

**2015/1/Study 2: The Bible Version We Use (2 Pet. 1:19-21)**

by BS Poh

We adopt the New King James Bible as the official Bible of the church, encouraging its use while not forbidding the use of other versions. We highly respect the King James Version but object to it being promoted as the only Bible to be used by English-speaking believers. We uphold the traditional view of the verbal, plenary, inspiration of the Scriptures (VPI), and reject the idea of verbal, plenary, preservation (VPP).

**2.1 The Importance of a good version.**

- (i) Not everyone has the ability, opportunity, nor inclination to study the original languages of the Bible, viz. the Hebrew & Aramaic of the OT and the Greek of the NT. Indeed, it is not required that we know these languages before we hear the gospel & come to faith (Matt. 28:18-20; Rom. 10:17; 1 Cor. 14:6, 9, 11-12). Recognizing this the 1689 Confession states that “the Scriptures are therefore to be translated into the ordinary language of every nation...” (1689:1:8). Today, the Bible has been translated into many languages, with many versions in English.
- (ii) It is specified in our Church Constitution that the NKJV is the official version of the church. Why specify one version for the church? (a) We do not want the church to be divided over the Bible version used; (b) We recite the Psalms, and other portions of the Bible, as part of worship; (c) Preaching is made easier without the mind of hearers being troubled by different translations all the time; (d) Memory passages for members, children, and Sunday School teaching are standardized. Note that we have not forbidden other versions from being used by individuals. In fact, it is sometimes necessary and helpful for preachers to consult other versions.
- (iii) Churches have been divided over Bible versions, due to two extreme groups: (a) the liberal-minded, who think of the welfare of others and desire them to have an easily understood version, ignoring the fact that the accuracy of translation is an important factor; (b) the conservative-minded, who value the word of God but is skewed in thinking by fear of change and by personal preference, to the extent of being unhappy with others who disagree. With the advent of the internet, bad ideas are propagated with good ones. We must beware of being influenced by wrong, or extreme, views.

**2.2 Why choose the NKJV.**

- (i) Some basic facts about translation.
  - *Inspiration*: The Holy Spirit moved God-chosen men to write His word without suppressing their personalities (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21). It was not a process of dictation, in which the persons became mere robots or machines. The original writings (“autographs”) were infallible (not capable of being wrong) and inerrant (without error in words and facts).
  - *Transmission*: (a) The original autographs, written on papyrus and maybe also animal skins, perished due to use, fire, natural decay, etc. The OT was copied by scribes with extreme care down the centuries. Between 7th and 10th century AD, the Masoretic Text was compiled which became the official OT text. When compared with the Dead Sea Scroll (c. 150 BC) discovered in 1948,

with the MT of AD 900-1000, they were almost identical. In the 3rd and 2nd century BC, the OT was translated into Greek, called the Septuagint, which was quoted much in the NT. (b) The NT has similarly been copied and transmitted, so that there are various families of manuscripts that are extant. Protestants have relied on the family of manuscripts called the Textus Receptus (or Received Text), until recent days when textual critics begin to use other families of manuscripts such as Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus.

- *Canonization*: It is clear that God guided His people to recognize which books were Scriptures and which were not, so that by the time of Christ and the apostles, the OT canon was fixed. Similarly, by the mid-2nd century AD, the NT canon was fixed. In 1546, the RC declared the 14 books of the Apocrypha as part of the Bible. All Protestant Confessions of Faith reject these (e.g. 1689:1:3).
- *Translation*: As the Christian faith spread, the Bible was translated into many languages. Two competing principles of Bible translation are *Formal Equivalence* and *Dynamic Equivalence* - one focussing on literal faithfulness, the other on readability, respectively.

(ii) Criteria for choosing NKJV. We choose the NKJV because:

- (a) It uses the Masoretic Text and the Textus Receptus as the bases of translation, although other texts were consulted.
- (b) It uses the principle of Formal Equivalence, which we believe to be more suitable for important documents.
- (c) It uses modern English, cf. Matt. 8:19; Phil. 3:20; 1 Pet. 2:9. The principle is that the Bible is meant to be readily understood, without the need to learn another language, even old English.

(iii) Why VPI (Verbal, Plenary Inspiration) and not VPP (Verbal, Plenary Preservation)? Recent days saw the rise of the VPP view in Evangelical circles. It claims that God miraculously preserved His word in the transmission process, so that the apographs underlying the Masoretic Text and the Textus Receptus contained no scribal error. The KJV of 1611 is regarded as the most reliable English Bible, while all others are corrupt. We reject VPP because:

- (a) It wrongly understands the expression in the Confessions (Westminster & 1689), that the inspired word of God was “by his singular care and providence kept pure in all ages” as meaning “miraculous preservation of Scripture such that no scribal error entered”. We do not doubt God’s special care of His word, through His imperfect people. We do not deny the doctrine of providence, which is different from miraculous intervention. Inerrancy applies in a direct sense to the autographs, and in a derivative sense to the apographs. Scribal errors came in, but not to the extent of affecting any doctrine, e.g. 2 Sam. 15:7. The 1.5% textual differences are mostly alleged discrepancies, capable of reasonable explanation, e.g. 1 Chron. 21:25 cf. 2 Sam. 24:24. We do not need to believe in a perfect Bible in the sense that the VPP advocates mean. All the Bible passages they use do not support VPP but VPI, e.g. 2 Tim 3:14-17; Ps. 12:6-7; Mat. 5:18.
- (b) It requires miraculous intervention in the Masorets of the 7th to 10th centuries AD and the KJV translators of 1611 to sieve out the texts for the MT and the TR.
- (c) Its proponents wrongly and unfairly imply that all others are neo-evangelicals, favour unreliable manuscript texts like those of Westcott and Hort, adopt liberal textual criticisms, and deny the power of God.

## **Conclusion**

1. Do not be drawn away by the ideas of VPP or KJV-only. Understand why we favour the NKJV to the NIV and other versions that use the dynamic equivalence principle of translation, or are mere paraphrases.

2. Value the Bible as God’s word, written by inspiration, transmitted down by special care and providence of God, “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work”.

**Notes:**

1. On how we get our Bible, see: (a) Jensen's Survey of the OT, pp. 1-51 (Moody Press); (b) Nothing But the Truth, Brian Edwards (Evangelical Press).
2. Alleged discrepancies of the Bible, John W. Haley (Baker).
3. A short helpful article on the traditional view of VPI, see "Inerrancy and Inspiration of the Bible", Matt Slick, at: <http://carm.org/inerrancy-and-inspiration-bible>.

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