

Sunday, June 18, 2023—Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*
 Lesson 209 The AV 1611: Producing A Proper Perspective on the Preface (Leveraging, Misuse & Presentism)

Introduction

- In [Lesson 208](#) after considering personal testimonials from a variety of people regarding how the Preface is misused by those on both sides of the text and translation debate, we consider the historical error of “presentism.”
- In doing so, we used Douglas L. Wilson’s essay “Thomas Jefferson and the Meaning of Liberty,” to frame the discussion. Originally published in the November 1992 issue of *The Atlantic*, Wilson defines “presentism” as follows, “the imposition of present-day values and assumptions on individuals and societies of the past.” (Wilson, 103)
 - “In this selection, a distinguished Jefferson scholar reflects on this "many-sided and multi-talented man," especially on his contradictions concerning slavery and race. In doing so, Douglas Wilson raises a crucial point about the perils of presentism — that is, of intruding today's values and attitudes upon the past. To do that, he warns, is distorting history. What annoys him is that too many Americans today seem unable to discuss the past in its own terms, unable "to make appropriate allowances for prevailing historical conditions.” (Wilson, 102)
- After citing one more passage from Wilson’s essay, I concluded Lesson 208 by stating the following:
 - “It is my contention that “presentism” clouds modern readers from properly contextualizing the Preface to the King James Bible. As a result, modern standards and praxis regarding Textual Criticism, and Modern Version advocacy are imposed upon the Preface in an ahistorical manner. This is done by contemporary interlocutors who seek to rhetorically leverage the Preface and advance the argument that the King James translators would have agreed with them. I think parties on both sides of text and translation debate do this to varying degrees.” (7)
- I further stated that in the next Lesson we would consider Brother Joshua Barzon’s 2022 book *The Forgotten Preface* as an example of “presentism” when it comes to the Preface. It is to this endeavor that we will now turn our attention.

Presentism: *The Forgotten Preface* by Joshua Barzon

- Joshua Barzon’s 2022 publication *The Forgotten Preface: Surprising Insight On the Translation Philosophy of the King James Translators* stands out as a prime example of “presentism” when it comes to the King James Preface. In the Introduction Brother Barzon states the following regarding the goal of his book.
 - “. . . And even today, more than four centuries after its original publication, the KJV remains the most famous Bible translation in history, and one of the most-printed books in English.

However, there is an important portion of the King James Bible that is absent from the majority of KJV editions. It is not a lost book of the Bible, nor a newly discovered Greek manuscript. No, it is what I have deemed “The Forgotten Preface.” Upon its completion, the King James Translators included a letter “from the translators to the reader,” as the Preface to this new English translation. Its purpose was to defend their work against the fierce criticism that they felt it would receive from readers.

In the nineteenth century, for one reason or another, this preface ceased to be included in the majority of printed Bibles.

This book aims to exposit the preface to the King James Version and to show the reader what it is that the King James translators believed about inspiration, preservation, translation, and even modern translations. You might be surprised by what you find.” (Barzon, v-vi)

- Before moving on, there are a couple of points we should note. First, Barzon agrees with what we saw from the pen of Edgar J. Goodspeed in [Lesson 193](#) regarding the Preface being “practically out of print.” (Goodspeed, 25) Second, this is because, in the 19th century, publishers ceased printing it. Third, Barzon endeavors to “exposit” the Preface to explain what the King James translators believed about the following four categories: 1) inspiration, 2) preservation, 3) translation, and 4) modern translations. This enterprise is the focus of Chapter 1 which is titled “What the King James Translators Believed.” In this Chapter, Barzon sets forth the following ten theses regarding the beliefs of the King James translators.
 - Thesis #1: The King James translators believed that any attempt to produce a modern translation of the Bible would be met with resistance and suspicion.
 - Thesis #2: The King James translators believed that the Bible should be available in the common English of the then-present age.
 - Thesis #3: The King James translators believed that God used and blessed faulty Bible translations in the past.
 - Thesis #4: The King James translators believed that differing and even faulty translations are still the Word of God.
 - Thesis #5: The King James translators did not believe their translation was perfect.
 - Thesis #6: The King James translators did not believe that only the most educated scholars were capable of translating the Scriptures.
 - Thesis #7: The King James translators believed that those opposed to modern translations would use the age of previous translations to argue against new translations.

