

Facts From History About Our

King James Bible.

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Chapter X

King James I

The King James Bible 1611 AD

The Authorized Bible.

Queen Elizabeth reign was the last of the Tudor monarchs. The throne was now in the house of the Stuarts of Scotland, King James VI. He became England's king in 1603 as King James I.

The religious and intellectual forces set to work, stirred up and molded the desires, aspirations, and endeavors of the Englishmen at the close of the sixteenth century. Scholarship had achieved a high standard of excellence and was not satisfied with anything small, or less than the best.

James I early life, and training, had made him a student of the Bible. He had even tried his hand at authorship. He had written a paraphrase of the book of Revelation and translated some of the Psalms.

The beginnings of the movement to undertake the 1611 Authorized Version was apparently unpremeditated. King James had called a meeting at Hampton Court in January, 1604, to consider complaints by the Puritans. The preface of the Authorized Version states:

“... the very historical truth is that upon the importunate petitions of the Puritans, at his Majesty's coming to this crown, the conference at Hampton Court having been appointed for hearing their complaints: when by force of reason they were put from all other grounds, they had recourse at the last, to this shift, that they could not with good conscience subscribe to the Communion [Prayer] book, since it maintained the Bible as it was there translated [*in the Great Bible*], which was, as they said, a most corrupted translation. And although this was judged to be but a very poor and empty shift, yet even here upon did his Majesty begin to be-think himself of the good that might ensue by a new translation, and presently after gave order for this translation which is now presented unto thee.”

The recommendation for a new revision was made to the conference by Dr. John Reynolds, president of Corpus Christi College, Oxford. His examples of "a most corrupted translation" were cited from the Great Bible and the Bishops' Bible. So far as is known the conference ended without taking any definite steps toward meeting the issue of the Puritans. However, the strong words of the Oxford president had been sown in fruitful soil.

Dr. Reynolds was highly respected for his linguistic ability in both the Greek and Hebrew. None other of his day was his equal. The charge of the Puritans that mistranslation of the Scriptures were found in the Prayer Book was the first definite step toward a revision. It was a brilliant move by Reynolds to use the Prayer book instead of the Bishops Bible. Attacking the Bishops Bible would have created resistance from churchmen. That would have been a confrontational assault on their best work.

James I was thoroughly in accord with the idea of a new revision of the Bible. The King had been brought up on the Bishops and Geneva Bible, using them in his Biblical studies. It was now prudent to make the best effort possible to make a translation with the greatest scholars of the day. King James therefore entered heartily into the preparation and execution of a plan to provide a uniform translation "by the best learned men in both the Universities, after them to be reviewed by the bishops, and the chief learned of the church." The work would be ratified by the Privy Council, and then by royal authority.

In a letter dated July 22, 1604, James wrote to Bishop Bancroft that he had "appointed certain learned men to the number of four and fifty for the translating of the Bible." The only prerequisite for the position of translator seems to have been proved efficiency as Biblical scholars. The list included Anglican churchmen, Puritans, and laymen.

Though King James's letter mentions fifty-four, the list that has been preserved contains only forty-seven. The discrepancy between the original number and the actual workers is supposed to be accounted for by resignations and deaths between the time of appointment and the time when the real work began.

Those assigned to this great work were organized into six groups—two at Westminster, two at Oxford, and two at Cambridge. Each of the six groups worked on a specified portion of Scripture. They worked separately at first. The Westminster group revised Genesis to II Kings, and Romans to Jude. The Oxford group took Isaiah to Malachi, the Gospels, the Acts, and the Apocalypse. The Cambridge group revised I Chronicles to Ecclesiastes, and the Apocrypha.

The skills and abilities of the revisers was undoubted. Nevertheless, to insure harmony firm rules were made. They are as follows:

1. The ordinary Bible read in the Church, commonly called the Bishops Bible, to be followed, and as little altered as the Truth of the original will permit.

The names of the Prophets, and the Holy Writers, with the other Names of the Text, to be retained, as nigh as may be, accordingly as they were vulgarly (meaning commonly) used.

3. The Old Ecclesiastical Words to be kept, *viz.* the word Church not to be translated Congregation &c.

4. When a word hath divers significations, that to be kept which hath been most commonly used by the most of the ancient fathers, being agreeable to the propriety of the place, and the analogy of the Faith.

5. The division of the chapters to be altered, either not at all, or as little as may be, if necessity so require.

6. No marginal notes at all to be affixed, but only for the explanation of the Hebrew or Greek words, which cannot without some circumlocution, so briefly and fitly be expressed in the text.

7. Such quotations of places to be marginally set down as shall serve for the fit reference of one scripture to another.

8. Every particular man of each company, to take the same chapter or chapters, and having translated or amended them severally by himself, where he thinketh good, all to meet together, confer what they have done, and agree for their Parts what shall stand.

