

Plain Reasons for Keeping to the Authorised Version

WHY should we keep to the Authorised (King James) Version of the Bible in preference to the many modern versions now available? The question is often asked, and here are some of the answers, from the Trinitarian Bible Society.

1. *The Authorised Version is based on a better “text”.* By ‘text’ is meant the Hebrew and Greek wording of the Bible, from which translations are made into English and other languages. A good text is one that can be trusted as a faithful copy of the words which God originally inspired. The text of the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament is available in printed editions, which are in turn based on handwritten copies known as ‘manuscripts’.

The Hebrew and Greek editions which were used by the Authorised Version translators were based on only a few manuscripts. In the centuries which have passed since 1611, when the Authorised Version was published, several thousands of manuscripts have been discovered which were not used by the early translators. The majority of such manuscripts have been proved to be substantially in agreement with the Authorised Version, and the general reliability of the text used for this version has been confirmed.

From the 18th century onwards, “scholars” have made increasing use of a few very old Greek manuscripts which contain a different form of text. The two best known such manuscripts are the ‘codex Vaticanus’, known to be in the papal library in Rome from at least the fifteenth century, and ‘codex Sinaiticus’, discovered at a monastery on Mount Sinai in 1844. Most modern Bible translations leave out or alter many verses to make them agree with these 4th century manuscript copies. The

assumption behind this change of text is that ‘the oldest manuscripts must be the best’. However, the age of a manuscript is not at all a proof of its quality. The early copies which have survived reflect a form of text which was used in Egypt during the 3rd and 4th centuries, and there is a grave danger that the text suffered from local influences. By following this form of text, the modern versions have revived ancient errors. Hundreds of words in the New Testament have been omitted, as well as two lengthy passages (Mark 16:9-20 and John 7:53; 8:1-11) and dozens of complete verses.

The mass of later manuscripts, on the other hand, are undoubtedly faithful copies of the form of text which was handed down over hundreds of years in the many areas where Greek was spoken. This is known as the ‘majority text’ or ‘traditional text’. The Authorised Version is largely based on this form of text, which is the safest and most trustworthy.

2. *The Authorised Version is a more accurate translation.* Because of their reverent regard for the Bible as the inspired Word of God, the translators felt that they should very carefully set down in English all that was written by the inspired writers. They were conscious of the strict commands in (Deuteronomy 4:2), that God’s people should not add to his Word or take anything away from it. Modern versions quite often commit both of these errors, and the reader loses as a result.

For instance, in (John 1:17) John wrote, ‘For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ’. The Authorised Version puts this in simple English, with nothing added and nothing taken away. Compare this with the

Living Bible: 'Moses only gave us the law, with its rigid demands and merciless justice. Jesus gives us loving forgiveness as well'. Here something is added about 'rigid demands and merciless justice', but John did not write these words, and they are not in any New Testament manuscript. The Law of Moses says that God shows mercy to thousands of them that love him (Ex 20:6), so the Living Bible makes John contradict Moses. Notice also that Moses did not only give us the Law - the Living Bible adds the word only - but Jesus said of Moses, 'He wrote of me'. The Living Bible also takes something away. John wrote, 'Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ', but the Living Bible omits all reference to the truth, although all the manuscripts have this word in this place. In this example the modern version is neither accurate nor true.

In other passages the same tendency to add to and take away from the inspired words is also found in the Good News Bible, the New International Version, and other popular modern versions. The Authorised Version, however, keeps very close to the original, and is a reliable guide to what the inspired writers actually wrote under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and also a reliable guide to what they meant.

3. *The Authorised Version is in more appropriate English.* The Holy Bible is the Word of a Holy God, and a translation should be in language appropriate to the Divine Author. The Bible was written by holy men of God who 'spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost' (2 Pet 1:21), so a translation should use language and style appropriate to the inspired writers. The Bible speaks of many important and solemn matters such as eternal life, everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, of sin and salvation, of lost sinners and their Divine Saviour, the Eternal Son of the Eternal God. A translation should therefore be in language and style appropriate to the subject matter.

