

REASON TOGETHER CHURCH

THE BIBLE TRANSLATION QUESTION

A TEN-PART SERIES | PART SIX OF TEN

KJV AND ESV: DO DIFFERENT MANUSCRIPTS CHANGE THE MESSAGE?



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TRUSTING GOD'S WORD THROUGH CAREFUL EXAMINATION

KJV and ESV Do Different Manuscripts Change the Message

Sermon Transcript

Reason Together Church

Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley

Aloha.

Welcome to Reason Together Church.

If you are visiting with us today, we are especially glad you are here.

We are grateful for every honored guest who has joined us.

Our invitation is simple.

Bring your questions.

Open your Bible.

Let's Reason Together the Word of God.

Today we have reached Part Six of our ten-part series, "The Bible Translation Question."

In Part One, we asked whether the King James Version contains translation errors.

In Part Two, we asked whether the KJV we read today is the same as the KJV printed in 1611.

In Part Three, we examined why some verses or phrases found in the KJV are absent, bracketed or footnoted in modern translations.

In Part Four, we compared the KJV and the NKJV.

In Part Five, we compared the KJV and the NIV and asked whether a less literal translation remains a genuine translation.

Today we turn to the KJV and the ESV.

Our question is narrower than it may first appear.

KJV and ESV: Do Different Manuscripts Change the Message?

Imagine two Christians sitting beside one another in church.

One opens a KJV.

The other opens an ESV.

The preacher announces a verse.

They begin reading.

Then one of them notices that the words are different.

The difference may be small.

It may be one word.

It may be part of a sentence.

Occasionally, the difference may affect how the entire sentence is understood.

One reader may immediately wonder, "Which Bible changed the Word of God?"

That question is understandable.

It is also too early.

Before we decide that someone changed the Bible, we must ask why the English words differ.

Did the translators begin with different Hebrew or Greek wording?

Or did they begin with the same Hebrew or Greek wording and translate it differently?

Those are not the same issue.

One is a textual difference.

The other is a translation difference.

Sometimes both questions are present in the same verse.

By the end of this study, I want us to be able to recognize that distinction.

I also want us to answer the larger question honestly.

Different manuscripts sometimes change the sentence.

They have not changed the Savior.

Let us pray.

Our Father, we thank You for giving us Your Word.

Your words are pure words.

Your truth endureth to all generations.

We thank You for the people who copied the Scriptures, preserved them, translated them and carried them throughout the world.

Give us wisdom as we examine difficult questions.

Keep us from fear.

Keep us from pride.

Keep us from turning a preferred translation into a test of another believer's faithfulness.

Help us to speak accurately where the evidence is clear.

Help us to speak humbly where uncertainty remains.

Most of all, help us to hear the voice of God in the Word of God and to obey what You have said.

We ask these things in the name of Jesus.

Amen.

Our Scripture reading is Psalm 12:6-7.

“The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times.

Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever.”

Isaiah 40:8 adds:

“The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever.”

We begin with confidence.

God has spoken.

His Word is pure.

His Word will stand forever.

Studying manuscripts does not mean that we are deciding whether God has spoken.

Textual criticism is the careful work of comparing the surviving copies in order to determine, as closely as possible, the wording first written by the Biblical authors.

The word “criticism” can sound hostile.

In this setting, it does not mean attacking the Bible.

It means examining evidence.

Before we continue, let me briefly explain giving at Reason Together Church.

We do not pass an offering plate.

Guests are never expected to give.

If you are a member of another church, we encourage you to give to your home church.

If the Lord leads you to support this ministry, there is a giving box in the back.

The Bible says in II Corinthians 9:7:

“Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.”

We also have a guest card available.

We ask only for your first name and email address.

You are welcome to join us afterward at the Reason Together Café for free coffee, free refills and, we hope, more conversation.

The Keiki Kids Center is available for our younger guests.

We do not hide what happens with an offering.

Responsible Bible publishers should not hide places where manuscripts differ.

Transparency is not an admission that the Bible has failed.

It is an act of honesty.

That brings us to the first lesson.

When two English Bibles differ, we need to ask two questions.

First, are they translating different original-language readings?

Second, are they translating the same reading differently?

Suppose two witnesses heard the same sentence but expressed it in different words.

That would be a translation issue.

Now suppose the witnesses received two copies of a letter and one copy contained a different word.

