

## A VALUABLE VIEW OF A VALUABLE VERSION

by Allan A. MacRae, Ph.D.

A man who was accused of having broken all ten commandments replied that he had not. "I have never made a molten image," said he. All of us could probably say that we have never made a molten image, yet I doubt if there are many people who have not broken the second commandment which is not a command against making images. The serpent of brass in Numbers 21:8-9 was made at God's command so that everyone that was bitten by a fiery serpent when he looked upon it, would live. The second commandment is against worshipping idols, and it is very easy to fall into the sin of worshipping idols. The children of Israel made an idol of the brazen serpent and worshipped it.

God praised Hezekiah for destroying the thing He had commanded Moses to make because the people had made an idol of it. In 2 Kings 18:4 Hezekiah "removed the high places and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made; for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Nehushtan." So an idol is not necessarily a statue. An idol is not necessarily something that is only found among the "heathen." Anything we put ahead of God and His will can become an idol.

Some have made an idol out of the King James Version (KJV) of the Scripture. We Fundamentalists are often accused of being bibliolaters, Bible-worshippers. We are not. We believe that the Bible is our wonderful God-given guide. It teaches us how to worship Him and find His will. It is very important we stand by that Book as God gave it to the original writers as absolutely free

from error, so that any ideas that are properly drawn from it are true and absolutely dependable. But we do not worship the Bible.

I fear there are some who tend to worship the King James Version. In a booklet entitled, The Impregnable Rock of Holy Scriptures we are told, "Guard God's Holy Word, the Bible, for it is being undermined." That is true. I have written leaflets against modernist translations of the Bible that do away with some of its important Christian teachings, especially its teachings about Christ. But this booklet states, "We do not say that the KJV is infallible. There are changes that could be and should be profitably made. But we do say that with emphasis there are no errors found therein." An amazing statement! The KJV was made by human beings. All human beings make errors. We find errors in the KJV.

For instance, in Hebrews 11:17 the KJV says, "By faith Abraham when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son." Here is an error. Anybody who reads the book of Genesis knows that Isaac was not Abraham's "only begotten son." Before Abraham begat Isaac, Abraham begat Ishmael. Ishmael was just as much a "begotten son" of Abraham as was Isaac. Afterwards Abraham begat a number of sons of Keturah. Isaac was definitely not Abraham's "only begotten son" -- the KJV rendering of the Greek word monogenes, a word that can easily be misinterpreted to mean "only begotten" because of the similarity with the word gennao, to beget. But gennao has two nu's, and genes has only one nu. The clear proof that monogenes is not derived from gennao, is that it would make this statement in

Hebrews an absolute untruth. Even if monogenes were derived from gennaō it would make no sense in this paragraph. It is far better to derive it from the word from which we get our English word genus, a class, or type.

Criticism is sometimes made of the NIV's translation of John 3:16 which contains the wording "his one and only Son." Of course Jesus was not God's only Son. All who believe in Christ are God's sons, or children, by the new birth. They are His begotten sons. But Jesus is His one-of-a-class Son. He is unique. He is the only one of the type, or kind, just as Isaac was the only son of Abraham through whom the promise was to come. God had said to Abraham that Sarah would bear a son and through him the promised Messiah would come. Ishmael was a begotten son of Abraham, a true son, but he was not in the one unique class.

The word monogenes occurs nine times in the New Testament -- four of them refer to Christ, and in all four cases the KJV translates them "only begotten." Aside from this one time where a human being, Isaac, is referred to as "only begotten" by the KJV, the same word is used four times in the book of Luke and the KJV translates it "only" -- three times of an only son, once of an only daughter. It means the only one of its class. It may mean the only one. It does not mean only begotten. This is a definite error in the KJV, though a minor one.

Some are saying that all recent versions are bad because they are not translated from the *textus receptus*. This term is being widely used. It came from a book published in Holland in 1633.

Earlier in 1624 a Dutch publishing firm composed of two brothers named Elziver, published a nice little edition of the Greek New Testament (NT). And in 1633 they got out a second edition in which they said that in this book is the text that is now received by all and in which nothing is changed or corrupted. The term *textus receptus* or the received text was the publisher's ad, and it was a phrase that originated in 1633, twenty-two years after the KJV was published in 1611.

