

Sunday, February 23, 2014—Grace Life School of Theology—*Grace History Project*—Lesson 128
The Life and Ministry of C. Richard Jordan: Leaving the Bible Society

Introduction

- The past couple lessons have been devoted to setting forth some history regarding the Discovery, Disclosure, and Dissent of the Grace Alternative Doctrines (GADs). We observed at the close of Lesson 127 that Pastor Stam rejected these doctrines. This, of course, created an awkward situation for Pastor Jordan as he was beginning to rejoice personally in what he and the other men were studying together; Stam did not share his sentiments. Yet, during the early part of this process, Richard was still working at the Berean Bible Society (BBS) and, by 1986, had been made the editor of the *Searchlight* and was running the ministry.
- In the meantime, Grace School of the Bible (Pastoral Training Class then) was beginning to take off via video and Pastor Jordan's influence continued to grow. The last Cedar Lake Conference (Berean Bible Fellowship's (BBF) annual meeting) that Richard attended before resigning from the BBS was in the summer of 1987. By this time there were nearly sixty men at the conference who were students of the Pastoral Training Class (PTC). It was not long after this conference that Richard resigned his position at the Bible Society.
- During my interview, Richard stated that his conversation with Stam prior to his resignation was about the subject of prayer not the King James Bible (KJB). However, as I stated in a previous lesson, Jordan and Stam never agreed on the King James Bible. Stam was fully aware of what Richard believed on this matter when he offered Richard a position at the Bible Society in the late 1970s.
- The tempest within the BBS/BBF circle of the Grace Movement in the second half of the 1980s that led to Richard's resignation from the Bible Society was largely over the Bible issue and, to a lesser extent, the GADs. Please recall from the testimony of Pastor Ted Fellows that it was in 1986 and 1987 that the GADs, such as Pauline Prayer, were just beginning to be understood. There were some within the BBS/BBF who never agreed with Richard's stand for the KJB and resented his growing popularity as a Bible teacher.
- Consequently, the Bible issue took center stage in the public discourse that preceded Richard's resignation from the BBS in August of 1987 and immediately following his resignation.
- We have before us "An Important Letter From Pastor Stam and the Board of Directors" dated September 1, 1987. The main function of this letter, among other things, was to announce to the constituency of the BBS that the relationship between Richard and the BBS officially came to an end on August 29, 1987.
- The goal of the current lesson is to explore the factors that led to parting of ways between Stam and Jordan. We will do this primarily by looking at the following three documents:

- “The Reverence Due The King James Bible: Let’s Clear the Air” by Richard Jordan in the November, 1986 issue of the *Berean Searchlight*
 - “An Important Letter From Pastor Stam and Board of Directors” dated September 1, 1987
 - “Here I Stand” by Richard Jordan in the inaugural issue of *The Grace Journal* from December, 1987
- Please note that we will consider Stam’s letter of September 1, 1987 as a means of setting the stage so that we might better understand what occurred and why.

“An Important Letter From Pastor Stam . . .” Sept. 1, 1987

- In the second paragraph, Stam paints the following picture regarding Richard’s view on the KJB.
 - “Some time prior to the Fall of 1986 Brother Richard Jordan, our president and gifted teacher of the Word, came to believe and teach (though not in the Searchlight or over Bible Time) that our English King James translation of the Bible is the absolute, inerrant, final authority for faith and practice, being the very W-O-R-D-S of God, preserved word-for-word from the original Hebrew and Greek manuscripts. This naturally stirred up much controversy and caused serious division in the Body of Christ, even resulting in a split in some local assemblies. It was distressing to learn of heated arguments, especially among the young men, disrupting the fellowship of the saints and, no question about it now, this crusade was spearheaded by Pastor Jordan.”
- Please note that Stam’s comments imply that he did not know prior to the fall of 1986 what Richard believed about the KJB. Please note also that Richard told me in our interview that Stam knew where he stood on the issue when he first came to the Bible Society in late 1970s. Bear in mind that Stam gave Richard permission to teach the PTC as early as 1983. One of the first classes in the first year of the PTC was Manuscript Evidence in which Richard presents his case for the KJB.
- In the next paragraph Stam claims to have talked Richard out of this extreme position with respect to the KJB.
 - “By the grace of God, I was able at length to convince our Brother that Hebrew and Greek manuscripts could not possibly be preserved in English, and that therefore this translation could not possibly be inerrant. We agree that while the KJV was indeed a faithful translation, it did not and could not contain word-for-word the original w-o-r-d-s of the ancient manuscripts.”
- Stam then speaks of an article Richard wrote for the November, 1986 *Searchlight* at the board’s request explaining why his former position on the KJB was erroneous.

