

Sunday, November 30, 2025—Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*
 Lesson 269 Assessing the Printed History of the King James Text (American Text 1840 & Beyond)

Introduction

- [Lesson 268](#) continued our exploration of the King James Bible (KJB) in America, focusing on its development after the Revolutionary War and how American editions evolved in terms of printing, orthography (spelling), and distribution.
- All told we considered the following points:
 - Post-Revolutionary KJB Editions (1783–1800)
 - Four major editions were printed by; Isaac Collins (1789), Isaiah Thomas (1791), Brown Family Bible (1792), and Hugh Gaine (1792).
 - Concerns over textual accuracy led to petitions to Congress, but the First Amendment prevented government regulation of Bible printing.
 - Matthew Carey’s Editions
 - Carey printed a notable edition in 1801 after collating eighteen different versions.
 - He identified orthographic and textual variations, showing early American editions already diverged from British norms.
 - Carey’s 1813 edition reused standing type from his 1802/03 edition, originally purchased from Hugh Gaine.
 - Stereotyping and the American Bible Society (ABS)
 - Stereotyping (a printing method using reusable plates) revolutionized Bible production starting in 1812.
 - The ABS, founded in 1816, used this method to mass-produce Bibles, aiming to provide one for every American household.
 - Orthographic Changes in ABS Texts
 - ABS editions (e.g., 1816 and 1819) show spelling updates like “stablish” to “establish” and “alway” to “always.”
 - These changes reflected American spelling conventions and were not doctrinal alterations.

- By 1820, ABS used ten sets of plates with noticeable spelling differences across editions.
- In this Lesson we will conclude our discussion of the American text by considering the following points:
 - David Norton on “The American Text”
 - Gordon Campbell on “The American Text”
 - Laurence M. Vance on “American Bibles”
 - Conclusions based on the American Text

David Norton on “The American Text”

- Chapter 7 of Dr. David Norton’s book, *A Textual History of the Kings James Bible*, is titled “The Current Text.” In this chapter there is a subsection titled “The American Text” in which Professor Norton offers some high-level observations regarding the text of KJB in the United States in the 19th century.
 - “By the 1830s the American Bible Society’s (ABS) texts were serving as the model for other American publishers. In 1847, thirty years after the Society first expressed concern about the accuracy of its texts, its Board of Managers established a Committee on Versions to create its own standard text. After four years work the Committee recommended ‘that the Octavo Reference Bible, now in the course of preparation . . . be adopted as the Standard Copy of the Society; to which all future editions published by the Society shall be conformed’, and presented a report giving some occasionally inaccurate history of the text and detailing the ongoing work (*Report*, p. 32). The result was a fine quarto Bible, large enough to be a folio, published, without the Apocrypha, in 1856 (H1904), and intended to be the standard American Bible Society text. The *Report* itself was initially accepted then rejected ‘on the ground of alleged want of constitutional authority, and popular dissatisfaction with a number of the changes made’. Similarly, the 1856 Bible ran into trouble, mainly because of its work on the chapter summaries. A new committee was formed, changes were reconsidered, and new editions were produced which did become standard for seventy years. Nevertheless, it is the work of the first committee that is of the greatest interest, for the *Report* gives the most substantial account of work on the text so far published, and the 1856 text itself has real merits.

Fundamental to the edition was a collation of the Society’s ‘royal octavo edition’ with ‘copies of the four leading British editions, viz. those of London, Oxford, Cambridge, and Edinburgh; and also with the original edition of 1611’ (*Report*, p. 16); the Oxford edition

was Blayney's, which 'has been regarded, ever since its publication, as the standard copy' (p. 10). Though this collation yielded nearly 24,000 variations in text and punctuation (not including the margin, summaries or headers), the Committee declared there was 'not one, which mars the integrity of the text, or affects any doctrine or precept of the Bible' (p. 31). If Curtis would have been astonished at this, his apoplexy can only be imagined at the further declaration that 'the English Bible, as left by the translators, has come down to us unaltered in respect to its text; except in the changes of orthography which the whole English language has undergone' (p. 7), and, similarly, that the lesson of the 1833 reprint of the first edition was that, typographical errors and orthography excepted, 'the text of our present Bibles remains unchanged, and is without variation from the original copy as left by the translators' (p. 11). The basis for this nonsense is that there are three kinds of variation: printer's errors in 1611, printer's errors in subsequent editions, and 'other variations from the reading of 1611'; though the Committee initially suggested that it was not always certain whether these last were deliberate, after listing examples it observed that they 'are also mostly, if not all, merely errors of the press, which have been corrected in later editions' (pp. 11, 14). The work of editors therefore had been to rid the text of typographical errors. So Blayney's object had been 'to restore the text of the English Bible to its original purity', and he had succeeded 'to as great a degree as can well be expected in any work of like extent' (p. 14).

