THE KING JAMES BIBLE

Prayer
Scripture: Psalm 23
Hymn: 332 "All People that on Earth Do Dwell"

For church history the most important event in the reign of King James I of England was the appearance of the King James Version of the Bible, also called "The Authorized Version." Reacting to the Millenary Petition presented to James VI of Scotland on his way to London to be crowned James I of England, the king called the Hampton Court Conference that met on January 16, 1604, to consider "things pretended to be amiss in the church." The Puritans in their Petition had called on the king to purge the Prayer Book and worship of human rites and ceremonies. The king summoned four Puritan ministers to the conference where they found themselves confronted by nine bishops, seven deans and archdeacons, and five ecclesiastical lawyers, and the king himself. Bishop Andrewes reported that the king lectured the conference for five hours on corruptions in the church, wonderfully playing the Puritan. But it became clear that he was only having a "revel with the Puritans." The king was on the side of the bishops and the Anglican Church. He had no sympathy for the Puritans. In the end he "peppered them soundly" and declared "I will make them conform themselves, or I will harry them out of the land, or do worse." Whitgift, Archbishop of Canterbury, declared that the king spoke by "the special assistance of God's spirit." Bancroft, bishop of London, fell on his knees and thanked God for "the singular mercy of such a king, as since Christ the like had not been seen."

The chief spokesman for the four Puritans was Dr. John Reynolds, president of Corpus Christi College of Oxford and a former dean of Lincoln. He was alternately snubbed, upbraided, and ridiculed by the king. Dr. Reynolds was one of the most learned men in England. He suggested to the king "that there might be a new translation of the Bible because those which were allowed in the reign of King Henry VIII and Edward VI were corrupt and not answerable to the truth of the original." He cited as the most corrupted translations the Great Bible and the Bishops' Bible from which the Prayer Book had been constructed. Bancroft, Bishop of London, contumaciously replied "if every man's humour were followed, there would be no end of translating."

Dr. Reynolds's suggestion struck the fancy of the king who was proud of his own competence in Scripture and theology. The king had prepared a paraphrase of the Revelation of John and had translated the Psalms into metre. The king declared, "I could never yet see a Bible well translated in English; but I think that, of all, that of Geneva is the worst. I wish some special pains were taken for an uniform translation, which should be done by the best-learned men in both Universities, then reviewed
by the Bishops, presented to the Privy Council, lastly ratified by Royal authority, to be read in the whole Church, and none other." Bancroft suggested that such a translation should have no marginal notes. The king immediately accepted the suggestion. It was the marginal notes of the Geneva Bible that he found so objectionable. The king described them as "very partial, untrue, seditious, and savouring too much of dangerous and traiterous conceits."

The Preface of the Authorized Version contains this record of the conference:

...the very historical truth is that upon the importunate petitions of the Puritans, at his Majesty's coming to this crown, the conference at Hampton Court having been appointed for hearing their complaints: when by force of reason they were put from all other grounds, they had recourse at the last, to this shift, that they could not with good conscience subscribe to the Communion (Prayer) Book, since it maintained the Bible as it was there translated (in the Great Bible), which was, as they said, a most corrupted translation. And although this was judged to be but a very poor and empty shift, yet even hereupon did his Majesty begin to bethink himself of the good that might ensue by a new translation, and presently after gave order for this translation which is now presented unto thee.

The king did not delay in getting the project under way. On February 10, 1604, he issued the order: "That a translation be made of the whole Bible, as consonant as can be to the original Hebrew and Greek; and this to be set out and printed without any marginal notes, and only to be used in all churches of England in time of divine service." He charged all the bishops to aid in meeting the expense of the work and in securing suggestions from all competent scholars within their dioceses. We do not know with whom King James made all the plans and arranged all the details. Within six months the general plan of procedure and the list of scholars who were to do the work had been prepared. The king appointed fifty-four of the leading biblical scholars of England to prepare the translation; the number included both Anglicans and Puritans but no Separatists. The names of forty-seven have been preserved; the others probably died before the work was begun. Omitted from the list was Dr. Hugh Broughton, reputed to be the greatest living Hebraist, but known to be too cantankerous to work with any one.

