

Sunday, April 7, 2024—Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*  
 Lesson 231 Assessing the Printed History of the King James Text (Which KJV Argument, Part 2)

## **Introduction**

- In [Lesson 230](#) we began a consideration of the “which KJV” argument commonly used by Modern Version advocates to counter King James Onlyism. In doing so we looked at two different enunciations of the argument by James R. White and Micheal J. Penfold.
- In addition, we began studying how King James Only advocates have sought to answer the “which KJV” argument. David F. Reagan’s *The King James Version of 1611: The Myth of Early Revisions* was used to frame the discussion. Reagan’s response breaks down into three subsections:
  - Printing Changes
  - Spelling Changes
  - Textual Changes
- Under the category of “printing changes” Reagan addressed changes in type face and letters. In his second category Reagan dealt with the “spelling changes” that occurred between 1611 and 1769. Regarding Reagan’s first two categories, we agreed with the author, that changes in font, letters, and spelling are not even in the same league with the textual changes exhibited by the modern Critical Text and Modern Versions.
- At this juncture, Reagan’s third category of “textual changes” remains undiscussed. It is to this topic that we will now turn our attention. In addition, we will also consider Reagan’s thoughts on the New King James Version as a viable revision of the King James.

## **King James Only Response**

### *Textual Changes*

- Reagan’s comments on “textual changes” comprise the longest section of his booklet. As the citation below bears out, Reagan maintains that “textual differences” between the 1611 and 1769 editions are essentially the “correction of early printing errors.”
  - “Almost all of the alleged changes have been accounted for. We now come to the question of actual textual differences between our present edition and that of 1611. There are some differences between the two, but they are not the changes of a revision. They are instead the correction of early printing errors. That this is a fact may be seen in three things: 1) the character of the changes, 2) the frequency of the changes throughout the Bible, and 3) the time the changes were made. First, let us look at the character of the changes made from the time of the first printing of the Authorized English Bible.

The changes from the 1611 edition that are admittedly textual are obviously printing errors because of the nature of these changes. They are not textual changes made to alter the reading. In the first printing, words were sometimes inverted. Sometimes a plural was written as singular or visa versa. At times a word was miswritten for one that was similar. A few times a word or even a phrase was omitted. The omissions were obvious and did not have the doctrinal implications of those found in modern translations. In fact, there is really no comparison between the corrections made in the King James text and those proposed by the scholars of today.

F. H. A. Scrivener, in the appendix of his book, lists the variations between the 1611 edition of the KJV and later printings. A sampling of these corrections is given below. In order to be objective, the samples give the first textual correction on consecutive left-hand pages of Scrivener's book. The 1611 reading is given first; then the present reading; and finally, the date the correction was first made.

1. Gen. 19:21—this thing - this thing also (1638)
2. Dan. 4:25—shalt have remained - ye shall have remained (1762)
3. Jud. 1:31—Achzib, nor Helbath, nor Aphik - of Achzib, nor of Helbath, nor of Aphik (1762)
4. 2 Sam. 16:12—requite good - requite me good (1629)
5. 2 Kin. 23:21—this book of the Covenant - the book of this covenant (1629)
6. 1 Chron. 5:2—chief rulers - chief ruler (1629)
7. 1 Chron. 26:18—And Parbar - At Parbar (1638)
8. 2 Chron. 32:20—For this cause - And for this cause (1638)
9. Esther 1:8—For the king had appointed - for so the king had appointed (1629)
10. Ps. 69:32—Seek good - seek God (1617)
11. Isa. 34:11—The cormorant - But the cormorant (1629)
12. Eze. 1:17—returned - turned (1769)
13. Dan. 3:15—a fiery furnace - a burning fiery furnace (1638)
14. Nah. 3:17—The crowned - Thy crowned (1629)
15. Matt. 6:3—thy right doeth - thy right hand doeth (1613)
16. Matt. 13:4—the wayes side - the way side (1743)
17. Acts 24:24—which was a Jew - which was a Jewess (1629)
18. 2 Cor. 11:32—the city - the city of the Damascenes (1629)
19. Jude 25 now and ever - both now and ever (1638)
20. which was of our father's - which was our fathers (1616)

