



STATEMENT DB015

A Summary Critique: New Age Bible Versions G. A. Riplinger (A. V. Publications, 1993)

by H. Wayne House

Another book against modern versions of the Bible has entered the marketplace. Like previous works by King James Version (KJV)-only advocates, it argues for the KJV and/or majority text-type as being truer to the original manuscripts than the modern critical Greek texts and their underlying textual traditions. It goes beyond previous works, however, by developing a conspiracy theory for the KJV-only view. Author G. A. Riplinger believes that lying behind modern versions (especially the NASB and NIV, apparently) is New Age influence.

Until the late 19th century, the texts used by scholars generally were built on a manuscript tradition begun in the seventh century of the Christian era (though I would concede that some readings found in this tradition date back before the fourth century). With the discovery of older Greek manuscripts, and other New Testament manuscripts, critical texts began to be built on manuscripts developed in the fourth and fifth centuries — in addition to a number of ancient papyri, some of which date into the second century. Riplinger rejects these earlier manuscripts and urges us to return to the Bible of the precritical era.

If there is anything good to say about Riplinger's *New Age Bible Versions* (hereafter *NABV*), it is that the book is not any longer than it is and that the foolishness of its various claims are transparent when one takes the time to study them. Unfortunately, *NABV* has received considerable praise from many popular authors who either did not really take the time to evaluate the book or apparently share Riplinger's ignorance of the issues of textual criticism and translation.

NABV is replete with logical, philosophical, theological, biblical, and technical errors. Riplinger lacks the proper training to write this book (her MA. and M.F.A. in "Home Economics" notwithstanding). Many of her errors arise from a lack of understanding of Old and New Testament textual criticism as well as biblical and theological studies. In a two-hour debate I had with her, I found her very able to articulate her position. But she repeatedly mispronounced terms used by biblical scholars and did not seem to understand the development of the textual tradition from the Byzantine/"majority" manuscripts to the Erasmusian text used by the translators of the KJV. Moreover, I had to ask her four times before she hesitatingly admitted that she really could not read Greek.

A seminary degree is not required to understand the matters of Bible transmission and translation. But one must learn the history and methodology of textual transcription and transmission, and gain a good grasp of the Hebrew and Greek languages, before one "pontificates" on the subject as Riplinger has done. Simply comparing the KJV with the NIV and NASB through endless charts does not prove a thing. She needs to demonstrate that the specific translations she accepts are really better textual renditions than the alternatives she rejects, rather than merely assuming the superiority of the majority text type or the KJV.

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I have no personal interest in defending the NIV or NASB. I prefer to use the NKJV (New King James Version), though I adopt a more eclectic view of textual criticism than its translators, who hold to the majority text theory.

In order to do justice to a review of *NABV* in such short space, I will categorize the types of errors Riplinger makes throughout her work and then provide an illustration of each.

THE APPEAL TO DIVINE AUTHORITY

Riplinger commits a logical fallacy commonly employed by those whose arguments are weak: *an appeal to authority*. In a newsletter, she explains her reason for writing the book and claims some sense of divine inspiration for her work: “Daily, during the six years needed for this investigation, the Lord miraculously brought the needed materials and resources — much like the ravens fed Elijah. Each discovery was not the result of effort on my part, but of the direct hand of God — so much so that I hesitated to even put my name on the book. Consequently, I used G. A. Riplinger, which signifies to me, God and Riplinger — God as author and Riplinger as secretary.”¹

Certainly we should not credit God with being a participant in the writing of *NABV* unless we are prepared to affirm that God commits the kind of errors manifestly obvious in her book. This I am unwilling to do.

Another example of this approach may be found in a debate between Riplinger and James White, where, upon being challenged on her acrostic algebra, she claimed it was given to her by God.² Note her method, which involves deleting the common letters of NASV and NIV, and then deleting the letters A and V from what is left:

Step 1:	(NASV - NIV) - AV	=	X
Step 2:	(NASV - NIV) - AV	=	X
Step 3:	(ASI + NV) - AV	=	X
Step 4:	ASI + NV - AV	=	X
Step 5:	SIN	=	X

The success of this arbitrary method of determining truth depends on using NASV rather than NASB (the customary designation for the New American Standard Bible), and using AV rather than KJV (the customary designation for the King James Version). When asked about this alternation, Riplinger said God calls the NASB the NASV.

