

# HOW WE GOT OUR BIBLE

## The Authorized and Revised Versions

Topic for week of Dec. 17.

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Read chapter 8 of Smyth's "How We Got Our Bible."  
Lesson for meeting: 1 Peter 1: 12-25.

### THE AUTHORIZED VERSION—1611.

We come now to the Bible with which we are all, perhaps, most familiar. And these studies must close with as careful a comparison as space will permit, between this version and the Revised Version of 1881-85.

The title page of the Authorized Version bears the words "newly translated out of the original tongues; and with former translations diligently compared and revised by his Majesty's special command." The "former translations" that were "diligently compared and revised" were the various English versions that went before it, and which, as we have seen, were little more than reproductions of Jerome's Vulgate. The King James' Version was really a revision based on the Bishops' Bible, which in its turn was based on the Great Bible, a slightly revised edition of Tyndale's work, which was, for the most, a translation of the Latin Vulgate. So we see how large a place both Tyndale's work and the Vulgate occupy in this version. And as to its being translated out of the original tongues, it could be shown, were we able to go minutely into its history, that in the New Testament part, at least, it is based on but a very few manuscripts, and those comparatively modern. The Old Testament was, of course, translated from the Masoretic Hebrew text, but before any very critical study had been made of this text. There was no standard or "received" Hebrew text of the Old Testament, so the revisers had to depend on the four current Hebrew Bibles.

And what called forth this version of the Bible? Let the Preface again answer: "The very historical truth is that upon the importunate petitions of the Puritans, at his Majesty's coming to this crown, the conference at Hampton Court having been appointed for hearing their complaints: when by force of reason they were put from all other grounds, they had recourse at the last to this shift, that they could not, with good conscience, subscribe to the Communion [Prayer] Book, since it maintained the Bible as it was there translated [in the Great Bible], which was, as they said, a most corrupted translation. And although this was judged to be but a very poor and empty shift, yet even hereupon did his Majesty begin to bethink himself of the good that might ensue by a new translation, and presently, after gave order for this translation, which is now presented unto thee." This charge of the Puritans that the Prayer-Book contained false translations of the Scriptures was the first direct step towards a revision. James heartily favored the idea from the first, for he was something of a Biblical student himself, having paraphrased the book of Revelation and translated some of the

Psalms. He knew, moreover, that a Bible translation, made under his auspices, would add to his prestige.

But there was another element in the cause, not mentioned in the Preface. The king had taken exception to some of those marginal notes of the Geneva version (notes which he supposed came in question his divine right to the crown, the point on which the Stuarts were so strong), and his version, with its notes, was anathema, for the notes were "very partial, untrue, seditious, and savoring too much of dangerous and traitorous conceits."

We may smile at the whim of the king, but there can be no doubt, either about the sagacity shown by him in the plans he made for carrying out the work, or the excellence of the work itself. The arrangements were careful and elaborate, and, considering the time in which it was done, and the facilities at the disposal of the men who undertook it, the work is, in many respects, a remarkable one. Never before had such labor and care been expended on an English Bible. Men of the best scholarship (fifty-four of them) were selected for the task. They were organized in groups, in such a way that the work of every man in the entire company came under review by all the other men. An admirable set of rules was drawn up to guide them in their work. Ample time was taken for careful study of accessible aids. The revisers studied carefully the Hebrew and Greek, as well as the best commentaries of European scholars. Bibles in other languages (French, German, Italian, Spanish) were examined for any help they might give in arriving at the exact sense of the Scriptures. And when these translators found what appeared to them to be the meaning of each passage, great

care was taken to express it in good, forcible, idiomatic English. And in this latter respect they succeeded well. "Its simple, majestic, Anglo-Saxon tongue, its clear, sparkling style, its directness and force of utterance," its "grace and dignity," its "flowing words," have made our authorized version "the model in language, style, and dignity of some of the choicest writers of the last two centuries." There is also about it a "reverential and spiritual tone and attitude," which have made it "the jewel of the Christian church." And the popular attachment to this book is not, therefore, to be wondered at, or harshly criticised. These are some of the things, one is glad to say, in just praise of this great work.

But yet, there is another side which demands notice, and, in speaking of it, there is no disparagement of the book which has given so many people all the knowledge they have of the Word of God. Let us give our Authorized Version all the credit that is its due. Let us be deeply grateful for this treasure that has been preserved for us through the centuries. Yet a word of criticism must be added in the interest of truth, and as a help to dispel that prejudiced, half-fanciful attachment to a form of wording of the Scriptures, which exists with some people, and which closes their eyes to any other form of expression, which may set forth clearer and larger views of the revealed Word, and a fullness and richness of meaning, which the old forms failed to express.

### THE REVISED VERSION (1881-85).

While fully appreciating the admirable qualities of the Authorized Version, we will scarcely require now to ask why we should need another revision? The answer to this must be quite clear, for we have seen: (1) That we have access now to a great many manuscripts which the scholars of King James' time had never heard of, and that the readings of the ancient versions and fathers are now much better known than they were then; (2) that the science of textual criticism, which teaches the relative value and the right methods of dealing with these documents, has been entirely developed since 1611; (3) that our scholars are better acquainted with the original languages of the Bible, and are able to distinguish delicate shades of meaning which were quite lost on their predecessors; and (4) owing to the natural growth of the English language itself, many words of the King James' Version have either become obsolete or entirely changed in meaning.

The last two of these points may now be elaborated, so as to show some of the improvements in the Revised Version.

In 1611, while the Greek language had been fairly well mastered, the Hebrew was but very imperfectly understood. Hence the Hebrew words in the Authorized Version were often very inaccurately rendered into English. But the Old Testament of the Revised Version, while it is based on practically the same text as that used in 1611, is a much better translation of the Hebrew, since it makes sense of many passages that were either obscure or meaningless as they stood in the King James' Version. This improvement is especially noticeable in the prophetic and poetical books, where we meet with many obscurities. And then, as regards the New Testament, the Revised Version shows many improvements upon its predecessor in bringing out the delicate shades of meaning in many passages. A correct rendering depends on a discriminating knowledge of the grammar and syntax of New Testament Greek. Many illustrations of this may be found in St. Paul's Epistles.

And then, as regards the growth of the English language, the two hundred and seventy years which lie between the two versions have produced a number of changes. The Authorized Version contains many words whose meanings have either been greatly modified or entirely changed. The revisers took good care (for the most part) "to weed out these obsolete words and archaisms, and expressions that do not now mean what they did originally, nor what the original text now means. . . . Again, many of the apparently plain and even immodest expressions of the Authorized Version, though entirely common and proper three centuries ago, are quite barred from good literature to-day."

The improvements in this respect have been well summarized by a recent writer: "The revisers were required to translate the original into modern, modest, and yet forcible language that would properly represent the original texts, and, at the same time, give no needless offence to any thoughtful reader. This modernization of the language of Scripture, and, as far as possible, the translation of the same original by the same English word, were two of the hard tasks of the revisers. Such changes in words were made as 'Holy Spirit' for 'Holy Ghost,' 'Shew' for 'Reveal,' 'hell' for 'Gehenna,' for 'outlandish,' 'smooth' for 'peeled,' 'inwards' for 'purtenance,' 'condemnation' for 'damnation,' 'falsehood' for 'damnation,' 'falsehood' for 'leading.' The second task had been disregarded by the 1611 re-