

Part Eight: The Bible, Appointed to be Read ...

The message and impact of the KJV

King James could not afford to fund the translation work or the cost of printing his new Bible version. Parliament controlled the purse strings and would not agree to provide additional resources for printing.

Funding the King James Version

The translators do not appear to have been paid anything for their work. In July 1604 Archbishop Bancroft wrote to the Bishops asking them to assist in finding employment for the translators so, as posts became vacant, they were offered opportunities to advance their careers in the Church. The revisers of the translators' work fared better. They met in Stationers Hall and were paid a generous 30 shillings per week by the Company of Stationers.

The cost of financing the printing fell to the Barker family who had enjoyed the privileged status of Approved Royal printers in the reign of Elizabeth I and then as King's Printer to King James I. It appears that Robert Barker set aside £3,500 for the project and went into partnership to fund the venture, ending his days imprisoned for debt. The first edition published in 1611 was large and heavy being approximately 16 x 11 inches in size and designed to sit on a church lectern. Since then Bibles of many different sizes have been printed. In the early 1900s miniature Bibles measuring only 1 x 1¼ inches were printed to celebrate the tri-centenary of the 1611 King James Bible. You can see the difference here!



The royal restrictions on who could print Bibles did not apply to the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge. In 1629 Cambridge published their first edition of the King James Bible followed by Oxford in 1675.

Gunpowder Plot 1605

The six companies of translators were still in the early stages of their work when there was a serious threat to the life of King James. James was no stranger to plots against his life having already survived several attempts to remove him.

The plot against James was hatched by Robert Catesby and some of his close friends. They planned to kill the King during the state opening of Parliament by blowing up the building. Guy Fawkes was recruited to do the deed. Fawkes had fought for the Spanish against the Dutch and was sympathetic to the Catholic cause to restore a Catholic monarchy in England. On 5th November 1605 the plot was foiled when Guy Fawkes was arrested

in the cellars under the Houses of Parliament. The English Bible translation project was able to continue without any change in political direction. We can see the hand of God at work in human affairs. God sets up rulers and removes them.

King Nebuchadnezzar, the ruler of ancient Babylon, learnt this by first hand experience when he was told by the prophet:

“And they shall drive you from men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. They shall make you eat grass like oxen; and seven times shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses” (Daniel 4:32).

Authorised?

The ‘King James Version’ of the Bible is also known as the ‘Authorised Version’. There is no record of the King authorising this translation. It has been suggested that any formal record of royal authorisation may have been burnt in the Whitehall fire of 12 January 1618 which destroyed the Privy Council registers for 1600 to 1613. Authorised or not, the King James Bible has played an important role in shaping the English language and of much greater importance, in taking the Gospel message throughout the English speaking world.

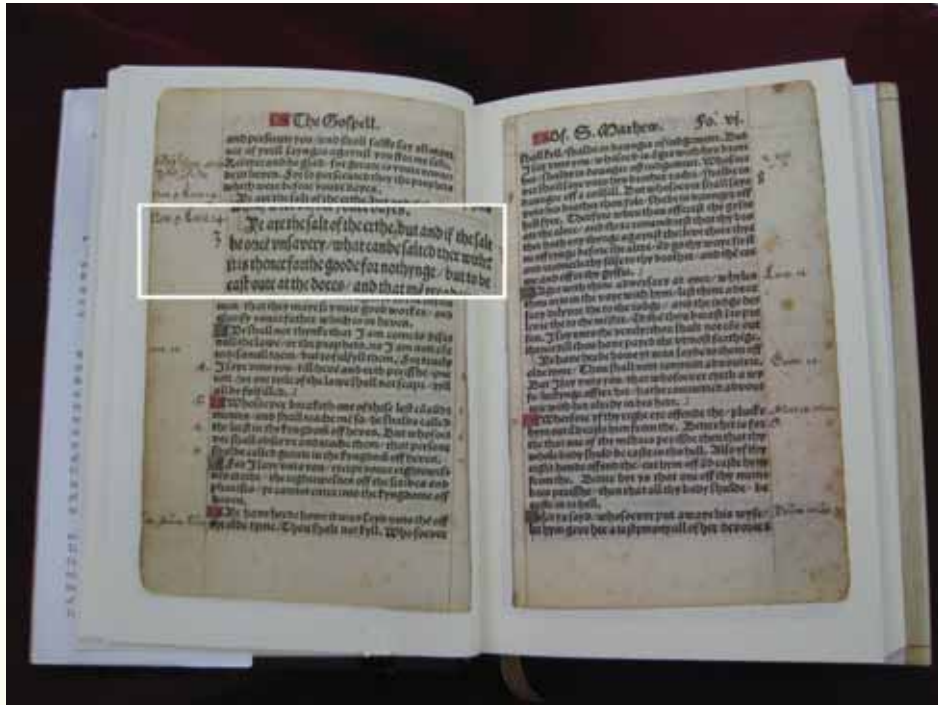
The King James Bible has contributed many sayings, figures of speech and phrases that are embedded in the English language and 400 years later these are still in everyday use. Many of these sayings are from the pen of Tyndale (1526) and some from Wycliffe two centuries earlier. William Tyndale is acknowledged as the most formative influence on the

text of the King James Bible. How often do you quote the Bible without being aware of doing so? Here is a sample of some of the many sayings we use today which have come directly from the pages of the King James Bible.

