

Is the word "steel" an error in the King James Bible?

In his book, *The Unbound Scriptures*, Rick Norris criticizes the King James Bible for using the word "steel". He quotes several Bible dictionaries and scholars who say emphatically that the Hebrew word should never be translated as "steel". It is claimed, he says, that steel was not known during Bible times until the first century A.D.

As a side note, I have read Rick Norris' book and had many encounters with the man on the internet clubs over the years. Mr. Norris is one of the more elusive Bible agnostics you will run into. He simply has NO complete, inspired and infallible Bible in any language to believe in himself or to recommend to others. He will NEVER tell you where you can get a copy of God's 100% true words to read for yourself. In fact, I have often asked him direct questions like "Is Acts 8:37 or 1 John 5:7 or Matthew 23:14 inspired Scripture?". He simply won't tell us one way or the other. He just avoids answering the question. But apparently the one thing the man is sure of is that the King James Bible has erred and mistranslated numerous words and texts, and Mr. Norris is here to cast doubt upon accuracy and infallibility of ANY Bible in ANY language, and especially the King James Bible, for which he seems to harbor a particular dislike.

If anyone ever typified the mindset of "Yeah, hath God said...?" (Genesis 3:1), it's Rick Norris. All you will get from him is an endless series of Questions and Doubts, but never any concrete Answers to anything.

You can see my Response to his book, *The Unbound Scriptures*, here if you like -

<http://brandplucked.webs.com/unboundscriptures.htm>

Mr. Norris then asks: "Can KJV-only advocates offer any consistent evidence that shows that these two Hebrew words should be translated as "steel" in some verses?"

Yes, Mr. Norris, we can, and will do so presently.

As for the claim he makes about the date of the invention and use of steel, there are many who would disagree about his supposition. A friend and fellow King James Bible believer, brother Jim, is an excellent researcher. He located a site for me by a Professor David K. Jordan, professor of Anthropology and Provost at Earl Warren College, University of California, San Diego. This professor has written an article about metallurgy and he discusses brass, iron and steel production. Here are some of his findings.

<http://weber.ucsd.edu/%7Edkjordan/arch/metallurgy.html>

"An important technique in modern and late historic steel production is "quenching," that is, heating the metal and then rapidly lowering its temperature again by plunging it into water. The result is a dramatic increase in the strength of the metal, which can be increased yet further by repeating the process. THE EARLIEST QUENCH-HARDENED STEEL THAT WE KNOW ABOUT DATES FROM ABOUT 1200 BC or so. (Homer refers to the process.) Obviously there is a

fine line between iron and steel, and some metallic products are difficult to classify as quite one or quite the other."

At another site we find a discussion of ancient Indian steel production dating from the 8th century B.C.

http://www.infinityfoundation.com/mandala/t_es/t_es_agraw_wootz.htm

"The Ancient Indian Steel by D.P. Agrawal - J. Le Coze, of the Centre for Materials Science, France, has come out with an interesting essay about the different names of steel in different parts of the world that the ancient Indian steel known as wootz inspired. This steel making process was practiced in peninsular India since great antiquity. The ancient Indian steel was known as Damascene steel in Persia and was in great demand in the Persian courts of the First Millennium BC. Even Alexander was presented a sword made of such steel."

Coze informs that in ancient Greek, three names were attributed to steel: stomoma, adamas and chalybs. Since Hesiod (8th BC), adamas signifies inflexible or hard. It was systematically translated into "hard as steel". (End of notes)

I'm not going to base my defense of the King James reading of "steel" solely on the debateable timeline of the use of this material in making weaponry. It may be literal steel or a composite of various hard metals that are referred to by "a bow of steel"; but it may also be figurative.

Webster's 1828 Dictionary lists the second definition of "steel" as: Figuratively, weapons; particularly, offensive weapons, swords, spears and the like.

