

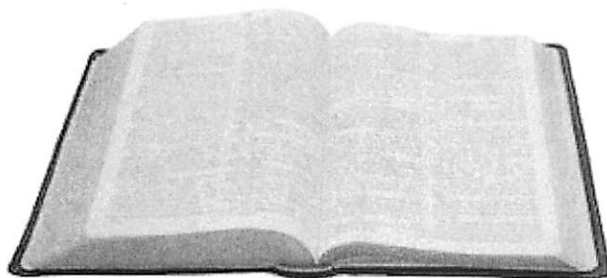
Way of Life Literature

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Materials

History of the English Bible - The King James Bible

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The King James Bible is the most famous and influential of the English Reformation Bibles. It is called the *King James Bible* because its production was authorized by King James I, who ruled England from 1603 to 1625. In Britain it is more commonly called *The Authorized Version*.

THE PROPOSAL AND AUTHORIZATION

Soon after King James assumed the throne of England in 1603, he was approached by a group of Puritans led by John Reynolds, president of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, and presented with the Millennium Petition. This called for spiritual reform in the Church of England along Presbyterian lines, and it got its name from the fact that it was signed by an estimated 1,000 ministers.

A conference was held at Hampton Court Palace in 1604 to discuss the petition. Reynolds suggested that a new translation of the English Bible be produced. It is thought that this historic meeting was held in the Cartoon Gallery, which is so called because of the impressive paintings that hang on the walls depicting biblical scenes. The Gallery was first built to display Raphael's *Acts of the Apostles*. Queen Victoria gave the originals to the Victoria and Albert Museum, and the paintings in the Cartoon Gallery today are copies that were made by Henry Cooke in 1697.

The king approved the proposition for the new Bible, and within six months a list of 54 scholars

was drawn up for the work. Deaths and withdrawals reduced the list, and it appears that roughly 50 men were actually involved in the translation.

Work began in 1607.

THE SPIRITUAL CLIMATE FOR THE TRANSLATION

The King James Bible came out of a period of intense persecution and spiritual revival.

The Wycliffe Bible was persecuted and was a product of spiritual revival; it was the Bible of the Lollards. Laws were passed against it and its translator's bones were dug up and burned.

The Tyndale Bible was persecuted; thousands of copies were burned and otherwise destroyed by ecclesiastical authorities; laws were passed against it; and its translator was burned at the stake.

The translator of the Matthew's Bible, John Rogers, was put to death for his faith.

The Bishops Bible was translated by men who were persecuted for their faith.

The Geneva Bible was also a product of persecution and spiritual revival, having been produced by men who were in exile for their faith.

These Bibles produced a great spiritual awakening in England and beyond.

THE LITERARY CLIMATE FOR THE TRANSLATION

By the early 17th century, the English Bible had been developing for more than two centuries.

The wording of the King James Bible represents the labors of centuries of brilliant, believing, sacrificial, godly scholarship. Dozens of some of the best biblical linguists who have ever lived applied their minds and their prayers to translating into English PRECISELY what the Hebrew and Greek text mean.

The foundation for the English Bible was the Wycliffe Bible of 1384. Though it was translated from Latin rather than Hebrew and Greek and thus contained some textual errors, it was a masterpiece of translation work. Wycliffe and his editor John Purvey had a gift of molding the English language to fit the Bible. As we have seen, large numbers of words and phrases passed from the Wycliffe into the Tyndale and from there into the King James Bible.

The next important step in the progress of the English Bible was the publication of Tyndale's masterpiece, based directly upon the Hebrew and the Greek.

The Tyndale Bible was by John Rogers completed after Tyndale's death and appeared in the Matthew's Bible. This went through various revisions, particularly the Great, the Bishops, and the Geneva, preparing the way for the King James Bible.

“Thus it came to pass, that the English Bible received its present form, after a fivefold revision of the translation as it was left in 1537 by Tyndale and Rogers. During this interval of seventy-four years, it had been slowly ripening, till this last, most elaborate, and thorough revision under King James matured the work for coming centuries” (Alexander McClure, *The Translators Revived*, 1855, p. 59).

The early 17th century was also an hour in which the English language was at its apex.

Alexander McClure observed: “The English language had passed through many and great changes, and had at last reached the very height of its purity and strength. The Bible has ever since been the grand English classic. It is still the noblest monument of the power of the English speech. It is the pattern and standard of excellence therein” (*The Translators Revived*).

The early 17th century was also an hour in which the knowledge of Biblical languages was at an apex.

