

WHAT TODAY'S CHRISTIAN NEEDS TO KNOW ABOUT

THE NEW KING JAMES VERSION

There are Christians and churches today who are desiring to change the translation of the Bible which they use. Some are changing from translations such as the Revised Standard Version to the modern and popular 'easy-to read' versions such as the Good News Bible or the New International Version. Others are desiring to make a change from one of these popular versions to what they consider to be a more accurate and conservative translation. In this latter category, some are changing to the New King James Version. They believe that if they switch to the New King James Version, they will have the accuracy and fidelity of the Authorised Version with the benefit of the updated language: it bears the name 'King James Version'; therefore, it must be a revision of the Authorised (King James) Version. They believe that in the NKJV they will have the best of both worlds in one new Bible. They do not realise that the New King James Version is not an updated Authorised (King James) Version. Instead, the NKJV is a highly-edited new translation which is theologically and philosophically inconsistent with the AV. The purpose of this article is to show that the NKJV is not a

faithful revision of the Authorised Version but instead is just another attempt to usurp the place of authority which the AV has enjoyed for well over three centuries as the premier translation in English from the Hebrew Masoretic Old Testament and the Greek Textus Receptus New Testament.

It is generally acknowledged that the problems which are associated with the NKJV are not as numerous or as serious as those found in other versions such as the New International Version, the Revised English Bible or the Good News Bible. The NKJV does not omit hundreds of verses, phrases and words as is done in these other versions. It is not a loose translation or a paraphrase. However, the problems of the NKJV are significant in the light of the claim by its publishers and others that it is an accurate improvement of the AV and thus should replace the AV. In this article information is given on the background and problems of the New King James Version, particularly why it should not be viewed as a new edition of the Authorised Version and thus a replacement for it.

Editions of the NKJV

There have been several editions of the NKJV issued by the Thomas Nelson Publishers. The New Testament was copyrighted in 1979, with the entire Bible copyrighted in 1982 and 1990. The United Kingdom edition (at first named the Revised Authorised Version) was issued in 1982 and is now published by the British and Foreign Bible Society (also known as the Bible Society), which is a member of the United Bible Societies. There have been literally thousands of changes in the text of the NKJV during the intervening years. 'The text has been continually revised since 1982 and thousands of changes have been made.'¹ These changes were made even though there was not a new copyright issued during the years from 1982–1990.

Some of these changes are:

❖ The 1979 American edition of the New Testament in Philippians 2.7 has 'but emptied Himself', whilst the 1982 American edition of the Bible in Philippians 2.7 has 'but made Himself of no reputation'.

❖ The 1982 American edition of the Bible in Romans 1.1 has 'Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ', whilst the 1982 copyright edition of *The Word In Life New Testament* and 1990 American editions of the Bible in Romans 1.1 have 'Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ'.²

❖ The 1979 American edition of the New Testament, the 1982 American edition of the Bible and the 1982 United Kingdom edition of the Bible in Acts 22.1 have 'Men, brethren, and fathers'; the

1990 American edition of the Bible and the 1982 American edition text as used in *The Word In Life Study Bible* (copyright 1993) in Acts 22.1 have 'Brethren and fathers'.

Normally when changes are made to the text of a translation, these changes are made when a new copyrighted edition is issued. An example of this is the New American Standard Bible. There were nine copyrighted editions issued between 1960 and 1977. This does not appear to be the case in the NKJV. There are numerous differences between editions with the same copyright. These many changes in the NKJV in what seem to be the same copyrighted editions have made research for this article very difficult. Thus it must be understood that individual examples given in this article may or may not be found in a copy of the NKJV New Testament or Bible which the reader of this article may possess. These many changes may cause confusion when the NKJV is used in public reading as well as in preaching and teaching. One of the benefits of the AV is that only one edition, the 1769 Oxford Standard, is customarily used; thus, no matter where an AV user goes, he can expect to have essentially the same Bible as others who use the AV. One would have hoped that a version which was designed eventually to replace the AV would have the same consistency of readings.

The Translators

Interestingly enough, there were nine scholars who worked on both the NKJV and the New International Version. Since these translations had two differing methods of translation principles and

used different texts, this surely provided an interesting dilemma for these men. They apparently did not have problems working in a formal as opposed to a dynamic equivalence³ setting, nor must they have had difficulty using the Textus Receptus versus the Critical Text, nor using the Hebrew text versus the Hebrew plus the extensive use of any number of ancient and modern translations. In other words, the translators who worked on both projects apparently had no problem with supporting opposing principles in translation work today. Most scholars who are committed to the use and support of the Textus Receptus are so committed because of strong convictions regarding the true text of Scripture. Most men who support the Textus Receptus are persecuted, abused in print or ridiculed by scholars who support the Critical Text. Thus, it is difficult to understand how these men could work on both translations.

