

The King James Version of Sacred Scripture

Four Hundredth Anniversary Talk: Dec., 4, 2011

The year 2011 marks the 400th anniversary of the publication of the King James Version (KJV) of the Holy Bible. Also known as the Authorized Version no other English translation of Scripture has been as influential and significant as the KJV. What is the story of the King James's translation? What was the context that is say, the background conditions which produced this outstanding translation of Holy Scripture? Who produced this translation ? Why did they produce it? and why did it come about exactly 400 years ago? These are some of the issues which will be touched upon in the following talk.

A Big Picture Background

First, a word about the other most famous, but little known translations of Holy Scripture. In the overall history of Scripture translation into any language only two other works rank alongside the KJV. The Vulgate is one such work. The Vulgate was the authoritative Latin translation of the Bible produced by St Jerome in the 5th century and used by literate Christians in the Western world for the following 1000 years. The Vulgate surely deserves a place in this catalogue. The other translation, of even greater antiquity and influence, is the Septuagint. A translation of the Old Testament and certain deuterocanonical or apocryphal works from the ancient Hebrew into 3rd century BC Greek, the Septuagint was a classic by the time of the New Testament. Proof aplenty of the Septuagint's heady status exists. First, the legend, readily accepted by the time of our Lord, that 70 or 72 scholars worked on the translation in isolation from each. Upon completion of their task they compared the final results only to discover that they agreed exactly. This story handily affirms the inspired status of the resulting translation. Secondly, the fact that all the Old Testament quotations found in the New Testament are quotations taken directly from the Septuagint's Greek text and not from the Hebrew. The reason for this? By the time of our Lord only a few of the most privileged Jewish scribes could read Old Testament Hebrew. This fact of Old Testament quotation by the New is coincidentally relevant today. It explains why, when a reader compares the New Testament quotation of an Old Testament phrase or line to that of the Old Testament translation in their Bibles, slight differences in grammar, sentence structure and/or verb tense are discerned.

Background and Context

To set the context for the KJV we need to look backwards, we have to glance at the world before the publication year of 1611. What is required is an investigation in turn; of a death, an escape and a show down. First, the death. Queen Elizabeth I died on March 24, 1603. The famous and fabled Elizabethan Age had come to a close – the *Faerie Queene* had died. The Age of Elizabeth had been pivotal and had, by its end, come to be seen as a turning point. It was the

age of Spenser and Shakespeare, of Raleigh and Frobisher, it had witnessed the spectacular and providential defeat of the Spanish Armada (in 1588) and England had grown in power, in prestige and in international presence. At home, no small part of this national expansion and success stemmed from stability and in the 16th century there was no such thing as national cohesion and stability without religious unity and uniformity.

The entire century before the KJV's production had witnessed religious debate, turmoil and persecution. Henry VIII's quest for a legitimate male heir had necessitated his break with Rome. But England did not become Protestant under Henry. Henry VII's second son had been raised for a career in the church and Henry VIII's theology was essentially conservative and traditional. He allowed only one church service to appear in English – the Litany and Latin remained the language of liturgy (church services). In 1538 however, Henry did allow the placement of large English Bibles in every church “where it might be read, only without noise or disturbance of any public service, and without any disputation or exposition.” Upon Henry's death change came and it came quickly.

Under Edward, two service books in English appeared in quick succession. The Prayer Books of 1549 and 1552 were a radical change and were the occasion for disturbances, riots and a rebellion. The 1549 book was theologically more conservative, that is to say, traditional in outlook, while that of 1552 possessed a decidedly more reformed or Protestant bias. All the changes of Edward's reign were short-lived and died with him. Succeeded by his half-sister Mary, England experienced an abrupt about face in religion. Mary sought, by any means possible, to turn back the clock not only undoing the radical recent changes introduced under Edward's reign but also the jurisdictional breach with Rome effected decades earlier by her father. The results were brutal. Unrepentant heretics were burnt at the stake, and Smithfield, near London, became a place name synonymous with brutal religious persecution and death. Mary even had her father's favourite cleric, Thomas Cranmer, compiler of the *Book of Common Prayer* and Archbishop of Canterbury burned at the stake at Oxford. One can still view the singes on the doors of the building nearby his place of execution.