That would be a textual issue.

We cannot determine which situation we have merely by looking at the English.

We must look behind the translation.

Let us begin with the KJV.

The Old Testament of the KJV is based principally on the traditional Masoretic Hebrew text.

The word “Masoretic” refers to the work of Jewish scribes and scholars who carefully preserved the Hebrew consonants, pronunciation and reading tradition.

The KJV translators worked primarily from a printed Hebrew edition commonly called the Second Rabbinic Bible.

It was edited by Jacob ben Hayyim and printed by Daniel Bomberg in 1524 and 1525.

The translators did not lock every other book outside the room.

They consulted earlier English Bibles.

They consulted the Greek Septuagint.

They consulted the Latin Vulgate.

They consulted Jewish commentaries and other scholarly resources available to them.

They respected the traditional Hebrew text, but they still had to study difficult readings and make decisions.

The New Testament foundation of the KJV is usually called the Textus Receptus.

That expression means “Received Text.”

We should understand what the name does and does not mean.

The Textus Receptus is not one ancient manuscript discovered intact and handed to the KJV translators.

It is a family of printed Greek New Testaments.

Those editions are associated especially with Erasmus, Stephanus and Theodore Beza.

The KJV translators relied heavily upon Beza's later editions.

They also consulted other Greek editions, the Vulgate and earlier English translations.

The KJV does not agree perfectly with one edition of Erasmus, Stephanus or Beza in every place.

In the nineteenth century, F. H. A. Scrivener compared the KJV with those printed Greek editions.

He reconstructed a Greek text that corresponds as closely as possible to the readings represented in the KJV.

Therefore, it is fair to say that the KJV New Testament came from the Received Text tradition.

It is not fair to say that the KJV was translated from one perfectly uniform ancient manuscript called the Textus Receptus.

There is another distinction we must remember.

The Textus Receptus is not identical to the Majority Text.

Most surviving Greek New Testament manuscripts belong broadly to the Byzantine tradition.

The Received Text usually agrees with that tradition.

At some places, however, the Received Text contains a reading that is not the numerical majority reading.

Now let us consider the ESV.

The ESV Old Testament is also based principally on the Masoretic Text.

That fact is important.

The KJV and ESV Old Testaments do not ordinarily begin with two completely different Hebrew Bibles.

The ESV uses the Masoretic text printed in Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia.

That edition principally reproduces the Hebrew text of the Leningrad Codex, copied around AD 1008.

In unusually difficult passages, the ESV committee also consulted the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Septuagint, the Samaritan Pentateuch, the Syriac Peshitta and the Latin Vulgate.

The ESV New Testament uses modern critical Greek editions.

The principal editions named in its current preface are Nestle-Aland 28 and the fifth edition of the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament.

These editors considered Greek manuscripts, ancient translations and quotations of Scripture found in early Christian writers.

They also studied how scribes copied texts and how readings may be related.

It is sometimes said that the ESV was translated from only two manuscripts, Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus.

That is not accurate.

Those manuscripts are important because they are ancient and often preserve valuable readings.

They are not the only evidence considered.

Modern critical editions examine a much larger body of evidence.

The ESV committee also says that it sometimes follows a Greek reading different from the one preferred in Nestle-Aland 28.

Here is the fair comparison.

The KJV translators used an edited Greek text.

The ESV translators used an edited Greek text.

The disagreement concerns which editorial decisions best represent the earliest recoverable wording.

That does not make every decision equally strong.

It does mean that both sides are working with copies and making judgments.

We often hear about manuscript families.

The best-known labels are Byzantine, Alexandrian and Western.

Those labels can help us identify broad patterns.

They become misleading when we imagine three sealed boxes containing three separate Bibles.

Ancient copyists sometimes used more than one source.

A manuscript may contain readings associated with different streams of transmission.

The age of the physical manuscript is not necessarily the age of every reading within it.

An old manuscript can contain a later reading.

A later manuscript can preserve an ancient reading.

For that reason, “older is always better” is too simple.

“The majority is always right” is also too simple.

Evidence must be weighed, not merely counted.

Let us see how this works in actual passages.

We will begin in the Old Testament with Deuteronomy 32:8.

The KJV reads:

“When the most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel.”

The ESV reads:

“When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind, he fixed the borders of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God.”

The principal difference is easy to see.