- Thesis #8: The King James translators believed that manuscripts and translations should not be judged solely by the character of the men that compiled them, even if those men held erroneous beliefs and heretical doctrines.
- Thesis #9: The King James translators did not believe in an absolute “word-for-word” translation; they sometimes used dynamic equivalence.
- Thesis #10: The King James translators believed that God was blessing their endeavor regardless of what the established church and religious crowd thought.
- Before we unpack some of the specific claims made by Brother Barzon in the above theses, it is important to understand the direction in which his argumentation is advancing. Chapter 2 of Barzon’s book is aptly titled “An Endorsement” which seeks to funnel the conclusions gleaned from his expository theses in Chapter 1 into an endorsement for the New King James Bible. Please consider the opening paragraphs from Chapter 2.
 - “For this author to present an exposition of the preface in order to demonstrate the need for continual modern English translations—and then to not recommend a modern English translation would be disingenuous. It is the intent of this chapter to give a deliberate endorsement of a modern English translation to the modern English believer. But what translation to recommend? With numerous translations used by many faithful and evangelical churches, pastors, and theologians, it can be a daunting task to recommend one modern English translation. This book risks becoming a multi-volume series if it were to delve into the areas of textual traditions and manuscript differences. It is not the intent of this book to do so. Rather, the endorsement will be to the least controversial modern English translation (in my opinion). It is a translation that is from the same textual tradition as the King James Version, yet is masterfully brought into the modern and readable English. That particular translation that will be endorsed is the New King James Version (NKJV).

Before we move forward, it must be acknowledged that the aim of this endorsement is not to take the spirit of the “KJVO” movement and create a “NKJVO” movement. Far be it from that. Rather, this is an attempt to appeal to the consciences of brothers and sisters in Christ who hold educated preferences, yet desire to read God’s Word in clear, common English. This chapter is for those who love, respect, and cherish the KJV, just as I do. But this chapter is also for the person who desires to “hear the Scriptures speak as it did in the language of Canaan; that it may be understood even by the very vulgar [common] person,” as some wise English Bible translators once said!” (Barzon, 23-24)

- So, all Barzon’s theses regarding the Preface in Chapter 1 are designed to support his “endorsement” of the New King James Version in Chapter 2 and, ultimately, his defense of it in Chapter 3. Simply stated, Barzon is leveraging Smith’s Preface to endorse and defend the New King James Version as a modern replacement for the AV. This is done to create the perception that the King James translators would have supported/endorsed the NKJV.
- Before moving on, it is also important to note that Barzon presents the King James Preface in a modern and heavily edited form. On the Acknowledgements page (53), Barzon thanks James

Snapp for, “allowing me to use his modern English translation of the Preface to the KJV.” Barzon is unclear if his use of Snapp’s translation applies only to Appendix B located in the back of the book, in which the entirety to Smith’s Preface is provided or also to the text of the Preface presented in the main portion of the book. My reason for raising this question is that the citations of the Preface found in the main section of the work do not match the form of the Preface provided in Appendix B. Put another way, when Barzon cites the Preface in the main portion of the book, it contains further editing beyond what is found in Appendix B. After listening to hours of online interviews that Brother Barzon has given on YouTube, I must conclude that the text of the Preface presented in the main portion of the book is an edited version of Snapp’s translation that has received further revision. It is my conclusion that these additional revisions performed on Snapp’s work were conducted by Brother Barzon himself (with possible assistance from another party). Therefore, readers of *The Forgotten Preface* need to realize that the theses found therein are derived from Barzon’s revisions of Snapp’s modern translation of the Preface. Consequently, the derived theses presented in the book have been sifted through the interoperative grid of both Snapp and Barzon, thereby making claims to merely be expositing the translators in their own words questionable.

- In my view, Brother Barzon’s book is a prime example of the historical error of “presentism.” Time and space will not permit an exhaustive exploration/refutation of all of Barzon’s theses that are guilty of “presentism,” so a few of the more egregious examples will have to suffice.

Thesis #1

- Thesis #1: The King James translators believed that any attempt to produce a modern translation of the Bible would be met with resistance and suspicion. Brother Barzon states the following in support of Thesis 1:
 - “It is important to understand that the King James Bible was considered a modern translation in its day. Just as today’s modern translations are often seen as an attack upon venerable antiquated translations, so too was the King James seen as an affront to established English Bibles such as the Geneva Bible, the Bishops’ Bible, and the Coverdale Bible. The translators describe this opposition against their work with the following words:

[Modern Bible translations] are welcomed with suspicion instead of love, and with envy instead of thanks. If anything can be misunderstood, some critic will ensure that it will be misunderstood and thus be in danger of being condemned. Everyone who has gone through the experience of promoting new things will affirm this. Was there ever any project that involved something new, or renewal, that did not endure many a storm of protest and opposition?

It is hard to please everyone, even when we please God best, and seek to commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience.

The translators clearly understood that their endeavor to make a new translation of the Bible (actually a revision of the Bishops’ Bible of 1568) would cause the translation to be

set upon a stage to be mocked, nit-picked, and criticized by the religious crowd of their day. . . [quotes modern form of the Preface]

The translators asserted that a particular Bible translation can become a golden calf (“man’s Religion”) [Where in the Preface do the translators ever use the term “golden calf” to refer to “a particular Bible translation.”] among the church at large. They imagined that their critics would see their modern translation as equivalent to claiming that the church has been deceived by previous translations. [quotes modern form of the Preface]” (Barzon, 2-3)