The KJV is not based on the *textus receptus*. This *textus receptus* published by the firm of Elziver was a rather good text of the Greek NT and became the standard text on the continent of Europe, but the standard Greek text in Great Britain and the United States was a text that had been published 82 years earlier, in 1551. In that year, in Geneva, a man named Estinne or Stephanus published a Greek text which became a standard text of the English speaking world differing in 287 places from the Greek text issued by Elziver 82 years later and which he called "the received text."

Now both of these Greek texts rest back upon a version Erasmus, the great enemy of Martin Luther, made. Erasmus was the man who did everything he could to hurt the Reformation after having published earlier writings that helped in laying the foundation for the Reformation. But when he found that he might lose part of his pension if he supported the Reformation, he began to write against it. Erasmus' edition is a basis on which the 1551 edition of Stephanus was laid and also the so-called *textus receptus* -- the Elziver edition made 22 years after the KJV.

In order to form his edition, Erasmus had to find some copies of the Greek NT in a great hurry. The reason for this was that a Spanish archbishop, a cardinal, had secured some text of the NT and had already prepared and printed an edition that was ready to be distributed, but he did not yet have the pope's approval. Two years before the Reformation, a publisher in Basel decided to get ahead of the Archbishop so he asked Erasmus, the great scholar, to come to Basel and prepare an edition of the Greek NT. Erasmus said, "Fine, give me five years to hunt for some good manuscripts. I'll study them, compare texts and prepare an edition." But the publisher said, "No, the Cardinal in Spain has got his edition already printed and is waiting on the pope's approval to distribute it. I want to get one out ahead of him. Hurry, get some manuscripts!"

So they went to a convent in Basel and found six or seven manuscripts, none of them containing the whole NT. Erasmus set to work comparing them and made a conflate text from them. In some places no one of these manuscripts had it all, so Erasmus took his Latin Bible and translated into the Greek. Thus he got out an edition in a tremendous hurry. The publisher printed it in a great hurry and dedicated it to Pope Leo X, the same pope who later condemned Luther. He sent a copy to the pope asking him for the exclusive right to publish the Greek NT for a few years.

It is fairly well authenticated, though not completely proven, that the pope gave him that right for four years, because it was not until four years later that the pope gave his Spanish archbishop the right to publish his Greek NT which had been prepared

with much more care.

Erasmus was very disgusted with having to prepare an edition so rapidly and in the second and third editions he made a few changes, but by this time he was interested in other works and he did not take time to try to get other manuscripts and prepare a better edition. Erasmus' edition was copied by others with slight changes and was eventually the foundation of the edition of Stephanus in 1551 that became the standard for England and America. Our numbered verses in the NT began with this edition of Stephanus.

Now there is nothing that is any way anti-Christian, or harmful about the textus receptus. If in one place Paul had said Jesus appeared to him, some scribe may have written Christ Jesus. Or if Paul had said Christ Jesus appeared, a scribe may have written the Lord Jesus Christ. Little things like that do not affect the sense at all. There is hardly anything in the textus receptus that affects any important idea as compared with the earlier manuscripts. If someone wants to use the Erasmus text I will not argue with him about it. But when someone says it is wrong to make a translation based upon Greek texts earlier than the ones Erasmus used, he is putting up an idol. He is taking a good thing like the serpent of brass and making an idol of it.

We find God's truth in the textus receptus. We find it in the original manuscripts of Scripture of which we have copies earlier than the textus receptus. But I believe it is a great sin to make an idol of the textus receptus just as it is a sin to make an idol of the KJV. Few would say, "If the KJV was good enough for St. Paul

it ought to be good enough for me." But it would be equally wrong to say that about the textus receptus based as it is upon manuscripts most of which came from the tenth century or later. These had some slight changes in them from the earlier manuscripts, but none that were harmful. They were the kind of changes that add an idea already found in one place to another place, or use a longer or a shorter title where its opposite is used.

On recent writer said it is terrible to refer to Jesus simply as Jesus as some of the modern versions do, because we should always call Him the Lord Jesus Christ. But the Gospel of Matthew calls Him Jesus Christ twice and Jesus maybe 200 times! He was always called Jesus in His earthly ministry. Afterwards Peter said that God has made this same Jesus both Lord and Christ. Whatever Name Scripture calls Him, the important thing is our attitude toward Him.

It is not His desire to have Christians divide over small points. Above all it is not His desire that we make idols of any human production no matter how good it may be. The KJV is a wonderful translation which has been tremendously used of God, although I believe that today we need the Bible in language that the ordinary person can better understand.