

Bible Versions

BY JACOB PRASCH

I CANNOT TELL YOU HOW MANY TIMES people have come to me with a copy of a book such as Gail Riplinger's *New Age Bible Versions*, very confused about which Bible version to read, and asking questions like:

- "Is it true that only the King James Version follows the original Greek and Hebrew texts?"
- "Is it true that all the other texts have been mutilated in some way?"
- "Do you know that New Agers say *The Christ*?"
- "Do you know there was a lesbian on the translation committee of the N.I.V.?"

Now, is there any basis for all this stuff?

Let's begin at the beginning.

During December 1996, I went into hospital for tests on my neck. I consulted one of the most highly respected neuro-radiologists in Africa — a British educated, Jewish woman who came to faith through our ministry in South Africa. Dr Hilda Podlas is a professor of neuro-radiology (she writes for medical journals and lectures on the subject). And in Britain I had a Magnetic Resonance Imaging scan on my neck.

All the neuro-surgeons and neurologists, consulting together, came to the same conclusion: *We could operate on your neck, but there is not a sufficiently high enough probability that surgery would either reduce the pain or prevent future degeneration. If there was any reasonable chance of either or both those outcomes we would recommend surgery, but as things are we cannot make that recommendation.*

I went to see the best specialists in South Africa and Britain, and all the experts agreed. No problem.

Incidentally, I had those medical tests thanks to my membership of a health insurance fund. How I came to have that health insurance is an interesting story.

When I was in Bible College, my church in London had a new heat pump installed in the basement of the building.

But it was not implemented correctly. One dark, rainy night, when I was leaving the building, I noticed boiling water pouring off the main roof onto a lower roof. I did not know what it was, but I was afraid that it might cause an electrical fire.

So I decided to investigate — not by going back inside and up the stairs to look out a window with a torch to see what it was, but by climbing up on the spike-topped cast iron railing that surrounded the old building.

The railing was wet. My foot slipped. And one of the spikes went through my ribs and into my chest, driving my pectoral muscle into my lung. I was impaled and there was no one around.

That was only the beginning of calamities. Getting off the spike was the second. And the third was that the British National Health Scheme was in such a bad way that the hospital staff asked me to "be a good Christian" and sign myself out of hospital while I was still in need of treatment. They promised that they would send visiting nurses around to repack my chest.

We had no money for private health insurance (I was a seminary student at the time) and I wanted to "be a good Christian", so I signed myself out of hospital. Then my chest became infected and I almost failed my last year of Bible College. So I said, "I can live like this, but God forbid that it should happen to my wife and children". And although it cost us a lot of money, by our standards at the time, we have had health insurance ever since.

I went into hospital last December to have the tests on my neck. But somebody goofed up. I was supposed to have a Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) scan, but they had me down for something called a cerebral angiogram.

Some clerk not trained in medical terminology goofed the thing up. Thanks to my medical training, I knew the difference between the two procedures and was able to redirect the hospital staff.

I spotted the mistake in time and everything turned out alright. But what would have happened if I did not have that medical knowledge? Anyone who didn't know what a cerebral angiogram was would have had the wrong test.

Expert knowledge versus uneducated opinion

Here we have two cases. In one case we have expert medical opinion all agreed. In the other case we have an untrained clerk arranging for someone to undergo the wrong procedure.

The debate about Bible versions is no different. There is a divide between scholarly people who can read Hebrew and Greek, who have studied theology and biblical archaeology and textual criticism all their lives, and a group of vocal individuals who do not have the scholarship background to be making the claims they do.

Gail Riplinger seems impressive. She has letters after her name — "B.A.", "M.A." and "M.F.A." from Cornell University and Harvard University. Very impressive.

What she doesn't tell you is that her degrees are in "Home Economics"! Gail Riplinger has no relevant theological or language qualifications at all.

Dentists and lawyers

Last week I visited my dentist to have a cap put on a tooth. My dentist is Maurice Green, a Jewish guy who prayed with me to receive the Lord many years ago. His son is the Vice Principal of *London Bible College* and the Chairman of *Jews for Jesus* in the U.K. Maurice is a very good dentist.

