

*Question: For many years the King James Version of the Bible was the only one trusted, but today there are many other Bibles. Why do we need new translations, and why are the new translations different from the King James?*

All of our Bibles in English are translations from ancient Hebrew and Greek manuscripts. John Wycliffe translated the Bible into English for the first time in the 1380's. We owe a great debt of gratitude to Wycliffe and other early scholars who risked their lives in face of official opposition to make the Bible available to English-speaking people. The popular King James Authorized Version was translated from Hebrew and Greek manuscripts available to them in England in 1611, nearly 400 years ago.

One reason for newer translations is that there have been the numerous changes in English vocabulary and grammar between 1611 and today. As a result, the King James Bible is not in the common language of people living today. We do not refer to one another with "thee," "thou," "thy," or "ye." We do not use the archaic verb forms like "doeth," "saith," "heareth," or "goeth." In 1611 "Holy Ghost" meant something like Holy Guest, but literally it refers to the Holy Spirit. Today the word "conversation" refers to people talking with one another, but in the King James Bible it refers to one's "manner of life" (1 Peter 3:1). "Prevent" means to "go before" in the KJV, but today it means to stop someone or something (1 Thessalonians 4:15). In 1960 two men named Bridges and Weigle published an entire volume to define the now unknown and archaic words in the King James Bible.

Another problem with the older translation is the lack of manuscript information that was available to the translators in England in 1611. Because the papyrus and animal skins that were used for writing materials easily decayed with use, copies were made; and then copies were made of the copies down through the centuries. Since the first copies of the books of the Bible were written long before the printing press, they were made by hand. The copyists made the same kinds of errors of hand and eye that we would make today. As a result, words were sometimes omitted and others added. Often later copyists made changes in an attempt to restore or correct an inaccurate text. We now know that they ended up corrupting the text even further. At

most about fifty manuscripts of the Bible were available to the translators in England in 1611. Most of these manuscripts dated from the 10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> centuries. We have only one dating back to the 6<sup>th</sup> century. Modern translators have over 5000 manuscripts available today. The three almost complete manuscripts date from the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries, and we have some portions of the Bible dating as early as the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. We now have the ability to re-construct a more accurate text. This also explains why the KJV has words and passages that the newer translations do not include.

The old King James Bible was a truly great translation for its time, and it continues to serve many people well. But those who have not grown up reading it are often discouraged by the difficulties in the language. Students of the Bible today have translations available that use the English language of today's world, and that reflect a more accurate wording. For further study and evaluation of various translations, I recommend a book entitled, *The English Bible, from KJV to NIV* by Jack P. Lewis.

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