The scholars were organized into six groups: two at Westminster, two at Oxford, and two at Cambridge. The Westminster group was headed by Lancelot Andrewes, Dean of Westminster, afterwards Bishop of Chichester, of Ely, and finally of Winchester, "who might have been interpreter general at Babel...the world wanted learning to know how learned he was." Also included were the Hebraist Hadrian Saravia, and William Bedwell, the greatest living Arabic scholar. The Westminster groups were assigned
Genesis through II Kings and Romans through Jude. The Oxford group was headed by Dr. John Hardinge, Regius Professor of Hebrew. It included Dr. John Reynolds who had suggested the project, "his memory and reading were near to a miracle;" also Dr. Miles Smith, who "had Hebrew at his fingers' ends." Dr. Richard Brett, "skilled and versed to a criticism in Latin, Greek, Chaldee, Arabic and Ethiopic tongues;" Sir Henry Saville, editor of the works of Chrysostom; and Dr. John Harmer, Professor of Greek, "a most noted Latinist, Grecian and divine." The Oxford group was assigned Isaiah through Malachi and the Gospels, Acts, and Revelation. The Cambridge group was first presided over by Edward Lively, Regius Professor of Hebrew, who died in 1605. Dr. Robert Spalding succeeded him as Professor of Hebrew. Also included were Dr. Lawrence Chalderton, "familiar with the Greek and Hebrew tongues, and the numerous writings of the Rabbis;" Thomas Harrison, "noted for his exquisite skill in Hebrew and Greek idioms;" John Bois, "a precocious Greek and Hebrew scholar;" and Andrew Downes, "one composed of Greek and industry." The Cambridge group worked on I Chronicles through Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon and the Apocrypha.

Fifteen specific rules entitled "the Rules to be observed in the Translation of the Bible" provided the scheme for the work:

1. The ordinary Bible read in the Church, commonly called the Bishops Bible, to be followed, and as little altered as the truth of the original will permit.
2. The Names of the Prophets, and the Holy Writers, with the other Names of the Text, to be retained, as nigh as may be accordingly as they were vulgarly used.
3. The old Ecclesiastical Words to be kept, viz. the Word, "Church" not to be translated "Congregation," etc.
4. When a Word hath divers Significations, that to be kept which hath been most commonly used by the most of the Ancient Fathers, being agreeable to the Propriety of the Place and the Analogy of the Faith.
5. The Division of the Chapters to be altered, either not at all, or as little as may be, if Necessity so require.
6. No Marginal Notes at all to be affixed, but only for the Explanation of the Hebrew or Greek Words, which cannot without some circumlocution, so briefly and fitly be express'd in the Text.
7. Such Quotations of Places to be marginally set down as shall serve for the fit Reference of one Scripture to another.
8. Every particular Man of each Company, to take the same Chapter, or Chapters, and having translated or amended them severally by himself, where he thinketh good, all to meet together, confer what they have done, and agree for their Parts what shall stand.
9. 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.
10. If any Company, upon the Review of the Book so
sent, doubt or differ upon any Place, to send them Word thereof; note the Place, and withal send the Reasons, to which if they consent not, the Difference to be com-
pounded at the General Meeting, which is to be of the chief Persons of each Company, at the end of the Work.

11. When any Place of special Obscurity is doubted of Letters to be directed, by Authority, to send to any Learned Man in the Land, for his Judgement of such a Place.

12. Letters to be sent from every Bishop to the rest of his Clergy, admonishing them of this Translation in hand; and to move and charge as many as being skilful in the Tongues; and having taken pains in that kind, to send his particular Observations to the Company, either at Westminster, Cambridge or Oxford.

13. The Directors in each Company, to be the Deans of Westminster and Chester for that Place; and the King's Professors in the Hebrew or Greek in either University.

