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The Hebrew Roots Movement: Deeper Insights or Elitist Distraction?

by G. Richard Fisher

Wheels within wheels — is how the prophet Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1:16; 10:10) described God and His revelation: subjects that are deep, vast, and complex. It could be used to describe the array of divisions within Christianity. There are so many wheels within wheels that it is impossible for one person to grasp them all.

One subculture could be labeled “Lovers of Israel”: those sympathetic to the Jewish people and the nation of Israel. This group is also interested in researching everything pertaining to Israel’s past. Within this subculture is the Hebrew Roots Movement.

This subculture is varied and contradictory, but can be broken down into divisions realizing that the divisions are not so tight and clear cut. They are:

1. *The Messianic Movement.* This group is made of large numbers of Jewish converts to Christ. Within it are organizations that are involved in

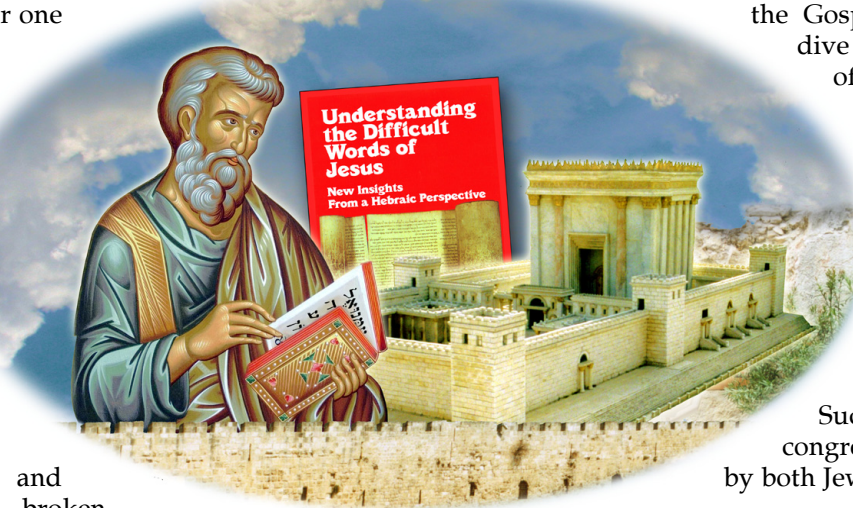
Jewish evangelism and apologetics. These organizations reach out to Jewish people and run the gamut from mainstream Evangelicals, such as Friends of Israel and Jews for Jesus, to

those who adhere to Jewish practices in varying degrees. There are probably hundreds of these kinds of groups that range from highly organized associations to individuals with a congregation. Some are strictly into unpacking Bible content and sharing

the Gospel, while others may dive deeply into the study of Second Temple (or first-century) Judaism. Some veer off into serious Talmudic study and take on all the trappings of Orthodox Judaism, including calling their pastors “Rabbi” and their churches “synagogues.”

Such extreme Messianic congregations are spurned by both Jews and Christians.

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Editorials

THE MYSTIQUE OF ASSUMPTION

Cults and aberrational groups have slick but subtle ways of fooling us. They play a game that could be called “assuming the content.” Another way of saying it would be that cults often use our lingo and let us fill in the blanks — *and we do*. So just how does assuming the content work? This is easily illustrated by the way in which, some years ago, Phillip Morris advertised a brand of their cigarettes. The company sold Lucky Strike cigarettes under the slogan, “Luckies taste better.” The assumption was that people would think, “better than any other cigarette.” No one asked, “Better than what?” The campaign was all about *assuming* the content.

There is much the same thing going on in religion. So many cults and New Age groups use the term “God” and let us fill in the rest. Though the one speaking may mean a force in the universe, the one listening may assume they are speaking of the God of the Bible. Content is assumed and the listener’s conclusion is that both believe in the same God.

When a Mormon missionary uses the words “God the Father,” he is talking about someone who was once a man, prevailed over his own sin, worked his way to godhood, and is now just one among many other gods. One might not know that they believe we all can become gods. These teachings and ideas are easily found in their

own history and literature, not to mention books written to expose Mormonism.

A person might speak of having an encounter with Christ, and that he believes in Jesus and His resurrection. But when pressed for what he means by an “encounter” with Jesus, he might speak of seeing a movie about the life of a famous preacher and getting a warm feeling and some kind of metaphysical and existential experience — an emotional high. Totally lacking is any Gospel content and any thoughts of sin, guilt, repentance, or a new-birth experience.

A person might feel good about Jesus, but believe that Christ’s physical resurrection was not necessary and that Jesus came back in spirit. This is nullifying the very hope of the Gospel. The underlying Greek word for “resurrection” has to do with a dead body sitting up or standing up. Resurrection had no meaning to a first-century Jew apart from a dead body being reanimated. If Christ’s resurrection was only spiritual, it makes Jesus a liar (John 2:19-22) and a deceiver (Luke 24:36-40), and it cancels all the New Testament promises of the believer’s ultimate bodily resurrection as found in Romans 8 and 1 Corinthians 15. Manipulating content with an intention to deceive is one of the definitions of lying.

Today many speak of “hearing God” or “listening to God.” The only real way to hear God or listen to Him is in His Word. One early Church Father said the Gospels to be the mouth of Christ. People claim to be “hearing God”

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News Updates

CAMPING FAILS AGAIN

May 21, 2011, began and ended as every other day in history: Jesus did not return. While most of the world's population was not expecting anything extraordinary, followers of Harold Camping and his Family Radio ministry were. Camping had forecast that on May 21 a massive earthquake would shake the world apart and the true believers of Jesus would "be carried into heaven, while the rest of humanity will endure 153 days of 'death and horror' before the world ends on October 21," according to a report in *Daily Mail*.

End-time prognostications are nothing new to Camping. Nearly two decades ago, the aberrant Bible teacher scheduled the return of Christ and the end of the world on Sept. 6, 1994.

For many months leading up to the May 21 date, Camping's devotees engaged in campaigns across the country warning that Judgment Day was approaching, boldly proclaiming, "The Bible Guarantees It." A group of 10 members from his Oakland, Calif., base gave up jobs, families, and possessions to embark on "Project Caravan," a convoy of RVs with their side panels completely painted with the doomsday message. Billboards in the United States and across the world proclaimed the impending end of the world.

Camping, as he did with every previous prediction, insisted on the accuracy of the 2011 date. "I know it's absolutely true, because the Bible is always true," he told CNN. Camping arrived at his predictions based on numerical codes he ascribes to Scripture and Bible events. He says his 1994 date failed because of a misreading of the Bible codes he used to interpret the date of the Rapture.

—MKG

HINN SUED BY PUBLISHER

The *National Enquirer* has the distinction of being dubious in its news stories. Yet despite its reputation, fallout from its reports seems to be incessant. Just ask healing evangelist Benny Hinn. Last August, the super-market tabloid published an article linking Hinn with twice-divorced televangelist Paula White. The magazine featured photographs of the couple hand-in-hand emerging from a hotel in Rome, Italy. At the time the story hit the newsstands, Hinn himself was going through his own divorce.

Now, as a result of that initial report, Hinn is being sued by his longtime friend and colleague Stephen Strang. Strang's publishing company had signed a three-book deal with Hinn and is now suing him, saying Hinn's admitted relationship with White violated a morality clause in their contract. Strang Communications Company has filed a complaint in Seminole County, Fla., and is seeking \$250,000 from Hinn.

In 2009 Strang published Hinn's *Blood in the Sand*, subtitled as a guide to "Understanding the Middle East Conflict." Reports indicate that Hinn was paid a \$300,000 advance for the book.

The lawsuit also stated that Hinn further "violated the contract by failing to work hard enough to market *Blood in the Sand*," according to a report in *The Orlando Sentinel*. The newspaper also said that Hinn "failed to make television appearances to promote it, including several on *700 Club*."

Immediately following the *National Enquirer* feature, Hinn went on the offensive and while admitting that a friendship with White "did develop," stated that there was never any immorality. He told his television audience that his "friendship" with White is over.

Hinn maintained that he was in Rome because the Vatican had made him a Patron of the Arts, a person who solicits donors to sustain the Vatican's art collection. Hinn claimed that he invited White to come with him to Rome to enlist her as a donor. However, according to the International Coordinator of The Patrons of the Arts in the Vatican Museums, Father Mark Haydu, "To my knowledge, Paula White or Benny Hinn were not invited to the Vatican Museums in any official context, nor did we find anyone on our donors database of Patrons under those names."

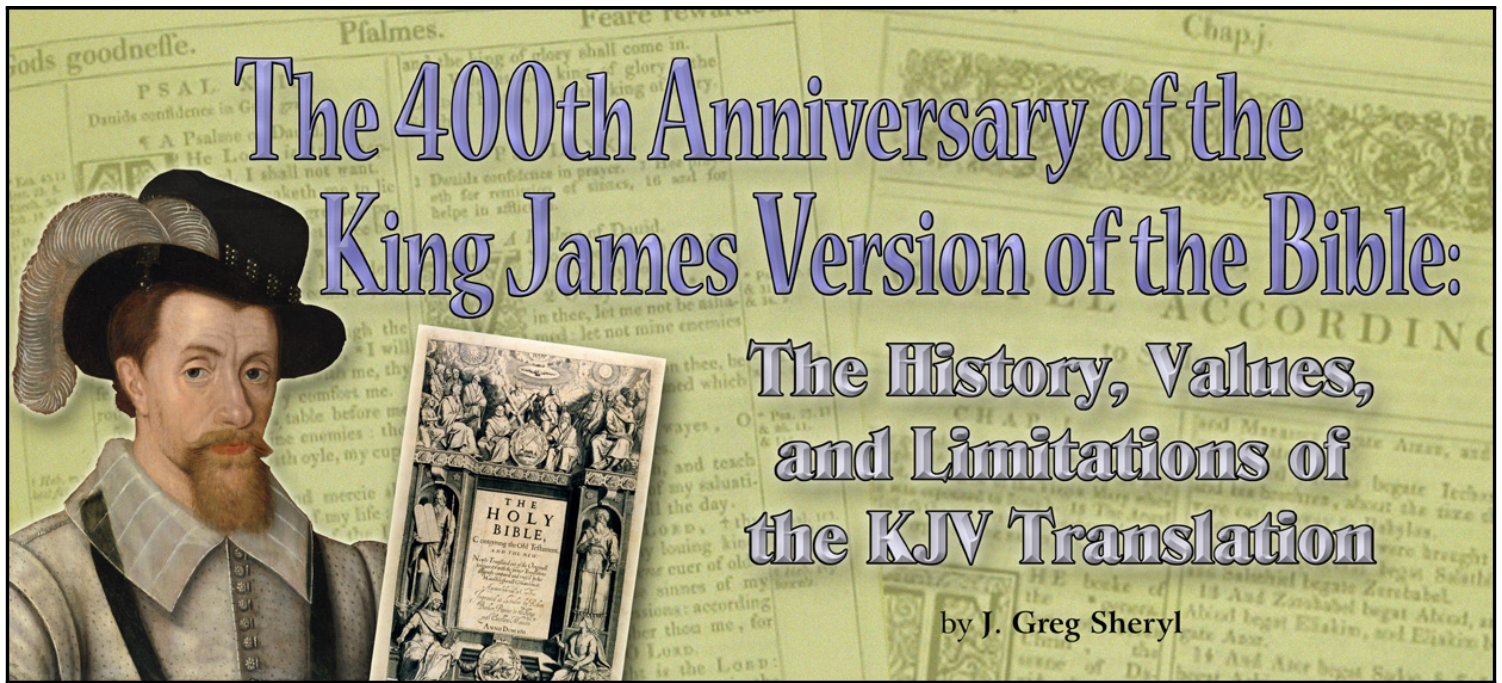
Hinn has a lengthy record of personal overstatements and untruths as documented in *The Confusing World of Benny Hinn*.

—MKG

LEAD "ARTIFACT" OF DEEP SECRETS MET WITH SKEPTICISM

A "tempest in a teapot" boiled up in March 2011 as a Galilee Bedouin and others tried to put one over on the Israel Antiquities Authority.

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This year marks the 400th Anniversary of the King James Version of the Bible, also known as the Authorized Version. Celebrations of this quatercentenary have been occurring and are scheduled to occur this year in such places as Ashland Theological Seminary, Baylor University, Houston Baptist University, and Washington, D.C.¹

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE KJV

In 1603, James VI, king of Scotland (1566-1625) became king of England following the death of Elizabeth I of England. Thus, James VI of Scotland was now also James I of England, becoming the first Stuart king in England. In April 1603, as James was en route to London, he was presented with what was called the Millenary Petition,² so called because it supposedly contained the signatures of a thousand Puritans. They were concerned about practices in the Church of England to which they objected.

The Church of England was a divided church, with the conservatives who liked the ecclesiastical system the way it was, and the Puritans who thought that the Reformation had not had its full intended effect in the Church of England. Some, though not all, of the Puritans' objections

addressed Roman Catholic practices that the Church of England had retained, such as bowing to the name of Jesus,³ the rite of confirmation, "the use of the cross as a kind of magic symbol," "kneeling at communion," and so forth.⁴

After receiving the Millenary Petition, King James decided to convene a conference. Originally it was scheduled for Nov. 1, 1603, but was moved to January 1604.⁵ The three-day Hampton Court Conference began Jan. 12, 1604.⁶

The conservatives (bishops and deans) of the Church of England were present, as were the four Puritan representatives. Adam Nicholson says that representatives from both sides knew one another. "The four representatives of the Puritan party were in fact old friends of many of the [Anglican] bishops and deans,"⁷ Nicholson wrote. "This was not an encounter of parties at each other's throats."⁸ He wrote that the more radical Puritans had been excluded from the Conference.⁹ "The only outsider, ironically enough, was the king."¹⁰

King James first met with the representatives of the conservatives in the Church of England. He soon tore into them, although he ended the hours-

long meeting with them more gently.¹¹

Then King James met with the Puritans. "James may have been rude, challenging and clever with the bishops," Nicholson wrote, "Now, he was even worse with the Puritans."¹²

Nicholson added:

"James dismissed all the Puritan objections. He was familiar with them all. They were the points which any Scots Presbyterian would have made and which strict English Protestants, dissatisfied with the compromise of the English Church, had been making since the 1550s. Everyone knew the territory; there were no surprises, but the atmosphere was nasty. These were moderate and distinguished men, suggesting moderate changes. But James ... was treating them like extreme schismatics from the outer reaches of Anabaptist lunacy."¹³

In his biography of King James, David Teems wrote:

"In the end, other than the small concession to the Book of Common Prayer, which James intended to revise anyway, he dismissed *all* of the Puritan objections."¹⁴

However, in his meeting on Monday with the Puritans, one of their representatives, John Reynolds (or Rainolds) said:

“The petitioning ministers he represented would like ‘one only translation of ye byble to be authentical and read in ye church’. In another jotted-down account of the scene, Reynolds is more courteous: ‘May your Majesty be pleased that the Bible be new translated?’”¹⁵

This item “was not even listed on the Puritan’s original list of grievances.”¹⁶ But the request found favor with the king.

