

# Why We Hold to the KJV

## *Part 8 – The Unmatched Heritage of the KJV*

**Text:** Proverbs 21:1

### **Introduction:**

1. In our last lesson we considered the 5 pre-KJV Bibles (Coverdale Bible, Matthews Bible, Great Bible, Geneva Bible & Bishop's Bible). These Bibles built on the pioneering work of Wycliffe and especially Tyndale and form a very important part of the heritage of the Bible in English.
2. The KJV was the crowning product of over 200 years of translation work in relation to the English Bible. The result was an unrivaled masterpiece that has stood the test of time.
3. In this lesson we begin studying the history of the KJV specifically. We will learn how God moved in the heart of the king of England at that time, James I, to commission the project. We will get a sense for the spiritual and academic environment of the times in which the KJV was translated and the qualifications of the translators involved in the project.
4. Through it all, we see GOD'S HAND WORKING IN HISTORY to give us this glorious Bible in the English language.
5. Note: The majority of the information below is drawn from David Cloud's book, "Faith vs. the Modern Bible versions" as well as Robert Sargent's excellent course entitled "English Bible Manuscript Evidence".

### **I. KING JAMES I**

Let's commence with a little history concerning the English King God used to commission the project.

- A. James Stuart (1566-1625) was king (James VI) of Scotland before he was king (James I) of England.
- B. James' father, Henry Stuart (Lord Darnley) died in mysterious circumstances shortly after James was born. There is strong reason to believe Queen Mary was behind the assassination of her own husband.
- C. James became king of England in March 1603 upon the death of Elizabeth. He was the closest living relative of the unmarried and childless queen, being the son of Elizabeth's cousin. He united England and Scotland under one reign.
- D. King James married Anne of Denmark and they had 8 children together but only 3 of their children lived beyond infancy.
- E. King James was known as the most educated sovereign in Europe. In spite of some of his physical problems, he had a very sharp mind. By

the age of seven, he was able to read a chapter of the Bible out of Latin into French and next out of French into English. Before he was 20, he had translated 30 of the Psalms in metrical form and as a parallel venture had paraphrased the Revelation of St John. Pg. 526 (Cloud)

- F. King James was not a homosexual as has been charged. He fathered eight children with his wife, and spoke fondly of his intimate relationship with her. The charge of homosexuality was made by the king's enemies and only after his death.
- G. Sadly, though, King James was a persecutor. Many fled his tyranny, including Puritans in 1607 and the Pilgrims in 1620.
- H. The last man burned alive in England for his faith was Edward Wightman, a Baptist, on April 11, 1612.

## **II. THE HAMPTON COURT CONFERENCE**

- A. King James I made the decision to create the translation at Hampton Court in 1604.
- B. A conference was held at Hampton Court at which the Puritans petitioned the new king for spiritual reform in the Church of England.
- C. Puritan leader John Reynolds proposed a new translation of the Bible and the king agreed.
- D. Hampton Court Palace was a magnificent palace on the Thames.

## **III. THE TRANSLATION GROUPS**

- A. There were roughly 50 translators
- B. They were divided into six companies and each group was assigned a portion to translate
- C. Two committees met at Oxford
- D. Two met at Cambridge
- E. Two met at Westminster in the Jerusalem Chamber

## **IV. THE TRANSLATION RULES (15 rules)**

- A. THAT the basic text shall be that of the Bishop's Bible, with as little altered as the truth of the original will permit.
- B. THAT proper names, including those of the authors of Biblical Books, shall be retained in the ordinary spelling as far as might be.
- C. THAT the old ecclesiastical words (such as "church") shall be retained.
- D. THAT words of more than one meaning shall be used in the sense found in most of the ancient fathers, appropriate to the context and consistent with the analogy of the faith. (In addition, to avoid any

formalistic or stilted literary style, a variety of English words were used to render the same Hebrew or Greek word throughout the translation.)

- E. THAT the chapter divisions shall follow those of the Bishop's Bible.
- F. THAT no marginal notes shall be added, except for the explanation of Hebrew or Greek words which cannot be briefly and fitly expressed in the text.
- G. THAT cross-references shall only relate to relevant passages elsewhere in scripture.
- H. THAT translations and revisions were to be done first by individuals, then submitted to the whole company for scrutiny, criticism, and final approval.
- I. THAT as each section of the books are completed, they shall be submitted to the other companies *"to be considered of seriously and judiciously, for his Majesty is very careful in this point."*
- J. THAT if any company, upon reviewing a book, doubt or differ upon any place, they shall notify the original company. If their objection is declined, the matter shall be settled at a general meeting.
- K. THAT in cases of special obscurity, the translators shall be entitled to request assistance from any learned man in the land.
- L. THAT each bishop shall seek the judgment of those among his clergy who are "skillful in tongues" upon the work at hand.
- M. THAT the directors of each company shall be Deans of Westminster and Chester, and the Regius Professors of Oxford and Cambridge universities.
- N. THAT the following translations shall be used when they agree better with the text than the Bishop's Bible, viz., Tyndale, Coverdale, Matthew, the Great Bible, and the Geneva Bible.
- O. THAT three or four of the most ancient and grave divines, from either of the universities and not employed in the translating, shall be overseers of the work.

