

# DR. KENNETH TAYLOR'S SEARCH FOR THE LIVING BIBLE

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In writing *My Life: A Guided Tour*, Dr. Kenneth Taylor reveals how his Bible, *The Living Bible*, became a reality. Dr. Taylor's search for *The Living Bible* began when he received a New Testament from the Pocket Testament League while a member of the Beaverton Congregational Church, Beaverton, Oregon.

At this time he testified "...I read some of it that afternoon, but it was hard to understand." According to Dr. Taylor, [his] difficulty became especially acute when [he] finally got out of the narrative section-the four Gospels and the book of Acts-into Romans and the other Epistles.

The sentence structure was often twisted and the meaning obscure, and it was just hard work to read. [He] didn't get very much out of it. Yet [his] parents and Doug seemed to have no such problems and even revelled in the reading. [He] thought it was normal for [his] mother and father to enjoy it, because they had been reading it all their lives, but it made [him] jealous and almost angry that Doug was getting so much more from his regular Bible reading than [he, Taylor] was from [his].

"Actually, Bible reading continued to be a frustration to [him] for many years." "[He also] knew from personal experience how easy it is to read through the books of Genesis and Exodus, then get bogged down and quit."

He went to a Christian college [Wheaton] (See *Steps Toward Apostasy At Wheaton College* by Wilhelm Ernst Schmitt) and had the same problem there. He took the required Bible courses, read the assignments, and got reasonably good grades on the lectures, but his devotional reading was always difficult.

He had a college roommate who had a regular daily Bible reading programme, and this upset him because his roommate seemed to enjoy it! This roommate was a constant reminder to him of his own failure in regard to a regular daily Bible reading programme. This failure however did help him to realize the error of his ways.

Listen to Dr. Taylor in 1940. By now he has graduated from Wheaton College [1938] and is serving on the staff of Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship in Canada [1939-1940].

I was in my room at the Montreal YMCA, preparing a message for the Inter-Varsity meeting at McGill University that evening. I found myself baffled about the meaning of a chapter in Ephesians, on which I had been asked to speak. I read the chapter several times, without much comprehension. Then I read it slowly, a verse at a time, with no better results. I could understand the words, of course, but I just could not understand the significance of the teaching or make any useful application to my life or the lives of the students.

Suddenly I was overwhelmed with the realization that my Bible reading in the New Testament letters had ever been thus. All my life I had wrestled in vain to understand them. Others could grasp their meaning; why couldn't I? Was I more stupid than my friends who gloried in reading the Word?

Frustrated and ashamed, I exclaimed aloud to the empty room, 'Why can't somebody translate the Bible so a person like me can understand it?'

The transition from the King James Version of the Bible to The Living Bible began as a rewriting of the Bible for his children. Why? Because according to Taylor, "...The King James Version of the Bible was difficult." He said when he used the King James Version of the Bible with his children, and he has ten children, "the result was often bafflement." "He remembers that after he had explained the meaning of one particular verse from the King James Version, Janet, then about eight, said, 'But Daddy, if that's what it means, why doesn't it say so?'"

Later, he testifies that he enjoyed reading his paraphrase ... and got much more out of it than from other Bible reading. (Emphasis mine) Still later, he declares that the Minor Prophets seemed to him to be so dull in the King James Version. (Emphasis mine)

Since Taylor had such a low view of the King James Version of the Bible, what English translation would he use as the basis of his paraphrase?

Listen to Dr. Taylor's own words.

"I chose the American Standard Version of 1901 as the basic text, because it was, and still is, in my opinion, the most accurate of the word-for-word English translations. It was prepared by a large committee of scholars far more expert in Greek than I was. My study of seminary Greek had given me only a basic vocabulary and grammar."

Dr. Taylor received a Th.M. from Northern Baptist Theological Seminary in June of 1944. Since 1965 he has received four honorary doctorates from Wheaton College [his alma mater - 1965], Trinity Evangelical Divinity School [1972], Huntington College [1974] and Taylor University [1989].

Through his seminary education, Dr. Taylor came under the influence of Westcott and Hort and

their spurious Greek text. How can one say this?

He used the 1901 American Standard Version of the Bible as the basis for his Bible, The Living Bible.