14. These translations to be used when they agree better with the Text than the Bishops Bible: Tindall's, Matthews, Coverdale's, Whitchurch's, Geneva.

15. Besides the said Directors before mentioned, three or four of the most Ancient and Grave Divines, in either of the Universities, not employed in Translating, to be assigned by the Vice-Chancellor, upon Conference with the rest of the Heads, to be Overseers of the Translations as well Hebrew as Greek, for the better Observation of the 4th Rule above specified.

By June 30, 1604 the appointments had been completed and Bancroft, Bishop of London, wrote to the Cambridge translators, "for as much as his Highness is very anxious that the same so religious a work should admit of no delay, he has commanded me to signify unto you in his name that his pleasure is, you should with all possible speed meet together in your University and begin the same." On July 22, 1604, the King wrote to Bancroft, then acting Archbishop of Canterbury, ordering him to move all bishops to call on the learned men in their several dioceses in their private studies to note obscurities in the Hebrew or Greek and to note any mistakes in former translations and to send their suggestions to one of the leaders of the three companies so that the translators could have the help of all the learned men in the kingdom.

Actually very little is known of the actual procedure of the translators. John Selden, one of the most learned Orientalists of the time, has given this description of their work: "The translators in King James's time took an excellent way. That part of the Bible was given to him who was most excellent in such a tongue (as the Apocrypha to Andrew Downes) and then they met together, and one read the Translation, the rest holding in their hands some Bible, either of the learned Tongues, or French, Spanish, Italian, etc: if they found any fault they spake, if not he read on." The first three years (1604-07) were occupied in perfecting the arrangements and with the private study of the translators carefully working over the material to be considered by the larger group. The next
three to four years were spent by the six groups. When the groups had completed their work and had worked over the work of the other groups, each group selected two members to carry their copy of the translation to London. The committee of six spent nine months on the final editing. The final product was seen through the press by Dr. Thomas Bilson, bishop of Winchester, and Dr. Myles Smith of Oxford.

The first edition bore the title:

The Holy Bible, Conteyning the Old Testament and the New: Newly Translated out of the Originall tongues, with the former Translations diligently compared and revised, by his Majesties speciall commandment. Appointed to be read in Churches. Imprinted at London by Robert Barker, Printer to the Kings most Excellent Majestie. Anno Dom. 1611

The New Testament bore the separate title:

The New Testament of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Newly translated out of the Originall Greeke; and with the former Translations diligently compared and revised, by His Majesties speciall Commandment. Imprinted at London by Robert Barker, Printer to the Kings most Excellent Majestie. Anno Dom. 1611. com Privilegio.

The 1611 version contained a lengthy and extravagant dedication to the King that began: "To the Most High and Mighty Prince, James, By the Grace of God, King of Great Britain, France, and Ireland, Defender of the Faith. The Translators of the Bible wish Grace, Mercy, and Peace, Through Jesus Christ Our Lord."

Dr. Myles Smith composed a lengthy preface, "The Translators to the Reader," setting forth the principles of Bible translation and the necessity for this new translation. They have obeyed the King's command and the people should thank God for a King so interested in his people's spiritual welfare. They have worked from the Hebrew text of the Old Testament and from the Greek of the New Testament because those were the languages in which God chose to speak to his church through apostles and prophets. They have not been hasty in their work like the translators of the Septuagint. They consulted translators, commentators, Chaldee, Hebrew, Syrian, Greek, Latin, Spanish, French, Italian and Dutch. They have not disdained to revise their own work. They confessed misgivings about many readings and marginal readings. They recognized the difficulty of translating obscure Hebrew terms and of choosing from a variety of English synonyms. They confessed that they had not tied themselves to uniformity of phrasing or to an identity of words. They had tried to avoid the scrupulosity of the Puritans and the errors of the Papists. They had worked out of a deep sense of responsibility and they pled for an equal sense of responsibility on the part of their readers. Their conception of their work is set forth in these words:
Truly, good Christian Reader, we never thought from the beginning, that we should need to make a new translation, nor yet to make of a bad one a good one; ...but to make a good one better, or out of many good ones one principal good one, not justly to be excepted against; that hath been our endeavour, that our mark. 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.

