



The Unbound Scriptures: A Review of KJV-only Claims and Publications *By Rick Norris*

A Review Essay by Fred Butler

During the course of my personal reading, I will occasionally come across a book that is like an aromatic cup of warm coffee; it is both delightful to the taste and warming to the soul. Rick Norris has written such a book with *The Unbound Scriptures: A Review of KJV-only Claims and Publications*. This book is a delight, because Mr. Norris has addressed a topic that is close to me: I was once a rabid King James Only proponent.

For nearly a decade, I believed that the only English Bible that accurately represented the true Words of God was contained in the 1611 translation of the King James Bible. It was my sincere conviction that the KJV was based upon the best Hebrew and Greek texts that had accurately preserved every "jot and tittle" of Holy Scripture, and that it had been translated by the godliest and most capable scholars the Christian world has ever known.

I would argue that any of the modern, English translations like the *New International Version*, *New American Standard Version* and *English Standard Version*, were based upon inferior Hebrew and Greek texts. I would call them "modern perversions," because I believed heretics had corrupted the original manuscripts that these translations are based upon by stealthily injecting cultic doctrines by omitting a key word here, or adding a slightly different phrase there. Additionally, those versions were translated by men who were unbelievers; individuals who held to unorthodox beliefs and denied essential Christian doctrine like the Virgin Birth and the Deity of Jesus Christ. Any Christian who read and studied these modern versions, in my opinion, was only receiving a portion of what God really said, and even worse, believers were being brainwashed to unwittingly accept false doctrine. Moreover, any person who actually defended the use of modern versions and had the audacity to challenge the pure, inerrant translation contained in the King James Bible, was, in my mind, a Bible rejecter and corrector, and this person was setting himself up as the final authority, rather than submitting to God's Word. I was, in all sense of the term, a King James Only advocate; and I would add, I rather obnoxious one at times.

In order to defend my KJV convictions, I appealed to an arsenal of supposed truth claims and arguments that are promoted in the myriad of publications produced by KJV-only advocates, and I would often utilize those arguments in order to defend what I believed to be God's unalterable Word. It is these truth claims and arguments that Rick Norris has dared to challenge in his book. Just offering a challenge, in and of itself, is of utmost importance, because King James Only advocates refuse to have the fundamental presuppositions of their beliefs examined by any meaningful critique.¹

Rick Norris, however, has provided that meaningful examination in his 500 plus page book and it is one that is both thorough and devastating to the KJV-only system. I would further point out that his challenge is at the risk of having his personal character viciously smeared and his research ridiculed by the KJV-only advocates in their monthly newspapers, internet bulletin boards, and other publications. Yet, with all of the bombast billowing from the KJV-only crowd, Mr. Norris's work is sure to withstand the ridiculous scrutiny it is going to receive.

¹ I mean this with all honesty. When I came to a place where I began to ask critical questions of my KJV-only convictions, I would also ask my pointed questions of other KJV-only advocates. The reactions I received would be mixed. Sometimes, the individual would turn into an ostrich of sorts, ignoring the gravity of my questions altogether. Others would simply repeat the elaborate conspiracy theories designed by KJV-only advocates to conveniently explain away the glaring problems my questions would raise. And the worst response, and I have received these mainly from participants on internet discussion boards dedicated to KJV onlyism, is to cruelly mock me and pronounce me a Bible rejecter/corrector/denier, or any other number of pejoratives, and accuse me of having some hidden, anti-Bible agenda. Some have even called me a liar, telling me that I never held KJV-only convictions, or never really understood them, because if I had truly believed the KJV was the Word of God, I would never had abandon the truth.

Mr. Norris has documented his case well against the KJV-only arguments by wading through literally hundreds of KJV-only books, tracts, pamphlets and other similar materials. That alone is a daunting task (it takes steeled courage to sift through page after page of erroneous nonsense), but his bibliography covers 48 pages, so it is obvious that he has done his homework and is informed when he writes.