- In terms of analysis, Barzon’s insertion of “Modern Bible translations” in brackets into the quote from the Preface is extremely misleading. This is a prime example of “presentism” because it inserts present thinking and parlance into a historical document that was not originally there. This is also a prime example of the difference between the form of the Preface presented in the main body of the book and the one found in Appendix B. The insertion of “Modern Bible translations” in brackets is not found in Appendix B. So the commentary offered by Barzon in support of Thesis #1 is based on his own edited form of the Preface.
- First, the King James translators did not view themselves as making a “new translation” much less a “modern translation.” “Truly (good Christian Reader) we never thought from the beginning, **that we should need to make a new Translation**, nor yet to make of a bad one a good one . . . but to make a good one better, or out of many good ones, one principal good one, not justly to be excepted against; that hath been our endeavor, that our mark.” Therefore, to state that the KJB “was considered a modern translation in its day,” is misleading and ahistorical because that is not what the translators said they did. They sought to make “one principal good one” out of “many” preexisting “good ones.” The following statement from the pen of Brother Barzon directly contradicts what Myles Smith stated in the Preface, “The translators clearly understood that their endeavor to make a new translation of the Bible. . .” The testimony of Myles Smith is that they were not endeavoring “to make a new translation” much less a “modern translation.”
- Second, Barzon’s use of language is unclear. Was the KJB an “affront to established English Bibles” such as the Geneva, Bishops, and Coverdale as asserted in paragraph one, or a revision of those Bibles as argued in paragraph two? The author of the Epistle Dedicatory states the following:
 - “For when Your Highness had once out of deep judgment apprehended how convenient it was, that out of the Original Sacred Tongues, together with comparing of the labours, both in our own, and other foreign Languages, of many worthy men who went before us, there should be one more exact Translation of the holy Scriptures into the English Tongue; . . .”
- This statement from the Epistle Dedicatory along with the one quoted above from subsection thirteen (“The Purpose of the Translators, With Their Number, Furniture, Care, Etc.”) coupled with Rules 1 (“The ordinary Bible read in the Church, commonly called the Bishops Bible, to be followed, and as little altered as the Truth of the original will permit.”) and 14 (“These translations to be used when they agree better with the Text than the Bishops Bible: Tyndale’s,

Matthew's, Coverdale's, Whitchurch's, Geneva.") make it clear that the KJB was a revision of the Bishops Bible compared against the original Greek as well as previous English Bibles. Therefore, the KJB is "new" in the sense of it being a unique collection of readings, but it was certainly not "modern" since in the places where the Bishops text was revised by the translators it was done so using readings from the Tyndale, Coverdale, Great, Geneva, and Rheims Bibles.

- Third, since the King James was a "revision" based on prior English versions there are places where the text remained unchanged since the Great Bible of 1539. Consider Romans 1:2 as a case in point. The wording found in the King James is identical with the 1602 Bishops, "Which he had promised afore by his Prophets in the holy Scriptures." The only differences are that the KJB places the verse in parenthesis and adds a comma at the end. Given the fact that Bishop Bible was a revision of the Great Bible, one should not be surprised to find that the Great Bible reads exactly as do the Bishops and the King James in Romans 1:2, "whych he had promysed afore by hys Prophetes in the holy scriptures." Therefore, it seems hardly accurate to call the KJB a "modern translation" as does Brother Barzon when it uses readings that were unchanged from nearly one hundred years earlier. This is but one example of this phenomenon.
- Fourth, it is widely recognized that the KJB did not use "modern" or contemporary methods of speaking when it was first produced in the early 17th century. Alister McGrath states the following in his 2001 publication *In the Beginning: The Story of the King James Bible and How It Changed a Nation, a Language, and a Culture*:
 - "One of the most interesting aspects of the King James Bible is its use of ways of speaking that were already become archaic in the Standard English of the seventeenth century. By adopting these older forms, the King James Bible had the unintended effect of perpetuating ways of speaking, that strictly speaking, were dying out in everyday English speech. In what follows, we shall look at three broad areas in which archaic forms are used, and consider their significance. . . [quotes Rule 1] The King's translators were thus forbidden to depart to any significant extent from the text of the Bishops Bible of 1568. Yet what were the instructions given to those who prepared the Bishops Bible? To use the Great Bible of 1539 except where it did not accurately represent the original texts. The directions given to the translators over the years 1539-1604 were thus virtually guarded to ensure continuity of language over a period in which the English language itself underwent considerable change and development." (McGrath, 265)
- How can the KJB rightly be called a "modern translation" when it was not even translated into the contemporary English of its day? For all these reasons Thesis #1 from Brother Barzon's book stands out as a prime case of "presentism" and an attempt to leverage the Preface.

Thesis #2

- Thesis #2: The King James translators believed that the Bible should be available in the common English of the then-present age.
 - "The comparison is made by the translators that "the Scripture should speak as it did in the language of Canaan" meaning that, just as the book of Genesis sounded like the

common language of Canaan at the time of Moses, so too should Genesis sound like the contemporary English of each present era.