The King James Version was a revision rather than a new translation. The official basis of the revision was the Bishops' Bible but the translators liberally borrowed from Tindale, Matthew, Coverdale, the Great Bible, the Geneva Bible and the Rhemes New Testament. It has been estimated that nine tenths of the final King James Version as published in 1611 agreed with Tindale—Tindale as handed down in the succession of English Bibles between Tindale and King James. But they used all available foreign aids: Luther, Leo Juda, and Zwingli in the German; Olivetan in French, Pagninus, Sebastian Munster and Castalio in Latin; also the Vulgate and the Latin of Erasmus. They used the new French Bible of 1587-8 and a new Spanish translation of 1602. They used the Italian translation by J. Diodati of 1607. They used the current Hebrew Bibles, the Complutensian and Antwerp Polyglots. They consulted the Plantin Polyglott of 1572 in which Arias Montanus gave an interlinear translation of the Hebrew on the basis of Pagninus' Latin. They consulted the Latin translation of the Old Testament made in 1579 by Tremellius, a converted Jew, who became the King's Reader of Hebrew at Cambridge. They used the Latin Apocrypha by Tremellius' son-in-law, Junius. They made use of the Chaldaic Targum and the Syriac New Testament in Tremellius's version. In the Greek they relied on Erasmus, Stephanus and Beza.

Bilson and Smith supplied chapter summaries and page headings. From the first the King James Version contained a profusion of marginal notes. Controversial notes were excluded but there were some 6,637 marginal notes in the Old Testament, with 4,034 giving the literal meaning of the Hebrew and 77 of the Chaldee; 2,156 offered marginal readings; 63 give meanings of proper names; 31 give massoretic differences between the written text and what should be read. In the New Testament there were 765 notes; 35 gave variant readings; 582 alternate renderings; 112 literal translations.

The translators anticipated there would be criticisms. They began early and continued in a mounting stream. Broughton was one of the early critics. He wrote one of the King's attendants: "The late Bible...was sent to me to censure: which bred in me a sadness that will grieve me while I breathe, it is so ill done. Tell His Majesty that I had rather be rent in pieces with wild horses, than any such translation by my consent should be urged upon poor churches... The new edition crosseth me. I require it to be burnt." He contended that the translators had put the errors in the text and the correct reading in the
margins. Robert Gell attributed this to the method of the translators: a majority of voices put mis-translations in the text and better translations in the margin. Catholics declared the alternate readings in the margins were shaking the certainty of the Scripture. John Lightfoot and many others objected to the Apocrypha being included between the Testaments. John Selden charged that they had translated into English words instead of into English phrases. William Kilburne and many others pointed to errors in printing.

The King James Version came to be called "The Authorized Version," probably from the fact that the King had backed the project and from the phrase, "Appointed to be read in Churches." No record survives of any authorization by King, Parliament or Convocation. The King James Version had to win its place by its merits. The Bishops' Bible was not printed after 1602 but continued to be used in some churches as late as 1650. For half a century the Geneva Bible was a strong rival. Older bishops such as Dillingham and Overall continued to use the Geneva Bible in their sermons. The Geneva Bible was quoted in the preface to the King James Version. Lancelot Andrewes continued to quote from both the Bishops' Bible and the Geneva Bible. There were fifteen printings of the King James Version in the first three years. Robert Barker, the King's printer, continued to print the Geneva Bible until 1616; others continued to print it until 1644. By that time there had been 182 printings of the King James and only 15 of the Geneva after the appearance of the King James. The hostility of the church authorities made it impossible to print the Geneva in England after 1618. Bishop Laud ordered copies of it to be burned and tried to prevent the importation of Geneva Bibles. It took some time for the Puritans to switch from the Geneva to the King James. Within about half a century the King James Version became the English Bible and would continue such with no strong rival for two hundred and fifty years. After 300 years it is still the most widely used English Bible.

