

# Changes to the KJV since 1611: An Illustration

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Recently a reader of the BSF web site sent this letter to me (and presumably to several of his friends as well):

Daniel Wallace is a noted Greek scholar and professor of New Testament at Dallas Theological Seminary. In his paper entitled "Why So Many Versions?" Wallace makes the following statement - "...we must remember that the King James Bible of today is not the King James of 1611. It has undergone three revisions, incorporating more than 100,000 changes!"

There you have it. A scholar of repute has spoken. Other critics have taken up the same whimpering cry.

But is it true?

No, it is not true. Furthermore, it is willfully deceptive, as I shall now demonstrate.

First, the facts... The King James Bible contains 791,328 words. Since the first King James Bible rolled off the press in 1611 to the King James Bible you buy off the shelf today, there have been - are you ready - there have been a grand total of 421 word changes! That's it!

From 1611 until now, the King James Bible has undergone a *grand total of 421 word changes*, amounting to only five one-hundredths of a percent of the text! But that's not all. It gets better.

Out of the 421 total changes amounting to only five one-hundredths of a percent, the following should be noted -

TOWARDS has been changed to TOWARD 14 times.

BURNT has been changed to BURNED 31 times.

AMONGST has been changed to AMONG 36 times.

LIFT has been changed to LIFTED 51 times.

YOU has been changed to YE 82 times.

Out of a grand total of 421 changes from 1611 to the present, almost 300 of the 421 are of this exact nature! Now let's do the math...

By omitting changes of this nature, we now have about 150 (to be conservative) remaining changes. This amounts to one one-hundredth of a percent of the text.

The remaining 150 changes from 1611 to today are composed of printing errors, spelling standardization, and a few minor phrase changes. For example...

In Genesis 22:7 AND WOOD was changed to AND THE WOOD.

In Leviticus 11:3 CHEWETH CUD was changed to CHEWETH THE CUD.

In Romans 6:12 REIGN THEREFORE was changed to THEREFORE REIGN.

Friends, this is the ENTIRE extent of the nature of the changes from the King James Bible of 1611 to the King James Bible of the present day.

Indeed, the words of the Holy Ghost are very appropriate here - "The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times." Psalm 12:6

The question now arises, how then can Daniel Wallace and other enemies of God's Word make a statement like the one he made above? If there have been only 421 changes from 1611 until today, how can Wallace et al say that there have been 100,000 changes?

It's very simple, and yet very insidious, my friends. Here is how Wallace et al attempt to justify their deception...

You see, the King James Bible you buy off the shelf today is printed in the ROMAN TYPE FACE!  
The King James Bible of 1611 was printed in the GOTHIC TYPE FACE!

VIOLA!!! [sic]

There you have it, friends. Changes in TYPE FACE are the "changes" that Wallace et al are referring to. And yet, Wallace clearly intended his reader to believe that the King James Bible of 1611 is significantly different than the King James of today.

As usual, however, the facts don't bear the critics out. The facts condemn the critics and expose their smoke-and-mirror shell game. Deceit is the only thing modern critics can traffic in, for the facts are so overwhelmingly against them that they have no other means by which to denigrate the Word of God.

Conclusion: the FACT is that the King James Bible you buy off the shelf today is VIRTUALLY IDENTICAL to the King James Bible of 1611.

God has truly preserved his word in the Bible of the King James.

Scott [last name withheld from me]

This writer made a very interesting argument. He had details and, though I would say that the tone of his letter was certainly less than charitable, I thought that the content needed some investigation. To begin with, I did not *personally* count 100,000 changes between the 1611 KJV and the modern reprints. But I did take the word from some reputable scholars on that score. Second, this gentleman's own statistics show that the count of 100,000 could not possibly be attributable to font changes alone: if so, then there should be nearly 791,328 changes (according to this gentleman's word-count of the total words in the KJV [a number which, by the way, *may* include part of the Apocrypha<sup>1</sup>]). Third, since this gentleman has included rather minor changes (which I also assumed to be part of the 100,000 changes)—specifically, "printing errors, spelling standardization, and a few minor phrase changes" (though he considers these to be among the biggest of the 421 changes), we can proceed on his definition of an alteration. In particular, *spelling standardization* is the largest single group of changes made between 1611 and the modern era.

