



THE KING JAMES VERSION OF THE BIBLE

Preface The Bible is God's inspired and infallible Word – it is God's Book. God has given this Book to His people to teach them the Truth that they must believe and the godly life that they must live. Without the Holy Scriptures the believer has no standard of what is the Truth and what is the lie, what is righteous and what is wicked. It is, therefore, imperative that everyone takes great care that the Bible version that he uses, defends, and promotes in the world is a faithful translation of the Word of God. On this point, however, there is much confusion. There are many versions available today and they are all promoted as the best, the most accurate or the easiest to understand. All of them are justified by the supposed inferiority of the King James Version. The truth is quite different. The King James Version, although it is 400 years old, is still the best translation available today. It was translated by men who were both intellectually and spiritually qualified for the work. The great version that they produced is faithful to the originals, accurate, incomparable in its style, and easily understood by all those who are serious about knowing God's Word. The King James Version of the Bible is the version to be used in our churches and in our homes.

The Inception Of The New Version: A Puritan's Petition – Representatives of the Church of England were gathered together for a conference in January 1604. The Puritans had many objections concerning the English Church as it was then established. They were hoping that their new king, James I, would guide the Church of God in England to be more like the Reformed Church of Geneva and the Presbyterian Churches of Scotland. They had already met James on his way to London where he was to receive the English crown and had presented him with a petition called the Millenary Petition (1000 signatories). It did not go well for the Puritans, however, and King James supported the cause of the High Churchmen who did not want the Presbyterian form of Church government. In the midst of their struggle Dr. John Reynolds, the Puritan president of Corpus Christi College, suddenly petitioned the king, that there might be a new translation of the Bible, because those that were allowed in the reigns of Henry VIII and Edward VI were corrupt and not answerable to the truth of the original. This motion of the Puritan leader evidently was not something planned but something that was introduced incidentally in order to keep from losing at the conference. The Puritans did object to the translations of the Great Bible and the Bishops' Bible, which were quoted in the Prayer Book, but they did not zealously demand a new translation. They were content with their Geneva Bible and its Calvinistic notes. The motion for a new translation was incidental to them. In fact, if it were up to them, there probably would not be a King James Version of the Bible.

Bishops And King – On the other hand, the bishops were not immediately in favor of a new translation either. Bishop Bancroft of London (who was appointed by the king to oversee the translation work) expressed his opposition this way, If every man's humor should be followed, there would be no end of translating. It was the king's zeal and enthusiasm for the project that caused the work to be undertaken and saw through to the end. Indeed, the king seems to have been the driving force behind this grand undertaking. Yet we make a mistake if we attribute his zeal to good motives. It may have been that he had an interest in the Scriptures and it is said to have done some translating of the Bible of his own. Most, however, attribute his zeal to an ambition to advance his own cause

and glory. He greatly disliked the marginal notes of the Geneva Bible because he thought they encouraged disobedience to kings and therefore wanted a new translation to replace it. He was shrewd enough to see that a new translation would do much to unite the church and thus enhance his own glory.

God's Bible – We must conclude from all of this, that the King James Version of the Bible is not a Puritan Bible, nor an Anglican Bible, and not even a King James Bible. A Bible, which has been used of the Lord for hundreds of years, cannot be merely the product of an incidental suggestion or the zeal of bad motives. No! The King James Version is the product of God's great love for His English-speaking Church. God so ruled in the hearts and lives of finite men that He caused this new translation of the Bible to be made. He provided this Bible for His English-speaking Church so that His Word might be preserved in her midst. Even the translators acknowledge that it was God who had put the zeal for a new translation into the heart of the king. They exhort us, Let us rather bless God from the ground of our heart, for working this religious care in him, to have the translations of the Bible maturely considered of and examined. God in His providence took the incidental remarks of a Puritan, the zeal of a king for his throne, and in the midst of the opposition of bishops, gave to His Church a Bible that has been her blessing and strength for almost four hundred years. In the King James Version of the Bible we have the authoritative Word of God.