Consider the testimony of J.W. Whittaker, two centuries after the completion of the King James Bible. In 1820 Whittaker, Fellow of St. John's, Cambridge, published *An Historical and Critical Enquiry into the Interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures, with Remarks on Mr. Bellamy's New Translation*. It was a brilliant defense of the Authorized Version against John Bellamy's harsh criticisms. Bellamy had launched a vicious attack on the authenticity of the King James Bible and had made the accusation that the translators of the KJV and its predecessors were not skilled in Hebrew. Whittaker, a Hebrew scholar, carefully described the linguistic excellencies of Tyndale, Miles Coverdale, John Rogers, and the translators of the Great Bible, the Geneva, the Bishops, and the Authorized 1611. Whittaker gave examples from these translations, demonstrating that the versions conformed to the Hebrew rather than to the Greek Septuagint or the Latin Vulgate. He made the following statement about the early 17th century: “Had this gentleman [Bellamy] consulted any historical authority, or in the slightest degree investigated the characters of our translators, he would have found that many of them were celebrated Hebrew scholars, and could not have failed to perceive that THE SACRED LANGUAGE WAS AT THAT TIME CULTIVATED TO A FAR GREATER EXTENT IN ENGLAND THAN IT HAS EVER BEEN SINCE. We have already seen that twelve editions of the Hebrew Bible were printed before the year 1527, four of which were published in one year. Ever since the first dawn of literature in Europe, the study of the Scriptures in the original languages had been an object of the warmest enthusiasm. The turn which religious controversy took at the birth of the Reformation compelled all learned men to take their authorities from the inspired text, and not from a Romish version. In the year 1540, King Henry the Eighth appointed regular Hebrew Professors, and the consequences of this measure were instantaneous. In Queen Elizabeth's reign no person who pretended to eminence as a learned man was ignorant of this language, and so very common did it become, that the ladies of noble families frequently made it one of their accomplishments.... Under Queen Elisabeth and King James, who were not only the patrons of learning by their institutions, but examples of it in their own persons, Hebrew literature prospered to a very great extent, and under the last of these monarchs attained its greatest splendor. The Universities, and all public bodies for the promotion of learning, flourished in an extraordinary degree, and AT THIS HAPPY JUNCTURE OUR TRANSLATION WAS MADE.

Every circumstance had been conspiring during the whole of the preceding century to extend the study of Hebrew. The attempts of the Papists to check the circulation of the translations, the zeal of the Protestants to expose the Vulgate errors, the novelty of theological speculations to society at large, and even the disputes of the Reformed Churches, GAVE AN ANIMATED VIGOUR TO THE STUDY OF THE ORIGINAL SCRIPTURES WHICH HAS NEVER SINCE BEEN WITNESSED (Whittaker, pp. 99-104).

Consider also testimony of Alexander McClure, author of *The Translators Revived* (1855). He said: “As to the capability of those men, we may say again, that, by the good providence of God, their work was undertaken in a fortunate time. Not only had the English language, that singular compound, then ripened to its full perfection, but THE STUDY OF GREEK, AND OF THE ORIENTAL TONGUES, AND OF RABBINICAL LORE, HAD THEN BEEN CARRIED TO A GREATER EXTENT IN ENGLAND THAN EVER BEFORE OR SINCE” (*The Translators Revived*, pp. 59, 61).

Biblical scholars of that day grew up with Latin, Greek, and Hebrew and were as at home in these languages as in their mother tongue. In our day, scholars don’t ordinarily even begin to learn the biblical tongues until their college days or later.

Further, it is crucial to understand that biblical scholarship has taken a dramatically rationalistic turn since the 19th century. Most of the greatest names in this field have been affected by this spirit of unbelief, including the authors of many of the important lexicons and study aids, such as Joseph Thayer, Samuel Driver, Eberhard Nestle, Hermann von Soden, Gerhard Kittel, Eugene Nida, Kurt and Barbara Aland, and Bruce Metzger.

THE TRANSLATION PROCESS

1. Each part of the Bible was translated and examined at least 14 times, by the following process.

- * The translators were divided into six companies, and each group was assigned a portion of Scripture to translate.

- * The portion was first translated individually by each member of the company. “Every particular man of each company to take the same chapter or chapters; and having translated or amended them severally by himself, where he thinks good...” (rule # 8).

- * That translated portion was then considered by the company as a whole. “...all to meet together, to confer what they have done, and agree for their part what shall stand” (rule # 8).

“The company of translators would meet together and as the newly translated book was read verse by verse, each one compared it to a Bible in some language in his hand. If any thing struck any of them as requiring alteration, he spoke, otherwise they read on” (prologue to *The English Hexapla*, 1841).

If a special obscurity or difficulty was found, the companies were authorized to “send to any

learned in the land for his judgment in such a place” (rule # 11).

Learned men not on the translation committee were invited to submit their opinions even if not questioned by the translation committee (rule # 12).

* When the companies completed a book, it was then sent to the other five companies for review. “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” (rule # 9). Thus, each book of the translation was reviewed by all of the companies.

* The finished product from each company was then submitted to a 12-man committee (composed of two chief men from each company) for final review and preparation for the press. As the companies reviewed each book, they noted any questions or differences, and these matters were settled by the final committee.

