

Let the Minutia Speak: The Place of Genealogies, Numbers, and Parallel Passages in the King James Only Debate

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"Things that are different are not the same." So says the title of Mickey Carter's book advocating the exclusive use of the King James Bible. This sentiment is a fair summary of the mindset of most King James only (KJO) advocates. The differences between Bible versions demand a judgment. *Which Bible is right?*

Troubled by differing Bible versions, many sincere Christians seek for answers. One side affirms that no doctrine is affected by the relatively minor differences between Bible versions. The message is the same, but finer points and particular details may be slightly different. The KJO position jumps in and says this can't be right. Verbal inspiration is useless without the preservation of those very words of God. In fact, we need to know each and every word, in order to live (Matt. 4:4). All differences, even word order and spelling differences, matter (Matt. 5:18). Differing versions cannot *both* claim to be translations of the perfect, inspired Word of God.

On the face of it, the KJO argument makes sense. When we're speaking about the Bible, shouldn't every little difference matter? Some respond with manuscript evidence that calls into question the choice of the King James Bible as a perfect standard. Others have shown that the various proof texts for word perfect preservation don't actually promise a single, identifiable, word-perfect copy of the Bible. And prior to 1611, where was such a copy to be found, anyway?

In this paper, I want to take us down a road less traveled. Rather than looking for a proof text which directly deals with this controversy, I aim to scour the King James Bible itself for examples of the very differences which are said to matter so much. The minor points of Scripture itself, the minutia, should be allowed to speak to this issue. Genealogies, lists, numbers, and parallel passages all have an important bearing on how we should think about "things that are different".

Genealogies

Few passages of Scripture are more consistently skimmed or avoided than genealogies. We get lost in hard-to-pronounce names, and find the contents quite boring. We do assume that they were accurately recorded and are without error. Upon closer inspection however, the genealogies sometimes reveal an alarming amount of variation.

1 Chronicles chapter 1 compiles a variety of genealogies from different parts of Genesis. In the first 37 verses, we find 135 names. 20 of them are spelled differently. Some people are omitted (like the sons of Dedan vs. 32-33 - Gen. 25:2-4), and others are redefined. Aram's sons become Shem's sons (vs. 17 - Gen. 25:22-23), and a concubine turns into a son (Timna, vs. 36 - Gen. 36:10-12). The most important difference is revealed by cross-referencing Luke 3:36 and noticing its inclusion of an additional name (Cainan) not recorded in Genesis or 1 Chronicles (although it is found in the Greek OT translation, v. 24 - Gen. 11:11-13).

Other genealogies show similar differences. Ezra 7:1-5 compared to 1 Chron. 6:1-15 reveals a gap of 5 or 6 generations. Even Jesus' two genealogies differ significantly. Matt. 1 traces the line of David's son

Solomon, whereas Luke 3 uses David's son Nathan. Luke's list contains an additional 14 generations between David and Jesus.

Lists

Other lists of names contain similar problems to the genealogies. Given the stress we hear about word-perfect preservation, wouldn't it be natural to expect that two lists of David's mighty men would be identical? Instead, when one compares the lists in 2 Sam. 23 and 1 Chron. 11, several strange variations are found. The chief of the captains, the number one guy isn't given a consistent name, and he doesn't kill the same number of people with his spear. Is he "the Tachmonite" named as "Adino the Eznite" (he is said to have killed 800 at one time) or "Jashobeam, an Hachmonite" (who killed 300)? Shammah defends a field of lentils in Samuel, and another guy Eleazar defends a field of barley in Chronicles (Shammah doesn't appear in that list). 7 guys in Samuel don't have a counterpart in Chronicles. 6 guys in Chronicles don't have an equal in Samuel. And the men who are on both lists rarely have the same name and title (or lineage). To top it off, after Uriah the Hittite's important spot at the bottom of Samuel's list, the Chronicles list goes on to add another 16 heroes.

An even more perplexing list comes from Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7. A count is given of all the people from various families who returned to Jerusalem. What's striking here is how different the numbers are.

Family Group	Ezra 2	Nehemiah 7
Children of Arah	652	775
Children of Pahathmoab, Jeshua & Joab	2818	2812
Children of Zattu	845	945
Children of Binnui	648	642
Children of Bebai	628	623
Children of Azgad	2322	1222
Children of Adonikam	667	666
Children of Bigvai	2067	2056
Children of Adin	655	454
Children of Hashum	228	223
Children of Bezai	324	323
Men of Bethel & Ai	123	223
Children of Lod, Hadid & Ono	721	725
Children of Senaah	3930	3630
The singers: (of Asaph)	148	128
Porters	138	139
Children of Delaiah, Tobiah & Nekoda	642	652
Singing men and women	245	200

Numbers

The list above moved us into the realm of numerical difficulties. Anyone familiar with the accounts of the Israelite kings may have an inkling of what's ahead.

My first encounter with numerical differences came in high school. I noticed the differing census figures given for David's numbering of the people in 2 Sam. 24 and 1 Chron. 21. One account gives 800,000 soldiers for Israel and 500,000 for Judah, whereas the other account gives 1,100,000 for Israel

and 470,000 for Judah. I studied the passage more closely and found further discrepancies. David is given a choice of 7 years famine in Samuel, but 3 in Chronicles. He pays 50 shekels for the threshing floor of Araunah in one account and 600 shekels to Ornan in the other. And to top it all off, God moves David to number the people in one text, while Satan provokes David to sin in the other. My teacher (who was a fan of Peter Ruckman), didn't have a good answer. He later came up with a confusing explanation involving quite a bit of biblical numerology if I remember right.

The following table shows some additional numerical discrepancies. Some of this discussion is adapted from a paper entitled "[Large Numbers in the Old Testament](#)" (*Tyndale Bulletin*, 1967) by J.W. Wenham.

