

The King James Version

A Study of A Scholarly Translation

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The King James Version

I. History

The colorful sixteenth century came to an end with the death of Queen Elizabeth I in 1603. The English Church was now definitely separated from the Church of Rome; England and Scotland were united under the crown of King James I; English literature was bursting into full flower with Shakespeare, Bacon, and Spenser. One of the first tasks which King James faced was the reconciliation of various religious parties. One of their more serious differences of opinion was over the Bible versions. The Bishops' Bible and the Great Bible were in use in the churches, but the Puritans, who were in ascendancy, were buying the Geneva Bible. The Bishops' Bible was the Authorized Version but it was a poor translation. King James liked the Geneva Bible as a translation but the many marginal notes which attacked the King were objectionable. No one knew just what faction James would uphold

In January 1604, King James called a conference of leading religious leaders at Hampton Court to promote religious toleration. Amid the discussion, Dr. John Reynolds, President of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, spokesman for the Puritan group, proposed a new translation that would have the approval of the whole church. Most present took little notice of the suggestion with the exception of King James who was himself somewhat a Bible scholar and had even done some translation.

On July 22, 1604, the king announced that he had appointed 54 men as translators of new version. The list included Anglican churchmen, Puritan churchmen, linguists and theologians (including some who were uncommitted to either religious party), laymen and ministers. And these translators had the privilege of calling on any scholar outside their committee if they should desire.

A list of 47 of the men has been preserved with the company they served. The other seven appear to have died or resigned before the work began. One of the most valuable Hebrew scholars, Dr. Lively, died in 1605 before the translating work started. (Hills, p. 21)

The Revisers were organized into six companies; two meeting at Westminster, two at Cambridge, and two at Oxford. The companies were made up of seven or eight of the greatest Hebrew and Greek scholars of the day. Each company was given a section of scripture with which to start. Each man made his own translation and they then compared and revised them into one version which then went to each of the other companies for review. Thus every part of the Bible went through the hands of the entire body of revisers. Then the entire version, thus, amended, came before a selected committee of twelve, two from each company. They ironed out ultimate differences and put the finishing touches, the harmonistic elements, upon the work and prepared it for the printer. (Miller, p. 364)

The King gave the revisers a set of 15 rules to govern their work. A gist of a few of them being:

1. The Bishops' Bible shall be followed and as little altered as the truth of the original will permit.
2. The old ecclesiastical words shall be retained.
3. The chapter divisions shall not be changed, unless very necessary.
4. No marginal notes at all, except explanation of Hebrew and Greek words which cannot be briefly and fitly expressed in the text.
5. Whenever the Tyndale, Matthew, Coverdale, the Great Bible, or the Geneva agrees better with the text than the Bishops' Bible, they are to be used.

[See McClintock and Strong, Vol. 1, p.560 for full list.]

II. Early Editions

The translation was proposed in January 1604, began in 1607, took two years to accomplish and nine months more to prepare for the printer. The first edition appeared with an engraved title page, a dedication to King James, a Preface to the Reader, genealogies, maps, and other popular features. The engravings were from

previously published Bibles and classic books. The pages were unnumbered but there were 1668 of them. It was a stately folio edition measuring 16 x 10½ inches, and was intended to be a "pulpit" edition.

There is no evidence to show that the version ever had the official approval or authority of King James. Evidently the printers on their own authority had been using the phrase "Authorized and Appointed to be Read in the Churches" on copies of the Bishops' Bible to distinguish it from the Geneva Bible. They continued the same use with the new version. Thus the phrase "Authorized Version" used as a label to distinguish it from other versions was not a historical reality. It appears that the king never even made a contribution toward financing the operation.

Three editions of the KJV appeared during the first year. In the next three years fourteen editions in various sizes were printed. As to be expected under early printing methods, there were many typographical errors in every edition. As old ones were corrected, new ones appeared. Some were quite humorous and some serious.

One of the 1611 editions had "I Corinthians" and "2 Corinthians" listed in the Old Testament instead of Chronicles. But of all the misprints the KJV suffered, none were as scandalous as the omission of the word "*not*" from the seventh commandment, hence the offending edition was commonly called the *Wicked Bible*.