Having collated its six texts (and without considering that its four modern texts might be Blayney's and three close representations of his work), the Committee treated this unscholarly sample in a still more unscholarly way, that is, it treated them democratically. The rule it adopted for variations in punctuation, that 'the uniform usage of any three of the copies shall be followed', appears to reflect its general practice, which resulted 'in the great majority of instances [in] conformity with the [modern] English copies' (pp. 17, 25). If this is an unkind reflection on a huge project, the Committee brought it on itself by obliterating almost all signs of scholarly consideration of the actual merits of readings: only five readings settled with reference to the original are noted, under the innocent heading, 'Words'.¹⁰ As far as the readings are concerned what the Committee offered was Blayney with his own 116 typographical errors removed. With its 'great and leading object [being] uniformity' (p. 19), it helped to entrench the Oxford standard.¹¹

The policy of following the punctuation of the majority of their copies prevented innovation, and also worked against uniformity with any one of their copies: the result was an eclectic version of eighteenth-century punctuation. Nevertheless, the committee did good work in other areas such as the chapter summaries, the regularisation of names (something that now makes the American Bible Society's Apocrypha strikingly different from the British editions) and the spelling. This last is what catches the eye because it contains a significant number of the changes that still need making to the British editions, including regularising the use of 'a' and 'an'. Here are the main changes to words that still appear in an old form (given in parentheses) in the British editions, an asterisk indicating those found in the 1856 text but not noted in the *Report*:

astonished (astonied)	brazen (brasen)
assuaged (asswaged)	caterpillar (caterpillar)
aught (ought)	ceiling (cieling)
awl (aul)	*chapped (chapt)
basin (bason)	cleft (clift)
borne (born)	cloak (cloke)
braided (broided)	clothes (cloths)
cuckoo (cuckow)	prized (prised)
*entreat (intreat)	*public (publick)
grizzled (grisled)	raven (ravin)
*havoc (havock)	rearward (rereward)
*heretic (heretick)	*recompense (recompence)
*inflaming (enflaming)	*repaid (repayed)
jubilee (jubile)	ringstreaked (ringstraked)
*laden (loaden)	sackcloth (sackclothes)
lain (lien)	*since (sith)
lift (lifted)	soap (sope)
loathe (lothe)	soldering (sodering)
*lowering (lowning)	*spew (spue)
*lunatic (lunatick)	sponge (spunge)
*marshes (marishes)	steadfastly (stedfastly)
*mixed (mixt)	*stoics (stoicks)
mortar (morter)	streaks (strakes)
music (musick)	strewed (strowed)
outer court (utter court)	*stripped (stript)
*paid (payed)	*sycamore (sycomore)
plaster (plaister)	*Syriac (Syriack)
plucked (pluckt)	thoroughly (throughly)
*portray (pourtray)	*while (whiles)
prancings (pransings)	

American editions have been more inclined than the British to follow this example, but with no great thoroughness, although the policy of the ABS continued to be that spelling should be conformed to modern standards (Herbert, p. 399). It is a pity that the example was not generally followed, for then some unnecessary difficulty and appearance of antiquity would have been removed from the text a century and a half ago.” (Norton, 119-122)

Gordon Campbell on “The American Text”

- Professor Gordon Campbell also addresses “The American Text” in Chapter 8 of his book *Bible: The Story of the King James Version 1611-2011* (2010) titled “The Nineteenth Century.” In order to avoid covering ground already discussed in prior Lessons, we will be selective in our look at Campbell’s comments.
 - “Thereafter [Aitken’s unprofitable attempt to publish the KJB. See [Lesson 267](#) for details.] KJVs imported from England dominated the market. This pattern changed, however, when the American Bible Society (ABS, founded in 1816) the mightiest force in American Bible publishing, decided to prepare its own text. From the outset members

of the ABS were concerned about the textual accuracy of the Bibles it was distributing, and Curtis's pamphlet [See [Lesson 266](#).] fueled such anxieties. In 1847 the ABS decided to address the problem by creating a standard American text of the KJV. The process proved to be protracted. An edition was published (in a large quarto format) in 1856. This edition proved to be controversial, in part because of its chapter summaries, and in due course new committees were convened to consider revisions and publish yet another standard text.

