

I love to hear the beautiful strains of that song we just sang. In fact I love any beautiful strains of music. But I don't like to strain some ligament. I imagine that some of you have found yourselves straining hard in examinations to remember everything you have tried to learn for the exam. You might strain at an exam, but did you ever strain at a gnat? Well that's what the KJV says.

In KJV, turn to Mat. 23:23-24 --"Woe unto you scribes, pharisees, hypocrites, for ye pay tithes of mint, anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law--judgment, mercy, faith. These ought ye to have done and not to have left the others undone. Ye blind guides who strain at a gnat and swallow a camel." I don't know of the Bible that renders it "straining at a gnat." I don't know what it could mean: straining at a gnat. You can strain at an examination. You could strain at an effort to remember something. But straining at a gnat just doesn't make sense.

When you read the last part of the verse, you find it's contrasted with swallowing a camel. That makes it clear that what it means is not straining at a gnat, but straining out a gnat. That's what is translated in just about every version I've looked into so far and seen except the KJV. It is a queer thing, indeed, that that mistake quite unique--I don't know of any other translation that has made that rather foolish error, --perhaps it was a printer's error in 1611-- I don't know, I can hardly believe that those scholars who made the manuscripts from which the KJV was written wrote "strain at a gnat," though perhaps one of them wrote about as poorly as my handwriting is, and the printer misread it. I don't know.

But the stranger thing is that that mistake, unique among Bible translations that I've ever seen, has been copied and recopied, and recopied and recopied hundreds of times through the years since that time. The KJV was printed in 1611 and there were two printings of it. There were some hundreds of differences between the two printings and scholars have argued at length as to which of the two printings was the first because they both came out in 1611. In 1613 a new printing was made and in which there were 14 (?) changes made from the version that came out in 1611.

In the 18th century there was a rather thoroughgoing revision made; mostly of minor points in the KJV. In all these revisions, they simply copied that phrase: strain at a gnat. Well, if I were to throw away the KJV because of that I would indeed be straining at a gnat. But there is I think a very important lesson for us in these two verses. "Ye blind guides which strain at a gnat and swallow a camel." It is very important that we learn to distinguish between the gnats and the camels.

There was a "camel" that occurred in the KJV which has been preserved right up to this date which is very unfortunate. I'd say 100 times more unfortunate than the preservation of that silly phrase "strain at a gnat," or the equally silly phrase where we read about Stephen's martyrdom, and it says they "gnashed on him with their teeth." How do you gnash on someone? Does that mean you chew it up?