| Sayings | Bible Reference |
|---|--------------------|
| “Let there be light” | Genesis 1:3 |
| “fell on his sword” | 1 Samuel.31:5 |
| “escaped by the skin of my teeth” | Job 19:20 |
| “men of the world” | Psalms 17:14 |
| “the salt of the earth” (see the picture opposite) | Matthew 5:13 |
| “a law unto themselves” | Romans 2:14 |
| “thorn in the flesh” | 2 Corinthians 12:7 |
| “the patience of Job” | James 5:11 |

Accuracy in Translating

The translators of the King James Bible had what we might call, a ‘formal approach’ to translation. They tried to find the nearest English equivalent word to the Hebrew or Greek words they were translating. Wherever possible, they also followed the basic word order of the original text. Each word in



Facsimile of William Tyndale's 1526 New Testament showing the phrase "salt of the earth" that is used in the 1611 King James Version.

the manuscripts they were working from was rendered by an equivalent English word.

Where they encountered rare words or were unsure of the most appropriate English word to use, they provided alternatives in the margin. (Bancroft's Translation Rule No.6 allowed them to do this.) They added words in italics in the text where it was necessary to give clearer sense to the English.

The notations indicated by an asterisk '*' indicate a biblical cross reference, a dagger-like symbol '†' indicates a literal translation and parallel lines '||' indicate an alternative English translation. These ways of annotating the text have been preserved in a modified form today, in some printed editions of the KJV.

Its Message

The King James Version is a literal translation of the Word of God, as close as the English language allows. We can therefore be confident in reading it that the message is accurate. In previous articles, we have seen that the Bible:

- ❖ claims to be the Word of God (2 Peter 1:20-21)
- ❖ tells us God has a purpose with humanity (Isaiah 55:11)
- ❖ invites us to come and drink of the water of life and live (Isaiah 55:1-3)
- ❖ warns us there is no other God upon whom we can rely (Isaiah 45:21)

- ❖ teaches us to pray for the Kingdom of God to come on earth (Matthew 6:9-10)
- ❖ warns us that God has appointed a day when He will send Jesus to judge the world (Acts 17:30-31)
- ❖ tells us that the glory of man will pass away but the Word of God endures for ever (1Peter 1:24-25)
- ❖ tells us we should respect those who rule over us (1Timothy 2:1-4)
- ❖ tells us that Jesus will return to set up God's Kingdom on earth (John 14:2-3)
- ❖ instructs that believing in God and being baptised are essential for our salvation (Mark 16:15-16)
- ❖ exhorts us to strive to do right in our lives and only then will God bless us with true peace (James 3:17)

Competing Versions

The publication of the King James Bible did not meet with immediate acceptance and praise by the population at large. The Puritans were concerned that it included the Apocrypha which originated from Greek and Latin versions, but is not found in the Hebrew Bible.

The King James Version was seen as a Bible of the Church because it gradually replaced their Bishops' Bibles while the Geneva Bible continued to enjoy a wide circulation and popularity due to its extensive marginal notes. Between 1642 and 1715 there was a compromise. At least nine editions of the King James Bible were published with marginal notes from the Geneva Bible.

On the death of King James I in 1625 his son, Charles I, acceded to the throne. Charles, like his father, felt

threatened by the Geneva Bible notes which challenged the divine right of kings. The Archbishop of Canterbury successfully suppressed the market for imported Geneva Bibles by claiming that the imports were threatening the UK print trade and therefore to purchase them was unpatriotic. The supply of Geneva Bibles eventually dried up after 1644.

Its Reception

The take-up of the King James Bible was slow at first. There were some who challenged it, calling for a revision, perhaps for personal or political reasons. A Parliamentary subcommittee was set up in 1657 to consider the issues. Their report to the Grand Committee for Religion on the King James Bible, included the observation that, "some mistakes of the Bible in English; which yet was agreed to be the best of any translation in the world".

The King James Bible was to experience a mixed but increasingly supportive reception over the next 150 years. In the first half of the seventeenth century during the reign of Charles I, it was seen as the Bible of the established Church and the Geneva Bible as the Puritan's Bible.

After a short interval when Oliver Cromwell was Lord Protector, the monarchy was restored in 1660. Under King Charles II the King James Bible was embraced by monarch, church and state. After this slow start the scene was set for the King James Version (or the Authorised Version as it is sometimes called) to emerge as the key translation which would take the Gospel message throughout the world.

Peter Moore

Next: Manuscripts and Translations