The KJV says, “children of Israel.”

The ESV says, “sons of God.”

That is not simply a modern translator choosing a new English expression.

The translations are following different Hebrew readings.

The medieval Masoretic tradition reads “children of Israel.”

Hebrew evidence from the Dead Sea Scrolls supports a reading that may be translated “sons of God” or “sons of El.”

The ancient Greek Septuagint preserves a related reading, often expressed as “angels of God.”

The Dead Sea Scrolls are much older than the great medieval Masoretic codices.

They do not contain one perfectly uniform Old Testament text.

Some scrolls agree closely with the later Masoretic tradition.

Some reflect readings related to the Septuagint.

Some preserve other readings.

The discovery of those scrolls did not destroy confidence in the Masoretic Text.

It showed remarkable continuity across many centuries.

It also showed that genuine variations existed before the time of Christ.

What difference does Deuteronomy 32:8 make?

“Children of Israel” connects the division of the nations with Israel.

“Sons of God” may refer to heavenly beings associated with the nations.

Verse 9 continues:

“For the LORD’S portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance.”

The “sons of God” reading creates a contrast between the nations and Israel, which belongs especially to the LORD.

The wording matters.

The interpretation is affected.

We should not pretend otherwise.

Does either reading deny that the Most High rules over the nations?

No.

Does either reading deny God's special covenant relationship with Israel?

No.

The sentence changes.

The sovereignty of God does not.

Now turn to Mark 1:2.

The KJV reads:

"As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee."

The ESV reads:

"As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way."

The KJV says, "in the prophets."

The ESV says, "in Isaiah the prophet."

Why is that difficult?

The first quotation comes from Malachi 3:1.

The next line comes from Isaiah 40:3.

"In the prophets" accurately describes the combined quotation.

"In Isaiah the prophet" names Isaiah even though Mark begins with words from Malachi.

That may be why a copyist would change "Isaiah the prophet" to the smoother expression "the prophets."

It is harder to explain why a copyist would take the accurate general expression "the prophets" and replace it with the more difficult "Isaiah the prophet."

Ancient writers could identify a combined quotation by its principal or more prominent source.

Paul uses a similar practice in Romans 9:27 when he introduces material that continues beyond one verse of Isaiah.

The difficult reading may therefore be original.

Does Mark 1:2 change the identity of John the Baptist?

No.

Does it change the fulfillment of Isaiah 40:3?

No.

Does it change the identity of Jesus as the Lord whose way John prepared?

No.

The wording differs.

The message of the passage remains.

Now we come to a more sensitive example.

I Timothy 3:16 in the KJV says:

“And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh.”

The ESV says:

“Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh.”

The KJV has “God.”

The ESV has “He.”

The Received Text reads the Greek word theos, which means “God.”

The critical text reads hos, which means “who.”

In early Greek manuscripts, sacred names were often abbreviated.

The abbreviated form of “God” and the word “who” could look similar.

The KJV reading has extensive support in the later Byzantine tradition.

The ESV reading has support from earlier Greek manuscripts, ancient translations and early Christian quotations.

Supporters of the Received Text may argue that the KJV reading was preserved in the church’s dominant textual tradition.

Supporters of the critical reading may argue that “God” arose when a copyist misread or clarified the pronoun.

We should represent both arguments fairly.

We should also admit what the difference does.

“God was manifest in the flesh” is more explicit than “He was manifested in the flesh.”

The KJV wording provides a direct statement that the one manifested in flesh is God.

The ESV wording requires us to identify the person from the confession and its context.

The ESV continues:

“He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.”

Who was manifested in the flesh?

Who was seen by angels?

Who was preached among the nations?

Who was believed on in the world?

Who was received up into glory?

Jesus Christ.

The critical reading does not make the subject mysterious.

It does make the verse less direct as an isolated proof that Christ is God.

That is a real difference.

Does the deity of Christ depend upon this one word?

John 1:1 says:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

John 20:28 records Thomas saying to Jesus:

“My Lord and my God.”

Hebrews 1:8 says of the Son:

“Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever.”

The deity of Christ remains clear in both translations.

A textual reading can make one proof text less explicit without removing the truth taught throughout the Bible.

Now consider Jude 5.

The KJV reads:

“I will therefore put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not.”

The ESV reads:

“Now I want to remind you, although you once fully knew it, that Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe.”

