

THE KING JAMES BIBLE AND BAPTISTS OVER 400 YEARS¹

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The King James Version was commissioned in 1604 at the Hampton Court Conference, a gathering called by the new monarch of the United Kingdom with a view to easing tensions that had existed in the Elizabethan Church of England. The new King, James I (of England & VI of Scotland), accepted a proposal for the commissioning of a new Bible translation put to him by the leading Puritan scholar at the conference, Dr John Reynolds (1549-1607), President of Corpus Christi College, Oxford.² Why did Reynolds call for a new Bible translation when the Geneva Bible was so popular amongst devout Protestant Christians? It is likely that he wished to see a replacement for the version that was most common in parish churches in England, the Bishops' Bible. Archbishop Matthew Parker (1504-75) had asked the previous monarch, Elizabeth I, to authorise this Bible alone for reading in church since "in certain places be publically used some translations which have not been laboured in your Realm, having inspersed divers prejudicial notes." He wanted "to draw to one uniformity." This version was not a work of particularly high merit, though this was unlikely to have been the reason why the Queen declined his request, but its significance in this context is that James required it to serve as the basis of the 1611 revision of the English Bible.³ Parker, together with Edmund Grindal (1519-83), Bishop of London, made a concerted effort to restrict the supply of Geneva Bibles in order to encourage usage of the Bishops' Bible. However, "his [Parker's] lack of confidence [in it] sealed the fate of the Bishops' Bible".⁴ It is probable therefore, that Reynolds wanted a version of the Bible that would gain general acceptance throughout the land, something that did not happen with the previous Bishops' Bible. It would have greatly surprised him how long it would take before the King James Version became accepted as the "Authorised Version" in the United Kingdom.

The Geneva Bible was the most popular English language version in the years leading up to 1611. Between 1560 and 1611 there were sixty-four separate editions of the Geneva Bible or New Testament produced.⁵ By way of contrast with the Bishops' Bible, between 1583 and 1603 only seven editions of the Bishops' Bible were produced compared to fifty-one of the

¹ Some material used in this paper has also contributed to B.R Talbot, "The King James Bible: A Reflection on 400 Years of its history," *Evangelical Review of Theology*, 35.4 (October 2011).

² William Barlow, *The Summe and Substance of the Conference Which It Pleaseth His Excellent Majestie to have with the Lords, Bishops and Other of His Clergie at Hampton Court, 14 January 1603 [1604]*. See also 'To the Reader', the Preface to the first edition of 1611, *The Holy Bible 1611 Edition* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010), p. vii. Details of the exchange are given in D. Daniell, *The Bible in English* (London: Yale University Press, 2003), 432-436.

³ S.L. Greenslade, ed., *The Cambridge History of the Bible: The West from the Reformation to the Present Day* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 159-161.

⁴ A.W. Pollard, *Records of the English Bible* (London: Henry Frowde, 1911), 40.

⁵ Daniell, *Bible in English*, 369.

Geneva edition.⁶ The fundamental motivation for the production of the Geneva Bible was to make the Bible accessible and intelligible to a lay readership. In addition, it contained marginal notes that proved both immensely popular and helpful to its Protestant readership during the great religious controversies of Elizabethan and Jacobean England. It is generally agreed that this Bible version was the best in the English language at that time.⁷ As a result, when the King James Bible appeared in print sometime between March 1611 and February 1612 very few British Christians would have been aware of its arrival. The launch of the new Bible version took place without any fanfare. In fact even the Stationer’s Company that printed it did not record the actual date of first publication. For them it was simply a revision of the Bishops’ Bible, the Anglican Church’s official Bible.⁸ The earliest description of this version was given in February 1612 where it was described as: “a great Bible of the new translation”.⁹ The origins of this translation (KJV) of the Scriptures was, therefore, much more humble than would have been expected by its later devotees.

In the light of its low-key launch it is no surprise that this Bible version struggled to claim support from the vast majority of Protestant churchgoers in the United Kingdom. In fact the very first time it was included in a formal list of English-language Bible versions was as late as 1645, where it was referred to as “the last translation procured by King James” or “the new translation”, and uniquely, “the reformed and revised edition of the Bible”.¹⁰ Throughout the first half of the seventeenth century the Geneva Bible was the version of choice not only of the Puritans in England, but also their counterparts in America and on the European mainland. The spiritual ancestors of those Christians who in a later era would refer to themselves as Evangelicals, would almost unanimously have chosen the Geneva Bible as their preferred English-language translation. A good illustration of the esteem in which the Geneva Bible was held by Protestant Dissenters was related in a satirical pamphlet published in 1642. The story concerned Thomas Williams who ran a haberdashers shop in Oxford. In December 1641 a fire broke out in his shop. Smelling smoke, Mr. and Mrs. Williams went downstairs to investigate the problem. They saw their goods on fire, including their highly valued Geneva Bible. The booklet reported that this couple could more easily have accepted their losses had the burnt Bible “been a copy of the KJV with the Apocrypha and [if it had been] bound with a copy of *The Book of Common Prayer*”.¹¹ Here is an excerpt from Thomas Weaver’s satire on the plight of this Dissenting couple.

5. He heard some cry, Fire, fire, amaine,
 and said that were he slack,
 Great John of All trades would againe
 be brought to his first pack:
 Then hasting downe to see what burn’d,

⁶ A. McGrath, *In The Beginning: The Story of the King James Bible* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2001), 128-129.

⁷ For example, McGrath, *In The Beginning*, 118-119; Greenslade, *History of the Bible*, 159; D. Wilson, *The People’s Bible* (Oxford: Lion Hudson, 2010), 68; F.F. Bruce, *The English Bible* (London: Methuen, 1963), 90-92.

⁸ D. Norton, *The King James Bible: A Short History from Tyndale to Today* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 133.

⁹ Pollard, *Records of the English Bible*, 66.

¹⁰ Preface, possibly by Downname, to *Annotations upon all the Books of the Old and New Testament*, fols. B3^r-B4^r cited by Norton, *King James Bible*, 134.

¹¹ Cited by L. Kreitzer, “William Kiffen and the Prodigal Printer Henry Hills: Publish Abroad: Printing and the King James Bible,” chapter twelve in L. Kreitzer, *William Kiffen and his World* (Part.2; Oxford: Centre for Baptist History and Heritage, 2012).

the smoke did almost stop
His breath: the new Exchange was turn'd
to a Tobacco shop.

6. His wife came downe at that report,
her cloaths hung in such pickle,
As she were new come from the sport
after a Conventicle:
And first in these flames she espide
a pure Geneva Bible,
With gilded leaves, and strings beside,
that were not contemptible.