Just what is The Living Bible according to its author? (Emphasis mine) "...The Living Bible in English is a thought-for-thought translation, not a word-for-word translation from the Greek and Hebrew...." On one occasion, he had the audacity to call his paraphrase God's Word. How sad. His paraphrase cannot be God's Word when the underlying text he used attacks the Deity of Jesus Christ as does the American Standard Version of 1901 in I Timothy 3:16.

There is a big difference between Theos and hos in I Timothy 3:16. The Aland text of the Greek New Testament gives the Scripture in question a "B" reading. They are to be pitied for their lack of courage.

Dr. Taylor is not to be criticized for his lack of courage but he is to be pitied for his leading millions away from God's Word to a paraphrase that is perverted because of his own subjectivism. (See also The Paraphrased Perversion by Dr. Gene Nowlin, published by BFT in 1974 - C2085) Subjectivism!

Yes. On April 11, 1962 Dr. Taylor entered the following into his diary: It seems like people usually don't enjoy the Epistles much; they find them hard going-hard to understand without digging through the wording. I hope the paraphrase will help them, at least as an introduction to what the Apostles were saying.

How lives would be radically changed if people could read the Epistles with ease and understanding!

Well, I fear this 'apologia' is useless. Some will praise the Lord for blessings received and some will think a paraphrase foolish, unnecessary, etc. (Emphasis mine)

On May 8, 1962 Dr. Taylor entered the following into his diary: ...That I must keep praying that Living Letters will help multitudes of people and that God will do a miracle of circulation for His own glory as His people understand what the Epistles are talking about, as I feel so many don't now. And that the unsaved will read Romans and Galatians as well as the Gospel of John.

How clearly Paul brings out the way of salvation by faith, not works or law. Oh, that all people could read and freshly understand this, that they may sit down and read with understanding and great profit instead of fighting their way through the underbrush of verbiage.... (Emphasis mine)

On one occasion Dr. Taylor testifies that [he] had not initially planned to paraphrase the Gospels because, despite the thees and thous used in the King James Version, the story of Jesus' life and death seemed fairly easy to understand.

But something had happened at the 1964 Christian Booksellers convention that changed [his]

mind. A young couple asked [him] when the paraphrased Gospels would be ready, and [he] responded that [he] didn't plan to work on the Gospels, because they were reasonably understandable in the King James Version.

They countered by quoting John 3:8: 'The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.'

They asked, 'Can't you say that more understandably?' [He] didn't remember what [he] replied, but from that time on [he] began thinking of working on the Gospels and Acts, and eventually started the task.

Additional incentive for the paraphrased Living Gospels was provided by Billy Graham's organization. Dr. Graham planned to use the Living Gospels as a TV giveaway. Thus Living Gospels was published in 1966.

Dr. Taylor also said that "I do not think it was just a coincidence that Living Letters was published during the time of Dr. Graham 's great popularity and his use of television to reach millions of viewers worldwide. I think God personally and directly arranged this timing." (Emphasis mine)

According to Taylor the time-honoured Douay version presented many of the same difficulties that the King James Version did, Catholics therefore welcomed the Living translation.

A Roman Catholic homemaker wrote the following letter: Dear Mr. Kenneth Taylor, I've been wanting to write you a thank-you note ever since I realized how much of a treasure God's Word is in your Living Bible. Since I was saved thirteen years ago I've worn out several copies of The Living Bible, dragging them to church, to the cellar when I do my washing, soaking in the tub, camping, in bed, or wherever.

My first Bible given to me was a King James. I loved to memorize verses or to use it with my concordance or sing songs to Jesus from it-Oh! but The Living Bible-THAT'S SOMETHING ELSE-I can just drink it all in with ease and apply it to my life-weep with it, and laugh, be convicted with, grow with, fall deeper in love with my Saviour.

I make sure all my new spiritual babies get copies of The Living Bible, and have been discovering formulas within its endless Treasure Chest for happiness, marriage, kids, and you name it-and that it's not difficult but thrilling to read.

The Living Bible was warmly received in many Roman Catholic circles.

[Taylor] heard this from a nun: "I know it was the Holy Spirit's inspiration for you to translate the Bible, because He speaks to me all the time through The Living Bible.