How can we proceed with this comparison? I have on the wall in my study two leaves from the 1611 edition—the first edition—of the King James Bible. The following text, 2 Samuel 12:20-31, is part of a leaf from the 1611 printing of the KJV. There are a total of 362 words in these verses. This ought to be a good test-case for whether there are 421 total changes or 100,000 changes to the KJV in its nearly 400-year history. Only 421 changes to the KJV equals an average of *one change per 1880 words*. Therefore, we should expect to find *none* in these twelve verses, statistically speaking (or, more precisely, about one-sixth of one change). If, on the other hand, there are 100,000 changes to the KJV, that averages out to one out of nearly eight words (1:7.91328 is the precise ratio), or 45.745 words.<sup>2</sup> Thus, if my statistics are correct, we should expect to find one or more instances per verse, on average, and a grand total in the double digits. If Scott's statistics are correct, to find more than one or two would be disturbing, and to find even a dozen or more would show that his data are fundamentally incorrect. To be sure, this is hardly a scientific sampling;

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<sup>1</sup> According to the software program, *Accordance*, the KJV has 585,761 words in the 39 books of the Old Testament that are accepted by Protestants as canonical; the KJV has 180,376 words in the New Testament. This comes out to a total of 766,137 words, or 25,191 words shorter than the number provided by Scott. (There are 155,683 words in the Apocrypha, the group of books that was almost always printed as part of the KJV Bible until late last century.) The difference is probably due to a wrong count somewhere, the possible incorporating of English titles as part of the text of scripture, or the inclusion of some material from the Apocrypha.

<sup>2</sup> Inexplicably, Scott speaks of valid changes as those that include words only. He does not mention punctuation changes as valid. Punctuation changes can, of course, be rather significant. In the least, they ought to be counted. One group of changes that I did *not* count involved the older English transposition of 'u' for 'v' and vice versa (e.g., in 2 Sam 12:21 the 1611 KJV reads *seruants vnto* while the modern font has *servants unto*). This group of changes would qualify for Scott's 'font theory' that he assumes I embrace. Hence, it was deliberately left out of the count.

but at the same time since the two statistical models are so widely divergent from one another, we might expect to see either pattern emerge.

The text that follows is a list of the verses in their 'modern' KJV version; beneath each verse is a catalog of the changes in that verse from the 1611 version to the latest KJV. At the end of this treatment will be a summary.

## •A Comparison of the 1611 KJV with the 'Modern' KJV in 2 Samuel 12:20-31

(2 Samuel 12:20) Then David arose from the earth, and washed, and anointed himself, and changed his apparel, and came into the house of the LORD, and worshipped: then he came to his own house; and when he required, they set bread before him, and he did eat.

"apparell"@"apparel"

"owne"@"own"

"house;"@"house,"

(2 Samuel 12:21) Then said his servants unto him, What thing is this that thou hast done? thou didst fast and weep for the child, while it was alive; but when the child was dead, thou didst rise and eat bread.

"diddest"@"didst"

"weepe"@"weep"

"alive;"@"alive;"

(2 Samuel 12:22) And he said, While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept: for I said, Who can tell whether GOD will be gracious to me, that the child may live?

"tell, whether"@"tell whether"

(2 Samuel 12:23) But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.

"Wherefore"@"wherefore"

"Can"@"can"

"backe"@"back"

"goe"@"go"

"returne"@"return"

(2 Samuel 12:24) And David comforted Bath-sheba his wife, and went in unto her, and lay with her: and she bare a son, and he called his name Solomon: and the LORD loved him.

"sonne"@"son"

(2 Samuel 12:25) And he sent by the hand of Nathan the prophet; and he called his name Jedidiah, because of the LORD.

"Prophet"@"prophet"

"Prophet;"@"prophet;"

"hee"@"he"

(2 Samuel 12:26) And Joab fought against Rabbah of the children of Ammon, and took the royal city.

"Rabbah;"@"Rabbah"

"tooke"@"took"

"royall"@"royal"

"citie"@"city"

(2 Samuel 12:27) And Joab sent messengers to David, and said, I have fought against Rabbah, and have taken the city of waters.

"citie"@"city"

(2 Samuel 12:28) Now therefore gather the rest of the people together, and encamp against the city, and take it: lest I take the city, and it be called after my name.

“therefore,”@“therefore”

“citie”@“city”

“citie”@“city”

(2 Samuel 12:29) And David gathered all the people together, and went to Rabbah, and fought against it, and took it.

