

Article of the Month
November, 2024

-- Acts 13:19, 20 --
A Review and Harmonization of the "Critical Text" Translations with the Older King James Version

INTRODUCTION

This article is being presented in order to deal with modern translations of these verses which, at least on the surface, totally contradict the King James Version. This will not be an easy study. But we hope it will be found beneficial for those who have been puzzled by the seeming discrepancy.

It should be mentioned at the outset that the King James Bible (KJV) was translated from the Hebrew and Greek texts (along with Latin sources) available at that time (1611). Scholars refer to those manuscripts as "*The Received Text*." MANY older and superior manuscript discoveries have been made since that time -- especially since the late 19th century. Consequently, more modern Bibles reflect those discoveries -- almost always to our benefit. The conglomerate text of these new discoveries is usually called "*The Critical Text*."

But the verses here under consideration in modern translations DO NOT easily reflect the accuracy of the information in the KJV. The problem IS NOT in the superior manuscript finds. It is in how they are translated and comprehended. Hopefully a careful examination will correct this and bring modern translations into agreement with the truthful information in the venerated KJV.

This article was prompted by the release of the new RVIC2020 translation ("*Revised Version, Improved & Corrected*" of 2020). We will deal with the problem caused by the Greek text **used *verbatim*** in this and most other translations. (See Appendix at the close of this article).

This article is for the purpose of reporting on how the Greek text used in the RVIC, and nearly all modern Bibles, can (with help) be translated or comprehended to agree with the accuracy in the KJV -- thus bringing the "*Received Text*" and the "*Critical Text*" into functional agreement. This will then corroborate the consistent true chronology of the entire Bible. Properly handled, the *Critical Text* verses will add additional insight without destroying the basic truths we have appreciated and relied upon in the KJV.

The fact is, the "Period of the Judges" (even as reflected within the Book of Judges itself) IS 450 years in length -- something very much obliterated in modern Bibles in the Acts text.

The RVIC₂₀₂₀ is the work of James Parkinson -- a delightful, talented, and respected friend of this writer. Correspondence with him has been made in an effort to find a solution to what, as it stands, is a translation which likely cannot be understood by nearly any among us, and which might easily lead some astray. Certainly it does not have the chronological clarity which we all learned via the KJV. In our correspondence with Jim Parkinson, he agreed that the following explanatory comments on the text are a likely solution to the problem inherent in the Greek text. We are grateful for his help in this matter.

TRANSLATION PHILOSOPHY

When anything (not just the Bible) is translated, it should be manifest that the **IDEA of the original** should be conveyed in the translation. If it is not, the translation is functionally a forgery. Literal, word-by-word ("*verbatim*"), translation often simply DOES NOT WORK! However, when it comes to Scripture (which is "God-breathed"), there is an additional responsibility for the translator. Not only should the IDEA of the original be transmitted to the new language, but the *inspired wording* in all of its detail should also be transferred to the new language as closely as is possible. After all, God's Word is sacred. And He frequently hides the most subtle or the most sensational truths in the smallest jot or tittle of language. Consequently it is better to ADD identified explanatory words for clarity than to SUBTRACT words from the original when translating. ANY translation will require some adjustment of the original wording. **It is just the nature of translating.** And it is NOT in violation of Revelation 22:18, 19! Indeed, such careful translating in order to RETAIN the meaning (not just the words) of the original is the only way NOT to add or subtract from the original when translating.

This combination of accuracy and understandability makes Biblical translating an art and a science of the highest degree. This responsibility of the translator is so enormous as to discourage (hopefully) all but the most learned, the most sincere, and the most spiritual of wordsmiths. It is a burden few of us would ever wish to carry.

But we must also realize that the Lord intended for Scripture to be spread all over the inhabited world in languages of many peoples. (Matthew 24:14) Therefore, the Lord well knew that translations and varying manuscripts must not easily deter the Gospel message. His over-rulings have assured that sincere searchers into the Holy Word can find where problems exist and how to fix them for clear understanding.

As we look at the verses under consideration, we will, therefore, attempt to maintain the integrity of the Greek text (in this case, the "*Critical Text*" version) to the best of our ability. But, understanding that it IS NOT CLEAR to us as English readers when it is

verbatim in its translation, we will both discuss and suggest how to make its words convey the true meaning apparently behind the words of the inspired Apostle.

WHAT IS OUR PURPOSE?

We have but one purpose for this article. We are NOT enamored of the translations which have come out of the “Critical Text” manuscripts for Acts 13:19,20. We find them nearly all insufficient due to lack of clarity and seeming contradiction of the Biblical chronology which is manifest in the total testimony of God’s Word.

It should be noted that honest translators seem to have been troubled by these two verses. Consequently, different translators add words (which is appropriate if successful) in order to try to clarify what they seem not to be able to comprehend. They have almost never succeeded.

