

AN EVALUATION OF THE *NEW KING JAMES BIBLE*

“Raccoon” John Smith often puzzled over the “obsolete terms and antiquated forms of speech” in the King James Bible. This difficulty often caused him embarrassment when preaching. Smith needed a Bible that spoke the plain language of the nineteenth-century American frontiersman. The need was filled in 1826 when Alexander Campbell published his new translation. When Smith sat down to peruse the first edition of Campbell’s *Living Oracles* (New Testament), he remarked, “Many an obscure passage was at once made clear, unintelligible words and phrases disappeared, discrepancies were reconciled, and the sacred page seemed to grow transparent.”¹

A similar need for clarity in the King James Bible (KJB) led to the publishing of the *New King James Bible: New Testament* in 1979. Sam Moore, President of Thomas Nelson Inc., the exclusive financier and publisher of the project, tells of this need in an interview with *Advantage* magazine.²

Advantage: The new King James you’re about to publish, when was the idea first mentioned, and who originated it?

Moore: Well, not really as much me as the consumer. The consumer always ultimately decides what is needed.

Within the last 25 years, there have been several modern language translations, including the Revised Standard Version that Nelson published back in 1952. The thing is, though, these new translations were not accepted by a lot of conservative Christians. Instead, they clung to the original King James version, even though it had been published over 300 years earlier.

¹John Augustus Williams, *Life of Elder John Smith* (Cincinnati, OH: Standard Publishing Co., 1904), 139.

²Jim Sparks and Ken Powers II, “*Advantage* Interviews: Sam Moore,” *Advantage* 1 (March 1979): n.p.

In the late 50s there was a cry for a Bible that people could understand, and shortly after that the Living Bible came into being. It was a huge success selling about 23 million copies in about two years.

But the Living Bible is a paraphrase . . . in other words, translating thoughts for thoughts. . . . The King James version, on the other hand, was a more *literal* translation. It was translated word for word, rather than thought for thought.

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Advantage: How long has the new King James Bible been in the works? When was the idea first conceived?

Moore: . . . What we did, however, was put understandable explanations of some of the words in the King James text at the end of the verses, and we called it the Open Bible.

The concept was quickly accepted by the people; they found the Open Bible so relevant and so meaningful. When we saw the reception it got, I immediately knew that something should be done with the text of the King James Bible itself.

Then one day my boy, who was ten years old at the time, came to me and said, “Dad, you make a lot of Bibles. Can’t you make one I can understand?” That sort of hit me like a ton of bricks, and I decided that I had to do something. I tried to get two or three foundations to undertake the project, but nobody would touch it. So I had to do it myself.

This pressing need for intelligibility along with a strict adherence to the text (textus receptus) and lyrical beauty of the KJB (loved by so many) motivated the publishers to produce a revision.

In the Preface to the 1611 edition, the translators of the Authorized King James Version state that it was not their purpose “to make a new translation . . . but to make a good one better.”

. . . The publishers have felt obliged to follow the method of the original translators—to produce a revised English edition which will unlock the spiritual treasures found uniquely in the King James Version of the Holy Scriptures.³

³“Introduction,” *New King James Bible: New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers, 1979), iii.

To accomplish this task, the publishers solicited forty-nine scholars⁴ to revise the New Testament.

Committed to a belief in the inspiration and infallibility of Scripture, each scholar independently recommended changes based on his research of the Greek texts, the King James Version, and the established guidelines.⁵

The work of the scholars then went to the New Testament editor, Arthur L. Farstad, who “correlated and unified” (e.g., deleted, added, changed) the translation work submitted by the scholarly team. An overview committee of sixty-five preachers and college teachers functioned as a sounding board to voice their opinions concerning the strengths and weaknesses of the revision. Manuscripts also were submitted to English language experts to check “grammatical accuracy, poetical beauty, and the communication of ideas.” Finally, when the work neared completion, an executive review committee (five scholars working under the careful direction of the editor) “resolved any outstanding difficulties and brought the New Testament text to its essentially final state.”⁶

The revisers aptly accomplished their goals. The substitution of “you” and “your” for “ye,” “thee,” “thou,” “thy,” and “thine” and the omission of *-eth* and *-est* verb endings greatly enhances clarity. Contemporary wording replaces archaic terminology and expressions which have changed in meaning. The following examples are cited from the KJB followed by the *New King James* (NKJ) reading. Compare the underlined wording.

⁴The 49 scholars represent the following countries: United States (41), Canada (3), Scotland (2), Australia (1), England (1), and New Zealand (1).

