

# **Responding to a New Translation of the Bible: Lessons from the Niagara Fundamentalists (1875-1900)**

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We live in a day of proliferating Bible translations. Perhaps never before have so many translations appeared, many of which purport to be alternatives for public worship and all of which seek to gain a share of the market for specific lay audiences. The very uniqueness of our situation means that we must use great care in evaluating, using, and recommending new translations. As a church historian and not an expert in translation, textual criticism, or pastoral ministry, I will not presume to give sweeping advice about this endeavor. Nevertheless, other generations have faced similar issues, and one of the great values of church history is that it allows us to learn from the struggles, errors, and solutions of earlier generations as they grappled with complexities that seem to recur in the life of the church.

My doctoral dissertation addressed the attitudes of key representatives of the Niagara Bible Conference of the late nineteenth century toward several issues in bibliology, such as the handling of Bible versions and textual criticism.<sup>1</sup> The representatives addressed in the dissertation were James H. Brookes, who served as president of Niagara for most of its history; A. J. Gordon, the foremost Baptist participant at Niagara; and A. T. Pierson, the great proponent

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<sup>1</sup> David L. Saxon, "Fundamentalist Bibliology 1870-1900: An Analysis of the Early Fundamentalist Views of Inspiration, Bible Translations, and Bible Criticism from the Writings of James H. Brookes, A. J. Gordon and A. T. Pierson" (Ph.D. dissertation, Bob Jones University, 1998). Much of the first half of this presentation is based on chapter five of this dissertation (pp. 123-169).

of missions and holiness during the nineteenth century conference movement. These men were leading voices in the most important intellectual currents that eventuated in American Fundamentalism early in the twentieth century. In fact, the continuity between these men and the later self-styled “Fundamentalists” is so strong that the dissertation refers to these men as *Niagara Fundamentalists*.

Niagara Fundamentalists did not engage in controversy over Bible versions. They ministered, however, at a time when many translations were appearing, including a major revision of the Bible authorized by the British Parliament and intended for public use. Their understanding of the doctrine of inspiration guided them in their evaluations of these contemporary translation efforts.<sup>2</sup> They were not textual experts, but they sought to measure translations against the underlying Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek text. Most of them valued the work of men who were textual experts, and in general they felt free to draw from the sound conclusions of many different critics and translators.

While the Niagara men held firmly to the King James Version as their preferred English translation in the 1870s, they were not unaware of the many private translations that had emerged over the previous fifty years. Indeed, when Brookes greeted the Revised Version in 1881, he commented that the novelty was not as great as some assumed. Earnest students of the Word, Brookes said, regularly used the translations of Young (1862), the American Bible Union (NT, 1864; revised NT, 1873; whole Bible, 1912), Alford (NT, 1869), Noyes (1869), Darby (NT, 1870; whole Bible, 1890, after his death), and Rotherham (NT, 1872; whole Bible, 1902).<sup>3</sup> While

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<sup>2</sup> See “Fundamentalist Bibliology,” pages 50-122 for a discussion of the Niagara handling of the doctrine of inspiration.

<sup>3</sup> Brookes, “The Revised Version,” *The Truth* 7 (1881): 300.

valuable as aids to Bible study, none of these translations threatened to supplant the KJV in the study, the pulpit, or the pew.<sup>4</sup>

One might wonder, then, why men like Brookes, Gordon, and Pierson would utilize these translations at all. Their attitude toward the KJV explains this tendency. It was their Bible; they loved it, they preferred it to other contemporary options, and they were occasionally dissatisfied with it. In particular, they sometimes preferred renderings of the text that differed from the KJV, and they periodically appealed to an underlying text that differed from the Received Text that underlay the KJV.<sup>5</sup> This tension between reverencing the KJV and yet regarding it as a translation that they sometimes deemed it necessary to criticize is evident in the following words from Brookes, which he wrote in 1876, the year the Niagara Bible Conference opened to the public:

The whole Bible proceeds upon the assumption, so apparent even to the casual reader, that it is the voice of God speaking through men unto men. It is obvious, therefore, that each little word as *of, the, in, from, to*, which we are so apt to overlook in human writings, is worthy of particular and devout attention. It is true that unimportant errors may have crept into this and that version or translation, but when competent scholarship conducts us to the words the Holy Ghost really used, we are to consider every one of these as having its own definite place and meaning in the book of God.<sup>6</sup>

In the 1870s the Authorized Version was clearly their Bible of choice. They possessed many of the private translations that were appearing and freely used them, but they never

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<sup>4</sup> They suffered from various defects. Young's was so literal it was virtually unreadable. Darby, likewise, wrote very awkward English. Noyes was a Unitarian and occasionally reflected his theological bias. By the time the whole Bible appeared from Rotherham and the American Bible Union, both translations suffered from comparison with the Revised Version and its American cousin, the American Standard Version.

<sup>5</sup> For abundant evidence regarding both the Niagara reverence for the KJV and the Niagara freeness in criticizing the KJV, see "Fundamentalist Bibliology," pages 123-141.

<sup>6</sup> Brookes, "How to Study the Bible," *The Truth* 2 (1876): 428.

considered replacing their “old, common version”<sup>7</sup> with any of these individual efforts. The situation changed, however, in 1881 with the appearance of the English Revised Version of the New Testament. Now evangelicals had a choice to make.

### **Initial Fundamentalist Acceptance of the Revised Version**

Parliament approved a new translation of the Scriptures in 1870 and appointed committees with strict instructions to revise the KJV by making as few alterations as possible. The committees featured an impressive array of British scholarship and labored throughout the decade on the revision effort. In the decades previous to this undertaking, researchers had discovered important manuscripts, such as the great uncials Sinaiticus and Alexandrinus, and scholars had made significant advances in the field of textual criticism. F. J. A. Hort and B. F. Westcott were members of the revision committee and were simultaneously producing a new Greek text based on the new finds in textual criticism. Their influence and the general trend of the scholarship of the day moved the committees to produce a translation that was far more radically different from the KJV than Parliament had envisioned.

Nevertheless, when the Revised New Testament appeared in 1881 it was greeted with enthusiasm on both sides of the Atlantic, experienced record sales, and seemed poised to challenge the KJV for supremacy as the standard English translation. Ultimately, its defects in English style and the beloved character of the KJV doomed the RV. While students of the

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<sup>7</sup> Brookes regularly referred to the KJV as “the old, common version.” The references appear to be affectionate rather than derogatory.

Scriptures utilized both it and its American cousin, the American Standard Version (1901), fairly extensively, neither version came close to supplanting the KJV.<sup>8</sup>

The early Fundamentalists were more receptive to the Revised Version than were evangelicals as a whole. The reason for this surprising fact is not difficult to find. For several decades, premillennialists had argued that the Authorized Version contains various mistranslations that militate against proper eschatology. When they discovered that the English revisers, very few of whom were premillennialists,<sup>9</sup> had adopted many of the changes they had proposed, they rejoiced and claimed vindication.

