

Is the King James Version (KJV) the truest translation of the Bible?

Some are arguing that the KJV is the most faithful rendering of the Bible, as opposed to the NIV or ESV (New International or English Standard Version) or even the NRSV (New Revised Standard Version). One reason the KJV is thought to be the best translation of the Bible is that it's the oldest (which it isn't, it was introduced in 1611), or if proponents of the KJV-only movement are aware of the older Bible translations (such as the Latin Vulgate (around 400), Wycliffe's Bible (1382) or Martin Luther's German translation (1522)), they think the KJV is the only English translation that is "uncorrupted" by the political and theological views of certain publishing houses, such as Harper Collins. While it is true that Harper Collins publishes some eye-opening titles such as *The Satanic Verses*, Harper Collins' acquisition of the NIV from Zondervan has nothing to do with how the NIV was brought about; namely, by a process of translation that lasted over 50 years beginning in 1956. The purpose of the NIV was to have a modern translation of the Bible using the earliest, highest quality manuscripts of the original Hebrew and Greek. While the KJV is older than the NIV, King James' translators were working from the *Textus Receptus*, a Greek New Testament that was compiled by Erasmus in the 16th century, that many modern scholars consider less reliable than the manuscripts used in making the NIV. Obviously, the *truest* Bible will be the reliable manuscripts of the Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic; yet, we don't have the original manuscripts – we only have copies of copies. However, as time goes on, archaeologists and other historians find more and better manuscript copies, so the NIV, though compiled in the 20th century, has better evidence for it than the KJV written in the 16th century.

Still, why does the NIV lack certain verses included in the KJV? Is this due, as some allege, to a left-wing Satanic conspiracy or, put more benignly, modernity's drifting away from tradition? This is not at all the case. The real question is: why does the KJV version contain verses or fragments which are *not* in the best Hebrew and Greek manuscripts? Really, it is not that the NIV editors deleted verses, it is that the editors of the KJV took liberties and *added* where they should not have. For instance, KJV-only proponents cite Matthew 18:11 (*For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost*) as an instance of the NIV deleting a key verse. Matthew 18:11 isn't in the NIV; however, this omission is not because the NIV is watered down, or, worse yet, engaging in a conspiracy against the deity of Christ, rather it is because the best manuscripts don't have anything at Matthew 18:11, the KJV authors added them to make a theological statement. The NIV still contains plenty of verses that extol the deity of Christ – it just omitted the verses and fragments the KJV editors embellished.

So, does this mean that the KJV, not the NIV, is to be shunned as a fabricated Bible? Not at all. Almost every edition of the Bible has some adding or redacting. For instance, Martin Luther, to punctuate his theological idea that we are saved by faith alone, added the word "alone" to Romans 3:28 (it was not in the Greek manuscripts). More radically, Luther even argued that four books of the Bible should be removed: Hebrews, James, Jude and Revelation, because these books deemphasize or lack salvation by faith alone through Jesus Christ. If he was alive, Luther might turn up his nose at both today's KJV and NIV as a "Satanic conspiracies against faith", just as the KJV proponents are doing today to the NIV.

The bottom line is that virtually no edition or version of the Bible is without human bias or interpretation. Choose a version of the Bible that you are comfortable with and read that. If you would like a more expansive picture, look at some of the other versions of the Bible (remember, there are many more than just the KJV and the NIV). You can use a concordance of the Bible, which will give the original Greek and Hebrew words, if you want to see how things have been translated. Read the Bible, whichever version you choose, and pray to God for help in discerning it.

