

## **The New King James Version Considered**

Today there are many different versions of the Holy Bible. Today's Christian is faced with a large selection from which to choose. Which Bible should we use? Most conservative churches still use the King James Version of the Bible. Yet, is this the best choice? Are there other versions that are just as good as – or better than- the old King James Bible? There are, in my opinion, several good versions of the Bible available to today's Christian. One of these versions is the New King James Version of the Word of God. This short study will seek to give a good understanding of this version and show why I believe that the Daniels Missionary Baptist Church should use it for preaching and teaching.

### **The History of the New King James Bible**

Before we look at the New King James Version in detail, we must understand the history of this version. Our study must begin with the study of the old King James, for these versions have a common history.

People often do not realize that the King James Version used today is not the 1611 King James Bible. This is evidenced in the rhetoric of the “1611 King James only: proponents. In fact, the King James in use today is the fourth major revision of the original 1611 King James Version- the Cambridge Edition of 1769! We would have great difficulty reading the 1611 version.

The 1611 King James Bible was not inspired by God, contrary to what many believe. This can be seen in the need for four major revisions. The first revision took place in 1629. The purpose was to correct printing errors and to make text revisions- there were quite a few errors! In 1638, a second revision took place. This was a more thorough revision. A third was completed in 1762, this revision was done to keep up with current grammar and vocabulary. Errors were not the problem- readability was! In 1769, a fourth major revision was completed. Again, readability and understandability were the issues being addressed. This fourth revision is the one still in use today. This is important to keep in mind, and I will explain exactly why later.

The King James Bible was not a new translation. This may startle some, but it is indeed the case. In fact, the King James Version was “a conservative and careful revision of several English Bibles produced and revised between 1526 and 1610” (Farstad, [The New King James Version in the Great Tradition](#), pg. 9). In order to understand the issue at hand, one must consider the main Bibles from which the King James has come into being.

In 1392, John Wycliffe translated the New Testament. He did not translate from the Greek, but from the Latin Vulgate. In other words, his work was a translation of a translation (a Catholic translation, no less!). A few of Wycliffe's wordings were carried over into the King James Version, but not many.

In 1526, Tyndale translated the New Testament from Erasmus' Greek New Testament. He had few scholarly helps and no manuscripts from which to work. In 1530, he translated the Old Testament, doing his work from the second edition of the Bomberg Rabbinic Bible (1525). Again, he had no manuscripts from which to work. In 1535-1536, he revised his New Testament translation, which became the basis for all of the following English translations. Incidentally, the original King James Version was very similar to Tyndale's work- keeping about 90% of Tyndale's work.

In 1534, the Coverdale Bible was printed. It was to be the first complete printed Bible in English. Coverdale had been Tyndale's assistant and his work was really nothing more than a modification of Tyndale's work. Coverdale was the first to separate the Apocrypha from the Old Testament. His work

was not based entirely on the original languages- he looked to other translations for help, including the Latin Vulgate.

The Matthew's Bible came out in 1537 and was the first English Bible licensed by the King of England. His work was a strict revision of Tyndale and Coverdale. In 1539, the Taverner Bible was published. This was a revision of Matthew's Bible.

Also in 1539, the Great Bible was published. This was a revision of the Matthew's Bible. The original purpose of this revision was to produce a "Matthew's Bible" that was closer to the original languages. Unfortunately, like the others, it has much Latin influence, which disappointed the Reformers of the day. This Bible became extremely popular. It went through seven revisions in two years, and many printings.

The Geneva Bible was printed in 1560. This was a revision of the Great Bible. It was very well received. In fact, it was better received than even the Great Bible! It went through 140 editions, the last of which was in 1644. It remained more popular than even the King James Version for an entire generation. The problem with this version was that it contained many Calvinistic notes. This was a problem for many.

In 1568, the Bishop's Bible was printed. This, too, was a revision of the Great Bible. It was done in reaction to the Geneva Bible and its many Calvinistic notes. Because of the urgency felt by its authors, this work was done very quickly, with poor organization and leadership. Still, it became an influential work, as will be seen later.

In 1610, the Douai-Rheims Version was completed. This was the Catholic Bible which is still used by Catholics today. It made some references to the original languages, but mostly it came from other English translations. There was a heavy reliance upon Tyndale and the Latin Vulgate.