* Thus, every part of the translation was examined at least 14 times! “As the number of companies was six, and the numbers in each company varied from seven to ten, it follows that every several part would be examined at the least fourteen times distinctly; many parts fifteen times, and some seventeen” (“Historical Account of the English Versions of the Scriptures,” prologue to *The English Hexapla*, 1841, p. 153).

2. The basic translation by the companies took two years; while nine months were required for the final revision.

THE TRANSLATORS

The translators of the King James Bible were scholars of the highest caliber. Alexander McClure, who published *Translators Revived: Biographical Notes of the KJV Bible Translators* in 1855, observed: “It is confidently expected that the reader of these pages will yield to the conviction that all the colleges of Great Britain and America, even in this proud day of boastings, could not bring together the same number of divines equally qualified by learning and piety for the great undertaking.”

Almost all of the translators were masters of Greek, Hebrew, and Latin. That was merely a basic part of what was called a classical education in those days. Unlike today, these men grew up with the biblical languages and Latin. They learned these in their childhood and perfected the use of them throughout their lives. This is not true today. Even those who are scholars in the biblical languages don’t usually begin to learn them until their adult years.

At Oxford and Cambridge in the 1500s and early 1600s, all of the printed texts were in Latin. All of the compositions, lectures, and disputations were in Latin.

In 1605, of the 6,000 volumes in the library at Oxford, only 60 were in English (Daniell, *Tyndale’s New Testament*, p. 45)

Erasmus taught at Cambridge in the early 1500s even though he did not speak a word of English

(Daniell, p. 46). He was able to teach directly in Latin.

The King James Bible translators as a whole were masters not only of Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, and Latin but also of all of the cognate or associate languages that are necessary for research into ancient documents relative to the Bible. These include Persian, Coptic, Syriac, Armenian, and Chaldee.

They further had the ability to read ancient unprinted manuscript versions of Greek, Latin, German, Italian, and Spanish. It is one thing to read modern German or modern Latin; it is far more difficult to read ancient versions of these languages and to be able to read these in the handwritten manuscripts. These men were accustomed to such research inasmuch as in their day most scholarly resources had not yet been printed and it was common to have to use handwritten manuscripts in the pursuit of ordinary study. The common scholar of that day had a level of expertise in such things that is found only in the most rare of cases today.

Following are some examples of the quality of their scholarship:

Lancelot Andrews had mastered 15 languages.

Miles Smith was expert in Hebrew, Chaldee, Syriac, Latin, Greek, and Arabic. These were as familiar to him as his own mother tongue.

Henry Saville was a weighty Greek scholar. He was the first to edit the complete works of Chrysostom. *Translators Revived* says, "Sir Henry Savile was one of the most profound, exact, and critical scholars of his age."

John Bois could read the whole Bible in Hebrew at age five.

William Bedwell was the best Arabic scholar of his time.

Edward Livlie, Regius Professor of Hebrew at Cambridge, was one of the eminent scholars of Hebrew of that day.

Of John Rainolds it was said, "The memory and reading of that man were near to a miracle; and all Europe at the time could not have produced three men superior to Rainolds, Jewell, and Ussher."

Richard Brett was eminent as a linguist in Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Chaldee, Arabic, and Ethiopic.

Consider some testimonies to the capability of the KJV translators:

Alexander McClure, author of *Translators Revived*, 1855: "As to the capability of those men, we may say against that by the good Providence of God, their work was undertaken in a fortunate time. Not only had the English language, that singular compound, then ripened to its full perfection, but the study of Greek, and of the oriental tongues ... had then been carried to a greater extent in England than ever before or since. ... it is confidently expected that the reader

of these pages will yield to the conviction, that all the colleges of Great Britain and America, even in this proud day of boastings, could not bring together the same number of divines equally qualified by learning and piety for the great undertaking. Few indeed are the living names worthy to be enrolled with these mighty men. It would be impossible to convent out of any one Christian denomination, or out of all, a body of translators, on whom the whole Christian community would bestow such confidence as is reposed upon that illustrious company, or who would prove themselves as deserving of such confidence.”

Dean John Burgon, one of the greatest textual scholars of the 19th century: “... the plain fact being that the men of 1611 produced a work of real genius: seizing with generous warmth the meaning and intention of the sacred Writers. ... Verily, those men understood their craft! ‘There were giants in those days.’ ... the Spirit of their God was mightily upon them” (*The Revision Revised*, 1883, pp. 167, 196).

Edward F. Hills, who had a doctorate in textual criticism from Harvard: “Judged even by modern standards, their knowledge of the biblical languages was second to none” (*The King James Version Defended*, p. 114).