In September 1881, just four months after the publication of the Revised Version, Gordon published in his bimonthly periodical *Watchword* an article entitled “The New Version and Eschatology.”<sup>10</sup> He passes no general opinion on the version. His use of it, however, implies that he considers its readings to express the conclusions of current scholarship. Furthermore, the reinforcement given premillennial expositors by many of these readings gratifies Gordon.

He says that the new version “throws very distinct and powerful light” upon Christ’s personal advent, the resurrection of the body, and future rewards and punishments. For instance, Gordon believes the Postmillenarians have lost one of their favorite texts because of the revision of 2 Thessalonians 2:2. No longer do the Scriptures say that the Thessalonians mistakenly thought the day of the Lord was “at hand.” “This last phrase,” Gordon says, “can be quoted no

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<sup>8</sup> For more information on the RV, see “Fundamentalist Bibliology,” pages 142-146.

<sup>9</sup> In fact, the foremost postmillennial writer of the day, David Brown of the Scottish Free Church college in Aberdeen, was a member of the New Testament revision committee (Mombert, 457). Premillennialist Henry Alford, although he attended few sessions, exerted continuing influence on the committee through his critical Greek text.

<sup>10</sup> Gordon, “The New Version and Eschatology,” *Watchword* 3, no. 12 (Sept. 1881): 242-44.

longer by scholars, for the Revised Version reads, ‘as that the day of the Lord *is now present.*’<sup>11</sup>

Second, Gordon revels in the revised rendering of Philippians 3:21. He laments the fact that Swedenborgianism, which in Gnostic fashion rejects the body and teaches that it gives way to pure spirit at death, is running rampant in his day.<sup>12</sup> The Authorized Version, in his view, gives comfort to these deniers of resurrection by its ill-chosen phrase “our vile body.”<sup>13</sup> The revisers have done signal service to the Church by correcting this rendering. Gordon says,

Nothing in all the Revision is more welcome to us than the beautiful and balanced phrase, “*Who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of his glory.*”<sup>14</sup>

Third, Gordon asserts that the new version does not mollify or modify the many passages that teach the damnation of the lost. He chooses an interesting illustration of this fact. Mark 3:29 in the Revised Version teaches that the one who blasphemes the Spirit is in danger of “an eternal sin.” Gordon believes that this rendering makes the sense of doom even stronger than the KJV’s “eternal damnation.” The sin itself issues in “endless and irrevocable consequences” and removes all hope from the sinner.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 243 (italics in the original).

<sup>12</sup> Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772) was a Swedish mystic and theologian whose writings exerted influence in the late nineteenth century in the direction of spiritism and a dualism between body and spirit. The effects of his theology extended well beyond the small New Jerusalem Church founded by his followers. See E. G. Rohr, “Swedenborg, Emanuel,” *Who’s Who in Christian History*, ed. J. D. Douglas, 650-51.

<sup>13</sup> “The New Version and Eschatology,” 243. Gordon relates the following story: “When Archbishop Whately lay on his death-bed, his chaplain was reading to him, from the common version, the passage in which the words occur, ‘Who shall change our vile body’ (Phil. iii. 21). ‘Read it in the original,’ said the dying Archbishop. The chaplain read it in the Greek, rendering the words, ‘Who shall change the body of our humiliation.’ ‘Ah, that is it!’ said Dr. Whately. ‘Nothing that God made is *vile*’” (italics in the original).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 243.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 244. The Majority Text reads “judgment” or “damnation,” but the witnesses for “sin” are very strong. The critical text adopts the latter rendering and assigns it a probability of *B* (which means, quite likely).

Brookes, too, responded generally favorably to the RV shortly after its arrival. He published four articles in his periodical *The Truth* reviewing the work within six months of its publication.<sup>16</sup> In the first of these articles, rejoicing that so many people were buying the new translation, he praises the translation committees as dedicated servants of Christ<sup>17</sup> and expresses his thankfulness for the product of their labors. In the next two articles, Brookes lists and discusses over fifty passages for which he believes the RV rendering to be an improvement over that found in the KJV.<sup>18</sup>

His fourth article shows that Brookes was not uncritically accepting the revisers' work. First, he asserts that several passages already obscure in the KJV remain difficult in the new version. Why did the revisers not use Alford's fine rendering of James 4:5 instead of making it as confusing as it was in the old version, he asks. At 2 Timothy 2:26, they could have used the rendering of Ellicott, who was after all a member of the committee, instead of the murky translation that appears.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, Fausset's rendering would have been better yet. The revisers have perpetuated "the blunder and error of the old" by retaining *to bring us* in Galatians 3:24. And while they have often improved the sense by adding the definite article, they

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<sup>16</sup> "The Revised Version," *The Truth* 7 (1881): 297-300; "Changes in the Revised Version," *The Truth* 7 (1881): 301-4; "Improved Readings," *The Truth* 7 (1881): 345-48; "Unimproved Readings," *The Truth* 7 (1881): 349-52.

<sup>17</sup> He praised them as "highly honored for their learning, their piety, and their humility" ("The Revised Version," *The Truth* 7 (1881): 299.

<sup>18</sup> Matthew 6:1, 22, 25; 9:13, 16-17; 12:43; 18:6, 24; 25:46; 26:28; Mark 3:29; 9:42; Luke 6:40; 11:41; Luke 19:23; John 3:18, 34; 5:24, 29; John 7:17 (Brookes suggests a still further improvement upon this verse, and several modern versions adopt his suggestion); 10:16, 28; 13:10; 15:3, 16; 16:8; 17:21. Romans 5:11; 6:6, 17; 8:19, 26; 2 Corinthians 5:14; Galatians 2:20; 5:17; 6:14, 17; Ephesians 2:5; 6:12; Philippians 1:8; 3:3, 20; 4:7; Colossians 1:12, 13; 3:3; 1 Thessalonians 4:15; 2 Thessalonians 2:2, 8; 2 Timothy 4:1; Titus 2:14; Hebrews 1:6; 1 John 3:4; 4:17.

<sup>19</sup> "It will require a long time for a simple man to get at the meaning of such a translation as this" ("Unimproved Readings," 351).

inexplicably failed to do so at Romans 15:13.<sup>20</sup> Notice that in each of these changes, Brookes approves the notion of revision but does not like the way it was carried out.