The implication of this philosophy is that English translations of God’s word need to be continually measured against the common language of the land, and revised in agreement with it—because all languages change over time. . . [quotes modern form of the Preface]

While this book aims to be objective by strictly expositing the translators’ preface in light of the historical context of their translation work, it is fitting to close this point with an analogy.” (Barzon, 4-6)

- My problem here is that this is not what the translators did. As we have already seen, the KJB uses ways and manners of speaking that were archaic and falling out of use when the translation was made in the early 17th century. Smith statements about the “language of Canaan” are arguably about endeavoring to follow the word order and literary forms of the Hebrew and not the “contemporary English of each present era.” Interested parties are encouraged to read Dr. Leland Ryken’s excellent book *The Legacy of the King James Bible: Celebrating 400 Years Of The Most Influential English Translation*. In this book Dr. Ryken argues that the reason the KJB reads as it does is because of the translator’s desire to translate literally and retain the word order of the Hebrew and Greek to the greatest extent possible. Once again, as we saw above with Alister McGrath this results in a text that is inherently foreign in many respects from the “contemporary English” of early 17th century England. Brother Barzon claims to be “objective by strictly expositing the translators’ preface in light of the historical context of their translation work” while reading modern assumptions back into the Preface. Consequently, Barzon’s statement regarding this stated manner of “expositing” the Preface rings hollow. His entire goal is to leverage Smith’s Preface to argue that the King James translators would have approved of modern versions like the NKJV on the grounds of “contemporary English” usage. While I do not dispute that the translators did not lock themselves into “an uniformity of phrasing, or identify words” Barzon has no grounds for asserting that the King James translators would have approved of the text critical decisions and wording changes of the New King James translators. This based upon the assumption that all the NKJV translators did was update the archaicism of the KJB into “contemporary English” which is a major assumption that many take exception with, including this author. A close examination of the NKJV reveals that there were more changes made to the text than simply updating archaic language.

Theses #3 & 4

- Thesis #3: The King James translators believed that God used and blessed faulty Bible translations in the past.
 - “The King James translators were honest about the limitation of Bible translation. They acknowledged that while the Word of God is perfect, translations carry with them human error and obscurity. The best example of this, they said, is the Septuagint. . . The translators acknowledge that even with some clumsy translation choices that deviate from the original Hebrew, the Septuagint can be claimed to be the “Word of God,” which is validated by historical and apostolic use.” (Barzon, 7)

- Thesis #4: The King James translators believed that differing and even faulty translations are still the Word of God.
 - “The King James translators acknowledged that no translators have possessed infallibility in their translation work. Yet the KJV translators believed that even an imperfect translation is still the word of God.” (Barzon, 9)
- In a YouTube video titled “[A Forgotten History of Unbelief: Review of The Forgotten Preface by Joshua Barzon](#)” Brian Snider states the following regarding Thesis #3 & 4:
 - “[4:13] I guess it really depends on what he means by “faulty.” “Faulty,” is his word, it is not used in the Preface to the King James Version. And so he’s interpreted them to have said that. But nevertheless, faulty as in not optimum but still accurate, that is one thing. But if you mean faulty as in modified or mistranslated or edited in some way, that is not okay. So again, we must define what Barzon means by faulty as that is his word [4:38].” (Snider)
 - We cannot help but agree with Snider on this point. Barzon must define what he means here by “faulty” in order for Thesis #4 to have any purchase as an argument in this discussion. I would submit that Barzan is assuming the faulty standard of *verbatim identically* of wording in Theses #3 & 4 that was not embraced or endorsed by the King James translators. See our discussion of “uniformity of phrasing” in [Lesson 204](#).
- In a general sense, I do not dispute that these were the sentiments expressed in the Preface by Myles Smith, The King’s speech remained the King’s speech when translated into different languages even when ungracefully or inelegantly done (This does not mean that Smith would have accepted substantively inaccurate translations as the word of God.). Likewise, the scriptures remain the word of God and retain their inspired status even when translated into vernacular languages. Just like the King’s speech does not cease to be the King’s speech when rendered in French, the scriptures do not cease to be the word of God when translated into English (See our discussion of “the King’s Speech” analogy in [Lesson 199](#)). Smith’s is an argument for a high Protestant view of the inspiration and infallibility of God’s word not a back door ahistorical justification for the NKJV. Consider the following from the *Westminster Confession of Faith* regarding vulgar language translations.
 - Chapter I Article VIII— The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old), and the New Testament in Greek (which, at the time of the writing of it, was most generally known to the nations), being immediately inspired by God and, by His singular care and providence, kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentical; so as, in all controversies of religion, the Church is finally to appeal unto them. **But, because these original tongues are not known to all the people of God, who have right unto, and interest in the Scriptures, and are commanded, in the fear of God, to read and search them, therefore they are to be translated in to the vulgar language of every nation unto which they come, that, the Word of God dwelling plentifully in all, they may worship Him in an acceptable manner; and, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, may have hope.**