Another edition was called the *Vinegar Bible* because the chapter heading of Luke 20 which read *vinegar* instead of *vineyard*. The *Murderers' Bible* was so called because Mark 7:27 was made to read "*Let the children first be killed*" instead of *filled*. Another misprint read "*he slew two lions like men*" (2 Samuel 23:20). The moral of all this was pointed up most effectually by the careless typesetter who made Psalms 119:161 read, "*Printers have persecuted me without a cause*"!

The classic misprint which has been perpetuated by modern editions is Matthew 23:24, "*strain at a gnat*" instead of "*strain out a gnat*."

Our present edition of the KJV comes from revisions made in 1762 by Dr. Thomas Paris of Trinity College for Cambridge Press, and 1769 by Dr. Benjamin Blayney for the Oxford Press. These revisions primarily modernized spelling.

III. The Reception of the KJV

The new version began to be used immediately in all the churches through the people continued to hold on to the older versions in their private reading. Kenyon says, "From the first, however, the version of 1611 seems to have been received into popular favor." (Kenyon, p. 232).

Some believe it was forty years before the KJV won out over the popularity of the Geneva Bible.

The publishers added their contribution to the success of the KJV by ceasing the publication of the Bishops' Bible in 1606 and by issuing the KJV with the same format as the Geneva Bible.

But the Roman Catholics accused it of being false to the scriptures in favor of protestantism; Armenians thought it favored Calvinism; the Puritans would have preferred to use "*washing*" instead of "*baptism*", and "*congregation*" or "*assembly*" instead of "*church*." They also disliked the words "*bishops*," "*ordain*," and "*Easter*."

The reasons for the gradual but overwhelming success of the KJV have been well stated by several writers and may be briefly summarized as follows:

1. The personal qualifications of the revisers, who were the choice scholars and linguists of their day as well as men of profound and unaffected piety.
2. The almost universal sense of the work as a national effort, supported wholehearted by the king, and with the full concurrence and approval of both church and state.
3. It was the work of no single man and of no single school. It was the deliberate work of a large body of trained scholars who had before them nearly a century of revision. The translation of the Bible had passed out of the sphere of controversy. It was a national undertaking in which no one had any interest at heart save that of producing the best possible version of the scriptures.
4. The congeniality of the religious climate of the day with the sympathies and enthusiasm of the translators, as the predominate interest of their age was theology and religion.

- 5 The organized system of cooperative work which followed the precedent of the Geneva translators, while it may have been improved, resulted in a unity of tone in the Authorized Version which surpassed all its predecessors.
6. The literary atmosphere of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries paralleled the lofty sense of style and artistic touch of the translators. (Geisler, p. 420)

IV. The Greek Text of the KJV

Champions of recent versions have tried to disparage the Greek text from which the KJV was made. These men are usually theological liberals, or trained under them, such as Clarence T. Craig who was on the translation committee of the RSV. He says on page 15 of the Introduction to the Revised Standard Version (a book published by the RSV translation committee), "The King James Version....was based on late and corrupt medieval manuscripts." And thus, he attacks the foundation of the KJV, supposing the RSV by using the "two most ancient" MSS and the Dead Sea Scrolls have a superior text.

The Greek text that formed the basis for the King James Version has since been given the name *Textus Receptus*. This is a Greek edition based on the Byzantine family of MSS. Some in attacking this particular edition point out that it is partially based upon the work of Desiderius Erasmus of 1516, who had no MSS older than the X century, and who had only one XII century MS on Revelation. We know from Erasmus that the last six verses of his Revelation MS were missing and that he translated it from a Latin Bible into Greek and incorporated it into his Greek edition.

But one must realize that the *Textus Receptus* had undergone other revisions. The text from Erasmus was his 5th edition of 1535, not his first of 1516. It had also been revised and as a result is also called Stephen's "royal edition" of 1550 with marginal reading from 15 MSS.

Even Robertson after saying some disparaging things about it, says, "It should be stated at once that the *Textus Receptus* is not a bad text. It is not a heretical text. It is substantially correct." (Miller, p. 364)

We have in this century seen a lot of liberties taken with the Bible text. Men who have no reverence for God or his word do not blink about changing it to fit their pet theories. No example serves any better than the very first verse of the Bible. The KJV and the ASV translate it "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." But the slow, deliberate, tactic of liberals can be easily traced as they work to alter the scripture.