The KJV says, “the Lord.”

The ESV says, “Jesus.”

The surviving manuscripts contain several readings at this point, principally “Lord,” “Jesus” and “God.”

The current critical text prefers “Jesus.”

If “Jesus” is original, Jude identifies Jesus as the one who delivered Israel from Egypt and later judged unbelief.

That places Jesus before His birth in Bethlehem.

It identifies Him with the divine Lord active in Israel’s history.

In I Timothy 3:16, the critical reading is less explicit about Christ’s deity.

In Jude 5, the critical reading is more explicit about Christ’s divine identity and preexistence.

If modern textual criticism were designed to remove the deity of Christ, Jude 5 would be a strange way to accomplish it.

The evidence does not always move in one theological direction.

Some Received Text readings are more explicit.

Some critical-text readings are more explicit.

Each passage must be examined on its own evidence.

Now look at John 1:18.

The KJV reads:

“No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.”

The current ESV reads:

“No one has ever seen God; God the only Son, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.”

Some older ESV Bibles read “the only God” rather than “God the only Son.”

That does not mean a new ancient manuscript suddenly appeared.

The English translation was revised.

The KJV’s Greek tradition reads “only-begotten Son.”

The critical Greek text reads “only God” or “unique God.”

The current ESV expresses that critical reading as “God the only Son.”

The word “Son” helps English readers understand whom the verse identifies while “God” reflects the critical Greek noun.

This verse contains two questions.

Which Greek reading should be followed?

How should that reading be expressed in English?

The manuscript decision comes first.

The translation decision comes next.

The ESV’s reading does not weaken the deity of Christ.

It explicitly identifies the unique Son as God and as the one who makes the Father known.

Now consider Philippians 2:6.

The KJV says that Christ, “being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God.”

The ESV says, “though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped.”

Those expressions sound quite different.

This time, the principal cause is not a different Greek manuscript.

Both translations are working from substantially the same Greek wording.

The question concerns the meaning of the Greek word *harpagmos*.

It can involve something seized, something held or something exploited for advantage.

The KJV word “robbery” may confuse a modern reader.

The ESV phrase “a thing to be grasped” also requires explanation.

The context supplies the controlling idea.

Christ existed in the form of God.

He did not use His equality with God for selfish advantage.

He “made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant.”

He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, “even the death of the cross.”

Sometimes the manuscripts agree while the translators disagree.

Acts 12:4 provides another simple example.

The KJV says that Herod intended “after Easter to bring him forth to the people.”

The ESV says that he intended “after the Passover to bring him out to the people.”

Both are translating the same Greek word, *pascha*.

The manuscript is not the cause of that difference.

It is a translation decision.

That is why we must ask what kind of difference we are seeing before we evaluate it.

What should we do when an ESV footnote says, “Some manuscripts”?

Do not panic.

The footnote is telling you that a textual variation exists.

It is also telling you which reading the translators placed in the main text.

The ESV preface calls textual footnotes an integral part of the translation.

They frequently preserve the traditional reading even when the committee selected another reading for the text.

A footnote does not mean, “We do not know whether the Bible is true.”

It means, “Ancient witnesses preserve more than one reading here, and we want you to know which decision we made.”

Footnotes have limitations.

“Some manuscripts” does not tell us whether those manuscripts are early or late.

It does not tell us whether they are numerous or few.

It does not tell us whether several manuscripts copied the reading from one common ancestor.

A translation footnote is not a complete critical apparatus.

It is a doorway into further study.

A footnote is not a hole in the Bible.

It is a window into the history of its transmission.

Now let us conduct a doctrine audit.

Does the ESV’s critical text remove the deity of Christ?

No.

I Timothy 3:16 is less explicit in the ESV.

Jude 5 is more explicit in the ESV.

John 1:18 strongly affirms Christ’s deity in the current ESV.

John 1:1, John 20:28 and Hebrews 1:8 remain.

Does the critical text remove the Trinity?

No.

We examined I John 5:7 in our earlier study of omitted verses, so we will not repeat that entire discussion.

The doctrine of the Trinity does not depend upon one disputed clause.

Matthew 28:19 names “the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”

II Corinthians 13:14 brings together “the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost.”

Does the critical text remove redemption through the blood of Christ?

No.

The KJV includes “through his blood” in Colossians 1:14 while the ESV does not include the phrase at that location.