- This is a strong appeal for the accurate and proper translation of the pure Hebrew and Greek words into the vernacular languages of all peoples. It is also important to note that the drafters of the Confession were ascribing these statements to the Masoretic Hebrew Text and the Greek *Textus Receptus*, the only Greek text they had available to them. It was the act of translating the *Textus Receptus* into the vernacular languages of Europe that drove the Reformation and touched off the greatest era of Christian mission work the world has ever seen. These are historical facts that cannot be disputed. The word of God translated dwells “plentifully in all” languages into which it is rendered and remains undiminished.
- Herein lies my problem with Theses #3 & 4 as set forth by Brother Barzon, they decry an inherent inconsistency in his expositional framework. He wants to use them to leverage the Preface to support the notion that the King James translators would have supported “contemporary language” translations while failing to acknowledge 17th century Protestant views on vernacular language translations. Therefore, Barzon’s claim to be “expositing the preface in light of the historical context of their translation work” (6) misses the mark and commits the error of “presentism.”

Thesis #5

- Thesis #5: The King James translators did not believe their translation was perfect.
 - “This statement will very likely be the most controversial among what the translators believed. The King James translators believed that their own translation was not a perfect translation—because they, too, were limited by the same human limitations that accompanied every previous translation.

... The KJV translators, based on this reasoning, gave three particular warnings to their readers. First, they implored their readers to utilize the marginal notes which offer alternative reading in place of doubtfulness and ambiguity. Second, they advocated for the use of multiple translations for “finding the full sense” of the Scriptures. And lastly, they warned their readers not to dogmatize about one particular translation (even their own King James translation) but rather to hold all faithful translations in high regard.

... Presently, there are those within Christendom who claim that the King James translators produced a “perfect, error-free, and final” translation that is the ultimate standard for all Bible translations (sometimes even foreign ones). If the King James translators were alive today, they would be opposed to this erroneous view.

... It is evident from this close examination of the preface that a “King James Only” position was not only foreign to the King James translators, but that they would be adamantly opposed to such a doctrine if they were alive today.” (Barzon, 10-13)
- Brother Barzon has correctly identified that the King James translators opposed the false assumption that preservation, transmission, and translation require *verbatim identity* of wording. The King James translators clearly recognized a difference between 1) a different way of saying the same thing, and 2) a substantive difference in meaning. Yet, Brother Barzon asserts

that the King James translators would argue for holding “all faithful translation in high regard” as a way of suggesting that they would have supported modern versions.

- My second objection to Thesis #5 centers around Barzon’s use of “perfect.” As we have argued in this series of studies on the Preface, the word “perfect” is a “false friend.” There are various ways that the King James translators did view their work as “perfect.” I find this to be interesting given the fact that Mark Ward, author of *Authorized: The Use and Misuse of the King James Bible* and the chief purveyor of the “false friends” concept, consulted with Brother Barzon on his book (see the Acknowledgements page). In his “endorsement” for the NKJV in Chapter 2 Barzon stated the following regarding “false friends” and the KJV:
 - “But even more problematic are the countless “false friends” littered throughout the King James. The difference between an archaic word and a false friend is that an archaic word is one readers know they’re puzzled by. They encounter collops, daysman, murrain and they know they need to look these words up in the dictionary in order to understand them. But a false friend is a word that is still in use but has a modern connotation that is very different from the seventeenth-century meaning. That means that readers think they understand these words, but they don’t. Common words like remove, comment, and halt—words we still use today—may have meant very different things in the English of 1611. It is projected that there are more than fifty different “false friends” in the KJV that appear over 1,300 times. This comes out to be about 4.3% of all verses (and this is conservative estimate based on the occurrence of only 50 or so false friends) in the KJV.” (Barzon, 25)
 - Why does discussion of “false friends” never impact conversations of the King James Preface? If the presence of “false friends” is so detrimental to one’s understanding of the Biblical text in the AV why are they never discussed in relation to proper understanding of the Preface? How can a book that purports to “exposit” the King James Preface in its proper historical context fail to address the very phenomena (“false friends”) that drive one of the main arguments for replacement of the AV by the book’s author?
- According to Smith, only those who are “endued with an extraordinary measure of God’s Spirit” are capable of infallibility and perfection in the ultimate or absolute sense.
 - “For whatever was **perfect** under the Sun, were Apostles or Apostolic men, that is, men endued with an extraordinary measure of God’s Spirit, and privileged with the privilege of infallibility, had not their hand?”
- In this sixth occurrence of “perfect” in the Preface, Smith has the ultimate/absolute sense of “perfect” in view. Specifically, he ties perfection to “infallibility,” a quality that is only possessed by men who are “endued with an extraordinary measure of God’s Spirit.” When used in the absolute sense, “perfect” carries the meaning of adjective entry 1.b in the OED: “In a state of complete excellence; free from any imperfection or defect of quality; that cannot be improved upon; flawless, faultless.” According to Smith, only the “Apostles or Apostolic men” were capable of producing this level of perfection because they were “endued with an extraordinary measure of God’s Spirit,” i.e., they were inspired.

