

KJV 400

The 400th Anniversary of the King James Version of the Bible

The King James Version of the Bible/The Authorised Version stands like the Tower of London as a monument at the heart of the English speaking world. It is the best selling book of all time.

The KJV is the Bible that endured, having the greatest formative influence on the development of the English language worldwide. The KJV is actually one of the first British things to be made. It was made by the whole Island shortly after the inauguration of the United Kingdom of England and Scotland, when King James VI of Scotland became King James I of England.

Celebrations

For the 400th anniversary of the Authorised Version, Great Britain is hosting more than 70 different events, including a continuous reading of the whole Bible at Blackburn Cathedral, Symposiums at Cambridge and Aberdeen and St. Johns College in Cambridge are setting up a special exhibition. The British Royal Mail is issuing a special commemorative stamp. Even the British Broadcasting Corporation will show an hour long documentary. The Duke of Edinburgh launched the official celebrations in the banqueting house at Whitehall. Innumerable websites have been set up to celebrate the Authorised Version.

Foundational

There is no doubt that the KJV Bible is the most beloved and respected Bible in all of history. It has an ageless magnificence, a beauty of phrase and poetical arrangement which is absolutely unique. It is not possible to comprehend the history of the English speaking peoples without understanding the great KJV translation. The KJV Bible has most certainly been far more influential than even Shakespeare in the development and spread of English worldwide.

Superlatives

The KJV attracts superlatives. It is: the most important book in the English language, religion and culture, the most celebrated book throughout the English speaking world, the most enduring embodiment of Scripture in the English language and the gold standard by which all other Bible translations are evaluated. "All other versions still exist, as it were, in its shadow. It has shaped, formed and moulded the language in which the others must speak." The KJV is the most pre-eminent Bible translation of all time. Without any doubt, this is the greatest example of English literature ever produced. No book ever had such a great impact on the development of a language and culture as the KJV has had. Nor can any other Bible translation claim to have inspired so many Revivals and the launching of so many missionary movements as the KJV.

Influential

The KJV is the most influential version of the most influential book in the world, in what has become the most influential language in the world.

Linguistic Rallying Point

English linguist, Professor David Crystal of Oxford University, following a strict methodology, came up with at least 256 idioms from the Authorised Version which have entered into the English language. This has included terms such as: feet of clay, land of milk and honey, whited sepulchres, girded loins, salt of the earth, and much more.

Bestseller

Most Gideon Bibles in hotel rooms are KJV. Oxford University Press alone sells over 250,000 copies of the KJV every year, which it describes as “the most widely owned and used translation.”

Before the KJV

Pre-Reformation Bibles were mostly in Latin. This precluded ordinary people from hearing or understanding the Scriptures. King Alfred the Great did translate the Gospels into Anglo Saxon. The Lindesfarne Gospels included Anglo-Saxon interlinear script written between the lines of the Latin text. Professor John Wycliffe of Oxford University translated the Latin Vulgate into English, publishing handwritten copies of the New Testament in 1380 and the Old Testament in 1382. However these were all only handwritten, few in number and inaccessible to the common man.

The Printing Press

The invention of the Printing Press by Johannes Guttenberg and the printing of the first book, a Bible in Latin, on a mechanical movable type printing press, made possible a revival of learning and education and a circulation of literature on a scale never before seen. This invention laid the groundwork for the Reformation in the 16th century. The Printing Press was often referred to as “*The Reformers Friend, the Tyrants Foe!*”

The Greek New Testament

In 1516 the eminent scholar Erasmus published the Greek New Testament (the *Textus Receptus*). This Greek New Testament made available by Erasmus was used by William Tyndale to translate the New Testament into English.

William Tyndale

The first English New Testament to be translated from the original languages, and printed, was William Tyndale’s work, which was first smuggled into England in 1526. In 1536, the Bible translator, William Tyndale was burned at the stake for this crime.

Myles Coverdale

William Tyndale’s co-worker, Myles Coverdale produced the official Great Bible of 1539 which was authorised by King Henry VIII “*for reading aloud in churches*”. The Great Bible was mostly the work of William Tyndale.

The Geneva Bible

In 1557 the Geneva New Testament in English was published to be followed in 1560 by the complete Geneva Bible. The accession to the throne of England of the young Edward VI, a Protestant, gave unprecedented religious freedom and impetus to the translation of the Bible into English. The untimely death of King Edward and accession to the throne of Bloody Mary led to a reign of terror (1553 to 1558), in which hundreds of men, women and children were burned to death, including some of the most prominent Protestant Bible translators, teachers, preachers and theologians, even the Archbishop of Canterbury, and author of the Book of Common Prayer, Thomas Cramer. Led many church leaders to flee to Switzerland for sanctuary. It is for that reason that the next Bible translation into English was the Geneva Bible, published in 1560.

