

Sunday, March 24, 2024—Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*  
Lesson 230 Assessing the Printed History of the King James Text (Which KJV? Argument)

### **Introduction**

- In [Lesson 229](#) we began a new section of this class focusing on the printed history of the King James text. The previous Lesson was largely a review of what had been said about this subject in prior lessons. In doing so we considered the following points:
  - Sizes, Printings, & Editions
  - Printing Errors: The Irksome Subject
- In the current Lesson we want to explore a common objection to the pro-King James stance leveled by opponents of the position. Namely, the question of “which KJV?” The purpose of this Lesson is to lay out the nature of the “which KJV” argument as well as outline how King James advocates have attempted to counter the argument. Consequently, we will cover the following:
  - The Which KJV? Argument
  - King James Only Response

### **The Which KJV? Argument**

- The which KJV Argument has been utilized by many critics of King James Onlyism. Perhaps the most well-known and outspoken has been James R. White, author of *The King James Only Controversy: Can You Trust Modern Translations*. In Chapter 4 White has a subsection titled “The Revisions of the KJV” in which he argues as follows:
  - “The KJV carried by the average KJV Only advocate today looks very different than the edition that came off Robert Barker’s press in 1611. Not only do many prints of the today’s KJV lack the marginal notes and references, but the form *and the wording* of the text has undergone change over time. Editions with textual changes came out as soon as 1612 and again in 1613, followed by editions in 1616, 1629, and 1638. William Kilburne, in a tract titled *Dangerous Errors in Several Late Printed Bibles to the Great Scandal and Corruption of Sound and True Religion*, could claim twenty thousand errors had crept into six different editions printed in the 1650s.

Most modern KJVs follow the revision made by Benjamin Blayney in 1769, Jack Lewis notes that Blayney “did extensive revision, and added seventy-six notes—including many on weights, measures, and coins—and added 30,495 new marginal references.”

Does the modern edition of the KJV differ significantly from 1611? That depends upon how one defines significantly. For the general audience seeking merely to understand the

KJV's textual tradition, no—most revisions have dealt with small matters of spelling, punctuation, etc. but for those who assert the KJB's absolute inerrancy, the question looms large: which KJV: Note some of the changes that have taken place over the years indicated by Scrivener: “the LORD” to “the LORD thy God” at Deuteronomy 26:1; “Manasseh” to “the children of Manasseh” at Joshua 13:29; “seek good” to “seek God” at Psalm 69:32; “inherit God” to “inherit Gad” at Jeremiah 49:1; “Thou art Christ” to “Thou art the Christ” at Matthew 16:16; “there is no man good, but one” to “there is none good but one” at Mark 10:18; “approved unto death” to “appointed to death” at 1 Corinthians 4:9; and “hath not the Son” to “hath not the Son of God” at 1 John 5:12.

Are these changes important? Surely, they present a sticky problem for the radical KJV Only proponent. How are textual changes like this be handled? How can one determine the “right” reading, when the KJV is made the absolute standard? Of course, the non-KJV Only believers had recourse to the Greek and Hebrew manuscripts. But once a person has invested the English translation with inspiration itself, that route is no longer a consistent option.” (White, 124-125)

- Another example of this type of reasoning is found in Michael J. Penfold's September 2016 article for *webtruth.org* titled “[Is the King James Version Perfect?](#)”
  - “Consider this: if one must have all the words of the original and only the words of the original, in one book, to be able to call that book the word of God, what shall we say of the fact that not only do no two Greek or Hebrew manuscripts agree with each other 100% (including no two editions of the Textus Receptus), no two editions of the King James Version agree perfectly either? The first KJV appeared in 1611. However, the KJV used widely today is the 1769 Benjamin Blayney revision. The fact is, unless your KJV contains the Apocrypha and spells Jew as ‘Iewe’ and cattle as ‘cattell’, you do not have a 1611 KJV. As for the italics, in Matthew's Gospel alone, the 1769 KJV has 315 more uses of italics than the 1611 edition. Did you know that the 1769 KJV differs from the 1611 edition in a total of 75,000 details, 421 of which are noticeable to the ear when read aloud? It is true that most of these involve adjustments to archaic spelling, the correction of printing errors and the more regular use of italics, and that about 72% of the noticeable textual changes had been made by 1638, only 27 years after the KJV was first published. Nevertheless, the following examples are corrections that were not made until 1762, over 150 years after the KJV was first published. These do not involve corrections of spelling or printing errors:

Matt 16:16

1611 KJV: “Thou art Christ.”

Current KJV: “Thou are the Christ.”

John 12:22

1611 KJV: “Andrew and Philip told Jesus.”

Current KJV: “Andrew and Philip tell Jesus.”

Romans 3:24

1611 KJV: “the redemption that is in Jesus Christ”

Current KJV: “the redemption that is in Christ Jesus”

(For a full list see Dr. F. Scrivener’s, *The Authorized Edition of the English Bible*, 1884, Appendix A).

