

**MARY BAKER EDDY’S SUPREME REGARD  
FOR THE KING JAMES VERSION OF THE BIBLE**

by Ralph Byron Copper

*Recorded history enables the past to inform the present of timeless truths to heed and of age-old errors to avoid. History, rightly told and learned, offers more than a set of disparate facts about the past. It provides needed interpretation of those facts. Historical knowledge, involving alternate perspectives, competing opinions, changing positions, must be weighed in the context of what, when, and why something is said or done by someone. A fact isolated from a right context risks losing its capacity to convey a correct meaning.*

*Members of Mary Baker Eddy’s Church seek to learn from her history, not to fossilize the status quo in some form of institutional traditionalism, but to stay faithful to their Leader’s founding vision, which was divinely inspired by an immutable Truth that is eternally “the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.”*

*The following information is an honest attempt to provide an accurate historical context of Mrs. Eddy’s supreme regard for the King James Version of the Bible (which she refers to as “the common version” or “our version” in her published writings) and of the KJV’s singular use in the Christian Science movement during her day and since. Although documents from The Mary Baker Eddy Library cited in this research cannot be quoted in full because of copyright protection, “fair use” permits selective quoting and paraphrasing. In each instance the archival accession number is given so that anyone who wishes to do so can obtain a copy of the entire document directly from the Library [617-450-7218].*

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A major event occurred in the 1880s when a revision of the 1611 King James Version of the Bible—known as the Revised Version (RV)—was first published. The stated aim of the RV’s scholars was to make adaptations “without changing the idiom and vocabulary” of the renowned KJV ([www.bible-researcher.com/ervhistory.html](http://www.bible-researcher.com/ervhistory.html)). In its first year (1890) the *Christian Science Quarterly* printed lesson texts of the International Bible Series that quoted verses from the Revised Version. But starting in 1891 the *Quarterly* announced: “The lesson text is that of the Common Version” (later amended to read: “. . . the Common or Authorized Version”).

In 1902 this wording was omitted, probably because beginning in 1898, in eleven exceptional instances, the Golden Text for a few of Mrs. Eddy’s Bible Lesson subjects (including one Golden Text for an International Bible Lesson) quoted the Revised Version. Only twice during this time did the Responsive Reading vary from the King James Version—and one of those times was when, in conjunction with fifteen verses from the KJV, one word from the Revised Version was substituted! While these few exceptions cannot be dismissed out of hand, they invite a closer look. They occurred on the following dates and always with the same Bible translation (the Revised Version):

1898: July 31

1899: January 1 [International Bible Lesson]; October 29

1900: February 25; July 1 [one RV *word* in the Responsive Reading]

1901: January 27; March 3; March 31; August 25; November 17

1903: April 19 [one RV *verse* in the Responsive Reading]

1904: January 24

1906: July 22

If the *Quarterly*'s infrequent use of a single non-KJV Bible during Mrs. Eddy's lifetime is meant to serve as a "pattern" or precedent for resuming a similar practice today (but this time with multiple translations)—and thereby overturn a century of complete reliance on the King James Version to convey the spiritual import of the Bible—surely it is fair to ask: Exactly what is the historical "pattern" Christian Scientists are to follow? The most notable feature of this "pattern" is that after 1901 official use of a non-KJV Bible diminished rapidly, came to a complete stop in 1906, and was never employed again during the remaining years of Mrs. Eddy's life.

In the Golden Text for the Bible Lesson of February 1, 1914, a solitary attempt was made to revive the practice of quoting the Revised Version. But as officials at the time acknowledged, this one instance engendered such "criticisms" from the field that no further attempt was ever made, until now, to resort to a practice that had become inoperative during Mrs. Eddy's final years (as cited in *The Christian Science Journal*, June 2005, Vol. 123, p. 17).

The essential role of the King James Version of the Bible in Christian Science church services springs from its unique relation to *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*. On at least three separate occasions when Mrs. Eddy was working on a major revision of the textbook, after careful (and no doubt prayerful) consideration, she gave instructions that the Bible references and quotations in *Science and Health* were to conform to the King James Version [The Mary Baker Eddy Collection: L02166 (1885); L07631 (September 4, 1890); and L12425 & L10602 (both dated November 20, 1901)]. Indeed, two whole chapters of the textbook—"Genesis" and "The Apocalypse"—are inextricably linked, verse by verse, with the specific translated words of the King James Version. As far back as 1885 Mrs. Eddy insisted that there be no change in what she called "the uniformity" between the King James Version and her notes on Genesis [L02166 (1885)].