He has more serious objections to bring against the revision, however. More than anything else, omissions disturb Brookes. If the revisers are going to omit passages like John 5:4, they had better give their reasons in full in a marginal note. Good men have regarded these passages as Scripture for hundreds of years, he avers, and evangelicals will not abandon them on the mere authority of the revision committee.<sup>21</sup> Another “exceedingly objectionable” element occurs in a marginal note at Romans 9:5. The revisers give three alternative renderings that would remove the passage’s testimony to the deity of Christ. Brookes considers this note a capitulation to Unitarians, although it is not yet evident that Brookes was aware of the presence of a Unitarian on the revision committee.<sup>22</sup> Brookes still considers the Revised Version a valuable reference work, but he repeats his judgment that the new translation will never supersede the King James Version.<sup>23</sup> His overall attitude towards this type of translation work best appears in an article on improved renderings in the RV. Brookes says,

As a commentary [the Revised Version] will be exceedingly helpful to every diligent student of God’s word, and it may lead to the publication of a Bible with wide margin, containing alternative readings, or new translations, when a competent committee shall deem these absolutely necessary in order to express the true sense of the original. It may be urged that any ordinarily intelligent Pastor or Sunday-school teacher can make such

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 351-52.

<sup>21</sup> “It is respectfully suggested that since *many* ancient authorities contain these words [John 5:4], the Revisers had no right to reject them without laying before their brethren throughout the whole church the grounds upon which a part of what has been regarded as Scripture for nearly three hundred years is omitted” (ibid., 349). Actually, the textual evidence for omitting verse four is overwhelming. The editors of the UBS third edition Greek New Testament express the highest possible certainty that the verse is not genuine.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 350. One Unitarian, G. Vance Smith, served on the committees.

<sup>23</sup> “Improved Readings,” 345.

necessary corrections, with the numerous helps to Bible study now at every one's hand; but certainly it would be better still if all could read them for themselves.<sup>24</sup>

The consideration that various readings and renderings of the Scriptures might confuse laymen and weaken the authority of Scripture evidently did not unsettle Brookes. He considered it helpful and wholesome for his people to have as much information as possible about the original text of the Scriptures.

The summit of this type of analysis appeared in the pages of *The Truth* in 1883 from the pen of Nathaniel West. West (1826-1906) held Presbyterian pastorates in Cincinnati, Brooklyn, Detroit, and Louisville and taught from 1869-75 at Danville Theological Seminary in Kentucky.<sup>25</sup> He spoke almost every year at Niagara and contributed many articles to both Brookes's and Gordon's periodicals. He held the respect of the other early Fundamentalists as an incisive thinker and a strong defender of premillennialism.

In a contribution to *The Truth* entitled "The Revised Version and Pre-Millennialism," West discusses six key passages in which the new renderings substantiate premillennial interpretations. He analyzes Acts 3:19-21, Hebrews 1:6, and Revelation 5:9-10, 7:14, 10:7, and 12:10.<sup>26</sup> In the RV rendering of the first of these passages, West finds the synchronization of the conversion of Israel with the second advent "distinctly" revealed. The Revision brings out the causal relationship between the repentance of Israel and the coming of Christ that the Authorized

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism*, 142. Sandeen says, "West, Moorehead, and W. J. Erdman held the reputation for possessing the best knowledge of theology and the Bible among all the ministers who taught at Niagara." This statement is essentially true; however, none exceeded Brookes in knowledge of the Bible, and Gordon was the equal of these men in theological acumen.

<sup>26</sup> West, "The Revised Version and Pre-Millennialism," *The Truth* 9 (1883): 223-29.

rendering obscures.<sup>27</sup> In Hebrews 1:6 West prefers the RV's positioning of the word *again*. By saying that God *again* sends the Firstborn into the world, the writer of Hebrews (whom West identifies as the Apostle Paul) shifts attention from the first advent to the second for the balance of the chapter.<sup>28</sup> West points out, however, that the revisers have not done perfect work. The verb in verse six is an aorist subjunctive; translators should render it with a future or a future perfect but not with a present as in the RV. "Nevertheless," West says, "the revision shows a great gain, and puts the text in its true relation."<sup>29</sup>

The key dispensational distinction between Israel and the Church fuels West's enthusiasm for the RV rendering of Revelation 5:9-10. The revisers rightly removed the first person reference in the verses and supplied the word *men* in verse nine to agree with the pronoun *them* in verse ten. Thus, the Revelation distinguishes the Church, which is the kingdom and priests in heaven, from Israel, which is suffering through the Great Tribulation.<sup>30</sup> The other three

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 223.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 223-24. Modern versions divide over where to place the word *again*. For example, the NASB renders the verse "And when He again brings the first-born into the world"; the NIV reads, "And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world," which agrees with the King James Version.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 224. Modern grammarians scarcely agree with West's judgment. They uniformly translate the verb as a present tense. Rienecker suggests that the word is a Hebraism (Fritz Rienecker, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, ed. Cleon Rogers [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976], 665).

<sup>30</sup> West obviously taught the pretribulation rapture of the Church in 1883. In the late 1880s and early 1890s, he became the foremost Niagara proponent of posttribulationism. Sandeen relates the story that the Canadian Robert Cameron challenged West to study the issue after the 1884 Niagara Conference. Agreeing to do so, West converted to the posttribulation view and became a virtual evangelist for the doctrine. By the mid-1890s, he had won over the secretary of the conference W. J. Erdman, James Stifler, William Moorehead, and Henry Frost. Gordon and Brookes attempted to maintain peace and unity in the movement, but they both remained pretribulationists. After their deaths in 1895 and 1897, the ensuing controversy split the Niagara Fundamentalists and signaled the demise of the conference (Sandeen, 210-11; see also Beale, 28-29).

passages in Revelation likewise contain relatively small changes that bear significance from the dispensational standpoint. Indeed, West finds references to Israel everywhere in these passages.<sup>31</sup>

West concludes his discussion with a ringing affirmation that indicates precisely what the Niagara Fundamentalists initially thought of the Revised Version. He exclaims,

Robertson Smith may mock and ridicule, and Canon Farrar may præterize and pervert, and post-millennarians may apply all to the Church of the present historical period, but it is a fact now in history that the very best parts of the *Revised New Testament* are the result of pre-millennarian criticism and scholarship, which the revisers themselves have been forced to adopt. This is no small victory.<sup>32</sup>

This is no small exaggeration, but it certainly indicates the enthusiastic reception the early Fundamentalists accorded the new version.

Not surprisingly, therefore, the early Fundamentalists utilized the Revised Version extensively in the 1880s and early 1890s. Brookes sprinkled citations from the RV throughout his articles in *The Truth* as well as in his many books, Gordon occasionally used the RV in *Watchword* and turned to it often in his theological books, Pierson was comfortable with the RV and turned to it at times, and many other speakers at the Niagara conferences used the RV freely from the pulpit. The Revised Version never threatened to supplant the KJV in the movement, but the two coexisted peacefully for over a decade.