- Given the entirety of the Preface and Epistle Dedicatory, while it is clear that Smith did not view himself or his fellow translators as inspired and therefore producing “perfection” in the absolute sense, it is equally clear that he did view their work as “perfect” in various lesser senses.
 - First, according to Epistle Dedicatory, the translators viewed their work as being “**more exact**” than the prior English Bibles that they were “revising,” “rubbing,” and “polishing.” In [Lesson 191](#) we observed that the word “exact” meant “perfectly done,” according to Robert Cawdrey’s 1604 *Table Alphabetical*. Moreover, we observed that the OED presents the following “obsolete” meaning for the adjective form of “exact,” “perfected, consummate, ‘finished’.” Derived from the Latin *exactus*, the word carries meanings related to “consummate,” “complete,” and a bringing “to perfection.” The OED elaborates upon the meaning of the word “perfect” during the early 17th century with more detail than we can cover in this Lesson. It is instructive to note there is a connection between “exact” and “perfect” in definition 6.b., “accurate, correct; spec. (of a copy, representation, etc.) accurately reproducing or reflecting the original; †(of a notion, thought, record, etc.) exactly corresponding to the facts (*obsolete*).” The King James translators, according to their own testimony compared prior English Bibles with the “original sacred tongues” along with “other foreign language” Bibles to produce “one more exact Translation of the holy Scriptures into the English Tongue.” Their estimation of their work was that it was “exact” i.e., “perfectly done” in that it was “accurate,” “correct,” and “accurately reproducing or reflecting the original.” Put another way, they viewed their work as perfectly representing the contents of the “original sacred tongues” in English.
 - Second, in subsection eleven Smith stated that the work of translators “perfected” the English Bible (See [Lesson 198](#)). Smith says, “Yet for all that, as nothing is begun and **perfected** at the same time.” In this occurrence we see the use of the past tense form of the verb “perfect” being employed in a context that speaks of the completion of the process that had begun at a prior time. According to the OED there is an “obsolete” meaning of “perfect” that means: “to complete or finish successfully; to carry through, accomplish. In early use also: † to bring to fulfilment or full development (*obsolete*).” I believe this was the meaning that Smith had in mind when he used the word “perfected” in subsection eleven. In other words, Smith viewed the work of the translators as completing, successfully finishing, improving upon, or bringing to completion the translational work begun by prior English Bibles. Therefore, Smith concludes that their translational forebears would have no reason to “mislike” the King James translators but would rather “thank” them for finishing their work.
 - Third, “imperfections” in terms of “mean,” ungraceful, or “unadorned” language do not result in a translation not being the word of God.
 - Lastly, Smith made all these statements within the framework of early 17th century understanding of the Reformation Text. Put another way, when the King James translators thought of the “original sacred tongues” they thought in terms of the Hebrew *Masoretic Text* for the Old Testament and the Greek *Received Text* for the New Testament. These were the “golden pipes, or rather conduits, where-through the olive

branches empty themselves into the gold,” that Smith spoke of in subsection thirteen. The prior English Bibles that the translators were surveying and polishing were based on the Reformation Era text. Consequently, when modern critics and commentators seek to leverage the Preface to advance the notion that the King James translators would have supported the modern Critical Text, modern text critical methodologies, and modern versions they are guilty of the historical error of “presentism” i.e., “the imposition of present-day values and assumptions on individuals and societies of the past.” (Wilson, 103) There is simply no evidence that the King James translators would have approved of modern text critical theory and practice and no amount of ahistorical leveraging of the Preface can alter this reality. Smith’s Preface and other primary source documents related to the AV need to be historically contextualized with an early 17th century framework. Myles Smith, speaking on behalf of the translators in the Preface, believed that their work “perfected” or completed the process of setting forth the Reformation Era text in English. The King James translators believed their work to be “more exact” i.e., “perfectly done” in the sense of OED definition 6.b., “accurate, correct; *spec.* (of a copy, representation, etc.) accurately reproducing or reflecting the original; † (of a notion, thought, record, etc.) exactly corresponding to the facts.” Their estimation of their work was that it was “accurate,” “correct,” and “accurately reproducing or reflecting the original.” Put another way, they viewed their work as perfectly representing the contents of the “original sacred tongues” in English. They believed they had fulfilled the King’s desire for “one uniform translation” (Barlow, 47) by the creation of “one principal good one” that was “not justly to be excepted against” (See [Lesson 201](#) for a detailed discussion of this clause.)”

