

ITALICS IN THE BIBLE

Why does the Bible contain words that are in *italics*? Is there a special significance to these *italicized* words? What purpose do they serve?

Using different types—specifically *italics*—for words and phrases to indicate that they were not in the original Hebrew or Greek manuscripts was supposedly first introduced by Sebastian Munster of Basel (Switzerland) in a Latin version of the Old Testament published in 1534.

In 1557 the English New Testament was published in Geneva. Then, in 1560, an edition of the Bible known as the Geneva Bible appeared. Prepared by a group of religious and linguistic scholars known as the Reformers, it was translated directly from the original Hebrew and Greek.

The Companion Bible Appendix 48, page 39 "The Use of Various Types in the English Bible" mentions that these scholars "put in that word which, lacking, made the sentence obscure, but set it in such letters as may be easily be discerned from the common text" because no language can be translated word for word.

In short, words were added in the English to make the meaning understandable, although they were not in the original Hebrew and Greek. These scholars distinguished such added words by *italicizing* them.

By the beginning of the 17th century, there were three versions of the Bible in England. Because these translations were by no means accurate and correct and because the meaning of the English words had changed over the centuries, the need for a better translation arose.

Thus the Authorized Version or King James Version was produced.

In 1611, King James I of England assigned this task to a group of 54 translators. They were composed of prominent members of the clergy, Puritans and the acknowledged scholars of that time. They translated from the original Hebrew and Greek manuscripts. And just like their predecessors, they used *italics* to distinguish the words they added to make the peculiar Hebrew and Greek idiomatic expressions understandable in English.

In most cases, the words did clarify the meaning of the phrases. But, as with the work of mortal men without God's Spirit, many mistakes were made.

Here are two examples:

1. John 18:4-6

4 Jesus therefore, knowing all things that would come upon Him, went forward and said to them, "Whom are you seeking?"

5 They answered Him, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus said to them, "I am *He*." And Judas, who betrayed Him, also stood with them.

6 Now when He said to them, "I am *He*," they drew back and fell to the ground.

In his telecast "Jesus Christ, God of the Old Testament?" Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong explains that Jesus Christ and not the Father is the "LORD" very often mentioned in the Old Testament.

In Exodus 3:14, the Lord told Moses at the burning bush that His Name was I AM.

When the men came to the Garden of Gethsemane for Him, He told them, "I am *He*" (John 18:5) .

But notice that the word "He" is in *italics*; and so, it was not spoken by Jesus. The translation of the original text should have been: "Jesus saith unto them, I AM". This man-inserted "He"

completely obscures the significant fact behind this event. The mob knew what Jesus meant, and they fell backward because they were facing the God of Israel: the I AM!

2. Revelation 20:10

10 The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet *are*. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

John wrote that the devil, at the end of the 1000-year reign of Christ, would be cast into the lake of fire “where the beast and the false prophet *are*”.

“Are” is in *italics* and is a man-supplied word. It is not in the original Greek.

To make the meaning clear in English, the words “were cast” ought to have been added.

The word “are” falsely implies that the beast and the false prophet are still alive in the lake of fire at the time of Satan’s punishment, which is after the millennium.

The beast and the false prophet are put in this fire just after the return of Jesus Christ at the beginning of the millennial reign. We know that they will not remain there for 1000 years because they, being mortal flesh, will be burnt up.

The real meaning is that Satan is to be cast into the same lake of fire into which the beast and false prophet were cast a thousand years previously.

Obviously, the Puritans among the translators had allowed their beliefs about an eternal hell-fire to influence their interpretation.

These are only two of the numerous man-made errors in translating the Word of God.

We should not be deceived or confused by them. Nor should these mistakes destroy our faith and shake our confidence in the veracity of the Bible as originally inspired and preserved so very accurately for us by a Loving and Merciful Creator.

Instead let us obey the exhortation of Paul in his letter to Timothy:

2 Timothy 3:16

16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.