The Translators Of The KJV: Their Organization – The suggestion of Dr. Reynolds was fixed in the mind of the king. Conformists and Puritans alike with great zeal and dedication were ready to begin their tasks. By June 30, 1604 (six months after the Hampton Court Conference), fifty-four men had been approved as translators of the new version (Evidently only forty seven men actually took up the labors), and a plan of procedure had been set down. The translators were formed into six companies: two meeting at Westminster, two at Cambridge, and two at Oxford. Genesis through II Kings was translated by the first Westminster company, I Chronicles through Ecclesiastes by the first Cambridge company, and Isaiah through Malachi by the first Oxford company. The second Oxford company translated the four Gospel accounts, Acts, and Revelation. The Second Westminster company did Romans through Jude. The Apocrypha was done by the second Cambridge company. The Apocrypha, however, was not considered a part of the inspired Scriptures. It was translated and bound with the Bible, but the King James Version translators did not count it as God's Word. In this way, they differed from the Roman Church. The fact that the Apocryphal books were separated out of the Old Testament and put after it indicates that they did not consider it equal with Holy Scripture. In later editions it was dropped altogether.

Their Learning – In these six companies of translators were gathered together the most learned men of the age. Today it is charged that the King James Version is obsolete, for we have learned so much more and have men who are much greater scholars than those of the 17th century and who, therefore, can do a much better job of translating the Bible. Indeed, we have gathered much general knowledge in the past three hundred and eighty years. It is NOT true, however, that the King James Version translators were inferior scholars. They were men of great learning.

- Launcelot Andrews was skilled in fifteen languages as was the head of the Westminster company which translated Genesis through II Kings.

- William Bedwell of the same company was well known as the greatest Arabic scholar of the day.
- Dr. Smith, the author of *The Translators To The Readers* and one of the final editors, was so conversant in Chaldee, Syriac, and Arabic that they were as familiar to him as English.
- John Harmar of the Oxford company, was a noted scholar in Greek and Latin.
- John Boys of the Cambridge group was taught Hebrew when he was five years old and he was admitted to St. John's College, Cambridge when he was fourteen. He was a most exact Greek grammarian.
- Dr. John Reynolds, the Puritan who first suggested a new translation, had a reputation as a Hebrew and Greek scholar. He was held to be the most learned man in England.
- Henry Savile of the New Testament Oxford company was one of the most profound, exact, and critical scholars of his age. He became famous for his Greek at an early age.

No, these men were not ignorant or even average. They were exceptional in their various areas of knowledge.

The Spiritual Character Of The Translators – Scholarship is not everything. A translation of the Bible is always affected by the spiritual character and faith of the translators. Martin Luther wrote, Translating is not an art that everyone can practice, as the mad saints think; it requires a right, pious, faithful, diligent, God-fearing, experienced heart. Therefore, I hold that no false Christian, or sectarian can be a faithful translator. No false Christian, no sectarian - that is, no unbeliever can be a good translator of the Bible. This is the problem with many modern versions.

Protestant Men – What about these translators? Did they have this heart that Luther describes? The answer is a most emphatic, yes. These men were pious men of God, who were committed to the Truth. They were all Protestants who belonged to the Anglican Church. Some were High Churchmen. Some were Puritans. Others were somewhere in between, but they were all members of a church that was Protestant, a church of the Reformation. The church was not as Reformed as Geneva, not even as Reformed as it had been in the days of Edward VI, but it was nevertheless a church that had adopted many of the Truths of the Reformation. **Godly Men** – They were godly men who did not trust in their own strength, but sought guidance and help from God. They believed that, even after the translation was completed, it would be meaningless to the people of England without the enlightening power of God's grace. **Believing Men** – Unlike many who translate the Bible today, they believed that they were dealing with the inspired Word of God. These men considered the Scriptures to be the inspired Word of God. To them, the Bible was a very special book and they handled it accordingly.

The Rules And Methodology Followed: The Rules – The translators took great care to follow strict guidelines and rules set in place. To name a few:

- 1) The Bishops' Bible, the official version of the Church, was to be as little altered as the originals permitted.
- 2) There were to be no marginal notes with the exception of explanations of Hebrew and Greek words.

- 3) There also were to be Scripture references in the margins. There were 8,422 marginal notes in the 1611 edition of the King James Version. In succeeding editions, thousands more were added.
- 4) Proper names were to be as near to the common usage as possible.
- 5) Old ecclesiastical words such as Church were to be used.
- 6) Words of varying interpretations were to be rendered with patristic tradition and the analogy of faith.
- 7) Other translations were to be consulted such as Tyndale's, Matthew's, Coverdale's, the Great Bible, and the Geneva Bible.