Brookes turned to the RV whenever he needed any of the passages in which he believed the revisers had improved upon the KJV. The discussion above considers some of those

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<sup>31</sup> West, 224-29.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 229. West concludes this extraordinary paragraph by comparing the eschatological darkness reigning in the nineteenth century with the soteriological darkness of the ten centuries prior to the Reformation. He was very zealous for premillennial truth, and he considered the RV a new and valuable weapon in his arsenal.

passages. Sometimes, though, he quotes from the RV for no important reason. For instance, when he quotes 2 Thessalonians 2:8 from the RV, he apparently prefers the RV's "lawless one" to the AV's "that Wicked."<sup>33</sup> Brookes entitles an 1886 article "Kept for Jesus Christ," a phrase he found in the RV's rendering of Jude 1. The KJV says that saints are "preserved in Jesus Christ"; Brookes comments, "There is practically little difference between the two renderings, but it is comforting to think that we are kept for Jesus Christ."<sup>34</sup> Again, in Matthew 6:1 Brookes finds better preaching material in the RV's "righteousness" than in the AV's "alms."<sup>35</sup>

These citations, in which only minor factors come into play, indicate two things about Brookes and the Revised Version. First, he was equally comfortable using either the RV or the AV. He did not need a major theological issue, such as premillennialism, to drive him to the RV. He would use it if one of its prepositions suited him better than the word in the KJV. Second, in order to turn effortlessly to the RV when such occasions arose, he had to know the version very well. About a year prior to his death, Brookes said that he had twice thoroughly compared the Revised Version with the KJV.<sup>36</sup> He does not state when he did these comparisons, but throughout the 1880s he was sufficiently familiar with the work to intermingle quotations from it with quotations from the AV in both his writings and sermons.

Gordon used the RV in *Watchword* much less than Brookes in *The Truth*. Contributors to Gordon's paper freely used the version, but Gordon rarely did so. An exception is his 1885 article on 1 Peter 2:12, in which he used the RV rendering for the title of the article and based his

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<sup>33</sup> Brookes, "Warning Voices," *The Truth* 8 (1882): 357.

<sup>34</sup> Brookes, "Kept for Jesus Christ," *The Truth* 12 (1886): 5.

<sup>35</sup> Brookes, "Piety without Display," *The Truth* 13 (1887): 415. Incidentally, this example comes from a series of articles that Brookes intended for use in churches as Sunday school lessons.

<sup>36</sup> Brookes, "The Revised Version," *The Truth* 22 (1896): 89.

exposition on that version. Oddly enough, the only significant difference between the RV and AV renderings is that the AV uses *honest* and the RV uses *seemly* to describe the Christian's proper behavior.<sup>37</sup>

In his theological books, however, Gordon turned to the RV frequently. An excellent example is his great book *The Ministry of the Spirit*.<sup>38</sup> The work devotes one chapter to each of ten aspects of the Spirit's work and is a total of two hundred twelve pages in length. In this work, Gordon quotes approximately two hundred ninety verses of Scripture. Fifteen percent of these verses—forty-four passages—come from the Revised Version. Gordon quotes nearly a dozen passages from both versions. For example, John 16:13 comes from the AV four times and from the RV twice. The revision yields all of his citations from Philippians, Titus, and 2 Peter. The Boston pastor was clearly at ease in both versions and used first one and then the other for no obvious reason.

Therefore, beginning in the 1880s, early Fundamentalists could choose between two versions of the Bible. They did not feel threatened by this choice. They availed themselves of the new version whenever it confirmed their study of the Scriptures or improved upon what they deemed unfortunate features of the old version. In particular, they gloried in the fact that the new version confirmed in myriad instances the budding premillennial scholarship. They rarely address the style of the RV that the almost unanimous testimony of their own day condemned.

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<sup>37</sup> Gordon, "'Having Your Conversation Seemly Among the Gentiles' (I Pet. ii.12, R.V.)," *Watchword* 7, no. 6 (Aug. 1885): 118. The Greek word translated "seemly" is *kalein*, which basically means "good." The RV rendering captures this meaning better than the AV's *honest*, but Peter's thought is simply that Christians should have good behavior or a praiseworthy manner of living.

<sup>38</sup> Gordon, *The Ministry of the Spirit* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1894).

Their concern was for accuracy: Which version best expresses the mind of the Spirit? Often, they believed that the RV did so.

### **Eventual Fundamentalist Concerns about the Revised Version**

They did not adopt the Revised Version as the Bible of the movement, however.<sup>39</sup> By the middle of the 1890s, they were discovering various problems with the RV and had begun to turn away from it as an option for public use. The principal source of their discontent was the mistranslation of a single key passage and the fact that higher critics increasingly began to use that mistranslation. The final section of this chapter will demonstrate the growing disaffection of the early Fundamentalists for the Revised Version because of its handling of 2 Timothy 3:16.

Paul's admonition to his adjutant Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 is the strongest text in the New Testament on the doctrine of inspiration. It is, of course, the only passage in which the word *inspiration* occurs. The debate over inspiration often turns on the interpretation of this key passage. The Authorized Version renders these verses thus:

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<sup>39</sup> Interestingly, Scofield says that he settled on the AV for his Reference Bible only after careful thought. His full statement from the introduction to his great work is as follows: "After mature reflection it was determined to use the Authorized Version. None of the many Revisions have commended themselves to the people at large. The Revised Version, which has now been before the public for twenty-seven years, gives no indication of becoming in any general sense the people's Bible of the English-speaking world. The discovery of the Sinaitic MS. and the labours in the field of textual criticism of such scholars as Griesbach, Lachmann, Tischendorf, Tregelles, Winer, Alford, and Westcott and Hort, have cleared the Greek *textus receptus* of minor inaccuracies, while confirming in a remarkable degree the general accuracy of the Authorized Version of that text. Such emendations of the text as scholarship demands have been placed in the margins of this edition, which therefore combines the dignity, the high religious value, the tender associations of the past, the literary beauty and remarkable general accuracy of the Authorized Version, with the results of the best textual scholarship" (Scofield, *Reference Bible*, iii-iv).

All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.

The revisers, working from the same Greek text, rendered the verses in the following way:

Every scripture inspired of God *is* also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction for instruction which is in righteousness, That the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work.

The Greek for the first clause of this verse reads as follows: *Pasa graphe theopneustos kai ophelimos*, which is literally “Every [or all] writings inspired and profitable.”

Conservative scholarship since at least the time of Warfield has rejected the latter rendering and embraced the former. This article will not address the textual arguments, but I believe the case for the former translation is extremely strong.<sup>40</sup>

The early Fundamentalists gradually came to agree that the RV rendering of this crucial passage was misleading and dangerous, but this development took time. The advance of higher criticism in the 1880s and 1890s prompted the Niagara men to scrutinize this passage closely, and the abuse of this passage by the higher critics drove them into an ever stronger repudiation of the RV rendering as inaccurate and misleading. They did not initially, however, see the danger in the RV translation. Because of their enthusiasm for the perceived strengthening of the premillennial case in the new work, they accepted the revisers’ justifications of their rendering of 2 Timothy 3:16.

