

# Bible Versions

MAY 2021

THE SHEPHERD'S TABERNACLE, SINGAPORE



*...which English versions of the Holy Bible should we use? Which is the best available today?*

## Which English Bible Version? by Willy Ng

**If you walk into any Christian Bookshop today, you will find many English versions of the Holy Bible.**

You can pick and choose according to your liking, Bibles in different sizes, colours and print. You can also select a variety of "Study Bibles" such as the New Geneva Study Bible, the ESV Study Bible or the KJV Study Bible, etc.



version available today?

Now, which English version of the Holy Bible should we use? Which is the best English

In Criswell Tabernacle, we use the King James Version (KJV) and the New King James Version (NKJV). However, we do not hold to a "KJV only" conviction and neither do we use other English versions like the popular NIV, ESV, etc.

It is important for us to take note that we do not want to show any disrespect to those who hold to a "KJV only" conviction or others who use English versions like NIV or ESV. We believe that we have the Christian liberty to disagree respectfully with them on this matter.

Why do we use the KJV and NKJV but not hold to a "KJV only" conviction? Conversely, why do we not encourage the use of other English versions?

First, we will explain the

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reasons why we use the KJV and NKJV but not other English versions. Second, we will explain why we do not hold to a "KJV only" conviction.

### **WHY DO WE USE THE KJV AND NKJV?**

In this section, we will state the proper biblical principles that we believe must be followed in the translation of the Word of God into the English language. These principles have guided us

to adopt the KJV and NKJV but not the other available English versions.

First, we must look at the translators. It is crucial that the Bible translators must be spiritually and academically qualified for this job. As the Holy Bible says in 1 Corinthians 2:14, "But the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God ... neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned". Our Lord Jesus tells us in John 3:3, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God".

It is equally important that the Bible translators are academically qualified for the job. How can a person translate from the original Hebrew and Greek languages if the person does not have a good knowledge of these languages? At the same time, the translator must also have a good working and practical knowledge of the English language to produce an accurate English translation.

Second, we must look at the OT and NT manuscripts from which the English version was translated. Generally, most Bible versions used the Masoretic text for the OT.

Broadly speaking, there are basically two NT manuscript traditions used today. One is the traditional Byzantine tradition which the Christian Church and our Protestant forebears held to and from which our KJV and NKJV are translated from. The other is the manuscript tradition that are compiled by

or linked to two non-Christian scholars, Aland and Nestle.



Now, the Christian must ask, "Which manuscript tradition should we follow?"

As a Church, we hold to the Byzantine manuscript tradition for the NT and we reject the use of any source linked to non Christian scholars. No matter what justifications one can come up with to support the use of non-Christian "scholarly findings", the fact remains that the Holy Bible says, "But the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God". We must maintain the stand that non-Christians have no part in the translation of God's Word.

It is sad to note that most modern English versions are based on the "Aland and Nestle" tradition including the popular NIV and ESV, though most of its translators are professing Christians.

Third, we must look at the principles of translation. In other words, are the translations based on a literal "word-for-word" translation rule or a freer "thought-for-thought" translation rule (which is sometimes known as

the "dynamic equivalent" method)?

The KJV and the NKJV are based on the "word-for-word" approach whereas the NIV is based on the "thought-for-thought" method of translation.

Our forebears believed that the calling of a Bible translator is to translate what the original OT and NT texts say into the reader's language whenever possible and not to interpret what he thinks the text says for the reader (which the "thought-for-thought" method is guilty of).

It is important to take note that the origin of the "thought-for-thought" approach comes from non Christian sources, namely, from non-Christian scholars like Eugene Nida. It is sad that Christians are willing to adopt such an unbiblical method.

It is worth noting that the translations from Tyndale to the KJV used the "word-for-word" method. We admit that "thought-for-thought" do occur in some verses but the main rule of translation is the literal "word-for-word" approach. This is because our forebears believe the Holy Bible demands a "word-for-word" method of translation as we believe every word of the Holy Bible is the Word of God and not just the "thought" behind the words.

