

THE MISTAKES OF THE BIBLE

Perhaps our announced subject, THE MISTAKES OF THE BIBLE, will seem to you to be a shocking, or perhaps even a sacrilegious one. Certainly it is a timely one, with more and more modern translations of the Bible coming into use every year, each one attempting to correct some of the errors of the past, or at least to render the Bible truths into language which can readily be understood by modern readers. Each of these new translations is met with approval and scholarly consideration by some, and with bitter accusation and disapproval by others. Most disapproval of new translations of the Bible is by people who are totally unfamiliar with the story of how our Bible was translated and brought to us in this modern day. If you will bear with us a few moments as we discuss THE MISTAKES OF THE BIBLE, we hope you will learn that we do not intend to be either presumptuous or impious in discussing this subject.

There are several very erroneous ideas about the Bible held even by otherwise well educated and well informed people. One idea is that the King James Bible is "the original Bible." It was not even the first English translation, having been preceded by partial translations by Caedmon, Bede, and Aelfric, and by complete translations from Wycliffe, Tyndale and Coverdale; by the Geneva Bible, the refugees in France. Another idea is that the King James Bible is sole, unique, divinely inspired, and therefore infallible. Its translators never claimed any such distinction for it. They were university professors and scholars--not prophets. So uncertain were they that they had the last word on many difficult translations that they inserted marginal notes, giving the reader his choice of two or more possible renderings.

When the King James translation of the Bible appeared, it aroused a storm of protest and criticism. "Have we been deceived before?" certain doubters asked "Was not the previous translation good? If it was good, why mend it? If it was not good, why was it obtruded upon us before?" In the translators' preface (which unfortunately is omitted from nearly every edition of the King James Bible today) the scholars responsible for this new translation expressed themselves thus, in answer to these critics: "So we, building upon their foundation that went before us, and being holpen by their labors, do endeavor to make that better which they left so good." Since the publication of this translation in 1611, there have been dozens, if not hundreds of new translations presented to the public. Which one is correct? Which one is infallible? We answer, "None of them, for the ultimate and final in Biblical translation will never be reached. Each generation will have need of certain revision and modernization, in keeping with changes in word meaning, and advances in scholarship."

When Joseph Smith undertook to correct some of the errors of the Bible, claiming inspiration for that task, people fumed and wrathfully protested against his presumption. They asserted again, as critics had before 1611, that the Bible was final, perfect, infallible, not to be touched by mortal minds or hands. Since 1833, when Joseph Smith finished this task, there have been many new translations; but all of them have left a great many of the same old errors. The Inspired Version, as we call this revision by Joseph Smith, does not claim to have corrected them all. But it has corrected a remarkable number of them, some of which we shall examine presently.

Our purpose tonight is not to tear down or discredit the Bible, but to encourage men to approach the study of it sanely and reasonably. Questioning the errors of the Bible is not the same as questioning the Bible, for no Bible writer or translator ever claimed infallibility for this work. The Bible is the word of God; but it is not the perfect word of God. To quote again from the Translators' Preface to the King James Translation, "As the King's speech, which he uttereth in Parliament, being translated into French, Dutch, Italian, and Latin, is still the King's speech, though it be not interpreted by every Translator with the like grace, nor peradventure so fitly for phrase, nor so expressly for sense everywhere." In spite of clumsiness and error in copying or in translation, the Bible is still the word of God. But we shall do well to avoid superstitions veneration of an imperfect book, and to guard against error and deception by recognizing the difficulties through which the Bible has passed to reach us, and the possibilities and even certainties of error in such a devious process.

Why can we be so sure that there are errors in the Bible? First, because we do not have all the books of the Bible. The King James version mentions in all 21 books which are not included in our canon of scripture. Second, because nowhere in the Bible are we told that God would ever cease inspiring men to write scripture. Third, because the versification, punctuation, and capitalization we have in our modern versions were not part of the original manuscripts, and meaning can often be changed by versification and punctuation. Fourth, because of the possibility that the original writer, though inspired, did not express himself clearly. Fifth, because of the possibility that his writings were not copied correctly-- and so far as anyone knows, there is not a single ORIGINAL manuscript of the Bible in existence; that is, one actually written by the author. Sixth, there is the possibility that if correctly expressed, and correctly copied, the sense was not translated correctly. And seventh, because of the probability that the translation which was correct in the day it was made will come to convey a wrong meaning in the future, because of shifts in word meaning and usage.

Let us briefly point out some example of what we mean by this last point. Today the verb LET means to permit, to allow. As used in I Thessalonians 2:7, it means exactly the opposite-- to prevent, to hinder. And that word PREVENT, used in I Thessalonians 4:15, does not mean to hinder or to forbid at all, but to precede or outrun. When Paul says in I Corinthians 10:24, "Let no man seek his own, but every man another's WEALTH," He doesn't mean that we are all to go around trying to grab each other's money.

Wealth does not mean money at all, but WEAL--TH, or well being. When Jesus said that he would send another COMFORTER, he did not mean something to console us, or to express pity for us, but one to give STRENGTH to us. The word ATONEMENT in the day when the King James Bible was translated had nothing of the meaning of expiation as it has come to have today, but simply meant setting at one with each other -- bringing together again -- the AT- ONE-MENT.

