

Sunday, March 2, 2014—Grace Life School of Theology—*Grace History Project*—Lesson 129 The Life and Ministry of C. Richard Jordan: Leaving the Bible Society, Part 2

### **Introduction/Review**

- In our last study we began to consider the circumstances that led to Pastor Jordan’s resignation from the Berean Bible Society (BBS) on August 29, 1987. Seeing as how the Grace Alternative Doctrines (GADs) were just coming into focus in the middle portion of the 1980s, the major issue in the parting of ways between Stam and Jordan was the Bible issue.
- In Lesson 128 we began a survey of the following three documents in order to understand the major factors that lead to the split between Stam and Jordan.
  - “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 recall that we did not consider these documents in chronological order. Rather we studied Stam’s letter dated September 1, 1987 first in order to set the context for our discussion. From this letter we gleaned the following observations.
  - Stam is not clear that he knew Richard’s position on the King James Bible (KJB) before asking him to come and work for him in the late 1970s.
  - Stam claims to have, by the grace of God, talked Richard out of his extreme position that the KJB was a word-for-word preservation of the original manuscripts in English.
  - Stam states that he and the board of BBS imposed upon Richard to write the November, 1986 article for the *Berean Searchlight*.
  - Stam accuses Richard of being dishonest in writing the November, 1986 article and of seeking to placate the members of his “Pastor’s Class.”
  - Stam states that Richard was teaching “far out” doctrines that were “utterly devoid of scriptural foundation” regarding Pauline prayer.
  - Twice Stam claims to have, by the grace of God, talked Richard out of these “extreme” beliefs which are positions that Jordan still holds to this day.

- Using Stam’s comments as a back drop, next we 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 argued that true friends of the KJB would not teach that the translators were inspired because that would leave open the door of “continuing inspiration” and leave the body of Christ at the mercy of the charismatics and the cults.
  - Richard stated that he once believed that the KJB was a word-for-word preservation of the original manuscripts in English. However, further thought and study on the matter caused him to realize that it was an inaccurate way of stating his position.
  - The most controversial portion of Richard’s article is the third point where he states that the KJB is not a “perfect” translation and no translation can rightly be called perfect.
- After doing my own study and analysis of the documents, I concluded that Richard had written a nuanced article to appease Stam but at the same time not overthrown his own conscience with respect to what he believed about the KJB. My own study was followed up by a phone conversation with Richard in which he provided further details regarding his controversy with Stam and confirmed the conclusions that I had reached from my own study of the documents. As I said last week, Stam and Jordan were speaking past each other on their definitions of what “perfect” meant in this case. While Richard said the KJV was not perfect, he stopped short of saying that it contained any mistakes in terms of how it was translated.
- 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.”
- It is to the inaugural issue of *The Grace Journal* that we now turn our attention.

**“Here I Stand” from *The Grace Journal Vol. 1 Num. 1, December, 1987***

- Please recall that at the time of this writing, Brother Jordan had been resigned from the BBS since late August of 1987, thereby relieving him of the political pressure of the previous year when he drafted his article for the *Searchlight*. Borrowing a line from Luther’s famous defense before the Catholic Inquisition, Richard states the purpose of his article as follows:
  - “Most of you know that in recent days several charges have been leveled at me and our Pastoral Training Class in regard to the King James Bible and prayer. My views on both issues have been so distorted as not to be recognizable and thus I want to take this opportunity to state for you as clearly as I can my own convictions on these matters.”
- The bulk of the editorial is taken up with a discussion of “The Bible Version Issue.” That this editorial should be viewed as a response to Stam’s letter of September 1, 1987 is without question. Consider Pastor Jordan’s articulation of his position in his own words:
  - “The current charges concerning a so-called “KJV inerrancy theory” are in reality little more than a ruse designed to draw attention away from the fact that these brethren do not believe the Bible actually exists today in anything more than what they term a “general sense.” In other words, they do not believe the words of Scripture are now available; rather its message is all that now exists. Because I—and scores of others—agree with the Lord Jesus Christ that His “words” shall not pass away” (Luke 21:33), I have been denounced as a rabble rouser, a liar and a heretic teaching some “**far out doctrine**” with “**not one verse**” to support my claims.

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.