He interacts with all of the regulars from the King James Only camp. Men like Samuel Gipp, David Cloud, D.A. Waite, Thomas Holland, Jack Moorman, and of course the grand patriarch Peter Ruckman, who is the loudest and most savage of all the King James Only proponents. Mr. Norris basically puts all of their various arguments defending the KJV on trial and subjects them to a barrage of questions and the proper citing of historical fact that exposes those arguments as outright fallacious and absolutely without any merit.

Let me highlight some areas of special research Mr. Norris provides in his book.

I am particularly pleased with the extensive research Mr. Norris provides in the area of pre-KJV English translations. He has comb through translations like Tyndale's Bible, Coverdale's Bible, Matthew's Bible, the Bishop's Bible, and the Geneva Bible to provide some original citations that are normally inaccessible to the average laymen. This is a significant study for a couple of reasons:

First, KJV only advocates argue that the King James translation is the only Bible to be used by Christians, because it is the final, purified seven times, translation in the line of seven English translations that God blessed. That fact, argue the KJV advocates, establishes it as the crowning authority of God's Word. They attempt to build their argumentation for the "line of good Bibles" from the pages of scripture by misapplying Psalm 12:6, a verse they horribly abuse and wrestle out of context, which states, *The words of the LORD are pure words, like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times.* Mr. Norris points out that this argumentation is seriously flawed, and he uses his study in pre-KJV translations to demonstrate this error. He states:

If this line of good Bibles gives any valid evidence for the KJV-only view, all the Bibles must be inspired and inerrant like they claim the KJV is. Otherwise, if any errors (errancy) or corruption enters their line, how does that prove the KJV-only claim that an inerrant KJV must result? [*Unbound*, 206].

In other words, all of the Bibles listed in the line of seven must have God's hand of blessing upon them, protecting them from the encroachment of error into the translational process. If a textual, theological, or translational error enters into the stream at any point, then any subsequent Bible would be polluted and the KJV advocate's claim to a pure line of Bibles resulting in the crowning achievement of the King James is ruined. As Mr. Norris points out, "Can a stream rise higher than its sources?" [*Unbound*, 206]

One amusing fact Mr. Norris shows us in his research is that no two KJV advocates can agree as to which biblical translations belong in the list leading up to the King James. For example, Peter Ruckman's good tree chart found in his book *The Bible Babel* omits the 1568 Bishop's Bible, but it is included among the list found in KJV only advocate J.J. Ray's book, *God Only Wrote One Bible*, [*Unbound*, 207]. KJV only advocate, William Bradley, has a list of Bibles in one of his publications that consists of Wycliffe's, Tyndale's, Coverdale's, Matthew's, The Great Bible, the Geneva, and then the King James, while omitting the Bishop's Bible, of which the KJV was officially a revision; but in a later publication, he reinserts it his line of seven good Bibles: Wycliffe's, Tyndale's, Coverdale's, Matthew's, The Great Bible, the Geneva, the Bishops's and then the King James, which would then make the King James the eighth in the line of good Bibles, not the seventh, [*Unbound*, 236]. Such inconsistency illustrates the absurdity of holding to a mystical notion of God blessing a specific translational stream that results in the purified King James published in 1611. Mr. Norris rightly observes:

What consistent criteria was used to determine objectively which translations to include? It seems that the KJV-only advocates cannot agree on which Bibles to include on their lists and on which Bibles to leave off. Do they start with the assumption that the KJV has to be the seventh one and then subjectively pick out six others to make their count work? If believers were to accept the erroneous claim that men can purify God's word in a series of translations, on whose authority do we base the claim that the KJV is the seventh and final purification? [*Unbound*, 236, 237]

A second area of importance that is addressed with Mr. Norris's study of pre-KJV English Bibles is the rendering of specific phrases, as well as unique translations, that are found in earlier English versions that KJV only advocates condemn when the same renderings and translations appear in modern translations.

