**How Many Revisions?**

**By Alan Pohl**

"How many revisions have there been to the KJV (originally published in 1611) and what are the dates?"

It is a pertinent question because Thomas Nelson, which publishes the NKJV, the so-called "New King James Version", claims that this new translation is "the fifth major revision" of the KJV. I have some of their promotional literature in which this is claimed.

To answer the question briefly, the answer is zero. The KJV that we have today is the same as what was published in 1611.

The claim is often made that there have been four major revisions encompassing over 75,000 word changes. The first part of this statement is true; the second is false. Actually, there appear to be many more than 75,000 changes. There have been numerous editions of the KJV since 1611. More about the so-called "four major revisions" claim at the end.

The KJV available today may not look the same as what was originally published in 1611, but it really is, once you make allowances for three kinds of changes: proofreading (what I call typos), printing or type (font), and orthographic (spelling). In addition, there have been a number of changes of punctuation and case.

All of these changes resulted in different editions, but no revisions. This is not engaging in semantics. A given work is revised if the author (or translator) didn't like everything in the original and wants to make substantive changes. However, to follow this example, if the publisher did not accurately transcribe the author's manuscript in the original edition, then the corrections would be incorporated into a second edition, not a revision. This second edition would simply be what the author originally wished to say (assuming that all of the printing errors were purged). And this is the case with the KJV.

Of the changes of the first kind, there were about 400 typos in the 1611 edition. Considering how big the Bible is and that they lacked word processors and spell-check-on-the-fly, that is a remarkably small number.

I have a copy of a book here at home in which all of these typos are cataloged (*The Authorized Edition of the English Bible (1611); Its Subsequent Reprints and Modern Representatives*, published in 1884 by Prebendary F.H.A. Scrivener, M.A. D.C.L., LL.D.) and have looked at all of them. I also have a 1611 edition of the KJV (set in Roman font instead of Gothic, but preserving the typos). Most of these typos are simply a word that was mistakenly used in place of a similar word. Also, a plural may have been used in place of a singular and vice versa, or the word order inverted, or a word or phrase omitted. Of all of these, there is only one that is doctrinally significant. In Psalm 69:32, the KJV reads,

The humble shall see *this, and* be glad: and your heart shall live that seek God.

The original 1611 edition reads:

The humble shall see *this, and* be glad: and your heart shall live that seek good.

This typo was corrected in 1617. At that point, most of the KJV translators were still alive.

Bear in mind how labor-intensive printing was back in those days. Johann Gutenberg, to whom invention of the moveable type printing press is usually attributed (A.D. 1450), published the Bible in 1456. However, little had changed in the intervening 161 years. Printers had to set type into the plates by hand from boxes and boxes of metal type, one letter at a time. I am quite amazed that the first KJV Bible had as few typos as it did. Most modern translations of the Bible and other books of comparable size don’t do much better. Some do worse.

The 400 or so typos were noted and corrected in subsequent editions, most within a few years. About 100 were corrected by the time of the second printing of the original KJV edition (still in 1611), and almost three fourths were corrected by 1638.

As may be expected, it has proven impossible to keep errors like these from creeping into later printings and editions. For example, the edition of 1631 came to be known as the Wicked Bible because it omitted "not" from the seventh commandment in Exodus 20:14.

The second class of changes had to do with the choice of type, or font. The original 1611 edition was set in Gothic font. The change to Roman font resulted in numerous changes because of the differences in certain letters. Examples:

\* The Gothic lower case "s" looks like our lower case "f" without the cross except when used at the end of the word. Thus, for example, "Mofes" (allowing that I cannot remove the cross in the "f") was changed to "Moses". There were approximately 30,000 such changes.

\* The Gothic "u" looks like our letter "v" and vice versa. (As a child learning to read, I could never figure out why the letter "w" was called "double-u" instead of "double-v" – now I know!) (Cut me a little slack – someone has to worry about things like that!) This resulted in over 45,000 more changes, e.g., "vnto" to "unto".

\* The Gothic "J" and "j" look like our "I" and "I". Thus, "Iesus" was changed to "Jesus" 700 times, etc.

This class of change is not even spelling changes, but only a type style or font change. It does not materially alter the text.

The third and final class is spelling changes. At the time of the KJV translation, the English language was well developed concerning basic grammar and vocabulary. That much of our language hasn’t changed, but spelling was much more free form that what is acceptable today. It was not unusual for an author to spell the same word differently in the same book and even on the same page. This was acceptable back then. By the 18th century (1700s), spelling had become much more standardized, and this was reflected in later editions of the KJV. Most of the spelling changes were incorporated into the 1762 and 1769 editions.

For example, double consonants were formerly more common, and these were likewise changed, such as "ranne" to "ran". Other examples of spelling changes are "ynough" to "enough", "foorth" to "forth", and "towre" to "tower". Dropping the old English final "e", such as "olde" to "old", alone resulted in more than 30,000 changes.

Again, this kind of change does not properly constitute a revision.

In addition, there were about 5,000 other changes made, mostly punctuation, including periods to commas, commas to colons, colons to semicolons, and lower case to upper case or vice versa. Again, these could not properly be called changes significant enough to warrant the label of revision.

To get back to the original question: You have likely heard that there were four major revisions to the KJV. The dates of these were supposedly 1629, 1637, 1762, and 1769. Having looked at the many different printings and editions of the KJV during its first 180 or so years and the changes that were made, I find absolutely nothing to support this claim. If the above changes must be classed as revisions, then what do we call what has been done in modern-day translations? Certainly not a Bible.

 "For God is not vnrighteous, to forget your worke and labour of loue, which yee haue shewed toward his Name, in that yee haue ministred to the Saints, and doe minister."

Hebrews 6:10

KJV, 1611 edition