The Procedure – Along with such rules as these, the procedure that was to bring together into one work the translations of all these various men and companies, was strictly set down for them. First of all, each translator was to individually work on a translation of the section. After that was done each man's work was brought to his company as a whole. Evidently the head of the company would read the passage from the Bishops' Bible. Whenever one of the translators wanted something changed or had something to say about the translation, he would present his own work. In this way the work of each was compared with the others and the company as a whole worked out one translation. When each book of the Bible was finished, they would send it to each of the other five companies to be reviewed. If the later companies found anything objectionable, they would note such places and send it back to the originating company with their reasons. If there was a disagreement, it was to be settled by an editing committee later. If there was a passage that was especially difficult, all the learned men of the land could be called upon to make a judgment. After each company had finished their work they sent it to a committee comprised of two men from each company, which reviewed and revised the whole work. Finally, the finishing touches and printing were completed.

Other contributors: A Careful Work – They did not rush themselves. They say in the preface, Neither did we run over the work with that posting hast that the Septuagint did, if that be true which is reported of them, that they finished it in 72 days; neither were we bared or hindered from going over it again having once done it, like St. Jerome ... These men were not afraid to go over their work again and again until they were satisfied that they had attained the best possible translation. **Each part of the work must have been closely scrutinized at least fourteen times.** Some of the translators began their work, as soon as they were appointed in 1604. The entire body was engaged in the work by 1607. The new version was finally published in 1611 from the press of Robert Barker who retained the right of printing for nearly a hundred years. Thus you can see that some men diligently labored for six or seven years, while the main body worked for three or four.

An Accurate Translation – It must be noted further that the King James Version translators were very concerned to have an accurate translation of the originals. They proclaim on the title page, Holy Bible, containing the Old Testament and the New: newly translated out of the original tongues ... That proclamation is true. For these men have given us, for the most part, a word-for-word translation of the originals. **They did not follow the principle of dynamic equivalence, as do most translators today. Most modern versions are not word-for-word translations!** One English word is not translated for one Greek or Hebrew word. Rather the ideas expressed in the originals are put into English. Dynamic equivalence is the method of translation whereby one translates the ideas but

not necessarily the words. The King James Version translators did not use such a method. **They translated word for word.** Thus they have produced a very accurate and faithful translation as far as the original words are concerned. They were so concerned about it that they even took over the very phraseology of the Hebrew and Greek We find in our Bibles, all kinds of Hebrew expressions and concepts that are not natural to the English way of speaking. **In fact, it can even be said that the English of the King James Version is neither the English of the 17th century, nor of any century. It is an English that is unique,for it is Biblical English-an English formed by the Hebrew and Greek of the Bible.** It is Biblical English because the translators were more interested in being faithful to the originals than in making their translation in the street language of the day, as do translators today. That they sought an accurate translation is further indicated by the fact that they italicized every word that did not have a corresponding word in the original. How many modern Bible versions do that? Moreover, to insure the fact that the reader understands the meaning of certain original words, they added 4,223 marginal notes that gave the literal meaning of the original words, and 2,738 notes with alternate translations. **The result is that in the King James Version we have an accurate translation that puts the others to shame!**

A Majestic Translation – In the third place we must note the fact that the translators gave the King James Version a majestic quality that raises it high above all other translations. They recognized God to be GOD-a God of glory and majesty. Therefore, they were careful to translate His Word in such a way that it would be filled with His majesty. That is another reason why the English of the King James Version is not the English of the 17th century. The translators deliberately chose words and phrases that were no longer used in general conversation even in their day in order that they might set this book apart from all others. There is no version that even comes close to the beauty and majesty of the King James Version.

The Sources Used In Translating: Original Languages – The particular English of this version is also due to the fact that the King James Version is at the same time both a new translation and a revision of previous translations. It is indeed a new translation, which goes back to the original languages. The translators had editions of both the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament available to them. The age in which they lived was bursting with knowledge. Since the fall of Constantinople (1453), the West had been flooded with scholars and knowledge had increased tremendously. There was renewed interest in the ancient tongues and as a result the originals were there for them to use. God had remarkably preserved the Hebrew text. At the time the translators were ready to begin their work, they had no less than ten printed editions of the Hebrew Old Testament available to them. They recognized the fact that the final authorities in this work were the Hebrew and the Greek texts.