- “At the Board’s request, Brother Jordan wrote an article for the November, 1986 *Searchlight*, explaining that his former position had been erroneous. Also he wrote a touching letter of apology to the Board and to me for all the trouble caused promising “to do all I possibly can to set them (these things) right.”
- Note that the Board of the BBS asked Richard to write this article for the November, 1986 *Searchlight*. It was not something Richard did of his own accord. More on this later.
- In the fifth paragraph Stam accuses Jordan of making purposefully misleading statements to Stam in order to save face with the men in his “Pastor’s Class.”
 - “This, regrettably, he has not done but has rather, by many misleading statements, sought to satisfy us and at the same time keep the many students and graduates of his Pastor’s Class championing the “inerrancy” of the King James Version. This has caused us much trouble here at Berean Bible Society, and has brought us many letters of complaint, some blaming me, personally, for not doing something about it. Actually many personal discussions and some board meetings had been held about it, each one leaving us hoping that thereforth Brother Jordan would take a more consistent stand for the translation we have used and loved so long.

By now the complaints have piled up so, however, that the Board has felt that for the sake of the Body of Christ as a whole and the testimony of Berean Bible Society in particular, this situation should no longer be tolerated.”

- That Jordan was in a tight spot politically is beyond doubt. He had taught the men in the PTC that the KJB was God’s word for English speaking people. On the other side, he had Stam and the Board of BBS putting pressure on him to renounce THEIR UNDERSTANDING of Richard’s position. The Grace History Project is convinced after analyzing all Stam wrote about this issue in the *Searchlight* throughout 1988 that he never fully understood Richard’s actual position.
- In the next section of the letter, Stam turns his emphasis against some of the early thinking on the GADs. Jordan is accused of teaching “far out doctrine utterly devoid of Scriptural foundation.”
 - “Some months ago Pastor Jordan began teaching another “far out” doctrine, utterly devoid of Scriptural foundation: the doctrine that “God does not heal the sick in answer to prayer during this dispensation,” and that our prayers should be only for spiritual blessings, not for physical or temporal ones. In light of Philippians 4:6-7 and related verses, of course, this teaching also stirred up much controversy, with many godly saints deeply discouraged.

In discussing the subject with Brother Jordan I was again, by the grace of God, able to show him that he was in error, making it God’s policy not to heal the sick in answer to prayer in this dispensation, and that in light of Philippians 2:25-27 alone this could not possibly be so. He acknowledged this and wrote a letter of apology to one family who

had strongly protested this teaching and had wondered how we could permit it, indirectly helping it to gain ground.

The sad fact is that we do not know of one person whom Brother Jordan has dissuaded from either of the above errors. Indeed, only on August 21, less than two weeks ago, did we learn that Brother Jordan has been circulating a set of nine tapes teaching the very subject he had acknowledged to be in error, and that many of his students and/or graduates were advancing this doctrine with great zeal.

Considering what a discouraging doctrine this must be to any saint with physical or material problems, and what division these two errors have already caused among grace believers, our Board of Directors has felt convinced that Brother Jordan and Berean Bible Society must come to a parting of the ways, and his services here have been terminated as of August 29, 1987, with sincere regret and the earnest prayer that God will yet bless and use him to make known the glorious message which He has so graciously committed to us all.”

- Stam claims that the BBS terminated Richard’s employment status while Richard maintains that he resigned his post. Twice Stam claims to have straightened Richard out with respect to doctrines that Richard still holds to this day nearly thirty years later. Speaking from experience, I can understand why some would have perceived Richard and others to be teaching that one can only pray for spiritual things for we ourselves once thought this after being introduced to the GADs. In addition, this thinking was fresh in the minds of the men teaching it and they were still struggling to put into words what they actually believed. As a result, some manners of speaking with respect to the GADs were no doubt refined and restated as the thinking around them became more focused and precise.

