

The Word of God is Not A Book

By David L. Miner

This article is going to anger some Believers. But I think it will free a great many more than it will anger. More than anger or freedom, I believe this article will push many Believers deeper into Truth. This article concerns which translation of the Bible you prefer. And if you think of the issue in that term – prefer – this article will free you. But if you ask the question and think of the answer in terms of “which translation is SCRIPTURE,” then this article just might make you angry.

But first I must caution you. This article will not establish which translation is best. That is an academic question, and is able to be resolved only in the minds of many scholarly experts in linguistics. I am not such an expert.

Nor will this article push you into thinking which translation you SHOULD prefer, because that is an issue with way too many intricacies for me to address.

But before we attempt to resolve this question, I think we might want to visit a much deeper issue. We might want to take a closer look at something that sits at the root of unspoken and sometimes unthought religious beliefs. We might want to take a closer look at something that many of us want to avoid.

Some of us need to rethink our *theology*. Actually, MOST of us need to rethink our theology. Why? Because most of us don't think in terms of theology enough to really know our theology. This is part of the reason why religious divisions exist, and most of the reason why religious arguments often can't be resolved. We simply do not think through the theology we THINK we believe.

Often, we think that we can't understand theology, so we simply don't think about theology. Many of us think that theology is too heavenly, and so we tend to keep our thoughts to more practical matters. And some of us think that discussions of theological issues just result in argument.

But most of us think that our preferences and our practices ARE theology.

I submit there are few REAL differences in theology among mainstream Christianity. And I submit that most of the perceived differences in theology are simply knee-jerk reactions resulting from childhood beliefs we have adopted out of reverence for the fact that they have been in our thoughts and in lives for a long time, and NOT based on the fact that God said it is His Word.

Let me offer a couple of definitions for our discussion. And YES, I expect a discussion – polite and varied, but most likely spirited.

THEOLOGY – *who and what God is; His character and nature; simplistically summed up by many as Omniscient, Omnipotent, and Omnipresent (all-knowing, all-powerful, and present everywhere); and the next part of theology is, in light of who and what God is, who and what am I*

DOCTRINE – *in light of one's theology, how does one expect to live, and how does one expect others to live*

I submit that most religious arguments concern doctrinal issues, and not theological issues. I submit most religious arguments are NOT about the character and nature of God, but they are instead about how YOU and I expect OTHERS to practice, to live out, how WE see God. Please allow me to explain.

Let's take baptism as an example. Almost all Christians see the spiritual importance of being baptized as a public declaration of a personal relationship with God. This is the theology part.

The arguments are about how wet you should get. This is the doctrine part.

What age should we be baptized? Should we be sprinkled or dunked? How many times should we be dunked? What words should be used when we get baptized? These are all doctrinal questions. These are all practices which we expect or demand of ourselves and others.

These are not theological differences.

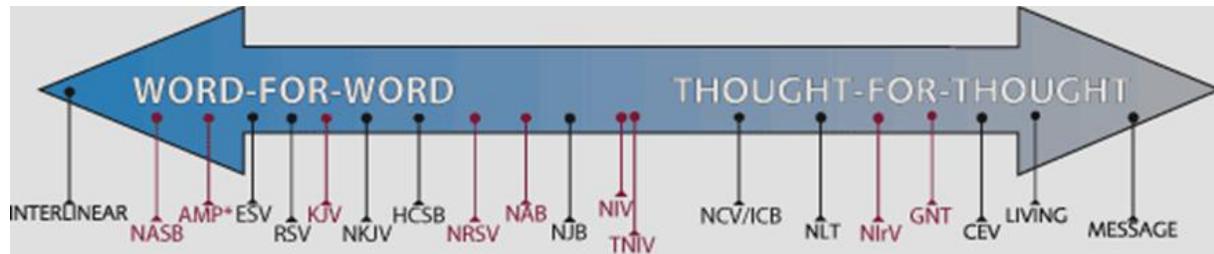
So, let's get back to the question above, related to what translation of the Bible do we prefer. Or is the question more like what translation do we use, and expect others to use? Or even demand others to use?

Which translation we use is DOCTRINE; it is not THEOLOGY.

By far, the most widely used translation in all of history is the Authorized Version; which many know as the King James Version, or KJV. And by far, the most widely used modern translation is the New International Version, or NIV. Further, there are AT LEAST another 40 versions that have sprung up in the past generation.