## **V. THE ENVIRONMENT OF THE TRANSLATION**

What was the religious and academic climate of that day?

### **A. The Spiritual Climate**

1. The KJV came out of a period of intense persecution and spiritual revival.
2. Examples: Wycliffe, Tyndale, Coverdale, John Rogers etc...
3. The general population was made up of a church-going people who were knowledgeable of the Bible.
4. "It is doubtful that there has ever been a nation more steeped in basic Bible knowledge than 17<sup>th</sup> century England. The people were

required to attend church, and at church they heard the entire Bible read and sung in the liturgy.” D. Cloud

5. True Bible believers were prepared to earnestly contend for the faith, even unto death.

### **B. The Literary Climate**

1. By the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the English translation of the Bible had been through a rigorous process of refinement. “The wording of the KJB represents the labors of centuries of brilliant, believing, sacrificial, godly scholarship. Dozens of some of the best biblical linguists who have ever lived applied their minds and their prayers to translating into English precisely what the Hebrew and Greek text mean.” (Cloud)
2. By the early 17th century, the English language was at its apex. Alexander McClure observed: “The English language had passed through many and great changes, and had at last reached the very height of its purity and strength. The Bible has ever since been the grand English classic. It is still the noblest monument of the power of the English speech. It is the pattern and standard of excellence therein” (*The Translators Revived*).

### **C. The Academic Climate**

1. It was a time of great emphasis on rigorous academic discipline. Large portions of the Scriptures were known by heart not only by ministers but also laymen and children.
2. “English children, from the earliest age, were disciplined in prayer, in reading books of devotion and in close knowledge of Bible histories and Bible doctrine...Hence, we notice psychologically, there were developed enormous industry in learning, endurance in listening to preachers and teachers, tenacious memory and the power of visualizing and concentrating the thoughts on Bible heroes, Bible stories, Bible language and Bible aspirations.” (The Cambridge History of English and American Literature)
3. In the Universities, Theology was the chief subject. There was a strong emphasis on learning Hebrew and Greek.
4. The translators represented the best biblical scholarship in the world.
5. They were also godly men, with few exceptions, who loved the Bible and who trusted the Holy Spirit to guide them.
6. “It is confidently expected that the reader of these pages will yield to the conviction that all the colleges of Great Britain and America, even in this proud day of boastings, could not bring together the same number of divines equally qualified by learning and piety for

the great undertaking” (Alexander McClure, *Translators Revived*, 1855)

7. They were “giants of Scriptural scholarship.” A biographical history of all who had part in the Translation might be an effectual antidote to the itch for superseding their work, which seems to trouble so many in our days” (Authur Coxe, *An Apology for the Common English Bible*, 1857)
8. Unlike today, these men grew up with the biblical languages and Latin. They learned these in their childhood and perfected the use of them throughout their lives. This is not true today. Even those who are scholars in the biblical languages don’t usually begin to learn them until their adult years.
9. “It was a time when the study of sacred literature was pursued by thousands with a zeal amounting to a passion” (McClure).
10. Such an atmosphere exists nowhere in the world today. It could be compared only to something like sports, in which thousands compete earnestly from their youth to win a place on a professional team.
11. The King James translators as a whole were masters not only of Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek and Latin but of all the cognate or associate languages that are necessary for research into ancient documents relative to the Bible. These include Persian, Coptic, Syriac and Chaldee.

## VI. THE KJV TRANSLATORS

We will briefly consider 8 examples out of the approx. 50 translators to illustrate the kind of academic credentials that were typical of the men who were on the translation committee. (See slide presentation for details)

- A. Lancelot Andrewes
- B. Miles Smith
- C. John Bois
- D. Thomas Bilson
- E. William Bedwell
- F. Henry Savile
- G. Lawrence Chaderton
- H. John Rainolds

**CONCLUSION:** The KJV is a testament to the hand of God working in history. Let’s read it, study it, memorize it, love it, and obey it.