

Should We Use The New English Bible?

IN THE last 50 years a number of new Bible translations have appeared on bookstands. The newest is the completed New English Bible. As a result, we have received many questions concerning these translations, especially the more popular ones such as the Revised Standard Version, The James Moffatt translation and the above-mentioned New English Bible. Just how useful and valid are these translations?

The answer involves an understanding of how God preserved His Word — and how textual critics reason today.

God originally inspired the Old Testament to be written in Hebrew and the New Testament in Greek. And, as might be expected, God used the two peoples who preserved a knowledge of these languages, the Jews and the Greeks, to copy and perpetuate the Scriptures in their original languages.

Notice Romans 3:1-2: "What advantage then hath the Jew? Much . . . because that *unto them were committed the oracles of God.*" God has used the Jews to preserve the Old Testament. But God had to use another people — the Greeks — to preserve the New Testament.

The King James Version

The King James translation of 1611 was based on the *officially kept* scriptures of both Jews and Greeks. The Hebrew and Greek texts from which it was translated were basically sound manuscripts. The occasional weakness of the King James Version is due primarily to lack of understanding by the translators of the *original meanings* of certain words in Hebrew and Greek. There are, of course, some errors in the King James Version. But these are few in number and can be readily discovered.

Modern translations, such as the Revised Standard Version and the New

English Bible, are of value in that they sometimes help clarify the archaic English of the King James Version. However, these versions err in a very important way. They are based on manuscripts full of corruptions and spurious readings which were long rejected by the official scholarly community of Jews and Greeks.

Looking for Original Text

Such often incorrect translations result from an attempt on the part of translators to find a supposed "original" text. The translators labored under the false assumption that the original, inspired text was lost.

What scholars are not aware of is that many false prophets and errant religious teachers attempted to corrupt the inspired Hebrew and Greek texts. But God is in authority, and He saw to it that the Jews and Greeks officially rejected these spurious manuscripts. It is the spurious manuscripts, long rejected, that most modern textual critics have foolishly adopted.

But why were the spurious ones adopted? The scholars seemed to accept them for the following reason: The reliable manuscripts — which comprise the bulk of all manuscripts extant — are GENERALLY YOUNGER. But that is one of the reasons they *are* reliable. The true manuscripts, when worn out, were always burned by Jews and Greeks, *after* careful NEW COPIES were made. That of course is the logical procedure. When a suit of clothes wears out, you buy another "copy." The old suit is discarded.

Discarding Corrupt Manuscripts

On the other hand, the corrupt manuscripts were not treated in this manner. They were merely discarded or used for fuel — as was the famous corrupt Sinaitic Manuscript, found in the waste basket of a Sinai Monastery. By accident

some such manuscripts survived the centuries. The translators of the New English Bible and other modern versions latched onto these as guides.

This procedure is explained in the Introduction to the New English Bible. Notice the translator's explanation carefully:

"The Revised Version, which appeared in 1881, marked a *new departure* especially in [that] it abandoned the so-called Received Text, which has reigned ever since printed editions of the New Testament began."

Now, notice the translators' admission that they abandoned the official texts because they were *younger*.

"The Revisers *no longer* followed (like their predecessors) the text of *the majority of manuscripts*, which being for the most part of late date, had been exposed not only to accidental corruptions of long-continued copying [this, of course was *assumed* by the translators, but is not true.] but also in part to deliberate correction and 'improvement'. Instead, they followed a *very small group* of manuscripts, the earliest, and in their judgment the best, of those which had survived.

"The problem of restoring a form of text as near as possible to the vanished autographs *now appears less simple* than it did to our predecessors. There is not at the present time any critical text which would command the same degree of general acceptance as the Revisers' text did in its day."

After frankly admitting that scholars do not KNOW what manuscripts are the correct ones, the translators summarized in this vein:

"The present translators therefore *could do no other* than consider variant readings on their merits, and, having weighed the evidence for themselves, select for translation in each passage the reading which to the *best of their judgment seemed* most likely to represent what the author wrote.

Scholars Don't Know

Notice the array! Words such as "judgment," "debate continues," "could do no other," "best of their judgment," "seemed most likely."

But why the confusion?

Scholars had discarded the simple,

logical method for discovering the true text! What was it? Use the official, cleanly copied, majority of texts. Further, and more importantly, they rejected the Biblical KEY — mentioned previously — for finding the true original text!

That is, since the Bible is the Word of God — He certainly was quite capable of preserving it Himself. Next, one can look into this Word of God to discover *how* God did the preserving and *whom* He used!

Both the New English Bible and the Moffatt translations are not merely revisions of the King James Version. They are free-flowing meaning-for-meaning, thought-for-thought comparisons — not the traditional phrase-by-phrase translation of which the King James Version is *the* outstanding example.

Where the translators have correctly grasped the thought intended by the Biblical writers, they have produced a remarkably clear rendering. But without the knowledge of what is the true text, the translators often went astray.

Moffatt's Approach

Now read what James Moffatt says in the introduction of his well-known translation. Speaking of the Bible he writes: "What it is may be partly suggested by a *new rendering*, such as the following pages present, that is, a fresh translation of the original, *not a revision of any English version*. A real translation is in the main an *interpretation* . . . its effectiveness depends largely upon the extent to which the interpreter has been able to see the original and to convey his impressions of what he has seen . . ."

In addition Dr. Moffatt went so far as to rearrange entire verses, paragraphs and even whole chapters. Again quoting from his introduction: "Now and then, as again in the case of the Old Testament, verses or even paragraphs and chapters will be found transposed . . ."

You can easily see that Dr. Moffatt's translation is merely his interpretation. However, it should be said that he did not intend it for study, but for easy reading. And it is a very helpful Bible.

He has produced a remarkably clear and for the most part accurate translation. But it does contain certain errors because Dr. Moffatt did not base his translation on the officially preserved scriptures of the Jews and Greeks.

Modern translations such as the Revised Standard Version, the Moffatt translation and the New English Bible, while useful Bible study helps, should not be solely relied upon. The King James Version is still the standard by which to judge the accuracy of these other translations and versions.

The only sound method of Bible study is to read the King James Version first. Then, if it is not clear, read these other modern renderings. They will often say the same thing in clearer, more modern English. But do not take for granted that they are right when they totally depart from the King James Version. They are most likely wrong, since they were rendered from faulty texts.

For more information on how God has preserved the Bible for us, be sure to request our free article, "Do We Have the Complete Bible?" □