7. But with lesse griefe he could have seen't,
as he then said to some one,
Had but the Apocrypha beene in't
and Prayers that we call Common:
The Practice there of Pietie,
and good St Katherine Stubs
Were martyr'd, which oft quoted hee
had heard in severall Tubs.¹²

This version became enormously popular with more than seventy editions published between 1560 and 1640. In England alone more than half a million copies were sold of the Geneva Bible. It was crucial for its availability that it was printed in the country between 1576 and 1640. The Geneva Bible was also the first English-language Bible published in Scotland, in 1579. However, although the Bible was in English, the dedication of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland was in the Scots language.¹³ This was the Bible of choice of most evangelical Protestants. No wonder the KJV struggled to make an impact in such an unsympathetic spiritual environment.

There were, though, additional reasons for the unattractiveness of this new Bible, in comparison with the much loved Geneva version. William Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury from 1633-1645, was a militant Arminian who loathed the Calvinistic theology of the study notes of the Geneva Bible. Laud drew attention to the primary reasons, he believed, were behind the popularity of this version that was imported from the printing presses of Amsterdam. He wrote: "For the books which came thence were better print, better bound, better paper, and for all the charges of bringing, sold better cheap. And would any man buy a worse Bible dearer, that might have a better more cheap?"¹⁴ Laud, for these reasons, banned the printing of the Geneva Bible in England by the King's Printer, Robert Barker, who had a

¹² "A Satire of Thomas Williams" in Thomas Weaver's *Songs and Poems of Love and Drollery* (1654), in Kreitzer, "William Kiffen and the Prodigal Printer Henry Hills". I am thankful to Dr Kreitzer for providing a pre-publication copy of this work.

¹³ G. Campbell, *Bible: The Story of the King James Version 1611-2011* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 26-27.

¹⁴ W. Laud, *Works*, Vol. IV, 263; quoted by Norton, *History of the English Bible*, 91. Puritan and London bookseller, Michael Sparke, who imported Bibles from Continental Europe, in defiance of the Government restrictions on this trade, strongly opposed the practice of printing monopolies and from the opposite theological point of view to Laud mentioned the same reasons as the Archbishop for the popularity of the Geneva Bible (*Scintilla*, 1641; reprinted in A.S. Herbert, *Historical Catalogue of Printed Editions of the English Bible, 1525-1961* (London: The British and Foreign Bible Society, 1968), 183-187.

monopoly at that time on Bible production and who had invested substantially in the KJV and needed it to become a commercial success. Without the legal restrictions imposed on the printing and importation of the Geneva Bible, it is likely that the KJV would have had very little commercial success.

However, there were two other reasons for the promotion of the KJV at the expense of this more popular version. The first of these related to the proclamation of 1541 specifying a need for Bibles “of the largest and greatest volume” for use in parish churches.¹⁵ There were only three Bibles printed successively with the required specifications, the Great Bible, the Bishop’s Bible and the KJV. Between 1612 and 1641 only the KJV was available to meet this requirement. It was referred to as “a Bible of the latest edition,” “the last translation,” or “a Bible of the largest volume”. It is interesting that in the first half of the seventeenth century the people of that era were having some difficulty distinguishing between the KJV and the Geneva Bible in terms of the translation of the text, but by contrast found it relatively easy to distinguish the KJV as an artifact.¹⁶ The second of these was the continuing objection by the Royalists to the study notes and theological comments on the text of the Geneva Bible. William Laud, after making reference to James I’s criticism of the notes, stated that this issue was just as pressing in the 1640s. He observed “that now of late these notes were more commonly used to ill purposes than formerly and that that was the cause why the High Commission was more careful and strict against them than before.”¹⁷ In the light of the execution of Charles I a few years later in 1649, the political concerns of Laud and his colleagues appeared to be well grounded. However, William Prynne, a Puritan with more evangelical and Low Church sympathies, while accepting that the annotations were a cause of conflict, suggested that the real issue was a fear on the part of Laud and his supporters that these comments on the biblical text “should over-much instruct the people in the knowledge of the Scriptures”.¹⁸ By the mid-seventeenth century there had been no significant debate over the alleged superiority or inferiority of the KJV as a Bible translation. Differences of opinion concerned the study notes accompanying the biblical text of the Geneva Bible. The more fervent and Bible-centred Protestant Christians retained their affection for the older version at home, but it was the KJV that regular worshippers heard read, Sunday by Sunday, in the local parish church. This version was now accepted and respected, and crucially after three decades of usage was one with which British Christians were increasingly familiar.

Baptists and the Early Years of the King James Version

Is there any evidence of Baptist connections with or usage of the KJV in the first half of the seventeenth century? It is clear that this is a field in which very little research has been done on this particular subject, but it is likely over time that a proportion of Baptists would have had access to this new Bible version, although it is most likely that it would not have displaced the Geneva Bible in their affections. At the present time, the earliest known reference to the KJV in the work of a Baptist at that time came in *An Appendix to a Confession of Faith 1646* produced by Benjamin Cox and appended to the 1646 edition of the *First London Confession*.¹⁹ Cox (1595-c.1664) had been an ordained Anglican clergyman,

¹⁵ Pollard, *Records of the English Bible*, 23.

¹⁶ Norton, *History of the English Bible*, 92.

¹⁷ Laud, *Works*, Vol IV, 262; quoted by Norton, *History of the English Bible*, 92.

¹⁸ W. Prynne, *Canterbury’s Doom* (London, 1646), 181; quoted by Norton, *History of the English Bible*, 92.