About 50 translators¹⁷ (some say it was 47; others say it was 54) worked on this translation. They were divided into six companies, with each working on a portion of the Bible. The Apocrypha¹⁸ was included. The translators were given rules to govern the process. Seven years later, in 1611, their work was printed.

NOT WELL-RECEIVED AT FIRST

It took many years for the King James Bible to gain wide acceptance. The favorite Bible of Protestants was the Geneva Bible of 1560 — the Bible that the Pilgrims brought with them on the Mayflower to America in 1620.

Nicholson wrote:

“Lancelot Andrewes [one of the KJV translators] nearly always took his sermon texts from the Geneva [Bible]. ... Most extraordinarily of all, Miles Smith, in the Preface to the new translation [the KJV], quotes from the very Geneva Bible which it was, in part, intended to replace.”¹⁹

Nicholson also tells of a Puritan Hebrew scholar named Hugh Broughton, who had wanted to be part of the KJV translation committee, but who was rejected because of his rudeness:

“Broughton castigated the Translators. Their understanding of Hebrew was inadequate; where they had stumbled on something worthwhile, they had usually relegated it to the margins. ... Blas-

phemy, most damnable corruptions, intolerable deceit and vile imposture were terms scarcely bad enough to describe the depths of their degeneracy. ‘The late Bible’, he wrote, ‘was sent to me to censure: which bred in me a sadness that will grieve me while I breathe, it is ill done. Tell His Majesty that I had rather be rent in pieces with wild horses, than any such translation by my consent should be urged upon poor churches ... The new edition crosseth me. I require it to be burnt.’”²⁰

Then there were the printing errors. Nicholson recounted:

“[The 1611 KJV] was littered with misprints, ‘hoopes’ for ‘hookes,’ ‘she’ for ‘he’, three whole lines simply repeated in Exodus, and alarmingly ‘Judas’ for ‘Jesus’ in one of the Gospels.²¹ ... When, finally, in the nineteenth century, Dr. F. Scrivener, a scholar working to modern standards, attempted to collate all the editions of the King James Bible then in circulation, he found more than 24,000 variations between them. The curious fact is that no one such thing as ‘The King James Bible’ — agreed, consistent and whole — has ever existed. ... Being only a revision of earlier translations, and not a new work, there was no need for it to be entered in the Stationers’ Register, which recorded only new publications and so, in addition to this most famous book having no agreed text, it also has no publication date.”²²

Nicholson noted that it was 1660 before the King James Bible began to come into its own as “the Bible,” finally replacing the Geneva Bible in popularity.²³

The King James Version has been revised throughout its history. According to one source, “Previous major revisions of this translation were issued in 1629, 1638, 1762, and 1769,”²⁴ with the 1769 revision being the work of Benjamin Blayney. According to King James Version researcher Rick Norris:

“Most editions of the King James Version that we use today are **substantially** the same as the 1769 version of the KJV, but some ‘spelling updates and the making of other changes [actually] continued in KJV editions until after 1885.’”²⁵

Christian researcher Ron Rhodes wrote:

“It is also noteworthy that some translational errors in the KJV have never been corrected. For example, the name ‘Jesus’ appears in both Acts 7:45 and Hebrews 4:8 when ‘Joshua’ is actually the correct rendering. Moreover, Matthew 23:24 is rendered ‘Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat and swallow a camel.’ The Greek text actually means ‘strain out a gnat,’ not ‘at a gnat.’ The average reader, of course, is completely unaware of mistranslations such as these.”²⁶

King James was not one of the translators and was a contradictory figure. While he had a wife and fathered children, he is widely believed to have been a homosexual. Christian evangelist Ralph Woodrow wrote:

“His reign was not without scandals, and historians are still divided as to whether he was homosexual or bisexual. That he was unfaithful to his marriage appears to be well-documented in encyclopedias.”²⁷

He was very intelligent and enjoyed theological disputes, yet he also had a foul mouth. He may have been a better ruler of Scotland, where he began his reign, than in England, where he ruled in the latter part of his life.

KJV NOT THE FIRST ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF THE BIBLE

Not only was the King James Version of the Bible not the first English translation of the Bible, it was not even the first *authorized* translation of the Bible. There were a number of English Bibles that preceded the King James Version, including the 14th-century Wycliffe Bible,²⁸ William Tyn-

dale's New Testament (1526), the Coverdale Bible (1535), Matthew's Bible (1537), the Great Bible (1539),²⁹ the Geneva Bible (1560), the Bishops' Bible (1568),³⁰ and the Rheims-Douay Bible (1582-1610). The Rheims-Douay was an English Roman Catholic translation.

Although King James commissioned the version that bears his name, the late textual critic and scholar Bruce Metzger wrote:

"Beyond the royal authority under which it was made and the statement on the title page 'Appointed to be read in churches,' it had never been officially authorized by ecclesiastical or legislative sanction. In the long run, however, the popularity attained eventually by the version 'authorized' it in the national mind — but in a sense different from the authorization of the Great Bible of 1539 and the Bishops' Bible of 1568."³¹

So, calling the King James Version the Authorized Version may be a misnomer. However, its popularity ended up authorizing it in the minds of the public.

PRAISE FOR THE KJV

The King James Version has been very popular since the late 1600s. No other English Bible translation seriously challenged it from then until the 1880s, when the English Revised Version (abbreviated "RV") was published. A KJV commemorative booklet notes that:

"In 1881, the scholars who developed the Revised Version had this to say about the King James Version: *We have had to study this great Version carefully and minutely, line by line; and the longer we have been engaged upon it the more we have learned to admire its simplicity, its dignity, its power, its happy turns of expression, its general accuracy, and, we must not fail to add, the music of its cadences and the felicities of its rhythm.*"³²

The Preface to the Revised Standard Version of the Bible (which was, indirectly, a revision of the King

James Bible)³³ praised the KJV in these words:

"The King James Version has with good reason been termed 'the noblest monument of English prose.' ... It entered, as no other book has, into the making of the personal character and the public institutions of the English-speaking peoples. We owe to it an incalculable debt."³⁴

The Preface to the New King James Version of the Bible quotes these words of the 19th-20th century British playwright George Bernard Shaw in praise of the KJV:

"The translation was extraordinarily well done because to the translators what they were translating was not merely a curious collection of ancient books written by different authors in different stages of culture, but the Word of God divinely revealed through His chosen and expressly inspired scribes. In this conviction they carried out their work with boundless reverence and care and achieved a beautifully artistic result."³⁵

One pamphlet commemorating the 400th anniversary of the KJV notes that in his famous 1776 pamphlet *Common Sense*, the American Revolutionary figure Thomas Paine "used the rhetorical tone of the King James Version to frame his own words."³⁶

Professor and author Gordon Campbell points out that Abraham Lincoln used language apparently based on the KJV in his Gettysburg Address and he explicitly quoted Matthew 18:7 from the KJV in his second inaugural address.³⁷ (Lincoln also quoted from Psalm 19:9 and references Matthew 7:1 in the KJV in this latter speech.) Campbell also notes that in his famous 1963 "I Have a Dream" speech, the late Martin Luther King, Jr. obviously referenced Isaiah 40:4-5 from the King James Version.³⁸

Both the first U.S. President, George Washington, and the most recent, Barack Obama, used a King James Bible when taking the presidential

oath of office.³⁹ Other U.S. Presidents who used a King James Bible at their inaugurations include Abraham Lincoln, Jimmy Carter, and both George H.W. Bush and George W. Bush.⁴⁰

Additionally, one source notes:

"Hundreds of idioms or figures of speech — semiproverbial or proverbial expressions that might have come from everyday usage but had never been made prominent in literature — became prominent through this Bible."⁴¹

This same source lists in a sidebar some examples of KJV phrases (whether it was original with the KJV or not) that have made their way into our English language, phrases such as: "the salt of the earth," "the apple of his eye," "a lamb to the slaughter," "seek and ye shall find," "fight the good fight," "no rest for the wicked," "fall from grace," and "by the skin of your teeth."⁴²

This all-too-brief survey shows us just some of the influence of the King James Version of the Bible in its 400-year history.

THE KING JAMES-ONLY CONTROVERSY

While there is much to admire about the King James Version of the Bible, some Christians have developed an unnatural attachment to it. They believe that this English version of the Bible is the only valid one, at least in the English language. Indeed, at least one contemporary KJV-only advocate has indicated that those who cannot read English would have to learn English in order to be able to have God's Word.⁴³

Some KJV-only proponents have gone so far as to label other modern-day English Bible translations as "perversions," "New Age Bible versions," or even "Satanic."

The Quarterly Journal has addressed the King James-only controversy in the past.⁴⁴

There are some perverse English Bible translations, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses' *New World Translation* or the Mormons' *Inspired Version*

of the Bible.⁴⁵ However, many of the major, widely published Bibles that we have today are faithful attempts at rendering God's Word into contemporary language. Some of these Bibles (such as the New King James Version, the Revised Standard Version, New Revised Standard Version, New American Standard Bible, and the English Standard Version) are revisions of earlier Bibles, such as the 1901 American Standard Version, which was itself a revision of the 1881-1885 English Revised Version.

Even the King James Version was actually a revision of earlier Bibles. Initially the King James Version was to be a revision of the Bishops' Bible, published in 1568:

"The King had forty unbound folio copies of the Bishops' Bible, 1602 edition, sent to the translators, a strong message that they were to stick closely to that text. But the translators did not allow themselves to be strapped to the Bishops' Bible. Earlier translations were to be used if it was deemed that they agreed better with the original text."⁴⁶

Those "earlier translations" included The Geneva Bible and The Great Bible along with translations by William Tyndale, John Rogers (The Matthew's Bible), and Miles Coverdale. The Rev. Steven Houck provides additional specifics:

"...the King James Version is not a totally new work. In terms of literary units — phrases and clauses — the King James Version is about thirty nine percent new translation. Sixty one percent of the phrases are taken over from older English versions. In fact, the King James Version can be considered the fifth revision of the work of William Tyndale who first translated the New Testament into English from the Greek. Before Tyndale there was the translation (1380) of John Wycliffe (An English Reformer often called *the Morning Star of the Reformation*) and the translation of John Purvey (A Colleague of Wycliffe), but they were trans-

lated from the Latin Bible. Tyndale was the first to go back to the original languages."⁴⁷

Thus, the King James Version was not actually a fresh translation of the Bible from the original languages that the Bible was written in: Hebrew and Aramaic (for the Old Testament) and Greek (for the New Testament).⁴⁸ Additionally, the Bishops' Bible itself was a revision of the Bible translation works of Tyndale and also of Coverdale earlier in that century.⁴⁹

While some current English Bibles are, therefore, revisions of an earlier version rather than a translation from the original biblical languages, other contemporary English Bibles actually are translations from the original languages (such as the New International Version, the New Living Translation, the Holman Christian Standard Bible, the NET Bible, the New English Bible, the Jerusalem Bible, and the Good News Translation).

Among those who have pledged exclusive allegiance to the King James Version, we would not include those who merely adhere to the King James Version due to a personal preference. Perhaps they enjoy the majestic language of the KJV or they and/or their family grew up using it. Perhaps they prefer it for other reasons.

Some KJV-only advocates, by contrast, have elevated the use of the King James Version to a religious dogma. They truly believe that this version of the Bible, good though it is, is the one true Bible that God Himself has ordained.

In an article titled "King James Only?" Christian evangelist and author Ralph Woodrow wrote:

"A young man we know visited a small church here in southern California. The Bible he carried on that occasion happened to be the *New International Version* (NIV). Being unaware of the 'King James Only' controversy, he was puzzled when someone told him the church was planning a 'Bible Burning Service.' The purpose would be to burn Bibles (like his NIV) and every other version — *except* the KING

JAMES VERSION (KJV)! ... Admittedly this is an extreme example; not everyone who is 'King James Only' would carry it this far. But this teaching does breed radical and misleading claims: that every version except the King James Version is a *perversion*; that newer translations are inspired by Satan; that they are part of a gigantic conspiracy, promoted by the New Age Movement! I received a letter some years ago expressing the view that those who use versions other than the KJV are in danger of having their names taken out of the Book of Life! Please be assured that my use of the term 'King James Only' is simply for clarification. I am not putting anyone down for using the KJV. I use it myself and have for years. But needless and harmful divisions occur when people insist that ONLY the KJV should be used."⁵⁰

Before discussing the King James-only position further, we should point out several things: First, while we believe in the Bible as being the inspired, inerrant Word of God, this only applies to what are called the original autographs of the Bible. (The original autographs of the Bible are those first copies of the books in the Bible as they were written by the authors of the Scripture in the original biblical languages: Hebrew and Aramaic for the Old Testament and Greek for the New Testament.) So, the original documents of the Bible are inerrant. The Bible itself bears testimony to its being God's Word (e.g., 2 Timothy 3:16-17; John 10:35). In His earthly ministry, the Lord Jesus continually cited Scripture as being authoritative and authored by God (e.g., Matthew 4:4) and the apostles did the same (e.g., 2 Peter 1:21).