It is acknowledged that these revisions are slight and do not affect any fundamental doctrine. However, they are real revisions; in light of which we ask, was the 1611 KJV really the infallible, inerrant and perfect word of God? If so, the modern KJV is ‘corrupt’. However, if the modern KJV is the perfect word of God, the 1611 edition was ‘corrupt’. Which is it? This argument alone spells the end of the myth of a ‘perfectly preserved, imperfection free KJV’. The next time someone tells you the KJV is the ‘mistake free, error free, completely perfect translation’, ask him which edition he is referring to. If he says 1769 ask him where the ‘perfect word of God’ was in 1768. Ask him if every preacher who held up the KJV in 1611 and said “This book is the word of God ” was a liar. Now you can see the humour of ‘1611 AV’ defenders, who are actually defending the ‘1769 AV’!

Let’s examine this further. ‘KJV only’ advocates state categorically that God must have kept a perfect Bible somewhere – otherwise His promises to preserve His word are worthless – yet many of them teach that no language in the world has a perfect Bible except English, and that no Englishman saw a perfect Bible until at least 1611. However, if, prior to 1611, no perfect book existed (in any language) which one could call the infallible word of God, there are only two options open to us – either God had failed for over 1,500 years to keep His promise, or the KJV only advocates have misinterpreted that promise. Clearly, the latter is the case.” (Penfold)

- The sentiments expressed above by White and Penfold are indicative of the standard “which KJV” argument put forth by Modern Version advocates. Mark well that the force of this argument rests upon the assumption that “perfect preservation” requires *verbatim identity* of wording. We will now turn our attention to how King James advocates have sought to counter this argument.

### **King James Only Response**

- Recall from Lesson 229 that we reviewed Peter S. Ruckman’s response to this argument in his 25-page booklet *Differences in the King James Version Editions*. In this piece Ruckman

essentially argued that the only differences between a 1611 AV and the now standard 1769 text are 1) spelling, 2) punctuation, and 3) correction of printer errors.

- David F. Reagan of Antioch Baptist Church of Knoxville, TN has also written a popular booklet on this topic titled *The King James Version of 1611: The Myth of Early Revisions*. Given the fact that Reagan’s work is frequently cited by King James Onlyists when this topic is being discussed, we will explore his arguments in detail.
- In the subsection titled “The Printing Conditions of 1611” Reagan argues that “printer errors” are “not the sort of textual alterations” that “are freely made in modern Bibles.” We agree with Reagan on this point, as we did with Dr. Ruckman in Lesson 229 on a similar point.
  - “The revision work that occurred on the AV text between 1611 and 1769 is not even remotely the same thing that occurred between 1870 and 1881 with the Revision Committee and their release of the Revised Version and the publication of the Westcott and Hort Greek text. The Modern Critical Text and its resultant Modern Versions differ substantively in their doctrinal content from the Received Text and its principal English translation, the AV.” (Reagan)  
*Representatives*
- In Section II, Reagan addresses “the four so-called revisions of the 1611 KJV” by looking at F.H.A. Scrivener’s work *The Authorized Editions of the English Bible (1611), Its Subsequent Reprints and Modern*. Regarding the first two so-called revisions, Reagan states the following:
  - “The first two so-called major revisions of the King James Bible occurred within 27 years of the original printing. (The language must have been changing very rapidly in those days.) The 1629 edition of the Bible printed in Cambridge is said to have been the first revision. A revision it was not, but simply a careful correction of earlier printing errors. Not only was this edition completed just eighteen years after the translation, but two of the men who participated in this printing, Dr. Samuel Ward and John Bois, had worked on the original translation of the King James Version [This statement is factually inaccurate. Ward and Bois assisted with the 1638 revision not the 1629 edition.]. Who better to correct early errors than two that had worked on the original translation! Only nine years later and in Cambridge again, another edition came out which is supposed to have been the second major revision. Both Ward and Bois were still alive, but it is not known if they participated at this time. But even Scrivener, who as you remember worked on the English Revised Version of 1881, admitted that the Cambridge printers had simply reinstated words and clauses overlooked by the 1611 printers and amended manifest errors. According to a study which will be detailed later, 72% of the approximately 400 textual corrections in the KJV were completed by the time of the 1638 Cambridge edition, only 27 years after the original printing!” (Reagan)
- In the paragraph above Reagan notes the correction of printer errors as the focus of the 1629 and 1638 editions. It is my understanding that Ward and Bois assisted on the 1638 edition as opposed

to the 1629. Regardless, the 1638 edition was the last revision for which any of the translators were alive to assist on.