¹⁹ I am grateful to Dr Stephen Holmes, Senior Lecturer in Theology, University of St Andrews, for drawing my attention to Cox’s use of the KJV.

and appointed a lecturer (on the Bible) at Barnstaple in Devon between 1620 and 1627. While serving as a curate at Sampford Peverill, Devon, during the 1630s it is likely he became acquainted with a group of Baptists in the nearby community of Tiverton. However, by the 1640s he had joined first the General Baptists, having been convinced at that stage of a general redemption of humankind, before identifying with the Particular Baptists from December 1645.²⁰ In 1646, Cox wrote an appendix to accompany the second printing of the First London Confession of Faith, first issued by a group of seven London Particular Baptist congregations two years earlier in 1644. This document was written by this elderly minister “for the further clearing of truth and discovery of their mistake who have imagined a dissent in fundamentals where there is none” amongst English Particular Baptists.²¹ In a paragraph addressing some individuals who had claimed that God was the author of evil, Cox expressed his clear disagreement with this position. “It is a great sin to say that God is the author of sin.” After citing a number of Bible verses to support his argument, Cox turned to the text alleged to support this claim. “As touching that place which is here objected against us, viz. Amos 3:6, ‘Shall there be evil in a city and the Lord hath not done it?’” He turned to the alternative reading in the KJV as the preferred option. “We conceive that it is either to be rendered according to the last translation in the margin, ‘Shall there be evil in a city, and shall not the Lord do somewhat?’ or else that it is to be understood only of the evil of punishment, and not of the evil of sin.”²² Cox, as a Dissenter, together with his congregation, would normally have preferred the Geneva Bible for public worship; however, he both owned and used a KJV in his studies. It is likely that Cox was representative of educated Baptist leaders by the 1640s in consulting the newer version, but preferring the long-established one. Further studies, though, are required before this hypothesis can be confirmed.

A second Baptist with a connection to the KJV in the 1640s was the little-known printer, Henry Hills (c1625-1690).²³ Hills was a controversial figure whose religious allegiance appeared to change over the years when it became advantageous to him for professional reasons. Christopher Anderson, noting his engagement as a Bible printer by Charles II, stated that: “his moral character seems to have been far from correct...[he] had actually been employed in printing the Scriptures, and according to report, shamefully incorrect.”²⁴ Anderson drew attention to Hill’s Anglican connections and especially his later shameful Roman Catholic ties. “The displeasure of the God of Truth he had brought upon himself,” but this careful Baptist scholar omitted any reference to Hills’ earlier Baptist connections!²⁵ Hills was associated with leading London Baptist William Kiffen as early as July 1642 and was a member of Kiffen’s congregation for most of the Commonwealth era. He was first employed by Sir Thomas Fairfax in Oxford in 1647, then by the Army and the Council of State in 1653. In later years he was employed by Oliver and then Richard Cromwell. However, after the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, Hills discovered strong Anglican convictions that ensured that he served in the same capacity as an official printer of Charles II. Remarkably this leading printer retained his post under James II after declaring his acceptance of Roman

²⁰ S. Wright, *The Early English Baptists, 1603-1649* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2006), 117-119. M. Tolmie, *The Triumph of the Saints: The Separate Churches of London 1616-1649* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 61. M.K. Bell, *Apocalypse How? Baptist Movements during the English Revolution* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2000), 90.

²¹ *The First London Confession of Faith 1646 edition with an Appendix by Benjamin Cox* (Rochester, New York: Backus Books, 1981), 23.

²² *First London Confession of Faith 1646 edition with an Appendix by Benjamin Cox*, 26.

²³ Most of the information on Henry Hills was provided by Dr Larry Kreitzer, Regent’s Park College, Oxford.

²⁴ *The London Printer’s Lamentation or the Press Opprest and Overprest, 1660*; C. Anderson, *The Annals of the English Bible in Two Volumes* (London: William Pickering, 1845), Vol.1, 555.

²⁵ Anderson, *Annals of the English Bible*, Vol.1, 555-557.

Catholic beliefs! When James II fled to France in 1688 his official printer also went into exile in the same country. Hills died in France in November 1689. Beginning in 1647 and continuing up to 1689, over 900 titles, including various editions of the King James Bible, bear the name of Henry Hills on their imprint. A number of Baptist titles, together with other radical works were produced between 1648 and 1673, including *A Confession of Faith of Several Churches of Christ in the County of Somerset* (August 10, 1656), under the guidance of Particular Baptist minister Thomas Collier. It is probable that his most important Baptist publication was *The Humble Apology of Some Commonly Called Anabaptists* (January 28, 1661). This document was issued by seven London Baptist causes in the immediate aftermath of the revolt of the Fifth Monarchists led by Thomas Venner, who had tried to overthrow the restored monarchy in January 1661. The inevitable defeat of the plotters resulted in more than forty deaths caused by this conflict and the subsequent execution of all those implicated in this uprising. It is important to note that Hills was one of five signatories from William Kiffen's congregation within this pamphlet who stressed their loyalty to the King.²⁶ Hills interest in the KJV was professional as a printer. It is ironic that a Dissenter who most probably preferred the Geneva Bible spent a large proportion of his professional life promoting the sale and usage of the KJV

Baptists in the Era of the Consolidation of the King James Version

The KJV consolidated its position as the predominant Bible version both in the home as well as the church in the second half of the seventeenth century. This process took place as a result of two events. The first was the lack of availability of Geneva Bibles. After 1644 this version was neither printed in the United Kingdom nor officially imported from the Netherlands.²⁷ The second and equally important fact was the absence of requests for its recall, even after the departure of Laud and the execution of Charles I in 1649, together with the establishment of the Commonwealth in the early 1650s. It is significant that the eight editions of the Bible with the Geneva notes, printed between 1642 and 1715, all contained the KJV text.²⁸ In this era, more than half a century after the KJV had first appeared, the public perception of its main rival had changed in England. No longer was the Geneva Bible automatically the people's version, it was now seen more as one associated with the Puritans and with an anti-Royalist agenda.²⁹ In the seventeenth century although they were very familiar with the Geneva Bible and used it extensively, even radicals associated with the Dissenting tradition and Oliver Cromwell's regime had adopted the KJV as their primary Bible version. Two examples will illustrate this point. John Milton (1608-1674), the great scholar and writer of such well-known works as *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*, vehemently opposed the established church and supported the execution of Charles I, yet his personal Bible was a 1612 edition of the KJV printed by Robert Barker. It is this version of the Bible that predominates in biblical citations in his literary endeavors.³⁰ John Bunyan (1628-1688) was brought up in very humble circumstances, yet this Baptist preacher became

²⁶ Kreitzer, 'William Kiffen and the Prodigal Printer Henry Hills', 1-16.

²⁷ Campbell, *Bible: The Story of the King James Version*, 125.

²⁸ H. Hamlin, 'Bunyan's biblical progress', in H. Hamlin & N.W. Jones (eds), *The King James Bible after 400 Years* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 214.

²⁹ J. N. King & A.T. Pratt, "The materiality of English printed Bibles," in Hamlin & Jones, *King James Bible after 400 Years*, 88. See the discussion of some of the Geneva notes on this topic in McGrath, *In the Beginning*, 141-148.