I also visited my lawyer last week. My barrister is Rex Makin, who is considered to be the best litigation attorney in the North of England. Good for Rex Makin, but he is not going to cap my teeth. Maurice Green is an excellent dentist, but I don't want him to represent me in a court of law.

“Expert” opinion?

What happens when an average person, not trained in Hebrew and Greek, reads a book like Riplinger’s *New Age Bible Versions*, a book produced by someone not qualified to write on the subject?

If you are going to pontificate on Bible versions you should have been to seminary. At the very least you should have done basic studies in theology. You should have studied Hebrew and Greek, and completed some university-level studies in Textual Criticism. You should have a better than passing acquaintance with Biblical Archaeology — you should understand how we came to have the various manuscripts that we do today.

Gail Riplinger was interviewed by Wayne House, a conservative, evangelical Christian scholar. Wayne House reports that she “repeatedly mispronounced terms used by biblical scholars”¹. After he had asked her four times, “she hesitatingly admitted that she could not read Greek”².

It is not a simple matter to reach an informed opinion regarding biblical texts and correct translations.

When I consulted the experts regarding my neck, there were three neural radiologists, two neuro-surgeons and four or five neurologists, all looking at the same MRI scans. Each of them expressed their personal opinion. They weren’t looking to make a political decision, they were looking for a right decision. They were considering a technical problem, with each bringing their own technical perspective and professional experience to bear on the question. Medicine is not an exact science. There is always a margin of discrepancy.

The same applies to Textual Criticism. It is not as easy as people make it out to be. With Gail Riplinger we have someone who doesn’t know what she is doing, causing enormous upset in the lives of untrained Christians.

Wayne House points that the only good thing about Riplinger’s book is that it “is not any longer than it is and that the foolishness of its various claims are transparent when one takes the time to study them”².

I have to agree with him. *New Age Bible Versions* is rubbish, absolute rubbish. This is not to put down the King James Version, and it is not to endorse other versions.

Personally, I do not think the New International Version (NIV) is a good translation. It is structured on a thought-by-thought basis, rather than a word-by-word basis. Whenever you take that approach to translation work, you end up with too much of the translator’s personal interpretation.

All translations carry a certain amount of interpretation. If you had a speaker in one language with three fluent speakers of that language translating into another language in which they were also fluent, the three translations would differ in many ways. There is always a subjective element in translation work.

The Greek of the New Testament (*koine*) is trying to convey Hebraic or Aramaic thoughts to a Hellenistic world. Which is not to say that you need to be a Greek or Hebrew scholar to understand the Bible. You don’t. But if you are going to make definitive pronouncements — this is the right one and that is the wrong one — you had better know what you are talking about. Some of the conclusions that Gail Riplinger has arrived at are absolutely absurd.

Acrostic algebra

There is such a thing as acrostic algebra in the Bible; see Psalm 119, for example. Many English translations insert headings — aleph, beth, gimel, dalet, etc. — above the relevant sections. And there is also such a thing as biblical numerics and numerical typology — twelve apostles, twelve tribes of Israel, one hundred and forty-four, multiples of four and seven, and so on. Certain numbers are associated with certain things.

There have been people like **Ivan Panin** — (1855-1942) a Russian who spent many years in the United States — who developed a system of numerical analysis late last century and early this century. His system is still being debated.

But Gail Riplinger teaches an absurd form of alphabetical algebra, where she subtracts the letters of carefully selected abbreviations from one another in order to end up with the letters **SIN**, which is supposed to show God’s disapproval of translations other than the King James Version.

Wayne House conducted a parallel exercise with the abbreviations for the *Cunard’s Authorized* (CA), *King James II* (KJ2), *Hayman’s Epistles* (HE), *Revised English Bible* (REB), *New International Version* (NIV), *New American Standard Bible* (NASB) and *Barclay’s New Testament* (BNT), and came up with the letters **CHRIST**. What does that prove?

