

Misconceptions About The KJV

by Bill Crews

The letters “KJV” are immediately recognized by Bible students. They stand for “King James Version,” “version” being used to mean “translation,” translation of the Bible into any language from the original languages. The King James Version is also known as the “Authorized Version” and the “Common Version;” it was called “King James” because finished under the reign of James I, king of England (the work was actually commenced under the reign of Elizabeth I, prior to the reign of James); it was called “Authorized” because it was done with the approval of that earthly ruler and became the official translation for state churches; it was called “Common” because it became so popular and widespread and prevailed for so long.

The KJV was not authorized by God any more than any other translation into any other language. It is no older than the date it was completed, namely 1611. Prior to that, other English translations had been “authorized” by English kings. The third edition of the translation made under Miles Coverdale and Matthew’s Bible (the work of John Rogers, who used the pseudonym “Thomas Matthew”) both had on their title pages the words: “set forth with the king’s most gracious license.” The Great Bible of 1539 was truly authorized by king Henry VIII for use in the churches, and each was provided with a copy. The Bishops’ Bible of 1568 was also an authorized version. Anyone, therefore, who labors under the impression that the KJV was somehow authorized by God in a way that no other English translation was labors under a false impression.

Furthermore, anyone who thinks that the only proper and reliable English translation is the KJV of 1611 labors under another delusion -- the belief that he is actually using the 1611 edition. In all of my life I have never met the person who will only use a KJV that is actually using the 1611 edition. I have a reprint of that original edition, and a look at any page in it will convince one immediately that that edition is not the edition that he has been using. The truth of the matter is that the KJV has undergone numerous revisions, and present-day KJV Bibles (not all identical) go back to one of the revisions, not to the 1611 original. The New King James Version was published in 1979. My copy has an interesting and informative article in the back titled, “The History of the King James Bible.” It is primarily a defense of the KJV and the Greek text upon which it was based, along with a brief background to the New King James Version, the most thorough and trustworthy of all the revisions of the KJV. The NKJV is the work of more than 130 conservative scholars.

I would like to share with you a few short quotations from that article. “There were three separate printings of the King James Bible in the first year and a total of fifteen editions between 1611 and 1614.” “Over the years from 1611 to 1616, words and phrases in the King James Bible were changed, and various printing errors were corrected.” “In 1629 the first edition of the Authorized Version, printed by the presses of Cambridge university, underwent a thorough and systematic revision of the text, the italics, and the marginal references. Dr. Samuel Ward and Dean Bois, two of the 1611 translators, participated in that revision.” “A still further revision, more thorough than the first, was carried out in the Cambridge edition of 1638. This carefully supervised revision covered ‘from the beginning of the volume to the end.’” “In 1762 Dr. Thomas Paris, a Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, issued a major revision of the King James Bible; and seven years later an Oxford revision, the work of Dr. Benjamin Blayney, was released. These two editors have been called ‘the great modernizers’ of the King James Version.” “Kings James Bibles in circulation today are the 1611 version as revised chiefly .by these two scholars.” (emphasis mine, bc)

Use the KJV if you prefer (it was based upon a better Greek text than nearly all 20th century translations), but do not put into the word “authorized” more than you should, and use it with the understanding that you are definitely not using the original 1611 edition.

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