³⁰ J.P. Rosenblatt, "Milton, Anxiety, and the King James Bible," in Hamlin & Jones, *King James Bible after 400 Years*, 181-201.

the author of numerous works, including the best-selling religious book (apart from the Bible) in the English-speaking world, *Pilgrim's Progress*. His biblical citations are almost certainly either from the Geneva or KJV Bibles. Yet it is clear that the Bible he used most was the KJV. In his 1665 work *The Holy City Or The New Jerusalem*, for example, Bunyan included a lengthy quotation of the biblical text from Revelation 21:10-22:4 to aid his readers in studying this topic. It would be natural for him to choose his preferred Bible version for this purpose.³¹ The vast majority of biblical quotations in *Pilgrim's Progress* or in his spiritual autobiography, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, come either from the KJV or from language shared by these two versions. It is probable that Milton and Bunyan were the first two major English Dissenting writers who were predominantly influenced by the KJV.³² However, Bunyan continued to use the Geneva Bible alongside the KJV with regular citations of the older version in his works.³³ For example, II Peter 1:17-19 (Geneva Bible) is probably cited from memory in his early work, *A Few Sighs from Hell*.³⁴ There are even occasions when he is quoting the Bible from memory and his quotation of a text is a combination of the Geneva and KJV renderings. This is seen in his expository comments on the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31).³⁵ In line with other Puritan and Dissenting ministers Bunyan had a high view of Scriptural authority,³⁶ but he was very open about accepting marginal readings of both the Geneva Bible³⁷ and the KJV,³⁸ if he felt they were justified. He also made a couple of references to William Tyndale's translation of the Bible.³⁹ The Bible version so closely associated with the monarchy and the established church had become the favoured version of radicals and dissenters like Bunyan and Milton by the second half of the seventeenth century.

In the eighteenth century, as in the previous one, variant texts of the KJV had circulated with unacceptable levels of printers' errors. Nonconformists, in particular, had drawn attention to them. William Kilburne had assembled a formidable list of typographical errors in his *Dangerous Errors in Several Late printed Bibles*, as early as 1660.⁴⁰ He was, though, only one of many writers to draw attention to this problem. Baptist minister Henry Jessey (1601-63), who was known as a "living concordance" of the original languages of the Bible, spoke for many Protestant Churchmen of his day when he stated that it is "our duty to endeavour to have the whole Bible rendered as exactly agreeing with the original as we can

³¹ J. Bunyan, *The Holy City Or The New Jerusalem*, in G. Offor, ed., *The Works of John Bunyan* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1991 [1854]), Vol.3, 399-400.

³² Hamlin, "Bunyan's biblical progress," 202-218.

³³ C. Hill, *A Turbulent, Seditious, and Factious People: John Bunyan and his Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 169.

³⁴ J. Bunyan, *A Few Sighs from Hell or The Groans of a Damned Soul* (1650), in Offor, ed., *John Bunyan*, Vol.3, 710.

³⁵ Bunyan, *A Few Sighs from Hell*, 677.

³⁶ For example, Hill, *John Bunyan and his Church*, 169.

³⁷ For example, *The Saint's Privilege and Profit* [published posthumously in 1692], in Offor, ed., *John Bunyan*, Vol. 1, 657; *A Discourse of the Building, Nature, Excellency and Government of the House of God* (1688), in Offor, ed., *John Bunyan*, Vol.2, 582.

³⁸ For example, *The Work of Christ As An Advocate* (1688), in Offor, ed., *John Bunyan*, Vol.1, 183; *A Treatise on the Fear of God* (1679), in Offor, ed., *John Bunyan*, Vol.1, 471; *The Desire of the Righteous Granted*, [published posthumously in 1692], in Offor, ed., *John Bunyan*, Vol.1, 759; *A Holy Life The Beauty of Christianity* (1684), in Offor, ed., *John Bunyan*, Vol.2, 530.

³⁹ *The Acceptable Sacrifice Or The Excellency of a Broken Heart* (1689), in Offor, ed., *John Bunyan*, Vol. 1, 695; *Differences about Water Baptism No Bar to Communion* (1673), in Offor, ed., *John Bunyan*, Vol.2, 642. This second reference does not mention Tyndale by name, but almost certainly is referring to his translation (and possibly others prior to the publication of the Bishop's Bible), as Offor indicates in his notes.

⁴⁰ Campbell, *Bible: The Story of the King James Version*, 127-128.

attain”.⁴¹ Yet there was a lack of political will to embrace the necessary wholesale revision of the KJV text in circulation at that time. John Wesley (1703-91), the leading Methodist minister, revised the New Testament text of the KJV in 1755 and made as many as twelve thousand modifications of it.⁴² Philip Doddridge (1702-1751), the well known biblical expositor and Congregational minister, also drew attention to the need for the revision of the KJV text in the preface to volume one of his popular work, *The Family Expositor* (1739). In its six substantial volumes, published over a period of seventeen years, the Northampton minister proposed a significant number of revisions to the KJV text.⁴³ Progress on this subject was most closely associated with the work of two scholars F.S. Parris, Fellow of Sidney College, Cambridge, and Benjamin Blayney, Fellow of Hertford College, Oxford, who produced revised texts for their respective university presses, two of the three permitted Bible publishers, in 1743 and 1769. Blayney’s edition, that incorporated Parris’s modifications, soon became the universally accepted text of the KJV that has hardly altered since that time. “This has been referred to often since as the standard edition.”⁴⁴ This version differed from the 1611 text in no fewer than 24,000 places. However, many of the changes were simply the correction of accumulated printers’ errors, though others were more substantial changes. What is remarkable is that these alterations were accepted by the Christian public without significant criticism. This signalled that the KJV had not yet become a sacrosanct cultural icon, a status that would be bestowed by some Christians at a later date.⁴⁵

Baptists and the Era of Adulation of the King James Version

Its Wonderful Language

However, the publication of Blayney’s modified text in 1769 was the event that stilled the many critical voices raised against the language and accuracy of the KJV.⁴⁶ In addition, a number of other factors began to emerge that enhanced the status of this biblical text. First of all, beginning around 1780, the classical taste that had dismissed the writings of the seventeenth century as unsophisticated began to take a delight in past works for their own sake. An unknown writer to *The Critical Review*, in January 1787, while still suggesting that the KJV did not achieve the highest literary standards, nevertheless, argued that:

The defect in idiom we cannot allow to be a fault; it raised the language above common use and has almost sanctified it; nor would we lose the noble simplicity, the energetic bravery, for all the idiomatic elegance which a polished age can bestow...Our attachment to this venerable relic has involuntarily made our language warm.⁴⁷

Critical accuracy in the text now combined with changing cultural tastes that placed greater value on the “relics” of the past, led to the KJV being viewed with greater favor in the wider social context of that day. It was not only secular and literary figures that were placing

⁴¹ E. Whiston, *The Life and Death of Mr Henry Jessey* (London, 1671), 45-47; quoted by Norton, *History of the English Bible*, 98-99.