Advertising Policy

The NKJV was originally advertised as the fifth revision of the AV. 'The first King James Version of the Holy Bible was published in 1611 after seven years of careful and reverent labor. Now, almost 371 years later, that Authorised Version has been carefully updated so that it will once again speak God's eternal truths with clarity.'⁴ In advertising, the translators are referred to as 'revisers'.⁵ It is stated in the 1990 American edition that '...the New King James Version is the fifth revision of a historic document'.⁶ However, the 1990 American edition also states that it 'was carefully crafted...to produce a new translation for today's readers'.⁷

This last statement seems to imply that this is not a revision, but a new, fresh translation. This was an advertisement on the back cover of an inexpensive paperback edition. Meanwhile, it is still advertised as the fifth revision (as one recent author has said, 'the New King James Version is the fifth revision of a historic document translated from specific Greek texts...'⁸) even though it is also advertised as being 'translated from the original Hebrew and Greek'.⁹ It appears that they have advertised it as both the fifth revision and as a new translation from the original languages.

Nor are Christians accepting the NKJV as the new AV. 'The NKJV has yet to prove itself a viable alternative to the AV. After seven years [in 1992], sales statistics from *Publisher's Weekly* (1990) rank the NIV and AV one and two in sales with the NKJV (despite its impressive sales record) never more than third.'¹⁰ However, the NKJV is, in the words of the advertising company, a modern translation that communicates 'the eternal truths of Scripture in today's words': 'The Modern Bible You'll Enjoy For Its Accuracy, Beauty, And Clarity'.¹¹

The Second Personal Pronoun

Perhaps the most significant problem concerns the second personal pronoun. 'The real character of the Authorised Version does not reside in its archaic pronouns or verbs or other grammatical forms of the seventeenth century, but rather in the care taken by its scholars to impart the letter and spirit of the original text in a majestic and reverent style.'¹² Thus the NKJV does not differentiate between 'you' singular and 'you'

plural. This distinction, which is made in the Biblical languages and in many modern languages, was recognised by the AV translators. They used 'thee', 'thou' and 'thine' to designate 'you' singular and 'ye', 'you' and 'your' for 'you' plural.

This tradition was continued in the Revised Version and its American edition, the American Standard Version. It had been believed that it was necessary to maintain fidelity to the Biblical languages to indicate this difference in pronouns. The Reformed commentator William Hendriksen differentiated between the singular and plural by using 'you' for the singular and 'y o u' for the plural pronoun in his commentaries. Even the New International Version translators occasionally indicated (by the use of a footnote) the plural 'you' in passages which could be misunderstood if this distinction were not made.

The NKJV translators were mistaken as to why the AV translators used 'thee' and 'thou' in their work. The NKJV publishers state that 'Readers of the Authorised Version will immediately be struck by the absence of several pronouns: *thee*, *thou*, and *ye* are replaced by the simple *you*, while *your* and *yours* are substituted for *thy* and *thine* as applicable. *Thee*, *thou*, *thy* and *thine* were once forms of address to express a special relationship to human as well as divine persons. These pronouns are no longer part of our language.'¹³ However, they were not used extensively in everyday language during the 16th and 17th centuries either, as can be seen from the works of Shakespeare. Also, one wonders what distinction the NKJV translators had in mind with reference to

'human as well as divine persons'. It is evident that they did not know why the AV used these pronouns and their accompanying verb forms. Since there are at least 14,665 occurrences of the singular pronoun in 10,479 verses in the AV, the possibility exists of numerous opportunities for misinterpretation and misapplication.

If the differences between these pronouns are not noted, problems with interpretation can occur. Note the following example (bold type added for emphasis):

❖ Luke 22.31–32, NKJV: 31 'And the Lord said, "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for **you**, that he may sift *you* as wheat. But I have prayed for **you**, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to *Me*, strengthen your brethren".' From the pronouns used in the NKJV one would be led to believe that both verses are referring only to Simon Peter. Satan desires Simon and wants to sift him as wheat.

Note carefully the shift of pronouns as shown accurately in the AV in this passage: 31 'And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired *to have* you, that he may sift *you* as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.' In verse 31, Jesus is telling Simon that Satan desires to have 'you' (the disciples) to sift as wheat. Jesus then tells Simon that he has prayed for him individually. Thus the AV is more accurate and preserves the particularity of the intercession of the Lord Jesus.

It is not uncommon for modern readers of Scripture to assume that 'you' is singular whenever used. By failing to distinguish between 'thee' and 'you', the NKJV translators contribute to this misinterpretation of the Scriptures. This problem is seen in the way in which many interpret Isaiah 7.14.

Isaiah 7.14 in the NKJV reads 'Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel'. In both the NKJV and the AV the pronoun used is 'you'; it is assumed by some that the word 'you' is singular, thus referring to King Ahaz alone. Since the NKJV translators make no distinction between the singular and plural forms of 'you', this might be a safe assumption for the reader of the NKJV. However, if it had been singular in the Hebrew, the AV translators would have used 'thee'. Since the AV has 'you' in this verse, it is apparent that the sign is given to more than one person, to the house of David, as mentioned in verse 13. However, since the NKJV does not make this distinction, it is difficult for the reader of this verse in the NKJV to avoid misinterpreting the pronoun and thinking that this 'you' is King Ahaz alone.

