

## **The New King James Bible, New Testament:**

Nashville and New York: Nelson, 1979; 407 pp; \$7.95

For the past four years a new Bible translation has been in process of preparation, to be known as *The New King James Bible* (NKJV). The New Testament has now reached the market. The dust jacket informs us that an international team of 119 scholars, church leaders, and lay Bible readers has cooperated in this project, all of whom have signed a document of subscription to the plenary and verbal inspiration of the original autographs of the Bible.

NKJV is somewhat of an anomaly. On the one hand, the dust jacket admits that KJV's "Elizabethan English is unfamiliar to many Christians." Who could disagree? The stated aim of the project was "to produce a new edition as it would have been done today by the original (KJV) scholars." And who would want to argue with that aim?

But now the anomaly. Although KJV's Elizabethan English is unfamiliar to many, yet the basic KJV word order has been carefully preserved. "The sequence and identity of words, phrases, and clauses ... is so close to the traditional that there is remarkable ease in listening to the public reading of either edition while following the other" (Introduction, p. iv).

In the reviewer's opinion, the decision to revise KJV vocabulary but to retain KJV syntax was unfortunate. For not only word meanings have changed over the last three centuries, but speech patterns as well. To decide to revise the one and to leave the other untouched is a philosophy of translation which is going to have some unhappy consequences. These can be seen in NKJV.

Since NKJV is not a fresh translation but a moderately revised KJV, many of its translations on every page are unidiomatic. A few random samples: God's promise to Abraham (Hb 6:14) is translated: "Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you." The Hebrew construction is translated literalistically, instead of making Moses talk English ("I will surely bless you ...").

"Lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness" (Ja 1:21) is probably preferable to "superfluity of naughtiness," but again it does not speak our idiom. "See how great a forest a little fire kindles" (Ja 3:5) doesn't come out right, either. Who today says: "The birth of Jesus Christ was thus" (Mt 1:18)? "Begot" in the genealogy of Matthew 1 was changed to "begot." "Nicht halb und nicht ganz," our German ancestors would have said.

The translation of Matthew 2:18, "Rachel would not be comforted," involves an archaic use of "would," but the translators' commitment to stay within the KJV mold prevented them from translating "Rachel refused ...". What does "gird up the loins of your mind" (1 Pt 1:13) say to the average member of your congregation? (And what does it say to the person still outside of God's family?)

The NKJV follows KJV in retaining long sentences in many of Paul's epistles. It translates Ephesians 3:1-7 (which the NKJV breaks up into three sentences) as one long, 140-word sentence, replete with a dozen relative, conditional, and temporal clauses and two dozen prepositional phrases.

Failure to use the idioms of a language will often result in a translation that is quaint, but sometimes in a translation that is unclear. There is evidence of this in NKJV. Read this translation of 2 Corinthians 6:12f, and ask yourself what the average Bible reader will understand of what Paul is saying to the Corinthians: "You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted by your own affections. Now in return for the same (I speak as to children) you also be open." Similarly,

the translation of James 1:3f does not make the apostle's message clear. "The testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect." Compare that for clarity with NIV: "The testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature ... "

Following KJV's word choice and word order too closely led to some imprecision in the new translation. "Lust" (Ja 4:2) is misleading, as is "carnal" (Rm 8:7). Both of those words have sexual overtones today, which are absent from the original context. "Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her" (1 Co 7:3) is too general to describe the marital duty. NKJV copies KJV's mistaken translation of John 13:2 ("Supper being ended ... ") instead of translating "During the meal ... "

Significantly, NKJV uses the *textus receptus*, the traditional Greek text underlying the 1611 edition of the English Bible. This means, eg., that 1 John 5:7, with its spurious insertion referring to the Trinity, is included in NKJV, as it is in KJV.

*The New King James Bible* will, however, not do for the 20th Century Bible reader what its illustrious predecessor did for the 17th Century reader. Although it eliminates archaic pronouns and verb endings, it does not give him the Word of God in the language he speaks.

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