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<sup>40</sup> For an excellent presentation of the argument, see Paul D. Feinberg, “The Meaning of Inerrancy,” *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman L. Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), 277-83.

Brookes did not include this key passage in his list of unimproved readings in the RV. In fact, the passage receives no notice in the four articles Brookes penned in 1881 to evaluate the RV. When he took up the pen to discuss the extent of inspiration in 1882, Brookes does allude to the alternate rendering of the RV. He quotes the first clause of 2 Timothy 3:16 from the AV and then immediately gives the RV rendering. He asserts that the latter rendering “only makes the affirmation the stronger” because the phrase “inspired Scripture” encompasses the entire Old Testament that Paul had just mentioned in verse 15.<sup>41</sup>

By 1886 Brookes had fine-tuned this judgment somewhat. He devoted an article entitled “Verbal Inspiration” to the exposition of 2 Timothy 3:16,17. In this article he repeats that “it makes no difference” which reading one adopts. Both assert that all Scripture is God-breathed. Furthermore, the chairman of the revision committee, as well as Gausson, has argued that the RV rendering strengthens the case for inspiration. However, Brookes says, “the best scholarship outside of the revision committee” disagrees. By choosing this rendering, the revisers have given some credence to the “rumor” that the committee included liberals and sometimes bowed to their wishes. The revisers have produced a mere tautology, since “even a fool knows that every scripture inspired of God is also profitable.” They also showed no consistency in their renderings. If they had used the same plan in their translation of Hebrews 4:13, one would read that “all things that are naked are also open to the eyes of God.”<sup>42</sup> Obviously, Brookes has begun to generate arguments to oppose the RV rendering, even while acknowledging that the revisers meant well and that an orthodox construction can be put on the words.

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<sup>41</sup> Brookes, “Extent of Inspiration,” *The Truth* 8 (1882): 347.

<sup>42</sup> Brookes, “Verbal Inspiration,” *The Truth* 12 (1886): 533-34.

Brookes briefly addresses 2 Timothy 3:16 in an 1889 article entitled “Inspiration.” He here calls the RV rendering “weak” but again cites the “learned chairman” of the Revision Committee (the chairman was John Ellicott) and agrees that either rendering supports the true doctrine of inspiration.<sup>43</sup>

By 1891 the wind had fully changed. Gordon published in *Watchword* two articles by his friend Nathaniel West—the same man that had most roundly praised the RV eight years before. West attacked the RV rendering of 2 Timothy 3:16 with a vehemence that would have made John Burgon proud.<sup>44</sup>

In his first article, West says that the “best scholars on earth” riddled the RV translation of this verse with “ten thousand bullets” when it first appeared. Nevertheless, evangelicals in West’s day need to take another look at the passage, because the higher critics are beginning to wrest this verse in the cause of infidelity. As Brookes had pointed out, the RV translation is a “bald tautology” that “must have made young Timothy stare” if Paul really said it. The revisers mistranslated this text in order to “*remove the barrier* that stopped the wild conclusions and assumptions of the Higher Critics.”<sup>45</sup> The fact that two-thirds of the revision committee adopted this translation does not change the Greek language. Furthermore, by putting the old translation in the margin, the revisers have committed suicide. Two translations that are theologically mutually exclusive cannot be alternatives to one another.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Brookes, “Inspiration,” *The Truth* 15 (1889): 533-34.

<sup>44</sup> Burgon, the British scholar who made a career of criticizing the Revised Version and especially the Greek text underlying the RV, had already expressed his mind fully on this subject in *Revision Revised*.

<sup>45</sup> Nathaniel West, “The Inspiration of the Bible: Revised Version,” *Watchword* 13, no. 10 (Oct. 1891): 258 (italics in the original).

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 256-58.

In the sequel that West submitted a month later, he says the RV rendering was an “enormous . . . concession” to the higher critics. They seized this rendering and adopted as their working rule that anything in Scripture that is unprofitable, such as Jonah’s whale or Samson’s foxtails, need not be inspired. Thus, the critics have evaded the authority of Scripture through this cunning and subtle translation. West argues,

The Bible, as such, is stripped of its supreme and sole authority over both reason and the church, and the man of God is left without a standard that is self-interpreting, imperial and conclusive on his conscience. Outside of man there is nothing absolute. The appeal to Scripture is disappointed.<sup>47</sup>

Again, the revisers should have followed their own practice at 1 Timothy 4:4 and Hebrews 4:13. Both of these passages have the same construction but become absurd and untrue if rendered as the RV committee translated 2 Timothy 3:16. Furthermore, the separation of two adjectives closely bound by *kai* has no parallel in “any classic author” or anywhere else in the New Testament. Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Chrysostom, Theodoret, Basil, and Cyril all give the translation found in the AV.<sup>48</sup> In fact, Bishop Middleton challenged the world of scholars to find one instance in the whole Greek language where this construction occurs and the RV rendering is appropriate. Tregelles refuted the one instance proposed. Finally, the committee abandoned its own rules of procedure and made a change that is manifestly not a *necessary* one. Acknowledging this fact, several of the members, such as Bishops Moberly and Wordsworth and Archbishop Trench, distanced themselves from the reading. “It was,” concludes

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<sup>47</sup> Nathaniel West, “The Inspiration of the Bible: Revised Version,” *Watchword* 13, no. 11 (Nov. 1891): 288.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 289. West gives the patristic citations for the first four of these. He adds, “When Greek fathers unite to translate their own language for us, modesty would require us to sit at their feet.”

West, “the glory of great scholars like Burgon, Scrivener, Tregelles and others . . . to smite the false rendering and assert the true.”<sup>49</sup> The translation of the Geneva Bible and the KJV (West pairs these translations at several points in the articles) will endure as the only correct rendering.<sup>50</sup>

West’s articles became the primary source for other evaluations of the RV by Niagara Fundamentalists. When Brookes next addresses the subject in 1893, he calls the RV rendering “feeble and foolish” and a “sad compromise with error.” He gives quotations from Burgon and Scrivener exactly as they had appeared in the articles by West. He also cites Dr. Bullinger, who said, “This is not English, to say nothing of the Greek.”<sup>51</sup>

The culmination of Brookes’s thinking on the RV translation of 2 Timothy 3:16 comes in 1895. In one of his books, *God Spake All These Words*, Brookes says that “foolish and unstable souls” have wrested the RV rendering to their own destruction. Therefore, although the committee chairman defends the view, many sound scholars attack it. He lists the American Bible Union, Young, Rotherham, Darby, Tregelles, Noyes, Fausset, Bullinger, and several others. Brookes gives a lengthy quotation from Bullinger’s *The Critical Lexicon and Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament* against the rendering. He then says that there are eight other similar structures in the New Testament, and that only at 2 Timothy 3:16 do the revisers choose this rendering.<sup>52</sup> In an 1895 article entitled “Revised Version of 2 Tim. iii.16”

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<sup>49</sup> West says that Burgon called the rendering “the most astonishing as well as calamitous literary blunder of the age,” a quotation from *Revision Revised* that actually refers to the entire RV (see John William Burgon, *Revision Revised* [Paradise, PA: Conservative Classics, n.d.], xi, reprint of 1883 edition). He also quotes Scrivener, who called it “a blunder such as makes itself hopelessly condemned” (290).