In fact, if you reverse the last three letters of Gail Riplinger’s first name and add the first letter of her surname you get the letters **LIAR**. What does that prove? And if someone were to declare that God had told them to carry out this piece of alphabetical acrobatics — as Riplinger claims regarding her absurd exercise — what would that prove?

The whole thing is insane.

Riplinger “inspired”?

In a newsletter, Riplinger effectively claims divine inspiration for her own book².

“Daily, during the six years needed for this investigation, the Lord miraculously brought the needed materials and resources — much like the ravens fed Elijah. Each discovery was not the result of effort on my part, but of the direct hand of God — so much so that I hesitated to even put my name on the book. Consequently, I used G. A. Riplinger — God as author and Riplinger as secretary.”

If God wrote this book, I would like to know why He made so many mistakes. Doesn’t He know Greek and Hebrew?

Responding Responsibly

There are genuine problems with some translations that exist today. For example, *The New Inclusive Bible* is a censored, politically-correct translation that is heretical.

There is a legitimate problem, but it must be addressed in a legitimate way.

There is a New Age infiltration of the church going on today. But it must be addressed responsibly, not irresponsibly.

When real problems are publicly and irresponsibly addressed by people who cannot be taken seriously, the arguments for truth become discredited. A lot of what is said in the name of Creationism is neither theologically nor scientifically responsible. Plausible arguments are easily discredited when advanced by crazy people. Hence the battle against the teaching of secular evolution is often damaged by Creationists.

¹ House, H. Wayne 1994, *A Summary Critique: New Age Bible Versions*, in *Christian Research Journal*, Fall 1994, Christian Research Institute International.

² Ibid.

When God needed somebody to defend the Messiahship of Jesus to the Jewish Establishment, He got a Pharisee to do it. When He needed somebody to carry the Gospel to the Greco-Roman world and write the Epistles — taking Jewish thoughts and communicating them to people with a Greek world-view — He got somebody who knew how to do it.

It is unfortunate that people try to do things that they are not called or equipped to do.

Quoting people out of context

In page after page, Riplinger attacks people. She does not attack people's views or teaching, but rather she slanders them, usually by taking things they said out of the context in which they said it. And on that false or distorted basis, she tries to say they are this or that or the other.

In a court of law, the rules of jurisprudence prevent this method of argument; Riplinger's attacks would simply be thrown out. Neither would it stand up in academic theology. In a scholarly debate her methods would be torn to bits.

For example, she attacks **Edwin Palmer**, the executive secretary of the NIV committee. Riplinger accuses Palmer of denying that the Holy Spirit played a role in the conception, the "begetting", of Jesus and tries to link his views to Mormon theology³.

She probably doesn't know it, but the Greek word is *monogenes*, which includes far more than the English word "beget".

Palmer made the statement⁴ — "The Holy Spirit did not beget the Son" — in relation to the eternal begetting of the Son from the Father within the Trinity. It had nothing to do with Mary's begetting of Jesus. Riplinger quotes Palmer — out of all context — then follows with another quote from the Mormon, Brigham Young, regarding the physical conception of Jesus through Mary.

Palmer⁵ says directly, in another place in his book, that the "Holy Spirit was needed at the very start of Jesus' human life, at his incarnation. By the word incarnation we mean the act by which the second Person of the Trinity, remaining God, 'became flesh and lived for a while among us' (John 1:14)."

Riplinger has taken one statement by Palmer, out of context, in order to falsely accuse him of denying the Holy Spirit's involvement in Jesus' physical conception, when Palmer — in the same book

— has explicitly stated that the Holy Spirit *was* involved.

Wayne House⁶ comments that:

"This is careless scholarship or confused theology at best, but it may be outright deception on her part to prove her ill-founded theory about the supposed heresies of the NIV."

Riplinger's method of suggesting that Edwin Palmer is a heretic is identical to that used against Jesus. "We heard Him say, 'I will destroy this temple made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without hands.'" (Mark 14:58).