“tooke”@“took”

(2 Samuel 12:30) And he took their king's crown from off his head, the weight whereof was a talent of gold with the precious stones: and it was set on David's head. And he brought forth the spoil of the city in great abundance.

“tooke”@“took”

“kings”@“king's”

“crowne”@“crown”

“head (the weight... stones)”@“head, the weight...stones:”

“gold,”@“gold”

“Davids”@“David's”

“head, and”@ “head. And”

“spoile”@“spoil”

“citie”@“city”

(2 Samuel 12:31) And he brought forth the people that were therein, and put them under saws, and under harrows of iron, and under axes of iron, and made them pass through the brickkiln: and thus did he unto all the cities of the children of Ammon. So David and all the people returned unto Jerusalem.

“sawes”@“saws”

“harrowes”@“harrows”

“yron”@“iron”

“yron”@“iron”

“passe”@“pass”

“brick=kilne”@“brickkiln”

“And thus”@“and thus”

Summary: of the 362 words in these twelve verses, the KJV has undergone **41** (forty-one) specific alterations. This averages out to one change per 8.83 words. This is just slightly less than one change per 7.91 words that I suggested was the average,<sup>3</sup> but *two hundred and thirty-seven times* the number Scott suggested. To be sure, these changes are not particularly significant—but this has been admitted by both sides. What is not admitted by KJV-only folks is that the changes in most modern translations from the KJV (though on a verbal level are certainly greater than these) do not affect the essentials of the faith. My argument about the KJV is not that it has undergone radical changes in its long history (although, to be sure, there are *some* rather significant changes in the KJV in various places, as has been frequently pointed out in the books by Bruce, Lewis, Kubo, etc. [see below for a few examples]), but that it has undergone changes—100,000 of them. I submit that *many* of the changes that modern translations make are a mere updating of the language of the KJV, yet even these get condemned on the basis of altering the Word of God. On that same basis, for the KJV to change at all would mean that it, too, stands condemned. I am *not*, of course, arguing that this is the case; I am arguing that there is a great deal of selective evidence used by KJV-only advocates used to support their position. As the adage goes, “Those who live in glass houses shouldn’t throw stones.”

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<sup>3</sup> Actually, the ratios are even tighter: the leaf from the 1611 KJV that I looked at begins with “changed” in 12:20. The first twelve words of the text are on the preceding leaf. 41 changes out of 354 words equals a ratio of 1:8.63.

## •Appendix

Three other points can be made here. First, Scott's statistics are probably an amalgam of global changes and individual changes. That is, most of the 421 changes that he sees in the KJV are groups of changes. The change of 'towards' to 'toward' that occurs fourteen times is thus counted as *one change*. (In the five words he lists, the total number of changes comes out to 214 changes.) The problem with this is that we are led to believe that those 421 changes represent a specific percentage of the whole—or, in Scott's words, "five one-hundredths of one percent." That would only be true if there were 791,328 *different* words (as opposed to total words) in the KJV.

Second, when Scott details a handful of changes that are indeed trivial, he says, "Friends, this is the ENTIRE extent of the nature of the changes from the King James Bible of 1611 to the King James Bible of the present day." As we mentioned above, that is not correct. Some of the changes in the KJV through the centuries have been fairly significant. The most famous blunder in the history of the King James Bible to come off the printing press was the 1631 edition. Robert Barker, the printer to the throne, inadvertently left out "not" in the seventh commandment! It was dubbed "the Wicked Bible" and Barker was fined 300 pounds for the error.<sup>4</sup>

Now, someone might object: "But that's a printer's error; that shouldn't count." There are two problems with this. First, errors creep into copies of a book, especially one that is nearly a million words long! Whether those errors crept into handwritten copies or printed copies, the principle is still the same. This, indeed, is one reason why the vast bulk of biblical scholars reject the KJV as the best translation available today and why they reject its underlying Greek text as being identical with the original: errors in the transmissional process have always taken place, and a great number of them are self-evident in the KJV tradition. Second, the problem is that the Bible that people have in their hands always have a small percentage of printing errors. Some of them are rather minor, some are major. But KJV-only advocates typically link inspiration to preservation to accessibility in such a way that logically makes printer's errors a part of the package.