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 288-90.

<sup>51</sup> Brookes, “The Spirit and the Word,” *The Truth* 19 (1893): 196.

<sup>52</sup> Brookes, *God Spake All These Words*, 127-28.

in *The Truth*, Brookes reproduces the section from his book and calls the RV rendering “disastrous” and “wretched.” He finally, too, arrives at the following conclusion about the cause of the new translation:

That there were sincere Christians on the Revision Committee is certain, but the presence of one, whose creed openly denies the divinity of our Lord, hindered all real fellowship, and, above all, hindered the blessing of God on their work. The influence of this man, and of others who sympathized more or less with him in his erroneous views of Scripture, can be traced, especially in the marginal readings, all the way through the New Testament.<sup>53</sup>

As a result of the mistranslation of 2 Timothy 3:16 and the presence of a Unitarian on the revision committee, Brookes had finally lost all confidence in the new version.

Gordon, while never adopting or approving the RV as strongly as Brookes, likewise never condemned it as roundly as his Presbyterian friend. He did print the powerful articles by West, however, and in 1894 he briefly expresses his view of 2 Timothy 3:16 in his book *The Ministry of the Spirit*. After citing the passage, he notes in a footnote that the RV has an alternative rendering. He rejects it and refers the reader to a book by S. P. Tregelles. Gordon considers Tregelles’s arguments against the modern rendering powerful and conclusive.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Brookes, “Revised Version of 2 Tim. iii.16,” *The Truth* 21 (1895): 192. Brookes does not justify or elaborate his statement that one can trace the Unitarian influence through the entire New Testament. Earlier in the article, he also calls the blunder at 2 Timothy 3:16 only one of the “many false renderings” of the revisers. He, however, lists none of these additional problems.

<sup>54</sup> Gordon, *The Ministry of the Spirit* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1894), 169. Tregelles, the eminent Plymouth Brethren textual critic and theologian, addresses the alternative rendering of 2 Timothy 3:16 in a lengthy footnote in his commentary on Daniel. He points out that *graphe* is a technical term that refers to Scripture; that the RV translation leaves the implication that some Scripture might not be inspired; that the new rendering causes Paul to utter an empty tautology; that Hebrews 4:13 and 1 Timothy 4:4 are exactly parallel passages that one must render as in the AV; that while later editions of the Vulgate support the RV rendering, “the oldest and best copies” read exactly as in the Greek. Furthermore, he says that he advanced these exact same arguments against the translation in 1839 (S. P. Tregelles, *Remarks on the Prophetic Visions in the Book of Daniel with Notes on Prophetic*

In conclusion, the early Fundamentalists came to have significant concerns about the Revised Version despite its many excellencies because of a major flaw: the mistranslation of 2 Timothy 3:16. Brookes gradually advanced from considering it a harmless alternative to considering it “weak” and “feeble,” and he finally denounced it as “disastrous” and “wretched.” As important as eschatology was to the early Fundamentalists—and some say it was *the* hallmark of the movement—they would not accept the substantiation of premillennialism afforded them by the new version at the expense of their even more cherished doctrine of plenary, verbal inspiration. The real priorities of the movement emerge in this decade-and-a-half process of discernment. Brookes gave his final evaluation of the Revised Version in an 1895 article entitled “Story of the English Bible”:

In 1870 a movement was inaugurated to bring out a Revised Version. A committee, consisting of at least fifty of the most accomplished scholars of Great Britain, and of at least half that number of American scholars began the work, and after years, no doubt, of conscientious and painstaking labor, it was completed. The immense demand for the new Bible, just following its publication, seemed to indicate that it would take the place of the Authorized Version. . . . But it speaks well for the spiritual instincts and sound sense of common Christians, that when it was carefully examined, they agreed to make it a *companion* to the old Version, but did not, and could not make it a substitute. There are many improvements, principally a better translation of moods and tenses, prepositions and the removal of obsolete words, but there are also many serious objections. Undoubtedly there were faithful and godly men on the Committee, but there were others who were the enemies of the cross of Christ, and they made themselves felt, so that the trail of the serpent is over it all.<sup>55</sup>

Now, clearly, this historical development was necessarily unique. The struggle of premillennial scholarship against a dominant amillennial and postmillennial culture, the rapid ascension of textual criticism together with the accumulation of ancient Greek texts, the

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*Interpretation in Connection with Popery, and a Defence of the Authenticity of the Book of Daniel* [London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, 1883], 272-74).

<sup>55</sup> Brookes, “Story of the English Bible,” *The Truth* 21 (1895): 188-90.

emergence of the Bible conference men who established a program of eschatology and apologetics that would lead to the formation of modern Fundamentalism, and the production of a new translation that for the first time in centuries would seek to rival the King James Version all conspired to create a setting for the debate described in this paper.

We live in a very different setting. New translations, however, continue to appear, and a few lessons from the foregoing narrative may help us in our evaluations of them.

- (1) We must not fall to the temptation of comparing Bible versions primarily with one another. The Niagara Fundamentalists never criticized the RV for changing from, omitting, or adding to the KJV. They appealed to the original languages. They measured the virtue of a translation solely in terms of its agreement with the Hebrew and Greek. In fact, they sometimes criticized all of the available translations.
- (2) We must take our time in endorsing new translations. In the 1890s when Brookes was noting the faults of the RV, he no doubt regretted the wholehearted endorsement he had given the work in 1881. The Niagara Fundamentalists did not come to their mature position on the RV for over a decade. We should avoid hastily embracing or rejecting new translations.
- (3) Our evaluations must take into account passages that are crucial to sound theology. We should probably pause before strongly recommending a translation that is otherwise sound but badly mishandles 2 Timothy 3:16, Isaiah 7:14, Romans 9:5, and other crucial texts.