In 1611, the King James Version of the Bible was printed. Why? There were several reasons. The main reason was to have a Bible that was acceptable to all. There were several factions, each claiming one of the Bibles already published. There was a desire to unify the church and to have one standard version. There were few guidelines for the revision work of the King James. First, it was to be done by 54 Greek and Hebrew scholars of the Church of England. Secondly, the King James Version was to be as close to the Bishop's Bible as possible. Thirdly, there were to be no notes included, other than explanations of Greek and Hebrew words.

For this revision, Tyndale was greatly used. In fact, the Tyndale Bible was as the main source for this version. The Douai-Rheims and Geneva Bibles were also used as main references. The other English Bibles were consulted as well. The Greek text used was the Textus Receptus, or received text. This was the work of Erasmus, as well as Stephanus, Beza, and the Complutensian Polyglot- (a combination of languages). The Old Testament sources were the Rabbinic Hebrew Bibles of 1519 and 1525, as well as Hebrew texts found in Complutensian and Antwerp Polyglots.

There we have the four major revisions of the King James Version, One must understand that every English version studied here was written to produce an accurate, readable English Bible. Every version was basically a revision of Tyndale's work. The 1611 King James was another in a long list of revisions of Tyndale's work. Since 1611, four revisions of the King James Bible have taken place, each with a desire for accuracy, readability and understandability. Since 1769, there has been one more revision of the King James Bible- it is called the New King James Bible- revision number five if you're a counting!

## **The Philosophy of the New King James Version**

Mr. Sam Moore, President of the Thomas Nelson Publishers, was deeply concerned that so many Christians do not fully understand the King James Version, mainly because of its archaic phraseology. Also, his son requested a comprehensive reliable Bible. This drove him to seek to produce an updated version of the King James Bible. Since so one seemed willing to do such a work, Nelson Publishers funded and headed the work. The following is the Statement of Purpose as given by Thomas Nelson Publishers:

The purpose of this project is to preserve the original intended purity of the King James Version in its communication of God's Word to man. Insofar as is humanly textually possible, the intention is to clarify this translation by the use of current words, grammar, and sentence structure so that this edition of the King James Version will speak to the individual reader in this final quarter of the twentieth century in as clear, simple, and accurate a manner as the original translators of the King James Version in 1611 endeavored to speak to their readers. This edition shall not add to, nor take from, nor alter the communication that was the intent of the original translators... This edition shall not corrupt nor diminish the original translation but shall endeavor to speak in the late twentieth century as simply, clearly, and effectively as possible- all within the format of the original 1611 version- so that a reader of this edition may follow without confusion a reading of the original edition (1769) from the pulpit. The intention is to clarify the 1611 translation by the use of the current words, grammar, idioms, and sentence structure so that this edition of the King James Version will speak to the individual reader in a clear and accurate manner

(Farstad, pp. 33-34).

The goals included the desire to use the Textus Receptus in all translation work. This is unusual, for most modern translations seem to be based upon the Westcott and Hort theory of translation. This means, then, that the New King James follows the tradition of the original King James Version.

### **The Translation of the New King James Version**

Thomas Nelson Publishers headed the work of producing the New King James Version. In order to determine what needed to be done to produce such a work, three conferences were held. One was in Chicago, one was in Nashville, and one in London. Over 100 church leaders, representing a broad spectrum of biblically oriented Christianity, attended for input and discussion. After these conferences a plan was laid.

Sixteen basic guidelines were laid down, in order to ensure that their goals would be met:

1. Retain all doctrinal and theological words unless the Greek or Hebrew clearly indicated otherwise.
2. Retain words items no longer in current use (ie., chariot or phylacteries).
3. Correct all departures from the Textus Receptus.
4. Words that have changed meaning since 1611 should be replaced by their modern equivalents.
5. Archaic idioms should be replaced by modern equivalents.
6. Words and expressions that have become vulgar or indelicate in current English usage should be

replaced by their proper equivalent.