They took the things He said out of context, and out of the overall context of His teaching, and falsely accused Him. This is the method of Satan — *the accuser of the brethren* (Revelation 12:10).

I do not like the NIV, but I am not going to go around telling people that Edwin Palmer is like the Mormons, just because I disagree with him from a scholarly perspective. Our disagreement does not make the man a heretic.

New Age and 'The Christ'

Riplinger charges that the translators of the NIV use the term "the Christ" in the same way as New Age people do.

It is true that when New Agers say "the Christ", they mean "the Christ within". They are not referring to Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah, they are referring to their spiritualist concept of the Christ. It all goes with their gnostic idea of the *Cosmic Illumination of the Inner Self*.

It is true that New Age people do that. However, the Hebrew Old Testament uses the term *HaMessiach* — the Messiah (or the Christ or the Anointed One), because there were many messiahs — many 'anointed ones'. Every king, every prophet and every priest was an 'anointed one'. The use of the definite article was necessary to indicate the ultimate 'anointed one' who was to come.

Jesus is apart from and above all the other 'anointed ones', and this fact is indicated by the use of the definite article.

The *HaMessiach* of the Old Testament becomes the *ho christos* — the Christ — of the New Testament. There is no problem here, except that Gail Riplinger says there is a problem.

"Real references to Jesus as 'the Christ' are rare: however, new versions literally paint their pages with this pawn⁷".

Let's look at the facts. The phrase "the Christ" appears 19 times in the King James Version. It appears 48 times in the NIV. The Greek *ho christos* appears 59 times in the (so-called) Textus Receptus.

If you take into account all the instances of *ho christos* in its other case forms, the total number of times "the Christ" appears in the various Greek texts is:

Textus Receptus (1551) = 169

Majority-Byzantine = 166

Nestle-Aland 26th Ed. = 146

Which is to say that, if we take Riplinger at her word, the manuscript on which the King James Version is based contains more "New Age" references than the manuscripts used in the modern versions.

a) Her argument is, itself, stupid.

b) If the term "the Christ" is proof of heretical tendencies, then the King James Version is far more heretical than the translations that she attacks.

The whole thing is absurd. Gail Riplinger is a charlatan and a fraud. I don't know how much money she has made out of her book, but I know the damage she has done to many Christians.

The King James Version as the Bible of Paul and the apostles

Riplinger's basic argument is that any biblical manuscript which doesn't agree with the King James Version is an "addition" to the Word of God. But what do you do if the "addition" appears in manuscripts that pre-date the documents that the King James Version draws upon? In that case we can argue that it is the King James that contains the "additions", not the other way around.

There are many ancient biblical manuscripts. Some are better than others. We have over ten thousand significant fragments of the New Testament; the oldest of which dates from the second century.

³ Riplinger, G.A. 1993, *New Age Bible Versions*, A. V. Publications, p.344.

⁴ Palmer, Edwin H. 1974, *The Person and Ministry of the Holy Spirit*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids Michigan, p.83.

⁵ Ibid, p.65.

⁶ House, H. Wayne 1994, *A Summary Critique: New Age Bible Versions*, in *Christian Research Journal*, Fall 1994, Christian Research Institute International.

⁷ Riplinger, G.A. 1993, *New Age Bible Versions*, A. V. Publications, p.318.

By comparison, we have only 420 copies of the Conquests of Julius Caesar, which shows that God is watching over His word to perform it.

Until the late nineteenth century, most texts used by Bible translators were constructed from a compilation of manuscripts that went back to the seventh century. Some were fourth century, but most were seventh century.

Since the end of the last century we have access to far more manuscripts than previously. Riplinger urges that we ignore these and stick to the ones used in the translation of King James Version.

The Textus Receptus

The KJV translators used something known as the Textus Receptus (meaning 'the received text') for the New Testament. Riplinger attacks all the alternative manuscripts as unreliable. But the Textus Receptus comes from something known as the Majority Text, which is not a source document in its own right. The Textus Receptus draws on at least four other source manuscripts, with the dominant source being from the Byzantine text tradition.