- The 18<sup>th</sup> century saw two further revisions in 1762 and 1769, years after the translators had passed away. Reagan states the following regarding these revisions:
  - “Just as the first two so-called revisions were actually two stages of one process: the purification of early printing errors, so the last two so-called revisions were two stages in another process: the standardization of the spelling. These two editions were only seven years apart (1762 and 1769) with the second one completing what the first had started. But when the scholars are numbering revisions, two sounds better than one. Very few textual corrections were necessary at this time. The thousands of alleged changes are spelling changes made to match the established correct forms. These spelling changes will be discussed later. Suffice it to say at this time that the tale of four major revisions is truly a fraud and a myth. But you say there are still changes whether they are few or many. What are you going to do with the changes that are still there? Let us now examine the character of these changes.” (Reagan)
- In the next subsection Reagan deals with the “character” of the “so-called thousands of changes” by looking at the following categories:
  - Printing Changes
  - Spelling Changes
  - Textual Changes

### *Printing Changes*

- In this category, Reagan addresses changes in type face and letters.
  - “The type style used in 1611 by the KJV translators was the Gothic Type Style. The type style you are reading right now and are familiar with is Roman Type. Gothic Type is sometimes called Germanic because it originated in Germany. Remember that that is where printing was invented. The Gothic letters were formed to resemble the hand-drawn manuscript lettering of the Middle ages. At first, it was the only style in use. The Roman Type Style was invented fairly early, but many years passed before it became the predominate style in most European countries. Gothic continued to be used in Germany until recent years. In 1611 in England, Roman Type was already very popular and would soon supersede the Gothic. However, the original printers chose the Gothic Style for the KJV because it was considered to be more beautiful and eloquent than the Roman. But the change to Roman Type was not long in coming. In 1612, the first King James Version using Roman Type was printed. Within a few years, all the Bibles printed used the Roman Type Style.

Please realize that a change in type style no more alters the text of the Bible than a change in format or type size does. However, the modern reader who has not become familiar with Gothic can find it very difficult to understand. Besides some general change in form, several specific letter changes need to be observed. For instance, the Gothic *s* looks like the Roman *s* when used as a capital letter or at the end of a word. But when it is used as a lower case *s* at the beginning or in the middle of a word, the letter looks like our *f*. Therefore, *also* becomes *alfo* and *set* becomes *fet*. Another variation is found in the German *v* and *u*. The Gothic *v* looks like a Roman *u* while the Gothic *u* looks like the Roman *v*. This explains why our *w* is called a *double-u* and not a *double-v*. Sound confusing? It is until you get used to it. In the 1611 edition, *love* is *loue*, *us* is *vs*, and *ever* is *euer*. But remember, these are not even spelling changes. They are simply type style changes. In another instance, the Gothic *j* looks like our *i*. So *Jesus* becomes *Iefus* (notice the middle *s* changed to *f*) and *Joy* becomes *ioy*. Even the Gothic *d* is shaped quite differently from the Roman *d* with the stem leaning back over the circle in a shape resembling that of the Greek Delta. These changes account for a large percentage of the "thousands" of changes in the KJV, yet they do no harm whatsoever to the text. They are nothing more than a smokescreen set up by the attackers of our English Bible." (Reagan)

- I can agree with Reagan in that these types of font and letter changes are not even in the same league with the textual changes exhibited by the modern Critical Text and Modern Versions.

### *Spelling Changes*

- In dealing with the category of spelling changes Reagan states the following:
  - "Another kind of change found in the history of the Authorized Version are changes of orthography or spelling. Most historians date the beginning of Modern English to around 1500. Therefore, by 1611 the grammatical structure and basic vocabulary of present-day English had long been established. However, the spelling did not stabilize at the same time. In the 1600's spelling was according to whim. There was no such thing as correct spelling. No standards had been established. An author often spelled the same word several different ways, often in the same book and sometimes on the same page. And these were the educated people. Some of you reading this today would have found the 1600's a spelling paradise. Not until the eighteenth century did spelling begin to take a stable form. Therefore, in the last half of the eighteenth century, spelling of the King James Version of 1611 was standardized.

What kind of spelling variations can you expect to find between your present edition and the 1611 printing? Although every spelling difference cannot be categorized, several characteristics are very common. Additional *e*'s were often found at the end of the words such as *feare*, *darke*, and *beare*. Also, double vowels were much more common than they are today. You would find *mee*, *bee*, and *mooued* instead me, be, and moved. Double consonants were also much more common. What would *ranne*, *euill*, and *farres* be

according to present-day spelling? See if you can figure them out. The present-day spellings would be ran, evil, and stars. These typographical and spelling changes account for almost all of the so-called thousands of changes in the King James Bible. None of them alter the text in any way. Therefore, they cannot be honestly compared with thousands of true textual changes which are blatantly made in the modern versions.” (Reagan)

- Once again, we agree with Reagan that the spelling changes such as those mentioned above are not the same thing as leaving out the last twelve verses of Mark’s Gospel.
- We will cover Reagan’s third category on *Textual Changes* in the next Lesson.

### Works Cited

Penfold, Michael J. “[Is the King James Version Perfect](#)” on *webtruth.org*. September 7, 2016.

Reagan, David F. *The King James Version of 1611: The Myth of Early Revisions*. 1986.

White, James R. *The King James Only Controversy: Can You Trust Modern Versions?* Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2009.