Our Lord Jesus says, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). In Matthew 5:18, we are

told that even "one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law till all be fulfilled." The Bible translator must be faithful in translating even "one jot or one tittle" into the reader's language whenever possible.

Now, the KJV meets all the above criteria. This is why we are using the KJV. Similarly, if you apply the same criteria to the NKJV, you will find that the NKJV also meets these criteria. The NKJV was translated by Christian scholars. The same textual tradition and translation method was followed. Hence, we consider the NKJV to be a faithful English version that we can use to the glory of God and the edification of Christians despite its imperfections.

Yes, it is more difficult to read a literal English translation like the KJV or the NKJV. It is so much easier to read the NIV (which reads much like a modern storybook). But the Christian must remember that the Word of God is never meant to be read in a casual manner but in a devotional and reverential spirit.

The Christian must study the Word of God diligently in order to understand the mysteries of God. 2 Timothy 2:15 says, "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth."

Even the apostle Peter tells us in 2 Peter 3:16 that he himself found some portions of Scripture to be "hard to be



understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest". Peter said "hard" but he did not say "impossible" to be understood. The solution is not to read a modern translation that is readable but to study the Word of God diligently in order to know the mind of God.

Now, we do acknowledge that the English language used in the KJV is different from the English language our children are taught in school today. We do not want them to grow up thinking that Christianity is an ancient religion that has no relevance to them. It is also for this reason that we allow the use of the NKJV.

As already mentioned above, the NKJV meets all the criteria, which we mentioned, for a good Bible translation. Furthermore, those who use the NKJV will have no problem following those who read from the KJV from the pulpit, whereas those using the NIV will be totally lost and will find it hard to join in the public reading of the Holy Bible during the Sunday worship service.

We have good reasons for using the KJV and the NKJV. We have equally good reasons for rejecting the use of other English versions like NIV or ESV.

### **WHY DO WE NOT HOLD TO THE "KJV ONLY" CONVICTION?**

Though we use the KJV, we do not hold to the "KJV only" conviction as we use also the NKJV and are also open to any English version that meets the criteria mentioned above.

Here are some reasons why we do not hold to the "KJV only" conviction:

**The Holy Bible is silent.** It is not right to maintain that the "KJV alone is the Word of God to the exclusion of all others (as the Roman Catholic Pope did for the Vulgate). As we believe in "Sola Scriptura", we must base any conviction we have on the Holy Bible alone. In other words, the chapter and verse from the Holy Scripture is needed in order to hold to such an absolute and declaratory judgment. It is clearly impossible to find a verse to support the conviction that the "KJV alone" is the Word of God. Thus to make such a claim is unscriptural.

**We should emulate our Lord's example.** The "KJV only" defenders would say that it is wrong to quote from or use a corrupted version of the Word of God. If we maintain this viewpoint, we will be in danger of accusing Our Lord and His

apostles of sin for on numerous occasions in the New Testament they are quoted or are represented as quoting from the corrupt Greek Septuagint translation of the OT Scriptures.

Only the Original Hebrew/Aramaic and Greek Autographa are divinely inspired of God.

It is not right to maintain that the KJV is divinely inspired or the "KJV only" is the Word of God in the English language because we will be in danger of denigrating the original autographa (which alone were given by the inspiration of God). We believe that the original autographa were "immediately inspired of God" and "kept pure in all ages". This means that God kept His Word pure before the KJV was translated in 1611 and even today in other languages and faithful English versions that meet the proper biblical translation criteria mentioned above. In short, God's Word is not kept pure or to be found in the "KJV only".

**The KJV is a faithful but not a perfect translation.** It is not



right to claim that the KJV is a perfect translation. Like all other translations, it is imperfect because it was translated by fallible men. For example, it clearly errs in

Matthew 23:24 and Acts 12:4, no matter what tortuous justifications are employed on their behalf. The KJV also occasionally uses "dynamic equivalence" (Mark 12:42) and inserts a reading for which there is no manuscript basis (1 John 2:23). If the KJV is a perfect translation, then we are entitled to ask, which KJV is the perfect translation?