Figure 1	Figure 2	Variation Type
40,000 " stalls of horses for his chariots " (1 Kings 4:26)	4,000 "stalls for horses and chariots " (2 Chron. 9:25)	Zero dropped out (symbols likely used similar to zeroes)
700 horsemen (2 Sam. 8:4)	7,000 horsemen (1 Chron. 18:4)	Zero dropped out
Jehoichin begins reign at age 18 (2 Kings 24:8)	Jehoichin begins reign at age 8 (2 Chron.36:9)	Digit dropped out
"40,000 horsemen" (2 Sam. 10:18)	"40,000 footmen" (1 Chron. 19:18)	Noun attached to the number was changed
2,000 baths – size of the brass sea (I Kings 7:26)	3,000 baths – size of the brass sea (2 Chron. 4:5)	Number changed by one unit (a ten, hundred or thousand)
Pillars 18 cubits high (1 Kings 7:15)	Pillars 35 cubits high (2 Chron. 3:15)	No correlation between the numbers
23,000 killed (Numb. 25:9)	24,000 killed (1 Cor. 10:8)	Different source used (Greek or some other translation??)
70 people went to Egypt (Gen. 46:27)	75 people went to Egypt (Acts 7:14)	Various explanations provided
Sum of the number of vessels listed = 2499	The stated total of vessels = 5400 (Ezra 1:9-11)	Sum of individual items in a list don't equal the said total

Parallel passages

Everyone is somewhat familiar with the synoptic problem. The words of Jesus and the sequence of his travels are presented differently in each of the four Gospels. Sometimes different sayings can be harmonized (a supposed original statement can account for each of the different quotations given by the Gospel authors). Other times such a solution doesn't seem to work. Even when we come up with a plausible explanation for differing words in a quotation, we have no way of knowing the true chronology. For example, which order did Jesus' three temptations come in? Matthew's or Luke's?

This problem is not unique to the New Testament Gospels, however. There are actually two sets of "the 10 commandments" (see Ex. 20 and Deut. 5) with considerable differences.

Perhaps the most extensive OT parallel passage is the account of the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem as found in 2 Kings 18-20 and Isaiah 36-38. These two passages, contain 12 speeches, mostly of Rabshekah, Hezekiah and Isaiah. The speeches cover just 51 verses (by Isaiah's record), yet we find considerable discrepancies. Remember, the following differences are from recorded speeches not the author's description of the narrative.

The speeches are almost identical most of the time, but there is considerable variation. The Isaiah account omits 85 words, adds 20 words, rearranges the order 8 times, and replaces a word with a similar

word 55 times. This does not count the ending of the final speech (Isaiah 38:7-8), which is a complete recasting of 2 Kings 20:8-11 (the narrative is condensed and given as a quotation).

Before we finish this look at parallel passages in the Bible, we will need to address the New Testament quotations of the Old Testament. According to John Battle of Western Reformed Seminary, there are conservatively 295 explicit references to the Old Testament. These quotations occupy 352 verses, equal in size to the book of Romans. 94 verses from the Pentateuch, 99 from the prophets and 85 from the writings are quoted by the New Testament. (See chapter 5 of Battle's syllabus for his course on Biblical Interpretation.)

The following chart is but the tip of the iceberg. Examining the passages listed will reveal numerous slight differences between the KJB OT and NT. Many times the differences stem from the NT agreeing more closely with the Greek OT translation. I recommend looking at R. Grant Jones' extensive and accessible [study of all the NT quotations of the OT](#). He demonstrates conclusively that the Greek OT translation is predominantly followed by the NT authors.

NT passage	OT passage	Observations
Matt. 27:9-10	Zech. 11:12-13 (with some words from Jer. 19:1-13)	This text is said to be from Jeremy the prophet but more closely aligns with Zechariah
Matt. 21:16	Ps. 8:2	Agrees with Greek OT
Heb. 10:5-7	Ps. 40:6-8	Agrees with Greek OT
John 19:37	Zech. 12:10	Agrees with Hebrew
Mk. 12:29-30	Dt. 6:4-5	Greek = mind, soul, strength Hebrew = heart, soul, might NT = heart, soul, mind, strength
Rom. 12:19	Dt. 32:35	Differs from both Greek + Hebrew

Conclusion

We have only begun to uncover the minor differences in numbers, names and parallel accounts in the Bible. Enough variations have been exposed however, to force us all to grapple with this problem. Just how are we to explain such differences?

The KJO adherents have to defend each and every difference as best they can. The opposing point of view however, can allow for some copyist errors in the manuscripts. They are also at liberty to look for solutions in other ancient manuscripts or versions (Greek, Latin, etc.). Ultimately, our faith in the clear statements of God's Word will keep us from becoming skeptics. The Bible clearly affirms its own inspiration, perfection and inerrancy. Faith leads us to believe the original copies of Scripture were perfect. We may not know the answer, but an answer does exist.

We can learn something else from this study, too. The Bible itself does not measure up to the word perfect standards of King James-onlyism. If absolute certainty of the specific wording of a text is required to have an authoritative Bible, the King James Bible itself doesn't measure up.

Matthew Poole's commentary from 1685 contains a similar observation: "...this custom of the New Testament... to quote texts out of the Old Testament, very often according to that Septuagint (Greek) translation... may learn us not to be too curious as to minute things in Scripture, for had it been a thing

of moment, the Holy Spirit of God had certainly never suffered [it]" (e-sword module version of *Annotations on the Holy Bible* by Matthew Poole).

May we all learn not to "be too curious as to minute things in Scripture". God has seen fit to inspire "things that are different". In His wisdom, these differences may prove to increase our faith. I trust they will teach us to be more charitable of Christians who make use of varying Bible versions.