- It is my belief, despite popular sentiments to the contrary, that the translators believed that they had accomplished their “purpose.” Therefore, the Epistle Dedicatory commends their work to his King’s Majesty as “one more exact Translation of the holy Scriptures into the English Tongue.” The work was to be viewed as the “principal good one” i.e., chief among the previous “good ones” used to create it. Therefore, in the judgment of Myles Smith it was “not justly to be excepted against,” and therefore to serve as the standard English Bible. The King James translators did view their work as “perfect” in the following senses:
 - Exact—“perfectly done” (See Table Alphabetical entry from 1604)
 - Perfect—“Accurate, correct; *spec.* (of a copy, representation, etc.) accurately reproducing or reflecting the original; †(of a notion, thought, record, etc.) exactly corresponding to the facts (*obsolete*).” (OED adjective entry 6.b.)
 - Perfected—“To complete or finish successfully; to carry through, accomplish. In early use also: † to bring to fulfilment or full development (*obsolete*).” (OED verb entry 1.a.)
- Therefore, categorical and/or unequivocal statements that the King James translators did not believe their work was “perfect” are simply erroneous. Smith believed that the “purpose” and “mark” of the translators in that matter had been accomplished via the product of their work in surveying and comparing prior English Bibles with the “original sacred tongues” to fulfill King James’ desire that there might be “one uniform translation.” (Barlow, 47)

- Attempts to leverage statements from Smith’s Preface to advance the argument that the King’s translators would have approved of continued revision based upon the modern Critical Text and/or modern text critical methodologies and practice are ahistorical and guilty of the historical error of “presentism.”
- Brother Barzon’s Thesis fails to acknowledge the various “false friend” uses of “perfect” in the Preface and, therefore, fails to accurately “exposit” the document “in light of the historical context of their translational work.” (Barzon, 6)

Thesis #8

- Thesis #8: The King James translators believed that manuscripts and translations should not be judged solely by the character of the men that compiled them, even if those men held erroneous beliefs and heretical doctrines.
 - “A common reason for the rejection of modern translations in the present age is due to the men involved in modern translation work or the transmission of manuscripts. Faithful modern translations are often marginalized as erroneous based upon the character, associations, and orthodoxy of the men who worked on them—or that of the ancient who passed the manuscripts along through history. . . A simple survey of church history will reveal that the Donatists and Ebionites, mentioned by the KJV translators, held highly unorthodox doctrinal views. . . Yet God was able to use the Donatists and Ebionites to do good for Christ’s body.” (Barzon, 18-19)
- Myles Smith mentioned one Donatist (Tychonius) and two Ebionites (Aquila & Theodotion) in the Preface. Donatists and Ebionites are actually very different groups. While Smith does explicitly label the Ebionites as “most vile heretics,” he never calls the Donatists heretics in the Preface. Donatists were fairly orthodox, mostly disputing over how to handle believers who denied Christ under threat of persecution (like the Apostle Peter); there is nothing in the Preface to suggest that the KJV translators viewed them as unorthodox, so Barzon’s comment regarding them is questionable.
- The main point of Thesis #8 is to address the attempts made by King James Only advocates to gainsay the Modern Critical Text and Modern Versions on account of the beliefs and actions of Westcott and Hort. Brother Barzon made this clear in a recent interview with Mark Ward on his [YouTube Channel](#). Barzon is trying to set as moral equivalents the Donatists and Ebionites over against Westcott and Hort. This does not work. These prior groups were used by God to preserve His words only in the sense that they guarded and copied the scriptures. In this regard they are not unlike the Masorettes, unbelieving Jews that God used to preserve the Hebrew Scriptures; they were not editing the Scriptures, and certainly not practicing textual criticism like Westcott and Hort. Barzon’s implicit attempt to equate them is classic of those in the modern camp, like James White who constantly harps that “Erasmus did textual criticism, and if he were alive today he would agree with modern text critical theory and practice.” This is essentially the error of “presentism,” although more subtle.

Thesis #9

- Thesis #9: The King James translators did not believe in an absolute “word-for-word” translation; they sometimes used dynamic equivalence.

- “No translation of the Bible in common usages is a completely word-for-word translation. Many people believe that an undeviating word-for-word translation is the most faithful way to translate the scriptures. . .

A translation that is truly understandable requires a careful balance between dynamic equivalence and formal equivalence. The formal equivalence approach tends to emphasize commitment to the form and grammatical structure of the original language, whereas dynamic equivalence tends to employ a more natural rendering but with less literal exactness.

While it is true that the King James Version predominately uses formal equivalence, there are cases in which the translators used dynamic equivalence and deviated from the original language’s intended meaning. A prime example of this would be Romans 6:1-2 which says, [quotes the verse, “God forbid”]

The phrase “God forbid” is an extremely dynamic translational choice. The Greek form of that phrase means, literally, “let it never be.” The translators chose to use the idiomatic English phrase—“God forbid”—to convey a very strong sense of an emphatic negative with a verb of being, even though neither “God” nor “forbid” occurs in the Greek.” (Barzon, 19-20)