One may construct a similar “acrostic” to Riplinger’s but have far different results: Rather than using two versions, however, let us use seven (the perfect number of God); Cunard’s Authorized (CA), King James II (KJ2), Hayman’s Epistles (HE), Revised English Bible (REB), New International Version (NIV), New American Standard Bible (NASB), and Barclay’s New Testament (BNT). In omitting all the letters in common one is left with CKJHRIVST-KJV, and thus CHRIST. Using Riplinger’s logic these versions must be from God.³

MISUNDERSTANDING BASIC THEOLOGICAL DEBATE

A major error Riplinger makes is impugning the theological integrity of evangelical scholars by identifying their thinking with New Age ideology. She does this without realizing, apparently, that the views she criticizes are representative of theological positions held by Christian theologians and laypeople for much of the history of the church.

Riplinger, for example, charges Edwin Palmer, executive-secretary of the NIV committee, with denying that the Holy Spirit participated in the conception (begetting) of Jesus, seeking to equate his views with Mormon theology (p. 344). The context of Palmer’s statement, “The Holy Spirit did not beget the Son,” however, indicates that he was speaking of the eternal begetting of the Son from the Father within the Trinity, *not* the physical conception of the Second

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Person as the man Jesus.⁴ Her quote from Brigham Young, however, speaks of the physical conception of Jesus through Mary.⁵ This is careless scholarship or confused theology at best, but it may be outright deception on her part to prove her ill-founded theory about the supposed heresies of the NIV.

When Palmer does speak of the conception of Jesus Christ, he clearly indicates that the Holy Spirit was personally involved:

The Holy Spirit was needed at the very start of Jesus' human life, at his incarnation. By the word incarnation we mean that act by which the second Person of the Trinity, remaining God, 'became flesh and lived for a while among us' (John 1:14). This act was effected by the Holy Spirit, as is seen by both Matthew's statement that Mary 'was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit' (1:18), and the angel's announcement to Mary that the 'Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you' (Luke 1:35). The Holy Spirit is the cause of the conception of Jesus. He is the one, and not the Father nor the Son, let alone Joseph, who planted the seed of life in a mysterious way in Mary's womb.⁶

QUOTING INDIVIDUALS OUT OF CONTEXT

Riplinger incessantly quotes people out of context. Certainly any of us might on occasion take a portion from someone's writing and use it improperly. Riplinger, however, does this repeatedly, page after page. Often these quotations appear to be not simply an oversight but a deliberate attempt to characterize her opponents improperly. Moreover, some of the quotes are constructed with isolated comments from an author separated by several paragraphs or pages — sometimes out of order. This procedure would allow one to make a person say anything he or she wanted that person to say (*see, e.g., her quote of Philip Comfort, Early Manuscripts and Modern Translations of the New Testament, pp. xvii and 8 in NABV, p. 530*).

She derisively charges that Edwin Palmer rejects Christ's deity in the NIV when she quotes him as saying, "[F]ew clear and decisive texts say that Jesus is God" (2). When one looks at Palmer's entire statement one discovers that she has turned his point on its head. Whereas he indicates that the *KJV* has obscured a few texts which explicitly state the deity of Christ, either because of its underlying Greek text (John 1:18) or because of its translation (Tit. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:2),⁷ she quotes him as though *he* is attempting to minimize the deity of our Lord.