## The English Standard Version: A Brief Case Study

As a case study, consider briefly a fairly recent translation that has won considerable popularity in evangelical and Fundamentalist circles: the English Standard Version. Making its appearance in 2001, the ESV boasted a very strong translation oversight committee, including such notable scholars as J. I. Packer (the overall editor), Wayne Grudem, R. Kent Hughes, Robert Mounce, William Mounce, Leland Ryken, Vern Poythress, and Gordon Wenham.<sup>56</sup>

Several characteristics of the ESV are the following:

- 1) It is based on the 1971 revision of the RSV. It corrects several renderings in the RSV about which conservatives have expressed grave concern,<sup>57</sup> but it is no new translation. It worked from the RSV so that “as a revision of the RSV, the ESV inherits many of its forebear’s qualities, both strengths and weaknesses.”<sup>58</sup>
- 2) It rejects the gender neutral philosophy of the TNIV and NRSV. Indeed, Grudem is both a major opponent of the gender neutrality of the TNIV and a significant proponent of the ESV.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> For information on the “Translation Oversight Committee,” the “Translation Review Scholars,” and the “Advisory Council,” see [www.esv.org](http://www.esv.org).

<sup>57</sup> Laird Harris wrote, “It is a curious study to check the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, a monument of higher critical scholarship, and note how every important Old Testament passage purporting to predict directly the coming of Christ has been altered so as to remove this possibility” (*Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible: An Historical and Exegetical Study* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1969], 58). Cited in Decker (see citation in footnote 58).

<sup>58</sup> Rodney J. Decker, “The ESV NT: A Review Article,” presented as a paper at the Faculty Forum, Baptist Bible Seminary, March 18, 2004, and available at [www.ntresources.com](http://www.ntresources.com).

<sup>59</sup> Note that Decker argues that the difference between the ESV and the TNIV on this point is overstated by the publishers of the ESV. See pages 16-19 of the article just cited.

- 3) It strives for formal equivalence in readable English. Its claim is that it seeks “to be ‘as literal as possible’ while maintaining clarity of expression and literary excellence” (ESV, *Preface*, viii).

Response to the ESV in the evangelical and Fundamentalist communities has been mixed. The three issues that reviewers have focused on are the textual basis (of concern to advocates of the TR or KJV);<sup>60</sup> its translation philosophy (formal equivalence, as noted),<sup>61</sup> and its position on gender translation.<sup>62</sup> This article will not address these wider questions, which, of course, are paramount in evaluating any translation.

Instead, I would like to address a single important passage that gives me significant concern over embracing the ESV over other conservative options. In doing so, I recognize that passages can be found in *every* conservative translation that one must work around if one is committed to interpreting the original language texts for oneself. I am not suggesting throwing a baby out with the bath water. Nevertheless, just as the Niagara Fundamentalists discovered over time the danger in adopting a translation that muddled the doctrine of inspiration by mistranslating 2 Timothy 3:16, I believe we should be alert to a threat to dispensationalism in a translation that, following the RSV, mistranslates Daniel 9:25.

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<sup>60</sup> See, for example, Joel R. Grassi, “A Critical Analysis of the English Standard Version of 2001,” in *Emmanuel Baptist Theological Journal* vol. 2 no. 1 (Spring 2006), 35-96. Grassi lodges many grievances against the ESV, but the bottom line is its reliance on the modern Greek text, and thus its divergence from the KJV.

<sup>61</sup> Many positive reviews praise the ESV for embracing a formal equivalence approach. See, for example, Earl D. Radmacher, “English Standard Version: Review,” in *Moody Magazine.com* (March/April 2002). Others question whether the difference between the ESV and the NIV, for instance, is really as marked as the ESV publishers would have the public believe. See interesting analyses by Allan Chapple, “The English Standard Version: A Review Article,” in *Reformed Theological Review* 62 (2003): 61-96, and Rodney J. Decker, “The ESV NT: A Review Article,” presented as a paper at the Faculty Forum, Baptist Bible Seminary, March 18, 2004, and available at [www.ntresources.com](http://www.ntresources.com). It should be noted that both Chapple and Decker defend dynamic equivalence and believe the problem with the ESV is that it purports to be one thing while actually doing a great deal of the other.

<sup>62</sup> See, for example, Earle E. Ellis, “Dynamic Equivalence Theory, Feminist Ideology and Three Recent Bible Translations,” in *Expository Times* 115 (2003): 7-12.

The following are renderings of Daniel 9:25 in several major Bible translations:

KJV: Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times.

ASV: Know therefore and discern, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the anointed one, the prince, shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: it shall be built again, with street and moat, even in troublous times.

NKJV: Know therefore and understand,  
*That from the going forth of the command*  
*To restore and build Jerusalem*  
*Until Messiah the Prince,*  
*There shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks;*  
*The street shall be built again, and the wall,*  
*Even in troublesome times.*

NASB: So you are to know and discern that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress.

NIV: Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven 'sevens,' and sixty-two 'sevens.' It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble.

TNIV: Know and understand this: From the time the word goes out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven 'sevens,' and sixty-two 'sevens.' It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble.

NLT: Now listen and understand! Seven sets of seven plus sixty-two sets of seven will pass from the time the command is given to rebuild Jerusalem until a ruler—the Anointed One—comes. Jerusalem will be rebuilt with streets and strong defenses, despite the perilous times.

CEV: You need to realize that from the command to rebuild Jerusalem until the coming of the Chosen Leader, it will be seven weeks and another sixty-two weeks. Streets will be built in Jerusalem, and a trench will be dug around the city for protection, but these will be difficult times.

RSV: Know therefore and understand that from the going forth of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks. Then for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time.

NRSV: Know therefore and understand: from the time that the word went out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the time of an anointed prince, there shall be seven weeks; and for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with streets and moat, but in a troubled time.

ESV: Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks. Then for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time.

Which rendering best fits the Hebrew? At this point, I must rely on experts because my knowledge of Hebrew does not allow me to adequately assess the data. Based on data I have received from several Hebrew scholars, the following points can be made about the Hebrew text of this verse:<sup>63</sup>

- 1) The original text did not have vowel points or accent marks. Masoretic scribes added these in the Christian era.
- 2) The Masoretes placed an accent mark (*atnak*) in the text so that it separated the seven weeks from the sixty-two weeks. It is probable that they did so in order to rule out the common Christian interpretation that the “anointed one” was the Messiah, Jesus Christ.
- 3) The normal word order of the Hebrew text does not indicate a break between the seven weeks and the sixty-two weeks, although obviously the two time periods are delineated separately.
- 4) The Septuagint does not agree with the Masoretic accent mark and renders the two time periods together.
- 5) The translation evidence given above shows that only the RSV and its stepsons, the NRSV and the ESV (the REB and NAB do so as well), adopt the Masoretic accenting. This produces a break between the seven weeks and the sixty-two weeks so that an anointed one arrives after seven weeks and the city is rebuilt in sixty-two weeks. After the city is rebuilt, the anointed one is cut off in verse 26a.
- 6) Related to this punctuation issue is the rendering of the Hebrew *anointed one*. The KJV, NKJV, and NASB render these words as *the Messiah*; the NIV, TNIV, NLT, and CEV

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<sup>63</sup> Private conversations with Preston Mayes, the Hebrew teacher at MBBC; Dr. Larry Oats, chairman of the MBBC Bible Department; and (through a friend) Dr. John Sailhamer, professor of Old Testament at Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary (he was at Southeastern when he provided information on this issue).

render the words more literally but capitalize them to indicate that the Messiah is in view; the ASV gives a literal rendering without capitalization, but uses the definite article to again identify this personage. With the punctuation that occurs in the RSV, NRSV, and ESV, it is very difficult to see how *anointed one* could be referring to the Messiah; hence, these translations render the words literally, supplying an indefinite article.