- Brian Snider takes exception to Thesis #9 in his YouTube video titled “[A Forgotten History of Unbelief: Review of The Forgotten Preface by Joshua Barzon.](#)”
 - “[4:47] I would absolutely reject to the way he has framed this point. He misrepresents what the Preface said and what the translators believed. And on top of that he inserts a statement about dynamic equivalence which is misleading. In the preface, the King James translators defended their use of translation words differently depending on the context. They said we have not tied ourselves to uniform phrasing or to the use of identical words. Why use one exclusively when we may use another that is no less appropriate. And this is considerably different than saying that King James translators did not believe in a word-for-word translation, which they clearly did believe in. In as far as his statement about dynamic equivalence all translations are going to use dynamic equivalence on a sparing and incidental basis to carry a translation over into another language. That’s dynamic equivalence lowercase. The translators knew nothing about dynamic equivalence as a method of translation or a philosophy, that is a modern thing. And, therefore, they made no comment on that whatsoever. They did not use thought-for-thought translation they used word-for-word translation principles. And it’s a major deception to suggest that they would approve of dynamic equivalency as a method of translation. When I am talking about dynamic equivalence lower case, I’m talking about the fact that languages are idiomatic and what you say in one language may not translate to another language [6:18].”
- After watching Snider’s video, I also was struck by the “presentism” in Barzon’s use of “dynamic equivalence” to speak about what the King James translations did. While I do not dispute that there are places where the King James translators were more dynamic than literal as in the case of

Romans 6:1-2, calling them instances of “dynamic equivalency” seems anachronistic. To argue as Barzon does that his theses are derived from an exposition of the Preface alone is a bit much when the document does not even remotely address “dynamic equivalence.” This was read into the Preface by Barzon and therefore constitutes an example of “Presentism” at its finest.

Thesis #10

- Thesis #10: The King James translators believed that God was blessing their endeavor regardless of what the established church and religious crowd thought.
 - “The final words of the King James preface emanate a humble yet unwavering boldness in what the KJV translation had set out to accomplish; to bring the Word of God into the common tongue of the Englishman. They did this against every kind of opposition, whether it was from strangers or brothers. Their ultimatum reverberates with a lasting impact even centuries later. Some of their last words in their now venerable preface are, [Quotes the first few lines of the final paragraph of the Preface.]” (Barzon, 22)
- Barzon’s statement that KJV translators had set out to “bring the Word of God into the common tongue of the Englishman,” should not be accepted at face value. We have already seen above from the pen of Alister McGrath that the KJV utilized forms and manners of speaking that were already archaic by the standards of the early 17th century. Yes, they wanted the Bible available to the common English speaker, but by saying “common tongue” Barzon is trying to sneak in some notion of “contemporary English of the 17th century.” The KJV translators followed Tyndale in the use of archaic pronouns and verb inflections for the purpose of precision in translation, but both practices had long since fallen out of usage among the “common” speakers of English by the early 17th century.
- Once again, Brian Snider takes exception with Thesis #10 in his video [“A Forgotten History of Unbelief: Review of The Forgotten Preface by Joshua Barzon.”](#)
 - “[6:47] Again the translators said nothing like this. He’s taken their closing remarks and reframed them and then adds his own bias statement into the mix. Here’s what they said, “Many other things we might give thee warning of (gentle Reader) if we had not exceeded the measure of a Preface already. It remaineth, that we commend thee to God, and to the Spirit of his grace, which is able to build further than we can ask or think. He removeth the scales from our eyes, the vail from our hearts, opening our wits that we may understand his word, enlarging our hearts, yea correcting our affections, that we may love it to the end.” In this statement the translators say nothing about God blessing them or the contention of the religious crowd. Those are simply inserted by the author and to this he adds an incredibly biased summary or overview of the prayer. And reframes things in his own words. Here is what he says to close his book, “May God continue to remove the scales from men’s eyes to behold His Word in their common tongue. May God continue to remove the veil of ignorance from the hearts of men bent on idolizing a particular translation. And may God open the mind, enlarge the heart, and correct our inclinations in order to love His Word more than earthly wealth or status. May God continue to honor the final words of the King James translators.” [Barzon, 22] His reference to a “veil of ignorance” and “idolizing a particular translation” are noted. And he mischaracterizes

what the preface said. At the end of the preface, he prayed that we would love God's word above gold and silver which is clearly a reference to Psalm 119:72 but somehow that becomes "wealth and status" in Barzon's interpretation which certainly the image presented. But in the tenth point he refers condescendingly to what he calls the religious crowd. And this is the second time that he has inserted that phrase into his summary of the preface. And clearly those who defend the King James are the religious crowd in his mind. [8:56]"

- The legitimacy of Barzon's attempted paraphrase to close off his exposition of Thesis #10 is questionable at best and appalling at worst, it is certainly not an accurate recasting of the closing of the Preface.
- For all the reasons enunciated in these notes, I believe that Brother Barzon's book is guilty of "presentism" in its attempt to leverage the Preface and cast King James translators as being supportive of modern text critical theory and practice. No attempt is made to unpack the Preface from within the late 16th and early 17th century historical context of the Martin-Fulke Controversy in which it was written (See Lessons [206](#) & [207](#)). While Brother Barzon's work has garnered much attention on YouTube and social media I believe there are considerable analytical flaws to the argumentation presented therein.

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