These various translations are each one based on one or the other of the philosophies that 1) a word-for-word translation from the original languages will give us a more accurate translation, or 2) a thought-for-thought translation from the original languages will give us a more understandable translation. These two competing philosophies have driven almost every new translation produced over the past 400 to 500 years

To get an overview of the common translations available to us in the local books stores, someone has compiled a graphic, and someone else has compiled a chart to explain the graphic. I am merely reproducing this graphic and this chart to assist us with clarity.



Above chart taken from <http://www.zondervanbibles.com/translations.htm> <link no longer active>

NASB	New American Standard Bible (1971; update 1995)	NIV	New International Version (1984)
AMP	Amplified Bible (1965)	TNIV	Today's New International Version (NT 2001, OT 2005)
ESV	English Standard Version (2001)	NCV	New Century Version
RSV	Revised Standard Version (1952)	NLT ¹	New Living Translation (1 st ed. 1996; 2 nd ed. 2004)
KJV	King James Version (1611; significantly revised 1769)	Nlrv	New International reader's Version
NKJV	New King James Version (1982)	GNT	Good News Translation (also Good News Bible)
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Version (2004)	CEV	Contemporary English Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version (1989)	Living	Living Bible (1950). Paraphrase by Ken Taylor. Liberal treatment of 'blood.'
NAB	New American Bible (Catholic, 1970, 1986 (NT), 1991 (Psalms))	Message	The Message by Eugene Peterson (1991-2000s)

For obvious reasons, we will look first at the Authorized Version, usually called the King James Version. However, before we look at the version itself, let's first look at the king who authorized that version to be created, and why.

King James has an interesting history. James was a child in the royal family of Scotland. When he was the age of a first grader (at least the age an American first grader would

have been in the 20th Century), the King died under suspicious circumstances. James was only a prince at the time, but he was immediately elevated to the position of king. He became King James VI of Scotland, and reigned for a number of years. If a child can truly reign as king, that is.

With the death of Queen Elizabeth I, King James VI of Scotland became King James I of England. King James set about creating a number of significant changes in England. One of the most important changes wrought by the king was to divorce the country from the Holy Roman Catholic Church. James created the Anglican Church, or the Church of England, and made it the required faith of all people in the British Isles. The religious rebellion that this decision caused is still being fought throughout the British Isles today, although most people see it as a war between Catholics and Protestants. Believe me, the Anglican Church was never considered Protestant. In fact, the Anglican Church actively, and sometimes violently, persecuted Protestants for hundreds of years. And it was freedom from this religious persecution that resulted in the Pilgrims and many others to flee England for the newly settled America.

King James was not a Protestant, and his nationalized Anglican Church persecuted and even murdered Protestants.

In fact, King James publicly declared he was not a Protestant many times, and many at that time believed he showed himself to not even be a Christian by engaging in activities condemned by every religion and every translation of the Bible.

One area of the life of King James that for many years remained clouded in controversy was allegations that James was homosexual. As James did father several children by Anne of Denmark, it is probably more accurate to say that he was a bi-sexual. While his close relationships with a number of men were documented throughout his life, earlier historians questioned their sexual nature in an effort to suppress the many rumors and allegations. However, few modern historians cast any doubt on the King's bisexuality, and the fact that his sexuality and choice of male partners both as King of Scotland then later in London as King of England was the subject of gossip from local taverns to royal balls. His relationship as a teenager with fellow teenager Esmé Stuart, Earl of Lennox was criticized by Scottish Church leaders, who were part of a conspiracy to keep the young King and the young French courtier apart, believing that the relationship was improper. Lennox, facing threats of death, was forced to leave Scotland.

In the 1583, King James openly kissed Francis Stewart Hepburn, Earl of Bothwell. Sources at that time gave up all pretenses of hiding the truth, and clearly hinted their relationship was a sexual one. By the time James inherited the English throne from Queen Elizabeth I in 1603, it was openly joked of the new English monarch in London and much of England that "Elizabeth was King: now James is Queen!" If there is still any doubt, it should be noted that George Villiers also held an intimate relationship with King James, about which King James himself was quite open. King James called Villiers his "wife" and called himself Villiers' "husband"! King James died in 1625 of gout and senility. He is buried in the Henry VII chapel in Westminster Abbey, with one of his

favorite male lovers on his right, and another on his left. His wife isn't even buried in the same room.

My purpose in discussing the history of King James is not to sully his name – he did that all by himself. But I have heard some claim that King James was a godly man who created the Authorized Version because of his heart for God. And I must clarify that King James I of England was not a godly man, and did not have a heart for God.