7. Alter punctuation to conform with that which is currently in use.
8. Change all Elizabethan pronouns, verb forms, and words having “eth” ending to their current Equivalent.
9. Attempt to keep King James word order. However, when comprehension or readability is affected transpose or revise sentence structure.
10. Eliminate the inordinate usage of the auxiliary verb “shall.” Follow current grammatical style for these changes.
11. Attempt to use words that avoid misunderstanding.
12. Attempt to keep sentences reasonably short without affecting text or meaning.
13. When making corrections use other words already represented by the same Greek or Hebrew word in the King James if possible.
14. Capitalize all personal pronouns referring to deity.
15. Proper names should agree with O.T. when possible.
16. All obsolete and archaic words as defined by one or more recognized dictionaries should be replaced by their current equivalents. This applies to phrases and idioms as well.

(Farstad, pp. 34-35)

The actual translation work was carried out in the following manner. First, there was the translation phase. Each book of the Bible was assigned to a scholar based upon his excellence in foreign languages, his special training, and his interest. Second, there was the editorial phase. The finished manuscript was sent to the proper editor (Old or New Testament), who did several things. He reviewed the manuscript, made helpful notes, provided data and suggestions for changes and sought out advice from experts and consultants in difficult areas. For example, “goodly pearls” were translated into the New King James with the help of a jeweler. Animal parts were translated with the help of a veterinarian. Third, there was an English editing phase. Here, an English editor (Dr. William McDowell) made revisions concerning English grammar and style. All changes were based upon and conformed to the original languages. Fourth, there was an early review phase. Here, copies of the edited manuscripts were sent to the original translator, members of the overview committee, members of the oversight committee, and other scholars. Comments were made by each, with suggestions for changes. These were all sent back to the editors for consideration with the Executive Review Committee. Finally, there was the Executive Review stage. A committee was made up of the Old Testament editor, the New Testament editor, the English editor, other scholars, and a layman’s committee. Suggestions from the reviewers were considered and the final changes were made,

The work done was based on the philosophy of complete equivalence (similar to formal equivalence) - not dynamic equivalence (like the NEB or NIV) or literal translation (like the NASB), but a word for

word translation done in a smooth, easily read and understood style. Let's pause here and look at the different philosophies of Bible translations.

All translations are interpretations. This is for two reasons. First is that English grammar is different than Greek or Hebrew grammar. A truly literal word for word translation would prove extraordinarily difficult to read. Secondly, in Greek and Hebrew, as with English, words often carry a variety of meanings depending on the context in which they are used.

Translators must make the decision as to what English words best represent the original text and they must write the grammar in such a way that the translation reflects the grammatical emphasis of the original. In doing so, it is impossible to translate without being influenced by your religious biases. The other challenge that you face in translation is in how you express a first century idea in twenty-first century language. This depends on how well you understand not only both cultures but also in understanding the context that surrounds the text.

You must also have an understanding of the Bible as a whole. God planned out history in intimate detail, and he wrote his scriptures and preserved them for his people. So, how we interpret scripture ought to reflect God's decisive hand in its creation but also the consistency and inerrancy that belongs to his written word. That being said, there are three general philosophies behind Bible translation: **Formal Equivalence, Dynamic Equivalence, and Paraphrasing.**

**Formal Equivalence:** This is as close to a literal translation as you will find. The philosophy is to translate the original text on a word for word basis into contemporary language. The main advantage of this approach is that it gives you a more accurate word for word correspondence with the original text. This makes word studies, where you trace a particular word's usage through the Bible, more straightforward. The drawback is that the language can often become fairly wooden and awkward to read.

There is another issue regarding formal equivalence translations that is hotly debated as to whether it is a strength or a weakness. Because the English language is often vague and sometimes less precise than the Greek and Hebrew languages, sometimes a literal translation on a word for word basis leaves important theological concepts open to the reader's interpretation. These concepts are usually clear in the original text, but become less clear when translated on a word for word basis into the English. Formal equivalence tries to minimize the translator's interpretation of the text.

**Dynamic Equivalence:** The response to the problem of ambiguity within formal equivalence translations is dynamic equivalence. Rather than translating on a word for word basis, dynamic equivalence translates on a thought for thought or a concept for concept basis. This does involve more interpretation of the original text, but often can deliver a reading that is closer to the original intent. This translation often provides a more fluid reading of the text, but it does sacrifice a degree of precision when it comes to word studies.

**Paraphrase:** Sometimes called "free translation," this mode of Bible translation is hotly debated. A paraphrase is the converting of the original text, or for most paraphrases, as translation, into your own words. Oftentimes this kind of translation can be very approachable for pleasure reading, but is not precise enough to do serious Bible study. Also, this kind of translation involves a great degree of interpretation, and depending on the translator's biases, biblical doctrines may be obscured or given undue weight.