I am a Catholic sister, but I never understood the traditional translations. But, oh, The Living

Bible makes my heart break out in praise and thanksgiving."

While many Catholics welcomed The Living Bible, others held back, fearing the disapproval of their church. The solution was to find a Catholic bishop authorized to give the official imprimatur and nihil obstat (a Latin phrase that means, in essence, "nothing here is damaging to faith or morals").

This [Taylor] did, and later on [he] added the Apocrypha, paraphrased to [his] satisfaction by a Catholic priest. No changes were made in the text of The Living Bible itself.

Publication of the Apocrypha brought some protests from the evangelical community, but I felt it was good to add this material if it would help Catholics accept The Living Bible. I wanted them to have an alternative to reading (or not reading) from their old and difficult Catholic translation. The result of this decision was that we were thrilled to see wide acceptance of The Catholic Living Bible by many in the priesthood and in parochial education, as well as by Catholic laity.

The deputy head of Catholic publications in Dublin requested copies to be considered for use in catechetical programs.

He wrote, "I cannot stop reading The Living Bible, and I hope our six catechists will use this instead of other versions." (Some of the above emphasis is mine)

Not only have the Roman Catholics welcomed The Living Bible but also Jerry Falwell, Bill Bright, Charles (Chuck) Swindoll, Gordon Mitchell (R.G. Mitchell, Toronto, Ontario) and the World Home Bible League.

A friendly reviewer said, "No doubt the scholars may curl their lips and say the translators took too many liberties, but no doubt the common people will read it gladly." (Emphasis mine) The translators?

The Living Bible was the effort of one man, Kenneth Taylor.

In reacting to the negative comments about The Living Bible, Dr. Taylor said the negative comments clearly reflected the strong, almost fanatical loyalty some Christians (usually older ones) have to the King James Version of the Bible.

We learned that a large number of Bible readers (or, at least, Bible owners) thought that the King James Version was "the original" Word of God and that anything else was an untrustworthy counterfeit.

Some pastors really believe that only the *King James Version is the inspired Word of God.*

[The Living Bible is the Word of God?](#)

Tyndale, for whom Tyndale House Publishers is named, would roll over in his grave to see how

Taylor translated I Corinthians 7:1.

In Tyndale's translation (1534) one reads, As concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: it is good for a man, not to touch a woman.

In the Authorised Version one reads, Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman.

In the Textus Receptus one reads, peri de hon egrapsate moi: kalon anthropon gunaikos me haptesthai.

In the Westcott and Hort (1948) text one reads, peri de hon egrapsate, kalon anthropon gunaikos me haptesthai.

Where did the moi go?

In The Living Bible one reads, Now about those questions you asked in your last letter: my answer is that if you do not marry, it is good. And this perverted paraphrase is the Word of God?

If one followed Ken Taylor's paraphrase, the human race would eventually become extinct.

The true Greek text does not support Ken Taylor's paraphrase.

Dr. Taylor would have one believe that he and Tyndale would be in the same league as translators. However this is not the case.

Why can one say this?

Because Tyndale's English translation was out of the original Greek text while Taylor's paraphrase perversion was based on a spurious Greek text.

Without question William Tyndale was Dr. Taylor's hero. Taylor had a dream of giving to America a Bible that was easy to understand. So his Bible was published under the name of Tyndale House Publishers.

Why a new publishing house?

Taylor worked for Moody Press. Why not let Moody publish his Bible? Taylor explains why not Moody Press.

Naturally, my first thought was to have it published by Moody Press, but I had second thoughts when I heard one of Moody's vice-presidents wonder aloud if friends of the Institute might react negatively to it.

They might be offended because of their high admiration for the King James Version and might

even discontinue their financial support of Moody. As director of Moody Press I had the authority to make the decision, but I certainly had a primary obligation to the good name and welfare of Moody Bible Institute.

I went to Dr. William Culbertson, our president, to ask his advice, but he wasn't very helpful. "I trust your judgment," he said. "You must make the decision." I appreciated his expression of trust, but his attitude only made the weight of my responsibility heavier.

Finally, after much thought and prayer, I decided it would be better not to risk involving the Institute, so I mailed the manuscript to the religious department of one of the well-known secular publishers.