This was the atmosphere and immediate background in the kingdom when Elizabeth came to the throne in 1558. At the outset, her grip on power, her suitability to rule, her public image and her ability to guide the country were all questioned – even by supporters. All her ministers of state and the entire house of bishops were her sister Mary's appointees and thus not supporters of Anne Boleyn's bastard daughter – Anne, who from their perspective, had usurped the crown from the legitimate good Queen Catherine. Among her Protestant minded subjects Elizabeth was an unknown quantity. What was her religious position? Exiles returning from the Continent where they had fled to escape Mary's wrath prayed, urged and attempted to prod Elizabeth to move the nation towards a truer, purer, more thorough going Protestantism than achieved under Edward. Elizabeth demurred.

Elizabeth wanted peace, stability and some degree of uniformity to return to England. This was impossible without a religious settlement which was the essential underpinning to even the hope of political stability. Elizabeth was clearly a reformed Christian – her father Henry had seen to that for he had insured that his second daughter was raised in a mildly reformed, protestant environment. Elizabeth was however, like her father, theologically conservative. Though Protestant, she favoured ritual, was comfortable with Latin and had a decided distaste for married clergy. But as queen she wanted and needed a religious settlement. She rebuffed early Parliaments and their attempts to hunt down and kill those of the old religion. The Prayer Book was reissued and used. If people inclined to the old ways would attend – once in a while at least or pay fines for not doing so, that was enough for stability and national unity. As Elizabeth famously stated – she did not want “ windows in(to) men’s souls” – outward conformity would do.

Many protestant minded people were not pleased with this status quo – Edward’s Prayer Books were not sufficiently godly for them – not reformed enough. And then there were robes, especially the white surplice and Eucharistic vestments. Under Elizabeth, they were allowed, indeed, mandated to be worn. A few clerics resigned, others demurred, still others vented, ranted and raved against what they termed *papistical* costumes. They held prayer meetings, as distinct from worship services, they prophesied and, as the reign wore on, became increasingly disenchanted with Elizabeth’s religious settlement and progressively vocal in their dislike and disdain for the status quo. Elizabeth however, not only held her ground, but pushed back as well.

The Escape

Such is an overview of the situation at the time of Queen Elizabeth’s death in 1603. Now for the Escape. Elizabeth died without marrying and obviously without a natural heir. She bequeathed the crown of England to her nearest royal relative, James VI of Scotland. James revelled in his good fortune and could barely contain his excitement. He earnestly and wholeheartedly desired to escape from his kingdom of Scotland. But why? The truth was that King James could not bear to live another day in the atmosphere of Scotland’s form of Protestantism – John Knox’s Presbyterianism.

James had been a king all his life – he had been crowned in 1567 while only a few months old. Although the son of Mary Queen of Scots, he was not a Roman Catholic and had limited patience for the papal party. His kingdom was poor and politically divided. Feuding and scheming barons were a constant threat in his early years as they attempted to capture (kidnap) and manipulate their ‘king.’ As for religion, the reformed Church in Scotland had been set up in 1560 under the leadership of John Knox. The character of this church was non-episcopal, that is, without bishops and Presbyterian in mindset and organization. Preaching ministers who held

sway over congregations would band together into districts known as presbyteries. As an individual, James studied and enjoyed theology. He held that his rule and authority came directly from God – the so called ‘divine right of kings’ and that he ruled over all aspects of his nation, both political and religious. James had been successful in Scotland, through the method of playing faction off against faction, in both politics and religion. He had even succeeded in imposing a small, bishop led, Episcopal Church in Scotland modelled off what existed in England.

The Presbyterians held a very different view of kingship, political order and of the church or *Kirk* as it was called in Scotland. The Presbyterians held that the king was to rule the state and not the church. They maintained that while the king was so limited in his sphere, the Presbyterian preachers were not – they were to preach in matters purely spiritual AND advise and direct the king as to how he was to rule. Their authority came directly from God and as such they could comment, direct and dictate on all matters affecting the faithful. It was to escape such persistent advise and interference that James took to the roads south immediately upon learning of Queen Elizabeth’s death.

