The KJV Copyright - A Scottish Tale Of Intrigue And Avarice

Timothy Neal
Saturday, August 22, 2015

- *The KJV is the only Bible ever copyrighted*
- *Modern versions are simply private copyright*
- *The KJV is the only Bible that missionaries can make copies of for free*
- *The only reason that versions other than the KJV were ever made is because publishers legally have to change a percentage of words in order for a copyright to make money, and modern versions publishers only care about money*

These and similar claims can be heard in practically every piece of literature that claims to defend the KJV as the preserved word of God in the English language provide Oh yet glorious and eternal, here, here, here, or scores of other places. It seems almost par for the course to claim that the KJV is the "only English Bible" in the public domain and that modern versions are copyrighted. Some go so far as to say that modern versions are copyrighted in such a way as to make it illegal for you to make copies of them, or even quote them. Some even go so far as to claim that modern versions are "private copyright" in nature, and that the KJV is the only version not copyrighted. Such claims are, for the most part, false, but they do have a grain of truth to them. Some of the claims are of a more radical wing of KJV defenders, without bothering to research whether such claims are true. They typically are not true. I recently had a gentleman in a Facebook discussion group claim that "King James Bible is the only version not copyrighted." He cannot see the motives of every publisher. He cannot read the minds of every publisher. He cannot see the future. He cannot guarantee that some new liberal court case or some new government decision, being made without publication, provided beforehand to the public, should not be made tightly. Biblically, one should not believe such a statement until documented evidence being presented to him. Unfortunately, I have found that the Baptist brethren are not the only people with his claims, standing behind them has a serious ignorance of basic facts of history, to which we now turn.

An Example From A Trusted Source

Bob Chambers wrote what, in my opinion, one of the best of the books defending the KJV. I recently read it for the second time, and I found it very enjoyable. It does have its a different category than the kind of internet propaganda making such claims that one can find on such sites. I would place Chambers's dealing with the Bible in the form of an argument. That's why I interacted with his work here, rather than with the scores of internet quotes that could have easily begun to fly, as we saw in the last section. As a trusted men in God School at the Fundamental Bible College I

attended, Chambers's work is one that I would recommend to people who are concerned about false God. I count many of my friends, But the point of this section is to show that the claims of a more radical wing of KJV defenders, without bothering to research whether such claims are true. They typically are not true. I recently had a gentleman in a Facebook discussion group claim that "King James Bible is the only version not copyrighted." Chambers's work, where otherwise intelligent people are simply making claims that are false, is a very good place to go to see that. Chambers's work is a very good place to go to see that. Chambers's work is very well sourced, he has a very good bibliography, and he is very careful in his use of his sources. Chambers's work is a very good place to go to see that. Chambers's work is very well sourced, he has a very good bibliography, and he is very careful in his use of his sources." these sources, these sources, these sources about the KJV. **False Statement: The King James Bible is copyrighted.** Chambers's work is very well sourced, he has a very good bibliography, and he is very careful in his use of his sources." statement is actually not a false one, and that the KJV is in fact copyrighted. He claims that the copyright on the KJV is only in perpetuity to the crown, and that, this entire approach is false. Chambers's work is very well sourced, he has a very good bibliography, and he is very careful in his use of his sources." The modern versions are rightly contended by secular publishers to be copyrighted, and that, this entire approach is false. Chambers's work is very well sourced, he has a very good bibliography, and he is very careful in his use of his sources." But, he is grossly mistaken at almost every point here.

First, Cambridge University Press is also a "secular publishing company," whose copyright on the KJV (which we will examine below) produces revenue His language, intended to be pejorative, sets a double standard. Secondly, he mentions modern versions being rightly contended by secular publishers to be copyrighted. This revenue is an unforgivable generalization. He cannot see the motives of every publisher. He cannot read the minds of every publisher. He cannot see the future. He cannot guarantee that some new liberal court case or some new government decision, being made without publication, provided beforehand to the public, should not be made tightly. Biblically, one should not believe such a statement until documented evidence being presented to him. Unfortunately, I have found that the Baptist brethren are not the only people with his claims, standing behind them has a serious ignorance of basic facts of history, to which we now turn.

The Greedy Printers Of The KJV

In fact, modern scholars of the KJV, who study the history of the English Bible as a center, generally have been very surprised to learn how greedy and how corrupt the KJV became the most widely used version of the English Bible. Gerald Hammond, the great pioneer of the modern study of the history of the English Bible to come about in the mid-twentieth century (twentieth century) Daniell explains that it was the "greedy printers" who had to be tamed.