Both translations contain the words in Ephesians 1:7:

“In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.”

The blood of Christ is taught throughout both Bibles.

Does a disputed ending of Mark remove the resurrection?

No.

Mark announces the empty tomb before the disputed longer ending.

Matthew, Luke and John record the resurrection.

Acts and the Epistles proclaim it.

I Corinthians 15:3-4 says:

“Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;

And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.”

Here is the careful conclusion.

Some textual variants change wording.

Some change the meaning of an individual sentence.

Some make a particular proof text stronger or weaker.

No essential Biblical doctrine stands or falls with one contested reading.

That conclusion does not make the variants unimportant.

Every word of Scripture deserves careful study.

It does mean that God has not allowed the message of Scripture to disappear within the copying process.

The witnesses disagree in places, but the disagreement is visible because the witnesses survived.

The same abundance of manuscripts that gives us many recorded variations also gives us the evidence needed to recognize and examine them.

What should a Christian do when two translations differ?

First, do not be frightened.

Second, ask whether the difference is textual or translational.

Third, read the footnotes.

Fourth, examine the immediate context.

Fifth, compare other passages that teach the same truth.

Sixth, do not accuse another Christian of rejecting God's Word merely because that person uses a different faithful translation.

Seventh, do not claim absolute certainty where the evidence remains divided.

Faith does not require us to hide the evidence.

Honesty about a difficult verse is not unbelief.

God did not preserve His Word by preventing every copyist from ever making a mistake.

He preserved it through a vast body of witnesses that allows differences to be identified, compared and studied.

The manuscripts have variations.

Their united testimony still brings us to Jesus Christ.

So, do different manuscripts change the message?

Do they sometimes change the wording?

Yes.

Do they sometimes affect the meaning of a sentence?

Yes.

Do they sometimes affect how strongly one verse can be used to support a doctrine?

Yes.

Do they give us a different God?

No.

Do they give us a different Christ?

No.

Do they give us a different gospel?

No.

The KJV and ESV both declare that God created all things.

They both declare that all have sinned.

They both declare that the wages of sin is death.

They both declare that Jesus Christ is the divine Son of God.

They both declare that Christ died for our sins.

They both declare that He was buried.

They both declare that He rose again.

They both declare that salvation is by grace through faith in Him.

They both declare that He will return and judge the world in righteousness.

Different manuscripts sometimes change the sentence.

They have not changed the Savior.

That brings us to the most important question today.

The most important question is not whether you own a KJV or an ESV.

The most important question is whether you have trusted the Christ revealed in Scripture.

Romans 3:23 says:

“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.”

Romans 6:23 says:

“For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Christ paid for our sins upon the cross.

He rose again.

Ephesians 2:8-9 says:

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

Not of works, lest any man should boast.”

Romans 10:13 says:

“For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

If you have never trusted Jesus Christ as your Savior, you may call upon Him today.

You are not saved by repeating perfect words.

You are saved by grace when you place your faith in Jesus Christ.

You may pray something like this:

“Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner.

I know that I cannot save myself.

I believe that You died for my sins.

I believe that You were buried and rose again.

I turn from trusting myself and place my faith in You.

Forgive me.

Save me.

Give me the eternal life You promised.

I ask this in the name of Jesus.

Amen.”

If you prayed that prayer and trusted Christ, please speak with me after the service.

We would be honored to pray with you and help you begin growing in the Word of God.

For those who already know Christ, open your Bible with confidence.

When you find a difference, examine it without fear.

Read the note.

Study the context.

Listen carefully to another believer’s evidence.

Do not let a translation preference become an excuse for pride.

Do not let uncertainty at one word keep you from obeying the thousands of words that are clear.

Love God.

Love your neighbor.

Forgive one another.

Preach the gospel.

Care for the poor.

Walk humbly with your God.

The Bible’s commands are not hidden behind a footnote.

The gospel is not trapped inside a textual apparatus.

The Savior is not missing from either translation.

God's people have not been left without His Word.

Different manuscripts sometimes change the sentence, but they have not changed the Savior, and they have not silenced the voice of God.

Aloha Nui Loa.

KJV and ESV Do Different Manuscripts Change the Message

Detailed Commentary

Reason Together Church

Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley

Commentary Purpose

This commentary follows the sermon in order and explains the Biblical, historical and pastoral reasoning behind its principal claims. It also identifies necessary qualifications so the sermon can remain clear without becoming simplistic.