Previous Translations – Yet the King James Version is not a totally new work. In terms of literary units-phrases and clauses-the King James Version is about thirty nine percent new translation. Sixty one percent of the phrases are taken over from older English versions. In fact, the King James Version can be considered the fifth revision of the work of William Tyndale who first translated the New Testament into English from the Greek. Before Tyndale there was the translation (1380) of John Wycliffe and the translation of John Purvey (A Colleague of Wycliffe), but they were translated from the Latin Bible. Tyndale was the first to go back to the original languages. The first revision of Tyndale was done by John Rogers and is called the Matthew's Bible (1537). Under the auspices of

Thomas Cromwell, Myles Coverdale (Tyndale's assistant) revised the Matthew's Bible to produce the Great Bible (1539). In 1560 the Protestants in exile at Geneva produced the Geneva Bible, which was the third revision of Tyndale. Finally in 1568 the English bishops prepared what is known as the Bishops' Bible, which was the version from which the translators were to make their revisions, according to the command of King James. In actuality they used all of these versions plus many other translations such as the German and French Bibles as well as many commentaries such as Calvin's and Beza's. Of all the English versions used, more of the phrases and clauses found in the King James Version come from the Geneva Bible than any other-about 19 percent. While it is said that five sixths to nine tenths of the general literary style comes from the translation of William Tyndale.

A Bible Of The Reformation – If we carefully consider these sources of our Bible, then it becomes clear that there is something very special about it. Of all the English versions available today, the King James Version is the only one that can be called a **Reformation Bible**. This Bible came out of the Reformation of the 16th century.

Stephanus And Beza – This is true first of all from the point of view of the Greek text. In fact, it was even edited by them. Robert Stephanus (Estienne), whose forth edition of the Greek New Testament was very influential in the translation of the King James Version, was a strong adherent of the Reformed Faith. Forsaking Rome and embracing the Faith of the Reformation, he gave up his position as royal printer in order that he might publish Reformed literature. He fled from Paris to Geneva, that great Reformation city, where he printed his 4th edition of the Greek New Testament. The Reformer, Theodore Beza, was even more influential than Stephanus. Moreover, they not only used his Greek text but relied heavily upon his Latin translation of it. Therefore, Theodore Beza, the successor of Calvin at Geneva, a great Reformer himself, was a leading influence upon our King James Version.

The Received Text (Textus Receptus) – It must be noted on the other hand that with but two exceptions, there is not another English version available today which is based upon the text of Stephanus and Beza, commonly called the Received Text. All others, except the New King James Version and the Modern King James Version, are based on the critical text of Westcott and Hort which omits and changes thousands of words. For instance, in all other versions you will find the following passages either omitted or questioned:

- 1) the descent of the angel into the pool of Bethesda (John 5:3b-4),
- 2) the conclusion of the Lord's prayer (Matt. 6:13b),
- 3) the woman taken in adultery (John 7:53-8:11),
- 4) the last 12 verses of Mark 16,
- 5) the appearance of the angel to Christ and the sweating of the great drops of blood (Luke 22:43-44), and many more.

The critical text used by modern versions departs from the Received Text **in over 5000 places**. But the text of the King James Version is the text used by Martin Luther, John Calvin, Theodore Beza, and the fathers of the Synod of Dort. We are told that they used the Received Text because it was all that they had. **That is not true**. While they did not have the thousands of manuscripts that we have

today, they did know of this corrupt text as it was represented in some of the manuscripts that were available to them. They, however, rejected that text/or the Received Text-the text that is supported by 80 to 90 percent of all the manuscripts we have today. That is the text of the King James Version. This gives us strong incentive to use the King James Version rather than the modern versions. Modern versions are not reliable with regard to the true text of the New Testament. They are based on a text, which is the result of man's manipulations. The King James Version, on the other hand, is based on a faithful and reliable Greek text.