Now, exegesis should be the engine that drives theology and not *vice versa*. It should be noted, however, that dispensationalists (see, for instance, the commentaries on this passage by Sir Robert Anderson, Arno Gaebelein, H. A. Ironside, Clarence Larkin, Alva J. McClain, Stephen R. Miller, Philip R. Newell, William L. Pettingill, W. B. Riley, Renald Showers, Uriah Smith, Louis T. Talbot, S. P. Tregelles, John Walvoord, and Leon Wood<sup>64</sup>) interpret this verse along the following lines:

- 1) The *anointed one* is the Messiah, and He will come after sixty-nine weeks, the combination of the seven and sixty-two weeks.
- 2) The seven weeks express the time necessary to complete the rebuilding of the wall.

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<sup>64</sup> Anderson, *The Coming Prince* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1957 reprint); Gaebelein, *Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1985 reprint), 130-141; Ironside, *Lectures on Daniel the Prophet* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1920), 164-167; Larkin, *The Book of Daniel* (Philadelphia: Larkin, 1929), 169-218; McClain, *Daniel's Prophecy of the 70 Weeks* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1940), 12-27; Miller, *Daniel*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 252-269; Newell, *Daniel: The Man Greatly Beloved and His Prophecies* (Chicago: Moody, 1951), 143-150; Pettingill, *Simple Studies in Daniel* (Wilmington, DE: Just a Word Inc, n.d.), 93-99; Riley, *Daniel, The Bible of the Expositor and the Evangelist* (Cleveland: Union Gospel Press, 1933), 204-208; Showers, *The Most High God: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Bellmawr, NJ: Friends of Israel, 1982), 115-137; Smith, *Daniel and the Revelation* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1897), 219-232; Talbot, *The Prophecies of Daniel* (Los Angeles: Church of the Open Door, 1940), 230-234; Tregelles, *Remarks on the Prophetic Visions in the Book of Daniel* (London: Sovereign Grace Advent Testimony, 1965), 97-103; Walvoord, *Daniel: The Key to Prophetic Revelation* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), 223-231; Wood, *A Commentary on Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 251-257.

- 3) The sixty-two weeks then bring the timetable down to the time of Messiah (AD 30-33). Verse 26a teaches the substitutionary death of Christ (some dispute the translation *but not for himself*, but we will not address that issue here).
- 4) The seventieth week addressed in verse 27 is taken by dispensationalists to be the week of tribulation that will precede the Second Coming of Christ, and *the prince that shall come* (v. 26) is identified as the Antichrist.

Anyone familiar with dispensational eschatology recognizes this sequence. Only the non-Masoretic rendering of the verse, however, makes such a reconstruction possible from this passage.

In addition to the dispensational commentaries listed above, many commentaries acknowledge the non-Masoretic rendering and identify the *anointed one* as Messiah. They then recognize this prophecy as giving a timetable for Christ's First Advent (after the 69 weeks). They, however, do not interpret the seventieth week in accordance with dispensationalism, usually referring it to the time of Christ's death or spiritualizing it in some fashion. Such commentators include Jay Adams and Milton Fisher, Gleason L. Archer, Albert Barnes, John Calvin, B. H. Carroll, G. H. Lang, and Edward J. Young.<sup>65</sup> Young, for instance, analyzes the Hebrew carefully and concludes that he must dissent from the Masoretes because a literal understanding of the text forbids understanding an anointed one as coming after only forty-nine years.

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<sup>65</sup> Adams and Fisher, *The Time of the End: Daniel's Prophecy Reclaimed* (Woodruff, SC: Timeless Texts, 2000), 83-89; Archer, *Daniel*, Expositor's Bible Commentary, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 113-116; Barnes, *Notes on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979 reprint), 148-175; Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Daniel*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979 reprint), 219-220; Carroll, *Daniel and the InterBiblical Period* (Nashville: Broadman, 1916), 119-148; Lang, *The Histories and Prophecies of Daniel* (London: Paternoster, 1950), 133-138; Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 201-208, and *The Messianic Prophecies of Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 60-69.

The non-Christological interpretation of the passage—seeing the anointed one as Cyrus or some other personage, and seeing the anointed one in verse 26 as a character during the times of the Maccabees (or slightly later)—is held exclusively by commentators favoring the Masoretic rendering. Most of the commentaries appeal to the RSV as their underlying text, including Joyce G. Baldwin, F. W. Farrar, C. F. Keil, John Peter Lange, Paul M. Lederach, H. C. Leupold, Tremper Longman III (who rejects his base text the NIV and appeals to the alternate rendering in the NRSV), Ernest Lucas, James A. Montgomery, Paul L. Redditt, W. Sibley Towner, and Ronald S. Wallace.<sup>66</sup>

The conservatives who produced the ESV had to choose a rendering for this crucially important passage. Their default was the RSV, but they had to be aware that the RSV consciously supported the standard amillennial view of this passage, which is invariably non-Christological, against a long history of Christological interpretation (dispensational and otherwise). By choosing to retain the RSV rendering, which they adjusted in very minor ways, the ESV translators have made it difficult for a dispensationalist to utilize their work in defending one of his most cherished texts.

Obviously, a translation—or a theological system—does not rise or fall on a single verse of Scripture. These observations in no way mitigate the excellencies of the ESV, which are many. In my opinion, however, dispensational Fundamentalists should be aware of this serious

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<sup>66</sup> Baldwin, *Daniel*, TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, n.d.), 169-178; Farrar, *The Book of Daniel* (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, n.d.), 275-281; Keil, *Biblical Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955 reprint), 350-359; Lange, *Daniel*, Commentary on the Holy Scriptures (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, undated reprint), 196-199; Lederach, *Believers Church Bible Commentary* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1994), 215-219; Leupold, *Exposition of Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1969 reprint), 416-426; Longman, *Daniel*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 225-228; Lucas, *Daniel*, Apollos Old Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2002), 242-245; Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1927), 378-385; Redditt, *Daniel*, The New Century Bible Commentary (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 161-163; Towner, *Daniel*, Interpretation (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1984), 142-144; Wallace, *The Message of Daniel* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, n.d.), 163-170.

difficulty before uncritically embracing or advancing the ESV as their Bible of choice. Such awareness will be following in the footsteps of our forefathers, the Niagara Fundamentalists.