The Geneva Bible was a good scholarly work using original Roman type, smaller fonts, and the familiar verse formats of today’s Bibles and highlighting particular words to show where they had been added to the original for emphasis. The Geneva Bible was in general use for over 60 years and was the Bible quoted by playwrights such as William Shakespeare. The Geneva Bible

was the first to bring out a “pocket book” edition of the Bible that people could carry around with them more easily than the traditional large formats produced for public reading in church services.

The Bible of the Puritans

The Geneva Bible was one of the most historically significant translations of the Bible into the English language, preceding the KJV by 51 years. It was the primary Bible of the 16th century Protestant movement and the Bible used by William Shakespeare, Oliver Cromwell, John Milton, John Knox and John Bunyan in *Pilgrims Progress*. The Geneva Bible was the primary Bible of the Pilgrims who founded America and used by the Ironsides soldiers of Oliver Cromwell during the English Civil War.

The First Study Bible

The Geneva Bible was the first mechanically printed, mass produced Bible, made generally available, direct to the public, with a variety of Scriptural study guides and aids (including woodcut illustrations, maps, charts and indexes). Therefore the Geneva Bible was the world's first Study Bible. Over 150 editions of the Geneva Bible were printed between 1560 and 1644. The very first Bible printed in Scotland was a Geneva Bible, in 1579. A Law was passed in Scotland that year requiring every household to purchase a copy. The study notes were Calvinist and Puritan in character and were particularly objected to by the bishops and royalty for being “seditious”.

The Bishops Bible

The official Bishops Bible was published in England in 1568. The Church of England issued the Bishops Bible, essentially a revision of the Great Bible, which was mostly based on William Tyndale's work. The Bishops Bible remained in use in the churches until the King James Bible was published in 1611.

King James

When Queen Elizabeth I died on 24 March 1603, the crown of England passed to her cousin James I, who had already been King of Scotland for 37 years. During the royal procession of King James VI of Scotland to his coronation in London as King James I of the United Kingdom of Great Britain, a delegation of Puritans presented James the Millenary Petition, which had over 1,000 signatures representing 10% of the Clergy of England. This petition was the catalyst for the Hampton Court Conference.

The Puritans

The Puritans were loyal to the crown but they were Calvinists who insisted that England's Reformation had not gone far enough.

The Presbyterians

The Presbyterians wanted to do away with the hierarchal structure of powerful bishops. They promoted instead a model of church administration under elders, or presbyters.

The Pilgrims

The Pilgrims were non-conformists, or separatists, who wanted the state out of church affairs altogether. Many of them would emigrate to North America.

Parliament

Parliament was eager to expand its power and the Puritans retained a significant influence and representation in Parliament.

The Papists

The Papists were the Roman Catholics who wanted the English church to be returned under the authority of the Pope. They were excluded from the translation process and attempted to assassinate King James and blow up Parliament in the foiled Gunpowder Plot on 5 November. This is remembered annually in the Guy Fawkes fire works.

The Privileged

The privileged bishops had exceptional power and wealth. They had seats in the House of Lords and were determined to resist the Puritans, Presbyterians and Pilgrims.

The Hampton Court Conference

James took the Puritan petition seriously enough to call for a conference which took place in October 1603 at Hampton Court. This luxurious, one thousand roomed, estate just outside of London had originally been built by Cardinal Wolsey. Only four moderate representatives of the Puritan cause were invited to participate in the conference before the king at Hampton Court. The nine Bishops and Deans and the Privy Council were clearly prejudiced against the Puritans. King James delivered the opening address making clear that the doctrine and policy of the state church was not up for evaluation, or reconsideration. He made no effort to hide his frustration with the Presbyterian model he had endured in Scotland. Those who had hoped that he would be sympathetic to the Presbyterian or Puritan cause had obviously misunderstood his intransigence on this issue. However, the Puritans were not allowed to attend the first day of the conference and when, on the second day, the four Puritans were allowed to join the meeting they started on the wrong foot by suggesting: "Let's broaden the decision making base. Why shouldn't the bishops govern jointly with a presbytery of their brethren, the pastors and ministers of the church."

No Bishop – No King!