Many, for example, wish to claim that inspiration did not cease with the death of the last apostle but continued on with the wording of the Greek text that Erasmus, the Roman Catholic scholar, published. To be sure, they usually state it in such a way that Erasmus did not invent certain wording, but rather rediscovered the original. But this argument won't fly when we consider the last six verses of Revelation: since the Greek manuscript he was using lacked the last leaf, Erasmus had to back-translate from Latin into Greek, thereby *creating* seventeen textual variants in Rev 22:16-21 that have no Greek support!<sup>5</sup> That these variants were carried over in the KJV translation is problematic for KJV-only folks if they wish to deny that Erasmus was inspired. In particular, **Rev 22:19** in the KJV reads: "And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the **book** of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book." Instead of "the book of life" the Greek text says "the tree of life." No Greek MSS have "book of life" in this verse. Dr. Bruce Metzger points out that "The corruption of 'tree' into 'book' had occurred earlier in the transmission of the Latin text when a scribe accidentally miscopied the correct word *ligno* ('tree') as *libro* ('book')."<sup>6</sup> Thus, a handwritten error that originated in Latin found its way into the first published Greek New Testament and consequently into the KJV. Yet this error is defended by KJV-only advocates as though it came from the pen of the apostle John himself. Why is it that *this* error is defended as inspired while other printing errors are not?

Another well-known error is found in Jesus' discourse against the religious leaders of his day, recorded in Matthew 23. In v. 24 the KJV reads, "Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel." The Greek verb *diulivzw* means "to strain out." I believe that the KJV of 1611 actually had this wording, but inexplicably changed it

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. F. F. Bruce, *History of the Bible in English*, third edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978) 108.

<sup>5</sup> Even at 1 John 5:7-8 (the testimony about the Trinity in the KJV, known as the *Comma Johanneum*), in which Erasmus added the trinitarian formula in his third edition (1522) only because a Greek MS was made to order in 1520, virtually forcing Erasmus' hand, the Dutch scholar did not copy out the Greek MS exactly. The reason is that the MS was a poor translation of the Latin, omitting the article before 'Father,' 'Word,' and 'Holy Spirit' (since there is no article in Latin, the scribe simply transferred the Latin over into the Greek, without making the necessary adjustment). But Erasmus added the article for each member of the Trinity, creating yet three more variants without any Greek MS support.

<sup>6</sup> Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd edition (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994) 690.

later to “strain at.” Some scholars argue that “strain at” is simply an archaic rendering of “strain out.” But, even if this is the case, few in the KJV camp today would interpret this phrase as “strain out.”<sup>7</sup> Here is a place in which the KJV needs to be updated so that people can understand what is meant. After all, if inspiration implies preservation, and preservation implies accessibility, accessibility of *meaning* is just as important as accessibility of words. (It is in fact for the reason of accessibility that the Bible must be translated afresh every fifty years or so.)

Third, to put all this in perspective: There are approximately 25,000 changes made in the KJV of the *New Testament* from the original version of 1611. But in the underlying Greek text, the numbers are significantly smaller: there are approximately 5000 changes between the *Textus Receptus* (the Greek text used by the KJV translators) and the modern critical texts (used as the base for modern translations). That’s one-fifth the amount of changes that have occurred within the KJV NT itself. To be sure, many of these are fairly significant. But none of them affects any major doctrine and most of them are—like the internal changes within the KJV tradition—spelling changes. In the least, this puts the matter in a bit of a different light. Again, the reason I don’t think the KJV is the best translation today is basically threefold: (1) its underlying text is farther from the original than is the text used in modern translations; (2) its translation is archaic, with now over 300 words that no longer mean what they did in 1611; (3) four hundred years of increased knowledge of the biblical world and languages have rendered many of the KJV renderings obsolete. All this is not to say that the KJV is a bad translation; I still think it stands as the greatest literary monument in the English language. And one can come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ reading the KJV just as one can get saved reading the NIV. But if one is seeking clarity and accuracy, a modern translation is much preferred.

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<sup>7</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*.s.v. “strain [verb],” 21: “It has been asserted that ‘straine at’ in the Bible of 1611 is a misprint for ‘straine out’, the rendering of earlier versions ... But quotes. 1583 and 1594 show that the translators of 1611 simply adopted a rendering that had already obtained currency.” Although this may be true, the OED adds quickly that “The phrase, however, was early misapprehended (perh. already by Shaks. in quot. 1609), the verb being supposed to mean ‘to make violent effort.’”