James was not to escape so easily. On his way south he was met by a delegation of English ‘Puritan-minded’ clergy and presented with the ‘Millenary Petition.’ These Puritans were a NOT a separate denomination but a group of clergy within the Church in England who were similarly minded to the Scottish Presbyterians. The petition was said to have been signed by 1000 clergy (out of about 10,000 English clerics). On the surface, the document appears tempered and moderate. There were objections raised about the Prayer Book, the English Church’s official liturgy or service book. These objections included; a demand to abolish the use of the sign of the Cross at Baptism, a call for a similar ban on the use of the ring at marriage, the utter abandonment of the rite of confirmation, the wearing of the surplice by the clergy to be made optional, the cessation of the practice of bowing at the name of Jesus, and a stop to be made to the reading of lessons from the Apocrypha in church services. There was also a request for better education of the clergy and more and better preaching. Finally, there was a request for a much stricter observance of the Sabbath as a day of rest and no play. Being in his new kingdom, James listened carefully and referred the entire matter to a Conference. The gathering was held at Hampton Court in 1604. This was the show-down between the English Puritans and the otherwise minded clergy of the Established, Anglican Church. James himself chaired the meeting.

Hampton Court Conference

James considered himself the head of the English church (on earth) and an expert in matters biblical and theological. He made no pretence to impartiality at Hampton Court. While King James sat on his chair, surrounded by his bishops and advisors, a delegation of four

puritans were ushered in and asked what alterations they desired in the English Church. In addition to the points made in the Millenary Petition the Puritans now asked that the doctrine of predestination be more clearly highlighted and taught, that clergy be permitted to administer Holy Communion without having to fully agree to the English Church's teaching as to what it was and that a new translation of the Bible be undertaken. The Puritan's chief speaker ill advisedly used the term 'presbytery' and King James came off his chair. A Scottish style presbytery he cried out, "As well agreeth with a monarchy as God with the devil. Stay I pray you for one seven years before you demand that of me; and if you find me pursy (puffy faced) and fat and my windpipes stuffed I will perhaps hearken unto you. For let that government be once up ... we shall all have work enough, both our hands full. But, Dr Rainolds, (the Puritan clergyman) til you find I grow lazy, let that alone... No bishop, no king. When I mean to live under a presbytery I will go into Scotland again, but while I am in England I will have bishops to govern the church."

The King James Translation

King James did agree to the suggestion of a new translation. This was the first time a King, the head of the Church in England, had initiated a translation. What is more, James gave directions concerning the translation and intended the end product to be published by the Crown for the Church and for the Church to use only this 'authorized' translation. In short, it was not be one of many Bibles but the One Bible which was to be used. It was to supersede and replace all other English translations in existence.

The KJV was far from the first Bible in English. It was in effect the last in a long series of translations. The 1500s had witnessed an explosion of Scripture translation in the vernacular. During the early years of the Reformation, the English Lutheran, William Tyndale had translated large portions of the Bible while at Cologne and Antwerp. He did so on the Continent for fear he would run afoul of the religious authorities in his own country. From 1526 onwards, copies of his New Testament were smuggled into England hid in bales of wool. In 1536 he was caught in Flanders, garrotted and then his corpse burned at the stake – perhaps betrayed by a spy of his old enemy, Thomas Moore. Meanwhile, Miles Coverdale, another Englishman working abroad, this time with the temporary encouragement of English Church authorities, produced a translation of the entire Bible. Coverdale's translation was dedicated to none other than King Henry VIII. It is Coverdale's translation of the Psalms which appear in the *Book of Common Prayer*.

In 1537, Matthew's Bible appeared. So named due to the pseudonym Thomas Matthew, it was actually the work of John Rogers, a friend of Tyndale's. A compilation of Tyndale and Coverdale's work, this translation is noteworthy as the first English Bible legally available for sale in England. Henry VIII licensed 1500 copies for sale. Sadly, its author Rogers was burnt at

the stake by Henry's daughter, Queen Mary Tudor. In 1539, Henry VIII ordered that every English Parish church buy a Bible for public reading. This resulted in the so-called Whitchurch translation so named for printer's name, Edward Whitchurch, which appeared on the title page. It was actually a revision of the Matthew's Bible produced by none other than Coverdale himself.