Over the past eight-plus years I have learned much which has broadened both my appreciation for the KJV and my ability to more properly and accurately defend it. Let me state as clearly as I can that I do not believe that the King James translators were inspired nor do I believe that the KJV is somehow not really a translation but a “word-for-word preservation of the original manuscripts.” These are simply things invented by the critics: straw dummies, if you will.

The King James Version is just that—the King James Version. Look up the word “version” in the dictionary and you will find it means “a translation.” No one denies or

questions this. We recognize that to say the KJV is the word of God for English speaking people is to say that it is God's word translated into English. Nothing more and nothing less.

Let there be no mistake: I believe the KJV of the Bible is an accurate, reliable, authoritative translation of the providently preserved Word of God. And this is where all the difficulties begin and end.

- This is what Stam never understood with respect to this controversy. Richard believed that the underlying Greek text was the “providently preserved Word of God” and the KJB was “an accurate, reliable, and authoritative translation” of that text into English. The KJB was a proper translation of the proper text thereby making it God's Word for English speaking people.
- Richard then goes on to identify the fundamental problem of this debate i.e., whether or not the Bible is findable to us in our day.
  - “You see, the fundamental problem centers in the question of whether the Bible is indeed findable and knowable today in a particular and verbal sense; whether God not only originally wrote down particular words of his own choosing, but did he also preserve those very words through history to this day? Ask our critics exactly where the words God originally wrote down are to be found and they will deny even the possibility of finding those words.

My great sin has not been to believe that the words of God can only be “found in only one English translation.” I have never believed that. No, my great sin has been to believe that the Word of God consists of the “words” referred to in passages like Luke 21:33, Matt. 5:18, Isa. 30:8; 29:18, etc. and that God has provided a process whereby those “words” can actually be located. Notice for example, that the last verse just listed indicates those “words” will be preserved into and locatable by those in the kingdom age! Should they be any less available to us who live before that glorious day?

The bottom line is simply that I believe that the Word of God is knowable and findable in a particular sense and that that sense extends to the very words of the text. Friend, if “words” are not the issue, how then can the doctrine of the verbal (i.e., word-for-word) inspiration of the originals be anything but meaningless?

And do not be diverted by the question of variations in manuscripts. It is the path of faith to accept the Scriptures teaching as true even if we cannot confirm it all with our own finite experiences and sense at the moment. To deny the divine viewpoint because of limited human viewpoint is disastrous!

Furthermore: If it is the Scripture itself that is the inspired Word of God, would not an accurate translation also be legitimately called the inspired Word of God? Is not this the

very basis for at least one of our critics often writing, “God’s inspired Word says” and then referring to or quoting KJV?

As to the reliability of the KJV as a translation, I have often used the words of another: “We have in our hands, in the Authorized Version, a Bible so remarkably free from error that we can say even this translation, ‘This is the Bible. . .’”

I believe the KJV should not be changed or altered simply on the basis of private viewpoint—yours and mine not excepted. It should be honored for what it is, studied diligently by using all the study tools available (concordances, dictionaries, reference works, etc.) and taught with confidence so that the authority of God’s Word does God’s work.

- The above paragraphs make plain what Richard actually believed about the KJV. Careful students remember that Richard never addressed any of these issues in his November, 1986 *Searchlight* article, thereby giving credibility to our assessment of what he was trying to accomplish in writing that article – to appease Stam and BBS board without overthrowing his own conscience.
- In the closing section of his article, Richard pointed out what we alluded to in the last study. Richard observed that far too often preachers were altering the text of the KJB to suit their theology as opposed to altering their theology to match the Bible.
  - “Those who attend Bible conferences, listen to tapes and read the writings of prominent “grace preachers” can judge for themselves if there is any effort to discredit the KJV. For myself, I can only say that it troubles me to hear or read someone who themselves cannot translate, telling us how a verse should better be translated or pointing out supposed “mistakes” and “patent errors” in the KJV. Too often they are just plain wrong because they assumed someone else they have read is right or that their own research was adequate.

Remember: It is a serious matter to charge the Bible—in any language—with having a mistake in it. Before you follow someone who tells you your Bible has mistakes in it, you better find out if he has one that does not—and where it is!

