidentally (we would hope), usage of these perversions has been made by others trying, “simply,” to, “recover the original text (or that of the fourth century).”

The architects and advocates of the modern English translations of the Holy Scriptures often assure us that their numerous alterations, omissions and additions do not affect any vital doctrine. While this may be true of hundreds of minute variations there is nevertheless a substantial number of important doctrinal

⁵ Ibid, p. 188.

⁶ Richard N. Ostling, “Rivals to the King James Throne,” Time, April 20, 1981, pp. 93-94.

⁷ Fuller, True or False?, p. 62.

⁸ Fuller, Which Bible?, p.119.

passages which the modern versions present in an altered and invariably weakened form. These inspired Words of the Apostle Paul to Timothy have always been held to affirm the essential deity and pre-existence of the Lord Jesus Christ, but this testimony is not maintained by the modern versions which do not unequivocally declare that Christ was “God manifested in the body,” without even the grace of a marginal note, either in the English edition or in the corresponding Greek text edited by Professor Tasker, to inform the reader that any other reading was ever to be found in any of the manuscripts.⁹

Passages that have been brought into question (their very inclusion in the Bible has been attacked by unbelieving "scholars") include: Jn. 5:3-4; Jn. 7:53- 8:11; Mk. 16:9-20. Were these verses not to be included, we would find that: a) an angel did not move the waters at the pool of Bethesda, and that the people at the pool were not healed by it; b) we would not have Jesus' Words: “He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her,” and would thus be deprived of such a loving example of Jesus'; c) we would forget the verses: “And these signs shall follow them that believe; In My Name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues;” and “They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.” Just a few examples. In other words, the supernatural and miraculous nature of God's care for us and the love with which He forgives us would be minimized.

It must be seen, however, that were these passages to be excluded, they would not destroy any doctrine, but merely eliminate another (although strong) witness to one or more doctrines given elsewhere in the Scriptures. And our desire is not for the doctrines, alone, which Christ gave to us, but for the very written Scriptures by which He presented them to us. Satan works in subtleties in the physical, to achieve enormities in the Spiritual.

As spoken by Mr. Lindsell and Mr. Schaeffer, the denial of the inspiration of the Scriptures is the beginning of the destruction of the Church, so, for this reason also, the present author writes this book.

The textual critic has always been a theologian, but it is equally essential that the theologian shall be a textual critic. Certainly the two functions are indivisible and whether carried on in one mind or in two they must find close partnership.¹⁰

The present generation of Bible students, having been reared on Westcott and Hort (the “Patriarchs” of modern secular Textual Criticism), have for the most part accepted the theory without independent or critical examination. To the average student of the Greek New Testament today it is unthinkable to question the theory at least in its basic premises. Even to imply that one believes the Textus Receptus to be nearer the original text than the Westcott-Hort text is, lays one open to the suspicion of gross ignorance or unmitigated bigotry. That is

⁹ Fuller, True or False?, p. 24.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 277.

why this controversy needs to be aired again among Bible-believing Christians. There is little hope of convincing those who are unbelieving textual critics, but if believing Bible students had the evidence of both sides put before them, instead of one side only, there would not be so much blind following of Westcott and Hort.¹¹

We have, therefore, two reasons to study and compare the theories and methods behind the textual criticisms of modern secular, “scholars,” on the one hand, and those behind the followers of inerrancy and preservation, on the other:

- 1) To decide our beliefs regarding the Divine inspiration and preservation of the Scriptures.
- 2) By so-doing, to gain peace of mind.

In Parentheses, "For the present, the problem revolves mostly around the thousands of different readings in the Greek New Testament manuscripts. By the time of Christ, the Old Testament was in a settled condition."¹² A reliable copy of the Hebrew Bible was made by the Masoretic scholar Moshe ben Asher about 895, the oldest remaining complete copy of which, dates to A.D. 1008. (“Masoretic” is translated, “Traditional.”)¹³

IN CHOOSING THE TEXTUS RECEPTUS, WHAT IN FACT SHOULD WE RECOGNIZE?

1. Its use by the Church testifies to the Traditional Text that the Church of God, the tangible representative of Christ on earth, has always used the text that for that very reason is now called the Traditional, witnesses to the correctness of that text.

13 Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, Is come, He will guide you into all truth: for He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak: and He will shew you things to come.

14 He shall glorify Me: for He shall receive of Mine, and shall shew it unto you.

John 16:13-14 The BIBLE

In just the same manner that God determined that all Scripture (the inspired Word of God), and only the Scripture would be included in the Bible, by means of the common recognition and usage by the Church (compared to, for instance, common consensus determined by a church-wide meeting), so also He determined that by common recognition and usage by the Church, the true form of

¹¹ Fuller, Which Bible? p. 151.