9. As any one company hath dispatched any one book in this manner they shall send it to the rest, to be considered of seriously and judiciously, for His Majesty is very careful in this point.

10. If any company, upon the review of the book so sent, doubt or differ upon any place, to send them word thereof; note the Place, and withal send the reasons, to which if they consent not, the difference to be compounded at the general meeting, which is to be of the chief persons of each company, at the end of the work.

11. When any place of special obscurity is doubted of, letters to be directed by authority, to send to any learned man in the land, for his judgement of such a place.

12. Letters to be sent from every Bishop to the rest of his Clergy, admonishing them of this translation in hand; and to move and charge as many skilful in the tongues; and having taken pains in that kind, to send his particular observations to the company, either at Westminster, Cambridge, or Oxford.

13. The directors in each company, to be the Deans of Westminster, and Chester for that place; and the King's professors in the Hebrew or Greek in either University.

14. These translations to be used when they agree better with the text than the Bishops Bible: Tyndale's, Matthews, Coverdale's, Whitchurch's, Geneva.

15. Besides the said directors before mentioned, three or four of the most ancient and grave divines, in either of the Universities, not employed in translating, to be assigned by the vice-chancellor, upon conference with the rest of the heads, to be overseers of the translations as well Hebrew as Creek, for the better observation of the 4th Rule above specified.

The labor of translation and revision being done two members of each of the three companies were chosen to pass the final revision for the press in London.

Robert Barker

was the printer that produce the first edition in 1611. The King James Bible was in a large folio volume that was in appearance both external and internal very much like the Bishops' Bible. The type, chapter, and verse divisions, charts and tables, running titles, and chapter summaries were similar as well. The dedication and preface to the work was learned, and explained the purpose of the translation. It reviewed the controversy with the Roman Catholic church regarding the desirability of an English Bible.

To the disgrace of today's publishers of modern times the Preface is generally omitted, or cut to just a token of the extensive work in the early King James Bibles. This is a serious detriment of understanding and appreciation of this Bible. Professor Edgar J. Goodspeed sought for years to have this practice corrected, but failed.

The original title page of the King James Bible read: "The Holy Bible, Contayning the Old Testament and the New: Newly Translated out of the Original tongues; & with the former Translations diligently compared and revised by his Majesties special Commandment. Appointed to be read in Churches."

When we consider that the Bishops' Bible was a slightly revised edition of Tyndale's translation we can appreciate better his far-reaching contribution to the history of the English Bible.

The King James translators had the Greek New Testament. They had Beta's improvements on Erasmus and on Stephanus. The Old Testament far surpassed any English translation in

its faithful representation of the Hebrew text, and did it in a simplicity of language admirably representative of the Elizabethan age. The New Testament is so expressive in language and form that it is even said to surpass the original Greek as literature.

One quality that exists with the King James Bible is the consistent translation of particular words throughout the Bible. This allows the student of God's Word to do word studies that are doctrinally and Biblically correct. A good example to this would be the word "seed" used in Genesis 3 and Galatians 3. The Seed is Christ throughout the Bible!

The King James Bible in connection with its production and use, became widely known as the "King James Version" or the "King's Bible." But eventually it came to be designated as the "Authorized Version."

It is true that the title Page read "Appointed to be read in Churches" and that this translation was prepared under the direct order of the King and his appointees, but there is no record of any order, act, or decree, by Parliament, or King, authorizing, or sanctioning it. But the King in 1604 had specified that "a translation be made of the whole Bible, and only to be used in all Churches of England in time of Divine Service."

Its birth occurred without any blast of trumpets, any royal edict, or public proclamation. This Bible gained rapid adoption in the churches and private reading. The Spirit gave witness to its accuracy and inspiration. Those using this great work were blessed without precedent.

It met opposition, and resistance, but soon outran the popularity of the Bishops' Bible. The Geneva Bible waged a running fight for a full half-century. But character and merit won the contest, and the "Authorized Version" completely took the field.

In 1613 another edition was printed which contained more than four hundred variations from the first, and differed in several other features. A second issue partly printed in 1611 and partly in 1613 containing a few variations. The two are sometimes called the "He" and "She" Bibles from their respective translation of the pronoun in Ruth 3:15. The former is generally considered to be the first Published edition. **These were printing errors and soon found correction in the next printing.**

The most important changes occurred in the eighteenth century. In 1762 Dr. Thomas Paris published an extensive revision at Cambridge. In 1769 Dr. Benjamin Blayney, after about four years of work, brought out another at Oxford. The latter work included much modernization of spelling, punctuation, and expression. These changes were due to printing errors and spelling changes in many words. This update represents the exact words in the 1611 Bible first edition, only the spelling is changed. This 1769 update is the King James Bible of our time and use.