While some scholars often belittle the “*Received Text*” used for the KJV, we find that the KJV translation conveys the most-meaningful part of Acts 13:19 & 20 far better than most translations which have been made from the “*Critical Text*.” Nevertheless, we, as devoted Bible students, **MUST** be able to explain the true meaning of these verses regardless of which manuscript is used in their translation. IF the “*Critical Text*” Greek be correct (which it almost certainly is), it is incumbent upon us to understand it in the light of what the Lord has given to us at this time of Church history.

Therefore, the purpose of this article is to work with the modern manuscript finds to show how (with care) they can, indeed, bolster what we have already accepted as true from our exhaustive considerations of the other parts of the Bible’s testimony on chronology.

THE PASSAGE UNDER CONSIDERATION

We begin by quoting the RVIC₂₀₂₀.

17. The God of this people Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they sojourned in *the* land of Egypt, and with a high arm led he them forth out of it.
18. And for about *the* time of forty years suffered he their manners in the wilderness.
19. And when he had destroyed seven nations in *the* land of Canaan, he gave *them* their land for an inheritance, for about four hundred and fifty years: [See our Appendix #2 below.]
20. also after these things he gave *them* judges until Samuel *the* prophet.
21. And afterward they asked for a king: and God gave unto them Saul *the* son of Kish, a man of *the* tribe of Benjamin, *for the space of* forty years.

The RVIC is careful to distinguish added words from those in the Greek text by the use of *italics*. We appreciate this care. Even the KJV translators were thoughtful to do this -- even though some publishers and translators have abandoned the practice..

We should also note that WHEN THE MATTER IS UNDERSTOOD, the above translation is quite good -- but ONLY if it first be understood!

THE PROBLEM

Most readers could not possibly discern the subtleties in the translation. This is why the KJV seems so much clearer to most of us.

Most of us would agree from reading the above translation **that it SEEMS to say this:**

19. When the land was divided, Israel inherited their land for 450 years.
20. After the “things” of verses 17-19, and after 450 years, God gave them judges.
21. After the Judges, Saul was king for forty years.

Therefore the problem is this: We all KNOW that this interpretation (especially of verse 20) cannot be true. [See our Appendix #2 below.] It is out of harmony with what we know of Old Testament chronology -- from the Bible itself. Even the Book of Judges (with all of its chronological difficulties) gives us (with careful investigation) about (if not exactly) a 450-year total for the period. Thus the translation fails us because we don't know how to read it to make sense of it.

THE SOLUTION

First, we must learn that several words are of *extreme importance*:

- (1) “**Things**” (verse 20) in the manuscript is a plural word. We must discern to which “things” it refers.
- (2) “**Also**” (verse 20) is going to prove to be a word vital to a correct understanding.
- (3) “**Inheritance**” (verse 19) will be used in a way we have probably never considered.

A treatment of these three items might be helpful here:

(1) The “**things**” (verse 20) is a list of the 5 “things” we have read about in verses 17-19. (The periods of time in these verses are not “things.”) Thus, the “things” with which we are dealing seem to be:

- The choosing of the “fathers.” — verse 17
- The sojourn in Egypt (which, by the way, was 215 years) ending at The Exodus. — verse 17
- The Wilderness journey (stated as 40 years). — verse 18
- The destruction of the enemies in the Land (which took 6 years). — verse 19
- The giving of the land to the people as an inheritance (which lasted ONLY for 450 years!). — verse 19

(2) The word, “**also**” (verse 20) is SO VERY IMPORTANT. “Also” means “in addition to.” In other words, (and PLEASE read with critical care!), verse 20 does NOT begin with, “And THEN...(meaning subsequently)!” However: The wording DOES SAY, “**Also after these things...**” Here things get subtle!

The “inheritance” WAS GIVEN at the end of the division of the land. It was a single act of giving. The “four-hundred and fifty years” tells HOW LONG the inheritance lasted, (NOT how long it was intended to last); but “the *thing*” was the inheritance gift -- given at the completion of the division of the land. Consequently, when verse 20 says “ALSO, AFTER THESE THINGS...” It means that after the 6 years division of the land, when He gave them the inheritance (the LAST of the “things” thus far listed), He **ALSO** gave them Judges AT THE SAME TIME -- “after” the list of five “things.” Consequently, BOTH the inheritance and the Judges lasted for a simultaneous total of 450 concurrent years. The Judges helped the people MAINTAIN their inheritance.

Consequently, the verse **IS NOT SAYING** that Israel, after the division of the land, received a 450-year inheritance AFTER WHICH they received judges. It IS SAYING that **during** the time of the 450-year inheritance **they “ALSO” received judges**. This little word, “**also**,” now makes the KJV and the RVIC agree with each other. The period of the judges IS 450-years in length — **contemporaneous with the 450-year “inheritance.”** (THIS is SO VITAL!)