Tyndale And Rogers – The King James Version is a Bible of the Reformation also from the point of view of the English versions of which it is a revision. William Tyndale, whose translation is reflected in nine tenths of the King James Version, was a child of the Reformation. In fact, Tyndale also made use of Luther's German New Testament (1522) in his translation work. Thus Martin Luther influenced him greatly. John Rogers, who is responsible for the Matthew's Bible is another who embraced the doctrines of the Reformation. Rogers moved to Wittenberg and there he associated with the Lutheran divines, particularly Melancthon. He even translated four of Melancthon's books into English.

Coverdale And Cranmer – Myles Coverdale, who influenced the King James Version through his own Bible (1535), the Matthew's Bible to which he contributed one third, and the Great Bible which is a revision of his own work and that of Tyndale, was a strong supporter of the Faith of the Reformation. He moved from England to Germany

(corresponding with John Calvin), and later, he moved to Geneva where he was elder in the English Church there. Thomas Cranmer, the Archbishop of Canterbury who supported Coverdale in his work, turned to the true Faith. Cranmer especially supported the efforts of the Reformers in England.

Geneva And King James Versions – The Geneva Bible that influenced the King James Version more than any of the others was produced in the Reformation city of Calvin and Beza. Its translators were all exiles who had fled England and Scotland because of persecution for their Reformation doctrines.

God's Grace – It is clear, therefore, that the King James Version both as a revision of previous translations and as a new translation is the product of the Reformation. One is amazed by the fact that the translators of this Bible and its predecessors were almost all involved in the Reformation of the Church. The King James Version, therefore, is the product of the mighty power of God's grace. For it was God's grace alone that stood behind the Reformation. Indeed, the King James Version is the product of a God-given desire to see God's Word, in all of its reforming power, in the hands of the people that they might know and experience the glorious light of the gospel. Of all the English versions available today, the King James Version alone has claim to the name **The Reformation Bible**.

A Bible For Which Men Died – It is not strange, therefore, that this Bible comes down to us today stained with the blood of the martyrs. For the men behind the English Bible were of such strong conviction, by the grace of God, that they would suffer imprisonment and death rather than renounce their faith in the Bible as God's infallible Word and as their sole authority for life and doctrine. Indeed, the persecution was very great. It is not strange that the Roman Church should seek to do all in its power to stop the translation of the Scriptures. She recognized that one of the leading causes of

the Reformation was the translation of the Bible into the language of the people. Therefore, she persecuted the editors, translators, and promoters of the King James Version and its predecessors.

The Greek Text – We see this antagonism early, and the Roman Church did not look kindly upon the editions of the Greek New Testament which began to come off the presses. In 1514 Erasmus, the first editor of the Greek New Testament, was told not to publish his Greek text. Some in the Roman Church considered it an open condemnation of the Latin Vulgate. Robert Stephanus had to flee Paris and settle in Geneva because of persecution.

John Wycliffe – But even more than the Greek New Testament, the Roman Church feared the translation of the Bible into the language of the people. So much are they afraid of the light of the Scripture that they will not trust the people with it, no not as it is set forth by their own sworn men, no not with the License of their own Bishops and Inquisitors. Yea, so unwilling they are to communicate the Scriptures to the peoples' understanding in any sort, that they are not ashamed to confess, that we forced them to translate it into English against their will. Thus all the wrath of Rome came down upon those who were involved in getting the Bible into the hands of the people. John Wycliffe, translator of the first complete English Bible, was one of the first to feel the wrath of Rome, even though he translated from the Latin. He translated the Bible with the expressed purpose of promoting the reformation of the church. But the circulation of his Bible was bitterly opposed by the Roman Church. Those who read it and disseminated it were denounced as heretics. Wycliffe himself was accused of being a master of errors and condemned as a heretic. Even though they could not capture him in life because of his powerful friends, forty years after his death they disinterred his body and burned his bones, and scattered them into the river.

William Tyndale – William Tyndale, who so greatly influenced the King James Version, was so persecuted that he was not even allowed to translate the Bible in England. He had to do it in Germany. But even there he was not left alone. Both the emissaries of Henry VIII and those of the Roman Church hunted him down. In order to elude them he was compelled not only to move with great secrecy, but also to assume other names. When his translation finally came off the press and was circulated in England, it was branded as crafty, false, and untrue and was forbidden to be kept and used in the land. Many copies were confiscated and burned. Tyndale himself was slandered by his enemies. His enemies finally captured him in early 1535 and imprisoned him for eighteen months in the castle of Vilvorde. On the 6th of October 1536 they led him forth to the place of execution where they tied him to the stake. Tyndale then cried with a loud voice and fervent zeal, Lord, open the eyes of the King of England. That was his dying prayer. Then the hangman strangled him to death and burned his body.