Further examples of interpretation problems created by the NKJV's lack of distinction between pronouns can be found in 1 Kings 9.5–6; Matthew 5.39, 6.4–7, 11.23–24, 18.9–11; Mark 14.37–38; Luke 9.41, 17.21; John 14.9–11; 1 Corinthians 3.16–17, 6.19–20; Philippians 2.5; etc.

Replacement of Pronouns with Nouns

In a number of instances, the NKJV replaces the Hebrew pronouns with nouns. Three such occurrences are Genesis 29.30 and Genesis 30.29, in which 'he' is replaced with the name 'Jacob'; and 2 Kings 6.18, in which 'they' is replaced with 'the Syrians'. Although this reduces the ambiguity of the passages, it is not consistent with the Hebrew. If words need to be added to enhance clarity, they must be printed in italic type to indicate that they are not in the original texts. In some editions of the NKJV the name is placed in italic type to indicate that it is added, and in others a marginal note indicates the Hebrew reading. However, this is not always done, and thus the NKJV reading is not consistent with the Hebrew.

Replacement of Nouns with Pronouns

In addition, the NKJV has numerous places in which nouns are replaced with pronouns. These include Leviticus 8.23, in which 'Moses' is replaced with 'he'. The replacement of a pronoun with a noun can be understandable in an effort to increase clarity. It is difficult to understand, however, what purpose other than style would account for this abandonment of the original language texts.

Capitalisation

There is also difficulty in the NKJV's use of the capitalisation of pronouns referring to Deity in the American editions. 'Often this makes the message of Scripture clearer by indicating whether the person to which the pronoun refers is God or man.'¹⁴ Whilst this is true, it is

also true that neither the Hebrew nor the Greek texts use capitalisation to indicate to whom a pronoun refers. Doing so in English can be very subjective and interpretative. Psalm 37.23 in the AV reads, 'The steps of a *good* man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way'. Does the Lord delight in the man's way, or the man in the Lord's? The NKJV answers this by its use of capitalisation: 'And He delights in his way'. However, the question must be asked, is this interpretation correct?

Another such difficulty is found in 2 Thessalonians 2.7, which in the NKJV is 'He who now restrains *will do so* until He is taken out of the way'. Some believe that both instances of the word 'he' in this verse refer to the Holy Spirit, which would be in keeping with the NKJV's capitalisation of the pronoun. Other equally sound Christians, however, believe these refer to a man, which would be in keeping with the NKJV's marginal reading, 'Or *he*'. Still others would believe that the first instance refers to the Holy Spirit and the second to a man, in which case the NKJV would be neither correct nor incorrect. Capitalisation of this sort, particularly combined with marginal notes deleting the capitalisation, can be confusing at best and misinterpretative at worst. The use of capitalisation also displays and is caused by the theological bias of the translators. This matter is discussed under 'Theological Bias' later in this article.

Headings

Most editions of the NKJV use topical headings in the text to identify the subject matter which is found in the verses or paragraphs which follow. They are

used more frequently in the New Testament than in the Old Testament. The use of these headings dividing the text of Scripture is a fairly recent and widely accepted practice. However, the lack of objectivity in the use of subject headings quite often introduces problems to the text of Scripture. Some headings are simply words taken from the text. An example is Ephesians 2.1 'By Grace Through Faith'. In other places the headings are interpretative and suggestive, using words which are not found in the passage which follows. An example is in 2 Corinthians 3.7, 'Glory of the New Covenant'. Although the New Covenant is mentioned in the previous paragraph, it is not found in verses 7–18. This is not to say that the subject could not be in view in these verses, but that the heading is interpretative and suggestive. The following are examples of some of the problems found in the headings of the NKJV:

❖ Malachi 4.1 'The Great Day of God'. The text of the passage calls this day 'the great and dreadful day of the LORD'.

❖ Romans 7.1 'Freed from the Law' appears to suggest that the believer has no relationship to the Law of God. 'The believer's relationship to the Law' would be a more objective way of stating the subject. The reader may then see what the relationship of the believer to the Law is from the text of Scripture.

❖ Romans 8.1 'Free from Indwelling Sin' suggests that the believer has no problem with sin any longer.

❖ 1 Corinthians 3.5 'Watering, Working, Warning' may be good alliteration, but it

is ineffective and does not state enough information for the reader to know what the passage says.

❖ 1 Corinthians 10.1 'Old Testament Examples'. Since the headings have not indicated the subject matter, this heading is obscure and unclear.

❖ 2 Corinthians 13.7 'Paul Prefers Gentleness' is a problem because gentleness is not mentioned and is not the topic of the passage.

❖ 2 Timothy 4.19–21 'Come Before Winter' may be relevant for verse 21, but it bears no relation to verses 19 and 20.