Before your eyes are 5% of the textual changes made in the King James Version in 375 years. Even if they were not corrections of previous errors, they would be of no comparison to modern alterations. But they are corrections of printing errors, and therefore no comparison is at all possible. Look at the list for yourself and you will find only one that has serious implications. In fact, in an examination of Scrivener's entire appendix, it is the only variation found by this author that could be accused of being doctrinal. I am referring to Psalm 69:32 where the 1611 edition has "seek God." Yet, even

with this error, two points demonstrate that this was indeed a printing error. First, the similarity of the words "good" and "God" in spelling shows how easily a weary typesetter could misread the proof and put the wrong word in the text. Second, this error was so obvious that it was caught and corrected in the year 1617, only six years after the original printing and well before the first so-called revision. The myth that there are several major revisions to the 1611 KJV should be getting clearer. But there is more.

Not only does the character of the changes show them to be printing errors, so does their frequency. Fundamentalist scholars refer to the thousands of revisions made to the 1611 as if they were on a par with the recent Bible versions. They are not. The overwhelming majority of them are either type style or spelling changes. The few which do remain are clearly corrections of printing errors in the printing process. The sample list given on THE PREVIOUS PAGE will demonstrate just how careful Scrivener was in listing all the variations. Yet, even with this great care, only approximately 400 variations are named between the 1611 edition and modern copies. Remember that there were 100 variations between the first two Oxford editions which were both printed in 1611.

Since there are almost 1200 chapters in the Bible, the average variation per chapter (after 375 years) is one third, ie. one correction per every three chapters. These are changes such as "chief rulers" to "chief ruler" and "And Parbar" to "At Parbar." But there is yet one more evidence that these variations are simply corrected printing errors: the early date at which they were corrected.

The character and frequency of the textual changes clearly separate them from modern alterations. But the time the changes were made settles the issue absolutely. The great majority of the 400 corrections were made within a few years of the original printing. Take, for example, our earlier sampling. Of the twenty corrections listed, one was made in 1613, one in 1616, one in 1617, eight in 1629, five in 1638, one in 1743, two in 1762, and one in 1769. That means that 16 out of 20 corrections, or 80%, were made within twenty-seven years of the 1611 printing. That is hardly the long drawn out series of revisions the scholars would have you to believe. In another study made by examining every other page of Scrivener's appendix in detail, 72% of the textual corrections were made by 1638. There is no "revision" issue.

The character of the textual changes is that of obvious errors. The frequency of the textual changes is sparse, occurring only once per three chapters. The chronology of the textual changes is early with about three fourths of them occurring within twenty seven years of the first printing. All of these details establish the fact that there were no true revisions in the sense of updating the language or correcting translation errors. There were only editions which corrected early typographical errors. Our source of authority for the exact wording of the 1611 Authorized Version is not in the existing copies of the first printing. Our source of authority for the exact wording of our English Bible is in the preserving power of Almighty God. Just as God did not leave us the original autographs to fight and squabble over, so He did not see fit to leave us the proof copy of the

translation. Our authority is in the hand of God as always. You can praise the Lord for that!

. . . As stated before, the main purpose of the 1629 and 1638 Cambridge editions was the correction of earlier printing errors. And the main purpose of the 1762 and 1769 editions was the standardization of spelling.” (Reagan)

- So according to Reagan there are really only three types of changes that have been made to the text of the AV between 1611 and 1769:
  - 1) Printing changes i.e., font and letters.
  - 2) Spelling changes
  - 3) Textual changes i.e., the correction of printing errors.
- Note that Reagan is counting any textual change as the correction of printing errors. Is this conclusion accurate? More work needs to be done on this topic before we can reach a responsible conclusion.