First, see the RSV footnote. After suggesting that it could be "When God began to create," the tactic is to let a few years go by while the public gets use to the change and then the liberals put the footnote into the text. See C.H. Dodd's translation of the New English Bible (NEB). (Many of Thayer's radical footnotes in the ASV get into the text of the RSV.)

But how did the liberals arrive at this change in Genesis 1:1? The KJV and the ASV translators treat Genesis 1:1 as it appears in the Hebrew, an independent clause. The liberal radicals would change it to a dependent clause wherein "the doctrine of absolute creation is then not taught in the first chapter of Genesis." (Young, p. 2)

How can they do so? By stating they believe the Hebrew verb construction (a construct) is incorrect and taking the liberty to "emend," or correct, the Hebrew to what they believe is right, and without any MS support.

Edward J. Young points out conclusively that "It is not necessary, however, to emend the word, because the construct followed by a finite verb is a genuine Semitic usage." He then proceeds to point out several other identical Hebrew verb constructions in the Old Testament. (Young, p. 3).

In speaking of new translations taking liberties with the text, Foy E. Wallace says of "the Revised Standard Version... its text is full of interpolations with added words and phrases unknown to any Scripture text." (Wallace, p.xxvii).

The vast majority of extant Greek New Testament manuscripts agree together very closely. So closely, in fact, that they may fairly be said to contain the same New Testament text. This majority text is usually called the *Byzantine* text by

modern textual critics. This is because all modern critics acknowledge that this was the Greek New Testament in general use throughout the greater part of the Byzantine Period (AD 312 -AD 1453).

For many centuries before the protestant reformation this Byzantine text was the text of the entire Greek Church and for more than three centuries after the reformation it was the text of the entire protestant church. Even today it is the text which most protestants know best, since the King James Version and other early protestant translations were made from it. (Burgon, p. 20).

We believe that the Bible teaches providential preservation of the scriptures (Matthew 24:35; Mark 13:31; Luke 21:33). Where and how has it been preserved?

John Burgon was an ardent defender of the Byzantine text. He believed that Christ had fulfilled His promise of preserving His word for His people by handing down the Byzantine text (the Majority-Text) generation after generation without fail from the days of the apostles.

In attacks on the KJV by way of its Greek text, many have made the point that the KJV was made before the discovery of the three present oldest manuscripts. These three being: **A**, or *Alexandrinus*, a fourth or fifth century manuscript; **B**, *Vaticanus*, of the fourth century; and **Aleph** (), *Sinaiticus*, of the fourth or fifth century. **B** and **Aleph** are not of the Byzantine family, however, but are of a class referred to as the Alexandrian or Egyptian text.

Thus, many recent translations footnote some verses, "*Some ancient authorities say ...*" and attempt to alter the Majority-Text reading in favor of **B** and **Aleph**. But what support are these "ancient" manuscripts for changing the scriptures?

Burgon regarded the exceptional age of **B** and **Aleph** as a proof not of their goodness but of their badness. Arguing if they had been good manuscripts they would have been read to pieces long ago. "We suspect that these two manuscripts are indebted for their preservation *solely* to their ascertained evil character." (Burgon, p. 23). Thus, the fact that **B** and **Aleph** are so old is a point against them, not something in their favor. It shows that the church rejected them and did not read or copy them.

Even the liberal Kirsopp Lake admitted that the scribes "usually destroyed their exemplars when they had copied the sacred books." If Lake could believe this, why can't he believe that the most "*ancient*" Byzantine texts were worn out with much reading and copying?

Is it not odd that these ancient manuscripts **B** and **Aleph** are not forms which are preserved in a multitude of copies?

Also note that Egypt alone has a climate favorable to the preservation of most ancient texts, and indeed, even the oldest extant Byzantine text **A**, *Alexandrinus*, was discovered at Alexandria.

Foy E. Wallace documents on p. 637 that Tischendorf, the discoverer of the Sinaitic Manuscript (**Aleph**) has testified that **B** and **Aleph** bear evidence of having been prepared by the same hand, and in various portions the **Aleph** represents imperfect copying of **B**, and is therefore not an independent manuscript.

Note the basis of the RSV and the TEV for leaving off the last twelve verses of Mark and the weight of their evidences, or lack of it.

