



## The Impact of the King James Bible, 1611-2011



## **Impact of the King James Bible.**

**King James Bible.** London : Robert Barker, 1611

The “He” and “She” Bibles are both from the first edition of the King James Bible. Mistakes were corrected as the Bible was printed so there are many differences between bibles of this edition. Perhaps the most notable difference is in Ruth 3:15 where the earlier volumes read “and he went into the citie” (as shown at the right) and the later ones say “and she went into the citie.”

The Hebrew text says “he,” but in the context of the story, it is Ruth (“she”) who went into the city. Because the manuscript submitted to the printer disappeared, perhaps in a fire, it is not known what the translators intended.

The “She” Bible at the left is open to Job 4:6 where the word “crudle,” a variant of “curdle,” appears. It appears to have been used from about 1580 through 1630.

## **Later English versions**

**King James Bible.** Cambridge: Roger Daniel & Thomas Buck, 1638. (second Cambridge edition)

The 1611 Bible was beautifully printed, but the printer, Robert Barker, experienced a number of financial reverses. In fact, he died in debtor’s prison. In order to recover his outlay, subsequent editions were produced more cheaply and the quality, both aesthetic and editorial suffered.

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After 1534, in the reign of Henry VIII, Bibles could be printed only by the King's Printer, Cambridge University or Oxford University. The royal charter for Cambridge was reaffirmed in 1628 and the University lost no time in producing a fine edition.

The printers of this first Cambridge edition were Thomas and John Buck. They made nearly 200 corrections to the text imposing consistent spellings of names and correcting plural and singular noun constructions. The intent was only to correct the language, not to change the meaning. The only exception to this was the change to Job 4:6 from

“is not this thy fear, thy confidence; the uprightness of thy ways and thy hope?”

to

“is not thy fear, thy confidence; and the uprightness of thy ways, thy hope?”

On display is the second edition, printed in 1638, by Roger Daniel & Thomas Buck which includes the Book of Common Prayer and Sternhold and Hopkins metric version of the Psalms with tunes from the Geneva Psalter.

### **King James Bible. “The Vinegar Bible.” Oxford: John Baskett, 1717**

In 1632, Oxford followed Cambridge in having its charter reaffirmed but decided not to exercise that monopoly for 40 years in return for payments from the King's Printer. In 1673, they got into the business of publishing the Bible with a very modest volume followed by a more serious scholarly effort.

In 1717, John Baskett mounted a larger something or other to produce a fine edition of the larger volumes for use in churches. The paper was very fine, the engravings and decorative initial letters were exceptional.

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Unfortunately, the editorial quality did not match the physical beauty of the volume. This Bible is often referred to as the *Vinegar Bible* after an especially egregious error where a heading in the book of Luke referring to the Parable of the Vineyard as the Parable of the Vinegar.

### **King James Bible. Cambridge : John Baskerville, 1763.**

John Baskerville was best known for the design of his typeface. The Baskerville type, used for labels throughout this exhibit, is characterized by the contrast between the broad and thin strokes, elegant tapered lines and the roundness of rounded letters. To show the type to its best advantage, he developed “wove” paper which he put through rollers to create a finer texture than existing papers and he developed a blacker ink to heighten the contrast between ink and paper.

The title page for his New Testament with its generous margins and ample white space between the lines of text shows his design at its most elegant.

Baskerville was an emphatic atheist – he asked specifically to be buried in unconsecrated ground in his garden. Nonetheless, he put himself out to publish a beautiful Bible. It was, unfortunately not a financial success. In a moment of discouragement, he writes a friend

“If this does not sell, I shall be obliged to sacrifice a small Patrimony which brings me in 74 pounds a Year to this Business of Printing; which I am heartily tired of & repent I ever attempted.”

Note that he indicates the dates of events such as Daniel being cast into the lions’ den in the margins of the text. Ussher’s dates (Daniel in the lion’s den –537 BC

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### King James Bible. Oxford : T. Wright and W. Gill, 1769

*Benjamin Blayney based this edition on the principles of S. F. Parris, at Cambridge. The text used for the King James Bible today, is essentially this text.*

*Beyond correcting errors of the post-1611 editions, Parris worked to bring plural nouns and verbs into agreement, to replace archaic terms with more modern ones and to insert apostrophes to indicate possessives. Blayney did a more thorough job of implementing these changes.*

*He also corrected the dates that appear in the margins. Those dates were originally determined by James Ussher, Archbishop of Armagh, in his monumental chronology. In this work he had to take into consideration some of the inconsistencies between passages and times when the sun stood still or, even, moved backwards. The date of creation of the world was, according to his calculations, Sunday October 23, 4004 BC. Dates for all of the important events are recorded in the margins of the Blayney revision.*

*According to Gordon Campbell, “The first editions of Blayney’s and Parris’s Bibles are now comparatively rare books, because the warehouses of the London booksellers who held the wholesale stock both fell victim to serious fires.”*

## The Impact of the King James Bible

### The King James Bible in America

Although the Pilgrims and Puritans were partial to the Geneva Bible, William Bradford stepped off the Mayflower in 1620 with a King James Bible which would become the mainstay of American religion for three centuries.