The Original Language Texts

The translators of the NKJV used the Hebrew Masoretic Text as the basis for their Old Testament translation and the Greek Textus Receptus as the basis for their translation of the New Testament. In keeping with their desire to produce a 'new' King James Version, they selected the same basic original language texts as were used by the AV translators. However, the numerous unnecessary differences between the NKJV and the AV display the difficulties which the NKJV translators had in staying not only with the idea of revising the AV but also with the original language texts of the AV.

Unnecessary Changes from the AV Old Testament

For almost every word in Hebrew there are several valid translations in English. One Hebrew word can be translated 'glorify' (Psalm 22.23), 'grievous' (Genesis 18.20), 'hardened' (Ex-

odus 9.7), 'heavy' (1 Samuel 4.18), 'honour' (Exodus 20.12), 'much' (Exodus 12.38), 'rich' (Genesis 13.2) and 'thick' (Exodus 19.16). A derivative of the word even means 'liver' (Exodus 29.13), the idea being that the liver is a heavy or thick organ. Likewise, the word which in most places is translated 'bless' (Psalm 16.7), is in Job 1.11 'curse'. Thus, a single word may be translated in many different ways depending upon its context. Most translators will attempt to be consistent in rendering words, enabling readers of the Bible to see more easily the flow of Scripture; the AV translators were quite good at this in most instances.

The NKJV translators, however, seem unnecessarily to have given words differing translations. In Genesis 3.16–17, for example, the Hebrew word translated in the AV 'sorrow' is used three times: 'I will greatly multiply thy sorrow'; 'in sorrow thou shalt bring forth'; 'in sorrow shalt thou eat of it'. The word can also mean 'hurt', 'pain' and 'toil'; the translators of the NKJV chose to use this full range of meaning rather than continue the consistency so familiar to the readers of the AV. Thus, the NKJV has 'I will greatly multiply your sorrow'; 'In pain you shall bring forth'; 'In toil you shall eat of it'.

Another example of the NKJV's use of the full range of meaning of words is found in its translation of 'seed'. This word is literally rendered in Genesis in the AV as 'seed'; context enables the reader to differentiate whether this is the seed that is the fruit of the ground (Genesis 1.11) or the fruit of the woman (Genesis 3.15). This consistency of translation enables the reader to tie the

Seed throughout the Old Testament with that spoken of by Paul in the New Testament (Galatians 3.16). However, the NKJV renders the word 'seed' as 'species' (Genesis 7.3), 'descendants' (9.9), 'offspring' (15.3), 'lineage' (19.32) and 'heir' (38.8–9). In other places in the Old Testament of the NKJV it is 'semen' (Leviticus 15.16–17). These are all possible translations of the word, but not preferable. In the same way, the NKJV's 'generations' (rendered as such in Genesis 25.13) becomes 'history' in Genesis 2.4 and 'genealogy' in Genesis 5.1 and 25.12 (and note the change from the plural, as found in the Hebrew, to a singular).

There are a number of occasions in which the NKJV changes the English wording of the AV for no apparent reason. Examples of this are:

- ❖ 'Sodomite' in Deuteronomy 23.17 and elsewhere becomes 'perverted one', not only downplaying the intent of the word but removing it from its historical context of Sodom and Gomorrah.

- ❖ Whilst the Hebrew in Genesis 4.25 says that Eve bore a son 'and called his name Seth', the NKJV says only that she 'named him Seth'. The phrase 'called his name' (or in other places, 'called their name') is frequently rendered 'named' in the NKJV. However, in Genesis 5.29, Lamech 'called his name Noah' in the NKJV.

- ❖ In Genesis 31.21, the Hebrew text has 'set his face toward'; this the NKJV gives as 'headed to' war .

- ❖ In 1 Samuel 25.12 the Hebrew has

'turned about to their way'; the NKJV has 'turned on their heels'.

- ❖ In 1 Samuel 28.8 the Hebrew has 'Divine to me'; this the NKJV renders 'conduct a séance for me'.

- ❖ In Proverbs 4.18, the Hebrew's 'a light of brightness' is rendered in the NKJV as 'sun'.

In making these changes, not only is the NKJV failing to be literal in translation, it is also inconsistent.

Incorrect Translation in the NKJV Old Testament

The NKJV also contains readings which are, simply, incorrect. Examples of these are:

- ❖ Isaiah 53.9, in which the Hebrew reading is 'And he made his grave with the wicked' and the NKJV reading is 'And they made His grave with the wicked', with a marginal note that 'they' is 'Lit. *he* or *He*'.

- ❖ Jeremiah 34.14, in which the Hebrew is 'which hath been sold unto thee' whilst the NKJV has 'who has been sold to him'.

- ❖ Hosea 10.5, in which the Hebrew's plural 'calves' is made singular in the NKJV.

- ❖ Micah 7.19, in which the Hebrew's 'thou wilt cast all their sins...' is replaced in the NKJV with 'You will cast all our sins...', with a marginal note stating that 'our' is 'Lit. *their*'.

- ❖ Zechariah 9.17, in which the He-

brew's 'For how great *is* his goodness' is rendered 'For how great is their goodness' in the NKJV, with a marginal note stating that 'their' is 'Lit. *his*'.