### **Reagan On The New King James**

- In the final section of his booklet, Reagan takes up the supposition that the New King James Version is the fifth in a series of revisions of the AV. Using the first chapter of Ecclesiastes as a case study Reagan argues as follows:
  - “An examination of the first chapter in Ecclesiastes in the New King James Version reveals approximately 50 changes from our present edition. In order to be fair, spelling changes (cometh to comes; labour to labor; etc.) were not included in this count. That means there are probably about 600 alterations in the book of Ecclesiastes and approximately 60,000 changes in the entire Bible. If you accuse me of including every recognizable change, you are correct. But I am only counting the sort of changes which were identified in analyzing the 1611 King James. That’s only fair. Still, the number of changes is especially baffling for a version which claims to be an updating in the same vein as earlier revisions. According to the fundamentalist scholar, the New King James is only a fifth in a series of revisions. Then pray tell me how "four "revisions" and 375 years brought only 400 changes while the fifth revision brought about 60,000 additional changes? That means that the fifth revision made 150 times more changes than the total number of changes in the first four! That’s preposterous!

Not only is the frequency of the changes unbelievable, but the character of the alterations are serious. Although many of the alterations seem harmless enough at first glance, many are much more serious. The editors of the New King James Version were sly enough not to alter the most serious blunders of the modern bibles. Yet, they were not afraid to

change the reading in those places that are unfamiliar to the average fundamentalist. In these areas, the New King James Version is dangerous. Below are some of the more harmful alterations made in the book of Ecclesiastes. The reference is given first; then the reading as found in the King James Version: and last, the reading as found in the New King James Version.

- 1:13 sore travail; grievous task
- 1:14 vexation of spirit; grasping for the wind
- 1:16 my heart had great experience of wisdom; My heart has understood great wisdom
- 2:3 to give myself unto; to gratify my flesh with
- 2:3 acquainting; guiding
- 2:21 equity; skill
- 3:10 the travail, which God hath given; the God-given task
- 3:11 the world; eternity
- 3:18 that God might manifest them; God tests them
- 3:18 they themselves are beasts; they themselves are like beasts
- 3:22 portion; heritage
- 4:4 right work; skillful work
- 5:1 Keep thy foot; Walk prudently
- 5:6 the angel; the messenger of God
- 5:6 thy voice; your excuse
- 5:8 he that is higher than the highest; high official
- 5:20 God answereth him; God keeps him busy
- 6:3 untimely birth; stillborn child
- 7:29 inventions; schemes
- 8:1 boldness; sternness
- 8:10 the place of the holy; the place of holiness
- 10:1 Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour; Dead flies putrefy the perfumer's ointment
- 10:10 If the iron be blunt; If the ax is dull
- 10:10 wisdom is profitable to direct; wisdom brings success
- 12:9 gave good heed; pondered
- 12:11 the masters of assemblies; scholars

This is only a sampling of the changes in the book but notice what is done. Equity, which is a trait of godliness, becomes skill (2:21). The world becomes eternity (3:11) Man without God is no longer a beast but just like a beast (3:18). The clear reference to deity in Ecclesiastes 5:8 ("he that is higher than the highest") is successfully removed ("higher official"). But since success is what wisdom is supposed to bring us (10:10), this must be progress. At least God is keeping the scholars busy (5:20). Probably the most revealing of the above mentioned changes is the last one listed where "the masters of assemblies" become "scholars." According to the New King James, "the words of scholars are like well-driven nails, given by one Shepherd." The masters of assemblies are replaced by the

scholars who become the source of the Shepherd's words. That is what these scholars would like us to think, but it is not true.

In conclusion, the New King James is not a revision in the vein of former revisions of the King James Version. It is instead an entirely new translation.” (Reagan)

- I agree with Reagan's conclusion. The New King James is not a “revision” of the AV because it substantially alters the doctrinal content of the Bible. It is a new translation. That said, Reagan's claims that the only differences between the 1611 and 1769 editions of the AV are printing changes, spelling changes, and textual changes need further investigation.

### **Conclusion**

- Note that James R. White, Michael J. Penfold, and David Reagan rely on the work of F.H.A. Scrivener from the 1880s to advance their respective arguments. Put another way, they did not collate different printings/editions of the King James to arrive at their findings. More recent scholarly work on this topic has been conducted by Professor David Norton in *A Textual History of the King James Bible* (2005) and Dr. Lawrence Vance's still unfinished project *The Text of the King James Bible*. A consideration of these sources is required to judge the veracity of Reagan's response of the “which KJV” question.

### **Works Cited**

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