⁴² Daniell, *Bible in English*, 536.

⁴³ I. Rivers, “Philip Doddridge’s New Testament,” in Hamlin & Jones, *King James Bible after 400 Years*, 124-145.

⁴⁴ Anderson, *Annals of the English Bible*, Vol. 2, 560.

⁴⁵ Campbell, *Bible: The Story of the King James Version*, 132-142. D.W. Bebbington, “The King James Bible in Britain from the Late Eighteenth Century,” 1. I am grateful to Professor Bebbington for allowing me to read a copy of this as yet unpublished paper, prepared for “The King James Bible and the World It Made, 1611-2011” Conference at Baylor University, Texas, April 7-9, 2011. The next section of the paper was significantly influenced by this study.

⁴⁶ Campbell, *Bible: The Story of the King James Version*, 146.

⁴⁷ *The Critical Review*, 63 (1787), 40, quoted by Norton, *History of the English Bible*, 241.

greater value on the KJV. Vicesimus Knox, the Anglican headmaster of Tonbridge School in Kent, argued with respect to the KJV, that “its antiquity is a greater source of strength than any correction of its inaccuracies would be” and that “the present translation ought to be retained in our churches for its intrinsic beauty and excellence”.⁴⁸ This new mode of thinking and use of early seventeenth-century language was adopted by some Evangelical Christian ministers, for example, Edward Irving, the most popular London clergyman in the 1820s. He deliberately adopted the linguistic forms found in the KJV.⁴⁹ Baptist scholar, Christopher Anderson, declared; “As far as the English language and the art of printing were concerned, everything else in the form of human composition, or in the shape of a book, was reduced to a thing of comparative insignificance.”⁵⁰ Across the Atlantic prominent Southern Baptist minister, William T. Brantley (1787-1845), offered similar paeans of praise. “It is our heart’s desire and prayer to God, that this venerable monument of learning, of truth, of piety and of unequalled purity of style and diction, may be perpetuated to the end of time, just as we have it now.”⁵¹ In such a social context as this, modernisation of the language of the KJV was out of the question.

The KJV and British Identity

A second reason for the enhanced respect for the KJV was its growing association with national pride and identity. The French Revolution of 1789 had shaken the confidence of the British establishment with very real fears that the upheaval across the English Channel might erupt “in England’s green and pleasant land”. Some of the more radical Evangelicals such as Scottish landowner and Baptist layman Robert Haldane welcomed these changes, in the hope that the toppling of Roman Catholic governments in Europe might lead to greater freedom to preach the Gospel in those lands, though he needed to assure anxious colleagues that he was not wishing to promote a revolution at home.⁵² Political concerns had escalated further with the rising threat from Napoleon Bonaparte in still Catholic France. Militant Protestantism was the natural way to assert a distinctive religious and political identity.⁵³ France through ignorance of the Scriptures, it was assumed, had not adopted the Protestant faith. By contrast, the King James Bible came to be viewed as a symbol of national identity. It was distinctly Protestant. Roman Catholics would not accept it and preferred their own Douai-Rheims editions. When Bible verses were reproduced in educational literature in Catholic Ireland, they gave passages in both the Douai-Rheims and the KJV.⁵⁴ However, more enlightened Evangelical Protestants, such as Scottish Baptist Christopher Anderson, recognised that the Catholic Irish primarily had legitimately objected to the use of Protestant catechisms in their schools and when a further step was taken, the production of the Bible in their native Irish

⁴⁸ Vicesimus Knox, *Essays, Moral and Literary* (1778), 266-267; quoted by Norton, *History of the English Bible*, 243.

⁴⁹ E. Irving, *Babylon and Infidelity Foredoomed of God* (2 vols; Glasgow: for Chalmers and Collins, 1826), 1, 308, quoted by Bebbington, ‘King James Bible’, 3.

⁵⁰ Anderson, *Annals of the English Bible*, Vol.2, 562.

⁵¹ William T. Brantley D.D., *Objections to a Baptist Version of the New Testament* (New York: J.P. Callender, 1837), 6. I am indebted to the American Baptist Historical Society, Mercer University, USA, for access to a number of documents used in this study. See also C.D. Weaver, “Brantley, William T(heophilus),” in D.M. Lewis, ed., *The Blackwell Dictionary of Evangelical Biography 1730-1860* (2 vols; Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1995), Vol. 1, 134.

⁵² R. Haldane, *Address to the Public concerning Political Opinions* (Edinburgh, 1800).

⁵³ Bebbington, King James Bible, 4.

⁵⁴ A.S. Herbert, *Historical Catalogue of Printed Editions of the English Bible, 1525-1961* (London: British and Foreign Bible Society, 1968), 346.

language, there was a much greater degree of openness to work with the Protestant teachers and preachers. Anderson saw it as a scandal that the Bible had not been provided for the Irish in their own language.⁵⁵ However, he also lauded the success of the Bible of every “British Christian”.

His Bible, at this moment, is the only version on which the sun never sets...on the banks of the Ottawa and St Lawrence, as well as Sydney, Port Philip and Hobart Town; before his evening rays have left the spires of Quebec and Montreal, his morning beams have already shone for hours upon the shores of Australia and New Zealand...while the sun is sinking on Lake Ontario; in the eastern world, where he has risen in his glory on the banks of the Ganges, to the self-same Sacred Volume, many who are no less our countrymen have already turned...Here unquestionably, is the most elevated point of view in which Britain can be viewed- the only true summit of her greatness.⁵⁶

The KJV’s identification with a sense of British identity had hindered its acceptance amongst the Irish Catholics. By contrast, it had the opposite effect on the majority of Protestant Christians in mainland Britain.

