

Introduction

We will discuss matter of versions in several parts:

1. First the whole question of the text - almost all the modern versions use a different text of the NT than does the KJV.
2. Second, what makes a good translation - in this connection we will look at the KJV over against the modern versions and compare them.

Basic Information concerning the Greek New Testament:

1. We should understand that the whole question of the text concerns especially the NT.
 - a. The Jews were so careful in their copying of the OT that there is little question about the text.
 - b. There are, however, about 5000 manuscripts of the NT and thousands of differences between these manuscripts, thus raising the question as to which is correct.
2. As to the manuscripts, the following:
 - a. No original manuscripts of the NT survive: what we have are copies, usually copies of copies.
 - a. These manuscripts are composed of anything from a few fragments, to a page or a few pages, to a copy of the whole NT.
 - b. Some of the oldest date back to the second century, the early being written on papyrus (identified as P13, etc.) and the later on vellum (sheepskin).
 - c. If they are written all in capitals they are called uncials and identified with letters, if in small letters they are called cursives and identified with numbers.
 - d. Page 4 of the handouts shows a portion of a papyrus manuscript including a variant reading.
3. As to the different readings the following:
 - a. Most of these readings are very insignificant such as the change from "we" to "you" or vice versa (this is a difference of only one vowel in Greek).
 - b. Some readings, however, are very significant, either because they involve matters of doctrine or because they concern large sections of the Word (pages 5-8 of the handouts give two examples of important textual differences).
 - c. There are a number of reasons for these differences:
 - Errors in copying sometimes the result or carelessness, sometimes ignorance.
 - Copies made from other bad copies.
 - Deliberate changes made because the scribe could not understand what he copied.
 - Deliberate changes by heretics.
 - d. In determining which reading is correct, not only the Greek manuscripts are used but also ancient translations (Coptic, Syriac, Gothic, Latin), quotations from the church fathers, and lectionaries (copies of Scripture arranged for reading in the churches).

The Different Texts Used in Translating

1. The manuscripts of the NT fall into two main groups: the first group being a very large group of manuscripts that are very similar to one another.
 - a. Because it contains the largest number of manuscripts it is referred to as the Majority Text, but is also known as the Received Text because it is the text of the NT generally received by the church until very recent times.

- b. This group of manuscripts is the basis for the KJV and the NKJV as well as a few others.
 - c. This group is, however, of later date than the other group and generally held in suspicion by modern scholars as a result.
2. The second of these two main groups is a much smaller group that not only differs from the majority of manuscripts but also differs considerably amongst itself.
- a. This group contains the papyri as well as most of the uncial manuscripts and will be identified as the modern text (two of the most famous are \aleph and B).
 - b. This is the text that forms the basis of the majority of modern translations from the Revised Version to the New International and English Standard Versions.
 - c. This text is preferred by scholars because some of its manuscripts are the oldest NT manuscripts in existence dating back to the second and third centuries.
 - d. In using this group scholars operate on the general principle that older is better and choose between the different readings on a very subjective bias.
 - they follow rules such as that the shorter or more difficult reading is more probably correct (a good example is John 3:13 where a few manuscripts change "is" to "was" and several more omit the whole last phrase - the latter option usually the one followed in the modern versions because it is shorter).
 - this usually comes down to a matter of personal choice.

Our Analysis of the Two Texts

1. Concerning the manuscripts comprising the modern text:
 - a. As to their age, older is not necessarily better.
 - b. In this case, older is probably not better since manuscripts had to be copied by hand and were very valuable - it is unlikely, therefore, that a good manuscript would have survived centuries of use, i.e., it is not unlikely that the survival of some very old manuscripts is due to the fact that they were not very good and not used.
 - c. Not only that but the majority of surviving manuscripts come from Egypt because of its very dry climate and Egypt was never known for its faithfulness to Scripture and its teachings (Arianism, for example, arose in Egypt).
 - d. Some of these manuscripts show clear evidence of being poor quality: B omits 237 words, 452 clauses and 748 sentences in the NT that are found in the majority of manuscripts and \aleph had a number of correctors already in ancient times, yet modern scholars consider these two manuscripts the very best of all, i.e., the carelessness of the copyists shows a lack of regard for Scripture as the Word of God.
2. Concerning the manuscripts of the Majority Text:
 - a. The fact that they are not as old can easily be explained by the fact that they were the manuscripts that were in use and wore out and had to be recopied.
 - b. Their basic agreement as to the text of the NT is not a point against them but proof that there was already in the early church a tradition of carefulness in copying God's Word and a clear understanding that the Scripture are the Word of God.
3. Concerning the text in general:
 - a. It is impossible to believe that the true text of the Scriptures was lost for hundreds of years up until modern times when these older manuscripts were "discovered." If modern scholars are correct, the church has not had the as God gave them for centuries. This is impossible to believe in light of the importance of the Scriptures

for the church.

- b. The most powerful argument, therefore, for the majority or received text is that God in His providence must have preserved His Word for His church and that the text of the NT which has survived in the majority of manuscripts and which was the only text available at the time of the Reformation must be the true text of Scripture.

Concerning Two Examples of Textual Variation

1. I Timothy 3:16 (cf. pages 5, 6):

- a. Modern scholars reject the reading of the KJV on the basis of a few older manuscripts and their "scholarship" has produced the readings found in the modern versions, all of which change the text so that it no longer proves that Jesus is God.
- b. The variations in a few manuscripts are easily accounted for, especially in light of the struggle that went on in the early church concerning the divinity of Jesus.
- c. There can be no doubt, therefore, that the reading of the majority of manuscripts is the correct reading and that I Timothy 3:16 does prove the divinity of Christ.

2. Mark 16:9-20 (cf. pp. 7, 8):

- a. This section is omitted in three early manuscripts, both of which are favorites of modern scholars. It is found in every other NT manuscript that includes Mark's Gospel.
- b. These omissions are rather easily explained.
- c. Not only that, but many of the arguments for its omission are very subjective.
- d. That almost all the manuscripts contain it is clear proof that it belongs as part of the Word of God.