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Thirteen practical reasons for retaining the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible.

By Dr. Joel R. Beeke

A short, sound, theological and Reformed view of why we should continue to use the historic Received Text (TR) of the NT and the Masoretic Text of the OT, which are most faithfully translated for the English speaker in the Authorized (King James) Version.

1. The Standard Text of the English Bible

It is wiser to choose the known over against the unknown. The weaknesses and disadvantages of a particular version of the Bible cannot really be assessed apart from a thorough trial of daily usage over many years. Many who welcomed the New International Version (NIV) with great enthusiasm when it first appeared are now prepared to admit its serious weaknesses as a translation.

The KJV is well established in the market-place and in the literature of Christian scholarship. It will continue in production in many editions for years to come. Helps and reference works are commonly available. It is not likely that the KJV will fade from view and disappear as have many versions produced to supplant it.

Likewise the KJV is widely studied and commented on in the literature of biblical scholarship. It will always be a standard of reference and comparison of Bible commentators. All other versions are compared to it, contrasted with it, tested by it. Campaigns to sell other versions must attack it. The same cannot be said of any other Bible version.

2. Based on the Full Text of the Hebrew and Greek Originals

Based on the Textus Receptus (the Greek NT), and the Masoretic Text (Hebrew OT), the KJV gives the most authentic and fullest available text of the Scriptures, with none of the many omissions and textual rewrites of the modern translations such as the Revised Standard Versions (RSV) and the NIV.

(a) Oldest Does Not Mean Best - The Westcott and Hort arguments that 'the oldest manuscripts are the most reliable' and that 'age carries more weight than volume' are not necessarily true. It could well be that the two oldest, complete manuscripts were found to be in such unusually excellent condition because they were already recognized as faulty manuscripts in their time and therefore were placed aside and not recopied until worn out as were the reliable manuscripts. This is further supported by numerous existing differences between the Vatican and Sinaitic manuscripts.

(b) Volume - The King James Version is based upon the Traditional Text. The vast majority of the more than 5,000 known partial and complete Greek manuscripts follow this textual reading.



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(c) Church History - The 'Received' or 'Ecclesiastical' Text has been used by the church historically. The English, French, Dutch, and German Reformation churches all used Bibles based on the Traditional Text. (The Dutch 'Statenvertaling' is also based upon the 'Ecclesiastic' Text.)

3. A More Faithful Method of Translation

The KJV translators employed a method of verbal equivalence ('word for word') rather than the method of paraphrase or dynamic equivalence ('meaning for meaning') used in the NIV. The result is that the KJV gives you what biblical authors wrote, not what a committee thinks they meant to write.

4. A More Honest Translation

The text of the KJV used italics to identify every word or phrase interpolated (supplied by the translator) and not given in the original. Such a practice was not followed in the NIV, lest the loose method of its translators be unmercifully exposed to view.

5. A More Precise Idiom

Often attacked at this very point, the KJV actually is a more accurate and helpful translation precisely because of the archaic pronouns ('thou, thy, thee,' etc.). Both Hebrew and Greek distinguish clearly between the 2nd person singular ('thou') and the 2nd person plural ('ye, you'). In many statements this makes an important difference (e.g. John 3:7). In a sense it is correct to say that in praying the Lord Jesus used 'Thou' - God is one, not many! - for he definitely used the Hebrew or Greek equivalent.

6. The Best Liturgical Text

The KJV excels as a version to be used in public worship. That is why it has been used so widely in the churches. The requirements of the sanctuary are not those of the classroom. Other versions may be helpful on occasions to the student, but none is more edifying to the worshipper.

7. The Best Format For Preaching

The KJV traditionally has been laid out verse by verse on the page, rather than in paragraphs; though for most of the text, paragraphs are indicated by a sign. The Hebrew and Greek texts, of course, have no paragraphing at all. The verse-by-verse format best serves the purpose of verse-by-verse consecutive expository sermonizing.

8. The Most Beautiful Translation

The KJV gives classic expression to many important passages in the Bible (e.g. Ps 23, Isa 53, Luke 2, and the Parable of the Prodigal Son). Our seniors need to hear these passages



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as a comfort and help as they draw near to the end of life's journey and our children need to hear them in the KJV as part of their nurture and education. They need to understand that the KJV is an important part of the spiritual and cultural heritage of all English-speaking Christians, and a key to our greatest literature. Children well instructed in the KJV will be greatly advantaged over other children, spiritually, linguistically, educationally, and culturally.

9. An Ecumenical Text For Reformed Christians

No other version has been used so widely among evangelical Christians. More significantly for Reformed Christians, this version is used by preference in many conservative Reformed congregations. The KJV is also used in the Christian schools these churches sponsor. Using the KJV is one way to underscore our unity and identity with other conservative evangelical and Reformed Christians.

10. A Practical Choice

The KJV is available in many editions; with a full range of helps and reference materials, not to mention computer software; in large-type, clear-print editions; and often priced well below modern translations.

11. 'Sounds' Like the Bible

More than any other version, the KJV sounds like the Word of God, even to unbelievers. The KJV translators aimed at this very thing. Even in 1611 the KJV sounded old-fashioned, ancient, a voice from the past. This was to command a reverent hearing, and to suggest the timeless and eternal character of God's Word.

The modern unbeliever, if he has any spiritual concern at all, is well aware that the contemporary scene really offers him no hope. He expects the church to speak in a way that is timeless and other-worldly.

Many church-goers and occasional visitors to a church go much more by 'feel' and 'mood' than by intellectual content or apprehension. They are more likely to take seriously what is said to them if they sense that this is something more important than a casual conversation.

12. The Character of the Translators

The fifty men appointed to translate the King James Version were not only well-known scholars, but were also men of sound religious faith. They were strong believers in every word of the Bible being inspired by God and in all the central doctrinal truths of Scripture. They were God-fearing men whose lives testified of a saving knowledge of these truths. This same testimony cannot be made of all translators serving on modern translation teams.



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13. Upholds 'Old Paths'

Using the KJV is a clear statement of where we stand and want to be as a church walking in the 'old paths' of God's Word. 'Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls' (Jer 6:16). In choosing this version we choose to stand with all that is best in the great tradition of historic Christianity.

The penchant for new translations was part of the program of change which has done such harm to many denominations over the past century. This change to new translations was often part of an effort to strip worship services of dignity, reverence, and beauty, in favour of the casual, the contemporary, and the convenient. It also causes a congregation to lose touch with keeping the Word in memory. Memorization of the Scriptures suffers when each generation uses a different translation.

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