The KJV and Mission

A third reason was the formation of the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS) in 1804. Christians of the full range of Evangelical Protestant traditions supported this venture. However, one of the principal people with the vision for this work was Joseph Hughes (1769-1833), minister of a village congregation, Battersea Baptist Church, near London, from 1797 until his death. Hughes supported a range of evangelical and ecumenical ventures to promote the Christian faith. For example, he was one of the pioneers of Sunday Schools in Scotland, setting one up while studying at King’s College, Aberdeen, in 1789, based on new initiatives in children’s work he had seen in England, and was the founder of the Surrey Mission Society in England in 1798.⁵⁷ In May 1799 this Baptist minister was in attendance at a missionary meeting held in the Independent Surrey Chapel, London, and heard the preacher, Independent minister George Burder, lament the lack of a society that could promote and produce religious tracts. The following day a meeting was held to form such a mission agency, at which Hughes was a prominent participant. He was appointed secretary of the newly formed Religious Tract Society (RTS) for thirty-four years until his death. In its first full year of operations the RTS printed and distributed two hundred thousand tracts in the English language and took in subscriptions the substantial sum of four hundred and sixty-seven pounds. The growth of this mission agency under Hughes’ leadership can be illustrated by the fact that in 1832 in excess of fourteen million tracts were distributed in nearly eighty world languages. In total, in his life time, one hundred and ninety seven million pieces of Christian literature were written using the KJV as its biblical text. This work was an outstanding success.⁵⁸ It was at a meeting of the RTS in 1802 that the shortage of Bibles for ordinary people in the churches was raised which led to the formation of the BFBS two years later. Hughes, himself, was the principal mover of this initiative, writing a pamphlet ‘The Excellency of the Holy Scriptures’, in support of this cause. Hughes advocated the formation

⁵⁵ For example, C. Anderson, *The Native Irish and Their Descendants* (London: William Pickering, 3rd ed. 1846), 68.

⁵⁶ C. Anderson, *The Annals of the English Bible in Two Volumes* (London: William Pickering, 1845), Vol.1, xi. A similar view of the Bible’s significance on an even wider stage, is given in V. Mangalwadi, *The Book That Made Your World* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2011).

⁵⁷ “Joseph Hughes, M.A., Originator of Useful Works” in S.A. Swaine, *Faithful Men* (London: Alexander & Shephard, 1884), 139-141

⁵⁸ John Leifchild, *Memoir of Joseph Hughes, A.M.* (London: Thomas Ward & Co., 1835), 180-183.

of a society composed of Christians of all denominations “with the sole object of giving the Word of Life to the nations”. His tract was widely circulated and received a strong favourable response, leading to the launch of the BFBS.⁵⁹ He was appointed one of its secretaries.

The growth of Evangelicalism in the early nineteenth century led to a large increase in the production of Bibles for personal use, at a price ordinary people could increasingly afford. English Congregationalist John Campbell, in 1844-45, recorded a list of some of the necessities of life required in the 1840s: “light postage, quick transit, cheap Bibles, and cheap Periodicals, for the millions of England”.⁶⁰ Numerous societies were established to promote particular Christian causes. The BFBS believed that no barrier of language, cost or supply should hinder access to the means of salvation to potential readers. Over a period of around sixty years it transformed the contemporary printing and binding trades, becoming a Victorian institution in its own right. The initial motivation for the formation of the society was to overcome the scarcity of Welsh-language Bibles in Wales.⁶¹ However, this challenge soon pointed to the even greater need for Bibles in other parts of the world.⁶² The Bible Society histories reveal the extraordinary creative efforts to take Bibles not only to the English-speaking world, most notably in the British Empire countries, but also to other parts of the world.⁶³ This vision for exporting copies of the Scriptures led to a renewed enthusiasm amongst middle-class Christians for distributing KJV Bibles and New Testaments at home amongst the largely unreached poorer neighbourhoods of various towns and cities. Members of BFBS auxiliaries were entitled to obtain a number of copies of Bibles at the cost price, greatly increasing access amongst the population to the Bible.⁶⁴ The BFBS was by far the largest pan-evangelical organisation in the UK at that time. As early as 1824 there were no less than 859 BFBS auxiliaries, together with 500 Ladies’ organisations promoting its work; in 1832 it had more than 100,000 subscribers.⁶⁵ In the present context it is important to note that the one English-language version it published and promoted was the KJV. In addition to this significant step, was the decision to publish the Bible without note or comment, although allowing for cross-references and alternative textual readings in the margins, as had been the practice since Benjamin Blayney’s revision in 1769.⁶⁶ After various editions prior to Blaney’s work, this revision of the KJV text became the agreed text accepted and increasingly valued by all English-speaking Protestant Christians. The advent of the BFBS, in the first few decades of the nineteenth century, had in large measure ensured that a high proportion of the population of the United Kingdom who wished to own a Bible could have access to a copy of the KJV. It was not the only Bible version in print, but for the vast majority of Evangelical Christians in Britain, for all practical purposes, it was viewed as the Bible.

⁵⁹ Swain, *Faithful Men*, 144-145. See also E.P. Clipsham, “Hughes, Joseph,” in D.M. Lewis, ed., *The Blackwell Dictionary of Evangelical Biography 1730-1860* (2 Vols; Oxford: Blackwell, 1995) Vol.1, 580.

⁶⁰ A. Peel, *These Hundred Years A History of the Congregational Union of England and Wales 1831-1931* (London: Congregational Union of England and Wales, 1931), 135-139.

⁶¹ D.E. Jenkins, *The Life of the Rev. Thomas Charles of Bala* (3 vols; Denbigh: Llewelyn Jenkins, 1908), Vol. 2, 492-529.

⁶² Leifchild, *Joseph Hughes*, 192-195.

⁶³ There are many works which could be cited here. One example, in typescript manuscript, is G.A. F. Knight, “The History of the National Bible Society of Scotland, Part I: 1809-1900,” 1-120.

⁶⁴ L. Howsam, *Cheap Bibles: Nineteenth Century Publishing and the British and Foreign Bible Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 35-39.

⁶⁵ R.H. Martin, *Evangelicals United: Ecumenical Stirrings in Pre-Victorian Britain 1795-1830* (Metuchen, New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press, 1983), 91-92.

⁶⁶ Martin, *Evangelicals United*, 112.