For example, all of the KJV only advocates I have ever read in my pro-KJV only days would cite Luke 2:33 as proof of how modern translations corrupt God's Word by altering specific doctrines, like the Virgin Birth of Christ. In the KJV, Luke 2:33 reads, *And Joseph and his mother marveled at those things which were spoken of him.* Take note of the phrase "Joseph and his mother." However, the *New American Standard* translates the verse as, *And his father and mother...*, and the *New International Version* translates it as, *And the child's father and mother....* Both of these modern translations change the phrase "Joseph and his mother" to "his father and mother." King James Only advocates love to point out how the Virgin Birth of Christ is denied with these two modern translations. D.A. Waite, one of the more "scholarly" King James Advocates and the president of the Dean Burgon Society, writes concerning this translational difference:

After eliminating "**Joseph**," they substitute the words, "**the child's father**," thus possibly calling Joseph, Christ's literal "father," thereby denying His virgin birth. **This is certainly a matter of doctrine and theology.** At this point, these Greek texts and these English versions are **theologically deficient**, whereas the *Textus Receptus* and the KING JAMES BIBLE are **theologically superior**"²

His argumentation does sound convincing, especially to anyone who is untrained in textual criticism and translation methods, however, Mr. Waite, in his "heresy" hunt against modern translations, failed to take notice that several pre-KJV translations contain the words, "his father and mother." Mr. Norris shows us that the phrase "his father" has been translated in at least six of the pre-KJV translations that make up the supposed "good line of Bibles:" Wycliffe's, Tyndale's, Coverdale's, Matthew's, the Great Bible, and the Bishop's. On top of that, both the Luther's German NT translation and the Spanish Enzinas NT translation have "father" translated in their respective languages at Luke 2:33, [Unbound, 246]. The average churching Christian could be easily swayed by KJV-only arguments, but Mr. Norris's research into the earlier English translations does a valuable service to dispel the exaggerated examples KJV-only advocates often employ in their polemics. One can only wish KJV-only advocates would be so honest in their research.

I was also encouraged by Mr. Norris's biographical study of the King James translators and the king, James the 1st.

King James Only advocates practically deify the men who translated the KJV by claiming they are scholars of superior intelligence, qualified both academically and spiritually for the task of translating the Bible, as compared to those men who translated the modern versions. Oddly, as Mr. Norris points out in his opening remarks in this biographical chapter, many KJV-only proponents will vilify scholarship and knowledge, but inconsistently appeal to it to defend their beloved KJV translators.

The writings of KJV-only advocates gush with nauseating praise of how these men are the best translators the world has ever known; the godliest men the church has ever known; and their final translation is a work that should never be questioned. They are in essence raised to a level of infallibility.

Yet, Mr. Norris's research into their lives shows us that they were just ordinary men, and though they were for the most part, good men and decent translators of the original languages, they were not without their foibles, nor did they rise above the fleshly sins that plague all of God's people here in this life. For example, the King James translator's were Anglicans that were doing their translational work for the state church of England. Their work was essentially done for the political reasons of the state, not out of some compelling love to give God's people a "final authority" in a Bible. King James hated the Puritans, a movement within the Anglican Church, and the

² D.A. Waite, *Defending the King James Bible. A Four-fold Superiority: Texts, Translators, Technique, Theology* (Collingswood: Bible for Today press, 1995), 166 [highlights and italics his]

Puritans favored the popular *Geneva* Bible. James wanted to unseat it as the one Bible commonly used by most of his subjects, thus he allowed for a new translation, an update of the *Bishop's* Bible, to be produced.

Also, several of the KJV translators were notorious for their state sponsored persecutions of those Christians who would dissent from the Church of England. Mr. Norris points out that both George Abbot and Lancelot Andrewes, two of the key translators of the KJV, urged the burning at the stake of Bartholomew Legate in March of 1611. "George Abbot," writes Norris, "even presided over the proceedings."³ In addition to these persecutions, the Baptist church in England also suffered severe persecutions. It is ironic that KJV-only advocates, fundamental Baptist in conviction, would be so eager to defend a Bible translated by men who persecuted their Baptist forefathers.

Then, Mr. Norris moves to giving a well-documented biographical study of the character of King James.