Whilst it is acknowledged that in many instances the reading in the NKJV is consistent with context, it must be remembered that the Hebrew, from which we translate, has a different word. The Hebrew word, under the tenets of formal equivalence translation, must be rendered literally unless there is a valid reason for doing otherwise.

The Historical Present Tense in the NKJV New Testament

The NKJV makes a significant change to one of the important aspects of the AV. The AV correctly translates the historical present tense. When in an historical narrative a Greek writer desired to give his reader a vivid description of a certain event, he would use a present tense verb to express this. It would give the reader a feeling of being there as an observer. This verbal form is used frequently in the Gospels (especially in Mark and John) and is normally translated as an English present tense. Note the AV reading of John 1.29: 'The next day John **seeth** Jesus coming unto him, and **saith**, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world'. The NKJV translates the above boldface verbs, not in the modern present tense as 'sees' and 'says', but in the past tense as 'saw' and 'said' with no indication of the change. Examples may be found in Matthew 4.5,6,8,10 and 11 (the temptation of Christ); Matthew 19.18 and 20; Mark 1.30, 11.27, 14.17, 15.21 and 22; Luke 8.49; and John 4.5,

18.38. These are but a few examples of this change in the NKJV.

This particular translation device was used in the English Revised Version and the American Standard Version of 1901. Its importance was also recognised by the translators of the New American Standard Bible which used the English past tense to make the reading conform to modern usage, but also marked each instance with an asterisk. Thus there is a tradition in the translation of the English Bible to make a distinction of this verb tense. Since this is one of the strengths of the AV, one would expect a revision to continue this principle of accurate translation. It is apparent that the NKJV does not follow the same translation philosophy as the AV translators, as is seen clearly by the way they translate the historical present tense.

Omissions from the Textus Receptus

Although the NKJV translators used the Textus Receptus Greek New Testament, for unknown reasons they omitted numerous words. The following is a list of examples which can be found in a comparison of the AV readings with the omissions in the NKJV:

- ❖ Matthew 5.37: the AV has 'communication'; the NKJV omits
- ❖ Mark 2.21: the AV has 'that filled it up'; the NKJV omits
- ❖ Luke 1.35: the AV has 'of thee'; the NKJV omits
- ❖ John 15.13: the AV has 'a man lay down his life'; the NKJV omits 'a man'

and has 'to lay down one's life' (American edition), 'to lay down his life' (United Kingdom edition)

❖ John 19.16: the AV has 'therefore'; the NKJV omits

❖ John 20.27: the AV has 'and' ('and be not faithless, but believing'); the NKJV omits

❖ Acts 2.42: the AV has 'and' ('and in breaking of bread'; the omission of 'and' here is a textual variant as found in the critical Greek texts); the NKJV omits

❖ Acts 5.24: the AV has 'of them'; the NKJV omits

❖ Acts 7.2: the AV has 'Men, brethren, and fathers'; the NKJV (American edition) has 'Brethren and fathers' whilst the United Kingdom edition has the correct reading

❖ Acts 11.11: the AV has 'And, behold'; the NKJV omits

❖ Acts 13.38: the AV has 'men *and* brethren'; the NKJV has only 'brethren'

❖ Acts 16.24: the AV has 'who'; the NKJV omits

❖ Acts 16.37: the AV has 'but'; the NKJV omits (second instance)

❖ Acts 16.37: the AV has 'being' ('being Romans'); the NKJV omits

❖ Acts 22.1: the AV has 'Men, brethren, and fathers'; the NKJV (American edition) has 'Brethren and fathers' whilst the United Kingdom edition is correct

❖ 2 Corinthians 8.10: the AV has 'for'; the NKJV omits

❖ 1 Thessalonians 1.1: the AV has 'and' ('Paul and Silvanus'); the NKJV omits

❖ Hebrews 1.6: the AV has 'and' ('and Let all the angels of God worship Him'); the NKJV omits

❖ 1 Peter 1.8: the AV has 'in whom'; the NKJV omits

❖ 2 John 6: the AV has 'and' ('And this is love...'); the NKJV omits

❖ Revelation 22.12: the AV has 'shall be'; the NKJV omits

It must be noted that all translations occasionally omit words which are found in the Hebrew and Greek texts. However, one would think that a revision of the AV would not omit words which are found in the Hebrew and Greek and are included in the AV.

There is one word which is omitted from the NKJV New Testament fairly consistently. That word is 'and'. This is a small word, and according to some translators is unimportant in most instances. However, the loss of this word tends to disrupt the flow of thought in many passages. More importantly, however, the word is found in the Greek; therefore, there is no reason why it should be omitted from the English.

The consistency of the omission of 'and' can easily be seen in the Gospel of Mark. Mark used the word 'and' extensively to introduce sentences in his gospel. The purpose was to show the immediacy of the ministry of Jesus.