Obviously, these are very broad categories and they allow a great deal of overlapping. It is probably most accurate to picture these definitions on a chart with formal equivalence on one end and paraphrasing on the other, with dynamic equivalence being a middle ground. Each translation, then would fall somewhere on the chart, leaning toward one of the definitions, but being influenced by the others.

Regardless of their strengths and weaknesses, all three have their value. Formal equivalence translations are often best for serious Bible study, but dynamic equivalence is better for more casual reading and public reading of scripture. It is far more accessible both to younger people and to new Christians. While paraphrases are not my particular cup of tea, many find that they are quite good for pleasure reading. It just must be cautioned that a more technical translation of the Bible should be accessible for worship and study.

Regardless of your translation philosophy, the end goal is the same. We want the word of God to be read and understood by the people of God. People have different educational backgrounds and are at different levels of faith when they go to pick up this wonderful book. As Paul writes in Romans 1:16, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel for it is the power of God to salvation." If the word of God is to be brought to bear on the lives of God's people, it must be understood. Different translations for different seasons in different people's lives is the reason that we have so many versions to choose from when we go the Bible book store.

Having given an overview of translation philosophies- then what philosophy was used in translating the NKJV? The editors have told us that they used what they have called "complete equivalence." As mentioned above, not a formal, literal, woody translation but a formal, smooth, easily read and understood translation. So in some areas they have opted for a dynamic equivalence of the text. Over all the NKJV translation leans toward a more literal translation- which is what we are looking for in a translation.

### **The Accuracy of the New King James Version**

The old King James Version in use today was extremely accurate when it was written. It still is, if one understands the meaning of words. The problem is, however, that word meaning change. Also, linguists and geologists have shown us the true meanings of some words that had been mistranslated due to the lack of knowledge in 1611. Some examples include Exodus 20:13, I Samuel 13:21, I Kings 10:28, Philippians 1:16, Luke 2:1-2, Isaiah 19:5-10, and I Thessalonians 4:13-18.

Several familiar, well known, and well loved passages, are basically carried over from the old King James with very few changes (Genesis 1, Psalm 23). Other passages are written in clearer language. Still other passages that contain what today is considered vulgar speech were changed (Song of Solomon 5:4, II Kings 18:27, and Isaiah 36:12).

Basically, what we have in the New King James Version is a literal translation tempered by the stylistic demands of our English language. For example, the NASB, a very literal Bible, can become wooden in places- where the NKJV smooths out these spots and makes the text flow better as it is read.

I am personally pleased with the accuracy of the NKJV. Before accepting the pastorate at Daniels I was preparing the Greenbrier church for a change of translations. They had used the KJV for 125 years. A new translation was needed for several reasons. First, I would spend time explaining the KJV text when the NKJV presented the same text in a more readable and understanding light. Secondly,

young people are not going to read the KJV. The KJV is given at a 12<sup>th</sup> grade reading level whereas the NKJV is written at an 8<sup>th</sup> grade level. Most young people struggle with reading “old English” so a translation was needed which would draw the younger believers into the Word. Third, the NKJV reads very closely to the KJV allowing a familiarity with the new text.

I highly recommend the NKJV to the entire church. It is a more accurate translation than the KJV but still follows the great tradition of the KJV. It really is not a new translation but the fifth major revision of the 1611 text. Get one and try it- you will be blessed !

# The History of the New King James Bible

Translated from the  
Original Hebrew and  
Greek texts

**Tyndale's Version**  
**O.T. 1525**  
**N.T. 1530**

**Other Translations**

**Coverdale Bible**  
**1535**

Major Revisions of  
Tyndale's work

**Matthew's Bible**  
**1537**

**Taverner's Bible**  
**1539**

**Great Bible**  
**1539**

**Cranmer's Bible**  
**1540**

**Geneva Bible**  
**1560**

**Bishop's Bible**  
**1568**

**King James Bible**  
**1611**

## Revisions of the KJV

- 1629
- 1638
- 1762- Oxford Edition
- 1769- Cambridge Edition
- 1979, 82- New King James Bible
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**If you use a modern KJV Bible you are using the  
Cambridge Edition of 1769- not the 1611 KJV**