It is good to note that in the last few years more Greek scholars are coming back to recognize the superiority of the Majority-Text over these "ancient" but heretical texts. For example, in John there are no less than thirteen places where the new American Bible Society's Text ©. 1966) has changed the reading of the Nestle text *back to* the reading of the Textus Receptus. Also, another leading textual scholar, G.D. Kilpatrick, has recently been defending a surprising number of Majority-text reading. (Hodges, p. 14).

Though the Textus Receptus reflects the Majority-Text better than any other kind of printed text, it is not perfect. Our present edition, especially in the book of Revelation, needs to be revised using all the Byzantine MSS now available.

V. Points of Scholarship

There are more impressive points of scholarship surrounding the KJV than any other translation to date. We would like to enumerate a few of them in a brief fashion.

First, impressive is the very number of men and their piety who worked on the KJV; fifty-four men were appointed as opposed to thirty-one, for example, for the RSV. Also the men translating the KJV were the best, the most respected, and were godly men who revered the scriptures as the word of God. The major modern translation, the RSV, cannot make such a claim. Its committee was made up primarily of theological liberals and unbelievers who reject the basic cardinal doctrines of the Bible.

Second, the KJV translators wanted to translate the scriptures without giving a commentary on it. They left the interpretation to the reader. This is a prime factor in its universal acceptance. King James was wise enough to see that the Bible is not a sectarian book. Thus, superfluous notes in the margin were eliminated and those that appear have to do only with the Hebrew and Greek words.

Third, when the KJV translators found it necessary to supply a word in English to complete the meaning they indicated such supplied words by the use of italics. The King James Version was not the first version to use such a technique; italics first appeared in the Geneva Bible (AD 1557-60). The ASV followed this procedure but the RSV supplied so many words not in the Greek or Hebrew it would be too cumbersome so they omitted the practice. (Cf. Wallace, p. xxvii). Certainly this is another major point of scholarship the KJV has over modern versions.

Fourth, the Hebrew Old Testament has a tetragrammaton for the personal name of God. It was so sacred the Hebrews never uttered it. It was יהוה (YHWH), and when they came to it they gave it the pronunciation of *adonai* "lord" יהוה and indicated this by giving the vowel markings of *adonai*, and when in the context with *adonai* they gave it אלהים the pronunciation of *elohim* "God" and the vowels of *elohim*.

The KJV approached this matter and showed the best scholarship of any translation known. When they came to יהוה (YHWH) they used the word "LORD" in all caps indicating it was the tetragrammaton pronounced as *adonai* "lord", and for they used "GOD" in all caps showing it was the tetragrammaton pronounced as *elohim*. What a marvelous technique, so similar and parallel to the Hebrew itself!

Here the ASV falls quite short. Instead of following the KJV they proceeded to try and translate YHWH by "Jehovah" an old unscholarly pronunciation from the medieval period. (The KJV used "Jehovah" in four instances, Exodus 6:3; Psalm 83:18; Isaiah 12:2; 26:4). The best way to translate the name of God appears to be as "Yahweh." But according to which vowels one supplies there are about fifteen variations in pronouncing it.

Here the RSV and NEB recognized the weakness of "Jehovah" and returned to following the scholarly method of the KJV.

Fifth, another feature of the printed format of the KJV that many like and some attack is that each verse notation begins at the left of the column. This feature makes it possible to find a passage more rapidly. Some object that you cannot tell where the major breaks appear in the scripture. But they fail to notice the ¶ symbol which indicates the break or paragraph.

The shortcoming of this is that the KJV has the ¶ marks only through Acts 20. It has been puzzling why the ¶ symbols stop at this point. One person suggested "perhaps the printer ran out of these signs." But a good reply to this was: "That suggestion implies that the type for the whole book was set up before printing, as is the practice today, the stocks of the hand-cut type then used were so small that usually only four pages were set up and printed, the type then being distributed in order to set up the next four, and so on throughout; therefore the long-suffering printer would have just as many ¶ marks for the end as for the start of the Bible." (Bruce, p. 108).

The better reply is that it appears the last thing the KJV committee did in preparing it for the printer was to insert the ¶ markings. One report suggests that King James may have become impatient and ordered them to get it printed and they did not have time to complete that task.