Along with the words ‘immediately’ and ‘straightway’ he used ‘and’ to show the vigorous work of the Lord. The NKJV omits the introductory use of ‘and’ in thirty-one instances. Where it does translate the Greek word, the translators seem to struggle with its usage. The translators seem to go out of their way to vary the English used to translate this word. ‘Now’, ‘then’ and ‘so’ are used extensively. It may be difficult to see the importance of this word when English grammar books tell students not to begin sentences with the word ‘and’, but when the translators go out of their way to point out that ‘Complete Equivalence’ includes such words as are commonly left out of modern versions (such as ‘behold’, ‘indeed’ and ‘surely’),¹⁵ and such translation principles are linked to the inerrancy and inspiration of the Scriptures, it is indeed an important subject.

Verses in the NKJV Gospel of Mark in which the introductory ‘and’ is omitted:

| | | | |
|------|------|-------|-------|
| 1.9 | 5.42 | 8.32 | 13.25 |
| 2.2 | 6.8 | 9.3 | 14.17 |
| 3.17 | 6.25 | 9.8 | 14.35 |
| 3.18 | 6.45 | 9.15 | 14.39 |
| 3.24 | 6.56 | 10.2 | 15.1 |
| 4.16 | 7.35 | 11.14 | 15.35 |
| 4.35 | 8.5 | 12.4 | 16.2 |
| 5.29 | 8.29 | 12.39 | |

Unnecessary Changes in the New Testament

As with most revisions, the NKJV attempts to ‘repair’ things which are not ‘broken’. For some reason, there are occasions when the NKJV fails to translate a point of grammar which is very basic. For example, sometimes the definite article in Greek is translated as the English

relative pronoun ‘who’ or ‘which’. In places the NKJV omits the translation of the article altogether. Note the following examples:

❖ Matthew 5.16,45,48
 AV: ‘your Father which is in heaven’
 NKJV: ‘your Father in heaven’

❖ Matthew 6.9, Luke 11.2
 AV: ‘Our Father which art in heaven’
 NKJV: ‘Our Father in heaven’

(The verb forms ‘is’ and ‘art’ are supplied in the AV though not present in the Greek. Italics were not used in the AV in these instances.) There are, however, other verses in which the NKJV does render the definite article as a pronoun (see Luke 10.15). One wonders why the NKJV would need to be changed in this manner, particularly when the AV follows the Greek text and is perfectly clear and understandable.

Other examples of changes from the Greek include:

❖ Matthew 27.6: ‘it is’ is changed to ‘they are’.

❖ Luke 4.29: ‘headlong’ is changed to ‘over the cliff’.

❖ 1 Corinthians 7.13: ‘leave’ is changed to ‘divorce’.

Another unnecessary change deals with Hebrews 2.16. The NKJV reads ‘For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham’. The AV renders this verse, ‘For verily he took not on *him the nature of angels*; but he took on *him the seed of Abraham*’. The AV reading is perfectly

understandable in this verse and is consistent with the context as given in the following verse, which speaks of Christ being made like his brethren. The change is unnecessary and greatly weakens the Christological emphasis of the passage. It must be asked why the NKJV translators decided that this change was necessary.

Additions Without Italics

As mentioned earlier, occasionally a word or words will need to be added to a translation of the Scriptures in order to provide the reader with the clarity necessary to make the passage understandable. This is common in all translations. The translators of the AV, however, also saw the need for showing the reader where such words were added. Thus, they sought to place added words in italic type. The NKJV translators followed this tradition in the main, but on numerous occasions failed to do so without explanation. In addition to those instances in which pronouns were changed to nouns mentioned above are the following examples:

- ❖ 'at the mouth' is added in Mark 9.18.
- ❖ 'aroused' is added in Romans 7.5.
- ❖ 'commandments' is added in Romans 13.9.
- ❖ 'with indignation' is added in 2 Corinthians 11.29.

New Testament Footnotes

Throughout the NKJV New Testament, the translators made use of footnotes to aid the reader. 'It was the editors' conviction that the use of foot-

notes would encourage further inquiry by the reader. They also recognised that it was easier for the average reader to delete something he or she felt was not properly a part of the text, than to insert a word or phrase which had been left out by the revisers.'¹⁶ One of the uses of these notes was to indicate textual variants which differ between various printed editions of the Greek New Testament. They indicated differences between the Nestle-Aland/United Bible Societies editions of the Greek New Testament and the first edition of *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text* edited by Zane C. Hodges and Arthur L. Farstad. Many people, being untrained in the intricacies of textual criticism, do not understand the significance of these variants. Some people have found these notes confusing. Others have found them offensive, believing they call the truth of the Scriptures into question and open debate.

It is unclear why the translators used *The Majority Text*¹⁷ in these footnotes. This text at that time had never been the basis of any translation. Perhaps they were attempting to add an air of legitimacy to *The Majority Text*, or perhaps they were trying to sell the idea that this text is superior to the Textus Receptus, or perhaps they were using the NKJV to advertise and sell copies of this Greek text, which is also published by Thomas Nelson. At any rate, these notes weaken the position of the Textus Receptus. Since these readings were, for the most part, not a part of the AV textual or translational tradition, they have no place in the margin of a revision of the AV. Perhaps it could be argued that the legitimate use of textual footnotes would have been to repeat the textual notes

from the margin of the AV (see Acts 13.18,34), or even to show the places where the various editions of the Textus Receptus have minor variations.