(3) “**Inheritance**” (verse 19) is a word that can be “tricky!” But it now becomes crucial to understanding. As far as we can discern the Apostle’s intent, he seems to be telling us that the **Jewish people** were the “inheritors” of the land UNTIL they gave that inheritance away to the kings. This is WHY the **inheritance** is said to last ONLY for 450 years. This is a thought which the “Critical Text” tells us that the KJV does not. It is well worth pondering. When Israel had no king, THEY were their own kings under God's direction. The **inheritance** was THEIRS. When they insisted in doing what

neighboring lands did, they functionally turned over rule of their inheritance to a monarchy at the close of 450 years of inheritance for themselves. See I Samuel 10:1 for a confirmation of this thought.

THE RESULT

When we consider what we have above examined, we find that we can explain the RVIC (and all modern translations based on *The Critical Text*) in these terms: (*Italics* are words added by Parkinson or added here for elucidation for this article.)

17. The God of this people Israel (1) chose our fathers, and (2) exalted the people when they sojourned in *the* land of Egypt, and with a high arm led He them forth out of it.
18. And (3) for about *the* time of forty years suffered He their manners in the wilderness.
19. And when He had (4) destroyed seven nations in *the* land of Canaan, He (5) gave *the people of Israel* their land *which they kept* as an inheritance for about 450 years, *and*,
20. **also** [*during those years*], after these [*five*] things, *and during that inheritance time*, He gave *them* Judges *until* the time of Samuel *the prophet [who concluded the judges period]*.
21. And afterward, they asked for a king, *to whom they gave their inheritance*. And God gave unto them Saul...*for the space of forty years*.

This explanation, by way of *italicized* or bracketed additions, captures the meaning of the passage as well as also functions to retain the original words from the manuscript. This kind of combination of literal transference of words plus “connective tissue” for clarity would seem to meet the standards for a good translation.

As it appears above, it brings the passage significantly into conformity to the meaning of the “Received Text” (KJV). A “war” of meanings no longer exists between the two manuscript sources!

Thus, the above is not only helpfully interpretive, but it also creates an acceptable translation which conveys to the reader what the Apostle had in mind.

IN SHORT

Verses 17-21 say this:

(1) God led Israel through four steps from the Patriarchs through the the division of the land.

(2) At the close of these events, there followed a fifth step given -- 450 years during which Israel's people were "inheritors" of the land and were saved during this period, as needed, by Judges who were raised up for them.

We must not miss this intriguing thought: As great an amount of time as Israel was actually in their land, *ONLY 450 years of it* was considered their inheritance! This would make no sense whatsoever if we did not comprehend that the 450 years CAME DURING the period of the Judges (contemporaneous with their inheritance).

(3) The people lost faith AND their "inheritance" by insisting on kings.

(4) But God obliged them anyway and gave them Saul who reigned for 40 years.

APPENDIX #1

While the RVIC publication was the stimulus for this article, it is not well known; and it is certainly only one of a multitude of translations since the late 19th Century which use the "*Critical Text*" Greek manuscripts as the basis for their translations. A partial list of the translations which do this includes:

NASB	NIV	Phillips
NWT	RV	TCNT
NEB	Moffat	Weymouth
Rotherham	ASV	RNT
ISV	NAB	Concordant
ESV	Barclay	TLV
Marshall's Interlinear		

Our subject, of course, has been the Acts 13:19, 20 passage exclusively. The above versions are terribly deficient in their translations of that passage. But it should be noted that there are a few translations which use the "*Critical Text*" Greek which, to some degree, have managed to conquer its major problems. Ferrar Fenton and Wilson's Diaglott capture the IDEA well. Here is Fenton's helpful realization of the text:

"Afterwards, when He had conquered seven nations in the land of Canaan, He entrusted them with the possession of their country for about four hundred and fifty years, and contemporary with these events, He gave Judges until the end of Samuel the prophet."

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APPENDIX #2

Some scholars believe that a part of verse 19 actually belongs in verse 20. Making this simple switch eliminates the chronological problem -- although it also eliminates the thought of Israel's abandonment of its inheritance to kings. Below is the result of this switch as shown by using the RVIC with the only change being the re-location of the final phrase of verse 19 (and the alteration its punctuation) into verse 20. (It should be noted that the early manuscripts did not have verse divisions or punctuation. Therefore, such re-location of verses -- or even of chapter beginnings -- is perfectly permissible.)

17. The God of this people Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they sojourned in *the land of* Egypt, and with a high arm led he them forth out of it.
18. And for about *the* time of forty years suffered he their manners in the wilderness.
19. And when he had destroyed seven nations in *the land of* Canaan, he gave *them* their land for an inheritance.
20. For about four hundred and fifty years also, after these things, he gave *them* judges until Samuel *the* prophet.
21. And afterward they asked for a king: and God gave unto them Saul *the* son of Kish, a man of *the* tribe of Benjamin, *for the space of* forty years.

This possible solution seems a little less satisfying than the results of the above discussion. But it does mostly capture the clarification of meaning.

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