There is a fascinating account of the process whereby the ABS attempted to stabilize the text in its *Report on the History and Recent Collation of the English Version of the Bible, Presented by the Committee on Versions to the Board of Managers of the American Bible Society* (New York, 1851). The scholarly foundation of the process was a collation of six KJVs: its own earlier edition, the editions of Oxford and Cambridge, the editions of the king's printers in London and Edinburgh, and the text of 1611. The collation which was undertaken by a Presbyterian minister called James McLane, produced almost 24,000 variations in the texts, including punctuation but excluding apparatus in the margins and chapter summaries. At the end of the *Report* the members of the Committee declared, in defiance of the discrepancies that they had identified that 'the English Bible, as left by the translators has come down to us unaltered in respect of its text, except in changes of orthography which the whole English language has undergone'. Apart from orthography (that is, spelling) and misprints, they concluded, 'the text of our present Bible remains unchanged, and is without variation from the original copy as left by the translators'." (Campbell, 152-154)

- In the next paragraph Campbell takes exception with these findings along the following lines:
 - "Were the members of the Committee asleep on the job? Or perhaps not of the requisite caliber? . . . The difficulty lay . . . in the methodology with which they discharged their task. The Oxford text was Blayney's, and the other nine-teenth-century British texts were in varying degrees derivatives of Blayney's text. The 1611 text was accorded no special authority, so, when the principle that 'the uniform usage of any three of the copies shall be followed' was applied, the 1611 text was outvoted by Blayney and its clones. The variations between the texts, in the understanding of the Committee, could be attributed to print errors, and its task was to eliminate those errors by the process of the collation." (Campbell, 154-155)
- Campbell concludes this section by offering the following assessment of the American text.
 - "The result is a text that broadly reflects Blayney's and its cousins, but with important differences occasioned by three factors: scholarly scruple, the impetus to consistency, and the desire to use modern spelling. In the case of the first, the Committee acknowledges a few changes, all centuries-old textual cruces, that constitute a revision to the 1611 text, so setting aside the principle of following the consensus; in Josuah 19:2 for examples the ABS text follows the 1611 in reading 'or Sheba' instead of 'and Sheba'; in Ruth 3:15,

ABS reads ‘he went’ over ‘she went’, so preferring the literal sense to the contextual sense (it was Ruth who went, not Boaz); in Song of Solomon 2:7, ABS reads ‘nor awake my love, till he please’ (instead of ‘she please’), this time preferring the contextual sense to the literal (the Hebrew verb is feminine). The pursuit of consistency led to the regularization of indefinite articles (‘a’ and ‘an’), though some anomalies remain, especially in the vexed area of a definite article before a work beginning with ‘h’: in Genesis 25:25 Esau has skin ‘like an hairy garment’, but in Genesis 27:11 he is said to be ‘a hairy man’. The third intention, to use modern spelling, is the most obvious difference between the British and American texts of the KJV, because the former used eighteenth-century spelling and the later nine-teenth-century spelling, so in the ABS text “‘astonied’ becomes ‘astonished’, ‘asswaged’ becomes ‘assuaged’, ‘ought’ becomes ‘aught’, ‘aul’ becomes ‘awl’, and ‘bason’ becomes ‘basin’. The American text of the KJV is altogether more modern than its British cousin.” (Campbell, 155)

Laurence M. Vance on “American Bibles”

- On pages 232 through 235 of his recently published *The Text of the King James Bible*, Dr. Laurence M. Vance briefly addresses the topic of “American Bibles.” This subsection is found in Chapter 3 “Editions of the Authorized Version.” Over the last couple of Lessons, we have cited and/or referenced this source when it was pertinent/relevant to do so. As we wind down our discussion of the American text, I believe that Dr. Vance’s words are relevant to this discussion:
 - “I have only mentioned three American publishers of modern King James Bibles [Thomas Nelson, World Bible Publishers, American Bible Society]. There are many others. It would be an impossible and profitless task to examine the text of every King James Bible they have published or currently publish. The problem in the United States is, as a publisher, Harper Collins (the parent company of Zondervan) states on its website under “KJV 1611 Translation Questions”: “There is no one ‘standard’ KJV text. As this translation passes for public domain in the US, each publisher has made change to the text to clarify archaic language for the modern reader.” For the text of its King James Bible published after 2000, Zondervan actually uses the modified King James text of *The Cambridge Paragraph Bible* as edited by F.H.A. Scrivener (1813-1891) in 1873.

The only King James Bibles published in the United States that can be recommended are those which attempt to follow a Cambridge standard.” (Vance, 235)

Conclusion

Note: the content for this section, with a few changes, is taken from my book, [*The King James Bible In America: An Orthographic, Historical and Textual Investigation*](#) published by Dispensational Publishing House in 2019.

- Much more could be said about the textual history of the KJB in America between 1777 and 1881 that is beyond the scope of these Lessons. Our main purpose has been to address a particular aspect of how the King James position is messaged, discussed, and propagated by its supporters. I

believe it is detrimental to the integrity of the position to say things that cannot be supported by the historical and/or textual facts. The truth does not benefit from rhetoric, no matter how well intended, that can easily be proven wrong by a better command of the relevant facts. King James Bible Believers have enough challenges as it is, without adopting positions that expose our flanks to further attack.