Rogers, Cranmer, And Coverdale – John Rogers, who completed and edited Tyndale's version, found himself in great trouble when Bloody Mary came to the throne. For half a year he remained a prisoner in his own house and during all of 1554 he was confined to Newgate prison with thieves and murderers. All that time he was refused permission to see his wife and ten children. It was not until he was led to the stake on Jan. 4, 1555 that they met him. There he was burned alive to become the first victim of the wicked Mary. Thomas Cranmer, who exerted a great deal of pressure to get the Bible into the hands of the people, could not escape the wrath of Queen Mary either. He was tried and convicted of heresy with others of like Faith. Before he was executed, he was forced to watch the burning of Latimer (Bishop of Worcester) and Ridley (Bishop of London) who were also of the

Faith of the Reformation. Mary thought that she had won the day when Cranmer signed a recantation of his Protestantism. But when the fire was put to him, he repudiated his retractions and held the offending hand, which had signed the recantation, in the flame until it was consumed. Although Coverdale did not die at the hand of Mary, he did suffer persecution with the rest. He was imprisoned for two and a half years, examined by the Inquisitors, and was in extreme danger of losing his life.

Geneva And King James Versions – The very existence of the Geneva Bible was due to religious persecution. Queen Mary sought to stamp out the Word of God in England and hundreds of Protestants fled England to find refuge on the continent. Many of them settled in Geneva and there translated the Bible into English. The Geneva Bible is a Bible that came out of persecution. Even some of the translators of the King James Version had to suffer for the cause of the Holy Scriptures. Many of them sacrificed much for the work and were rewarded with very little. The translators make it very clear that there was much opposition to their work.

God's Word To His Church: Authorized Bible – The new translation did not immediately take over all others. For some time there was a struggle with the Geneva Bible. But in the end, the people of God recognized the superior qualities of the King James Version so that it conquered all others. It has gone through hundreds and hundreds of editions since it was first published in 1611. Some changes have been made in the spelling, punctuation, italicizing, and cross-references. Nevertheless, the King James Version that we have today is basically the same as that published in 1611. There is no other translation so universally regarded as God's Word.

The Best Version – Even though the King James Version has its weaknesses, it is an excellent translation and by far the best version available today. We must not be taken in by the modern versions and their claims. Our 400 year old Bible is to be preferred above all others because it is better than them all.

- 1) It was translated by men who were unsurpassed in their knowledge of Biblical studies.
- 2) The translators were pious men of God who believed in the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures.
- 3) It is the mature fruit of generations of English translations as well as the careful work of its translators.
- 4) The King James Version is based upon the Received Text rather than the critical Greek text of modern versions.
- 5) It is a word-for-word translation that faithfully and accurately reflects the originals.
- 6) The language is one of reverence and respect which gives honor to the majesty of its Author.
- 7) Of all the English versions of today, it alone is the Bible of the Reformation.
- 8) Our spiritual forefathers thought so highly of it that they were willing to suffer and even die for it.
- 9) It is the version that has been recognized for generations and generations as the Bible God has given to His English-speaking Church.

An Admonition – The translators' admonition to the reader concerning the new translation is certainly just as applicable to us today, as it was in 1611. They exhort us, saying, Ye are brought unto fountains of living water which ye digged not. Do not cast earth into them with the Philistines, neither prefer broken pits before them with the wicked Jews. Others have labored, and you may enter into their labors; O receive not so great things in vain, O despise not so great salvation! ... when God speaketh unto us, hearken; when he setteth his word before us, read it; when he stretcheth out his hand and calleth, answer, Here am I, Here we are to do they will, O God. Indeed, we find fountains of living water in the King James Version of the Bible. It is the living Word of the living God. Do not despise it and reject it for the unreliable modern versions as so many do today. Do not let anyone take this great Bible away from you. This version is the Bible we ought to use in our homes and churches. It ought to be the authority for both our faith and practice. We ought to stand up for and defend this Bible which has been given to us by the good providence of God.