Secondly, however, none of the original autographs has survived. Many have pointed out that perhaps the reason that God didn't permit the original autographs to survive was that people might have worshipped them if they had survived. Thus, what we have today are *copies* of the original autographs. Over the centuries,

some transcription errors crept into those copies since, until the invention of the printing press in the 15th century, these copies were all handwritten by various individuals with varying degrees of care and precision.

Thirdly, even if we had the error-free autographs there is no such thing as a perfect translation of the Word of God from the biblical languages into other languages. In order to achieve a perfect understanding of the original autographs, we would actually have to be able to read and understand the Bible in its original languages, and also have a knowledge of the customs and way of life of biblical times. Additionally, biblical translators, as careful as they are, sometimes have to make interpretations as to how to understand and translate Bible passages. No individual or group is able to do this perfectly.

Things are not as hopeless as they seem, however, for the God Who inspired His Word, the Bible, is aware of all this. Although the Bible, as it has come down to us, contains some copyists' errors, for the most part we can be confident that the English Bible translations that we use today — whether the King James Version or the majority of modern translations — are the Word of God. Renowned New Testament textual critic⁵¹ Dr. Daniel B. Wallace told Christian apologist Lee Strobel:

“The fact is that scholars across the theological spectrum say that in all essentials — not in every particular, but in *all* essentials — our New Testament manuscripts go back to the originals.”⁵²

Wallace also declared:

“Only about one percent of [NT textual] variants are both meaningful, which means they affect the meaning of the text to some degree, and viable, which means they have a decent chance of going back to the original [NT] text. ... But most of these are not very significant at all.”⁵³

Later, in the same interview, Wallace stated:

“Let me repeat the basic thesis that has been argued since [the mid-1700s⁵⁴]: *No cardinal or essential doctrine is altered by any textual variant that has plausibility of going back to the original.* The evidence for that has not changed to this day.”⁵⁵

The KJV-only advocates are not monolithic, however. There are shades of difference among their views. Additionally, some KJV-only advocates are more extreme than others. It is also important to keep in mind that the KJV-only position is mostly concerned with the New Testament, because both the King James Version and modern English Bible translations use the same basic Hebrew text in translating the Old Testament.⁵⁶

In his book refuting the KJV-only position, titled, *The King James Only Controversy*,⁵⁷ Christian apologist and author James White divides KJV-only advocates into several groups:

1. Those who believe that the Greek text underlying the KJV New Testament is a superior Greek text to the Greek text underlying most of the modern translations. The New Testament Greek text that the King James translators used was a somewhat worked-over version of the Greek New Testament text produced by the 16th-century Dutch Catholic priest and humanist Erasmus. This version of Erasmus' Greek New Testament later became known as the Textus Receptus. A 20th-century KJV-only view based on the superiority of the Textus Receptus was taught by the late Bible teacher Jasper James Ray, author of the book *God Wrote Only One Bible*.⁵⁸

A variation of the Textus Receptus text view is the Majority [Greek] Text view. This view proposes that the New Testament Greek text that accords with the majority of Greek manuscripts is the best New Testament text. However, according to Wallace there are 1,838 differences between the Textus Receptus and the Majority Text.⁵⁹ Thus, they are not identical Greek texts. However, there are defenders of both the Majority Text as well as those who defend the

Textus Receptus. Furthermore, as White points out, KJV-only advocates sometimes cite Majority Text advocates to buttress their views.⁶⁰ An example of this is the use by KJV-only advocates of the 19th-century textual critic Dean John William Burgon⁶¹ in support of the King James-only position. Burgon is often cited by KJV-only advocates, as if he were one of their own, although Burgon was actually similar in respects to the Majority Text advocates, rather than being a KJV-only proponent.⁶²

2. There are those who would go even further in their view of the Textus Receptus than those mentioned above. They would claim that the Textus Receptus “either has been supernaturally preserved over time or even inspired, and hence maintained in an inerrant condition. They would believe the same concerning the Hebrew text utilized by the KJV translators.”⁶³

3. Whereas the second group above would maintain that the Greek and Hebrew texts underlying the KJV are inspired, there is a more radical KJV-only view that believes that God inspired the actual KJV translation itself. White notes:

“Most King James Only advocates would fall into this group. They believe that the KJV itself, as an English language translation, is inspired and therefore inerrant. ... This group's key affirmation, which gives form and substance to the entire KJV Only controversy, is found in the following equation: **The King James Bible Alone = The Word of God Alone.** We *must* understand that this is the starting point in the thinking of most KJV Only believers. This belief gives rise to so much of the heat that marks this debate, for in the mind of a convinced KJV Only believer, any attack upon the KJV is an attack upon God's Word.”⁶⁴

In an important footnote to the above citation, White states:

“Some [of these] advocates try to avoid using the words *inspired* and *inerrant*, but when you ask

them if there are any errors in the KJV, they will say there are not. If you ask whether a better translation could be made, they will deny the possibility. Hence, whether or not they use the exact terms, the functional position they take is that the KJV is inspired and inerrant."⁶⁵

4. Among those at the most radical end of the KJV-only spectrum are such authors as Peter Ruckman, Gail Riplinger (author of the book *New Age Bible Versions*⁶⁶ and other KJV-only books), and Dr. Samuel Gipp. The views of these advocates are irrational and bizarre. Gipp, for instance, believes that those who do not know English need to learn English to be able to obtain the truth of God as it is revealed in the King James Version.⁶⁷

Although we have noted above *distinctions* among the spectrum of KJV-only advocates, in what follows, it will not be possible to deal individually with these various shades of KJV-only believers, other than having distinguished between them above. Thus, the reader should know that in the discussion that follows, we must of necessity, perhaps unfairly, lump all KJV-only advocates together, based on their common adherence to the King James Version as being the best (or only) English version of God's Word today. The reader should therefore be very aware that not everything that is said below will apply to all four groups of KJV-only advocates distinguished above.

THE FOUR "RAILS" OF THE KJV-ONLY POSITION⁶⁸

The KJV-only position seems to run along four rails: One rail is that of the Greek text that underlies the New Testament of the King James Bible. This text has some differences between it and the Greek text that is the basis for *most* modern translations of the Bible (excluding, for example, the New King James Version, which uses the same Greek text used by the King James Version).

A second rail of the KJV-only position is that of translation philosophy. Bible translations that truly *are* trans-

lations — as opposed to paraphrases, for instance — tend to use greater or lesser degrees of freedom in how they translate the language of the biblical texts. Those who tend to lean more toward a literal, word-for-word translation of the biblical text are called "formal equivalence" translations. These translations strive, as much as is feasible, to reproduce the exact wording and syntax of the biblical text, while still producing readable English (or whatever language the Bible is being translated into). Some English formal equivalence translations are the King James Version, the New King James Version, the Revised Standard Version, the New American Standard Bible, and the English Standard Version.

Some translations, however, strive to convey the same meaning of the biblical text that it would have had to the original audience, even if the precise wording and/or sentence structure is changed. These "meaning-based" translations are referred to as "dynamic equivalence" translations. Some modern dynamic equivalence translations would be the Revised English Bible, the Good News Translation, the New Living Translation, and perhaps the New International Version.

Paraphrases of the Bible would include the Living Bible and Eugene Peterson's rendering called *The Message*. However, *The Message* may actually be too free to be even called a paraphrase, although that is how it is usually designated.

In reality, a translation that is a perfect example of formal equivalence is seldom, if ever, a major Bible translation because a perfectly formal equivalence translation would be difficult to read and understand. So, all Bible translations employ dynamic equivalence to some degree. Formal equivalence translations translate literally when it is feasible to do so and to still make a comprehensible translation. Translations that are classified as dynamic equivalence translations tend to sacrifice literalness. Two modern English translations that attempt to strike a balance between formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence

are the New International Version and the Holman Christian Standard Bible.

So, one reason KJV-only proponents favor the King James Version is that they hold to a "formal equivalence" philosophy of Bible translation.⁶⁹

A third rail that KJV-only proponents run on is the presumed godliness and superior linguistic skills of the KJV translators. To compare the godliness of the KJV translators with that of contemporary translators is futile because the KJV translators are dead and because God alone knows the hearts of men. As to knowledge and linguistic skills, modern scholars know more about the Greek of the New Testament today than did the KJV translators. This wasn't due to any intellectual deficiency on their part, but rather it is due to discoveries since that time of more ancient manuscripts and greater knowledge of the Greek language.

If one wanted to argue for the superiority of the Greek text underlying the King James Version and if one wanted to argue for a formal equivalence philosophy of Bible translation and if one were willing to acknowledge the futility of attempting to pit the godliness of the KJV translators against that of more recent Bible translators, then the clear winner for an English Bible translation for the KJV-only advocate would be the New King James Version of the Bible. But this is not the case.

There is a fourth rail for the KJV-only advocate and that might be the belief that God had His hand in a special way on the KJV translation or that the KJV translation is somehow divinely inspired or that God has blessed the KJV translation in a singular way in history or any number of other reasons, at least some of which are not subject to rational discussion. For whatever reasons, many KJV-only advocates believe the KJV translation is singularly the Word of God simply as a matter of blind faith, and not due to any rational basis. And if they were content to merely have this as their own personal conviction before God, the discussion of their position here might not be necessary. The reason it

is necessary, however, is because many KJV-only proponents try to “poison the well” for those who read any other translation of the Bible by arguing that the only true English Bible is the King James Bible, and all other English translations either somehow fall short of being the Word of God — or that they are corrupt translations, New Age translations, or Satanic. They have made the use of the King James Version a test of Christian orthodoxy.

A BRIEF BACKGROUND OF THE KJV-ONLY POSITION

In an article some years ago in *The Quarterly Journal*, senior PFO researcher G. Richard Fisher traced the origins of the contemporary KJV-only controversy back to a Seventh-day Adventist professor, Benjamin G. Wilkinson, who, in 1930, wrote a defense of the King James Version, titled *Our Authorized Bible Vindicated*.⁷⁰ (The “Authorized Bible” that Wilkinson referred to is the “Authorized Version,” i.e., the King James Version.)

Fisher wrote that decades later this largely unknown book by Wilkinson⁷¹ was subsequently promoted by the late KJV proponent David Otis Fuller in his book, *Which Bible?*⁷² The last portion of *Which Bible?* consisted of a lengthy, edited abridgment of Wilkinson’s book *Our Authorized Bible Vindicated*.⁷³ Fisher cites author Doug Kutilek’s claim that Wilkinson’s defense of the King James Version was riddled with errors.⁷⁴ Fisher also points out that in *Which Bible?*, Fuller seems to have deliberately hidden Wilkinson’s Seventh-day Adventist roots.⁷⁵

Thus, Fisher concludes that “the real ‘father’” of the contemporary KJV-only movement was the Seventh-day Adventist professor Benjamin G. Wilkinson (along with his chief promoter, David Otis Fuller).⁷⁶

Someone else who has been cited many times by KJV-only advocates (including Wilkinson)⁷⁷ in support of their position is the 19th-century textual critic and Anglican Dean of Chichester, John William Burgon, even though Burgon was not actually

a KJV-only advocate! As noted earlier, Burgon advocated a position that is somewhat similar, though not identical, to the KJV-only position. So, although he was definitely *not* a KJV-only advocate, KJV-only proponents love to cite him because of the *similarity* of his view to their own.

A current example of Burgon being used to support a view that was not identical to his own is that of KJV-only advocate, D.A. Waite, who founded the KJV-only organization called The Dean Burgon Society. Waite also distributes materials written by Burgon. However, New Testament textual critic Daniel Wallace, mentioned above, wrote, “It is ironic that the Dean Burgon Society is one that Burgon himself would be excluded from, since Burgon’s views were closer to [the] majority text than [to the] TR [i.e., Textus Receptus].”⁷⁸

Thus, although Burgon was not a KJV-only proponent, they seem to have adopted him as their mentor. As Fisher pointed out in his article, Wilkinson actually *was* a KJV proponent and, so, in this sense, we might regard him as the father of the KJV-only position. Perhaps the contemporary KJV-only movement has two fathers, instead of one. The one who they seem to willingly cite as one of their own, even though his position was only similar, though not identical to theirs (Burgon); and the other one who is less acknowledged, but who actually *was* a KJV proponent (Wilkinson).

THE LIMITATIONS OF THE KJV: A RESPONSE TO THE KJV-ONLY POSITION

Some of the reasons that the King James Version needed a major overhaul are explained in the Preface of the Revised Standard Version of the Bible. It states:

“The King James Version of the New Testament was based upon a Greek text that was marred by mistakes, containing the accumulated errors of fourteen centuries of manuscript copying. It was essentially the Greek text of the New Testament as edited by

[Theodore] Beza, 1589,⁷⁹ who closely followed that published by Erasmus, 1516-1535, which was based upon a few medieval manuscripts. The earliest and best of the eight manuscripts which Erasmus consulted was from the tenth century, and he made the least use of it because it differed most from the commonly received text; Beza had access to two manuscripts of great value, dating from the fifth and sixth centuries, but he made very little use of them because they differed from the text published by Erasmus. We now possess many more ancient manuscripts of the New Testament, and are far better equipped to seek to recover the original wording of the Greek text. The evidence for the text of the books of the New Testament is better than for any other ancient book, both in the number of extant manuscripts and in the nearness of the date of some of these manuscripts to the date when the book was originally written.”⁸⁰

So, one reason that the King James Version needed revision was because recent discoveries provided more ancient Greek manuscripts than the KJV translators had access to when they made their 1611 translation.