⁵Arthur L. Farstad, “The New King James Bible, New Testament: A Prized Legacy,” *The New King James Bible, Monograph 1* (March 1979), n.p.

⁶Ibid.

Matthew 2.16	And in all the <u>coasts</u> thereof And in all that <u>region</u>
Matthew 6.25	<u>Take no thought</u> for your life <u>Do not worry</u> about your life
Matthew 7.13	Enter ye in at the <u>strait</u> gate Enter in at the <u>narrow</u> gate
Matthew 18.8	It is better for thee to enter into life <u>halt</u> or maimed It is better for you to enter into life <u>lame</u> or maimed
Matthew 19.14	<u>Suffer</u> little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me <u>Let</u> the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them
Matthew 23.24	Which strain <u>at</u> a gnat, and swallow a camel Who strain <u>out</u> a gnat and swallow a camel
Mark 1.30	And <u>anon</u> they tell him of her And <u>right away</u> they told Him about her
Mark 5.30	Immediately knowing in himself that <u>virtue</u> had gone out of him Immediately knowing in Himself that <u>power</u> had gone out of Him
Mark 6.8	And commanded them that they should take nothing for their journey, save a staff only; no <u>script</u> , . . . And He commanded them that they should take nothing for their journey except a staff—no <u>bag</u> , . . .
Mark 6.21	Herod on his birthday made a supper to his lords, high captains, and chief <u>estates</u> Herod on his birthday gave a feast for his nobles, the high officers, and the chief <u>men</u>
Mark 6.25	I will that thou give me <u>by and by</u> in a <u>charger</u> the head of John the Baptist I want you to give me <u>at once</u> the head of John the Baptist on a <u>platter</u>
Mark 6.31	They had no <u>leisure</u> so much as to eat They did not even have <u>time</u> to eat

- Mark 9.3 And his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them
And His clothes became shining, exceedingly white, like snow, such as no launderer on earth can whiten them
- Mark 14.33 He . . . began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy
He began to be troubled and deeply distressed
- Mark 15.15 Pilate, willing to content the people
Pilate, wanting to gratify the crowd
- Luke 10.40 Martha was cumbered about much serving
Martha was distracted with much serving
- Luke 10.41 Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things
Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things
- Luke 14.8 When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room
When you are invited by anyone to a wedding, do not sit down in the best place
- Luke 14.32 He sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace
He sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace
- Luke 15.16 And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat
And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate
- Luke 17.9 I trow not
I think not
- Luke 19.13 And said unto them, Occupy till I come
And said to them, Do business till I come
- Luke 19.43 Thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side
Your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side
- Luke 21.34 Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting
Take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing

- Luke 22.11 Ye shall say unto the goodman of the house
You shall say to the master of the house
- John 12.7 Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this
Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of My burial
- Acts 6.9 Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the
Libertines
Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the
Freedmen
- Acts 9.26 He assayed to join himself to the disciples
He tried to join the disciples
- Acts 12.1 Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the
church
Herod the king stretched out his hand to harass some from the
church
- Acts 17.3 Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered
Explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer
- Acts 17.4 And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas
And some of them believed; and . . . joined Paul and Silas
- Acts 17.23 For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions
For as I was passing through and considering the objects of your
worship
- Acts 19.1 Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus
Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus
- Acts 19.19 Many of them also which used curious arts
Also, many of those who practiced magic
- Acts 20.23 The Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and
afflictions abide me
The Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and
tribulations await me
- Acts 21.15 After those days we took up our carriages, and went up to
Jerusalem
After those days we packed and went up to Jerusalem