Finally, in 1560, during the reign of Elizabeth I, English Calvinist Protestants living in Geneva produced the famous Geneva Bible. The first Bible ever printed in Roman Type this publication included, maps, tables, illustrations and notes in the margins. The notes displayed a clear Calvinist slant casting doubt on kingship as the only divinely approved form of government and avoiding the use of terms such as 'bishop' in translation of New Testament texts. The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, (3rd ed.) characterizes the Geneva Bible's notes as written from an 'extreme Protestant viewpoint.' The Geneva translation became very popular and is the version of Scripture quoted by William Shakespeare in his plays.

In response to the Geneva Bible, Elizabeth I urged her archbishop of Canterbury, Matthew Parker to produce a new translation. The so-called Bishop's Bible appeared in 1568 and was revised in 1572. Lacking the Geneva Bible's 'helpful' notes its somewhat ponderous style is what was read publicly in English churches throughout the remainder of Elizabeth's reign.

The Translation: The King's Directive and the Process

King James seized upon the idea of a new translation of Holy Scripture and in 1604 appointed the 54 divines, that is, clerical scholars, who were to work on the project. Six companies of scholars under the guidance of a director or leader were to accomplish the task. This coterie of scholars included men like the Puritan minded John Rainolds whose theology had placed him at odds with both King James and Queen Elizabeth. Despite this, he was recognized as a learned man and one whose contribution to translation was not to be forfeit. Each company of between seven and eleven men was assigned a section of the Scriptures to complete. The men known to have been involved range from the most famous theologians and clerics of the age to individuals about whom all we know is their name. It is worth noting in passing that the second Cambridge Company was assigned the task of translating the entire Apocrypha. We must recall that while not part of the canon of Scripture, the post-Reformation Church in England continued to read the Apocrypha with the understanding and intent outlined in the 39 Articles of Religion.- i.e., 'for example of life and instruction of manners' and not so as to establish any doctrine or belief.

The translation teams were to use the Bishop's Bible as a reference but they were in no way limited in what they were permitted to consult. Significant portions of Tyndale's translation as well as parts of the Geneva Bible made the final cut. While never officially

mentioned, it is apparent that even the English Roman Catholic translation known as the Rheims-Douai Bible was consulted. The King James translation then was not an entirely new rendering but rather a revision of the best that had gone before coupled with new translation where such was deemed necessary. The translators did not start with blank sheets before them but rather were to utilize fully the efforts of those who had gone before. This reflects a particular Renaissance and Reformation perspective regarding academic achievement, namely, that each generation stands on the shoulders of the giants who have gone before. Or in other words, the present generation is not wiser than all those who came before but rather can see so far precisely because it stands on the shoulders of all those who have laboured before it.

The actual organization of the translation process fell to Richard Bancroft, Bishop of London at the time of the Hampton Court Conference and within the year, (upon Whitgifts death), Archbishop of Canterbury. Bancroft drew up a list, approved by King James, of Fifteen (15) Instructions for the translators. Directions included the retention of established chapter divisions, as well as traditional names for places and people and the retention of traditional terms such as ‘church’ for the Greek word *ecclesia*. The instructions also made clear King James other point – the KJV was not to have marginal notes of a theological/ partisan nature. Marginal notes abound but they are concerned solely with matters of text and translation.

As for the actual process of translation, each individual was to work on a selection of text and then the Company or group met to review the result and come to a common mind concerning the translation. After this process, completed portions were to be sent to all the other companies for their review and concurrence. If a disagreement arose respecting a particular translation, the specific reasons for it were to be written down and submitted to the final, central meeting. The central London meeting would decide all such matters. This final meeting, held in 1610, consisted of two members from each Company delegated to the task. The directives further stipulated that in the case of difficult or obscure words and /or texts, each translator was empowered to consult any learned man in the kingdom. The final draft was to be submitted to the bishops of Winchester (Andrewes) and Gloucester (Thomas Ravis) for review. It is also thought that Bancroft, in his capacity as Archbishop of Canterbury, reviewed the final draft translation.

