

The King James Bible is Printed

- 1.** We need to realize something: King James did not have the Bible printed so that we could read it for ourselves and work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. He printed it so that he could continue to have control over the church which was a part of his government and an important aspect of societal control. That goal had real impact on how it was translated.
- 2.** The Bishop's Bible was the model for his new version. In fact, directives had been given that it was to be changed as little as possible – despite what they might find in older texts. Not shaking the box or upsetting the apple cart was a major goal of the king and his bishops. [some wrote at the time that printers received Bishop's Bibles with notes written around the text]
- 3.** There is a lot of drama in the printing of the Bibles but much of it won't be of interest those in this class. Only four printers were allowed to print Bibles and only one was allowed to print theological materials. Different kings and queens picked different people and had different rules. The situation was, let's say, muddled by politics and the realities of life in England during the 1600s.
- 4.** Those who claim that only the KJV is the true translation of scripture need to be asked which printing they are referring to. Early printings had a host of errors that were only corrected with subsequent printings in following years. Much of this was due to the fact that the printers had to bear their own costs and, so, tried to find ways to cut their costs as much as possible (Gutenberg went bankrupt, remember). Proofreaders were often too expensive to keep around. Once errors were found, it was too expensive to change them for you had to scrap the whole page, not just replace a letter or word. (over 100,000 changes have been made in the three major revisions so far)
- 5.** Another change that economics wrought was the list of books considered canonical. James didn't think highly of the Apocrypha but the Church of England considered the books useful. Still, it was cheaper to print Bibles if the Apocrypha was eliminated so...over the years, more and more left them

out. The Puritans approved of this for they considered the Apocrypha too Catholic for them. By 1826, the Apocrypha was only rarely printed with the KJV.

6. This led to a host of books being written and printed attacking the scandal of the KJV as modern, inaccurate, and dangerous. William Kilburne's book "Dangerous Errors in Several Late Printed Bibles to the Great Scandal and Corruption of Sound and True Religion" is just one example. He claimed there were 20,000 errors in the KJV. Some of these were just misprints such as Numbers 25:17-18 which said "Vex the Midianites and smite them, for they vex you with their wives." The word was supposed to be "wiles" but this version, while inaccurate, is far more entertaining.
7. By 1675, most of the errors had been removed. Still, there remained the issue above all issues: was it an accurate version of the ancient texts? Leave aside for the moment that oldest texts of scripture we have to date were not known in the 1600s. They were using late texts and earlier translations. That's important to remember. It may have been the most accurate translation to that date, but it doesn't mean that it was the most accurate translation ever.
8. Another issue is the problem all translators face: how can the complexities in one language be expressed in another? One French translator put it rather crudely: "Translations are like women. If they are beautiful, they are not faithful. If they are faithful, they are not beautiful." While we may certainly disagree with his overall premise, there is an underlying truth there. (translations in magazines on Air Canada and the problem of the NASB)
9. One way to translate scripture well is to make sure that the message we receive is the one the first readers were to receive even if it means we have to change words. To make that call, we have to know the language well and we know Hebrew and other ancient languages far, far better now than we did in 1600. We now understand idioms far better. To illustrate this, think of the English expression "hot under the collar." What would that mean to a non-English speaker? The French express the same idea by saying "to have mustard up the nose." The KJV translators did not know many of these

idioms so they translated them literally, rendering some passages indecipherable. (In Jeremiah, the expression “to rise up early” is used 11x and it means “to do something continually.” Not knowing that, they translated it literally such as in Jer. 29:19)

- 10.** The Name of God was an issue to be handled. We now know that it was most likely pronounced “Yahweh” but the Jews didn’t pronounce it except in worship, if then. The translators had to figure out how to handle the tetragrammaton – YHWH. They generally handled it two ways. The first was to use the word “LORD” in all capital letters. The second (only used 4x) was to use the word “Jehovah” by inserting vowel sounds in the tetragrammaton.
- 11.** Another issue was the kind of Greek they were translating. They were experts in classical Greek but the Koine Greek of the NT was a different, more fluid language. They knew this was an issue and wrote of how they would love to discover letters between ordinary people that would shed light on how the language was used (and we have thousands of them now). Still, consider this – language changes over time. In the English used in 1600, the word “let” meant “hinder” or “prevent.” The word “prevent” meant something like “Go before” or “precede.” Think of how confused we would be to read the original KJV translation of Psalm 59:10 – “The God of my mercy shall prevent me.” It meant to go before us but... you see how language changes and that can cause issues. Greek had changed, too!
- 12.** Here is from Alister McGrath’s “In the Beginning.” “The koine Greek of the NT is the everyday Greek language of working people rather than of self-conscious literary scholars and poets. The King James translators were not aware of this fact. Their location in history denied them access to this knowledge. The result has important implications for the tone and style of those passages in the King James Bible that translate this form of Greek. The language of the workplace and the market is thus subtly changed into the high cadences of the palaces of Westminster and the high tables of Oxford and Cambridge. Many readers of the King James Bible often comment on its elegance and excellent style – yet the considerations we have just set out mean that, on occasion, the style and elegance will be those of the translators, rather than those of the passages they translated.”

- 13.** Because James was concerned about maintaining the status quo – including his supreme position in the church – some words were not translated but, rather, transliterated: deacon, baptism, and church were three of the most important terms and the refusal to translate them accurately has affected the church since that time.

- 14.** Other transliterated words are Amen (Agree, Truly), apostle (one sent), angel (messenger – both human and heavenly), blaspheme (to revile), Satan (adversary, spy, prosecutor). In Acts 12:4, they inserted the word “Easter.”