The king exploded in reply: "If you aim at a Scots presbytery it agreeeth as well with monarchy as God and the devil!" The word presbytery was apparently like a red flag to a bull. King James uttered his final word on the matter: "No bishop, no king!"

Conform or Else!

The king warned the Puritans: "If this be all your party has to say, I will make them conform themselves, or else I will harry them out of the land, or else do worse!"

A New Translation

At this point Dr. John Reynolds, the President of Corpus Christi College of Oxford, a leader of the Puritan side in the Church of England, and one of the greatest scholars of his day, proposed a new translation of the Bible into English. King James responded warmly to this suggestion because he despised the then popular Geneva Bible. The king was troubled by the often revolutionary margin notes of the Geneva Bible which spoke extensively against corrupt and immoral kings. King James ordered that a single translation that the whole nation could rely on "to be read in the whole church", should be produced by 50 of the nations finest language scholars and he approved rules for carefully checking the results, including no marginal notes at all to be effected, but only for the explanation of the Hebrew or Greek words, and to draw attention to parallel passages.

The Translation Teams

Six panels of translators had their work divided up between them; the Old Testament was entrusted to three panels, the New Testament to two and the Apocrypha to one. Two of the panels met at Oxford, two at Cambridge, and two at Westminster. The most learned men in the

Universities of Oxford and Cambridge were to take the lead in the work which was to be reviewed by the bishops, presented to the Privy Council and lastly ratified by the Royal Authority.

The KJV must be the only work of literary genius to have been produced by a committee. The group of great scholars had unparalleled qualifications. Most of them had spent most of their lives in the pursuit of God and knowledge. One translator, Dr. Lancelot Andrews, mastered at least 15 languages and by the time he was 6 years old, had read the entire Bible in Hebrew. Some of the translators had written foreign language Dictionaries and Lexicons. They commonly debated in Greek, they translated and edited great works and they wrote their own. Not only did the translators know the Biblical languages of Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek, but many also knew related languages that enabled them to study other documents and translations by the church Fathers in Persian, Coptic, Syrian, Chaldea, Latin, French, Italian, German and Dutch. Some of the translators prayed five hours a day. The translators were world class scholars, Christians who lived holy lives and were prominent as deans, professors and presidents of major colleges of Oxford and Cambridge.

After the final draft was completed by the 54 scholars, a concluding committee of 12 reviewed what the lower committees had prepared, and then Bishop Thomas Bilson and Dr. Miles Smith added the finishing touches. By 1609 the whole revision was ready and Miles Smith, the Canon of Hereford, later to become the Bishop of Gloucester, and Thomas Bilson, Bishop of Winchester, saw it through to the printing press and Miles Smith composed the Preface "The Translators to the Readers."

Although King James contributed no money to its production and although no record of an official authorisation of the finished product survives, if such were ever issued, the Bible came to be known as the King James Version. It was certainly not the only, or the first, Authorised Version. The Coverdale, or Great, Bible was the truly Authorised Bible (under Henry VIII) in English, and the Bishops Bible was Authorised by Queen Elizabeth I.

Initial Opposition

Not everyone supported the King James Bible at its first publication. Distinguished scholar Dr. Hugh Boughton declared that it "Bred in me a sadness that will grieve me while I breathe... tell His Majesty that I had rather be wrent in pieces with wild horses, than any such translation by my consent should be urged upon the churches... the new edition crosseth me. I require it to be burned." John Lightfoot objected to the Apocrypha being placed in the Bible.

An Enduring Work

The KJV went through 15 printings in the first 3 years with the translation committees being forced to make some minor revisions. The KJV most people use today is the result of a final revision brought about in 1769. The KJV is an incredible achievement. An enduring work which has had an enormous effect on hundreds of millions of lives, on the English language, culture and world history. It is the most important translation of the most important book in what has become the most important language in the world.

A Treasure

In the Preface to the 1611 edition, the translators of the Authorised Version stated that it was not their purpose "to make a new translation... but to make good ones better." They recorded their debt to the earlier works of William Tyndale and other Reformers and Bible translators. The New King James Version seeks to be faithful to the original text and to retain the King James Version style and idiom, while keeping abreast of changes in English speech.

A Challenge

In this 400th anniversary of the publication of the KJV why don't you read through the whole Bible? If you read just 4 chapters a day, it will get you through the whole Bible in a calendar year. To know the God of the Word we need to study the Word of God. We have the whole KJV Bible available on audio MP3 which is ideal to play while commuting by car. CLB will be giving this KJV audio MP3 as a gift to all who order in-house titles this month.

“So then Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.” Romans 10:17

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