The person of James the 1st is elevated to the level of being practically a closet fundamental Baptist by the KJV-only advocates. In fact, they sanitize what history records about his character and conduct by selectively citing the comments made about him from sycophantic courtiers and politicians. Mr. Norris goes into great detail to reveal that King James was not the great defender of Christ's Church that his followers during his time, and now with the KJV-only movement, make him out to be. History records that he was a horrid, tyrannical scoundrel who connived and lied his way through his political dealings. A sympathizer to Roman Catholics, when James came to the throne in England, he allowed both Baptists and Puritans to be persecuted, and was the catalyst that drove the English Puritan pilgrims to the shores of America.

Most importantly, Mr. Norris's affirms the fact that King James was a homosexual. This is a vital study, because KJV- only advocates vehemently deny the truth of King James's sexuality. They have to, because it would be scandalous to be promoting a translation that bears the name of an individual who engaged in perverse, sexual conduct. Thus, the KJV-only advocates have chosen to entirely blot out this fact from history and appeal to conspiratorial conjecture in order to counter anyone who would dare raise the truth about James the 1st of England. Appendix D is devoted to answering the claims of KJV-only advocates who assert that King James was not a homosexual and Mr. Norris again shows that their defense of this man is based upon a facade, built with selective, revised history.

Unbound Scriptures is an outstanding study of the various KJV arguments, but I would be amiss not to offer a couple of thoughts of constructive criticism I hope would only help improve such a tremendous book.

First, the book is privately published (see contact information below), and because of that fact, it runs the risk of quickly going away and not having a wide distribution. Word of mouth and positive reviews will obviously serve Mr. Norris's book well, but it would be a blessing to see a known publishing house take up the task of producing and marketing *Unbound Scriptures* to a larger Christian audience. Many pastors and laymen who have to deal with a vociferous KJV-only advocate disrupting the fellowship of their congregation or home Bible study may never be aware such a fine work exists to counter and silence KJV-only claims. The Christian Church at large would benefit greatly from the material contained in this book.

Second, the table of contents could be better organized so as to be more useful for the reader. Mr. Norris cleverly titles each one of his chapters with a biblical verse taken directly from the King James translation that highlights

³ [*Unbound*, 53]. The majority of well-known KJV advocates also stand against the doctrines of Grace, what is often referred to as the five points of Calvinism. For instance, Gail Riplinger, one of the strangest of KJV advocates, calls the five points of Calvinism, "the five pointed pentagram of Calvinism." Even though she is denounced as a lunatic by some fellow KJV advocates, her sentiments against Calvinism is still shared by the bulk of them. In a profound fit of hypocrisy, KJV-only advocates will often cite John Calvin's participation in the arrest, trial and burning of arch-heretic, Michael Servetus, as a reason why the system of theology that bears Calvin's name should be rejected as false. One wonders why they choose to ignore Andrewes and Abbot, who had a more direct involvement in several state sanctioned executions, than Calvin had with Servetus. Does their involvement with state sanctioned executions of religious dissenters disqualify KJV-onlyism as true?

specific subjects of KJV-only argumentation. For example, chapter two is entitled, *Understandst thou what thou readest*, and is an examination of the KJV-only argument that the King James is not copyrighted. Chapter 15 is called, *Give an account of thy stewardship*, and examines the claims concerning variation between the original language manuscripts of the Bible.

The chapter titles are catchy, but also ambiguous. They do not tell the reader what is necessarily being discussed. A helpful improvement for the table of contents would be to maintain the chapter titles, but then provide the sub-titles that indicate the subject of each chapter and list them under each of the chapter title headings. That would not only help inform the reader of the subjects addressed in the book, but would also provide a quicker reference for locating a specific subject. Also, a good index would also improve the usefulness of this book.

Thankfully, those small issues do not detract from the overall excellence of this work and should not deter any Christian from enjoying it. To obtain a copy of *Unbound Scriptures*, you can contact the author, Rick Norris, at his website: <http://www.unboundscriptures.com> or at his email, rick1560@juno.com.