The RSV Preface also gives another reason for a revision of the KJV:

“A major reason for revision of the King James Version, which is valid for both the Old Testament and the New Testament, is the change since 1611 in English usage. Many forms of expression have become archaic, while still generally intelligible — the use of thou, thee, thy, thine and the verb endings -est and -edst, the verb endings -eth and -th, it came to pass that, whosoever, whatsoever, insomuch that, because that, for that, unto, howbeit, peradventure, holden, aforetime, must needs, would fain, behooved, to you-ward, etc. Other words are obsolete and no longer understood by the common reader. The greatest prob-

lem, however, is presented by the English words which are still in constant use but now convey a different meaning from that which they had in 1611 and in the King James Version. These words were once accurate translations of the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures; but now, having changed in meaning, they have become misleading. They no longer say what the King James translators meant them to say. Thus, the King James Version uses the word 'let' in the sense of 'hinder,' 'prevent' to mean 'precede,' 'allow' in the sense of 'approve,' 'communicate' for 'share,' 'conversation' for 'conduct,' 'comprehend' for 'overcome,' 'ghost' for 'spirit,' 'wealth' for 'well-being,' 'allege' for 'prove,' 'demand' for 'ask,' 'take no thought' for 'be not anxious,' etc."⁸¹

Some English words used in the KJV are old-fashioned, although perhaps still understandable, at least by some. Other English words are "obsolete" and thus, may not be understood by the modern reader. Other English words no longer mean what they did in 1611. Today's reader of the KJV might *think* some of the words mean one thing when in reality they mean something else.

Evangelist Ralph Woodrow similarly comments about the King James Version that "in time I have come to realize that using wording that is now obsolete really serves no effective purpose."⁸²

And later in the same article, he astutely observes:

"We should keep in mind that even if the KJV were an absolutely perfect English translation in A.D. 1611, it would not be perfect now. The reason is obvious: In 400 years many words vary or change in meaning."⁸³

Woodrow then illustrates this with examples from the King James Version. Here are three of his examples from the KJV,⁸⁴ along with two more that I read a number of years ago. These illustrations from the KJV are

immediately followed by the same Scripture from the more up-to-date New King James Version:

KJV: "Stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong" (1 Corinthians 16:13).

NKJV: "Stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong."

KJV: "we fetched a compass" (Acts 28:13).

NKJV: "we circled round." (As Woodrow points out, when Acts was written, the navigational compass hadn't yet been invented.⁸⁵)

KJV: "he who now letteth will let" (2 Thessalonians 2:7).

NKJV: "He [or "he'"] who now restrains will do so."

KJV: "Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia" (2 Corinthians 8:1).

NKJV: "Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia"

KJV: "Be careful for nothing" (Philippians 4:6).

NKJV: "Be anxious for nothing."

Several other illustrations of obsolete and confusing KJV wording could be given. For example, James 5:11 says, "that the Lord is very pitiful," and Psalm 47:2 declares, "For the LORD most high is terrible." Again, to cite Woodrow:

"One writer has said, 'I recommend the KJV for any reader who is 350 years old or older. All others would do better with a more recent version.'"⁸⁶

The reasons given above merely scratch the surface of the reasons that the KJV-only position is rationally untenable.

It is regrettable that those who hold to a KJV-only position have caused the confusion, turmoil, slander of fellow believers, strife, dissension, and division within the Body of Christ that they have. Surely these bad fruits alone are enough to show that this

controversy is a work of the flesh and not a work of God's Holy Spirit.

In truth, the KJV-only controversy is "a tempest in a teapot." The choice of a Bible translation should not be a matter of division among Christians. There are enough *real* battles for Christians to fight. While the original autographs were perfect, no translation of God's Word is 100 percent perfect. Yet most major Bible translations are God's Word (with the exception of purposely perverted translations such as those mentioned earlier), and they should be regarded in that way.

Romans 14 contains the antidote to this controversy:

"Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand. One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind" (Romans 14:4-5).

And later, in the same chapter, Paul writes:

"Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way" (Romans 14:13).

And God's Word also instructs us to "avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife. And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all" (2 Timothy 2:23-24).

While there are KJV-only proponents who are very intelligent, and some even hold earned doctorates, the *controversy itself* is truly a "foolish dispute." And God tells us to avoid such foolish disputes, because all that results from them is strife, which is, indeed, what has occurred as a direct result of this controversy.

In conclusion, we should say that if a person chooses to use the King James Bible as their preferred Bible translation, let them do so, provided that they are able to understand it. In this regard, the Preface of the Revised Standard Version of the Bible is on target when it closes with these

words, which are laden with meaning:

“The Bible is more than a historical document to be preserved. And it is more than a classic of English literature to be cherished and admired. It is a record of God’s dealing with men, of God’s revelation of Himself and His will. It records the life and work of Him in whom the Word of God became flesh and dwelt among men. The Bible carries its full message, not to those who regard it simply as a heritage of the past or praise its literary style, but to those who read it that they may discern and understand God’s Word to men. That Word must not be disguised in phrases that are no longer clear, or hidden under words that have changed or lost their meaning. It must stand forth in language that is direct and plain and meaningful to people today. It is our hope and our earnest prayer that this Revised Standard Version of the Bible may be used by God to speak to men in these momentous times, and to help them to understand and believe and obey his Word.”⁸⁷

Let us thank God for the good influence of the King James Version of His Word for the past 400 years. Indeed, thanks be to God for the King James Version of the Bible and for all faithful translations of His Word, not just in English, but in so many different languages!

Endnotes:

1. More information on the activities at these different venues can be found at the Website: www.kjv400celebration.com/events.php.
2. David Teems, *Majestie: The King Behind the King James Bible*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010, pp. 152, 154. References to the “Millenary Petition” appear in different sources as capitalized or in small letters. Because it appears to be a proper name, I have capitalized it here and in a subsequent reference to it.
3. *Ibid.*, pg. 153.
4. Adam Nicholson, *God’s Secretaries: The Making of the King James Bible*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2005, pp. 54-55.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 40-41.
6. *Ibid.*, pg. 41.
7. *Ibid.*, pg. 45.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*, pg. 47.
10. *Ibid.*, pg. 48.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 49-52.
12. *Ibid.*, pg. 53.
13. *Ibid.*, pg. 55.
14. *Majestie*, op. cit., pg. 168, italic in original.
15. *God’s Secretaries*, op. cit., pg. 57.
16. *Majestie*, op. cit., pg. 168.
17. Nicholson states, “The names of fifty of the Translators are recorded.” *God’s Secretaries*, op. cit., pg. 251. Teems agrees with Nichols, stating, “Only fifty names are recorded.” *Majestie*, op. cit., pg. 171.
18. In the 1611 KJV, “the apocrypha” was a group of nine extra books (and some additional chapters of Esther and Daniel) that were mostly written during the 400-year period between the Old and New Testaments. Roman Catholic Bibles today contain six of these nine books (along with a small book called “Baruch”) interspersed among the books of their Old Testament. Catholics refer to these books as “deuterocanonical,” rather than the Protestant designation for them, “apocrypha.” At least since the first century A.D., they have not been a part of the Jewish canon of Scripture, and the Protestant Reformers, following the Jewish canon, rejected them as Scripture. The Roman Catholic Church only officially declared them to be Scripture during the Council of Trent in 1545-1563, a council convened to deal with issues raised by the Protestant Reformation. (Both the number of books and the books themselves in the Protestant and Roman Catholic New Testaments are identical, however.)
19. *God’s Secretaries*, op. cit., pg. 229.
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 227, 228, second ellipsis in original.
21. Concerning the misprints of the words that Nicholson mentions, there is no reason to suppose that he means that these words were misprinted throughout the entire Bible. Each of these words may have only been misprinted once in the 1611 KJV Bible.
22. *God’s Secretaries*, op. cit., pg. 226, 227.
23. *Ibid.*, pg. 229.
24. This information comes from the commemorative booklet, *KJV400: Celebrating the Legacy of the Bible*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2010, n.p. (but if the pages were numbered, it would likely be pg. 22).
25. E-mail correspondences with Rick Norris from March 1-6, 2011 on file, bold emphasis and brackets in original. Also see Rick Norris, *Today’s KJV and 1611 Compared and More*. Statesville, N.C.: Unbound Scriptures Publications, 2006, pp. 52-54. Title available as a booklet or download at www.lulu.com.
26. Ron Rhodes, *The Complete Guide to Bible Translations*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 2009, pg. 73, italic in original. Rhodes cites Daniel B. Wallace, “The Reign of the King James (The Era of Elegance),” downloaded from www.bible.org.
27. Ralph Woodrow, “King James Only?” Ralph Woodrow Evangelistic Association, Palm Springs, Calif., August 2009, pg. 4. Document accessed at: www.ralphwoodrow.org/articles/king-james-only.pdf.
28. The following English Bible translations and their dates are taken from Bruce M. Metzger, *The Bible in Translation*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2001, pp. 56-67.
29. Metzger notes that this was the first “authorized” English Bible, *ibid.*, pg. 62.
30. Metzger notes that this was the second “authorized” English Bible, *ibid.*, pg. 67.
31. *Ibid.*, pp. 72-73.
32. *KJV400: Celebrating the Legacy of the Bible*, op. cit., n.p. (but if the pages were numbered, it would likely be pg. 19), italics in original.
33. The Revised Standard Version of the Bible was a revision of the 1901 American Standard Version of the Bible. The ASV, in turn, was an American revision of the 1881-1885 (English) Revised Version of the Bible, and this Revised Version was a revision of the King James Bible.
34. Preface to the Revised Standard Version of the Bible. Document accessed at: www.nccusa.org/newbtu/aboutsv.html.
35. Preface to the New King James Version of the Bible. Document accessed at: http://assets.cambridge.org/9780521706193/frontmatter/9780521706193_frontmatter.pdf. Page 6 of the PDF file.
36. Bernard M. Levinson and Joshua A. Berman, *The King James Bible at 400*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, n.d., pg. 9.
37. Gordon Campbell, *Bible: The Story of the King James Version 1611-2011*. New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2010, pp. 205-208.
38. *Ibid.*, pp. 202-203.
39. *Ibid.*, pg. 204.
40. *Ibid.*, pp. 204-205.
41. *KJV400: Celebrating the Legacy of the Bible*, op. cit., n.p. (if the pages were numbered, it would likely be pg. 15).
42. *Ibid.*
43. From a transcript of The John Ankerberg Show, entitled, “Which English Translation of the Bible Is Best For Christians To Use Today?: Series 1.” Chattanooga, Tenn.: The Ankerberg Theological Research Institute, 1995, pg. 1. John Ankerberg here questions KJV-only advocate Dr. Samuel Gipp: “So if a guy is in Russia and he really wants to get to the truth of the Word of God, would he have to learn English?” to which Gipp replies: “Yes.”
44. Perhaps the most thorough *Quarterly Journal* article on this subject was G.

Richard Fisher, "The Cultic Root System of David Otis Fuller & King James Onlyism," *The Quarterly Journal*, October-December 2004, pp. 4, 10-13; other Personal Freedom Outreach responses to this issue include G. Richard Fisher, "Ruckmanism or Wreckmanism: The Teaching That K.J.V. Translators Were Inspired Is Dangerous," *Personal Freedom Outreach Newsletter* (the former name of *The Quarterly Journal*), April-June 1982, pp. 1, 5; also, G. Richard Fisher, "The Big Chick Attack," *Personal Freedom Outreach Newsletter*, January-March 1986, pg. 2.

45. For example, *The Complete Guide to Bible Translations*, op. cit., pp. 247-253, where Rhodes discusses both of these corrupt "translations."

46. Harold Rawlings, "The Noblest Monument of English Prose," *Bible Baptist Tribune*, March 2011, pg. 10.

47. Steven Houck, *The King James Version of the Bible*. Lansing, Ill.: Peace Protestant Reformed Church, 1991, pg. 16, italics in original.

48. *The Bible in Translation*, op. cit., pg. 76.

49. Ibid.

50. "King James Only?," op. cit., pg. 1, italics and capitalization in original. I would not agree with all of Woodrow's views, either in this article or elsewhere; however, he is "the king of common sense," in his discussions on various issues, and his discussion of the KJV-only controversy in this article is masterful.

51. As it has been historically understood, a textual critic is someone who uses various methods to try to determine the original text of the Scriptures. In a personal interview with Dr. Daniel Wallace on March 2, 2011, he illustrated what a small, specialized fraternity New Testament textual critics are, by saying that not too many years ago, there were fewer than 30 in the entire world. Furthermore, he said that today, there are no living New Testament textual critics who are KJV-only advocates, although there used to be one, Edward F. Hills, who has since died.

52. Lee Strobel, *The Case for the Real Jesus*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2007, pp. 71-72, italic in original.

53. Ibid., pg. 87.

54. In an e-mail correspondence dated April 6, 2011, Dr. Wallace said that, although in the interview with Strobel, he cited the year "1707" here, he misspoke; and that instead it should be "the mid-1700s." I have inserted it here due to his correction of this point.

55. *The Case for the Real Jesus*, op. cit., pp. 88-89, italic in original.

56. From the personal interview with Dr. Wallace on March 2, 2011. Similarly, Christian author Eric Pement notes, "There is usually little objection [by KJV-only advocates] to modern translations of the Old Testament, because the Hebrew

(Masoretic) text used in 1611 is still considered the standard today." Eric Pement, "Gimme the Bible that Paul Used: A Look at the King James Only Debate." Document accessed at: www.bibletopics.com/biblestudy/82.htm. Likewise, in his work on the KJV-only controversy, New Testament scholar D.A. Carson states, "the textual matters I have dealt with [in this book] concern only the New Testament. The reasons for this are twofold. (1) The defenders of the TR [i.e., Textus Receptus] do not usually discuss Old Testament textual problems, and this book is largely a rebuttal." D.A. Carson, *The King James Version Debate*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1979, pg. 81.

57. James R. White, *The King James Only Controversy*. Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2009, pp. 23-28.

58. Jasper James Ray, *God Wrote Only One Bible*. Junction City, Ore.: The Eye Opener Publishers, 1970. See, for example, the last sentence of the book, where he concludes, "It is impossible to be saved without 'FAITH,'" and perfect-saving-faith can only be produced by the 'ONE' Bible God wrote, and that we find only in translations which agree with the Greek Textus Receptus refused by Westcott and Hort" (pg. 122, capitalization in original).

59. Personal interview with Dr. Wallace, March 2, 2011. Also, *The King James Only Controversy*, op. cit., pg. 25, footnote 2, where White also cites this same information from an article by Dr. Wallace.

60. *The King James Only Controversy*, op. cit., pg. 25, footnote 2.

61. "Dean" was Burgon's ecclesiastical title, not part of his name. (Burgon was an Anglican churchman.)