My support for the KJV does not come from some supposed extremist view, but rather from an appreciation of the text from which it is translated and a recognition that as a translation it is the fruit of a long and arduous process in the Protestant Church to produce an authoritative English translation—one which is clearly the result of the historical application of the process of providential preservation as taught in Scripture. Thus I say again, in the words of another: “We have in our hands, in the Authorized Version, a Bible so remarkably free from error that we can say of even this translation, ‘This is the Bible,’”

## Conclusion

- In my recent phone conversation with Richard, he shared with me that when he submitted his letter of resignation Stam alluded to the fact that he was going to fight these issues publically in the *Searchlight*. Richard said that in hindsight, it was in Stam's nature to fight and that in doing so he made two tactical errors. First, Richard benefited from the public nature of the discourse in ways that Stam could not foresee. In short, if Stam had just said that Richard left him in the lurch everyone would have been upset with Richard for abandoning an elderly and infirmed Stam, who was nearly 80 at the time. Second, by choosing to publically engage Richard on the matter in the *Searchlight*, Stam ends up making statements that indicated that the president of the Bible Society thought that the Bible was not locatable in any meaningful sense.
- Stam did not waste any time attacking Richard on the Bible in the *Searchlight* after his resignation in late August. The November, 1987 issue of the *Searchlight* ran an article by Stam titled, "The KJV Controversy and Common Sense." Please note that this article appeared in the *Searchlight* a month before Richard issued the inaugural issue of *The Grace Journal* in December, 1987 to respond to accusations that were being made against him.
- In November, 1987 Stam attacked what he perceived to be Richard's view forcefully in his article. In seeking to set forth his arguments against Richard, Stam never says where he thinks the Bible can be found.
  - "God's Word has indeed been preserved for us, and in a most wonderful way, but He did not preserve the original manuscripts for us, much less in an English translation. This is self-evident." (229)
- Note that Stam says God DID preserve his Word but stops short of saying where it can be found. If it is neither in the originals nor in an English translation then where is it? Stam never says.
- Observe the same duplicity in the following statement made later.
  - "But who does not know that the King James Bible is an English translation of the "infallible inerrant Word of God?" Our brother cites many Scripture passages to support his view, but not one states that the original words of the Bible would be preserved for our use, much less in an English translation." (230)
- Again, we must ask Brother Stam that if he thinks that the KJB is an English translation of the "infallible inerrant Word of God" as he says, then where does one locate these "infallible" and "inerrant" words if the originals were not preserved? Moreover, the second sentence demonstrates that Stam never understood Richard's position. It was through a multiplicity of accurate reliable copies manifested historically in the Textus Receptus i.e., the underlying Greek text that the preservation of the originals was maintained. The KJB was a translation of the Preserved Text into English thereby making it God's Word for English speaking people. Stam even quotes from Richard's audio tape titled *Did Our Inspired Bible Expire?* on this point:

- “Where is God’s Word preserved? We have the Scriptural answer. God’s design is to preserve His word in a vast multiplicity of copies. If we allow their combined testimony to speak, it will furnish us with the inspired and preserved Word of God.” (232)
- As an alternative Stam offers the following nebulous statement that does not mean anything.
  - “We present four arguments to prove that God did not preserve the exact Hebrew and Greek words and give them to us now, word-for-word, in the King James Version. Rather, He has done something better—much better, leaving His Word “quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword (Heb. 4:12).” (230)
- Again we ask, what does this mean? If not in the originals or any translation where can one locate God’s preserved words today?
- Please note the following evidence that Stam and Jordan were talking past each other when it came to question of what constituted a mistake in the King James Bible.
  - “Only recently he signed a statement reading, “I do not believe there are any mistakes in the King James Bible.” When I confronted him about this he began speaking about different kinds of mistakes. But does it matter? If the King James Translation contains any mistakes of any kind it is not inerrant, is it?” (233)
- After raising the real issue of the underlying Greek text, Stam passes on an opportunity to discuss it.
  - “Much could be said as to why the Received Text was the right text to use as a basis for the translation, but here we must limit ourselves to a discussion of the translation itself.”
- After reading Stam’s article from the November, 1987 *Searchlight* we are left completely befuddled as to where Stam thought God’s preserved word was. It was not in the original manuscripts because those were not preserved, it is not found in any translation, and the Received Text contains too much variation, according to Stam. Consequently, the founder of the Bible Society is left arguing for the inerrant nebulous Bible that he cannot locate.
- Lastly, the article concludes with the following note: “. . . Be assured, however, that we have no intention of engaging in a running battle over this subject. . .” Yet many times in 1988 Stam chose to further addresses this very subject within the pages of the *Berean Searchlight*.