Baptists in America were equally enthusiastic about the formation of a Bible Society in their country. Baptists and paedobaptists joined forces to form the American Bible Society (ABS) in 1816, at a meeting in New York. In line with the policy of the BFBS, their Bibles were published without notes or comments and the only English language copies published would be of the version now in common use, that is the KJV.⁶⁷ The quality of the editions of the Bible produced by the ABS, together with the quantity of its output was acknowledged as the industry standard by the late 1820s.⁶⁸ The missionary vision of the ABS was clear in 1829 – to provide a Bible for every household in the land. Its *Fourteenth Annual Report* declared: “A Bible to every household must be the motto of each [auxiliary] Society, and must be sounded through all our borders, until every soul in the whole land has access to this fountain of life.”⁶⁹ By 1830 the ABS was printing as many as 300,000 KJV Bibles a year at a time when the population was thirteen million.⁷⁰ Baptists were active in the work of the ABS. Spencer Cone, a Baptist minister from New York, for example, was one of the society’s corresponding secretaries between 1834 and 1836. Baptists were also generous in their donations for this cause. It has stated that more than \$170,000 was donated by American Baptists to the work of the American Bible Society between 1816 and 1836.⁷¹ The Bible version long established in the USA, as in the United Kingdom, was of course the KJV. As early as the 1640s New England Puritans had adopted the KJV instead of the Geneva Bible. For the next two centuries the KJV would reign supreme in the affections of American Protestants.⁷² It was spoken of with a reverence unique to this English-language version. “Divine Providence [was] marking out to this country the true and only path to universal usage of the Sacred Volume, whether in this or in any other land. It was the Bible, but it must be without note and comment.”⁷³ The mass production of Bibles by the ABS in the early nineteenth century confirmed the KJV as the standard of American Baptists.⁷⁴ They were as supportive of its promotion and use in mission as any other Protestant denomination in that country. An additional agency, the Baptist General Tract Society, was formed on 25 February 1824 “to disseminate evangelical truth and to inculcate sound morals by the distribution of tracts”.⁷⁵ It complemented the work of the Bible Societies assisting Baptists in evangelistic endeavours not only in America, but also in Canada and Mexico, and further afield in Europe, Africa and South America.⁷⁶ American Baptists, whether with whole Bibles or smaller pieces of gospel literature in the KJV, communicated their faith with clarity and enthusiasm in the first half of the nineteenth century.

⁶⁷ These guidelines were reported in the *Second Annual Report of the American and Foreign Bible Society* (New York: John Gray, 1839), 50.

⁶⁸ P.C. Gutjahr, *An American Bible: A History of the Good Book in the United States 1777-1880* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1999), 90.

⁶⁹ *Annual Report*, American Bible Society 1830, 530-531, cited by Gutjahr, *American Bible*, 19.

⁷⁰ M. Bragg, *The Book of Books: The Radical Impact of the King James Bible 1611-2011* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2011), 166.

⁷¹ T. Armitage, *History of the Baptists* (New York: Bryan Taylor & Co., 1887), 895.

⁷² H. Stout, “Word and Order in Colonial New England” in N.O. Hatch & M.A. Noll, *The Bible in America: Essays in Cultural History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 19-38; cited by P.J. Thuesen, *In Discordance with the Scriptures: American Protestant Battles over Translating the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 30.

⁷³ Anon, *An Argument sustaining the Common English Version of the Bible* (New York: John A. Gray, 1850), viii.

⁷⁴ W. Wyckoff, *Revision of the English Scriptures* (New York, n.p., n.d. [1850s?]), 6. See also W. H. Brackney, *Historical Dictionary of the Baptists* (Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrows Press, 1999) 65.

⁷⁵ *The Columbian Star*, March 6, 1824; cited by D.G. Stevens, *The First Hundred Years of The American Baptist Publication Society* (Philadelphia: The American Baptist Publication Society, n.d [1924?]), 5.

⁷⁶ Stevens, *First Hundred Years*, 16.

Baptists and Controversies and the King James Version

The promising launch of the Bible Societies did not continue as harmoniously as might have been expected and Baptists were at the center of the controversies that arose. In America difficulties emerged when American Baptists presented an application for funds to the ABS, in August 1835, to assist the printing of a Bengali language Bible, prepared by William Yates, a Baptist missionary in Calcutta, in line with the Burmese version of the Scriptures, in which the Greek word βαπτίζω and its cognates were translated “immerse” and “immersion”. After months of discussion, the board of the ABS voted on 17 March 1836 to award the sum of \$5,000 for this purpose, with a clear restriction. They would only support translations that conform to the “common English version... and that all the religious denominations represented in this Society can consistently use and circulate said versions in their several schools and communities”.⁷⁷ Although other Christian bodies were happy with this decision, it was inevitable that American Baptists would reject this restriction. 390 delegates from Baptist Churches met in Philadelphia, in April 1837, to organise their own agency for printing and distributing the Scriptures. It was called the American and Foreign Bible Society (AFBS). Dr Spencer H. Cone, pastor of Olivet Street Baptist Church, New York, 1823-1841, was elected its president and Dr Charles G. Sommers, New York, its first corresponding secretary. William Colgate, a prominent manufacturer was the first treasurer.⁷⁸ However, although this Baptist agency was happy to support overseas Bible translations that rendered βαπτίζω in a manner deemed satisfactory to Baptists, a majority of its members had no desire to produce a revised version in English. A vote taken in May 1850 confirmed this policy. A minority of its members withdrew and formed yet another agency, the American Bible Union (ABU), with the object to “procure and circulate the most faithful versions of the Scriptures in all languages throughout the world”.⁷⁹ Both agencies struggled to find adequate financial support from Baptist churches. Battles over Bible translation policy in American Baptist ranks raised serious questions about the propriety of possessing denominational Bibles. The ABU did produce a translation of the New Testament in 1862-1863 that translated βαπτίζω as “immerse”,⁸⁰ but there was no chance of this translation replacing the KJV in American Baptist churches. This unfortunate controversy was resolved at a Bible Convention in Saratoga, New York, in May 1883, when it was decided that the American Baptist Publication Society would handle Bible work at home and foreign distribution would take place under the auspices of the American Baptist Missionary Union.⁸¹

British Baptists also participated in painful controversies over the Bible and translation policies at that time. The Apocrypha Controversy which unfolded between 1821 and 1825 concerned whether it had been the intention of the BFBS to circulate Bibles exclusively containing the sixty-six agreed books of the Old and New Testaments or whether additional non-canonical books could be bound with them, under certain circumstances, for distribution in parts of Continental Europe. The strongest pressure to exclude the Apocrypha came from

⁷⁷ “Resolution of the Board of Messengers of the American Bible Society, 17 February 1837” cited in the *First Annual Report of the American and Foreign Bible Society* (New York: John Gray, 1838), 13. See also R. Torbet, *A History of the Baptists* (London: The Carey Kingsgate Press, 1966), p. 278.

⁷⁸ *First Annual Report of the American and Foreign Bible Society*, 3.

⁷⁹ H. Vedder, *A Short History of the Baptists* (Philadelphia: The American Baptist Publication Society, 1907), 338-339.

⁸⁰ Thuesen, *In Discordance with the Scriptures*, 47.

