



Conducted by
Frank Worgan

"So many different versions of the Bible are being introduced into our services these days. Should it be accepted for the Scriptures on Sunday mornings to be read from three different versions, according to the reader's choice?"

A sister, who has been a reader and student of God's Word for a great many years, has posed this question. As you see, she draws attention to a situation which may also have given concern to other brethren.

AN 'INSPIRED' ENGLISH TRANSLATION?

Before offering a reply, I must first comment on an expression in her letter which, I feel, needs a little clarification. Our sister refers to *"the only Bible I know as God's inspired word"*.

Now, I wonder if the 'Bible' to which she refers is the one we know as 'King James Version', or 'The Authorised Version'? From other information found in her letter I strongly suspect that it is. And, if I may be permitted a personal note, as one of the 'older generation' I can report that, over sixty years ago, when the Lord added me to His Church, the use of no other version would have been contemplated in most of our worship-services. Even the use of the 'English Revised Version' would have been something of a rarity! I can, therefore, well understand this sister's feelings.

If, then, I have correctly assessed the situation, this may be an opportunity to say something about that expression in her letter to which I have just referred, namely, *"the only Bible I know as God's inspired Word"*. I do hope that it does not imply that we should regard the 'A.V.' or 'K.J.V.' as a *divinely inspired translation* of the ancient scriptures, because that it most certainly is not.

In fact, both titles, 'The King James Version', and 'The Authorised Version' are extremely vague and tend to leave a quite misleading impression. After all, King James himself played no part whatever in the translation of the scriptures which bears his name. Acting on a proposal put forward by a certain John Reynolds, during the Hampton Court Conference held in 1604, King James merely 'authorised' - (hence the name) - the preparation of a translation of the Bible that was intended to replace the several versions already in use. These were translations such as 'The Geneva Bible'; 'The Bishops' Bible', and those produced by individual translators such as Miles Coverdale and William Tyndale. It would appear that, over three hundred and fifty years ago, there was no English translation which pleased everyone!

By the time the 'Authorised Version' was ready in 1611 at least fifty-four scholars had worked to produce the translation which continues to occupy an honoured place in the affections of English-speaking believers, which no subsequent version has achieved and which it will always retain.

But it must be understood that, as beautiful as the language of the 'Authorised Version' undoubtedly is - (and I speak as one whose 'memory work' was all done with that version very many years ago) - its translators were *not* divinely inspired and therefore we need to guard against thinking of the 'A.V.' as the 'divinely inspired translation'. The simple fact is that no 'divinely inspired' English version of the last of

the scriptures exists, because the inspiration of the Holy Spirit ceased with the death of the last of the apostles of Christ. Thus, whilst we believe that the original documents were written by men who were inspired by the Holy Spirit, the same cannot be said for either the groups of scholars, or the individuals, who offer to the world their own new translations.

WHICH VERSION IN OUR WORSHIP?

As to the matter of the version to be used for the public reading of the scriptures during our Lord's Day morning worship, we cannot lay down a hard and fast rule, because this is something for which we have no 'thus saith the Lord'. In other words, we may not make a law where the Lord has not made a law. Each congregation must decide for itself, on the basis of expediency, - (that is, helpfulness) - the practice it will adopt. Leaders have the responsibility of exercising sanctified common sense and wisdom in seeking to ensure that the Lord's Day morning reading of the Word amounts to something more than a time-filling tradition in the service and is, instead, a spiritual exercise in worship which blesses the congregation.

IS IT EXPEDIENT?

I therefore ask this question; It is wisdom for the public-reader to use a (modern) version of the scriptures with which the majority of the worshippers are totally unfamiliar; to which very few - if any - have access, and which uses language and expressions that often resemble nothing in the Bibles with which the brethren are accustomed to follow the reading?

I suggest that the inevitable consequence of such a practice is not only that most in the assembly derive little benefit from the reading, but that they are left unsettled and unsatisfied.

There are, we know, some sound arguments for the use of translations of the Word of God in more modern language. We all realise that there are obsolete words and expressions in the 'Authorised Version' which occasionally obscure the meaning of the scriptures and which require explanation, and that later versions make use of more up-to-date textual knowledge. But if, after the matter has been given proper consideration, the leaders of a congregation decide to allow the Lord's Day morning reading to be taken from a modern version of the scriptures which is less familiar than the 'A.V.', would it not be wise to have copies of the alternative version available, so that brethren may follow the reading intelligently when the reader announces, in the now-so-familiar words, "*I shall be reading from the . . . Version*"?

AIM FOR CONSISTENCY AND CONTINUITY IN THE READING

This, I suggest, might be one way of solving the problem, although I must confess that my personal preference would be to aim for consistency and continuity in the reading, achieved when everyone regularly uses the same version. In the course of personal Bible study an individual is at liberty to consult as many versions and translations as may be available to him. But public worship is another matter, and the needs and wishes of the congregation should be uppermost in the hearts and minds of those responsible for the good order of the service.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SCRIPTURE READING

It is regrettable that, important as the public reading of the Word of God is, it would seem that very few congregations give serious consideration to the question as to which version or versions they will use in their worship. The frequent outcome is that the use of a variety of different versions, often of widely differing linguistic and textual quality, results in the absence, not only of continuity, but also of consistency in the Lord's Day morning readings. And this, to the detriment of the worshippers.

THE SCRIPTURE STANDARD

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Whilst we rightly insist on offering to God such acts of worship as the scriptures (Acts 2:42 and Acts 20:7, etc.) reveal to have been the practice of the New Testament Church, let us take care that we pay as much attention to the content of those acts, as we do their form.

*(All questions please to: Frank Worgan, 5 Gryfebank Way, Houston
Renfrewshire, Scotland PA6 7NZ.)*