The sermon's central conclusion distinguishes local effect from doctrinal loss. A textual variant may change the meaning of one sentence. It may alter whether a verse directly names Christ as God. That is a genuine doctrinal effect at the level of the verse. An essential doctrine, however, rests on the Bible's cumulative witness. None of the representative differences between the KJV and ESV removes that cumulative witness.

1 Series Introduction

The opening identifies the first five studies so the congregation understands why RTS-105 does not repeat the full omitted-verses discussion from RTS-102. The present study moves from general explanation to direct comparison. Its task is to show how textual decisions appear in two actual English Bibles.

The imagined scene of two readers noticing different words gives the subject a pastoral setting. Many believers encounter textual criticism first as surprise or alarm. The sermon delays the question 'Which Bible changed?' until the cause of the difference is identified. That delay is essential to fair reasoning.

2 Preservation Text and Translation

Psalm 12:6-7 expresses confidence in the purity and preservation of God's words. Interpreters debate whether the pronoun 'them' in verse 7 refers grammatically to the words, the oppressed people described earlier or both within the Psalm's movement. The sermon uses the passage as a broad confession of God's preserving faithfulness rather than as proof that one later printed Greek edition would be preserved without variation.

Isaiah 40:8 supplies an unambiguous declaration that God's Word stands forever. The sermon therefore begins from faith in divine revelation. Textual study is presented as examination of the means of transmission, not as a tribunal deciding whether revelation occurred.

3 Congregational Elements and Segue

The giving note preserves Reason Together Church practice. Guests are not pressured, believers from other churches are directed toward their home churches and giving is connected with 2 Corinthians 9:7. The guest card asks only for first name and email. The café and Keiki Kids Center invitations support the church's hospitable setting.

The segue connects financial transparency with textual transparency. Its purpose is limited. It does not claim that Bible publishing and church finance are identical. It establishes the principle that disclosure can increase trust rather than destroy it.

4 The Two Question Method

The distinction between textual difference and translation difference is the sermon's main educational tool. It gives listeners a practical method they can use after the service. An English comparison alone cannot reveal whether the source texts differ.

A textual decision asks what wording should be translated. A translation decision asks how that wording should be expressed in English. John 1:18 shows that both decisions may operate in one verse. Philippians 2:6 and Acts 12:4 demonstrate that striking English differences can occur without a significant difference in the underlying Greek text.

5 KJV Hebrew Foundation

The Second Rabbinic Bible was a printed representative of the Masoretic tradition rather than the origin of that tradition. Jacob ben Hayyim organized extensive Masoretic material, and Daniel Bomberg's press gave the edition wide influence. Calling it the KJV's principal Hebrew base is more precise than saying the KJV came from the Leningrad Codex.

The KJV translators consulted the Septuagint, Vulgate and other scholarship. Their preface, The Translators to the Reader, openly defends learning from earlier translations. This evidence prevents the sermon from portraying the KJV method as rigid dependence upon one printed text.

6 KJV Greek Foundation

The name Textus Receptus can suggest a unity greater than the historical editions possessed. Erasmus, Stephanus and Beza produced related but not identical texts. Beza's later editions were especially important for the KJV, yet the translators sometimes followed other sources.

Scrivener's reconstruction works backward from the KJV's English readings and the printed Greek editions to identify the Greek text apparently followed at each location. It should not be described as the exact physical Greek volume used in 1611. It is a later scholarly reconstruction.

The distinction between TR and Majority Text prevents a common factual error. A Byzantine-priority scholar may defend the majority reading at a place where the TR follows a minority reading. Support for the Byzantine tradition does not automatically validate every decision in the TR.

7 ESV Hebrew Foundation

BHS reproduces the Leningrad Codex as its main text and records alternatives in an apparatus. The ESV's preference for the Masoretic Text shows substantial continuity with the KJV. Differences between their Old Testaments should not automatically be attributed to the Dead Sea Scrolls or Septuagint.

The ESV preface says that ancient versions and manuscripts are used in exceptional difficult cases. That policy is significant in Deuteronomy 32:8, where the ESV adopts a reading supported by ancient Hebrew evidence.

