



Should a Translator Use Greek?

By Dr. Steve Combs

Not

so long ago, I talked with two Pastors about the source texts for Bible translating. The first asked me, “Why don’t you just use the King James Bible to translate?” The second told me not to say much in his

church about the Greek New Testament, because his people did not like it. I understand where these questions come from. For many years, I have run in circles that included quite a number of Pastors who saw things this way. The viewpoint is that the King James Bible is the word of God in English. It has no errors. So, it should be sufficient for translation work. Also, for decades, scholars have used “the Greek” to attempt to discredit the KJB. Therefore, some look on Greek as an enemy. Some of these Pastors believe the KJB is inspired and some believe it has superseded the Greek and Hebrew Bible. My view is this: I believe the KJV is an accurate, complete translation and is the word of God without error in the English language and I do not use the Greek text (the TR) to criticize the KJV. I use it to explain and defend the KJB, in addition to using it for translation work. God promised to preserve His words in Greek and Hebrew, and He has done so.

When Global Bible Translators/ Bearing Precious Seed Global started, we faced the question of whether to recommend the use of the Greek Textus Receptus for translation work. After due consideration we established the following statement.

The basis of translation work performed or supported through BPS Global will be the King James Bible, the Greek Textus Receptus and Hebrew Massoretic Text as found in the edition "The Hebrew and Greek Texts underlying the Authorized Version" by Trinitarian Bible Society.

There are a number of reasons why we believe a translator must either 1) translate direct from the Greek and Hebrew received texts (while using the KJB as a translation guide), or 2) make strong reference to them in the process of translating using Greek and Hebrew tools that are available. Please, allow me to explain below.

It is the method used by the King James translators. On the title page of any King James Bible it says. “Newly translated out of the original tongues and with the former translations diligently compared and revised ...” Notice that the first thing mentioned is that the King James Version is a translation from the original languages (“tongues”), that is, from Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. The translators based their work on the original inspired Words of God. God promised to preserve those words and the KJB translators professed to have them. There had been several previous English translations. They used them as additional sources, but changed them based on their own translation of the original languages (“diligently compared and revised”). They could have based their translation on Tyndale, but they did not. Tyndale’s translation had a great influence on the KJB translators, but they translated direct from Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. Then they compared the former translations. This was their method.

The Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek words are the original inspired words of God. I have often repeated this. Therefore, these inspired Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts were *the word of God*. Every word was from God. They were His words. The Greek and Hebrew Bible is the Word of God as much as is the King James Bible is the word of God. *So, the words of the Greek New Testament and the Hebrew/Aramaic Old Testament were given by God, they are inspired words, and, therefore, they are perfect words. They ARE the Word of God.*

God is perfect. There is no fault or blemish in Him. As such, all He does is perfect and without error. “*As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the LORD is tried: he is a buckler to all them that trust in him*” (2 Sam. 22:31). So, God’s way, all He does, is perfect. Part of what God has done is to give us His words. It follows, then, that when He gave His words, those words in Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic were perfect, without error, and infallible. They still are, as we shall see.

God has preserved the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek words He inspired. The King James translators apparently believed they had those inspired words and, truly, they did. The inspired words were not lost at any time in the past. The King James translators had these Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek words and the words have not gotten lost in the last 410 years since. Today, I can pick up the New Testament in Greek and read the inspired Greek words of God. I have them on my bookshelf, in my phone, on my computer, and on my Android pad. I also have the Hebrew and Aramaic. God has kept His promise to preserve His words. We still have the original inspired words. We ought to feel perfectly free to use them if we wish.

There is great value in a multitude of counselors. “Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety (Prov. 11:14). “Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counsellors they are established” (Prov. 15:22). The King James translators knew the value of many councilors in their translation work. They had all the former English translations available. From those, they saw all the word choices of those translators. They also had foreign translations: the Martin Luther German, the Reina-Valera Spanish, the French, the Latin Vulgate, the Erasmus Latin translation, and the Beza Latin translation. They also had the Complutensian Polyglot. A translator needs all the help he can get. The Greek New Testament and the Hebrew Old Testament are key councilors for the translation of the Bible into any language.

The Greek and Hebrew texts are perfect and pure. “The words of the LORD are pure words (Ps. 12:6). “The law of the LORD is perfect” (Ps. 19:7). The words He was talking about were Hebrew words at the time He said it. His statements clearly apply to the Greek words of the New Testament, as well. We apply the same truths to His English words. My father was a master carpenter. He taught me a few tricks of the trade. If I wanted to cut several lengths of board the same length, I would measure the first one exactly and cut it. Then, I would use the first board, measured exactly, to mark the following boards, so that I can cut them to the exact same length as the original. The Greek and Hebrew texts are the original inspired Words of God for the New and Old Testaments. They are the standard by which all translations are measured. If a translation does not meet that standard, it should be rejected or revised. This was a generally accepted principle when the KJB was translated. There is no basis on which to believe that has changed. Men like William Carey and Adoniram Judson and their associates knew that. Since the King James translators knew it, they acted accordingly by translating that standard accurately. In these last days, we have lost sight of it.

A Word About Lexicons

A Greek or Hebrew dictionary is called a *lexicon*. These days, there are some who feel that a lexicon is a dangerous thing to use. For example, the Greek dictionary by Henry Thayer is considered biased, because Thayer was a Unitarian. He denied the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is possible that Thayer was biased in a few of his entries. I use Thayer ... carefully. I also sometimes use lexicons from the early nineteenth century. I do this in the hope that early lexicons will be less affected by liberal textual criticism and bad doctrine. However, this is also why you should use more than one lexicon. In the multitude of counselors, there is safety. You will find that most lexicons, even Thayer and the early ones are in agreement on most words.

If you download the “e-sword” program (which I highly recommend) or “the Word” program, you will find that they have a module called “King James Concordance” (KJC). The KJC is linked to the numbering system in Strong’s

Concordance. The KJC lists all the Greek words used in the King James Bible and the various ways the KJB translated those words. The King James translators did not tie themselves to uniformly translate each Greek word by the same English word every time. They made extensive use of synonyms. However, at the same time, they translated consistently with the definitions of the Greek words. The result of this is that the KJB is a very good Greek lexicon all by itself. I have found, in the many times I have looked up words, that the various ways a Greek or Hebrew word is translated gives me a quite helpful understanding of that word. The KJC is not 100% accurate, but it still provides a great deal of useful information. In my opinion, lexicons ought to still be used, because they can provide additional information. For example, there are some Greek words used only one time in the NT. A lexicon can help in those and many other cases.