¹² Ibid., p. 181.

¹³ Hills, p. 93.

the Scripture would be both recognized and preserved. God led the Church to recognize the true text.

2. The Word of God Is unique and requires believing examination. The Word of God Is unlike any secular volume; It cannot be examined by unbelieving minds. Examination must employ believing principles, not the methods or practices employed in the examination of secular volumes. We have already listed many such principles suggested by Christian scholars. We must thus begin our examination of the Greek text of the Word of God with some prerequisite ideas, with the mind of a regenerated being, with a predisposition for the Word of God, as follows:

3. God inspired; God preserves. Unlike the unbelieving textual critic, the Christian must begin any examination of Scripture with faith in what the Word of God says about Itself. And these statements must and will govern every conclusion he makes as a result of his study. The Christian is therefore unlike the non-Christian textual critic, in that he believes God's statement that all Scripture was inspired by God.

16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

II Tim. 3:16 **The BIBLE**

And if God did indeed go to the trouble of inspiring the original text, and the original text was indeed as pure and perfect as it claims to be, God has also preserved His Word intact. One is pointless without the other.

6 The Words of the LORD Are pure Words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times.

7 Thou shalt keep Them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve Them from this generation for ever.

Psalms 12:6-7 **The BIBLE**

Nor did God allow His Word to be concealed from the world from approximately A.D. 200 to approximately A.D. 1850, when it (**B**) was supposedly found on a back shelf in the Vatican and also (**N**)¹⁴ pulled from the waste-basket of a monastery on mount Sinai. The Word of God in Its original and unadulterated form has been available to the world constantly, ever since it was written. And it will be available to the world until Christ returns to judge the living and the dead. With the Alexandrian Text¹⁵ thus made transparent and disqualified, we see once again only the Biblical Greek text that has always been recognized by the Church. This

¹⁴ "**B**" and "**N**" are the abbreviations/identifiers given the two favorite manuscripts of secular textual critics of the Bible: CODEX VATICANUS and CODEX SINAITICUS, respectively.

¹⁵ The so-called, "Alexandrian Text," consists, basically, of just "**B**" and "**N**" (above), and is the main source of today's modern Translations. See: <http://Micaiah.com/versionText 35.htm>

is the text which is represented by the vast majority of Greek manuscripts. This is the text that was put into print and given the name, Textus Receptus.

Is it probable then, that, as suggested by the theories of Deism, God created (the Bible), and then abandoned it to its own devices?¹⁶ Is it possible that Scripture was lost for fifteen hundred years, and has:

“... Run a very narrow risk of being lost forever to mankind. Dr. Hort contends that it more than half lay ‘perdu’ on a forgotten shelf in the Vatican Library; - Dr. Tischendorf that it had been deposited in a waste-paper basket in the convent of St. Catherine at the foot of Mount Sinai; - from which he rescued it on the 4th of February, 1859; - neither, we venture to think, a very likely circumstance.”¹⁷ It is hard to see how God would allow the true text to sink into virtual oblivion for fifteen hundred years only to have it brought to light again by Cambridge professors who did not even believe it to be verbally inspired.¹⁸

Burgon justly states that it is illogical to believe that after eighteen hundred years 995 out of every 1000 manuscripts are wrong, compared to the remainder, “whose contents were till yesterday as good as unknown... .”¹⁹

IN CONCLUSION,

Hence, if we believe in the special providential preservation of the Scriptures and make this the leading principle of our biblical textual criticism, we obtain maximum certainty, all the certainty that we need. For we are led by the logic of faith to the Masoretic Hebrew text, to the New Testament Textus Receptus, and the King James Version. But what if we ignore the providential preservation of the Scriptures and deal with the text of the Holy Bible in the same way in which we deal with the texts of other ancient books? If we do this, we are following the logic of unbelief, which leads to maximum uncertainty. When we handle the text of the Holy Bible in this way, we are behaving as unbelievers behave. We are either denying that the providential preservation of the Scriptures is a fact, or else we are saying that it is not an important fact, not important enough to be considered when dealing with the

¹⁶ Fuller, *Which Bible?*, p. 91.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 100.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 149.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

text of the Holy Bible. But if the providential preservation of the Scriptures is not important, why is the infallible inspiration of the original Scriptures important?²⁰

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For those who have read this message, and are wishing to examine the subject further, you are invited to now continue to the present author's more in-depth study on the subject:

WHICH VERSION?

**An Examination of New Testament Textual Criticism
And Which is the Best Bible Version**

²⁰ Hills, p. 224-225.