That uniformity—that oneness of thought and expression—is evident in more ways than just the five hundred or more passages of the King James Version quoted in the textbook. Virtually every page of *Science and Health* is filled with *indirect* references, allusions, and metaphors drawn straight from the KJV. Each book throws essential light on the spiritual meaning of the other. For example, Mrs. Eddy trusted that readers of *Science and Health* would recognize, without any need for quotation marks, that her statement on page 453 ("Hidden sin is spiritual wickedness in high places") was manifestly connected, in both letter and spirit, to the King James Version's unique wording of Ephesians 6:12 ("For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against . . . spiritual wickedness in high places").

This is by no means an isolated instance. Two more examples, out of many possible ones, must suffice: S&H 40:31-2 (to ;) and Heb. 6:19, 20; S&H 109:22-24 and Num. 12:8 ("apparently"). No other Bible translation, modern or ancient, is capable of providing a seeker of Truth with the spiritual meaning of these Bible passages the way *Science and Health* does. And no other Bible translation of these passages is able to enrich Mrs. Eddy's meaning the way the King James Version does. The spiritual sense of the Lord's Prayer, as given in *Science and Health*, is an interpretation of the King James Version, and of no other. The interrelation of these two books, in wording and meaning, forms a bond that cannot be safely or successfully severed.

To replace "our common version" with an "updated" Bible translation in our church services—whether for partial or total use on Sunday or Wednesday—does more than change the uniformity of Mrs. Eddy's wording and meaning; it opens the door for scholastic theology to impose its

adulterating influence on the thought of the congregation. Like wolves in sheep's clothing, religious errors can and do lurk in new Bible translations as surely as in old ones. Mrs. Eddy warned her readers that "a mortal and material sense stole into the divine record" through the "manifest mistakes" in ancient versions and through the hundreds of thousands of Bible renderings (*Science and Health*, p. 139).

In 1890, under the editorship of Joshua Bailey, the *Journal* enthusiastically endorsed the Rotherham translation of the New Testament (and, to a less fulsome extent, the Revised Version). (See *Journal*, Vol. 8, pp. 178-184, 268-272, 319-320.) Some readers quickly embraced the Rotherham version (pp. 256-257, 391). But soon a cautionary note was voiced by "A. F." (Very possibly these initials stand for Alfred Farlow, who would later become Mrs. Eddy's trusted Committee on Publication.) While "A. F." could recommend the Rotherham book for individual study at home, he thought it best *not* to quote the translation in Christian Science publications. "Nor do I see any necessity for so doing," the initialed correspondent wrote, "since the spiritual signification of the common version is identical with that of the Rotherham." Concurring with what "A. F." said, a newly appointed Editor, Sarah J. Clark, explained: ". . . since the truths expressed in SCIENCE AND HEALTH are all derived from the common version, is it wise for us, who have demonstrated so little of the Principle, to choose a translation of our own? Does it not tend to bring confusion in our own ranks, and also among those who are reaching out for a clearer understanding of the Bible?" (*Journal*, January 1891, Vol. 8, p. 460.)

***"Is it wise for us . . . to choose a translation of our own? Does it not tend to bring confusion in our own ranks . . . ?"*** What prophetic questions! If every Reader in every branch church were allowed to select whatever translation he or she favored, at what point would the line of demarcation between right and wrong metaphysics be crossed? (As an extreme example, might the Catholic *New Jerusalem Bible* be read in a Christian Science church service as a Scriptural Selection, benediction, or Wednesday Bible citations?)

Our Leader foresaw such danger. With extraordinary emphasis, she told Sarah Clark, for the sake of present and future generations, to "suppress" the majority of Scriptural versions in the periodicals! She explained that only "one in a dozen" translations might not give a "false version"—"but this is all" [The Mary Baker Eddy Collection: F00387 (January 28, 1891)]. By the time she wrote to Miss Clark, our Leader had already expressed her decided preference for the King James Version over both the Wilson translation and the Rotherham translation [F00414 (September 19, 1887) and L02247 (July 14, 1890)].