Little is known of the actual translation process – except that it seemed to proceed slowly at first – perhaps due to the need to consult all earlier translations. It is known that the Companies completed their work at different times – some in 1608, others in 1609 and one not until 1610. Moreover, it seems unlikely that every member of each company was present at each meeting of that Company. A select subgroup of each Company appears to have met and then shared their conclusions with the others. Very little of the ‘process’ per say has come down to us. One glimpse of a Company member’s life does exist. An account of John Bois’s life, a member of the Cambridge Company, has been preserved. Bois was rector of Boxworth near

Cambridge and his biographer delights in recording that he preferred the delights of the university to the work of his parish. Bois is said to have travelled to the university for translation work on Mondays only to return to his parish on Saturday evenings. This was the pattern of Bois's life for the four years of his Company's translation efforts. Whatever the balance between Parish and College, Bois's fellow Company members thought enough of him to make him one of their two delegates to the central, London meeting of 1610.

Again, of the final London meetings we possess little detail other than one revealing fact – the translation was read “out loud” at the gatherings. This is most revealing for it shows that private Bible reading was not the sole, or even the primary audience envisioned for this new translation. On the contrary, the KJV was created with an eye, or rather, especially an ear, to how it sounded when read publically. The KJV was created to be read out loud to a public audience.

While most ‘modern’ printings of the KJV include the two page dedication to ‘The most high and mighty King James,’ the eleven page section penned by Miles Smith, entitled “The Translators to the Reader,” is typically omitted. It stresses that the translators endeavoured to provide the English people with the best possible translation and that the text's divine origin and spiritual role was foremost in their minds. This letter to the Reader also clearly relates two telling matters. First, that many Hebrew terms in the Old Testament occur only once and that as a result their precise meaning was difficult to determine. Secondly, that as translators, they did not adhere to a wooden approach in rendering specific words. For example, the same word might be translated as ‘purpose’ one time and as ‘‘intent’’ another or ‘‘joy’’ in one instance and ‘‘gladness’’ in another. Why? They explained that to always employ the same word in translation would “savour more of curiosity than wisdom” and would incline to “breed scorn in the atheist ... rather than profit to the godly reader.” They argued, “For is the kingdom of God to become words or syllables? Why should we be in bondage to them if we be free, use one precisely when we may use another no less fit, as commodiously?”

One last matter concerning the London meetings, what document or manuscript was actually delivered to the Royal printer Robert Baker for publication? Was it a copy of the Bishop's Bible with corrections and annotations or was it an entire manuscript, handwritten, containing the final translation and all marginal notes? We shall never know – either possibility is tenable. We possess not such document – perhaps it was destroyed by the Great London Fire of 1666, we simply do not know for sure.

The Process of Printing the KJV

Printing in England in 1611 was a regulated activity. The Stationers Company controlled all printing and printing was permitted in four centers only, namely, London, York, Oxford and Cambridge. As printing itself was controlled, the publication of Bibles was further

regulated by monopoly – only the man who held the royally granted monopoly could print Bibles in England. In the case of the KJV, in 1611, Robert Barker was the King's Printer.

Printing, especially of Bibles, was a controlled activity for it was viewed as a means of making money or of losing it. King James provided not a penny for the publication of the Bible which bears his name. King James was terrible with money and usually broke and in debt. As a result, Barker, although King's Printer, had to finance the entire endeavour himself. Given the need for a massive first print-run, Barker was forced to solicit partners in order to raise the necessary capital for the project up-front.

By 1611, printing technology had not changed a great deal since its inception 150 years earlier. Type or lead letters had to be hand made in order to be set out into lines of text to be inked and then have the paper pressed upon them. Barker would have had to produce thousands of these lead letters – *type* before the manuscript appeared so that when it did arrive the actual work could begin. For the KJV, two columns of text (of 59 lines) appeared on each page and two pages were printed at a time. Each verse was numbered and each new verse began on a new line. Marginal textual notes were printed on the side of each page. Since the paper that received the inked impression had to be soaked overnight in order to better absorb the ink, pages had to be printed on the reverse side of each sheet as soon as possible. This was due to two considerations; first, so that the ink would penetrate equally well on the reverse side as on the first and, to avoid shrinkage of the paper thereby rendering impossible the alignment of pages back to back. The printing method employed produced twelve (12) pages of the Bible at a time. These twelve page units were then sewed together to make up the complete Bible.

