

Some Thoughts About the Revised Standard Version

by

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The principal reason why I find it necessary to reject the Revised Standard Version is the fact that many passages, particularly in the Old Testament, have been altered for no visible reason except to get rid of the evidence for the deity of Christ. In about a thousand places the RSV Old Testament contains footnotes stating that the text has been changed from what we find in our Hebrew manuscripts. In two-thirds of these, evidence from versions is alleged, and even this is often extremely questionable. In one-third there is no evidence at all for the change. In at least 100 cases this lack of evidence is plainly indicated by the letters Cn, which mean "conjecture", or, in plain English, "merely a guess". In instance after instance the New Testament writers quote a verse from the Old Testament as proof of what they say. The RSV always gives a footnote, referring to the particular Old Testament passage. Yet, time after time the reader discovers that the Old Testament passage is rendered, by decision of the same group (for the entire RSV committee passed on all changes in either Testament), in such a way as to contradict the New Testament quotation and thus destroy the entire force of the argument for the deity and work of Christ.

Thus Acts 2:27 states that on the day of Pentecost Peter quoted Psalm 16:10 as proof that David had predicted the bodily resurrection of Christ. The RSV in Acts quotes Psalm 16:10 as follows: "For thou wilt not abandon my soul to Hades, nor let thy Holy One see corruption." The latter phrase is also quoted by St. Paul in Acts 13:35. The whole point of the quotation is in the word "corruption." Yet the RSV Old Testament translates the verse as follows: "For thou dost not give me up to Sheol, or let the godly one see the Pit." Thus it completely destroys the force of Peter's and Paul's argument, and causes them to appear to have utterly misunderstood the Old Testament. It does not even mention in a footnote the fact that it has abandoned the reading of the King James Version.

What evidence was sufficient to cause so far reaching a change? Actually it is based on the theological presuppositions of the translators, even though, if questioned, they would claim to have philological warrant for the change. It might be worthwhile to glance at the reasons which commentaries give. First, however, we must ask, how do we determine the meaning of a Hebrew word? There are three ways. The best, if available, would be clear evidence from usage in the language itself. The second way is to find evidence from an ancient translation. The third is based on etymology. In this case the Hebrew word shachath occurs quite a number of times in the Old Testament. The Greek translation known as the Septuagint, which was made about 200 B.C. translates it "pit" in two cases, and "corruption" in at least eight. In case after case the RSV abandons the Hebrew on the basis of a Septuagint rendering of a passage. In this case it ignores the Septuagint rendering altogether, when the New Testament quotation is based upon it. After all, would not the Jews who translated the Old Testament into Greek two hundred years before the time of Christ know more about the meaning of a Hebrew word than we today?

In one case the meaning of "pit" seems to be required by the context, and it is so rendered by the Septuagint. This leads critics to say that the noun shachath must be derived from the verb shuach, "to sink down" rather than from the verb shachath, "to go to ruin". Some commentaries say that it would be impossible to have two different nouns which were identical in form but different in root, one of which meant "corruption" and the other "pit". On this ground the RSV casts aside