To my delight I received a kind letter of tentative acceptance. They would give me a final decision in about a month.

At the end of the month another letter came from them, and I eagerly tore it open. But my spirits sank as I read of their conclusion not to publish the manuscript.

The theologically liberal scholars they had consulted liked it, but the evangelical scholars could not tolerate a paraphrase translation, insisting that any translation must be on a word-for-word basis, rather than expressing the meaning of the Greek text.

Discouraged, but still hopeful, I sent the manuscript to another publisher, who promptly declined it, and then to another and yet another.

This was a setback I hadn't expected, since my own enthusiasm for the project had grown year by year and revision by revision.

I suppose it is not surprising, given my many years as director of Moody Press, that my next thought was to publish the book myself. The barrier, however, was the very practical matter of how to pay the printer.

With a small salary and a large family, we had only two or three hundred dollars in the savings account, and no assets a bank could consider sufficient collateral for a loan.

Nevertheless, the first step was to find out how much it would cost to print the book. I took the manuscript to my friend Paul Benson at Lithocolor Press and asked him for a price on printing and binding two thousand copies. From my publishing experience I knew that would be the minimum cost-effective quantity.

A few days later Paul came to my office at Moody Press, not only to quote a price but to say he had read the manuscript and was extremely impressed with it! He was so enthusiastic about its potential that he offered to print the book and let me pay him as the books were sold.

What a deal!

Paul was certainly God's man to get Living Letters under way. He took the manuscript back with him and soon began the typesetting.

Since Tyndale House has published The Living Bible, another significant project is now underway-the revision of The Living Bible.

Twenty years ago, when The Living Bible was first published in one volume, [Taylor] indicated that it would be updated every few years to reflect changes in language usage and to correct any verses that did not adequately express the original Greek and Hebrew texts.

For several years, with all the rush and excitement of the immense popularity and distribution of The Living Bible, this revision did not happen.

Taylor [had] spent years on a revision-only to decide in the end that the revisions did not improve upon the original Living Bible text.

Several years ago, Ron Beers proposed a different way of accomplishing my goal of complete accuracy. He suggested that we find eighty top Christian scholars to identify verses that needed improvement, and then I could work with the scholars to retranslate those verses.

It was a wonderful idea, far better than my trying to find the inadequate words or verses by myself.

So I threw away my many years of effort and enlisted some of the best scholarship of America to work with me and our editors on a revised Living Bible.

We hope to have it ready to print in 1994.

This whole revision process reminds one of the revisions of America's history.

Now these revisions are in need of revising. (See Catherine Millard's The Rewriting of America's History)

Dr. Taylor is praying to see more and more easy-to-read, understandable, contemporary versions of the Bible in hundreds of languages.... If the revision process continues, Dr. Taylor's prayer is going to be answered.

*When is this situational process going to stop?*

In closing, Dr. Taylor even today testifies when he reads occasionally from the King James Version, he has the same difficulty in understanding and applying it.

According to Taylor, perhaps the Lord veiled his mind to help him see the possibility of a clearer translation-but that came many years later.



One wonders, since Dr. Taylor used a spurious Greek text for his translation, if he would identify with the following. At the age of 23, in late 1851, [Fenton John Anthony] Hort wrote to a friend:

I had no idea till the last few weeks of the importance of texts, having read so little Greek Testament, and dragged on with the villainous Textus Receptus....Think of that vile Textus Receptus leaning entirely on late MSS.; it is a blessing there are such early ones.

In an appreciation written by Dr. V. Gilbert Beers, Dr. Beers says by the mid-point of the twentieth century, the world was ripe for a new kind of Bible translation.

The venerable King James Version had been a mighty force for God for 350 years, but its thees and thous and complex sentences were not easy to read.

There was great need for a new translation that not only expressed the Word of God in contemporary English, but also expressed it in contemporary style, easy to read and easy to understand.

### Why obscure the truth?

Say it the way God would say it if He were talking to us today in our kitchens or living rooms. That is what The Living Bible does.

If one contemplates reading Kenneth Taylor's *My Life: A Guided Tour*, beware of its ecumenism, situationism, mysticism, pragmatism, revisionism, and relativism as it relates to his search for The Living Bible.

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