At the time King James VI of Scotland took over as King James I of England, the Bible was available in Latin, for Catholics, and in English, for all others. The primary versions of the Bible in English were the Bishop's Bible and the Geneva Bible, although there were several other translations from various individual scholars. When King James created his Anglican Church, which many of us know as the Church of England, he declared the Bishop's Bible to be the only version acceptable in the Anglican Church, and the only version claimed by King James as inspired by God. For obvious reasons, the Protestants in England wanted their own version, and approached the King in 1604 to create a new version translated into the "popular vernacular" of the people. For some reason, the King gave the Protestants what they wanted. But then King James declared his "own" translation to be the only Authorized Version acceptable for use in church services and in personal study within his newly created Church of England.

The Authorized King James Version (AV or KJV) was written between 1604 and 1611 by a group of 54 men who may or may not have been Christians, as understood by any Evangelical definition today. These men were Anglicans, and were considered by King James to be a combination of scholars, language experts, and historians qualified to translate the readily available documents into the vernacular common to that time. However, I have been unable to confirm that any more than three of these men were actually and in fact experts in Greek or Hebrew or Aramaic.

They took into consideration several translations: The Tyndale New Testament, The Coverdale Bible, The Matthews Bible, The Great Bible, The Geneva Bible, and even the Rheims New Testament used by the Holy Roman Catholic Church. But many scholars believed the primary text used by these scholars was the Bishop's Bible. And in 1604, the great revision of the Bishop's Bible had begun. From 1605 to 1606 these scholars engaged in their own private research. From 1607 to 1609 the work was assembled. In 1610 the work went to press, and in 1611 the first of the huge pulpit folios (it was a book 16 inches thick) known today as "The 1611 King James Bible" came off the printing press. As an interesting side note, a typographical error in Ruth 3:15 rendered a pronoun "He" instead of "She" in that verse in some printings. This caused some of the 1611 First Editions to be known by collectors as "He" Bibles, and others as "She" Bibles. Starting just one year after the huge 1611 pulpit-size Authorized Versions were printed, printing then began on a normal sized version of the KJV. As one might imagine, these smaller versions were produced so individuals could have their own personal copy of the Bible.

Of particular note is the fact that the original Authorized Versions had many textual notes with alternative wordings, in addition to notes concerning many verses or portion of verses that were questioned as to their authenticity. Most of these verses that were in question by the translators are the same verses that are also in question in many other translations, and these alternative words are used as a basis for claiming all other versions and translations are NOT the Bible as God originally wrote it. The people who make this claim are usually unaware that the KJV also had these alternative words in the original publication of the Authorized Version. Another piece of information that is usually unknown by those who champion the KJV as the only valid version of the Bible is the fact that the original Authorized Version included the Apocrypha, a number of books considered Scripture by Catholics but not by Protestants of any age.

The King James Version has been updated a number of times, in 1629, 1638, 1762, and 1769; meaning that the KJVs sold today are not even the original 1611 version.

Protestants today are largely unaware of our own history, and unaware of the Geneva Bible. The Geneva Bible is textually 95% the same as the King James Version but 50 years older than the King James Version, and it was not influenced by the Roman Catholic Rheims New Testament that the King James translators admittedly took into consideration.

Nevertheless, the King James Bible clearly turned out to be an excellent and accurate translation, and it became the most printed book in the history of the world, and the only book with one billion copies in print. In fact, for over 250 years, until the appearance of the English Revised Version of 1881-1885, the King James Version reigned without much of a rival. One little-known fact is that for the past 200 years, all King James Bibles published in America are actually the 1769 Baskerville update, with spelling and wording revisions not contained in the 1611 version. The original "1611" preface is nearly always deceptively included by the publishers, but no mention of the fact that it is really the 1769 version is to be found, because that might hurt sales. The only way to obtain a true, unaltered, 1611 version is to purchase an original pre-1769 printing of the King James Bible.

Let me say that again. Any so-called King James Version Bible that you buy today at any local Christian Bookstore is absolutely NOT the 1611 King James Bible. It is the 1769 Baskerville Birmingham revision, even though this fact is admitted nowhere in the book, and even though it may say "1611" on the front page. But it's just not true. The spellings have been revised, and some words changed, in every printing done since 1769, and fourteen entire books plus extra prefatory features have been removed from almost every printing done since 1885. Between 1611 and today, there have been 6,637 modifications to the Authorized Version.