The translators of the King James Bible were also humble men who knew that only God could give them the wisdom necessary to produce an accurate Bible translation. The following is from the original 1611 Translator’s Preface:

“To that purpose there were many chosen, that were greater in other men’s eyes than in their own, and that sought the truth rather than their own praise . . . And in what sort did these assemble? In the trust of their own knowledge, or of their sharpness of wit, or deepness of judgment, as it were an arm of flesh? At no hand. They trusted in him that hath the key of David, opening, and no man shutting; they prayed to the Lord, the Father of our Lord, to the effect that St. Augustine did, O let thy Scriptures be my pure delight; let me not be deceived in them, neither let me deceive by them. In this confidence and with this devotion, did they assemble together; not too many, lest one should trouble another; and yet many, lest many things haply might escape them.”

The translators of the King James Bible were not paid for their work. Only the 12 who did the final revision received anything, and their wage was a small weekly stipend for basic expenses as they met in London for the nine months required to complete that portion of the work.

King James I had nothing to do with the translation beyond authorizing the work to proceed and agreeing on the translation standards.

He did not choose the translators. He did not do any of the translation. He did not fund the work.

There is no evidence that he even issued an official authorization when the translation was completed.

THE PRINTING

The King James Bible was first published in 1611. It was printed by Robert Barker in a large volume bearing on its title page the following inscription: "The Holy Bible, containing the Old Testament & the New: Newly Translated out of the Original tongues; & with the former Translations diligently compared and revised by His Majesties special Commandment."

From 1577 down to 1709 the Robert Barker family and their consigns had the sole right to print the King James Bible in England.

THE NATURE OF THE TRANSLATION

The King James Bible is a masterpiece of Bible translation. It wonderfully conforms to the Hebrew and Greek. Its English language is peerless. It has been called "The Miracle of English Prose."

I have about 40 old books in my library that extol the excellence of the King James Bible.

In his book *The Word of God in English: Criteria for Excellence in Bible Translation* (Wheaton: Crossway Book, 2002), Dr. Leland Ryken, a professor of English at Wheaton College, continually applauds the KJV, praising its beauty, dignity, and power. He uses it as an example of what good Bible translation is all about. He calls for modern translation work to be done after "the King James tradition" (p. 282, 284). The book contains many quotations exalting the KJV.

"peerless literary masterpiece" (p. 270)

"unquestionably the most beautiful book in the world" (p. 267)

"the noblest monument of English prose" (p. 258)

"incomparably the best English translation in its rhythm" (p. 259)

"when it comes to stylistic range and flexibility, the King James Bible is peerless" (p. 227)

"the touchstone of affective power" (p. 206)

"matchless in its literary qualities among all English translations" (p. 188)

"the supremely literary English translation" (p. 163)

"immeasurably superior" (p. 163)

"the touchstone of literary excellence" (p. 62)

"stylistically the greatest English Bible translation ever produced" (p. 51)

H.L. Mencken, one of the foremost American linguists of the 20th century, said this about the KJV: "But the Authorized Version has never yielded to any of them [the English Revised Version and the American Standard Version], for it is palpably and overwhelmingly better than they are. ... Its English is extraordinarily simple, pure, eloquent, and lovely. It is a mine of lordly and incomparable poetry, at once the most stirring and the most touching ever heard of" (cited from James H. Son, *The New Athenians*, p. 99).

Even Roman Catholics have given grudging praise to the King James Bible, recognizing that it has been the bulwark of Protestantism in the English-speaking world. A priest named Faber, for example used these words: "Who will say that the uncommon beauty and marvellous English of the Protestant Bible is not one of the great strongholds of heresy in this country? It lives on

the ear like a music that can never be forgotten, like the sound of church bells, which the convert scarcely knows how he can forego. Its felicities seem often to be almost things rather than words. ... It is his sacred thing, which doubt never dimmed and controversy never soiled; and in the length and breadth of the land there is not a Protestant with one spark of religiousness about him whose spiritual biography is not in his Saxon Bible” (Faber, quoted by J. Paterson Smyth, *How We Got Our Bible*, p. 132). These words were not only true; they were prophetic. Since the pulling down of the King James Bible and its replacement among Protestant churches in general with the multiplicity of conflicting modern versions, the Rome-oriented Ecumenical movement has made amazing progress.

Consider other testimonies:

“It was the work, not of one man, nor of one age, but of many labourers, of diverse and even opposing views, over a period of ninety years. It has watered with the blood of martyrs, and its slow growth gave time for the casting off of imperfections and for the full accomplishment of its destiny as the Bible of the English nation. ... As time went on the Authorised Version acquired the prescriptive right of age; its rhythms became familiar to the ears of all classes; its language entered into our literature; and English-men became prouder of their Bible than of any of the creative works of their own literature” (Frederic Kenyon, *Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts*, pp. 233, 34).