The original KJV, as well as the Dedicatory Epistle to King James and the eleven page essay to the Reader from the Translators also contained many tables. The first set was a lectionary, that is, a schedule of lessons for daily Scripture reading structured on a one year rotation or plan. Next came an Almanacke for the ensuing thirty-nine years listing matters such as the date for Easter, Whitsunday, the first Sunday in Advent etc. Next there was a page explaining the method for the perpetual calculation of the date of Easter. This was followed by a page explaining the logic of the historic practice of the daily use of the Psalms, which in turn was followed by pages giving the Scripture lessons for each Sunday and special holy day throughout the year. There followed a table of Psalms for daily use whereby all 150 psalms were said every month. The introductory matter concluded with a table of special biblical holy and saints days to be observed throughout the year and finally a page listing the books of the Old Testament, Apocrypha and New Testament to be found in the KJV. In 1662 most of this front matter was moved into the English Church's Prayer Book.

Textual Sources

While everyone realizes that the KJV is a translation of the Bible few people think this through – a translation of what? The original Hebrew and Greek texts, of course. But we do not possess the originals written by Isaiah any more than we possess the original Gospel hand written by St Mark. So what did the scholars actually translate in 1604-1610? To cite the example of the New Testament Greek, the scholars worked with what has come to be known as the *textus receptus*. This *textus receptus* was to be found in the famous Renaissance scholar Erasmus's Greek New Testament of 1516. In the subsequent 400 years, older and somewhat better portions of New Testament Greek texts have been discovered and are now preferred to that which formed the basis of Erasmus's Greek. However, it must be stressed that none of these newer ancient text discoveries have affected any of the basic facts, teachings or beliefs of the Christian Faith as found in the King James translation of the Bible. They have bettered our understanding of the Faith, but they have not led to any alteration of the Faith.

Perhaps a famous example of the difference improved original Greek texts have made is in order. Everyone knows the Lord's Prayer is found in the Bible, Matthew 6:9-13. The King James translation includes the doxology – that is, "For thine is the Kingdom etc..." The *textus receptus* which was consulted by the KJV translators included the doxology and so the KJV retains the doxology. Subsequent manuscript finds reveal that the doxology was not part of the original Greek New Testament and so it is omitted in modern translations.

The Old Testament presented many unique problems for the translators. One alluded to earlier was the appearance of words only one time – how does anyone figure out what they meant if the context does not make it clear? Advances in the study of Near Eastern languages in the 19th century related to ancient Hebrew have greatly aided in this puzzle. Of special note however was the issue of the name of God. The Old Testament gives multiple terms for God, eg., *The LORD, the LORD Almighty, the Lord of Hosts, etc.* To simply translate all these different Hebrew terms as *God* would be both untrue and misleading. The issue was especially acute with the ultimate name for God, the tetragramaton – the four letters, YHWH. Adding to the challenge is the fact that ancient Hebrew included no vowels – they were to be inserted based upon context! This divine name was sometimes translated misleadingly as *Jehovah* – misleading for Hebrew has no letter "J", the KJV usually renders the term as LORD – all capital letters. This is most effective for it reflects a development within the Old Testament itself – an increasing reverence for the divine name. That is to say, that by the end of Old Testament times, the Jews were substituting the term 'Adonai,' meaning 'master' or 'Lord' whenever this divine name appeared in the text. The KJV translators continued this tradition of reverence. The Jerusalem Bible is the most notable of recent translations to break with this reverential practice.

An area in which the KJV has been criticized and, perhaps rightly, is in the translation of Biblical poetry, not so much the translation as the manner in which it was portrayed on the printed page – as prose and not as poetry. Many modern translations have diverged from the KJV on this point and print poetry as poetry on the pages of their translations. Interestingly, an ever increasing weight given to this consideration was one of the main causes for calls to produce a new translation of the Bible in the 19th century.