Most of the textual footnotes in the New Testament concern the Nestle-Aland/United Bible Societies text which is also known as the Critical Text. This text is founded upon principles of textual criticism which exalt a handful of manuscripts from Alexandria, Egypt, from the 4th century A.D. Many words, verses and portions of the New Testament are omitted or changed in this text. Numerous doctrinal problems are revealed by these changes, many of which affect the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁸ These footnotes call into question the correct readings which are found in the texts of both the AV and the NKJV.

The value of these New Testament footnotes is also questionable because their inclusion was very selective. It was not stated what principles were used to determine why and which variant readings were included. The authenticity and trustworthiness of many verses and words are called into question by the use of these footnotes, with only a handful having explanations as to why they were chosen (see John 7.53 note). Thus, many people are led to believe that there are far fewer problems involved with these explanatory readings than actually exist. Thus, they call into question the words of Scripture.

Theological Bias in the NKJV

Every translation has the theological bias of the translators, notwithstanding

the honesty and effort of those translators. Each person brings his background, education, presuppositions and experience to the work of translation. The NKJV has a different philosophical and theological basis from the AV. One critic of English translations states, 'Despite their lip service to the 1611 revisers, the NKJV preparers hold different presuppositions which come to light in their work'.¹⁹ The NKJV is the product primarily of a late twentieth-century American Fundamentalist-Baptist-Evangelical (in its broadest terms) perspective. This is not a criticism of the United States or the perspective of the translators; instead, it points out that the theological biases of the NKJV will be different from those of the AV. 'Some of the passages [in the AV] formerly accused of having been unduly influenced by Calvinism have been modified.'²⁰ These modifications display the differences between the theological stances of the NKJV translators and those of the AV translators.

The AV was a product of the seventeenth century. The foundation of the New Testament was laid in the century before by the phenomenal work of William Tyndale. The translation was a Church of England production. The Protestant men who translated the AV were mainly Reformed in theology.²¹ Each of the editions of the AV—the 1611, the 1629, the 1638, the 1762 and the 1769 (the Oxford Standard edition which is the one in circulation today)—was published with the Apocrypha although even then it was acknowledged that the Apocrypha was not a part of Scripture. Today the AV commonly is published without the Apocrypha. Thus this great version was a product of its

times and theology. This theological and cultural perspective has been the source of influence throughout the English-speaking world for hundreds of years.

An example of the theological bias of the NKJV translators is found in their use of capitalisation in 2 Thessalonians 2.7. Here the NKJV has 'He who now restrains'. This capitalisation of 'he' indicates that it is the Holy Spirit who restrains and who will be 'taken out of the way'. This 'lends encouragement to the dispensational interpretation of this passage and will for them confirm the dispensationalist's supposition that the Holy Spirit is being mentioned.'²²

Another example of theological bias in the NKJV is found in its subject/chapter headings. The AV translators desired to draw attention to Christ in the Old Testament as is seen in the subject/chapter headings used in the AV. The NKJV translators have removed the title 'Christ' from their version's Old Testament headings. This is especially evident in Isaiah and the Song of Solomon. The AV 1611 and most subsequent editions of the AV contain numerous references to Christ in their Old Testament headings.

These points are made in order to note that, for a translation to be a complete and accurate revision and new edition of the original work, the translators must have three principles which they follow. They must use the same Greek and Hebrew texts, follow the same translational principles and have the same philosophical, cultural and theological basis as the original translators. If these three principles are not followed, what is produced is a new and different

translation. This is not to say that the version will be better or worse than the original version, only that it will be different. Thus it is seen that the NKJV translators did not follow the same principles as those used by the translators of the AV.

Conclusion

Several points need to be made in order to put the NKJV in perspective. Firstly, the stated policy of the Trinitarian Bible Society is that the Society supports and circulates in the English language only the Authorised Version of the Bible. 'This Society shall circulate the HOLY SCRIPTURES, as comprised in the Canonical books of the Old and New Testaments, WITHOUT NOTE OR COMMENT, to the exclusion of the Apocrypha; the copies in the English language shall be those of the Authorised Version.'²³ The reasons for this position are stated in the Trinitarian Bible Society's policy document: 'While perfection is not claimed for the Authorised Version (known in some countries as the King James Version), or for any other version, it is known that the translators of the Authorised Version acknowledged the Divine inspiration, authority and inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures; the fruitful use of their translation for nearly 400 years is evidence of the Lord's blessing upon their work. It is the most accurate and trustworthy translation into English available and is the only English version published by the Society'.²⁴ Although the NKJV claims to be a faithful revision of the AV, it has been demonstrated that it cannot validly claim the same strengths and virtues as those found in the AV.