- From its inception in 1611, the King James text has undergone orthographic change. This process is acknowledged as normal progression in the development of language. Consequently, differences in spelling conventions are anticipated and accepted when comparing the text of 1611 with the standard King James text of 1769. Yet, no King James Bible Believer views this reality as detrimental to their position.
- It is commonly held that the only differences that exist between the 1611 and 1769 texts are: 1) the correction of clear printer errors, 2) updates in orthography or the spelling of words, or 3) changes in punctuation as English grammar became more settled. Yet, as was demonstrated throughout our discussion of the printed history of the text, this notion is incorrect and does not accord with the facts. Wording differences beyond printer errors and spelling do exist between the various editions of the KJB. It is here that we must recognize there is a difference between 1) a different way of saying the same thing and 2) a substantive difference in meaning. The wording differences that exist between 1611 and the 1769 King James text fall into the first category, i.e., they are not substantive. They are different ways of saying the same thing and do not undermine the doctrinal integrity of the text while at the same time not exhibiting identical wording. If one does not allow for different ways of saying the same thing and insists upon *verbatim identity* of wording, then one would be forced to declare which edition of the King James is the inerrant one to the exclusion of the others.
- Once the insistence upon the standard of *verbatim identity* is broken, one is free to evaluate the nature of each variant encountered responsibly and ascertain the nature of the difference. Herein lies the distinction between the various editions of the King James and modern versions. The editions of the King James do not differ substantively despite not possessing *verbatim* wording. In contrast, modern versions and their underlying Greek text have changed the wording so drastically that they have altered the substantive doctrinal content of the text. Modern versions err because they report information that is false whereas the KJB does not because the doctrinal integrity of the readings is uncompromised despite their lack of *verbatim* wording.
- Once this lesson is learned, one can evaluate the various differences in orthography present in the King James text honestly. If words such as “thoroughly” and “thoroughly” can be proven to have the same meaning then it would be a mistake to call editions of the KJB that change the spelling of these words “corruptions.” Words such as “always” and “always,” or “example” and “example” or “stablish” and “establish” are not wholly different words of completely different meaning but alternative spellings of the same word.
- Continued orthographical updates to the King James text beyond 1769 occurred in America from the inception of the printed history of the text in the United States (1782). As early as 1792, the

spelling of words such as “throughly” was changed to “thoroughly”, not as part of a “new” attempt to corrupt the KJB, but in effort to conform the text to American spelling conventions. These changes were being made at a point in history when the King James text was not in dispute or being challenged by modern versions. Codex Sinaiticus had not even been discovered yet and it would be nearly another ninety years before the publication of the Westcott and Hort Greek Text and the Revised Version of 1881.

- The KJB was never printed with uniformity in North America. Nearly every American edition possessed some sort of orthographical variant. If one is going to persist in the position that editions containing different orthography are “corruptions” then they would be forced to conclude that generations of American Christians did not possess the “pure word of God”. This conclusion would be reached because of the fact that early American printings did not accord identically in every word with the twin standards of Oxford and Cambridge.
- Is this really the conclusion that King James Bible Believers desire to reach? Do we really want to say that generations of American Christians possessed “corrupt” King James Bibles because they did not come from an Oxford or Cambridge University Press? Is it our position that, in order to possess the “pure word of God” in English, one must possess a particular printing, from a particular press, produced on a particular continent?
- In reality the historical and textual facts are messier than we have heretofore realized. Out of our ignorance of the facts regarding the printed history of the KJB in America, King James Bible Believers have adopted positions that functionally impose our present textual and translational controversies upon bygone generations of Americans who knew nothing of the challenges we face today. For them the text of the Bible was not in dispute, everyone clung to the standard of the Common English text, i.e., the King James Bible. It never occurred to them that they might not have God’s preserved word if they did not possess a Bible printed on an Oxford or Cambridge University Press, assuming one was even available to them. They just believed that whichever copy of the KJB they were fortunate enough to possess was the word of God and allowed it to work in them effectually (I Thess. 2:13).
- The entire process of researching and preparing these Lessons has been an eye opening and sobering experience. Much that has been written in pro-King James literature in defense of this position possesses a superficial appeal but is nonetheless incorrect. As King James Bible Believers, we need to make sure that we are applying the Berean principal (Acts 17:11) to our position on the Bible, and search things out to make sure they are so. Empty, unsound, and incorrect rhetoric does not help our position; it harms it. Therefore, it is incumbent upon believers who stand for the infallibility of the King James Bible to enunciate a position which is accurate and in accordance with the historical and textual facts.

Works Cited

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