Influence and Legacy of the KJV

Few would disagree that the KJV translation of the Bible has been the single most important influence in the modern development and standardization of the English language. Interestingly, it appears that this was accomplished by accident – as a collateral effect of translation. There is absolutely no indication that the translators were aiming at creating a classic of English literature. Their aim was to produce the best, that is, the clearest and most true to the original languages, translation possible. However, doing it when it was done – at the end of the 16th and beginning of the 17th centuries, when English was coming into its own as a language AND by whom it was done, men who lived, studied and communicated at the end of the Renaissance and late Reformation periods – the result unavoidably reflects a golden age of the English language. It is no accident that the KJV translators were exact contemporaries of the English language's most famous playwright – William Shakespeare.

Upon publication in 1611, the KJV was not immediately received as a classic. The Geneva Bible persisted as the biblical best-seller. The increasingly dissatisfied Puritan-minded clergy within the English Church continued to prefer the Geneva Bible to the 'Establishment' produced KJV. However, by 1660, after the intervening English Civil War, the KJV had become the loved, used and winsome translation of the English people. And although the Pilgrim Fathers, religious refugees from early 17th century England, had carried the Geneva, not the KJV Bible with them, given the passage of time, it would be the KJV – minus the Apocrypha, that became the classic English Bible in the 13 Colonies. It is an amazing irony of history that the same rebellious 13 Colonies who would never allow an Anglican Bishop to be appointed for their side of the Atlantic – to use and love the Bible translation produced by the *popery inclined prelates* of the same Church Establishment they so disdained.

One way in which to exhibit the influence of the KJV translation upon the English language is to list phrases which have crept into and become part of our language. Many folks would today be surprised to learn that these terms are original to the KJV and that in turn many are actual idioms from the ancient Hebrew. The list includes; “to lick the dust” (Ps 72:9, Is 49:23 Micah 7:17), “to fall flat on his face” (Numbers 22:31), “a man after his own heart” (1 Sam 13:14), “the land of the living” (Job 28:13, Ps 27:13, 52:5 etc), “under the sun” (Eccles 1:4 and 20 more times), “pride goes before a fall”(Prov 16:18), “the skin of my teeth”(Job 19:20),

and “to put words in his mouth”(Ex 4:15, Deut. 18:18, Jer. 1:9). From the New Testament; “the salt of the earth” (Matt 5:13), “a thorn in the flesh” (2 Cor 12:7), “the powers that be”,(Romans 13:1), and “to give up the Ghost” (Mark 15:39, John 19:30).

Present Status and Usage of KJV

Finally, some thoughts on the KJV’s present status, relevance and state of usage. We live in an age of constant change and an insatiable desire for what is new. That the 400th anniversary of anything is marked and celebrated is a wonder. The KJV has staying power. One would think that it would have long ago been assigned to the dustbin of history, but it has not. There has been an explosion of new ‘modern’ Scriptural translations over the past sixty years. One would think that the KJV would have been long ago buried under this onrush of newness and relevance – but it has not. One would think that going into a bookstore, especially a secular bookstore, a person would not find the KJV, but there it is. The KJV persists – it is for sale and it is being sold. To say it has withstood the test of time is true, but exactly what does that mean in the 21st century? May I suggest that it is precisely in comparison with the newer translations, the self-proclaimed modern and relevant translations, that the KJV has shown its worth as literature, as a viable translation and as a desirable version of the Holy Bible.

While in England on sabbatical this past spring and summer I had the opportunity to attend a special, by *advance ticket purchase only*, exhibition on the 400 anniversary of the KJV at Lambeth Palace, London. As a contrast to the old KJV, the exhibit highlighted the 1961 publication of the New English Bible, the NEB. The exhibit’s glossy booklet intoned that the NEB translation came about out of a “level of disquiet among scholars and churchmen about the accuracy of the (KJV) translation.” Produced as an “ecumenical effort by the Protestant churches of Great Britain” the NEB sold 5 million copies its first morning. I was familiar with the NEB and it struck me as odd that this was the modern translation the exhibit chose to highlight. Years earlier, my exposure to the NEB had left me cold and unmoved. I had been left with the impression that the NEB was a dated, somewhat snobbish, English period-piece, which had been dismissed decades ago on this side of the Atlantic as one of the many failed attempts at producing a viable contemporary translation. Fortunately, the exhibit included some criticisms of the NEB from the time of its publication. No less a man than T.S. Eliot had summarized the NEB as “vulgar, trivial and pedantic.” It turns out I was not alone in my assessment.