The American Bible Society has printed an edition of the KJV in paragraph format similar to the ASV and RSV. But generally, even modern printed KJV Bibles end the ¶ markings with Acts 20.

Sixth, another printing format of the KJV continued by the ASV but dropped by most other modern versions were the verbs with the suffix "eth". Most modern translators say the "-eth" ending sound archaic. (Such as *goeth, doeth, abideth.*) But there was a reason behind the KJV use of this form. The Merriam-Webster New Collegiate Dictionary says the "eth" was "The Middle English ending of the present indicative third person singular." (P. 283).

The Greek present tense was the tense of continuous (or linear --->) action, while the aorist showed punctiliar (●) action. The distinction between the present and aorist is sometimes lost in some modern translations. Others, intent on showing the continuous action of the present indicative use an English participle (i.e. "doing" "going" "abiding"). But then, how will you show the Greek present participle?

The KJV clearly is superior for the student who wants the distinction between the present indicative, the aorist, and the present participle. The KJV is a scholarly translation.

Seventh, another helpful aid of the KJV is the distinction between the second person singular and plural pronouns. In English one cannot tell if "you" is singular or plural (a weakness of many modern translations, one of which puts a footnote on nearly every "you" to tell if it is singular or plural). But the KJV makes the distinction by the use of "thou - ye." Again, many people think of it as archaic style and fail to note the reason and the superiority of such usage. But in the KJV "thou and thee" are second person singular, while "ye and you" are reserved for the plural.

Eight, another point of superiority which we have already noted elsewhere is the reliance upon the Majority-Text (Byzantine) rather than a heavily interpolated text.

These, briefly, are a few of the points favoring the KJV.

VI. Criticism of the KJV

Foy E. Wallace says that "the objections and criticism flung at the old version center on (1) archaisms, obsolete words and archaic phrases; (2) the word *Easter* in Acts 12:4; (3) on Matthew 28:19, the translation of the Greek preposition *eis* by the English preposition "in" (Wallace p. xxiii). When critics claim there are "hundreds of errors in the King James Bible" it impresses a class room of students but honest scholars agree that these alleged errors relate only to syntax, consisting of variations in grammar, sentence structure, punctuation and ancient spellings, all of which means "there are *no errors in teaching and doctrine*" (Wallace, p. xxiv).

Some have criticized the KJV for being biased toward Calvinism. But as Wallace points out "...it is the Authorized King James Version with which we have refuted Calvinism at every point and turn in the polemics of oral debate and written discussion. That charge is another senseless assertion. These assaults on the Authorized Version are actually attacks on the Bible itself under the pretense and disguise of rejecting 'that old version'--" (Wallace, p. xxvi).

Some of the scholars working on new, modern versions complain that the KJV is too difficult for people to understand. But as one preacher pointed out in a class room, his grandfather, and many other great preachers with him, never completed a formal education and they had no difficulty understanding the KJV. Strange that modern educated scholars can't understand it! Of course, the reason they can't understand it is that it doesn't read the way they want it to read. And the modern way to do things is to publish a new, sectarian Bible that has your creed in it. (Note the tract Putting the Creed in the Bible.)

Some preachers, giving ear to the ASV and RSV and other modern versions, assert that the term church (*te ekklesia*) is not in the Greek New Testament in Acts 2:47 and that the KJV is incorrect in placing it there. This is a misleading statement. The term *te ekklesia* is in the Textus Receptus, from which the KJV was translated; it is in the Greek New Testament of the Expositor's Greek New Testament by W. Nicoll Robertson; in the Greek New Testament of Berry's Interlinear, and in the Reviser's Greek Text, by Whitney --all this before the American Standard Version

existed. Wallace says "The assertion that **te ekklesia** is not in the Greek New Testament has become entirely too prevalent among our own preachers--it is an uninformed and incorrect statement..." (Wallace, p. xxii).

Some among us are now low-rating the KJV saying it was not the Bible of the Restoration movement. But Wallace challenges such to look at the quotes in Campbell's book *Christian Baptism* and his defense of the Restoration principles in the Campbell-Rice Debate. The citations were from the KJV. Furthermore, the works of Campbell's contemporaries show that the KJV was their Bible also. Finally, Wallace vigorously says "The statement that the King James Version was not the Bible of the Restoration is a stupid statement. It reveals a spirit of animosity toward the Bible as we have had it and known it that is inexplicable." (Wallace, p. xxv).