Still, the Authorized Version has an immense following, and as such there have been a number of different attempts to update or improve upon it. The Revised Version and its derivatives also stem from the King James Version. There are currently in print 19 different King James Bibles, plus any claiming to be the original King James Version.

Yes, Protestants initially requested a new translation in the language of the people, but King James made this new translation the official Bible of his Anglican Church. As a result, the King James Bible took decades to overcome the more popular Protestant Church's Geneva Bible. One of the greatest ironies of history is that many Protestant Christian churches and individuals today embrace the King James Bible as the only "legitimate" English language translation, yet it is not even a Protestant translation! It was printed by King James to replace the Protestant Geneva Bible by authorities who throughout most of history were hostile to Protestants, placing many in prison and even killing some. While many Protestants are quick to assign the full blame of persecution to the Holy Roman Catholic Church, it should be noted that even after England broke from Catholicism in the 1500's, the Church of England (The Anglican Church) continued to persecute Protestants throughout the 1600's. One famous example of this is John Bunyan who, while in prison for the crime of preaching the Protestant Gospel, wrote one of Christian history's greatest books, *Pilgrim's Progress*. Throughout the 1600's, as the Puritans and the Pilgrims fled the persecution of the Church of England to cross the Atlantic and start a new free nation in America, they took with them their precious Geneva Bible, and they rejected the King's Bible. America was founded upon the Geneva Bible, not the King James Bible. That did not, however, stop the Authorized Version from becoming the most common Bible in America because of the easy availability of the KJV.

Why am I pointing out all this history?

All Bible translations today are attempts on the part of men to present the Bible in a clear and contemporary language so people can better understand the Word of God. This was the reason the Protestants asked King James to create a new version, and it is the reason behind the dozens of versions created since that time. All translations available today are a best-efforts attempt to create a better book to study. Some of them touch hearts better than others. Some of them touch minds better than others.

But the Word of God is not a book!

The Word of God is a message from a supernatural God concerning an eternal Plan to rescue God's Creation from a world of bondage to sin and service to Satan, and to reconcile that Creation to himself. The Word of God involves eternal and supernatural events and concepts, which often cannot be translated into temporal words of mankind. Because of this, all translations fail in at least one issue – there is so much more to the Word of God than what a mere book written in a human language by imperfect and finite men can ever state. All translations are flawed.

This DOES NOT mean that any or all translations are wrong. This DOES NOT mean that you cannot count on one or more translations to search out God's truth.

But it DOES mean that all translations are incomplete. So pick one, any one, and read it and study it and live by it. If you really want to, you WILL find God in your version.

It is simply not possible that eternal truths and infinite concepts can be translated into human languages. There is more to God's TRUTH and his eternal Message than can be described in English, and much more that can be put into a single book.

The Apostle John tells us this very clearly when he states in the very last verse of his Gospel, "And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written." [John 21:25, KJV]

You can clearly count on most, and maybe all, translations to point you to God. And in every translation you can find God's promise that all sincere hearts who turn to him will eventually find him. Everything necessary to life and godliness can be found in these translations. God has promised us that.

But not everything about God, and not everything about Jesus, is in any translation.

This is why Jesus tells us, as recorded in the Gospel of John, that the Holy Spirit will guide us into truth. Jesus never claimed that the Holy Spirit will guide us to a mere translation, or even to a more accurate translation, but to TRUTH.

It does not take a Bible translation for us to find God – it takes his Holy Spirit for us to find God. And the Holy Spirit can use any translation as a tool in this process.

The Bible tells us that God used a mule owned by Balaam to communicate his truth. Jesus told us a thousand years later that if the truth were not declared by his followers, that he would make the rocks cry out. And the Bible commands imperfect believers to spread the Gospel and make disciples all over the world, and he gave this command long before there was any version of the Bible available. If you truly believe the words of God, then you must admit that he can use any sincere Believer and any translation to communicate those words.

It is merely tradition that elevates one translation over another. Or else it is merely personal taste. But if you are elevating one translation over another to the extent that you believe one translation is inspired by God and the rest are either uninspired by God or tools of Satan, then you are elevating the traditions of men to a level not allowed by the very Scriptures you claim to believe.

The Word of God is not a book. And the Truth of God is not a translation. But I promise you that everything God wants to share with you here in this life is in the pages of your favorite translation.

So relax and enjoy that translation, believing that God's Holy Spirit will take the words of God and make them the Word of God, if you ask him to.