“The influence of the Authorised Version, alike on our religion and our literature, can never be exaggerated. ... The Authorized Version has often been called a well of English undefiled, and much of its purity is due to the fact that its water was drawn from the ancient springs. It has the universal note which gives it a place among the immortals. It has the Divine touch, even in its diction, which lifts it above the limitations of locality and time, and makes it valid and living for all the ages. Like a rare jewel fitly set, the sacred truths of Scripture have found such suitable expression in it, that we can hardly doubt that they filled those who made it with reverence and awe, so that they walked softly in the Holy Presence. ... The English Bible is still fresh and mighty, even if it has archaic or obsolete words. It has waxed old, but it has not decayed. Its youth abides, and the sun never sets on its sphere of influence. Many volumes have perished since it first saw the light; but its message is as modern as ever. It has not only kept up-to-date, it has anticipated every need of men, and still responds to every new demand” (William Muir, *Our Grand Old Bible*, 1911, p. 131, 192, 238).

“The Authorized Version is a miracle and a landmark. Its felicities are manifold, its music has entered into the very blood and marrow of English thought and speech, it has given countless proverbs and proverbial phrases even to the unlearned and the irreligious. There is no corner of English life, no conversation ribald or reverent it has not adorned. Embedded in its tercentenary wording is the language of a century earlier. It has both broadened and retarded the stream of English Speech” (H. Wheeler Robinson, *Ancient and English Versions of the Bible*, 1940, p. 205).

“The translators of our Bible were masters of an English style much fitter for that work than any which we see in our present writings, which I take to be owing to the simplicity that runs through the whole” (Jonathan Swift, writing 100 years after the publication of the King James

Bible, cited from Albert Cook, *The Authorized Version of the Bible and Its Influence*, 1910).

"Its simple, majestic, Anglo-Saxon tongue, its clear, sparkling style, its directness and force of utterance, have made it the model in language, style, and dignity of some of the choicest writers of the last two centuries. Added to the above characteristics, its reverential and spiritual tone and attitude have made it the idol of the Christian church, for its own words have been regarded as authoritative and binding. It has endeared itself to the hearts and lives of millions of Christians and has molded the characters of the leaders in every walk of life in the greatest nation of the world. During all these centuries, King James' Version has become a vital part of the English-speaking world, socially, morally, religiously, and politically. Launched with the endorsement of the regal and scholarly authority of the seventeenth century, its conquest and rule have been supreme" (H.S. Miller, *General Biblical Introduction*, 1937, pp. 365, 66; Miller quotes part of this paragraph from Ira Price's *The Ancestry of Our English Bible*). [Comment: The fact that the KJV was launched by regal and scholarly authority does not explain its popularity. The Bishops Bible had even stronger regal and scholarly backing but was never popular, compared with the Geneva Bible, which had no such backing.]

"THE TRANSLATORS HAVE SEIZED THE VERY SPIRIT AND SOUL OF THE ORIGINAL, AND EXPRESSED THIS ALMOST EVERYWHERE WITH PATHOS AND ENERGY. Besides, our translators have not only made a standard translation, but they have made their translation the standard of our language" (Adam Clarke, General Introduction to his *Commentary on the Whole Bible*).

"The English translation of the Bible is the best translation in the world, and renders the sense of the original best" (John Selden, *Table-talk*).

"The style of our present version is incomparably superior to any thing which might be expected from the finical and perverted taste of our own age. It is simple, it is harmonious, it is energetic; and, which is of no small importance, use has made it familiar, and time has rendered it sacred" (Dr. Middleton, Bishop of Calcutta).

"They [the KJV translators] were deeply penetrated with a reverence for the word of God, and, therefore, they felt themselves bound by a holy constraint to discharge their trust in the most faithful way. UNDER THIS DIVINE CONSTRAINT THEY WERE LED TO GIVE US A TRANSLATION UNEQUALLED FOR FAITHFULNESS TO THE ORIGINAL, AND YET AT THE SAME TIME CLOTHED IN THE PUREST AND SIMPLEST ENGLISH. ... No one can read, with an enlightened eye, the discourses of our Lord without seeing what a divine simplicity ran through all His words; and our translators were favoured with heavenly wisdom to translate these words of the Lord into language as simple as that in which they first fell from His lips. What can exceed the simplicity and yet beauty and blessedness of such declarations as these?--'I am the bread of life;' 'I am the door;' 'I am the way, the truth, and the life;' 'I lay down My life for the sheep;' 'I am the vine;' 'God is love;' 'By grace ye are saved.' Even where the words are not strictly monosyllabic they are of the simplest kind, and as such are adapted to the capacity of every child of God, in whatever rank of life he may be. The blessedness of having not only such a Bible, but possessing such a translation of it can never be sufficiently valued. ... it is because the language of our Bible is such pure, simple, unaffected, idiomatic,

intelligible English that it has become so thoroughly English a book, and has interwoven itself with our very laws and language” (Joseph Philpot, *Gospel Standard*, February 1861).