The word steel is found four times in the King James Bible. Three times the KJB refers to "a bow of steel" - 2 Samuel 22:35 "He teacheth my hands to war; so that a bow of steel is broken by my arms." Job 20:24 "He shall flee from the iron weapon, and the bow of steel shall strike him through." Psalm 18:34 "He teacheth my hands to war, so that a bow of steel is broken by my arms." In Jeremiah 15:12 we read: "Shall iron break the northern iron and the steel?"

The first three times the Hebrew word is # 5154 nekh-oo-shaw. This word has a variety of meanings as translated in many different Bibles, both old and new. Among the meanings found in the King James Bible for this word are: "brass" (7 times) and "steel" (3 times)

The second word for steel found in Jeremiah 15:12 is #5178 and this word likewise has several meanings including: "brass, steel, copper, fetters, and chains."

Mr. Norris says: "M'Clintock wrote: In all cases where the word 'steel' is used in the A.V. the

true rendering of the Hebrew is copper."

Well, unfortunately for our Bible correcting friend Mr. Norris and his sidekick Mr. M'Clintock (whoever he is), not even the ESV, NASB, NIV, or NKJV have translated it as "copper" but as "bronze".

Observe the different opinions various men have about what this particular Hebrew word means in Psalm 18:34 "a bow of STEEL is broken by mine arms". John Gill comments on Psalm 18:34 saying: "so that a bow of steel is broken by mine arms; that is, the bow of an enemy falling into his hands, which might be literally true of David. It is in the Hebrew text, "a bow of brass"; and so Apollinarius renders it; **which Kimchi and Ben Melech interpret strong iron, that is, steel**; and so the Targum; see (Job 20:24) "He shall flee from the iron weapon, and the bow of steel shall strike him through."

Matthew Henry simply comments: "God had given him bodily strength to go through the business and fatigue of war: God girded him with strength (v. 32, 39), to such a degree that he could break even a bow of steel, v. 34."

Examples of multiple meanings for a single word abound even in the modern versions. For instance, the NASB translates the Hebrew word #5178 as brass -2 times, bronze - 130 times, and copper - one time. The NASB also translates #1270 as "axe, iron, axe head, and chains."

The NIV translates the same word as "bronze" 128 times and as "copper" 4 times.

When it suits the purposes of Mr. Norris, he refers to various older Bible versions that differ from the King James Bible to show how they differ from the KJB. However these same older Bible versions often agree with the KJB against the modern versions.

The word "steel" as in the expression "a bow of steel" can be used figuratively to express something that is very strong, and not necessarily made of literal steel. We sometimes speak of someone having nerves of steel, but we mean that he is of a strong constitution and not literally made of steel. We also use the expression of having to "steel ourselves" for the coming difficulties.

One possible explanation of the expression "a bow of steel" as found in the King James Bible is that they are figurative rather than literal. In Psalms 18 David says of God that He is a BUCKLER (a shield), and A ROCK, and that God "maketh my feet like HINDS' FEET, and setteth me upon my HIGH PLACES. He teacheth my hands to war, so that a BOW OF STEEL is broken by mine arms. Thou hast also given me the SHIELD of thy salvation, and THY RIGHT HAND hath holden me up...Then did I BEAT THEM SMALL AS THE DUST."

None of these things mentioned are literal. God is not a buckler nor a Rock, and neither did God literally hold David up with His right hand. The "high places" were not literal but figurative of exaltation and victory, and David did not literally beat anyone "small as the dust". These are all figurative expressions. But the bow may also have literally been made of some kind of hardened alloy referred to as "steel".

Some people like to criticize the King James Bible when it is too literal, as in the expression "to cut off him that pisseth against the wall" (1 Kings 14:10), which is literally what the Hebrew texts and older Bible versions read. Then they criticize it for being too loose in expressing figurative concepts "in the receptor language".

The King James Bible is not the only one to use the word "steel" in its translation.

