

Authorized: The Use and Misuse of the King James Bible, by Mark Ward. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017. 168 pp. \$12.99.

Do we need another book on the King James Bible debate? If you had asked me that question before reading this book, I would have responded, No. There are some substantial contributors to this discussion already (D. A. Carson, James White, Kevin Bauder, and Roy Beacham). Nevertheless, this book fills a gap I was unaware existed, and for that I am thankful.

Mark Ward, a PhD graduate of Bob Jones University, knows the debate from the inside. He grew up using the KJV, and he takes pains to identify himself with that segment of the evangelical world that still uses the KJV (he suggests 55% of regular Bible readers read the KJV). He does this not only by detailing his KJV-credentialed past (e.g., he “memorized countless verses in AWANA”; 28), but also by indicating his current lifestyle. For example, his statements that he goes to church three times a week (3) and that he wears a tie to church (73) are not exercises in prideful self-reflection; rather, they are attempts to identify with those who are more likely to be using the KJV. This is because Ward’s book is primarily designed for the person in the pew. He wants to reach people just like him, and this can be seen in the tone and content of the book.

The cordiality of the book is recognizable from the very start. Instead of beginning with the problems modern readers have in reading the KJV, Ward begins with a consideration of what is lost when the KJV is no longer used. Three of these concern cultural elements. For example, he highlights that the loss of the traditional language of the KJV will result in a lack of stock, highly meaningful religious language, whose meaningfulness is directly related to the linguistic distance from modern vernacular (e.g., “Our Father which art in heaven”; 8). The other two fatalities in the movement away from the KJV concern the implicit trust of English readers, both within and outside the church. Stated differently, the recognition that phrases can be translated differently may result in the view that modern readers do not have access to the Word of God. This first chapter seeks to build bridges, and while I am not convinced each loss is as significant as Ward believes (particularly culturally), certainly Ward puts voice to the concerns some of his readers will have.

If the introduction and the first chapter establish Ward’s identity as someone who cares about the KJV, the second chapter is the detail of his journey to writing this book. He argues that he once believed that everyone was capable of understanding the KJV, but two major life experiences led him to reject this belief. First, he bought a Comparative Study Bible, which he said was the primary “thing that God used to break my pride in my ability to read KJV English” (28). By comparing translations, he came to realize that he actually did not know what the KJV translators were seeking to communicate. Such an experience, he

argues, was not and is not unique to him (see his potent, though anecdotal, illustration from summer camp). The second major life experience relates to his ministry among lower-income and lower-education groups. They simply could not understand the KJV. Ward gives voice to their concern: "I can't understand this. KJV language...is too difficult to follow. It's foreign and ancient" (18).

The third chapter focuses on what I find to be the most compelling part of the book, and it is the part that sets it apart from the books mentioned earlier. Many have noted that the language of the KJV is no longer the language of English speaking people. Most KJV proponents recognize this, so they suggest the use of a dictionary. Ward, however, highlights that a dictionary—even the *Oxford English Dictionary*—is not enough. This is because there are not only words in the KJV that have gone out of use (e.g., collop, bewray, and broid), but there are words which have changed meaning. These words Ward calls "false friends," because they appear to be familiar, yet they are not. Such familiarity means that a reader will not know he must look at a dictionary, and consequently, he will misunderstand the text without any awareness he has done so. These words deceive modern readers into believing the Bible says something other than it says. The phrase, "how long halt ye between two opinions" (1 Kgs 18:21) is an example, for most believe *halt* means to stop, but the KJV translators meant limp (cf. NIV: "How long will you go limping with two different opinions?").

This third chapter is so compelling because Ward highlights a fact that should be persuasive to KJV readers. Ward rightly recognizes that KJV readers value their Bibles; indeed, many say that is the reason they have stayed with the KJV. Ward undercuts such a connection by showing that if they truly value the Bible, then they should want a version that does not deceive them. It should be noted that Ward stresses that the KJV is not to blame for these false friends, for it is the inevitable result of language shift. One day every one of today's modern versions will have false friends.

The fourth chapter focuses on an argument frequently made concerning the KJV; namely, that it was written at a lower reading level than modern translations. The conclusion drawn is that the KJV is easier to read than modern versions. Clearly, if this is true, then Ward's argument is undercut. The chapter details why these computerized results are insufficient for making the case for the KJV (e.g., they mainly measure syllables and they don't take lexical and syntactical factors into account). Alternatively, Ward suggests that "if reading difficulty is the number one reason people set aside the KJV in favor of modern translations, then perhaps they know better than their computers" (59). Further, Ward highlights the ridiculousness of a statement like, "No, you can read the KJV just fine. My computer says so" (59).

The theological basis for a move towards an English Bible in the language of the people is given in the fifth chapter. While the Great Commission implies the need for vernacular translation, the central passage Ward develops is 1 Corinthians 14. After abstracting the principle

of the chapter, “Use intelligible speech rather than unintelligible, because only the former does any good for people” (64), Ward applies it to the current discussion through a syllogism: (a) “we should read the Scripture in our own language; (b) the KJV is not our language; (c) therefore we should update the KJV to be in our language, or we should read vernacular translations” (79). Other arguments in this section are helpful as well, e.g., that the New Testament was written in the language of the people.

The most substantial chapter of the book, chapter six, responds to ten arguments against reading modern, vernacular translations. It is not possible to cover all ten arguments here; it is enough to say that Ward handles each admirably, showing that none undermine the case he has made so far in the book. In this chapter, Ward finally raises the issue of manuscripts. He suggests that he is seeking to maintain a “studied neutrality on the question of text criticism in this book” (115). The reason for his position has to do with his audience, who he assumes will be non-specialists in Greek manuscripts. Non-specialists must trust those who lead them, and thus if a pastor emphasizes the superiority of the *Textus Receptus*, Ward encourages them to say, “Can you help me find a translation in my own language of *whatever Greek and Hebrew text you prefer?*” (116). In this way, Ward is seeking to maintain the primary point of his book (modern people need the Bible in their vernacular) despite the complex nature of the text-critical debate.

The conclusion to the sixth chapter provides Ward’s strongest exhortation towards reading a Bible in modern language. Not only are people who only read the KJV missing the meaning of Scripture, they do not know they are. Further, each Bible reader has a responsibility to others to pass God’s Word along. Using a biblical metaphor, Ward says, “You may wish to put a stumbling block in your own path...[but] don’t put stumbling blocks in someone else’s way (Rom 14:13)” (120). I initially struggled with Ward’s use of Romans 14 here, but the more I have thought about it, the more I understand why he used it. By requiring someone to read a Bible distantly removed from his language, we are in danger of preventing him from believing the Gospel (Rom 10:17).

The final chapter seeks to answer the question, “Which Bible translation is best?” Ward’s answer comes as a critique to the question. Why believe there is a “best”? Each version has its own strengths and potential weaknesses. Thus, modern readers ought to “take up the embarrassment of riches we now have” and “make the best of our multi-translation situation, because it is truly a great problem to have” (137).

A few concluding observations should be made. First, the summary given here does not capture the creative and humorous style of Ward’s writing. He has a gift of making complex issues simple, and making readers smile all the way through. Such a disarming approach is needed in such a potentially hostile conversation. Second, my fear is that this book will not reach its intended readership. If only academics or those interested in the debate read the book, I think Mark will find it less than successful. Nevertheless, he has done an admirable job in seeking to

market through the website, KJVquiz.com. Those who share Ward's conviction that the Bible needs to be read in modern English can help by encouraging others to take up and read.

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