Acts 21.24	<u>Be at charges</u> with them <u>Pay their expenses</u>
Acts 21.32	They <u>left</u> beating of Paul They <u>stopped</u> beating Paul
Acts 27.10	Not only of the <u>lading</u> and ship Not only of the <u>cargo</u> and ship
Acts 27.40	They . . . <u>hoised</u> up the mainsail to the wind They <u>hoisted</u> the mainsail to the wind
Acts 28.13	From thence we <u>fetch</u> a <u>compass</u> , and came to Rhegium From thence we <u>circled round</u> and reached Rhegium
Romans 1.13	Oftentimes I purposed to come to you, (but was <u>let hitherto</u>) That I often planned to come to you (but was <u>hindered until now</u>)
Romans 13.13	Not in <u>chambering</u> and wantonness Not in <u>licentiousness</u> and wantonness
1 Corinthians 4.4	For I know nothing <u>by</u> myself For I know nothing <u>against</u> myself
1 Corinthians 13.4	<u>Charity</u> suffereth long, and is kind; <u>charity</u> envieth not; <u>charity</u> <u>vaunteth not</u> itself, is not puffed up <u>Love</u> suffers long and is kind; <u>love</u> does not envy; <u>love</u> <u>does not</u> <u>parade</u> itself, is not puffed up
1 Corinthians 14.11	I shall be unto him that speaketh a <u>barbarian</u> I shall be a <u>foreigner</u> to him who speaks
2 Corinthians 8.1	We <u>do you to wit</u> of the grace of God We <u>make known to you</u> the grace of God
Galatians 4.24	The one from the mount Sinai, which <u>gendereth</u> to bondage, which is <u>Agar</u> The one from Mount Sinai, which <u>engenders</u> bondage, which is <u>Hagar</u>
Galatians 4.25	For this <u>Agar</u> is mount Sinai in Arabia, and <u>answereth</u> to Jerusalem For this <u>Hagar</u> is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and <u>corresponds</u> to Jerusalem

- Galatians 6.6 Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that
teachest in all good things
Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him
who teaches
- Ephesians 2.1 And you hath he quicken
And you He has made alive
- Ephesians 5.4 Which are not convenient
Which are not fitting
- Philippians 1.8 For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels
of Jesus Christ
For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the
affection of Jesus Christ
- Colossians 4.16 Cause that it be read
See that it is read
- 1 Thessalonians 2.8 So, being affectionately desirous of you
So, affectionately longing for you
- 1 Thessalonians 4.15 The Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep
The Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep
- 1 Thessalonians 5.14 Comfort the feebleminded
Comfort the fainthearted
- 2 Thessalonians 2.7 For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now
letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way
For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who
now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way
- 1 Timothy 5.4 But if any widow have children or nephews, let them learn first to
shew piety at home, and to requite their parents
But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn
to show piety at home and to repay their parents
- 1 Timothy 6.4 But doting about questions and strifes of words
But obsessed with disputes and arguments over words
- Philemon 8 Wherefore, though I might be much bold in Christ to enjoin thee
that which is convenient
Therefore, though I might be very bold in Christ to command you
what is fitting

Hebrews 12.8	If ye be without chastisement, . . . then are ye <u>bastards</u> If you are without chastening, . . . then you are <u>illegitimate</u>
Hebrews 13.5	Let your <u>conversation</u> be without covetousness Let your <u>conduct</u> be without covetousness
Hebrews 13.7	Considering the <u>end of their conversation</u> Considering the <u>outcome of their conduct</u>
James 3.13	Let him <u>shew</u> out of a good <u>conversation</u> his works Let him <u>show</u> by good <u>conduct</u> that his works
1 Peter 2.5	Ye also, as <u>lively</u> stones, are built up You also, as <u>living</u> stones, are being built up
1 Peter 2.18	Not only to the good and gentle, but also to the <u>froward</u> Not only to the good and gentle, but also to the <u>harsh</u>
1 Peter 3.2	While they behold your chaste <u>conversation</u> coupled with fear When they observe your chaste <u>conduct</u> accompanied by fear
2 Peter 2.3	And through covetousness shall they with <u>feigned</u> words make merchandise of you And by covetousness they will exploit you with <u>deceptive</u> words
Revelation 18.9	Who have committed fornication and lived <u>deliciously</u> with her Who have committed fornication and lived <u>luxuriously</u> with her

Consistent and accurate renderings in the NKJ replace mistranslations of the KJB.

Artificial distinctions (two English words for one Greek word) are corrected. In 1 Corinthians 16.1-2, the KJB reads, “Now concerning the collection for the saints, . . . that there be no gatherings when I come.” The same Greek word, *logeia*, is translated two different ways. Better is the NKJ, “Now concerning the collection for the saints, . . . that there be no collections when I come.” In Acts 17.19, 22, the KJB has “Areopagus . . . Mars’ hill.” The translators decided to use the Greek name for the god in one instance and the Roman name in the next. The NKJ corrects this by twice rendering “Areopagus.” The KJB gives the variant spellings “Jeremy” and “Jeremias” for Jeremiah in Matthew 2.17 and 16.14. Compare “Jesus” for Joshua in Acts 7.45

and Hebrews 4.8. The NKJ corrects these. Compare also Romans 5.10, 11 (“reconciled”); 1 Corinthians 11.29, 34 (“judgment”); and 2 Thessalonians 2.6-7 (“restrain”).