Secondly, the AV continues to be functional in all areas of Bible usage today. It is profitable for public reading, private devotions, family Bible readings, memorisation, studying, preaching, teaching and evangelism. This cannot be claimed for other translations. The NKJV does not and cannot have the same influence as held by the AV.

Thirdly, the AV, particularly in its fourth edition, has been distributed on a massive scale throughout the world for centuries. Not only has it been loved by Christians, it has been upheld by all as a masterpiece of English literature. It is acceptable in virtually all Christian churches, groups and organisations. It is the standard by which all other translations are judged. The NKJV is often too 'loose' a translation to be used in many churches, and too 'narrow' to find acceptance in others. Its place, therefore, as the standard, fifth edition of the AV cannot be accepted.

The NKJV publishers claim to have sought to revise the AV. It has been shown in this article that for a translation to be a complete and adequate revision of a previous translation three principles would need to be used. Firstly, it would need to be translated from the same Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek texts as the original translation. Secondly, it would need to use the same translational principles. Thirdly, the translators would have to be of the same presuppositional, theological and philosophical beliefs as the original translators. In considering the place of the NKJV as the fifth revision of the AV, it must be understood that it does not meet the required criteria. Although the same basic texts were used in the NKJV, they were not em-

ployed consistently. The translators used the same basic translational principles, but these men were of a different presuppositional and theological persuasion. Thus, it would not be correct to refer to the NKJV as the fifth revision of the AV. It is a translation which should be evaluated upon its own strengths and weaknesses but not as a new edition of the AV.

However, it must be acknowledged that the NKJV is of a very different quality and type from the other modern versions of the Bible. From a textual and translational standpoint it is in an entirely different category from, say, the New International Version or the Good News Bible.

The NKJV would not be a good choice for use as a primary translation to be used daily. Since it does not enjoy widespread acceptance it would not be particularly useful for memorisation. Its lack of accuracy regarding the personal pronouns and other linguistic features such as its many omissions of words substantially weakens and would undermine its public use. In private use, numerous users of the AV who have attempted to change to the NKJV found that the NKJV lacked the trustworthiness which they had come to expect from the AV.

The NKJV was not found to be a Bible in which they could put their trust.

The Trinitarian Bible Society believes that the NKJV has significant grammatical and translational problems and is not a complete and adequate improvement upon the excellence and authority of the AV. The NKJV removes too much

that was excellent in the older version and therefore does not achieve the same standard of accuracy as is to be found in the Authorised Version of the Bible. Therefore, the Trinitarian Bible Society is not in a position to publish, circulate or recommend this version as a part of our continuing ministry to publish 'the Word of God among all Nations'.

ENDNOTES

1. *The Online Bible*, 'Introduction to the NKJV'. version 61, September 1992.

2. 'This is from *The Word In Life New Testament* edition which has a 1993 copyright by Thomas Nelson. The copyright of the NKJV text in this study Bible edition is dated 1982 and has a different reading from the other 1982 edition.

3. For additional information on formal and dynamic equivalence please see the Society's article no 114, *The New International Version: What today's Christian needs to know about the NIV*.

4. *Why the NKJV?* (n.c.: Thomas Nelson Publishers,n.d.), p. 1.

5. *Ibid*.

6. *Holy Bible: NKJV* (Nashville, TN, USA: Thomas Nelson Inc, 1990), p vii.

7. *Ibid*, back cover.

8. *Ibid*, p. vii.

9. *Ibid*, back cover.

10. Jack P Lewis, *The English Bible from KJV to NIV*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Baker Book House, 1991), p. 347.

11. *Ibid*, back cover.

12. *KJV-NKJV Parallel Reference Bible*

(Nashville, TN, USA: Thomas Nelson, Inc, 1991), p. xxii.

13. *Holy Bible: NKJV*, p. v.

14. *Why the NKJV?*, p. 22.

15. *Holy Bible: NKJV*, p. iv.

16. 'Why the NKJV?', p. 10.

17. In this article, '*the Majority Text*' refers to the text produced by Hodges and Farstad, and is not to be confused with the Byzantine text which is the majority of manuscripts which are in existence and from which the Textus Receptus was derived. There is at least one other edition of a majority text which is in print today, *The New Testament in the Original Greek According to the Byzantine/Majority Textform* by Maurice A. Robinson and William G. Pierpont.

18. For additional information see the Trinitarian Bible Society's article No 100, *A Textual Key to the New Testament*, and *The Great Omission*, in *The Quarterly Record* No 524.

19. Lewis, p. 343.

20. *Ibid*, p. 339.

21. See the *Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion* of the Church of England for the doctrinal basis of most of the translators.

22. Lewis, p. 347.

23. *The Trinitarian Bible Society: The Constitution of the Society* (London, England: Trinitarian Bible Society, 1992), p. 5.

24. *The Trinitarian Bible Society: The Word of God among all nations: An Introduction to the Society's Principles* (London, England: Trinitarian Bible Society, 1992), p. 6.

This article is currently under review.