On a more familial note, in the past year, my twenty year old daughter, a university student, expressed her intention of buying a Bible of her own. I gave some fatherly advice, based, I assumed, on some actual knowledge of the field, I suggested she purchase the Revised Standard Version, the RSV – after research and comparison, she ended up buying the KJV. I stand corrected.

It is essential to note that there have been two distinct phases in the late 20th century explosion of Bible translations. The first phase began in the immediate post-war period and lasted until the 1980's and was based upon two primary concerns. First, the assumption that the KJV and all derivative revisions such as the RSV were insufficiently accurate translations and that the style of English employed was stiff, dated and academic. Secondly, and intimately connected with the first assumption, was the notion that newer translations had to be less formal, more folksy and thereby, it was assumed, more relevant and accessible to the modern hip reader. In sum, Scripture now had to appeal to, even attract and engage, the reader. Attempts at being more literally accurate include the American Standard Version, the translation adopted by the Gideons as well as the Jerusalem Bible and the New International Version, (NIV). As for attempts at engaging the audience with ease of reading as well as art, the Good News Version in Today's English remains popular. This edition, or more accurately, paraphrase, severely limits the number of vocabulary words employed in the translation. Tellingly, the original audience envisioned by this effort was those for whom English was a second language. Nonetheless it persists as a popular edition with English readers.

Many of the considerations involved in the precise and accurate translation of the Bible were abandoned in the 1980s. A new, politically correct, imperative took the field and triumphed over other considerations, especially that of accuracy of translation – the concern in question was inclusive language. The concept of inclusive language reflects a concern over the perceived 'maleness' and patriarchy inherent in the Scriptures. The goal is to eliminate 'male' references perceived as unnecessary and inessential to the translated text. As a result, terms such as *he, his, him* and even *man* which are found in the original languages are omitted from the translated text and replaced with gender neutral terms such as *we, us, they, them, their, those* and *person or persons*. The result is a 'politically correct' translation which consciously chooses to ignore or 'improve' on what is found in the original Hebrew or Greek. As a result, we now live in a period when an ideological imperative has produced 'correct' translations for our time. It must however be understood that this is a deliberate choice precisely not to translate the text found in the actual Bible.

This ideological trend has produced a whole host of **new** editions of Scripture translations. The NRSV (New Revised Standard Version) being but one. Ironically, one result of this trend has been to render one of the strongest criticisms of the KJV mute – the claim that it was no longer the most literally accurate translation reflecting modern advances in Biblical textual scholarship. This criticism no longer holds for we have now entered the age where translations have a predetermined agenda as to what is to be translated and transmitted to the reading audience. If it is deemed to violate the inclusive language principle, the English reader of new translations will never know for they will not see the original terms translated. Furthermore, the new translations do not tell the reader precisely where the original texts have

been 'corrected.' The reader is left in ignorance. What is more, even the introductions to editions which engage in gender neutral renderings do not clearly and systematically relate how the gender neutral translation policy was applied. Again, the reader is left in the dark, reduced to guessing at what the guidelines and policies were that the faceless translation committee followed. Clarity of the scriptural text, accuracy of translation from the original languages and transparency of meaning have all been compromised.

All of a sudden and, quite unexpectedly, the KJV translators are looking less dated and far less unreliable. Granted, they were working from somewhat dated manuscripts but they were honestly seeking to translate clearly and accurately, the Bible, as the Word of God they believed it to be. They were possessed of no ideological agendas which pre-empted what was to be found in Scripture and which dictated what could be shown to the readers of their translation. It appears that on this 400th anniversary year, we now have something new to take note of and to appreciate, about both King James' translators and their translation.