The Problem Stated

- We have a very large number of Bible versions in English today, with new ones coming out nearly every year.
- How do we tell which ones are reliable for the use of Christians and seekers in trying to understand God’s message to mankind?
Evaluating a Translation

- Are the translators in agreement with the teachings of the Bible?
- Is the translation faithful to the best available text of the Bible in the original languages?
- Is the translation clear for its intended audience?
- Does the translation conform to good contemporary English usage?
- Does the translation have stylistic beauty?
The Authorized (King James) Version (1611)

- A committee translation, with 3 committees appointed by King James I and meeting at Westminster, Oxford and Cambridge
- Involved the best scholars in England at a time when biblical scholarship was at a peak
- All the committee members had a very high opinion of the Bible.
- Thus the KJV seems to have satisfied all 5 items when it was translated.
- But with the passage of almost 400 years, it no longer satisfies all these criteria.
The KJV & the Criteria

- The KJV no longer conforms to the best available text in the original languages.
- The KJV is no longer in contemporary English.
- The original audience of the KJV is long dead.
- None of this is the fault of the original translators.
Changes in English since 1611

- Verb changes
- Pronoun changes
- Vocabulary changes
Verb Changes

- Disappearance of *est* forms for 2nd person singular
  - thou knowest $\rightarrow$ you know

- Transformation of *eth* forms for 3rd person singular
  - he knoweth $\rightarrow$ he knows
Pronoun Changes

- Disappearance of distinct 2\textsuperscript{nd} person singular forms ‘thou, thee, thy’
  - These were not terms of respect when the KJV was made.

- Disappearance of 2\textsuperscript{nd} plural \textit{ye}
  - Replaced by 2\textsuperscript{nd} singular/plural \textit{you, your}

- Replacement of relative pronoun \textit{which} by \textit{who} when a person is referred to
Verb & Pronoun Changes

- None of these changes are likely to produce serious misunderstanding of the text.
- They do give the average person the impression either:
  - That the Bible was written in some sort of pious or stilted language
  - That its writers were illiterate
  - Neither of which is true!
- Far more important are vocabulary changes, as they hinder understanding.
Some words in the KJV are archaic or no longer used in modern English:

- Assuage (Job 16:5)
- Ensue (1 Pet 3:11)
- Holpen (Ps 83:8)
- Rereward (Num 10:25)
- Straightway (Mt 4:22)
- Twain (often)
- Wot (Gen 21:26)
Vocabulary Changes

- Other words have changed meaning:
  - Charity (1 Cor 13)
  - Fetch a compass (2 Sam 5:23)
  - Girdle (often)
  - Leasing (Ps 4:2)
  - Meat (often)
  - Prevent (Ps 119:147-48)
  - Rent (often)
  - Tire (Isa 3:18)
Vocabulary Changes

- But the Bible was originally written in common, everyday language.
- It was intended to be understood by average people.
- We need to make a revision or new translation as often as the language changes significantly:
  - To preserve God’s intention
  - To make His message plain
Textual Discoveries &
Developments since 1611

- The Textual Basis of the KJV
- Manuscript Discoveries since 1611
- Developments in Textual Study
The Textual Basis of the KJV

- NT ultimately based on the edition of the Greek NT by Erasmus in 1516.
- Erasmus’ edition was based on only a few manuscripts; the oldest (10th cen) was least used.
- Erasmus had only one (incomplete) manuscript of Revelation; he supplied the last 6 verses from Latin.
- Acts 9:6 and 1 John 5:7-8 were also supplied from the Latin.
Manuscript Discoveries

- In 1611, very few manuscripts known from before AD 1000.
- Since then, several hundred earlier mss on parchment have been found, with two nearly complete from before AD 400.
- Since 1900, many fragmentary NT mss have been found written on more fragile papyrus and copied before AD 400.
- These include substantial parts of several mss from before AD 200 and a small fragment of John from about AD 130.
Developments in Text Study