Throughout the remainder of the seventeenth century the printers of almost every edition of the Authorized Version took it upon themselves to make corrections and revisions—sometimes they added new printing errors. Some improvements were made in 1612. The 1613 edition made 413 changes. One printing in 1613 used "he" in Ruth 3:15. Another printing from the same year used "she"; these became known as the "He" and "She" Bibles. Across the years printers have made humorous mistakes such as: the "Wicked Bible" which omitted "not" from the seventh of the Ten Commandments; the "Unrighteous Bible" in which the unrighteous inherit the Kingdom; the "Vinegar Bible" that had Parable of the Vinegar instead of Parable of the Vineyard; the "Ears to Ear Bible" which had "ear to ear" instead of "ears to hear." Some later printings have "strain at a gnat" in Matt. 23:24 instead of "strain out a gnat" which was the reading of 1611.

The Cambridge edition of 1629 was carefully revised by an
anonymous editor. One 1629 edition was the first to omit the Apocrypha—the omission did not become general until the nineteenth century. The folio edition of 1638 published by Buck and Daniel made a serious attempt at an "authentique corrected Bible." Survivors of the original translation worked on this revision. William Kilburne in 1659 claimed he had found 20,000 errors that had crept into six editions printed in the 1650's. New marginal references were introduced into printings in 1660. Dr. Anthony Scattergood in 1683 added 7,250 references.

In 1651 Matthew Barker, stationer of London, claimed the copyright because his father had paid 3,500 pounds for amending the translation. Pirated editions were made on the Continent and smuggled into England in an attempt to break the monopoly of the King's Printers. In 1714 the first Bible was printed in Ireland. The first New Testament in America was dated 1742 with a London imprint, though printed in Boston. The whole Bible was printed in the same manner in 1752. The first acknowledged American Bible was the Philadelphia edition of 1782.

Extensive revisions were made in the eighteenth century. In 1701 Bishop Lloyd inserted the biblical chronology of Bishop Ussher at the head of the reference columns in Old Testament books. F. S. Paris and H. Therold in 1762 extended the use of italics, attempted to modernize the language, and added 360 marginal references. Dr. Benjamin Blayney of Oxford in 1769 did extensive revisions, added 76 notes—many on weights, measures and coins—and added 30,495 new marginal references. He attempted to modernize the spelling and punctuation. Blayney's edition became the standard edition until the publication of the Cambridge Paragraph Bible in 1873. In 1932 The American Bible Society revised punctuation, spelling, and running heads.

In the second half of the nineteenth century the demands for extensive revisions and new translations mounted. The first serious rival to the King James Version was the English Revised Version of 1881 and then the American Revised Version of 1901. The twentieth century has produced a host of translations but the King James Version has continued to out sell them.

Since the middle of the nineteenth century it has become clear and clearer that the King James Version should be replaced. The two most compelling reasons are the changes in the English language and the advances in Hebrew and Greek scholarship. It is now clear that in 1611 the translators used English that was already behind the times. The language has continued to change so that the King James speaks with difficulty to the young people of the modern age. The King James translation was made from very late Greek texts—none of the great uncials were used and a tremendous wealth of manuscript and papyrus material has been discovered in the nineteenth and twentieth century. Great changes and progress has been made in the study of Biblical languages. From the first the King James Version had many limitations; it was not consistent in the spellings of proper names nor was it consistent in the translation of a number of words, frequently used. A striking example is the use of "love"
and "charity."

The King James Version stands as one of the noblest monuments of the English language. It was produced in a great age of the language. It is impossible to measure its influence on the language, culture, morals, religion, laws and arts of the English speaking peoples. The love and respect it has commanded for almost four centuries testifies to its greatness. It deserves to rank as one of the three greatest translations of the Bible, along with the Septuagint and the Vulgate. It does not seem likely that in the near future any other translation will prove so successful and lasting. It deserves to be cherished as one of the dearest treasures of our heritage.