VII. Conclusion

It may appear from this paper that I support and uphold the KJV and if "it is charged that a *crusade* against the new versions is being conducted,...that is exactly so, but it is made necessary by the *fight* that is being waged against the Bible." (Wallace, p. xxxiv).

George W. DeHoff in the introduction to *A Review of the New Versions*, says bluntly "Anything which can not be proved by the King James and American Standard Revised Bibles is not the truth." (p. xv).

How does Foy E. Wallace feel about the KJV in his book? He holds forth strongly for it, speaking of it as " 'the grand old version'" (p. xxii). He sums up his fears in the statement "it is my firm conviction that the greatest immediate danger confronting the churches of Christ is the general acceptance of the pseudo-versions of the Bible." (p. xxxv).

As to the importance of an accurate translation, Trench reminds us that when correctly translated what we have is "not the translation of an inspired Book, but is itself **the inspired Book.**" (Wallace p. 646).

The End

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THE KING JAMES VERSION

APPENDIX B

The Lord's Prayer in the Historic English Versions

(Luke 11:2-4 in the text of the first editions, except as indicated below)

WYCLIFFITE BIBLE, c. 1384

The earliest version, reprinted from the text edited by Forshall and Madden, Oxford, 1850.

Fadir, halewid be thi name. Thi kyngdom come to. 3yue to vs to day oure eche dayes breed. And for3yue to vs oure synnes, as and we for3yuen to ech owynge to vs. And leed not vs in to temptacioun.

COVERDALE BIBLE, 1535

O oure father which art in heauen, halowed be thy name. Thy kyngdome come. Thy wil be fulfilled upon earth, as it is in heauen. Geue vs this daye oure daylie bred. And forgeue vs oure synnes, for we also forgeue all them that are detters unto vs. And lede vs not in to temptacion, but delyuer vs from euell.

GREAT BIBLE, 1539

O oure father which art ī heauen, halowed be thy name. Thy kyngdome come. Thy will be fulfilled, euē in erth also as it is in heauē. Oure dayly breed geue vs thys daye. And forgeue vs our synnes: For euē we forgeue euery man that treaspaseth vs. And Leade vs not ito temptacyon. But delyuer vs from euyl.

BISHOPS' BIBLE, 1568

- 1 O our father which art in heauen, halowed be thy name, thy kyngdome come, thy wyll be fulfilled, euen in earth also, as it is in heauen.
- 3 Our dayly breade geue vs this day.
- 4 And forgeue vs our synnes: For euen we forgeue euery man that trespasseth vs. And leade vs not into temptation, but delyuer vs from euyl.

TYNDALE NEW TESTAMENT, 1525

Reprinted from a facsimile of the Bristol copy, see p. 8 above.

Oure father which arte in heuē, halowed be thy name. Lett thy kyngdō come. Thy will be fulfilled, even in erth as it is in heven. Oure dayly breed geue us this daye. And forgeve vs oure synnes: For euen we forgeve every man that tras-paseth vs; and ledde vs not into temptaciō. Butt deliver vs from evyll Amen.

MATTHEW'S BIBLE, 1537

O oure father which arte in heauen, halowed be thy name. Thy kyngdome come. Thy will be fulfilled, euen in erth as it is in heauen. Oure dayly breed geue vs euermore. And forgeue vs our synnes: For euen we forgeue euery man y^t treaspaseth vs. And leade vs not into temptacion. But delyuer vs from euyl.

GENEVA BIBLE, 1560

- 2 Our Father, w^e art in heauē, halowed be thy Name: Thy kingdome come: Let thy wil be done euē in earth, as *it is* in heauen:
- 3 Our daily bread giue vs for the day:
- 4 And forgiue vs our sinnes: for euen we forgiue euerie man that is indetted to vs: And lead vs not into temptation: but deliuer vs from euil.

KING JAMES BIBLE, 1611

- 2 Our Father which art in heauen, Halowed be thy Name, Thy kingdome come, Thy will be done as in heauen, so in earth.
- 3 Giue vs day by day our dayly bread.
- 4 And forgiue vs our sinnes: for we also forgiue euery one that is indebted to vs. And lead vs not into temptation, but deliuer vs from euill.