- The known manuscripts are now seen to fall into several families, of which the most important are:
  - Alexandrian
  - Western
  - Byzantine
Text Families

- Alexandrian
  - Early, known by AD 150
  - Short, but seems reliable
  - Text used in most recent English versions

- Western
  - Early, known by AD 150
  - Longer, erratic, tendency toward additions

- Byzantine
  - Later, apparently not before AD 300
  - Intermediate length
  - Often seems to combine Alex and West readings
  - Text used in KJV
Some Differences

- Matthew 6:13b – doxology of Lord’s Prayer
  - Probably not before 3rd or 4th century
- Mark 16:9-20 – ending of Mark
  - Most controversial
  - Known before AD 150
- John 7:53-8:11 – woman caught in adultery
  - Not in earlier mss
  - Probably a real incident preserved outside NT
- 1 John 5:7-8 – heavenly witnesses
  - Not in Greek before late medieval period
  - Not in Latin before 5th century
Theological Trends since 1611

♦ Renaissance (1300-1600)
  • Revival of interest in Classical period
  • Weakened dominance of the Church
  • Reintroduced many pagan ideas

♦ Reformation (1500-1700)
  • Return to Scripture as sole authority in faith
  • Priesthood of believers → more variety interpreting
  • Occultism of Renaissance suppressed
Theological Trends since 1611

- Liberalism (1700-present)
  - Antisupernatural reaction
  - Science replaces authority of Church & Bible
  - Rejection of miracles
  - Enters German churches in 1800s, US in 1900s

- Present situation (c2000)
  - Liberalism still strong in academia
  - Some resurgence of orthodoxy
  - Growing diversity in ethnic groups, with influence of other religions and new age movement
Evaluating Translations

- Are the translators in agreement with the teachings of the Bible?
- Is the translation faithful to the best available text of the Bible in the original languages?
- Is the translation clear for its intended audience?
- Does the translation conform to good contemporary English usage?
- Does the translation have stylistic beauty?
Evaluating Translations

- Are the translators in agreement with the teachings of the Bible?
  - Pass: NASU, NIV, NLT, ESV
  - Fail: NRSV, REB, NWT

- Is the translation faithful to the best available text of the Bible in the original languages?
  - Pass: Most modern versions
  - Fail: KJV, NKJV, etc.
Evaluating Translations

- Is the translation clear for its intended audience?
  - Not all have same intended audience.
  - NLT easiest reading
  - NASU, KJV hardest

- Does the translation conform to good contemporary English usage?
  - Pass: most modern versions
  - Fail: older versions, NASB, Amplified
Evaluating Translations

- Does the translation have stylistic beauty?
  - Think NIV, ESV best
  - NASU, NKJV somewhat weak
Literal vs Paraphrase
Some Tests for Theological Soundness

- Do the translators think the apostles properly understood the Old Testament?
  - Peter – cp Acts 2:27 with Ps 16:10
  - Matthew – cp Mt 1:23 with Isa 7:14
  - Hebrews – cp Heb 1:8 with Ps 45:6

- Do the translators think the apostles believed Jesus was God?
  - John – check Jn 1:1 and 8:58
  - Paul – check Rom 9:5
  - Hebrews – check Heb 1:8
Some Tests for Theological Soundness

- Do the translators downplay Messianic prophecy?
  - Ps 2:12 (kiss the Son?)
  - Ps 22:16 (pierced hands?)
  - Isa 9:6 (names suggest deity?)
  - Isa 53:10, 12 (dies and lives again?)
  - Dan 9:24-25 (Messiah or just anointed one?)
  - Mic 5:2 (eternally pre-existing?)
  - Zech 12:10 (look on me?)
Some Tests for Theological Soundness

- Do the translators downplay resurrection in the Old Testament?
  - 1 Sam 2:6
  - Job 19:25-27
  - Ps 17:15
  - Ps 49:14-15
The End

Lord, help us to judge rightly!