In another place, Riplinger quotes from Norman Geisler to bolster her view that when modern translations speak of "the Christ" they reflect a New Age perspective. It is hard for this reviewer to believe that she was not duplicitous in this instance. Look at her quote and then the original by Geisler:

"We should be particularly wary when someone refers to Jesus Christ as 'the Christ...'" (*NABV, p.318*)

*"We should be particularly wary when someone refers to Jesus Christ as 'the Christ spirit' or 'Christ-consciousness.' Generally, when New Agers (and many liberal Christians) speak of Christ, they are not referring to the historical Jesus spoken of in the New Testament and the great Christian creeds. If they do speak of the historical Jesus, they usually refer to Him as only one of several Christ figures in human history."*⁸

READING NEW AGE MEANINGS INTO LEGITIMATE TRANSLATIONS

Riplinger oftentimes reads too much into specific choices modern translators have made in translating Greek terms. For example, as one can surmise from the above, she sees New Age influence when modern translations use the term "the Christ" rather than "Jesus Christ" or "Christ Jesus": "Real references to Jesus as 'the Christ' are rare: however, new versions literally paint their pages with this pawn" (318).

Most Bible students understand that the word *Christ* is a term from a Greek word meaning "anointed one," which in turn translates a Hebrew word that is transliterated *Messiah*. To call Jesus "the Messiah" or "the Christ" in no way by

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itself implies New Age ideas. Only when New Agers invest a nonbiblical meaning into the use of that phrase should there be concern. As a matter of fact, “the Christ” is actually found 19 times in the KJV and *ho christos* (Greek for “the Christ”) is found 59 times in the 1551 Textus Receptus (so-called). On the other hand, *ho chrisros* is used 49 times in the Nestle-Aland (26th ed.) text, and “the Christ” is found 48 times in the NIV. When one adds to this the instances of *ho christos* in its other case forms, the total number of times in the Greek texts in which “the Christ” appears is:

169	Textus Receptus-Stephanus 1551
166	Majority-Byzantine
146	Nestle-Aland 26th ed. ⁹

If Riplinger is correct in saying that when a text refers to “the Christ” it is teaching New Age doctrine, the KJV is based on manuscripts that are more New Age than are the texts on which modern translations are based. One wonders how Riplinger can make such a claim about the translation of *ho christos* as “the Christ” when this is done in many important verses in the KJV (*see* John 1:41; 20:31; 1 John 2:22; 5:1).

MISUNDERSTANDING TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Riplinger’s understanding of textual criticism appears to be meager. To analyze this aspect of the book would require considerable space. Suffice it to say that when the older manuscripts disagree with particular readings found in the majority text type, they are (to Riplinger) “additions” to the Word of God. When readings found in the majority text are different from the Textus Receptus (or Erasmus’s earlier text), they go unmentioned so that the reader will not be confronted with the fact that the majority text on which the Textus Receptus is built also — along with older manuscripts — differs many places with the KJV. Moreover, if the KJV has verses or words not even found in the Textus Receptus, Riplinger fails to indicate this.

The bottom line in Riplinger’s mind is that the King James Version of 1611 is alone the Word of God. Anything *prior* to or *after* that specific translation is in some measure not really the Word of God. We are back to the absurd view that the KJV is the Bible of Paul and the apostles.

A volume the size of *NABV* would be required to point out Riplinger’s misunderstanding of theology, translation technique, and her fascination with New Age conspiracy and its association with modern versions. This book will cause a temporary stir. Hopefully, however, most Christians will recognize *NABV* as an ill-begotten book and will turn back to a study of the Word of God in the language of the people today. In so doing they will fulfill the prayers of godly translators of centuries past, including the very ones who translated the King James Version of the Bible.

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¹*The End Times and Victorious Living*, a ministry of the Paw Creek Church and Media Ministry, January-February 1994, 15.

²Personal conversation with James White, June 1994.

³Private letter from Bob and Gretchen Passantino, 12 January 1994,4.

⁴Edwin H. Palmer, *The Person and Ministry of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1974), 83.

⁵*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 1 (London: Latter-day Saints’ Book Depot, 1855), 50-51.

⁶Palmer, 65.

⁷Edwin H. Palmer, *The NIV: The Making of Contemporary Translation*, ed. Kenneth L. Barker (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 143.

⁸J. Yutaka Amano and Norman L. Geisler, *The Infiltration of the New Age* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1989), 142. (Emphasis added)

⁹I wish to express thanks to David Johnson for doing this computer search.