8 ESV Greek Foundation

NA28 and UBS5 share the same edited text but serve different purposes. NA28 gives a denser apparatus for textual study. UBS5 concentrates on variants considered especially useful for translators and assigns confidence ratings to selected decisions.

The sermon corrects the ‘two manuscripts’ claim without minimizing Sinaiticus and Vaticanus. Their age and textual quality make them important. Modern editors also consider papyri, later uncials, minuscules, lectionaries, ancient versions and patristic citations.

The word eclectic means that editors do not follow one manuscript or family at every point. A reading can be selected from a later witness when internal and external evidence indicate that it preserves an earlier textual state.

9 Manuscript Families

The traditional text-type labels describe patterns rather than inspired boundaries. The sermon avoids technical detail but introduces contamination, the standard scholarly term for mixing that occurs when a copyist uses more than one source.

The statement that an old manuscript can contain a later reading and a later manuscript can preserve an ancient reading corrects two opposing slogans. It does not make age irrelevant. Age remains significant evidence because an early copy has fewer possible generations between it and the autograph. It simply does not settle every reading by itself.

10 Dead Sea Scrolls and Septuagint

The Dead Sea Scrolls provide direct Hebrew evidence centuries older than the complete medieval Masoretic codices. Their overall agreement with the traditional text is substantial, but ‘substantial agreement’ should not be turned into ‘perfect identity.’ Their diversity is part of the historical evidence.

The Septuagint is important because it predates the medieval Hebrew codices and was widely used by early Christians. It is still a translation. Differences from the Masoretic Text may arise at the Hebrew-source level or during Greek translation and transmission. The sermon therefore avoids treating every Septuagint difference as recovery of the original Hebrew.

11 Deuteronomy 32 8

The phrase ‘sons of God’ is supported by ancient Hebrew witnesses from Qumran. Many Septuagint witnesses read ‘angels of God,’ which may represent an interpretation of a related Hebrew phrase. The Masoretic reading ‘sons of Israel’ is the basis of the KJV.

Verse 9 strengthens the coherence of ‘sons of God’ because it contrasts the nations with the LORD’s own portion, Jacob. Some scholars connect the passage with a heavenly council and the administration of nations. The sermon stops short of developing that system because the identity and function of the heavenly beings require a separate study.

The passage answers the title question with nuance. The variant changes local meaning. It does not change the passage's central confession that the Most High determines the nations and claims Israel as His portion.

12 Mark 1 2

Mark combines Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3. The critical reading's attribution to Isaiah is harder because the Malachi line appears first. The principle of the harder reading asks which form more naturally explains the other. A correcting scribe has an understandable reason to generalize Isaiah to 'the prophets.'

The explanation should not claim certainty about a particular copyist's intention. It presents the most plausible direction of change. The ancient practice of naming the principal source makes Mark's attribution intelligible without requiring the KJV reading.

13 First Timothy 3 16

This is the sermon's strongest example of a variant affecting the doctrinal force of one verse. The KJV directly says 'God.' The ESV does not. Refusing to admit that difference would weaken the study's credibility.

The forms theos and hos became visually close when theos was abbreviated as a sacred name. The relative pronoun also fits the pattern of early Christian confessional material that begins with 'who,' as in Philippians 2:6 and Colossians 1:15.

The ESV capitalizes 'He' and supplies an English subject for readability, but the critical Greek reading is a relative pronoun. The confession remains about Christ. The sermon then tests the broader doctrine against undisputed passages rather than assuming that one variant controls the whole New Testament.

14 Jude 5

Jude 5 provides necessary balance. The critical reading 'Jesus' connects Christ directly with the exodus and wilderness judgment. This reading is not a translation embellishment. It represents a textual decision.

The evidence is not unanimous. Lord remains ancient and has substantial support. The sermon therefore says that Jesus is currently preferred by many editors rather than treating the decision as mathematically certain.

The verse challenges theories that assign a consistent anti-Christological direction to critical texts. Textual decisions can strengthen, weaken or leave unchanged the explicit doctrinal wording of an individual passage.

15 John 1 18 and the Current ESV

John 1:18 requires special care because ESV editions differ. The 2016 wording ‘the only God’ and the 2025 wording ‘God the only Son’ translate the same critical reading. A listener with an older ESV may therefore see different English without a new textual decision.