62. E-mail correspondence on file from Dr. Wallace, dated Feb. 12, 2011.

63. *The King James Only Controversy*, op. cit., pg. 25.

64. Ibid., pg. 26, bold and italic in the original.

65. Ibid., footnote #4, italics in the original.

66. G.A. Riplinger, *New Age Bible Versions*. Munroe Falls, Ohio: A.V. Publications, 1994.

67. See note #43 above for documentation.

68. My understanding of the first three "rails" is gleaned from the transcript of The John Ankerberg Show, entitled, "Which English Translation of the Bible Is Best For Christians To Use Today?: Series 2." Chattanooga, Tenn.: The Ankerberg Theological Research Institute, 1995, pp. 15-16, combined with my personal interview with Dr. Wallace on March 2, 2011, where he used the concept of the KJV-only position running on "rails."

69. KJV-only proponents are not the only Bible believers who favor a word-for-word translation, as can be seen by sales of New King James Bibles, New American

Standard Bibles, English Standard Version Bibles, etc. It seems to me that both formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence translations can together play a complementary role in giving a fuller understanding of the Scriptures. Of the two, I prefer a formal equivalence translation. One pitfall of dynamic equivalence translations is that they are, by their very nature, more interpretive than a formal equivalence translation. Additionally, for understanding the actual words of Scripture (i.e., the Word of God), a formal equivalence translation has a clear advantage over a dynamic equivalence translation.

70. "The Cultic Root System of David Otis Fuller & King James Onlyism," op. cit., pp. 10-13. Fisher's acknowledged sources for this were two pieces by Doug Kutilek: The online article by Kutilek, "'Roots' of the KJV Controversy - The Unlearned Men: The True Genealogy and Genesis of King-James-Version-Onlyism." Document available at: www.kjv-only.com/doug/kjvoroots.html; and also the chapter by Kutilek in Roy E. Beacham and Kevin T. Bauder, General Editors, *One Bible Only?* Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publications, 2001, pp. 27-56.

71. Benjamin G. Wilkinson, *Our Authorized Bible Vindicated*. New York: TEACH Services, Inc., 2006.

72. David Otis Fuller, Editor, *Which Bible?* Grand Rapids, Mich.: Institute for Biblical Textual Studies, 1998.

73. Ibid., pp. 175-318. Although Fuller's edited abridgement of Wilkinson's work officially begins on page 176, page 175 consists of Wilkinson's Foreword to his book.

74. "The Cultic Root System of David Otis Fuller & King James Onlyism," op. cit., pg. 11, citing Doug Kutilek's chapter in *One Bible Only?*, op. cit., pg. 44.

75. Ibid., pp. 10-11. On pg. 11, Fisher cites Kutilek, who also accused Fuller of hiding Wilkinson's Seventh-day Adventism in *One Bible Only?*, op. cit., pp. 45-46.

76. Ibid., pg. 10, 13.

77. *Our Authorized Bible Vindicated*, op. cit., where Wilkinson cites Burgon on pp. 17, 21-22, 23, 25, 84, 118, 205, 214-215, and 247.

78. E-mail correspondence on file from Dr. Wallace, dated Feb. 12, 2011.

79. Theodore Beza was an associate of the Protestant Reformer John Calvin.

80. Preface to the Revised Standard Version of the Bible. Document accessed at: www.nccusa.org/newbtu/aboutrv.html.

81. Ibid.

82. "King James Only?," op. cit., pg. 1.

83. Ibid., pg. 2.

84. Ibid.

85. Ibid.

86. Ibid., pg. 4.

87. Preface to the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, op. cit.

2. *Third Questers*.¹ This is the scholarly wing of first-century biblical studies. It is filled with researchers and writers who spend their academic career unearthing information on Second Temple culture to varying degrees. Many of them contradict one another because they run the spectrum from evangelical to ultraliberal. The names most well known within this discipline are Ben Witherington, Darrell L. Bock, Richard Bauckham, Kenneth Bailey, James D.G. Dunn, John P. Meier, N.T. Wright, Raymond Brown, Geza Vermes, Richard A. Horsley, and John Dominic Crossan.² These often overlap with those who do manuscript study and archaeological research. The Third Quest is sometimes dubbed "The Search for the Historical Jesus," but it is in fact a search for first-century Judaism.

3. *Dual Covenant Groups*. This group includes John Hagee³ and Arnold Froese. They tend to be philanthropic, social, and ecumenical. They are interested in building bridges to the State of Israel, not necessarily converts to Christ from Israel. There is no evangelism of Jews because they believe that Jews are saved through the Abrahamic Covenant alone or some nuance of the Mosaic Law and adherence to it. Somewhat aligned to Dual Covenant belief is the so-called Two House Theory. They believe that all Gentiles are the lost tribes of Israel. When Gentiles realize this and become Jews in practice then together with Jewish people they will merit God's acceptance and approval. Gentiles have an inside track simply by being descended from the northern tribes. Those called Jews today are in because of their descent from the southern tribes of Judah and ultimately Abraham. Race, not grace, prevails. Realization of relationship, not radical conversion to Christ, is the key for this group.

4. *Noahides*. Noahide or B'nai Noach means "Descendants of Noah" or "Children of Noah." This is a small cult. Its members work closely with ultraorthodox rabbis in Israel and adhere to the Dual Covenant teach-

ings as well. They say that there are seven basic laws for all Gentiles extracted from the Book of Genesis and Noah's time and that these seven laws of Noah are all that Gentiles need for salvation.⁴ Jews have the Ten Commandments.

One of the better known Noahides is the late Vendyl Jones. Jones was a self-proclaimed archaeologist who boasted of finding holy anointing oil and sacred incense from Herod's Temple. He claimed to know where the Ark of the Covenant was buried, but never managed to produce it.

Among the accredited archaeologists in Israel he was a laughing-stock.⁵ Jones and an *ad hoc* committee of other Noahides, along with some orthodox rabbis in Israel, declared themselves to be the Sanhedrin of Israel in 2006. The new Sanhedrin, however, is a self-formed group that is recognized by no one in spite of the excitement of some sensationalist prophetic teachers at its founding. Jones died Dec. 27, 2010, in Texas, and is buried in Kibbutz Migdal in Israel.

5. *The Hebrew Roots Movement*. Stephen Katz, a Jewish believer who reviewed this movement for the Jews for Jesus ministry, writes:

"The Hebraic Roots or Jewish Roots movement refers to various organizations with a common emphasis on recovering the 'original' Jewishness of Christianity. This recovery comes through studying the Bible in its Jewish context, observing the Torah, keeping the Sabbath and festivals, avoiding the 'paganism' of Christianity, affirming the existence of original Hebrew language gospels and, in some cases, denigrating the Greek text of the New Testament. Writers such as Roy Blizzard, David Bivin, Brad Young and Robert Lindsay [sic] have given much impetus to this movement."⁶

Many small groups and individuals claim this designation and the most visible and influential part of the Hebrew Roots Movement can be found in Jerusalem, Israel. This movement centers on The Jerusalem School

of Synoptic Research based in Jerusalem. It was founded by Robert Lindsey (d. 1995), David Flusser (d. 2000), Menachem Stern (d. 1989), and Shmuel Safrai (d. 2003). Flusser taught at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and his forte was Second Temple times. One of the key figures today in the Hebrew Roots Movement is David Bivin. Bivin was a student of Robert Lindsey who called Lindsey, "my pastor, my mentor, and my second father."⁷

It was Lindsey who first had the idea of a retro-version, which is translating the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke into Hebrew from Greek and then seeing those translations as superior to the Greek text. Bivin says of Lindsey, "I believe that without Robert Lindsey's approach to the first three gospels the way to Jesus' person and message remains barren."⁸ Without question this is an elitist statement whether it is intended to be or not. It is an extreme and excessive statement because millions have never even heard the name Robert Lindsey or heard of his theories or teachings. It implies that these believers are shut out from having a way to Christ and are spiritually barren.

One also has to question Lindsey's (and by extension Bivin's) view of the inspiration of Scripture because Lindsey believed in the superiority and primacy of Luke's Gospel over the Gospels written by Matthew and Mark.⁹ This position of the superiority of Luke's Gospel was not finalized by Lindsey through study alone. His biographers write:

"Around midnight he slipped into a light sleep and had a fantastic dream in which 'the synoptic problem opened up like a book.' The dream was so real that he awoke with a start. With the dream fresh in his mind he looked over his notes and there it was — the clear picture for which he had been searching! Mark was not the first writer who was partially copied by Matthew and Luke. It was Luke who wrote first, and Mark was changing Luke! Matthew, in turn, was

using Mark and knew Luke only through Mark! ... Somehow he managed to climb the steps to the second floor where Margaret [his wife] was sleeping in their bedroom. He turned on the light and shook Margaret awake while shouting, 'Luke was first! Luke was first!'"¹⁰

The Hebrew Roots Movement also has its share of subcultures and spin-offs. There are even some organizations which associate with the Jewish and Hebraic Roots movement that try to refute the doctrine of the Trinity.¹¹

The basic premise of the Hebrew Roots way of thinking is the claimed existence of original Hebrew synoptic Gospels that are superior to the Greek texts and contain Hebrew idioms for deeper insights. The word synoptic comes from a Greek word meaning "to see together" and is a term for the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke because they have materials in common with each other and can be compared or seen together easily. The Jerusalem School tends to spawn elitism because of the claim of superior insights from the Hebrew text. It is good to remember that even if one has the Hebrew text, it does not guarantee proper interpretation because the Hebrew text is not self-interpreting. In this article our intention is to focus on the Hebrew Roots Movement and especially The Jerusalem School because it is foundational to most all of the proliferating Hebrew Roots Movement. From this point on we will designate it HRM.

6. *Autonomous entities.* There are also numerous independent archaeologists and aspiring archaeologists, along with independent prophetic teachers, who use the materials in right and wrong ways to reinforce their assertions. This is where selling and sensationalism abound. This is also where the average person can get lost in the many claims unless they have a good doctrinal foundation and some awareness of first-century culture.

7. *Eclectic system.* These are teachers and authors who select and choose in varying degrees of mixtures from all the above and those who pick

things helpful and not so helpful for dissemination to others. There are bad versions of this eclecticism (mixture of ideas), but we must be clear that there can be good versions as well. It all depends on who is doing the picking and choosing and from what they are picking. There are examples of that good version in evangelical Bible schools and seminaries and as well with reputable teachers, scholars, and missions organizations.

As we consider all the above, it is easy to become entangled in a myriad of ideas and philosophies. It is, after all, wheels within wheels within wheels in a mind-boggling array.

A GUIDE AND A CASUAL PURCHASE

This writer's informal introduction to the HRM took place over three decades ago. At the time I was leading tours to Israel every year in conjunction with my pastoral ministry and for the further training of my congregation. Our guide for several of these tours was a very well trained and very knowledgeable Israeli guide named Ezra Yaholam. His mind was like an encyclopedia. He knew even obscure, out-of-the-way places that were placed on the itinerary. For example, unrenowned sites as Veri Galilee, the observatory at Abu Tor, or the location of the ancient Jerusalem Armenian Mosaic all were part of Yaholam's geographical and historical repertoire. He was so personable that this business relationship turned into a personal friendship which lasted for many years until his death and which provided me a source of in-depth information about Israel.

On one of our excursions, Yaholam happened to ask if I had ever heard of David Bivin. I had not. On every subsequent tour, Yaholam would speak highly of Bivin, applauding his scholarship and deep insights into Jewish culture and customs. It was impressive to hear such a well-trained and educated guide speak so highly of someone else. On a number of the trips, there was an attempt to work out a personal meeting and time with Bivin, but it never developed. The best I could do was purchase one of

Bivin's books. I also visited the Baptist church on Narkis Street pastored by Robert Lisle Lindsey. At this time, I was unaware of the strong connection between Bivin and Lindsey. Following the purchase of Bivin's book, I developed even more interest in HRM.

BACK TO SCHOOL

The Jerusalem School of Synoptic Research is a loose consortium of Jewish and Christian scholars focusing on the Synoptic Gospels by studying the culture, language, and the backdrop of Jesus' life. The Jerusalem School is primarily the fountainhead for the HRM. The various scholars and writers who contribute articles to the Jerusalem School are in no way in doctrinal agreement, but each provides research studies and expertise in his particular area of interest. For example, there is no way Brad Young, who is an Oral Roberts University graduate, would be in complete doctrinal agreement with David Flusser, who was an unbelieving Jew. Flusser was quite critical of the New Testament text and often corrected it. So it is not to be assumed that all the contributing authors are fully on board with the Jerusalem School and its final conclusions. Most contributors would disagree with Bivin's foundational hypothesis. Unfortunately, because there is such a large assortment of trained men doing the articles, it may give the impression of unanimity on everything. There is at least one contributor who is overtly critical of Bivin's methodology. The Jerusalem School has wheels within its own wheels.

Before we look more closely at Bivin's book and examine his claims, it is important to understand some of the basic assumptions of the HRM and the Jerusalem School. These will become clear as we survey Bivin's material.

We are grateful for any teacher or group that does good background study of Scripture and brings to light the setting of the Bible. However, with the HRM there is a lot more going on and we should be aware of these things. Stephen Katz expresses a similar opinion and concern:

“Hebraic Roots teachers call upon believers to study Hebrew and learn about Jewish culture, which most of us can appreciate. More often than not, however, they call Gentiles to a Torah-observant and/or festival observant lifestyle as a means of drawing closer to Jesus and being conformed to His image. The implication is, if you really want to please God, if you really want to be holy, here are the rules. Even though most do not believe these observances are necessary for one’s salvation, there is often an implication that this is the higher way.”¹²

ORIGINAL WHAT?

The first assumption of the HRM is that the Synoptic Gospels can only be really understood properly and fully in Hebrew even though as we stated, the Hebrew is not self-interpreting. This also becomes an impossible barrier to cross because most Christians have never studied Hebrew. The only option these believers have is to swallow everything and anything that the HRM declares because they are supposed to be the linguistic “experts.” Accordingly then, the average Christian, quite unaware of Bivin and the HRM, is really mired in ignorance and barren if they are ignorant of the Synoptic School and its interpretations.