Searchlight Article from November, 1986

- Using Stam’s comments as a back drop, we now consider Richard’s article from November, 1986 titled “The Reverence Due the King James Version: Let’s Clear the Air.” This was the article which the BBS Board asked Richard to write on the Bible issue. The article is not long and addresses three basic issues with respect to the Bible version debate: 1) KJV translators were inspired; 2) KJV is a word-for-word preservation of the original manuscripts; 3) the KJV is a perfect translation.
- Richard warns that KJV supporters need “to be careful not to overstate their case lest we become its worst enemy.” He presents his first illustration.
 - “A few KJV supporters claim that the Kings James translators were inspired in the same sense as the original writers of Scripture. This is not only untrue—it is dangerous, for it threatens the completeness of the very canon of Scripture itself with a doctrine of “continuing inspiration.” True friends of the KJV will not long be found in the ranks of those who thus leave us at the mercy of the Charismatics and the cults, with their extra-

biblical revelations and inspiration. True, the translators were singly aided by the Holy Spirit in their work, but divine inspiration is quite another matter.” (236-237)

- In making this statement, Richard was distancing himself from the more radical elements in the KJV only movement, however, he was not backing down from something he himself ever believed. In short, Richard never taught that the KJV translators were inspired in the same sense as the writers of scripture.
- The second point that Richard made in this article was that the KJV is not “an infallible word-for-word preservation of the original manuscripts.”
 - “Others would contend that the KJV is “an infallible, word-for-word preservation of the original manuscripts.” Here the writer can speak from personal experience for he too once held this view. Further thought and study, however, has shown that this is simply not the case. No translation can be said to be a preservation of the original manuscripts—that is self-evident.” (237)
- In a recent phone conversation with Richard regarding this article, he stated that at one time he did believe that the KJV was a “word-for-word preservation of the original manuscripts,” as he suggested in the article. Later, however, he realized that it did not make sense to say that a translation was a preservation of the manuscripts. Rather the KJV is a proper translation of the preserved text into English.
- The third point is by far the most controversial and it revolves around whether or not it is appropriate to claim that the KJV is a “perfect translation.”
 - “Nor is it appropriate to claim that KJV is “a perfect translation,” for that would be to ask the impossible! It is simply not possible to translate any extended passage from one language into another “word-for-word.” Language limitations alone simply do not allow any translation to carry the title “perfect!” To claim otherwise is double talk.” (237)
- It may be subtle, but careful readers will observe that Richard never says that the KJV contains any mistakes. In a recent phone conversation with Richard I asked him about this subtlety. His statement that the KJV is not “perfect” was made from the point of view of Stam’s position on the matter. Stam and Jordan were talking past each other when it came to the question of what constituted an error.
 - *Stam’s Position*—perfection meant no errors of any kind: typos, misspelling, or punctuation mistakes. No variations of any kind in the various editions.
 - *Jordan’s Position*—perfection meant there were no bad translations or clear mistakes like Mark 1:2 in the KJV Bible. When confronted with a so-called mistake in the KJB, what Richard found was that someone did not like how the verse read because it did not fit their doctrinal statement, not that the translators actually made a mistake in how they

rendered something in English. In short, people were altering the KJV to make it fit their theology and then calling it a mistake. Errors such as typos, spelling mistakes, or punctuation errors were not the fault of the translators work but the typesetters and the printers.

- Richard said that coming out of the 1986 Cedar Lake Conference some of the old guard within the BBF, such as Win Johnson were pressing Stam and the Board of the BBS to do something about Richard. It was this outside pressure that was the impetus for the article. Jordan told me that when he submitted the November, 1986 article to Stam, he said to Stam that it was as far as he was willing to go and that if it was not good enough they would have to part ways.
- In the end, what Jordan did is draft a much nuanced article that distanced himself from aspects of the KJV only movement, with which he did not agree, in order to appease Stam and the BBS board. At the same time, he tried to craft a statement that would not overthrow his own conscience with respect to what he actually believed about the KJB.
- It is equally important to note what Pastor Jordan DID NOT say in his November, 1986 article. He NEVER SAYS that he DID NOT BELIEVE the “King James Bible is the Word of God for English speaking people.” Richard’s editorial “Here I Stand” in the inaugural issue of *The Grace Journal* from December, 1987 contains the following statement:
 - “For many years I have believed that *the King James Bible is the Word of God for English speaking people*. I came to Chicago with the clear understanding that I firmly held this conviction. I also understood that the ministry that brought me here was not designed to champion this cause. Since “the preaching of Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery” has long been the one great passion of my heart, I was willing to place my focus there and let others fight the Bible version battle. **I did not and have not changed my conviction**, however, about the KJV. **I believed then and continue to believe now** that the KJV is the Word of God for English speaking people. On that point, I have never wavered.”
- These comments are consistent with what Jordan DID NOT say in his November, 1986 *Searchlight* article. Richard never said that he DID NOT believe the KJV to be God’s Word for English speaking people. Consequently, given all the factors, the Grace History Project believes that Richard crafted a nuanced statement renouncing certain aspects of the KJV Only platform while at the same time not overthrowing his core belief regarding the KJV being God’s word for English speaking people.
- We will consider more from our third piece of documentation, the inaugural issue of *The Grace Journal* in our next lesson.