As the Bible is the Word of God, it should be

read both in public, and in private, and it should be remembered. A translation therefore needs to be in a form of English suitable for public and private reading -and easy to learn by heart. The rhythm of the Authorised Version, its reverent and dignified style, and the very high proportion of simple short words of Anglo-Saxon origin, which have continued to provide the 'basic' vocabulary of our language in every-day use, all combine to make this version the most suitable in all these respects.

'The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost... He that hath the Son hath life; he that hath not the Son of God hath not life'. These great statements are given to us in simple words all of one syllable, and much of the Authorised Version is in this simple 'timeless' English that a child can read, learn and understand.

4. *The Authorised Version bears a stronger testimony to the Godhead of the Lord Jesus Christ than we find in many modern versions.* Some of the old manuscripts favoured by modern scholars leave out or alter some of the most important passages which declare that our Redeemer is equal and co-eternal with God, and that he is himself 'God manifest in the flesh'. This great testimony in (1 Timothy 3:16) is weakened or lost in nearly every modern version. In many also the testimony of (Mark 1:1) is lost, where in the Authorised Version we read 'The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God'. The modern versions tend to omit or question the statement that he is 'the Son of God' (see also John 6:69 and 9:35). In (Hebrews 1:8) God the Father addresses the Son as God: 'Unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever'. In many modern versions this testimony is weakened or lost.

In the Old Testament the Authorised Version says in (Isaiah 9:6) that the coming Saviour's Name shall be called 'Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace'. Many modern versions change this passage so that the Messiah is not called 'the Mighty God'. Moffatt

calls him no more than 'a Divine hero'. In (Romans 9:5) the Authorised Version says that Christ is 'over all God blessed for ever', while modern versions tend to change this so completely that only God is said to be 'over all' and 'blessed for ever', and Christ is not said to be God.

Other altered passages concerning the Person of Christ are found in (Isaiah 7:14) and (Matthew 1:23), where modern versions sometimes put 'young woman' instead of 'virgin', thus obscuring the doctrine that Christ was born of a virgin. Many versions also omit the word 'firstborn' in (Matthew 1:25), where the Authorised Version bears a clear testimony that Jesus was Mary's firstborn son. The virgin birth is further called into question at (Luke 2:33), where modern versions refer to Joseph as the 'father' of Jesus. In (Micah 5:2), the prophet speaks of the coming birth of a Ruler at Bethlehem, 'whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting', clearly referring to the eternal nature of the Son of God. In the New International Version this becomes 'whose origins are from of old, from ancient times', which could easily give a reader the impression that Christ was a created being. The same error occurs in the Revised Standard Version and other modern versions.

5. *The Authorised Version has served as a standard English translation* recognised throughout the English-speaking world as the source and foundation of effective Gospel preaching, and as the highest authority in all matters of controversy. No other version has taken its place in this respect. The

greatest evangelists and expositors of the last 350 years have used this version for their ministry, and by means of it God has blessed millions of people with the light and truth of the Gospel of Christ.

There are hundreds of thousands of Christian people in Africa, India, the Far East and the West Indies, who use this version and want no other. During recent years the Trinitarian Bible Society has sent hundreds of thousands of copies of the Authorised Version into Africa, where it is read by Africans whose language is English. It is the Bible they know and love, and from which the Gospel is preached to them. In their resistance to less reliable modern versions these people show more discernment than many in our own country, who have too readily adopted one or other of the modern versions far inferior to the Authorised Version.

There are more than a hundred modern English versions. No doubt in every one of them some passages may be found well translated and perhaps some difficult passages are made clear, but any such advantage gained is far outweighed by the shortcomings and losses which have been mentioned. It is right to keep to the Authorised Version, not because it is older, but because it is better than the versions offered in its place. This Bible is a precious gift of God for which we should be thankful. Its excellence, its faithfulness, its power and fruitfulness, have been well tried in the experience of millions. It must not be surrendered in exchange for an inferior version.