Distinctions destroyed (one English word for two Greek words) by the KJB are restored by the NKJ. In 2 Corinthians 7.10, the KJB reads, “For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of.” The distinction in the Greek, *metanoian . . . ’ametameleton*, is preserved properly in the NKJ, “For godly sorrow produces repentance to salvation, not to be regretted.” The NKJ distinguishes between *daimonion* and *diabolos*. So, a demon instead of a devil was cast out of certain individuals (Matthew 9.33; Mark 7.26; Luke 11.14). The NKJ also distinguishes between *ades* and *geenna*. Rather than saying, “his [Jesus’] soul was not left in hell” (Acts 2.31), Peter remarked, “His soul was not left in Hades.” Compare also 1 Corinthians 14.20 (“children . . . babes”); John 10.16 (“fold . . . flock”); and Galatians 1.6-7 (“different . . . another”).

The NKJ improves the translation of Greek verbs in certain places. In Acts 19.2, the KJB translates the aorist participle, *pisteusantes*, “Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?” However, the expression is used for the act of becoming a Christian (see Acts 11.17) and should read, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” The word *’oida* (perfect form used as a present) in 2 Corinthians 12.2-3 translates, “I know a man in Christ . . . I know such a man” (NKJ), rather than, “I knew” (KJB). Also, Galatians 2.21, “then Christ is dead in vain” (KJB), is corrected to read, “then Christ died [*’apethanen*] in vain” (NKJ).

Anachronisms are removed by the NKJ. “Easter” becomes “Passover” (Acts 12.4); “candle” becomes “lamp” (Luke 15.8); “castle” becomes “barracks” (Acts 21.37); and “candlestick” becomes “lampstand” (Revelation 1.12, 13, 20).

The NKJ clarifies passages formerly influenced by doctrinal bias. Thus, the Calvinistic tainted Acts 2.47, “The Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved,” properly becomes, “The Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” Likewise, Galatians 5.17, “so that ye cannot do the things that ye would,” is changed to read, “so that you do not do the things you want.” The NKJ gives no support to the mistaken idea of total consumption in communion, for instead of “drink ye all of it,” the reading is, “All of you drink from it” (Matthew 26.27). And, a “great fish” not a “whale” swallowed Jonah, according to Jesus in Matthew 12.40. Other corrections follow below.

Matthew 28.1	In the <u>end</u> of the sabbath Now <u>after</u> the sabbath
Mark 6.20	<u>Observed</u> him <u>Protected</u> him
John 4.24	God is <u>a spirit</u> God is <u>Spirit</u>
Acts 2.6	When this was <u>noised abroad</u> When the <u>sound occurred</u>
1 Corinthians 1.21	It pleased God by the foolishness of <u>preaching</u> It pleased God by the foolishness of the <u>message preached</u>
1 Corinthians 3.9	<u>Husbandry</u> <u>Field</u>
2 Corinthians 2.17	Which <u>corrupt</u> the word of God <u>Peddling</u> the word of God
Philippians 3.20	Our <u>conversation</u> is in heaven Our <u>citizenship</u> is in heaven
Colossians 2.8	Beware lest any man <u>spoil</u> you Beware lest anyone <u>take</u> you <u>captive</u>
1 Thessalonians 5.22	Abstain from <u>all appearance</u> of evil Abstain from <u>every form</u> of evil

2 Timothy 2.15	<u>Study</u> to shew thyself approved unto God <u>Be diligent</u> to present yourself approved to God
Hebrews 12.1	Let us run with <u>patience</u> Let us run with <u>endurance</u>
1 Peter 1.7	That the <u>trial</u> of your faith That the <u>genuineness</u> of your faith

But, the NKJ on several accounts fails to correct some of the problems of the KJB.

“Baptize you with water” (Matthew 3.11; Mark 1.8) should be “baptize you in [’en] water.”

“Simon the Canaanite” (Matthew 10.4) should be “Simon the Cananean” (New American Standard, NAS) or “Simon the Zealot” (New International Version, NIV). In Matthew 28.19, “baptizing them in” does not render ’eis exactly as would “baptizing them into.” The Latin term “Calvary” (Luke 23.33) should be replaced by “Skull.” The “good olive tree” of Romans 11.23 is more accurately a “cultivated [*kallielaios*] olive tree.” Galatians 5.12, “I wish those who trouble you were also cut off!” is unclear. Better is the NIV, “I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves.” “Sabbaths” of Colossians 2.16 should be “sabbath” (the Aramaic *sabbaton* is not plural).