The KJV’s ‘only begotten Son’ reflects *monogenes huios*. The critical reading contains *theos* rather than *huios*. The current ESV uses ‘Son’ as an identifying expression while retaining ‘God.’ The rendering is interpretive, as every translation must sometimes be, and should not be cited as a wooden word-for-word equivalent.

Both textual readings are strongly Christological. The KJV stresses the unique Son who reveals the Father. The critical reading explicitly calls the unique one God. The variant cannot reasonably serve as evidence that the modern text seeks to deny Christ’s deity.

16 Philippians 2 6

The Greek noun *harpagmos* occurs only here in the New Testament. Its interpretation depends on broader Greek usage and the hymn’s movement. The KJV’s ‘robbery’ reflects an older way of describing something seized or claimed. Modern readers may mistakenly hear it as a criminal act.

The ESV’s ‘a thing to be grasped’ can mean something seized or something clung to. Many interpreters understand the clause to mean that Christ did not exploit equality with God for selfish advantage. The following self-emptying and servant language supports that ethical movement.

The sermon’s purpose is not to settle every lexical debate. It uses the verse to show that the manuscripts may agree even when translations sound different.

17 Acts 12 4

Pascha ordinarily refers to Passover. The KJV’s *Easter* reflects historical English usage and has received several defenses based on the calendar or the broader festival. Whatever judgment is made about the best English term, the underlying Greek reading is not the disputed element.

This short example reinforces the diagnostic method after several technical passages. It also prevents listeners from using a familiar KJV and ESV difference as proof of competing Greek manuscripts.

18 Footnotes and Uncertainty

The ESV’s textual footnotes provide disclosure but not complete argument. They frequently identify an alternative as ‘some manuscripts’ or ‘Hebrew’ without listing witnesses. That level is appropriate for a reading Bible but insufficient for advanced textual evaluation.

The sermon’s window metaphor should be understood modestly. A footnote allows the reader to see that a transmission question exists. It does not by itself reveal the entire historical landscape or prove that the main-text decision is correct.

19 Doctrine Audit

The audit distinguishes the doctrine from one verse used to teach it. Christ's deity is distributed across Johannine, Pauline and Hebrews passages. The Trinity arises from the Bible's identification of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost as divine and personally distinct, not from the Johannine Comma alone.

The blood-redemption example compares Colossians 1:14 with Ephesians 1:7. Even if 'through his blood' is secondary in Colossians, the phrase remains inspired Scripture in Ephesians. The doctrine also appears in Romans, Hebrews, Peter and Revelation.

The resurrection example should remain short because RTS-102 addressed the longer ending of Mark. Mark 16:6 already announces, 'He is risen; he is not here.' The doctrine is multiply attested outside the disputed verses.

20 Preservation and the Abundance of Witnesses

The sermon states that God did not preserve Scripture by preventing every copyist from making any mistake. That claim describes the surviving evidence. Manuscripts contain spelling differences, accidental omissions, repeated words and other variations.

Providential preservation can be understood through the abundance and distribution of witnesses. Copying errors did not ordinarily erase every competing reading. The surviving evidence allows comparison and often permits a strong conclusion about the earlier form.

This approach avoids equating preservation with one flawless line of handwritten or printed copies. It also avoids reducing preservation to a purely human achievement. God's providence operated through real scribes, real manuscripts and recoverable evidence.

21 Pastoral Application and Invitation

The numbered actions in the sermon give listeners a repeatable response: identify the kind of difference, read the note, examine context and compare the Bible's broader teaching. Charity is included because translation debates often become judgments about another believer's motives or salvation.

The invitation turns from the transmission of the message to the response demanded by that message. Romans 3:23, Romans 6:23, Ephesians 2:8-9 and Romans 10:13 are quoted from the KJV. The prayer ends in the name of Jesus according to Reason Together Church practice.

The final application does not ask listeners to become textual critics. It asks them to obey the clear Word they possess. The closing line answers the approved title while keeping Jesus Christ at the center of the study.

Source Guide

The research vault contains the fuller source list. The following primary resources are especially useful for verifying the textual foundations and the history described in the sermon.

Preface to the English Standard Version

Current ESV text of Deuteronomy 32

Current ESV text of Jude

Current ESV text of John 1

Gerd Mink on the Coherence-Based Genealogical Method

Israel Museum Great Isaiah Scroll

KJV Translators to the Reader

F H A Scrivener on the Authorized Version