In the colonial era, bibles were imported from England as English law limited the right to print the King James Bible to the King's printer and Cambridge and Oxford universities. Unfortunately, trade restrictions imposed in the 1770's halted the supply of bibles to the colonies. To remedy the situation, the Continental Congress asked for bids but, in the end, chose to import bibles more cheaply from the Netherlands. The project came to nothing as the Revolution intervened.

Robert Aitken, one of the bidders, published a New Testament in 1777. The entire bible was too vast an undertaking at that time – its size and complexity were greater than any other colonial printing efforts. But a few years later, the success of the New Testament encouraged him to publish the entire bible. It was a financial failure as trade with Europe resumed and flooded the market with much less expensive volumes.

By 1816, Elias Boudinot founded the American Bible Society out of his concern that the Bible no longer occupied a central place in the lives of Americans. The Society's mission was to see that bibles were available, at a reasonable cost, to every household in the nation. By the end of the nineteenth century, they had printed over 32 million bibles. They were able to price them affordably by employing the newest high speed presses, inexpensive papers, cloth bindings, and centralized production of everything from printing to marketing and distribution.

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At the same time, commercial publishers produced splendid volumes to appeal to the rising middle class and an increasingly well-educated public. The basic biblical text was supplemented by commentaries, glossaries, historical notes and illustrations that appealed to the 19<sup>th</sup> century interest in archaeology, and pages on which to record family histories and even to insert family photographs. Family bibles were often displayed in a central place in the home, demonstrating the high regard in which a cultured family held the volume. The Harper's Illuminated Bible incorporated 1600 illustrations and critics charged that such heavy reliance on pictures led people away from a connection with the text and to a more simplified, picture book engagement with the Bible..

After the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, interest in a revision of the King James Bible gathered steam on both sides of the Atlantic. A number of discoveries provided texts that were unknown to earlier translators. Two English committees (one for the Old Testament and one for the New) and, likewise, two American committees were appointed. The rules laid out for the translators were very similar to the original 1611 rules. The New Testament was published in 1881 to great initial acclaim, although enthusiasm waned. The Old Testament came out in 1885. The American committee made just a few changes to the whole Bible (mostly to spelling) and published the result as the American Standard Version in 1901.

In the twentieth century the Revised Standard Version in 1951 is "an authorized revision of the American Standard Version and in 1989, the New Revised Standard Version was completed. It was a further revision that took advantage of scholarship based on the Dead Sea Scrolls which were not available to earlier translators.

## The Impact of the King James Bible

### Impact of the King James Bible on literature

*It is perhaps not surprising that we often hear echoes of the King James Bible in works of literature. As early as 1753, King James Bible was described by Robert Lowth as literary and classes on The Bible as Literature were popular well into the twentieth century.*

*American literature, in particular, is full of examples. In our early years, the Bible – nearly always the KJV – was the most commonly owned book and was used to teach reading. Its cadences, turns of phrase and vocabulary were absorbed into our speaking and writing.*

*Most obvious are the direct quotations and references to people and events of the Bible. When Herman Melville began Moby Dick with “Call me Ishmael,” he signaled that the narrator was an outcast. His readers may even have recalled the words of the angel,*

*“And he will be as a wild man;  
His hand will be against every man  
And every man’s hand against him.”*

*Rudyard Kipling’s Just So story, How the leopard got his spots, comes directly from the question in the book of Jeremiah, “Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots?”*

*Other works incorporate biblical idioms – an idiom being a word or phrase that is widely recognized and used, almost unconsciously, in a figurative sense. When Captain Ahab (Moby Dick) complained,*

*“Forty years of continual whaling! forty years of privation, and peril, and storm-time! forty years on the pitiless sea! for forty years has Ahab forsaken the peaceful land, for forty years to make war on the horrors of the deep!”*

*the reader would not have missed the fact that it was a long time of trial like the 40 years Moses wandered in the wilderness, 40 days of the flood or Jesus’ sojourn in the desert.*



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Sometimes, the figurative meaning of a single word comes from the Bible. “Root” and “seed” refer to ancestors and children; “dust” to mortality; and, “breath” to life. Faulkner uses all of these repeatedly in *Absalom, Absalom*, in which Thomas Sutpen watched the great dynasty he had hoped to found come to nothing as the children he brought into the world squabble and are killed.