There is even more to this distinction because Bivin claims there are original Hebrew Gospels that are far *superior* to the Greek text. The obstacle to holding to this position is that neither Bivin nor anyone else has ever seen Hebrew *originals* or even copies of Hebrew *originals*. They are merely constructed from his own imagination, of course, with Robert Lindsey’s help. Bivin is actually only over-imagining what the Gospels might be like if they were in Hebrew. It makes for good detective story fiction, but it is not based on fact.

The second assumption is that the Synoptics can only be translated and interpreted through Jewish and rabbinical sources. What is overlooked is that these rabbinical sources may postdate Jesus by centuries. While this

second assumption is only partially correct, any reading back (to the first century) from later rabbinical sources must be done cautiously and with corroborating evidence and documentation. Customs occurring in second, third, and fourth century Judaism may have not existed in the first century. One instance might be the status of rabbi. Long after the first century it became a very specific office with rigid structure, specific requirements, formal training, and public ordination. However, in Jesus’ time, the position had no such meaning or requirements. Most any teacher could be designated “rabbi” if he had a group of followers.

This wholesale imposition of later rabbinical materials as an interpretive tool or hermeneutical principal can be misleading and easily diminish the illumination of the Holy Spirit. As well, it totally ignores the great insights and massive research given to us all throughout Church history. The HRM would have us assume that every scholar of every era in Church history somehow missed it or were never quite accurate in their insights. It is an arrogant position and it creates a separatist and elitist mindset. In the end we may end up with a halachic Jesus, not a biblical Jesus. Halacha has to do with the body of Jewish customs, laws, and traditions that developed over centuries. We may end up with a fictional Jesus and not the real Jesus of Scripture. If we construct a Jesus from Jewish tradition alone, He may have no relationship to the New Testament Jesus at all. A similar mistake was made by early Christian Gnostics, of whom Epiphanius once said that they “go looking for the one who does not exist, and have lost the one who does. Or rather, they have lost themselves.”¹³

Just as one should resist a Jesus constructed from late Roman Catholic tradition, or a Mormon Jesus, or the Jesus of the Jehovah’s Witnesses, we should reject a halachic Jesus. It is a fearful thing to start retranslating Scripture and reconstructing one’s Christology around a hypothetical nonexistent Hebrew copy of the Synoptics, hoping to create an accurate picture of Jesus. Let’s remember that

first-century studies do have limits. These studies can be valuable and helpful to a point. The materials must be interpreted and applied cautiously. The mind must be Holy Spirit-illuminated and aided and equipped by careful study. Knowledge alone can simply puff up.

KNOWING JESUS

We should also recall what the Apostle Paul stated and think seriously about his meaning when he wrote, “Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer” (2 Corinthians 5:16). To this David Lowery informs us: “Mere information about Jesus cannot transform a person from self centeredness to selflessness (5:15). Only conversion could effect that, as it had done for Paul (Acts 9:1-20).”¹⁴

Paul says that he used to see the Messiah purely in human terms, we might say academically through his Jewish grid only. Now he understood Jesus in a grander way and in spiritual terms. In recognizing both the deity and humanity of Jesus, the Apostle had a fuller and more realistic picture of who Jesus was and is. Jesus’ Jewishness and humanity separated from His deity creates a false Jesus. Warren Wiersbe captures Paul’s meaning as well:

“To know Christ ‘after the flesh’ means to evaluate Him from a human point of view. But ‘the days of His flesh’ are ended (Heb. 5:7) because He has ascended to heaven and is now glorified at the Father’s right hand.”¹⁵

It is noteworthy to realize that Paul is saying that even if we saw and knew the Jewish Christ in the flesh on earth, it would pale in comparison to being in spiritual union with the resurrected Jesus through the new birth. It seems that the HRM, perhaps inadvertently, is only concerned with knowing Jesus as He was in the flesh as a Jew and makes that the all-consuming pursuit. They seem to think there is no other way to really know Him but their way.

We are not suggesting that first-century studies are not valuable, but too much of any one thing can cause a loss of balance and perspective. As Solomon reminds us: "Have you found honey? Eat only as much as you need, lest you be filled with it and vomit" (Proverbs 25:16). Stephen Katz both alerts and advises that "a growing segment of believers are demonstrating an excessive interest in their Jewish roots, which can be harmful to their spiritual health."¹⁶

In other words, obsessing on one aspect of anything for too long can stall out Christian growth.

BACK TO THE SOURCE

The computer enthusiast can "meet" Bivin by going to Jerusalem Perspective Online and watching videos of his teachings.¹⁷ He is a slender man with the appearance of a kindly grandfather. As he sits and speaks he is rather monotone and tentative in his assertion that there is a deeper approach to the study of the Scripture by knowing Jewish culture and idioms. But there is a bit more to it than that and it retracts to his belief that Robert Lindsey's theories open the way to Jesus' person and message without which we remain barren.

Some of the specific illustrations Bivin uses in his Web videos include elementary interpretive blunders. In one of his video presentations, Bivin wants us to know that in Jewish culture people *stood* to pray and he uses the story of the Pharisee and publican in Luke 18:9-14. He conveys that knowing this gives us greater insight into the Bible. However, one may not be able to quite figure out what real value there is in knowing that people stood to pray. Of course, people stood to pray, but it may be incidental to the major thrust of the passage. It seems rather obvious that *some* people in the Bible stood to pray. However, to imply that standing in prayer is a universal rule for all the people of the Bible or that standing in prayer is a superior posture is just not true. Bivin's statement implying all Jews stood to pray is true for some eras and untrue for others.

Daniel, for instance, is facing a lion's den and Scripture tells us:

"Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, *he knelt down on his knees* three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days" (Daniel 6:10, emphasis added). It appears that posture as far as praying is concerned is inconsequential. One position is not efficacious because prayer is a matter of the heart. Knowing that some stood to pray is no great revelation.

Jesus is another example that posture in prayer is arbitrary and subjective. In the Garden of Gethsemane account we are told: "And He was withdrawn from them about a stone's throw, and *He knelt down and prayed*" (Luke 22:41, emphasis added). At one point it says of Jesus, "He went a little farther and *fell on His face, and prayed*" (Matthew 26:39, emphasis added).

There is some indication in the Psalms that David's prayers took place in the night while he was lying in bed (Psalm 6:6). There is an old poem about a man who fell down a well head first. He said that the best prayer he ever prayed was while standing on his head! Why Bivin would make such a big matter out of people standing in prayer is not clear. One can pray seated in a plane, lying in a bed, kneeling in a garden, or any other way. Taking Bivin's emphasis too far would exclude a paraplegic from prayer.

A similar nuance expressed by Bivin is his emphasis on knowing that Jewish teachers "*sat* while they taught." Here again, the Bible student would inquire as to what value there is in knowing teachers sat while they taught, and if it is really true that all teachers always sat when they taught. In the Gospels, Jesus is often described as *walking* with His disciples and teaching them as they all walked. In John 8, Jesus *stood* in the temple to teach according to verses 1-20. In John 9:1 we read that Jesus passed by or walked by and as He did the whole chapter is filled with His teachings. So the Scriptures affirm that teachers sat as they taught, stood as they taught, and walked as they taught. The ac-

count on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24 has Jesus walking with the two disciples (vv. 17-28), teaching them from the Old Testament and in the end they declare: "Did not our heart burn within us while *He talked with us on the road*, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?" (v. 32, emphasis added). Then in verse 35 they convey to others what had happened "on the road." Bivin's great insight turns out to be no insight at all. It is, in fact, misleading and simplistic. Upon close examination it does not seem that the HRM is offering a superior approach to Scripture after all, but simply imprecision, speculation, and overemphasis where it does not belong. This comes across as insider information.

IT'S IN THE BOOK

Bivin's book, written with Roy Blizzard, is titled *Understanding the Difficult Words of Jesus - New Insights From a Hebraic Perspective*. It was written in 1983, reprinted in 1994, and again in 2001. After nearly three decades, it certainly has not taken the academic world by storm. Neither has a new companion volume, *New Light on the Difficult Words of Jesus: Insights from His Jewish Context*, written by Bivin.¹⁸

Bivin, who is now in his early 70s, was born in Oklahoma and settled in Israel in 1963. He studied at the Hebrew University for six years under Menachem Stern and then was tutored by Robert Lindsey. From 1970 to 1981, Bivin taught at the Jerusalem University College on Mt. Zion (then known as The American Institute of Holy Land Studies). His book was an attempt to package and express the views of Robert Lindsey and David Flusser. Lindsey wrote the Foreword to Bivin's book. Bivin still lives near Jerusalem.

In the Foreword of *Understanding the Difficult Words of Jesus*, Lindsey tells us that we are "limiting ourselves to the translation of the Greek texts, preserved so faithfully by the Church" and that the answer is "exploring more deeply into the Hebrew texts lying behind our Greek ones."¹⁹ In the 1940s Lindsey devoted himself to translating a modern Hebrew New Testament because the only ones available in Hebrew had been trans-

lated from Greek into Hebrew in the late 1800s using now-archaic Hebrew.²⁰

The basic premise that is followed in Bivin's book is that studying Greek texts alone limits us in our understanding, but finding Hebrew originals behind the Synoptics will give us greater knowledge, insight, and understanding. Because the Hebrew originals or copies of them cannot be found anywhere, a translation of the Greek into Hebrew was the best thing available.

NO ONE HAD IT RIGHT

Bivin would ask us to believe that the Christian Church has had it all wrong for 2000 years when they stated over and over in their doctrinal and creedal statements the fact of the inspiration of an original New Testament in the Greek language. The Westminster Confession (a Reformed confessional statement), for example, echoes what most creeds have expressed:

"The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old), and the New Testament in Greek (which at the time of the writing of it was most generally known to the nations), being immediately inspired by God, and by his singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentic." ²¹

The historical statements of faith in many church constitutions carry the same belief.

Had there been only Jewish original Gospels, then Hebrew speakers in the land of Israel (and a few other places) would have been the only ones who could have interpreted it. God would not limit His Word in that way. God inspired the New Testament authors to write in a language that was universal and that everyone in the ancient world understood. This enabled the New Testament to be spread rapidly. Besides, it would not have taken almost 2000 years to discover all the creeds were wrong.

God's willingness to expose the world to truth is seen in His use of

the Greek language. In commenting on Galatians 4:4 and the phrase "when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His son," Donald Campbell observes: "This 'time' was when the Roman civilization had brought peace and a road system which facilitated travel; when the Grecian civilization provided a language which was adopted as the *lingua franca* of the empire."²²

The Greek text as God's chosen instrument has been widely recognized throughout Church history. Kenneth Wuest writes:

"The universal use of the Greek language made the speedy propagation of the Gospel possible. The earth-stage was all set for the greatest event in the history of the human race, the incarnation, sacrificial death, and bodily resurrection of God the Son."²³

No one can gainsay the fact that *all* of the existing *very early* manuscripts of Matthew's Gospel available to us are written in Greek. Even if there were early Hebrew translations from Greek of Matthew's Gospel or the Synoptics, they never survived and God's providence failed. Yet Bivin, without proof, documentation, or manuscript evidence, insists:

"Our reasons for writing this book are not only to show that the original biography of Jesus was communicated in the Hebrew language, but to show that the entire New Testament can only be understood from a Hebraic perspective."²⁴

This is an overstatement and not true to the historical or biblical evidence. Equally critical is the fact that we cannot pick just a portion of the New Testament — namely the Gospels — and ignore the rest. There is no existing "original biography" of Jesus in Hebrew and so many of Paul's epistles clearly reflect Greek culture, Greek ways, Greek figures of speech, Greek illustrations, Greek idioms, and were written to Greek people in Greece and Greek speakers in Asia Minor. Everyone would acknowledge that there are Hebraic thoughts in

Acts, the Epistles, and Revelation (after all the writers were Jewish), but in spite of those scattered instances, Greek thought predominates.

EXPERIENCE FIRST

Bivin also claims that a large part of his motivation was based on his experience of going to various teachers and pastors with questions concerning the written Gospels and not receiving answers but merely being told, "the Bible will interpret itself."²⁵ While Bivin does not specify which churches or denominations he is speaking of, his experience is notoriously subjective and limited. This author's experience was quite the opposite.

Hebrew culture, customs, and idioms have been long understood by interpreters. The older works of Adam Clarke, Alfred Edersheim, George Adam Smith, David Baron, George Foot Moore, William Thompson, James Freeman, and others are still available. There has been a virtual explosion of information about Second Temple Judaism since the early 1800s because of archaeological activity.²⁶

No one would argue with Bivin when he says that the culture, religion, traditions, and customs underlying the New Testament Gospels are Hebrew. But the idea could be nuanced a bit by understanding the underlying culture clash of Jews with Rome and Greece and how some parts of the Jewish culture were tainted by the Greeks. However, what is at question is how we get to the knowledge of Hebrew roots.

Bivin also seems to be no friend to the verbal inspiration of Scripture. He believes he can question the Bible as written. In discussing Mark 15:34 he states, "These words are Aramaic, but it is doubtful that Jesus spoke them as Mark records."²⁷ It seems if something does not quite fit Bivin's theory, the fall-back is that we can doubt that the words were spoken as recorded. This makes Bivin the ultimate judge of what is in the Bible and what is not. Believers should become troubled when someone says, in effect, "Hath God said?"

That there may be Hebrew loan words in the New Testament does not prove Bivin's theory of an original Hebrew New Testament, just as Aramaic and Greek loan words in the New Testament prove nothing except that the writers drew heavily from their culture and were inspired by God to do so. John, in writing his Gospel, used the contrast of light and darkness, as did the Essenes. John was not an Essene, but he drew from the same culture.

One of Bivin's big guns fires blanks. He argues that Matthew 6:22-23 cannot be understood clearly in the Greek text and that one must have the rendering in Hebrew to understand it. Along with that is the implicit idea that its meaning was unavailable to us until Bivin's time — or we should say until Lindsey's time because Bivin fostered this idea from him. The statement of Jesus in Matthew's passage has to do with a "good eye" vs. an "evil eye." It is the contrast between having a "good eye" and a "bad eye." Bivin says that these two terms are "common Hebrew idioms"²⁸ for generosity and miserliness — and he is correct. The contrast is between being a giver or being one who is stingy. But we did not have to wait until the founding of the Jerusalem School to find this out.