Some artificial distinctions are preserved in the NKJ. 1 Corinthians 13.8 remains, “they will fail [*katargethesontai*]; . . . they will cease [*pausontai*]; . . . it will vanish away [*katargethesetai*].” 1 Corinthians 3.17 reads, “If anyone defiles [*phtheirei*] the temple of God, God will destroy [*phtherei*] him.” The NIV correctly reads, “If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him.” Compare “discern . . . judge” for *diakrino* in 1 Corinthians 11.29, 31; and “everlasting . . . eternal” for ’*aionion* in Matthew 25.46.

Some distinctions in the Greek are missed by the NKJ. For example, John 1.11 should read, “He came to his own home, and his own people received him not” (Revised Standard

Version, RSV), but the NKJ has, “He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.”

Rather than “Before Abraham was, I AM,” the distinction of the verbs in John 8.58 is given better by the NIV, “Before Abraham was born, I am!” “Jesus I know [*ginosko*] and Paul I know about [*’epistamai*]” of Acts 19.15 wrongly remains “know . . . know” in the NKJ (cf. 1 Corinthians 13.12).

One mistranslation preserving doctrinal bias is not changed in the NKJ. Acts 3.19, “Repent therefore and be converted,” should read, “Repent, then, and turn to God” (NIV).

The NKJ also has problems with the translation of coins, weights, and measures. Concerning these items, the policy stated in the introduction (i.e., “words representing ancient objects, such as chariot and phylacteries, have no modern substitutes and are necessarily retained”) has been applied only in the case of *denarion*.⁷

Perhaps the greatest fault of the NKJ is its textual basis. The NKJ rigidly follows the *textus receptus* even to the inclusion of notable passages attested to be later scribal additions, for example, 1 Corinthians 6.20b; John 7.53–8.11; Luke 9.55–56; and Acts 8.37. Amazingly, the NKJ includes the *Comma Johanneum* (1 John 5.7–8), but it adds this footnote (the only textual note in the entire New Testament!), “The words from ‘in heaven’ through ‘on earth’ are from the Latin Bible, although three Greek mss. [manuscripts] from the 15th century and later also contain them.” The footnote certainly tells the truth, but it hardly speaks well of men (presumably the executive review committee) who supposedly are learned concerning the text of the New Testament! The whole approach to the text seems to be a slight to the last one-hundred years of scholarly studies of the text of the New Testament.

⁷For a good treatment of these inadequacies, see Walter A. Elwell, “The King James Even Better?” *Christianity Today* 24 (November 2, 1979): 48.

As for the format of the NKJ, the type is clear, legible, and appealing. Verses, printed individually, tend to break the continuity of thought in a passage; however, appropriately placed headings help correct this problem. Quotation marks are used, and the words of Jesus are printed in red ink (a standing practice that, in my opinion, should be discontinued forever). In the classic passage of John, chapter 3, Jesus speaks through verse 21. Implied words are not italicized (as is the case with the KJB), a procedure that can either be helpful or harmful depending on the exact passage (e.g., the KJB wrongly supplied “unknown” in 1 Corinthians 14 and wrongly italicizes the verb “are” throughout the beatitudes in Matthew, chapter 5). Quotations from Old Testament passages are printed in special type and cited in footnotes. Apart from these Old Testament references, only five other footnotes appear. These are: notes on “denarii” (John 12.6) and “denarius” (Revelation 6.3); a note on the Greek and Aramaic expressions in 1 Corinthians 16.22; an alternative reading to “He” (“or, he”) in 2 Thessalonians 2.7; and, of course, the textual note on 1 John 5.7-8 mentioned above. This lack of alternate textual readings and alternate translations contrasts with the usage of footnotes in the margin by the translators of the original KJB. Another point concerning format is the capitalization of pronouns referring to God, Christ, and Holy Spirit. This procedure often necessitates interpretation, as is the case with 2 Thessalonians 2.7 and Revelation 14.14, and, in my opinion, it is best omitted.

In spite of all its shortcomings, the NKJ does correct many faults and inadequacies of the KJB. Readers of the KJB now can use a more contemporary and reliable translation. This is its value—to aid the understanding of those who think all modern translations are “unholy” and “untrue.” If those of this mindset will take hold of and read the NKJ, the work of the revisers has been well worth their efforts. The publishers have not made a new translation, but they have made an old one better.

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