The person who has blindly accepted the Bible as infallible, and has never bothered to look inside it, has no idea of how many mistakes and contradictions and incongruities and anachronisms he can find therein. May we invite you to get your Bible and join us in looking for a few -- not in a spirit of carping impiety, but in a spirit of sound reason.

We would all agree that God is a perfect being. He can do no evil. If he never does evil, he never needs to repent. He can and does revoke punishment when MEN repent, but he does not repent of the punishment. Yet the King James version in dozens of places pictures God as repenting of the punishment he has brought on sinful men. Genesis 6:6 says that God repented of having made man as he saw the wickedness in the days of Noah. Exodus 32:14 says that God repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people. In I Samuel 15:11, God repents at having made Saul king. Numbers 23:19 and I Samuel 15:29 say that God is not a man, and does not ever need to repent.. Which is wrong? Or does the translation need to be clarified? The Inspired Version clarifies these and other similar passages by making MEN repent, instead of God, in order to revoke the punishment for sin.

A verse in Amos (3:6) makes God an all-out sinner. It reads: "Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?" The Inspired Version changes it to read, "Shall there be evil in a City, and the Lord hath not KNOWN it." There are some other very puzzling verses in I Samuel which make God a source of evil. Four times in the 16th chapter (verses 14,15,16,23) and once in the 18th chapter (verse 10) and once in the 19th chapter (verse 9) the King James says that an evil spirit from God troubled Saul. The Inspired Version changes it to read, "An evil spirit NOT of God."

David was a good man, but far from perfect. He was the murderer of Uriah, and an adulterer with Uriah's wife. Yet in I Kings 11:4, 11:6, and 11:33 it is stated that David's heart was perfect, that he went fully after the Lord, and that he kept all God's statutes. The Inspired version makes David like his son Solomon in NOT being perfect, or going fully after the Lord, or walking in all his statutes.

The King James Bible, and practically all the modern translations have preserved the queer anomaly of a son two years older than his father. II Chronicles 21:20 says that Jehoram began to reign at the age of 32, reigned eight years, and died. The second verse of the following chapter tells of the immediate accession of Ahaziah, Jehoram's son, who was FORTY-TWO years old when he began to reign, or two years older than his deceased father.

A minor slip, but a ludicrous one, is to be found in Matthew 8:12, which reads, "The children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness." The Inspired Version makes Ahaziah TWENTY and two years old as he began to reign, and renders the verse from Matthew, "But the children of the wicked one shall be cast out..." etc.

Both Matthew 27:44, and Mark 15:32 say that both of the thieves crucified with Jesus railed at him as they hung side by side on the three crosses. Luke 23:39-41 explains that one railed, while the other confessed his guilt, as said, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." The Inspired Version harmonizes these three passages.

Jesus is made to say in John 10:8, "All that came before me were thieves and robbers," which seems a little harsh on such good men as Noah, Enoch, Abraham, Moses, and the prophets. The Inspired Version adds, "All that came before me who testified not of me...." etc., which is quite another story.

In the original account of Saul's vision, in Acts 9:7, it is told that the men with him HEARD THE VOICE, but saw no man. Paul's account of the same incident, told to the people of Jerusalem from the palace stairs, Acts 22:9 says, "And they that were with me saw indeed the light, BUT HEARD NOT THE VOICE of him that spake to me." The Inspired version harmonizes these two contradictory passages in keeping with Paul's further account before Agrippa, as told in Acts 26:13.

Ephesians 4:26 says, "Be ye angry, and sin not." Then in verse 31 of the same chapter Paul says, "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger....be put away from you." Which does he mean? The Inspired Version reads, "Can ye be angry, and sin not? Let not the sun go down upon your wrath."

Out of many more mistakes which we could point out, we bring you one more and desist for fear of wearying you. Did you know that the King James tells of a man far more wonderful and unusual than Christ himself? It is Melchisedec, who according to Hebrews 7:3 was "Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life...." But in the Inspired Version, it is the PRIESTHOOD of Melchisedec which is without father or mother or descent, having neither beginning of days nor end of life.

What is our object in rehearsing all these mistakes of the Bible? (and there are literally hundreds more which could be listed had we the time.) What lesson is to be learned from them? The thing which this prevalence of mistakes seems to indicate to me is that we should read our Bibles with intelligence, rather than with blind credulity; that we should read them in faith, but not in superstition; that we should seek to find in them the word of God, but not expect to find it infallibly expressed in every word, syllable, and punctuation mark. Because it has come to us through devious human sources, the Bible is fallible. Because the capacities and understandings of men are constantly changing and enlarging,

because new words are constantly being coined and old ones discarded or changed in meaning, there will always be need for new translations to help us share the best scholarship and research of our generation.

And as a Latter Day Saint, after even a short survey of the mistakes of the Kings James Bible, I am grateful for the Inspired Version, completed by Joseph Smith in 1833. It is not perfect either; but it has corrected literally hundreds of mistakes, many of which have since been corrected in some way by modern scholars, but many of which remain in even the modern translations to plague and puzzle the Bible student who seeks the truth.