Adam Clarke lived from 1762 until 1832. In his commentary on Matthew he certainly worked from the Greek text and had no trouble picking up the Jewish background of the text:

"This state of the eye is termed, ver. 23, *πονηρος evil*, i.e. *diseased* or *defective*. An *evil eye* was a phrase in use, among the ancient Jews, to denote an *envious, covetous* man or disposition; a man who repined at his neighbour's prosperity, loved his own money, and would do nothing in the way of charity for God's sake."²⁹

Thus more than a century before Lindsey and Bivin were born, commentators such as Clarke were unpacking the background and meaning of the Greek New Testament texts.

The study of the Hebrew background, culture, customs, and idioms

of the Bible has been going on for many centuries. Martin Luther not only used the commentaries of Rabbis Moses and David Kimchi, but praised them highly and recommended their use.³⁰ These Jewish commentaries circulated throughout Europe as early as the 15th century. The Christian world has not been as ignorant of Hebraic backgrounds as Bivin would have us believe.

DIGGING INTO CULTURE

The real issue is not whether we are studying a Greek text or a Hebrew text or an Aramaic text. We still have to do cultural background study, as Bivin suggests:

"It cannot be overemphasized, that the key to an understanding of the New Testament is a fluent knowledge of Hebrew and an intimate acquaintance with Jewish history, culture, and Rabbinic Literature."³¹

Martin Luther, John Calvin, Adam Clarke, and many others who studied the Greek texts of the New Testament (the only text available) illustrate this wonderfully. The point is we would not have to read a Hebrew New Testament text to study Jewish culture, background, and idioms as these are independent of the Bible as a discipline.

In the third chapter of his book, Bivin presents what he calls "Recent Linguistic Research."³² Bivin presents a few scholars from 1950 to 1982 who *speculate* on a possible Hebrew Gospel of Matthew, but offer no manuscript evidence. Bivin introduces Pinchas Lapide, an Israeli researcher and author, citing his article, "The Missing Hebrew Gospel." The title of that article alone undermines Bivin's case altogether. Not only is it missing, there is no proof it ever existed.

Other faithful Bible scholars also weigh in that there is not even a tiny bit of evidence within Matthew's Greek-written Gospel that it was a translation directly from Hebrew. According to respected theologians Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown:

"... not a trace can be discovered in this Gospel itself of its being a

translation. ... But the entire failure of all such attempts is now generally admitted, and candid advocates of a Hebrew original are quite ready to own that none such are to be found, and that but for external testimony no one would have imagined that the Greek was not the original."³³

Bivin's whole third chapter of his book does not seem to tie in with his overall theme and seems like a throw-away chapter that exists for filler. The chapter has a discussion of the Dead Sea Scrolls, which were written a century or two before Matthew and in Hebrew. It possibly makes the case for the Jews using Hebrew and not just Aramaic but does not seem germane to Bivin's argumentation whatsoever. Perhaps he is trying to argue against any, like George Lamsa, who would suggest Aramaic originals.

In the next chapter, Bivin appeals to six early Church Fathers, Papias and Irenaeus from the second century, Origen from the third century, Eusebius and Epiphanius from the fourth century, and Jerome, who died in the fifth century. Bivin offers one-to-two-line statements from these Fathers with no context. The Bible student who has done even a little study in Patristics (history of the early Church Fathers) knows that there is no unanimity among the Fathers and they often contradicted one another and even some, like Origen, swerved off into heresy. So we must consider the source and all of the early Fathers must be looked at very carefully from a biblical basis. We also count as suspect traditions, even Church traditions, because Jesus condemned tradition so strongly in Matthew 15:1-9. Any tradition must pass through the fine grid of Scripture. It must have explicit or strongly implicit biblical backing.

The statement of Papias (which was reported by Eusebius 200 years after the fact) says, "Matthew put down the words of the Lord in the Hebrew language."³⁴ This means virtually nothing because the words "Gospel" or "Gospel of Matthew" are not mentioned in Papias' statement and it

could simply mean that Matthew compiled a few pages of the more prominent sentences and sayings of Jesus. D.A. Carson says "Papias's expressions are ambiguous."³⁵

It is also of critical importance to note that in Papias' use of the term, "words" (of the Lord), comes from the Greek word *logia* which can mean different things in different contexts. Various suggestions as to what *logia* really means have a very wide latitude. Some would say it points to the Old Testament quotes in Matthew's Gospel, while others suggest that *logia* means Matthew's Semitic style and literary form because he has so many Old Testament themes. Still others say it may refer to the Gospel According to the Hebrews or that Papias was thinking of some other Semitic work. As noted, it could mean a few pages of selected statements of Jesus written in Hebrew. We do not know for sure, but there even could have been a much later extinct Hebrew translation from someone who translated Matthew's Gospel from Greek. It is of little wonder that Carson refers to Papias' statements as ambiguous.

Origen's quote in Bivin's book is of little or no help because it is a quote of Eusebius two centuries later. Origen actually said that what he knew of Matthew's Gospel he learned "by tradition."³⁶ It is just more ambiguity and lack of clarity and specifics.

The rest of Bivin's book consists of selected passages of Scripture and his interpreting them in the light of Hebrew customs and idioms. This portion of the book can be helpful.

A RIDDLE WRAPPED IN A PUZZLE

The issue becomes more complex when one realizes there is another teaching called the "Double Original" theory, which speculates that Matthew was inspired to write an original Gospel in Greek and another in Hebrew at the same time. This is an attempt to hold on to the original Greek text and the imaginary original Hebrew text. While this presumption is not held by Bivin or the Synoptic School, it does intrude into the mix.

Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, in their *Commentary*, speak to the issue:

"Moved by these considerations, some advocates of a Hebrew original have adopted the theory of a *double original*; the external testimony, they think, requiring us to believe in a Hebrew original, while internal evidence is decisive in favor of the originality of the Greek. ... But, besides that this looks too like an artificial theory, invented to solve a difficulty, it is utterly void of historical support. There is not a vestige of testimony to support it in Christian antiquity. This ought to be decisive against it. It remains, then, that our Greek Matthew is the original of that Gospel, and that no other original ever existed."³⁷

Even if we accepted Bivin's premise of a Hebrew original for Matthew's Gospel, the interpretation of Hebrew words is not self-evident. Those words in Hebrew or Greek have to be translated. Hebrew words do not translate themselves. Having a Hebrew manuscript in and of itself is of no help unless one translates the Hebrew words properly. Having a Greek manuscript and knowing Greek would be much more advantageous than having a Hebrew manuscript that could not be understood. In the end we must perform language study and use good research books and commentaries. There are many good books that help us with word meanings and etymology.

GETTING TO THE BOTTOM LINE

Bivin's book has some value. Had he written it without getting into theory and the hypothesis about Hebrew originals, it could be a helpful little paperback in regard to the background of a number of Hebrew words and verses and some of the customs and idioms of the first century. It is, however, very limited because it does nothing for the study of the rest of the New Testament.

The hypothesis of an original Hebrew Gospel of Matthew or original

Hebrew Synoptics falls under its own weight. It cannot be proven.³⁸ Remember that Robert Lindsey was Bivin's mentor and the originator of the theory that there was an original Gospel of Matthew in Hebrew. However, even Lindsey's biographers admit, "To date, copies of the actual Hebrew text that Matthew is said to have written have not been found."³⁹

Bivin continues to promote something that has not been shown to exist. And he may not be aware of the troubling fact that such a view places him in league more with unwelcome company than responsible scholarship. A case in point is that Jehovah's Witnesses also claim an original Hebrew Gospel of Matthew. In an effort to justify its use of "Jehovah" throughout its New Testament translation, the Watchtower claims Matthew used the "divine name" in the form of the Tetragrammaton (YHWH) because "There is evidence to indicate that Matthew originally wrote his Gospel in the popular Hebrew of the time and later translated it into Greek."⁴⁰

David Bivin may be sincere, but in the world of manuscript evidence and historical documentation, sincerity does not cut it. Fantasies that suggest that we have never had the right Bibles are more preposterous than educational. They just promote a "we've got it and you don't" mentality.

In the end, Bivin can advocate his original Hebrew Synoptics argument, but until he finds manuscripts, he cannot make his case. The way in which the Greek New Testament was revered and cherished by the Church in all ages makes it hard to imagine that if a Hebrew copy of the Synoptics existed, it would not have been recopied, cherished, and preserved in the same way. One would rightly expect at least some copies or portions to be passed down and be extant somewhere in the Church world. We have fragments of the Greek New Testament called "P" fragments (discovered in Alexandria, Egypt) which go back virtually to the Apostles' doorstep. God in His providence has permitted these to survive.

One of the less convincing “proofs” offered for later Greek Synoptics taken from Hebrew originals is an appeal to the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament. This is a Greek version of the Hebrew Old Testament completed approximately 200 B.C. in Alexandria, Egypt. However, there is no evidence that this set some kind of precedent for New Testament writers and the early Church. It may be a creative suggestion, but it is drawn up out of thin air. The huge difference is that the Septuagint is a different Testament (Old versus New), done in a different age (B.C. versus A.D.), and in a different place (Egypt). Most importantly, copies also can be seen and studied and its existence demonstrated. We know by empirical evidence that it exists. If anything, it shows the predominance of Greek.

In his various presentations, Bivin never reveals that some of Lindsey’s theories were born of a dream and not of a discipline. In closing, consider the counsel of Bivin as he gives the meaning of Jesus’ words, “Wisdom is justified by all her children.” Bivin’s paraphrase is, “He said simply and clearly in Hebrew idiom, ‘You can tell whether wisdom is real wisdom or stupidity by the consistency or inconsistency of its arguments. Since your arguments are so inconsistent, it is a clear indication of your stupidity.’”⁴¹ We would appeal to Bivin to heed these words and be more cautious and less dogmatic.

Endnotes:

1. The term *Third Questers* is derived from the current of three quests for the historical Jesus. The First Quest was an attempt to use historical methods apart from religious ones to construct a biography of Jesus. Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694-1768) is credited as being the father of the “Quest for the Historical Jesus.” The term was originally defined by Albert Schweitzer, who was part of the movement, as was U.S. President Thomas Jefferson. The Second Quest, as known as The New Quest, was a brief movement in the 1950s reviving the quest for a historical Jesus. The Third Quest began in the 1970s and continues as a fervent research effort into the historical Jesus — specifically the Jewishness of Jesus — principally due to better knowledge of first-century Judaism.
2. See further, Ben Witherington III, *The Jesus Quest*. Downers Grove, Ill., InterVar-

sity Press, 1997.

3. See further, G. Richard Fisher, “The Other Gospel of John Hagee - Christian Zionism and Ethnic Salvation,” *The Quarterly Journal*, January-March 1999, pp. 5-13.
4. These seven laws are the prohibitions against idolatry, murder, theft, sexual immorality, blasphemy, the eating of flesh taken from an animal while it is still alive, and the establishment of law courts.
5. See further, Randall Price, *In Search of Temple Treasures*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 1994, pp. 142-146.
6. Stephen Katz, “The Jewish Roots Movement: Flowers and Thorns,” Jews for Jesus Web site, posted March 1, 2001. Document accessed at: http://jewsforjesus.org/publications/havurah/4_1/jewishroots.
7. Kenneth Mullican and Loren Turnage, *One Foot in Heaven, The Story of Bob Lindsey of Jerusalem*. Baltimore: Publish America, 2005, Foreword.
8. David Bivin, “Eight Tributes to Robert L. Lindsey,” Jerusalem Perspective Online, posted Jan. 1, 2004. Document accessed at: www.jerusalemerspective.com/Default.aspx?tabid=27&ArticleID=1691.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *One Foot in Heaven*, op. cit., pg. 168.
11. Two examples of those within the broader HRM who deny the Trinity and the deity of Christ are Sir Anthony Buzzard and Peter Michas. Buzzard says it is false to call Jesus the Almighty God because “That title is reserved for the Father of Jesus. Jesus represents God but is distinguished from Him” (Bible Quiz Question 6 on Buzzard’s Restoration Fellowship Website, <http://focusonthekingdom.org/index.html>). Michas writes, “To say God is three ‘persons’ opens the door to misunderstanding God. God is Spirit and cannot be reduced to the concept of a person. ... The Spirit of the Holy One is the very essence of the power of God the Father and not some separate entity” (*The Rod of an Almond Tree in God’s Master Plan*, pg. 257).
12. “The Jewish Roots Movement: Flowers and Thorns,” op. cit.
13. Frank Williams, Translator, *The Pannarion of Epiphanius of Salamis - Book 1*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill, 1997, pg. 91.
14. David Lowery in John Walvoord and Roy Zuck, Editors, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament*. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1983, pg. 567.
15. Warren Wiersbe, *Be Encouraged*. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1984, pg. 65.
16. “The Jewish Roots Movement: Flowers and Thorns,” op. cit.
17. The organization’s Web page address is: www.jerusalemerspective.com.
18. David Bivin, *New Light on the Difficult Words of Jesus: Insights from His Jewish Context*. Holland, Mich.: En-Gedi Resource Center, 2005.

