

Dear Lloyd,

Thank you for writing us at Christian Questions Radio. You wanted to know why some pastors “damn” the NIV Bible. You asked if one Bible version was better than another.

We discovered that some pastors are critical of the NIV version of the Bible because it leaves out 49 verses found in older English translations such as the King James Version. The insinuation is that the NIV committee did not have a proper respect for the text and that earlier versions of the English Bible are more accurate and faithful to God’s word because they contain these verses.

Translation is a difficult job. There are over 3000 Greek manuscripts and fragments of the New Testament of varying age. Each one was hand copied, which leaves room for mistakes and even practical decisions of what to do with what the previous copyist has done. Additionally, in the 400 years since the KJV was translated much older manuscripts have since surfaced that did not have certain verses. The KJV was translated largely from the Textus Receptus, which was a compilation of manuscripts that did not even date prior to 1100 AD. The NIV translation committee had access to manuscripts dating back within 150 years of the original documents of the New Testament.

What happened in the 800 years between the texts the NIV is based on and the texts the KJV is based on? Copying, copying, and more copying. Often a copyist would write an explanation in the margin and some times that explanation would end up in the text. Bruce Metzger (Text of the New Testament, 194) thinks that is exactly what happened in the case of John 5:4. (“For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had.” KJV) Why did John 5:4 become an actual Bible verse? For several reasons (listed in Metzger’s textual commentary 3rd ed, 209):

1 – Because the earliest manuscripts don’t contain it. Why not? Did they omit this verse just like the NIV? Of course not. They don’t contain the verse because the manuscripts they were copied from didn’t have it and the ones before them didn’t have it because the original didn’t have it. It doesn’t start appearing in manuscripts for at least 500 years. When no manuscript before 500 AD has a verse you can be fairly certain that it was added in from a marginal note, from a copying error, or due to the copyist remembering that verse in another gospel and accidentally harmonizing them in his head and copying it wrong (such is the case of a few other “missing verses”). But once it is added it then gets copied over and over and from that point on may appear original to the next copyist.

2 – Multiple Greek manuscripts copied after 900 AD have a mark showing that they thought the verse was questionable but they included it because it was in the manuscript they were copying from.

3 – This verse has multiple words that John doesn’t use anywhere else = out of character.

4 – This verse has a larger number of textual variants = there are many versions of this text in many different Greek manuscripts which points to it being very questionable as to what was original if it even was original.

With all that weight against John 5:4 the NIV decided not to include it in its translation. Did the NIV delete the verse from the inspired word of God? They didn't delete it if it wasn't there to begin with. It may seem like a verse was removed because previous English versions like the KJV included it because it was in the manuscripts they used to translate from. People read it for 400 years in English and became accustomed to it. So when they spot it missing from the NIV eyebrows go up and accusations begin to fly. So it probably wasn't so much that the NIV deleted something or that the KJV added something. The problem was the texts the KJV was translated from were simply not ideal."

Is one Bible version better than another? Some modern versions are better than others. We believe that the older American Standard Version (1901) is probably more accurate than the NIV. James Parkinson, a Bible scholar, laboriously worked on making further corrections to the Revised Standard Version (American Edition) from recent manuscripts discovered and published. You may want to contact him at Jim77Parkinson@Juno.com. We are sure that he would be happy to send you a copy of the RVIC (Revised Version Improved and Corrected).

For your edification, we have also attached a file of all the verses that are considered to be spurious. You may want to cross them out of your Bible.

We hope we have answered your question. Please write us again.

Sincerely,

Christian Questions Radio