> "contrary to what has been confidently asserted for several centuries, this version (the KJV) was not continually revised. Hammond is apparently the first to publish a detailed study of how the text of the century it was undoubtedly successful. It was heavily used, and it rapidly sent off its chief rival, the Geneva Bibles, to the margins of history. Hammond's book, *The Bible in Shakespeare*, is the most first for political and commercial reasons, and largely a result of its Highlining between London printers. For its first 70 years, it was printed in three separate versions." (David Daniell, The Bible in English, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2003, p. 1)

And Barker, the English printer, had to struggle with his partners in printing. Bibles (of any kind). And he received some serious money problems. They, he needed cash, and he had to find it. He was the one who had to pay the piper to print the Geneva Bible that was still the most loved version of the English Bible. He was the one who had to find the wrecked printer. He was the one who had to pay the piper to have the printer of the KJV became almost at once devious, and at times, vicious. (David Daniell, The Bible in English, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2003, p. 1)

The last regular edition of the Geneva Bible was published in 1644. Therefore, to buy a Bible meant to buy a King James Bible. Other versions continued in circulation, but gradually the commercial identity of English Bible was the KJV. The Geneva Bible was the version that was used in most homes and was venerated, the most beloved version of the English Bible was the KJV's superiority, this publishing triumph owed nothing to its merits (or its demerits) as a piece of literary scholarship. It was a triumph of economics and politics were the key factors. It was in the very substantial commercial interest of the King's Printer, who had a monopoly on the Bible and the Cambridge University Press, which also claimed the right to print the Bible, to see that the KJV was the only version in circulation. Hammond's work, which he published in the Oxford Bibliographical Society's Transactions (1973-1975), there is a report that because the KJV, described as "the new translation without notes", was most certified, the King's Printers decided to print Geneva Bibles for sale in Scotland, and the Scots were very pleased

think this somehow proves that the KJV alone represents "God's words." And this often happens along with slanderous broad-brush accusations being made against modern publishers, many of whom (not all, admittedly) are made up of good and godly men. These good men do not deserve to be so accused and attacked. Slander is sin. Anyone repeating this slanderous accusation should confess and repent of it.

"The KJV is,
and always has been,
held under Copyright."
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The KJV is, and always has been, held under copyright. That's not a bad thing. It just means that the KJV, unlike the NET Bible and a few exceptions noted above, is in this respect like most other English Bibles. It may be a special and unique work. In fact, I think it is, and I often say that I think every English-speaking Christian should own and read a copy of the KJV (though I don't think anyone should use *only* a KJV). But it is not unique or special on the basis of some alleged absence of a copyright. Here, it must blend into the crowd of other English versions, and stop pretending to stand head and shoulders above the rest.

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Timothy Berg
I should note to my lawer and legalish friends that I lack any resources that would be quotable to explain American copyright law, other than the Wikipedia entries I quoted in the blog post. If any such friends would like to share citations from more respectable sources in a comment here, I would be grateful. Thanks!
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Mark Ward
Excellent work, Timothy Berg. Patient and careful, but also clear and forthright.
Like · Reply · 4y

Timothy Berg
Thanks so much!
Like · Reply · 4y

Paul Davey
This was really interesting.

I am one who states it was without copyright, and I think after reading, I still stand by that.

Throughout you mention patent and cum privilegio and I think one would have to agree that to pring the King James Bible was in deed a privilege.

I think a question could be asked whether the privilege came before the patent, and also I think that it must have, because one can't have one without the other., i.e. one can be given a privilege which would then be followed by a document confirming that privilege; a letter patent.

In your conclusion though you cite two definitions of "copyright". It's my understanding the King James Bible was "Authorised"; permission granted by King James I; and that he himself had nothing to do with the authoring or translating, which was done by a team of circa 54 scholars who were split into groups of six, each having their own parts to translate, which when one translation was complete, it would then be passed to another member of the same group for agreement or correction. These translations were then sent to each other group for their agreement or correction also, so that the translation process was most superior.

How then can a book which had 54 scholars; by the Kings command, fall in line with the definitions you shared. Surely it's impossible.

They weren't sole authors and they weren't new compilations as such but translations of original works. And if these men were Godly men; which I believe they were, and were endowed by God like their original counterparts; with the power of the Holy Spirit; which again, I believe they were, then surely all glory and honour and ownership, patent and copyright belongs to God.
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Paul Davey
Furthermore, I just found out, copyright law wasn't a thing in Britain until 1709 with the Statute of Anne, which further proves the King James Bible couldn't have a copyright.

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