Psalms 18:34 - "He teacheth my hands to war, so that A BOW OF STEEL is broken by mine arms."

So also read the Great Bible (Cranmer) 1540 - "myne armes shall breake euen A BOW OF STEELE.", Matthew's Bible 1549 - "& maketh myne armes to breake euen A BOWE OF STELE.", Webster's Translation 1833, Calvin's Version 1856 - "And broken will be a bow of STEEL by my arms.", the KJV 21st Century Version 1994 and the Third Millenium Bible 1998.

The 1936 Jewish translation, put out by the Hebrew Publishing Company, New York, has "steel" in Job 20:24; Psalm 18:34, and in Jeremiah 15:12.

2 Samuel 22:35 "He teacheth my hands to war; so that a BOW OF STEEL is broken by mine arms."

So too read Coverdale 1535 - "and bendeth THE STELE BOWE with myne armes.", the Great Bible 1540 - "euen a bowe of stele is to weake for myne armes." the Bishops' Bible 1568 - "that euen A BOWE OF STEELE is broken with myne armes.", Webster's translation 1833 - "so that a bow of STEEL is broken by my arms.", the KJV 21st Century Version and the Third Millenium Bible 1998.

The Geneva Bible translates this same word as "steel" in Job 20:24

The Bishop's Bible 1568 has "steel" in 2 Samuel 22:35; Job 20:24, and Psalms 18:34

Job 20:24 - "He shall flee from the iron weapon, and THE BOW OF STEEL shall strike him through."

So too read Coverdale 1535 - "he shall be shott with THE STELE BOWE.", the Great Bible 1540 - "he shall be shott wt the STELE BOWE.", Matthew's Bible 1549 - "the STELE BOWE", the Bishops' Bible 1568 - "and THE BOWE OF STEELE shall strike him through.", the Geneva Bible 1587 - "and THE BOW OF STEELE shal strike him through.", Webster's Translation 1833, the KJV 21st Century and the Third Millenium Bible 1998.

Jeremiah 15:12 - "Shall iron break the northern iron and THE STEEL?"

So also read Webster's 1833 translation, the New English Bible 1970, the Revised English Bible 1989 - "Can iron break STEEL from the north?", the KJV 21st Century Version and the Third Millennium Bible 1998. and the French Martin 1744 - "Le fer usera-t-il le fer de l'Aquilon, **et l'acier?**"

Rotherham's 1902 Emphasized Bible has steel in Ezekiel 27:19 "Wedan and Javan, from Uzal, Brought into thy traffic, - **STEEL**, cassia and calamus, Were, in thy merchandise:"

The Revised Standard Version with Apocrypha 1952 has "steel" in Sirach 31:26 - "Fire and water prove the temper of **STEEL**, so wine tests hearts in the strife of the proud."

The Message 2002 actually has the word "steel" 10 times in the Old Testament. Here are a few examples:

Job 40:18 - His skeleton is made of STEEL, every bone in his body hard as steel.

Proverbs 27:17 - You use steel to sharpen STEEL, and one friend sharpens another.

Jeremiah 15:20 - I'll turn you into a STEEL wall, a thick STEEL wall, impregnable.

Jeremiah 17:1 - "Judah's sin is engraved with a STEEL chisel, A STEEL chisel with a diamond point-- engraved on their granite hearts, engraved on the stone corners of their altars.

STEEL in the modern versions - NASB, RV, ASV, RSV, Darby, Complete Jewish Bible, Hebrew Names Version, Emphasized bible, Weymouth, the Message.

Nahum 2:3 and the Modern Versions -

Several other modern versions also have the word "steel" in them, but these do not agree even among themselves. In Nahum 2:3 the Revised Version 1881, the ASV 1901, the 1917 Jewish translation (JPS), Darby, Amplified 1987 - "The chariots blaze with fire of STEEL on the day of his preparation , A Conservative Version, the New Heart English Bible of 2010 -"The chariots flash with STEEL" and the NASB 1995 say: "the chariots are enveloped in flashing STEEL". The World English Bible has: "The chariots flash with STEEL in the day of his preparation, and the pine spears are brandished."