19. Robert Lindsey in David Bivin with Roy Blizzard, Jr., *Understanding the Difficult Words of Jesus - New Insights From a Hebraic Perspective*. Shippensburg, Penna.: Destiny Image Publishers, 2001, Foreword.
20. *One Foot in Heaven*, op. cit., pg. 79.
21. J. Gordon Melton, Editor, *American Religious Creeds*. New York: Triumph Books, 1988, Vol. 1, pg. 218.
22. Donald Campbell in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament*, op. cit., pg. 601, italics in original.
23. Kenneth Wuest, *Wuest’s Word Studies From the Greek New Testament*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1966, Vol. 1, Galatians, pg. 115.
24. *Understanding the Difficult Words of Jesus*, op. cit., pg. 4.
25. *Ibid.*, pg. 3.
26. See further, E.M. Blaiklock, “A Chronological Table of Archaeologists and Their Works” in Merrill C. Tenney, Editor, *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1976, Vol. 1, pp. 266-277.
27. *Understanding the Difficult Words of Jesus*, op. cit., pg. 10.
28. *Ibid.*, pg. 15.
29. Adam Clarke, *The New Testament of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*. New York: Abindon Press, no date, Vol. 1, pg. 90, italics in original.
30. Moses and David Kimchi were part of a famous medieval family of Judaic scholars, particularly active in Hebrew linguistics, Bible commentary, and theological controversy.
31. *Understanding the Difficult Words of Jesus*, op. cit., pg. 16, italics in original.
32. *Ibid.*, pg. 17.
33. Robert Jamieson, A.R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Practical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1973, pg. 880.
34. *Understanding the Difficult Words of Jesus*, op. cit., pg. 24.
35. D.A. Carson, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1984, Vol. 8, pg. 11.
36. David W. Bercot, Editor, *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998, pg. 318.
37. *Commentary Practical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, op. cit., pg. 880.
38. For more information, see “Hebrew Gospels of Matthew” from Wikipedia. Document accessed at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hebrew_Gospels_of_Matthew.
39. *One Foot in Heaven*, op. cit., pg. 139.
40. Anonymous, “All Scripture is Inspired of God and Beneficial.” Brooklyn, N.Y.: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1963, pg. 176.
41. *Understanding the Difficult Words of Jesus*, op. cit., pp. 59-60.



when they are only hearing their own subjective imagination and thoughts as in contemplative meditation. Worse yet, they could be conjuring up demonic entities.

If divine revelation did not close in the era of Jesus and the apostles, then Hebrews 1:1 is wrong, Revelation 22:18-19 is wrong, and there is no fixed truth. With the deluge of false teachers, false prophets, and conflicting messages, it is anyone's guess as to who is right.

Many groups teach salvation by grace. We resonate with that. But as we probe for definitions and elaboration we find out that they do not mean we are saved by grace *alone*, as indicated in Ephesians 2:8-9. What they really believe is what is called semi-pelagianism, an ancient error. It sees grace as a motivator or facilitator — a starting point. This initial enabling grace (whether given by sacrament or some other way) empowers or enlivens one to begin to live the Christian life so that ultimately we can perform enough works to be saved. So they say, one is saved by grace — sort of, but not really.

Grace is a part of the salvation, they maintain, and without it one could not get to heaven. So in a sense we are saved by grace, but not completely. It is grace plus works. In the end one could receive the grace sacramentally or in some other way, but never take advantage of it and be lost anyway. There is no assurance and 1 John 5:13 is dismissed. In this view, grace is only part of the salvation equation.

Sometimes it is not what is said, but what is not said. Insist on context because aberrational contexts sometimes negate every premise they are making. A good rule is *assume absolutely nothing* and ask for definitions. Our conversations and discussions may have to take place on a more basic, definitional level. Remember the cultist's ploy is to make you think that he is just like you.

Recall how Paul, in Acts 16, was being extolled by the demon-possessed servant girl. She even said that Paul and Silas were, "servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation" (v. 17). Paul assumed nothing and after a time cast out the demon. He would not link truth and biblical content to demonic confession, no matter how good it sounded.

We live in a "microwave" culture. We want things to happen quickly. We are in a hurry and that works against us. Patience is a virtue and longsuffering is still a fruit of the Spirit. To cut through and deal with the blight of assuming the content, remember the acrostic SAFE. We can stay "safe" in our encounters with cultists and confused people if we insist on the following.

S — *Seek additional information.* Inquire as to what a certain group believes and why. Inquire as to how the cultist believes one gets to heaven and what he believes about God and Jesus. Take some time to research the origins, history, and beliefs of various groups. This is

important because sometimes the cultist does not really know what his group actually teaches. There are excellent charts and graphs that summarize a cult's view of the big issues like God, Jesus, the Bible, salvation, and so forth.

A — *Ask for definitions.* Do not assume the cultist defines words as we do. Evangelicals have a biblical word book and try to define words in a totally biblical way, taking into account all that the Scriptures have to say on any given subject. Doctrine is cumulative and not based on one verse. Proper doctrine is based on an accumulation of Scriptures and not just one proof text.

F — *Force definitions and explanations.* Have the cultist explain in detail what he means by words and phrases. Often the definitions come out of a cult play book and not the Bible. Every cult has its talking points. This may be hard and tedious work, but it is the only way to get beyond assuming the content.

E — *Examine all their information, explanations, and definitions in light of Scripture.* If those you encounter do not want the Bible to be the total and final arbiter, it is a dead giveaway. Remind them of the authority of Jesus (Matthew 28:18). Remind them that both Peter and Paul spoke of their apostolic teaching as commands (1 Corinthians 14:37, 2 Peter 3:2). Be sure to affirm that Jesus alone saves (Acts 4:12, Ephesians 2:8-9, 1 Timothy 2:5) and share your salvation story.

Let's stop naively assuming the content and thereby assisting error and false teaching to flourish. Let's not get so hung up on togetherness that we forget that truth and good doctrine sometimes divide. Assume nothing and when in doubt, probe. This will keep you "safe" from the dangers of the assumption of content.

—GRF

NEWS UPDATES

(continued from page 3)

The story, as best as can be assembled, began in Umm el Ghanim (meaning "Mother of Goats") in the lower Galilee south of Mount Tabor. For an untold number of years Umm el Ghanim was a Bedouin encampment. However, in the 1960s the inhabitants began building a permanent village. Today there are many villa-styled homes in the small town.

Hassan Saeda, a descendant of a Bedouin clan, makes his home in Umm el Ghanim and is currently the owner of a small fleet of trucks. Saeda is at the center of what has been claimed to be the most startling discovery since the Dead Sea Scrolls: a number of codices (small booklets) made up of lead plates bound together by lead straps. Yet the narrative abounds with inconsistency and uncertainty.

One account states the codices were discovered in Jordan five years ago and then secreted into Israel. But the original news release reported their discovery in an elusive cave in Jordan by Saeda's great-grandfather a century ago. The plates, it was said, have been passed down through the family. Saeda is said to have received them from his grandfather.

Some reports place the number of codices discovered as high as 70, while other accounts place the figure at 20. There are 14 or 15 "pages" in each "book" (some say 8 or 9) which are the size of a credit card and contain cryptic sayings in Hebrew and Greek, and one report noted a Phoenician script. The codices also contain various Jewish and Christian symbols that have yet to be deciphered. A British reporter has speculated that one plate has the face of Jesus.

Last March, the online edition of the *Jewish Chronicle* divulged that Robert Feather, a metallurgist, believed that the lead codices may be Kabbalah-related and contain Jewish magic incantations. Feather, a renowned expert on ancient inscriptions, speculates that the plates have some connection with Jewish rebel Bar Kochba and the Jewish revolt against Rome approximately 132-136 A.D. The link, Feather claims, is via Shimon Bar Yochai because his writings are foundational to the Kabbalah and Shimon was connected to Bar Kochba.

Andre Lemaire, a professor and expert in ancient inscriptions, has lumped the find with "sophisticated fakes." In an Op-Ed blog by April DeConick, she said, "This is feeling more and more like popular fiction (or forgery?)." *Christianity Today* magazine also added

healthy skepticism by quoting a number of scholars including Larry Hurtado, a professor of New Testament Language, Literature, and Theology, and director of the Centre for the Study of Christian Origins at the University of Edinburgh. Hurtado observed that "dangling such discoveries in front of the media, before making them available to scholars; is becoming a tired game. I'm impatient with people who go to the press and claim they have something of enormous scholarly value and do not provide the materials for independent scholarly analysis. Controlling access to information is not how we do business in scholarship."

Another telling revelation is from Oxford University's Peter Thonemann, who identifies "one page of a codex as a crude reproduction of an inscription from an ancient tombstone that has been on display in an Amman museum for the past half century. The only possible explanation is that the text on the bronze tablet was copied directly from the inscription in the museum."

Another key player is David Elkington. Elkington, according to a biography advertising one of his books, "has been led on a revelatory trail through world mythology, linguistics and philology into geophysics, architecture, acoustics, music, neuro-physiology, theology and still further into the all-encompassing, resonant atmosphere of the planet." Elkington believes that what exists does so because of vibration and appears to be drawn by the esoteric. Elkington has a literary agent and in 2010 published a book called *The Lead Codices*. He has another book about the lead tablets in production.

—GRF

PERSONAL FREEDOM OUTREACH — STATEMENT OF BELIEF

- I. THE BIBLE AS THE DIVINELY INSPIRED, INERRANT WORD OF GOD: IT IS IN ITS ENTIRETY THE SOLE AUTHORITY FOR ALL MATTERS OF CHRISTIAN BELIEF AND PRACTICE.
- II. THE ONE TRUE GOD. IN THE ONE TRUE GOD THERE EXIST THREE PERSONS, BEING: THE FATHER, THE SON JESUS CHRIST, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT.
- III. JESUS CHRIST: HIS DEITY, HUMANITY, VIRGIN BIRTH, SINLESSNESS, DEATH AND BODILY RESURRECTION; WHO WILL PERSONALLY AND VISIBLY RETURN AGAIN TO EARTH.
- IV. THE PERSONALITY AND DEITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.
- V. THE EXISTENCE AND PERSONALITY OF SATAN, HIS TOTAL OPPOSITION TO GOD, AND HIS POWER OVER THE UNREGENERATE.
- VI. THE COMPLETE AND TOTAL DEPRAVITY OF ALL MEN WHICH MAKES THEM HOPELESSLY LOST WITHOUT THE NEW BIRTH OBTAINABLE THROUGH FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST.
- VII. THE FINAL ESTATE OF MAN: FOR THE SAVED, EVERLASTING LIFE IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD AND FOR THE UNSAVED, EVERLASTING PUNISHMENT BECAUSE OF THEIR UNBELIEF.
- VIII. THE GOSPEL BY WHICH WE ARE SAVED BEING SUMMED IN THE DEATH, BURIAL AND RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.
- IX. THE CHURCH BEING THE BODY OF CHRIST, UNITED IN THE HOLY SPIRIT, CONSISTING OF THOSE WHO HAVE RECEIVED JESUS CHRIST AS SAVIOR. A LOCAL CHURCH IS AN ORGANIZED ASSEMBLY OF BELIEVERS UNITED FOR THE PURPOSE OF CARRYING OUT THE GREAT COMMISSION OF CHRIST.
- X. THE GREAT COMMISSION OF CHRIST BEING TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO ALL MEN, BAPTIZING AND DISCIPLING THOSE WHO HAVE BELIEVED.



Books in Review

INSTRUMENTS IN THE REDEEMER'S HANDS

by Paul David Tripp

P&R Publishing, 360 pages, \$16.99

While this is not a new volume — it's almost a decade old — it is one that is often called the most valuable book for those interested in biblical counseling. If there is a complete volume on biblical counseling, this is it.

Tripp's premise is that our problems flow from our hearts. If we are to help people live to the glory of God and handle their troubles properly, we must address the heart. We must expose what is in the heart, analyze what is found in light of Scripture, and call for a biblical response.

This emphasis on the heart is critical. If we are not careful, "biblical counseling" can be reduced to behavior modification: expose a problem, find appropriate Scripture, and then call for obedience and behavior change. But true biblical counseling is much more: if the heart is not addressed, then lasting and deep change will not take place, and the one in need may be transformed into a legalist rather than the person God wants them to be.

It is a book of "whys" and "hows": why we need to build relationships with others, and how to build those relationships thereby discovering where and what change is needed. The book, however, is not just about helping others. It calls the reader to personal reflection. As Tripp tells us, "If we are going to be faithful to Christ [in personal biblical ministry], we must begin by examining our own hearts. Are there thoughts, motives, or attitudes (self-righteous, anger, bitterness, spirit of condemnation, vengeance) that would get in the way of what God intends to do? As instruments of Christ's grace, we must confess that we need that grace just as much as the people we are helping" (pg. 209).

Tripp writes well, is faithful to Scripture (with a couple of exceptions), provides much biblical insight, offers case studies, gives practical tools, and develops an overall framework for counseling those in need. The book is not only useful to biblical counselors, but also to anyone desiring to grow in Christ and help others do the same.

—GEG

10 QUESTIONS & ANSWERS ON SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISM

by Paul Carden, General Editor

Rose Publishing, 14-page pamphlet, \$3.99

One of the more prominent religious movements which, through the years, has been able to escape a strict and biblical investigation has been the Seventh-day Adventist church. Unlike Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons, Adventists have eluded a surge of resources critical of its history, beliefs, and practices. Yet like Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons, the movement is permeated with unbiblical doctrine and a suspicious heritage. That's why this laminated fanfold pamphlet by Rose Publishing is a beneficial resource.

From Adventist roots have stemmed teachers (and their sects) such as Charles Taze Russell (Jehovah's Witnesses), Herbert W. Armstrong (Worldwide Church of God), and David Koresh (Branch Davidians). While nearly all Christians offer no hesitation in labeling these men as heretical, many of these same Christians are unsure or reluctant to apply the same designation to Ellen G. White and Seventh-day Adventists.

The pamphlet covers key, more well-known facets of Adventism, such as Ellen G. White as a prophet of God, the state of the dead and a temporal hell, the "investigative judgment," Sabbath worship, and the Adventist claim of being God's unique "Remnant Church." But other, lesser-known, aspects are also examined. For example, the pamphlet says, "Because [Adventists teach] there is no human spirit other than breath or 'life force,' Adventists make abortion a matter of choice because the fetus has not yet breathed and there is therefore not a living soul. Abortions are performed in Adventist hospitals." An evaluation of *The Clear Word*, which is the Adventists' expanded paraphrase of the Bible, first published in 1994, is provided.

Additional helpful panels in the brochure include a glossary of Seventh-day Adventist terms and the "Do's" and "Don'ts" of a Christian witness to Adventists.

The publication is full-color throughout, attractive, and a quick read. More importantly, it subjects Adventism to the scrutiny that it largely has been able to avoid for 150 years.

—MKG

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