[Comment: As we have seen, the purity and simplicity of the language of the KJV regularly goes back to William Tyndale, and many times even to Wycliffe.]

When the Harvard University Press published *The Literary Guide to the Bible* in 1987, they selected the KJV for the literary analysis of each of the Bible books. “...our reasons for doing so must be obvious: it is the version most English readers associate with the literary qualities of the Bible, and IT IS STILL ARGUABLY THE VERSION THAT BEST PRESERVES THE LITERARY EFFECTS OF THE ORIGINAL LANGUAGES” (foreword to *Tindale’s Triumph, John Rogers’ Monument: The New Testament of the Matthew’s Bible 1537*, 1989, p. ii).

The overall reading level of the KJV is not very high.

The KJV is written on an 8th to 10th grade level. This has been proven from computer analysis made by Dr. Donald Waite. He ran several books of the KJV through the *Right Writer* program and found that Genesis 1, Exodus 1, and Romans 8 are on the 8th grade level; Romans 1 and Jude are on the 10th grade level; and Romans 3:1-23 is on the 6th grade level.

In the book *The Art of Plain Talk* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1946), Dr. Rudolf Flesch analyzed the reading level of various documents and rated them on a scale from Very Easy to Very Difficult. He testified, “The best example of very easy prose (about 20 affixes per 200 words) is the King James Version of the Bible...” Dr. Flesch became famous with the publication of his book *Why Johnny Can’t Read*.

The KJV has a small, simple vocabulary and uses simple words throughout; most are only one or two syllables.

While Shakespeare used a vocabulary of roughly 21,000 English words and the *New English Dictionary* of the early 20th century had 113,677 main words, the vocabulary of the King James Bible is composed of only 6,000 words (Albert Cook, *The Authorized Version of the Bible and Its Influence*, 1910). This compares favorably to the vocabulary of the Hebrew Old Testament, which is 5,642 words, and the vocabulary of the Greek New Testament, which is about 4,800 words.

Consider Psalm 23: “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.”

Of the 119 English words in this Psalm, 95 are only one syllable; 19 are two syllables; and only 5 are three syllables.

The style of the King James Bible is not that of the 17th century but is an English style molded by the Hebrew and Greek.

“...the English of the King James Version is not the English of the early 17th century. To be exact, it is not a type of English that was ever spoken anywhere. IT IS BIBLICAL ENGLISH, which was not used on ordinary occasions even by the translators who produced the King James Version. As H. Wheeler Robinson (1940) pointed out, one need only compare the preface written by the translators with the text of their translation to feel the difference in style. And the observations of W.A. Irwin (1952) are to the same purport. The King James Version, he reminds us, owes its merit, not to 17th-century English--which was very different--but to its faithful translation of the original. ITS STYLE IS THAT OF THE HEBREW AND OF THE NEW TESTAMENT GREEK. Even in their use of *thee* and *thou* the translators were not following 17th-century English usage but biblical usage, for at the time these translators were doing their work these singular forms had already been replaced by the plural *you* in polite conversation” (Edward Hills, *The King James Version Defended*, p. 218).

“The elevation and nobility of Biblical diction, assisted by its slightly archaic tinge, have a tendency to keep all English style above meanness and triviality” (Albert Cook, *The Authorized Version of the Bible and Its Influence*, 1910; Cook was Professor of the English Language and Literature, Yale University).

“Hallam ... [declares] that the English of the Jacobean version [the King James Bible] ‘is not the English of Daniel, or Raleigh, or Bacon’--in fact, that ‘it is not the language of the reign of James I.’ ... this is strictly true, and for the reason that he assigns, namely, ‘in consequence of the principle of adherence to the original versions which had been kept up since the time of Henry VIII’” (quoted by Cook, *The Authorized Version of the Bible and Its Influence*).

The King James Bible has a proper “biblical” style that is understandable but exalted and reverent, having the proper “rhythm” and “tone.”

“The Bible is not a modern, human book. It is not as new as the morning newspaper, and no translation should suggest this. If the Bible were this new, it would not be the Bible. On the contrary, the Bible is an ancient, divine Book, which nevertheless is always new because in it God reveals Himself. Hence THE LANGUAGE OF THE BIBLE SHOULD BE VENERABLE AS WELL AS INTELLIGIBLE, and the King James Version fulfills these two requirements better than any other Bible in English” (Edward F. Hills, p. 219).

“I believe that it is correct for an English translation to preserve AN APPROPRIATE ARCHAIC FLAVOR as a way of preserving the distance between us and the biblical world. Joseph Wood Krutch used an evocative formula in connection with the King James Bible when he spoke of ‘an appropriate flavor of a past time’” (Leland Ryken, *The Word of God in English*, p. 182).