The brand new 1998 Complete Jewish Bible says: "The STEEL of the chariots flashes like fire as they prepare for battle", but the NIV, ESV say: "the METAL on the chariots flashes", the RSV has: "the chariots flash like FLAME", while the NKJV has: "the chariots come with flaming TORCHES." Rotherham's Emphasized bible 1902 has the word "STEEL" in Ezekiel 27:19 - "Wedan and Javan, from Uzal, Brought into thy traffic, - STEEL, cassia and calamus, Were, in thy merchandise."

While the KJB reads "bright iron", the ESV has "wrought iron"

The Knox Bible of 2012 has the word STEEL several times. In Judges 16:17 it says: "I am consecrated to God from birth, and this hair of mine has never felt the touch of STEEL.", and in Job 20:24 - "shuns he THE STEEL, to the bow of bronze he falls a prey." and in Job 40:13 - "bones like pipes of bronze, gristle like PLATES OF STEEL!", and Jeremiah 17:1 - "Not more indelible were the guilt of Juda, if pen of STEEL or point of diamond had graven it with their hearts" and twice in Daniel 2:41 and 42 - "sure enough, in the feet thou sawest, earthenware was mixed with TRUE STEEL." - "Yet was true STEEL mixed with base earthenware"

The Jubilee Bible of 2000 has the word STEEL in Job 6:12 - "Is my strength the strength of stones? Or is my flesh of STEEL?"

The 2011 Common English Bible (a critical text edition complete with the Apocryphal books) as the word STEEL in Sirach 31:26, as also the Revised Standard Version Catholic edition 1966 - "A furnace tests the hardening of STEEL when it's dipped"

Foreign Language Bibles that have the word "STEEL"

The Spanish Las Sagradas Escrituras of 1569, the Cipriano de Valera of 1602 and the Reina Valera of 1909 as well as the 2010 Reina Valera Gómez translations have "steel" (acero) in 2 Samuel 22:35, Job 20:24, and Psalms 18:34. Likewise Las Sagradas Escrituras 1999 edition reads "steel" (acero) in these verses.

The Spanish La Biblia de las Américas 1997, put out by the Lockman Foundation (who also give us the NASB) also says STEEL (acero) in Nahum 2:3 - "y de ACERO centelleante los carros cuando están en formación". The Spanish Jubilee Bible 2000 has the word STEEL (acero) four times - in 1 Samuel 17:5, 6 and 38 and in Job 6:12 - "¿Es mi fortaleza la de las piedras? O mi carne, ¿es de ACERO?" = "Is my strength that of the rocks? or my flesh, is it of STEEL?"

And the 2011 Reina Valera Contemporánea, put out by the United Bible Society, has STEEL (acero) in Job 20:25 - "una flecha le atravesará el cuerpo, la punta de ACERO le perforará el hígado" = "an arrow will pierce the body, the point of STEEL will pierce the liver."

Isn't it nice that all these Bible scholars are in such total agreement with each other? What we see going on today among all these Bible critics, correctors, Rummagers, bible agnostics [they do not know (a + gnostic) for sure] and unbelievers in the infallibility of The Bible - ANY Bible in ANY language - is that each one thinks he's an expert and somehow better qualified to tell us what the pure and true words of God REALLY are.

But not one of them agrees all the time with anybody else and not one of them can tell you where you can get a copy of what even they believe to be the complete, inspired and 100% true words of the living God. They end up like those in the days of the Judges - "In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes." Judges 21:25

Trust the Bible God has clearly blessed and used far more than any other, and the only one seriously believed by thousands to be the infallible words of God - the Authorized King James

Holy Bible.

All of grace, believing the Book,

Will Kinney

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