

God's Word and King James

By

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A friend once told me that if he were going to teach a Bible class, "The first thing I would do would be to have everyone use the same version of the Bible." This might make it easier for the teacher, but the question is: "Which version?"

In the past 50 plus years there have been a great number of translations, most of them claiming to make the Bible easier to understand by putting it in up-to-date English. Many of these versions, however, allow the preconceived notions of the translators to come through so that the understanding the reader gets is not an understanding of what God said, but of what the translator believes.

As a result, the devotees of the King James version have come to its defense to the point of claiming it to be the superior and true version vouchsafed to us by the Lord Himself. While pointing out flaws in recent versions, they sometimes ridicule those who in turn impute any errors to the King James Version (KJV) translators.

While the KJV has served us well, it has also been the cause of some sharp divisions over basic doctrines and gross confusion over others. There are at least two reasons for this. 1) King James laid down certain rules for the translators, one of them being that in no instance were they to so translate a word that it would change any basic doctrine of the church of England. If anything had to be changed, it was the Bible, not the preconceived belief and teaching of the church. 2) The scholars themselves had strong convictions which were based upon the teachings of the church, which itself was in the dark on certain issues. Consequently, there are several "willful mistranslations" in the long revered KJV Bible. The following are some samples.

"Pascha," properly translated, means "Passover," but in Acts 12:4 the King James translators called it "Easter." This made it fit the tradition of the church, but not the meaning of the word. There was no Christian "Easter" in the time of Dr. Luke who wrote the book of Acts.

"Baptizo" is the Greek word for "immerse" or "dip." To this all Greek lexicons and Greek scholars agree. However, sprinkling or pouring had already been introduced into the protestant church by John Calvin, who, by the way, admitted that the word "baptizo" signified "to immerse" (Inst. B., 4C, 15). The church practiced sprinkling or pouring, not immersion. In 1561 a group of the bishops produced a translation of the Bible known as "The Bishop's Bible." When confronted with the Greek word "baptizo" they were forced either to translate it or to transfer it, untranslated, into English. Had they translated it, they would have been obliged to use either "immerse" or "dip" and this would have brought them into sharp contrast with their teaching. On the other hand, had they translated it "sprinkle" or "pour" to fit their practice they would have been accused of dishonesty. So they chose to transliterate it, or simply transfer it into English, substituting the English alphabet for the Greek, and came up with "baptize."

When King James authorized the translation of new version in 1611, two rules he laid down were, 1) "Old ecclesiastical words must be kept, as, the word church must not

be translated congregation, etc.” 2) “The ordinary Bible, read in the church, commonly called the Bishop’s Bible, to be followed and as little altered as the original will permit.”

Since the word “baptism” had become an “old ecclesiastical word” and was in the Bishop’s Bible, it was retained in the KJV.

It is of interest to note that while Baptists and other immersionists are quick to point out the original meaning of this Greek word to prove the true Biblical meaning as immersion, they are not always ready to turn to the original to find the meaning of words like hell, torment, and destroy to clarify the destiny of the unredeemed.

“Diakonos” is the Greek word meaning “servant.” In the KJV it is sometimes translated minister, servant, and often simply transferred to a new English word: “deacon.”

“Pneuma” means “wind,” “breath,” or the Latin term “spirit,” and wherever used with the word for “holy” should be translated Holy Spirit. The KJV translates it “Holy Ghost.”

“Ekklesia” properly means “called out ones” but is translated in the KJV as “church” to defend the Roman Catholic notion that God meant “kyriakas” – “the Lord’s property” – and uphold the claim that the “visible” church is rooted in property and wealth.

One of the most glaring errors was in choosing the word “hell” to translate four different Greek or Hebrew words, three of which mean totally different things. In the Old English “hell” meant a “covered place, a pit,” or “concealed,” being derived from the verb “hele” meaning to cover or hide. It is from the same root as “helmet” and was at first used of the grave or place of the dead (Dictionary of Word Origins by Joseph T. Shipley, page 179). But by 1611 the concepts of purgatory and the influence of Dante’s “Inferno” had caused such confusion with regard to the subjects, “Sheol,” “Hades,” “Tartaroo” and “Gehenna,” all four were lumped together and translated into one English word, “hell.”

The one word used by Jesus to indicate the final destiny of the unredeemed was Gehenna. It has no English equivalent, being a proper name. Gehenna is the Greek way of spelling “gehinnom” or Valley of Hinnom. It was the place where by city ordinance the rubbish and refuse of Jerusalem, including bodies of executed criminals, was consigned to be burned and so destroyed. It was used by Jesus as a type of the future destruction of the lost.

The King James translators, following the rule given them, and in order to uphold a preconceived idea, rendered Gehenna as “hell,” so the term came to mean the horrible place of fiery destruction. The translators then inconsistently also translate “sheol” and “hades” as hell in numerous places. These words – Hebrew, “sheol” and Greek “hades” – have no relation to the final burning of the unredeemed in the lake of fire; but might properly be translated simply as the “grave” as is the case in some places. In Revelation we are told that death and hades will be cast into the lake of fire, the place Jesus calls Gehenna. To translate all three words as “hell” is a gross mistranslation, does violence to God’s revelation, and contributes immensely to the confusion that still surrounds the Biblical statements concerning the final destiny of the lost.

Unfortunately, most other translations also render the proper noun, Gehenna, as “hell.” But, at least they are more consistent, in that they do not also call sheol and hades “hell,” but transliterate them, or transfer them into English spelling, so that the reader has to interpret them for himself according to his own understanding of the subject.

Even under ideal conditions it is often impossible to find the English word that exactly expresses the Hebrew or Greek thought, but under the conditions laid down by the Crown a correct translation of the KJV was denied from the start. To find fault with it is not to find fault with God's word, but with those who have made it hard to understand by willful mistranslation.

The Bible reader may ask, "If one does not understand Greek or Hebrew how is he to know what the Lord is saying in the Bible?" The answer is, by context and comparison. For example, even if one doesn't know the meaning of "baptizo" he will read that Jesus "came up out of the water" as did the Ethiopian eunuch, and that baptism is called a burial and resurrection. Thus he would understand it to mean immersion.

By the use of footnotes in his study Bible he may learn the original meaning of the word, and by carefully examining ALL the places where it is mentioned, paying attention to who is speaking, to whom it is spoken, the occasion for it, and the general context of the passage, he will arrive very close to the meaning.

The Bible is God's infallible word, but it must be translated by fallible men. It is a compendium of the infinite mind of God, so finite man cannot expect to grasp it totally in its depth, but the Holy Spirit guides and enlightens to the extent that we are able and willing to lay aside all bias and learn of Him, that we may daily "grow" in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus the Christ.

It will help us to understand particular passages by understanding the overall purpose, as stated by John. "...these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing, you may have life in his name" (John 20:31).

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