At yet other times we encounter *biblicizing*; using archaic forms of words encountered in the Bible like “hast,” or syntax, like placing “not” after a verb, as in “But if I know not even the tail of the whale.”

Walt Whitman simply used the rhythm and structure of I Corinthians 13:4-7,

Charity suffreth long and is kind; charity envieth not:  
Charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up  
Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own,  
Is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil,  
Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth  
Beareth all things, believeth all things,  
Hopeth all things, endureth all things.

in his introduction to *Leaves of Grass* as he wrote

“Liberty relies upon itself, invites no one, promises nothing, sits in calmness and light, is positive and composed, and knows no discouragement.”

In *The Sun Also Rises*, Ernest Hemingway uses the device frequently encountered in the King James Bible, of listing or stringing phrases together connecting them with “and” implying no cause or effect, before or after. Here, he describes the land, seen from the window of a bus, giving a sense of steady forward motion.

“Then the road came over the crest, flattened out, and went into a forest. It was a forest of cork oaks, and the sun came through the trees in patches, and there were cattle grazing back in the trees.”

## The Impact of the King James Bible

### The King James in Speeches of our Presidents

The King James Bible was “appointed to be read in churches,” meaning that its large size and print were it easy to read from the pulpit. It is not known if the translators considered how the text would sound but it is very grand and beautiful when read aloud and it is no wonder that quotations, idioms and cadences of the King James Bible are used on public occasions of great importance.

The first president to use it was George Washington, but Lincoln may have used it most effectively. He read the Bible often and digested the words and rhythms so thoroughly that, although he seldom quoted the Bible, his speeches, The Gettysburg Address and his second inaugural address in particular, echo the King James Bible.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt was inaugurated in 1933 as the Depression deepened. It was a somber speech. He hit hard at banking institutions, referring to them as “money changers,” “driven from the temple” and urging his countrymen to eschew greed and use money instead for high moral purposes.

Although John Fitzgerald Kennedy did not take the oath of office on a King James Bible, he quoted from it twice in his address. In the most often remembered phrase of the address, he used a device frequently employed by the King James translators, placing “not” after the verb in “Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.”

Barak Obama, in a speech on Afghanistan that was otherwise not particularly poetic, closes with the poetic cadences of the King James and of Lincoln, with alliterating parallel phrases increasing in intensity with each repetition, “with confidence in our cause, with faith in our fellow citizen, with hope in our hearts...”

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## For more reading:

Robert Alter. *Pen of Iron : American prose and the King James Bible*.  
Princeton : Princeton University Press, 2010.

Gordon Campbell. *Bible : the story of the King James Version, 1611-2011*.  
Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2011.

David Crystal. *Begat : the King James Bible and the English language*.  
Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2010.

Paul C. Gutjahr. *A history of the Good Book in the United States, 1777-1880*.  
Stanford : Stanford University Press, 1999.

Christopher de Hamel. *The Book : a history of the Bible*. London : Phaidon, 2005.

David Katz. *God's last words : reading the English Bible from the Reformation to fundamentalism*. New Haven : Yale University Press, 2004.

*Experience the Bible*, an excellent series of videos produced by the King James Bible Trust and viewable at <http://www.kingjamesbibletrust.org/resources/experience-the-bible-revolution/>

**Quayle Bible Collection at  
Baker University  
548 Eighth Street  
Baldwin City, KS**

**The Quayle Bible Collection was a gift of Bishop William A. Quayle, sometime student, professor and president of Baker University. He built an outstanding collection of Bibles and other sacred materials. These rare books and manuscripts include early handwritten and printed materials, handwritten scrolls, significant Bible translations and editions with an additional collection of related reference volumes.**

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**Hours are 1:00—4:00 Saturday & Sunday through July 2011. To arrange a visit at other times or a guided tour, please contact us at:**

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quayle@bakeru.edu**

The 2012-2013 exhibit opens September 1, 2012. *The Secret Life of a Jacobean Drawing Room*, will feature a 17th century room. The 17th century in England was a time of great religious ferment and books from the Quayle Collection ~ Bibles, catechisms, sermons and prayers ~ will be on display to illustrate this.