Tellingly, our Leader made a distinction between personal and official use of translations. A few years later when the third edition of Rotherham's book was published with its "new dress and translation," Mrs. Eddy felt free to recommend it for individual use—as she did over the years with various literary works, including some Bible-related books: *The Journeys of Jesus*; *The Bible Interpreter*; *Walks and Words of Jesus*. (For these instances, see *Journal*, Vols. 15:696; 3:99 [cf. 15:586]; 14:379; 16:114.) But such endorsements—as surely as the selective use in her writings of a few other translations—do not signify any change of heart in her supreme regard for the King James Version of the Bible.

But what of the fact that no mention is made of the King James Version in our Leader's *Manual of The Mother Church*? The *Manual*'s silence on this subject (as surely as its silence regarding *The*

*Christian Science Monitor*) is best heard and understood in conjunction with *all* that our Leader has said and done on the subject. Christian Scientists of her day had no doubt as to what their Leader was telling them. They knew that she would have been quick to “reprove, rebuke, exhort” had they not been conducting their church services in accord with her ultimate sense of right. Her unobjecting silence spoke to them with eloquent authority. Their loving obedience to her judgment encompassed the totality of her directives, embracing the spirit as well as the letter of her leadership.

Less than three years after Mrs. Eddy’s passing, her student Annie Knott (who had been chosen by Mrs. Eddy to serve concurrently as an Editor and a member of the Bible Lesson Committee, and who would later become the first female Director of The Mother Church) wrote in the *Christian Science Sentinel*: “Many years ago Mrs. Eddy decided that the Authorized Version of the Bible, known as the King James Version, should be used at all our services, because it expressed the truth with sufficient clearness to enable every earnest student to demonstrate its power.” (*Sentinel*, April 12, 1913, Vol. 15, p. 631.)

Forty years later, another Editor, Richard J. Davis (also teacher of the 1949 Normal Class), reaffirmed this fact in the *Journal*: “It was from her study of the King James Version of the Bible that Mrs. Eddy discerned and had revealed to her the spiritual idea, or Christ. . . . In the early days of her discovery and writing, many people urged her to follow other versions, but she continuously and steadfastly indicated her preference for the King James Version. . . . Because this version of the Bible is the basis of Mrs. Eddy’s writings, it is and should be the accepted English translation for Christian Scientists.” (*Journal*, August 1953, Vol. 71, p. 436.)

Over the decades different Boards of Directors (including Directors who were taught by, or who worked with, Mrs. Eddy—such as Adam Dickey, James Neal, William Rathvon, Annie Knott, George Wendell Adams, William McKenzie) repeatedly issued statements upholding our Leader’s expressed choice. In 1923 the Directors explained: “While some versions of the Bible other than the King James are helpful to the student, none of them has the place the King James Bible occupies among Christian Scientists. . . . Our Leader studied it daily, and desired and required that it be used in all our public church services.” Less than five years later the Directors declared again: “The many translations of the Bible differ in their spiritual qualities as well as in their scholarship. Mrs. Eddy examined the new translations of her time, including some of the best of the modern versions, but she used them only to a very limited extent. Moreover, she not only adopted, but continued to approve, the King James Version for the Lesson-Sermons, on which, as she has said, ‘the prosperity of Christian Science largely depends’ (Manual, Art. III, Sect. 1).” (*Sentinel*, June 16, 1923, Vol. 25, p. 834; January 7, 1928, Vol. 30, p. 372.)

In advocating the primacy of the King James Version of the Bible, these official Mother Church statements (including those that span the years 1938-1984, which can be found on the next pages of this mailing) stand as timeless benchmarks of Truth. Today, as before, these statements have but one purpose: to enable Christian Scientists in every age to follow their Leader through an adherence to her instructions and a conviction that her judgment expressed a perfect Principle, “with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” These statements of historical truth affirm for all time that the dual pastor of Mary Baker Eddy’s Church is invested to speak with one inspired voice—concordant in both its wording and meaning.

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