“GOOD RHYTHM FOR A BIBLE IS LIKE A QUALIFYING EXAM: If a translation cannot measure up on this matter, it is not in the running to be a superior Bible for public use and oral reading in more private situations. The best test of rhythm is simply to read passages aloud. ... If in oral reading a passage ebbs and flows smoothly, avoids abrupt stops between words and

phrases where possible, and provides a sense of continuity, it is rhythmically excellent. If a translation clutters the flow of language and is consistently staccato in effect, it is rhythmically inferior. ... All of these considerations make rhythm an essential translation issue, not a peripheral one. For a book that is read aloud as often as the Bible is, and for a book whose utterances are so frequently charged with strong feeling and sublime ideas, excellent rhythm should be regarded as a given” (Ryken, pp. 257, 259).

“Tone is the literary term that refers to such things as the writer’s attitude toward his or her subject matter, the suitability of style for the content, and the correctness of effect on a reader. ... From time to time I encounter the sentiment from dynamic equivalency advocates that the Bible ‘should not sound like the Bible.’ Billy Graham endorsed *The Living Letters* by saying that ‘it is thrilling to read the Word ... [in] a style that reads much like today’s newspaper.’ I disagree with these verdicts. A SACRED BOOK SHOULD SOUND LIKE A SACRED BOOK, NOT LIKE THE DAILY NEWSPAPER. It should command attention and respect, and to do so it cannot be expressed in the idiom of the truck stop. The failure of modern colloquial translations is frequently a failure of tone.” (Ryken, *The Word of God in English*, pp. 278, 279, 280)

“To make the Bible readable in the modern sense means to flatten out, tone down and convert into tepid expository prose what in K.J.V. is wild, full of awe, poetic, and passionate. It means stepping down the voltage of K.J.V. so it won’t blow any fuses” (Dwight Macdonald, “The Bible in Modern Undress,” in *Literary Style of the Old Bible and the New*, ed. D.G. Kehl, 1970, p. 40).

“We are in real danger of losing, in an age of flat prose, an essential and invaluable capacity of the language, fully realized once in the English Bible ... the capacity to express by tone and overtone, by rhythm, and by beauty and force of vocabulary, the religious, the spiritual, the ethical cravings of man” (Henry Canby, “A Sermon on Style,” in *Literary Style of the Old Bible and the New*, ed. D.G. Kehl, 1970, p. 427).

What about the “thees” and “thous”?

Many criticize the use of “thee, thou, thy, and thine” in the King James Bible. They say that this is antiquated and difficult to understand. The fact is that these are used to distinguish between the second person singular and plural of pronouns. THEE, THOU, and THINE are always singular. YOU, YE, and YOUR are always plural. This follows the usage of the Hebrew and Greek, which make such a distinction. In modern English, this distinction has been dropped, and YOU can be either plural or singular. Following are some examples of how important this is:

Exodus 4:15. “THOU shalt speak unto him, and put words in his mouth; and I will be with THY mouth, and with his mouth, and will teach YOU what YE shall do.” THOU and THY refer to Moses, but YOU refers to the nation which would be instructed by the spokesman Aaron.

Matthew 26:64. “Jesus saith unto him, THOU hast said: nevertheless I say unto YOU, Hereafter shall YE see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.” THOU refers to the high priest, but YOU refers to the nation Israel as a whole and to all who will see Him in the day of His glory (Revelation 1:7).

John 3:7. “Marvel not that I said unto THEE, YE must be born again.” The message was spoken to an individual, Nicodemus [THEE], but it applies to all men [YE].

These important distinctions are lost in modern English versions.

The King James Version of 1611 was intended to be a study Bible.

It contained 9,000 cross references to parallel passages.

It contained 8,422 marginal notes. Of these, 4,111 gave a more literal meaning of the Hebrew and Greek, 2,156 gave alternative translations, and 67 gave variant readings. In the New Testament there are 37 variant readings in the marginal notes. “As the marginal notes indicate, the King James translators did not regard their work as perfect or inspired, but they did considerate it to be a trustworthy reproduction of God’s holy Word, and as such they commended it to their Christian readers” (Edward Hills, p. 216).

The King James Bible began to gain ascendancy over the popular Geneva Bible very quickly.

Between 1611 and 1614, at least 17 editions of the KJV were published, as opposed to only six of the Geneva. Between 1611 and 1644, there were 182 editions of the KJV and only 15 of the Geneva.

By 1618, the Geneva ceased to be printed in England because the market was so small, and by 1640 it ceased even to be imported from Holland.

The KJV underwent some minor revisions between 1629 and 1769.

These were done by the British publishers. The first was in 1629 by Samuel Ward and John Bois, who had worked on the original translation. The second was in 1638 by the Cambridge University Press. The third was in 1762 by Dr. Thomas Paris of Trinity College, Cambridge. The fourth was in 1769 by Dr. Benjamin Blayney of Oxford.