Another text, called the Alexandrinus, draws on the same source. The Textus Receptus — in common with other texts that the King-James-Only people condemn — has the same source!

How can you say that this is the only right one, the others follow bad source texts, when they actually have a common source text? It is an absurd argument, but the average person would not know that.

Riplinger says that, under the influences of Origen at Alexandria, all the other texts were mutilated to point away from the Deity of Christ.

Origen was a heretic. I do not deny that for one second. He had crazy, gnostic ideas (ultimate reconciliation, Satan is going to be saved), he castrated himself. The guy was nuts. I am no fan of Origen.

However, Origen also wrote something called the *Hexalpha*, where he published the six Greek versions of the Bible available in his time alongside one another, so that people could compare them. What we know about his life shows that Origen was not trying to push any one version.

These people claim all the other versions were mutilated, except the (so-called) Majority Text, which came to be the Textus Receptus and what evolved from that.

It is pure conjecture. There is no proof Origen ever did what they say. On the contrary, the *Hexalpha* indicates that the exact opposite is more likely.

Appeal to immorality

Then they say "there was a lesbian on the translation committee of the NIV".

Who 'authorised' the Authorised Version? It was not God, but a homosexual paedophile king who sodomised little boys — King James I of England. Does that negate the validity of the translation? Perverse as someone's sexual orientation may be, it has nothing to do with the quality of their scholarship. If you want to proceed at that level, the first translation you need to get rid of is the King James.

Deviations

What do you do with the fact that the King James Version deviates repeatedly from both the Textus Receptus and the Hebrew Masoretic text?

What do you do when the Textus Receptus says one thing and the King James mis-translates it? Or the words do not appear in the Textus Receptus and the King James adds them? Or the words appear in the Textus Receptus and the King James leaves them out?

And what about the words found in the Textus Receptus which do not appear in any Greek text?

According to the King-James-Only people, the only correct Old Testament text is the Masoretic. But when the New Testament quotes from the Old Testament, it usually does not follow the Masoretic Text, but the Septuagint. Does that make the New Testament heretical?

Dead Sea Scrolls

In this century we have seen the hand of God in the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. The 22% of the Scrolls published so far show there has been no mutation (changing) of the Bible text over the centuries. I would have to argue that any Bible Version which pre-dates the Dead Sea Scrolls is, for scholarly purposes, obsolete. Not because they tell a different story, but because they affirm the accuracy of the texts handed down to us.

While many people have come to faith through the preaching of the King James Version, I am convinced that the KJV translators would have produced a slightly different version if they had had access to the materials available today.

There are good translations and there are bad translations. The King James is a valid Bible. The NIV, although I don't like it, is a valid Bible. The *New American Standard Bible* is a valid Bible.

The Message, the *New World Translation*, the *Inclusive Bible*, the *Couples Bible*, the *New Jerusalem Bible* are not good translations.

The Bible is the Word of God in the Word of Man. That doesn't make it any less the Word of God, but neither does that make it any less the Word of Man.

The minor discrepancies in the source texts available to us do not affect the historicity of the relevant events — that God became a man in the person of Jesus, that He taught these things, that He went to the Cross and died for our sins, that He rose from the dead, that we should live this way accordingly, that this is our future, that certain things are going to happen.

None of these facts or doctrines are affected. The Word of God is still true. God is still watching over His Word to perform it. There are no problems with our Bible.

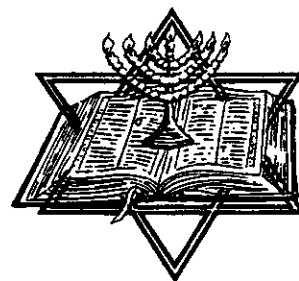
For more detailed information on the general subject of English translations of the Bible, see:

Carson, D.A. 1979, *The King James Version Debate: A Plea for Realism*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids.

Lewis, Jack P. 1981, *The English Bible: From KJV to NIV*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids.

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