

A Translational Observation on Psalm 24:1

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Psalm 24:1 is a familiar verse of the Hebrew Bible for many. In the King James Version (KJV) it reads as follows, *“A Psalm of David. The earth is the LORD’s and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.”* The English rendering is simple and beautiful, and follows the Hebrew quite closely.

Many modern versions (MVs) since the KJV do not deviate much from this traditional rendering, though some differences are noticeable. Two popular modern translations, the New King James Version (NKJV) of 1982, and the English Standard Version (ESV) of 2001, have varying degrees of slight differences. Each of these MVs is listed below:

“A Psalm of David. The earth is the LORD’s and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein.”

“A Psalm of David. The earth is the LORD’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein.”

Looking at the above two examples, one might think that the first is the ESV since that rendering is less similar to the KJV than the one below it. But in reality, the first rendering is from the NKJV and is the one that is less similar to the KJV. The second example is from the ESV and is nearly identical to the KJV.

There is no textual reason, nor any compelling translational reason, for the NKJV not to keep the familiar wording of the KJV, as the ESV does. The single Hebrew noun (with conjunction) *oomloah* (וּמְלוֹאָהּ) is translated “and the fulness thereof,” and the feminine pronominal suffix (הָ) conveys the possessiveness of the phrase. “Thereof” does mean “of it,” and conveys that idea, namely, the fulness that belongs to the earth which belongs to the LORD. The NKJV translation is accurate, as is the rendering in the KJV and the ESV.

The question is: of all MVs that read, “The earth is the LORD’s and the fulness thereof;” shouldn’t the NKJV be one of them? What is the reason for making this change in the wording, especially in such a familiar verse? When I start this verse to our congregation, they finish it aloud without even being prompted. I say, “The earth is the LORD’s” and they respond, “and the fulness thereof.” The phrase “of it” while accurate, is unfamiliar, and not as becoming as “thereof.”

There is something strange about a New King James Version making translation choices that cause it to sound and read differently than the King James Version, while a MV like the ESV (which declares of itself that it is a revision of the Revised Standard Version) adheres to the King James Version’s wording in this phrase.

My counsel to the NKJV’s publishers and translators would be to revert the wording in Psalm 24:1 back to being identical to the KJV since the Authorized Version is entirely accurate, understandable, and edifying, just as it has been since it appeared in 1611, and because the NKJV claims to be a King James Version.