The changes were largely the correction of printing errors, updating spelling and punctuation, and modernizing obsolete words (i.e., blinde to blind, sinne to sin, borne to born). The number of italicized words, marginal notes, and cross-references was also increased.

How different is the King James Bible today than the one in 1611? Dr. Donald Waite of Bible for Today ministry did an exhaustive comparison. He concluded that there are “only 136 SUBSTANTIAL CHANGES that were different words -- out of 791,328 words.”

Others have come up with different results, but the fact remain that the revisions were largely superficial.

The King James Version is still revered by millions of English-speaking people today. In spite of the vast advertising campaign that has been waged for 100 years in favor of the modern versions

by the mid-1990s the KJV was still outselling all opponents.

In 1994 the following appeared in the preface to *The King James Bible Word Book*: “Despite the availability of many new translations and paraphrases of God's Word, THE VENERABLE KING JAMES VERSION STILL POSTS MORE SALES EACH YEAR THAN ANY OTHER” (*The King James Bible Word Book*, Publisher's Preface, p. iii).

In 1995, I wrote to Thomas Nelson Publishers to find out what English version had the greatest sales, and they replied that the King James Bible still had the greatest sales in the United States. “In your fax dated March 27th, you mentioned a statistic that the ‘NIV version leads the King James Version in sales since 1986.’ This perspective is usually based on data reported by Spring Arbor Distributors which footnotes in their report that these figures are based on their distribution only. ALL GENERAL DISTRIBUTORS SELL MORE KJV than NIV. Unfortunately there is no industry-wide report available” (Philip Stoner, Vice President, Biblical and Religious Reference Publishing, Thomas Nelson, April 4, 1995).

TYNDALE'S INFLUENCE UPON THE KJV

The King James Version is merely a revision of the Tyndale Bible. Comparisons have been made, showing, for example, that nine-tenths of the Authorized Version in First John and five-sixths of Ephesians are directly from Tyndale. “These proportions are maintained throughout the entire New Testament” (Price, *The Ancestry of Our English Bible*, p. 251).

Tyndale Bible, Philippians 2:5-13 –

“Let the same mind be in you the which was in Christ Jesus: which, being in the shape of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God. Nevertheless he made himself of no reputation, and took on him the shape of a servant, and became like unto men, and was found in his apparel as a man. He humbled himself and became obedient unto the death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God hath exalted him, and given him a name above all names: that in the name of Jesus should every knee bow, both of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under earth, and that all tongues should confess that Jesus Christ is the Lord, unto the praise of God the Father. Wherefore, my dearly beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not when I was present only, but now much more in mine absence, even so perform your own health with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you, both the will and also the deed, even of good will.”

Therefore, much of the powerful, direct, energetic style of the English Bible is Tyndale's. Historian Froude observes: “Of the translation itself (the 1611), though since that time it has been many times revised and altered, we may say that it is substantially the Bible with which we are all familiar. The peculiar genius—if such a word may be permitted—which breathes through it—the mingled tenderness and majesty—the Saxon simplicity—the preternatural grandeur—unequalled, unapproached in the attempted improvements of modern scholars—all are here, and bear the impress of the mind of one man—William Tyndale. Lying, while engaged in that great office, under the shadow of death, the sword above his head and ready at any moment to fall, he worked, under circumstances alone perhaps truly worthy of the task which was laid upon him—

his spirit, as it were divorced from the world, moved in a purer element than common air” (Froude, *History of England*, III, p. 84).

THE KING JAMES BIBLE’S WORLDWIDE INFLUENCE

The King James Bible had a powerful influence upon England, producing spiritual reformation and making it into a great missionary-sending nation.

It also had a strong role in the creation of the United States of America, a nation that in former days particularly was a spiritual light to the entire world. America was created as a bastion of religious liberty by those who believed the Bible and were fleeing persecution in England and Europe. The King James Bible had a powerful influence upon America’s founding political documents. And it built the hundreds of thousands of churches that once made her great, morally and spiritually.

The KJV has had a powerful influence upon the English language itself.

It had a powerful influence upon the great missionary movement of the 17th to the 20th centuries. The King James Bible was the exclusive Bible of English-speaking missionaries for three and a half centuries, in which the Gospel went to the ends of the earth. In many cases, the King James Bible was the basis for translations into other languages.

Even in the 21st century, the King James Bible continues to be the Bible of tens of thousands of congregations and thousands of missionaries. It continues to be used as the basis for foreign-language translations. In recent decades translations have been made from the King James Bible into Korean, Thai, and several other languages.

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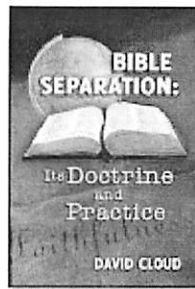
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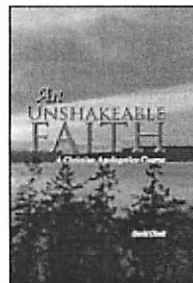
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