All bibliographers know that there were two editions of the KJV at first the "He" Bible and the "She" Bible, based on a variant in Ruth 3:15. Is the perfect one the "He" Bible or the "She" Bible? If we can determine this, then what about the subsequent editions of the KJV in which about 4000 alterations were made?

The majority of the "KJV only" supporters actually use an edition which differs from the original 1611 version in over 4000 places. Now, how then can we hold an English Version of the Holy Bible in our hands and claim it to be the Word of God if it has errors in it due to translation, transmission and corruption?

Our Lord and His apostles never treated this as a problem when they quoted from the Old Testament Scriptures. For example, they quoted from the corrupted Septuagint (which is a Greek translation of the OT) and yet they never hesitated in claiming, "Thus says the Lord". They never even addressed the issue in the NT Scriptures.

Why then should we make an issue out of something, which evidently was of no concern to our Lord or His apostles? Are we wiser than they are?

Well, we may ask, "If this is the case, should we then just use any English version that comes along?"

The answer of course is, "NO" because some versions are so corrupted and badly translated into English that, unless we are absolutely desperate, we would not want to use them. We are privileged to have a selection of English translations available today and we should use the best.

Now, it is sad to note that there are many Christians who over-react to the "KJV only" conviction and see themselves abandoning the KJV altogether and adopting a poor modern substitute like the NIV or ESV.

It is our conviction that English translations that are based on the Masoretic and Byzantine textual traditions, with godly as well as scholarly translators and who avoid the use of the "dynamic equivalence" method of translation and other textual liberties, are the best, available in the English language today. These criteria have been explained in detail above.

Now, there are not many English versions that meet the criteria we mentioned above. In fact we can think of only two: the KJV and the NKJV which we use. We are open to accepting any future English version that will meet these criteria.

It is important for Christians to recognise that cultic versions and such corrupted versions like the "Good News Bible" are dangerous. Even the popular NIV is loaded with liberties taken in translation due to its "dynamic--equivalent" method of translation. As such, with due respect, the NIV cannot be properly called a "translation" but a "paraphrase" or a "commentary" of the Word of God.

Though the ESV claims to be a "word-for-word" translation, it is based on the non-Christian "Aland and Nestle" Greek text. The ESV is really only a revision of the liberal RSV.

Now, we would not use, for example, the Septuagint (which is a Greek translation of the OT) as our pulpit OT Scripture because of its many corruptions and additions (far more than many modern versions). Yet, because of the example of our Lord and His apostles, we should not swing to the other extreme and call it the devil's Bible.

## **CONCLUSION**

The debate over this issue has done great damage to the cause of our Lord as much energy is being expended in a defense of the KJV. This may actually be

more detrimental to its use and value.

Nowadays, as soon as one is identified as using the KJV, then one is in danger of being branded a lunatic who is prepared to curse anyone who says a good word about any other version.

The KJV has stood the test of time and has been mightily used of God and needs no "defence". It is not a perfect version but it is the best available today. We proudly use the KJV and the NKJV. But we believe it is unscriptural to hold to a "KJV alone" conviction.

While we do not hold to a "KJV only" conviction, we do not want to swing to the other side of the pendulum and adopt a poor modern substitute and abandon the KJV altogether. We must use the best English version of the Holy Bible that is available to us according to the biblical principles mentioned earlier. We believe the KJV and the NKJV are not perfect but they are the best available English versions of the Holy Bible today. We are also open to any future new English version if it meets our criteria mentioned.



*“In all my perplexities and distresses, the Holy Bible has never failed to give me light and strength” (Robert E Lee).*

*“All human discoveries seem to be made only for the purpose of confirming more and more strongly the truths contained in the Sacred Scriptures” (Sir William Herschel).*

*“Bible reading is an education in itself” (Lord Tennyson).*

*“There are more sure marks of authenticity in the Holy Bible than in any profane history” (Sir Isaac Newton).*

*“The Holy Bible is worth all other books which have ever been printed” (Patrick Henry).*