⁸¹ Torbet, *History of the Baptists*, 279.

the Edinburgh and Glasgow auxiliaries of the BFBS, led by Baptist layman Robert Haldane. Already chafing at the control of the English parent body and its unwillingness to devolve some measure of control of their work to its constituent auxiliaries, this issue was seen as a matter of principle on which a stand needed to be taken. These men and their colleagues were convinced that a breach of promise had occurred by the addition of the Apocrypha, in particular with respect to various editions of a French Bible in which Haldane had taken a particular interest. Unfortunately the parent body declined to revert to its original position of excluding the Apocrypha and instead chose to maintain ties with Continental Bible Societies who took a different viewpoint in this controversy. As a result the Scottish auxiliaries withdrew from the parent body, eventually uniting as the National Bible Society of Scotland in May 1861. The rules for membership in Scottish ranks were tightened in 1831 to ensure that all officeholders were both Protestants and held orthodox views concerning the Trinity.⁸² A further secession from the ranks of the BFBS in England had occurred in 1831 when the parent body declined to break ties with Continental Bible Societies that had a significant number of Unitarians in their auxiliaries. Around that time a number of British mission agencies tightened their rules for membership concerning the Trinitarian issue and over the propriety of offering public prayers in committee meetings to God in the name of Christ.⁸³ The core issue was the authority of Scriptures and Baptists on both sides of the Atlantic felt strongly about these topics. However, the more fundamental question of whether the KJV itself ought to be revised was now increasingly being heard. Could Baptists and other Christians come to a common mind on that topic or would further fragmentation of Christian ranks occur?

Baptists and the Calls for Revision of the King James Version

As the nineteenth century progressed there were an increasing number of voices calling not for a new translation to replace the KJV, but rather for a revision and the correction of at least some of the more obvious errors in the text. Here many individuals could be cited, but a few examples will be given. The sentiments expressed at a meeting of the Virginia and Foreign Baptist Bible Society in June 1850 was representative. “Whilst the feeling appeared to be in favour of the present version—several brethren admitted that it had serious defects and that an improved version prepared in a way that would secure public confidence and approbation was a most desirable object.”⁸⁴ However, this was a change in opinion as a majority of American Baptists, as late as 1838, were opposed to such a step. In response to the concerns of a Massachusetts Baptist congregation, in March 1838, the AFBS board instructed corresponding secretary Charles Sommers to write a letter to the church indicating that they had no intention “to prepare at some future day a new or amended version of the English Scriptures.”⁸⁵ However, just over a decade later there had been a decisive shift of opinion on this topic. A report in the *New York Recorder*, in June 1850, produced a similar favourable response to a revised Bible version from Baptists in that city. The Baptist editor of that

⁸² W.C. Somerville, *From Iona to Dunblane: The Story of the National Bible Society of Scotland to 1948* (Edinburgh: National Bible Society of Scotland, 1948), 21-23. F. Macdonald, “Bible Societies,” in N.M. de Cameron et al eds., *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991), 71-72. A. Haldane, *The Lives of Robert and James Haldane* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1990 [1852]), 513-545.

⁸³ A.J. Brown, *The Word of God Among All Nations: A Brief History of the Trinitarian Bible Society 1831-1981* (London: Trinitarian Bible Society, 1981), 7-25.

⁸⁴ “Report of Virginia and Foreign Baptist Bible Society”, June 1850, in the *Religious Herald*, 13 June 1850. This is the Baptist newspaper published in Virginia. I am grateful to Dr Frederick Anderson, Executive Director of the Virginia Baptist Historical Society, for access to articles from this periodical.

⁸⁵ Anon, *An Argument sustaining the Common English Version of the Bible*, 16.

periodical claimed that a majority of Baptists in both the AFBS and the ABU would also support work on a revision. He added that he “will receive such a translation with thankfulness and willingly aid in its circulation in any feasible way”.⁸⁶ The impression must not be given that all Baptists were in favour of the revision. Some were fearful that a revision could only make matters worse, possibly destroying the good relations between Evangelical Protestants,⁸⁷ or that the KJV would be withdrawn from print if a new version was produced. William Colgate at an ABU gathering in 1857 admitted concerning the minority party opposed to revision: “I thought it would meet with great opposition at first. But I did not think it would be so fierce. People have made more noise and said more against it than I expected.”⁸⁸ These negative fears were unfounded, according to Edward Underhill, secretary of the British Baptist Missionary Society, in a letter to Dr Cone in New York. Underhill declared: “I rejoice much in the prospect of an English version.”⁸⁹ Most Baptists observed the movement towards the production of a revised Bible text, but a few were active participants in this process. One good example of the latter was Thomas Curtis, an English Baptist schoolmaster and publisher, who wrote to Cambridge University Press in 1832 because he claimed they were “circulating grossly inaccurate copies, if copies they may be called, of the Authorized Version”. He claimed to have identified thousands of errors, not counting mere typographical ones.⁹⁰ Some critics could be easily ignored but not Curtis. He organised a committee of Dissenting clergymen to assist him in pressing for reform. They produced a pamphlet in 1833, addressed to the Bishop of London, entitled *The Existing Monopoly*. They wished to break the monopoly of the three printing agencies that controlled the production of the Bible. By 1855 two-thirds of American Baptist periodicals advocated reform, a movement that was especially strong amongst Southern as opposed to Northern Baptists.⁹¹ Silas Mead and H.J. Lambert, Australian Baptists in Adelaide, both criticised the AV and called for a new translation in 1868.⁹² However, Dissenters alone were not powerful enough to produce a change on this subject, but by the 1850s the momentum had shifted in the direction of a revised version. By the time Anglican scholar J.B. Lightfoot, Hulsean Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, advocated reform, charging the translators of the KJV with “an imperfect knowledge of Greek grammar” in 1871⁹³, it was inevitable that the reformers would win the day. Charles Spurgeon, the most prominent Baptist preacher of his generation strongly supported a revised text. He declared:

If God’s Word is worthy of all reverence it is a crime of the highest magnitude to dilute it with error; and the sin is grievously increased, when the error is so apparent that the wayfaring man is aware of it. The cant and fudge which cries out against the least alteration of the old version of our forefathers, as if it were positive profanity, are nothing to me. I love God’s Word better than I love King James’ pedantic wisdom.⁹⁴

⁸⁶ *New York Recorder* article, reprinted in the *Religious Herald*, June 20, 1850.

⁸⁷ Brantley, *Objections to a Baptist Version of the New Testament*, 64-66.

⁸⁸ “[William] Colgate’s Reasons for Revision,” No. 23 (New York: American Bible Union, 1857), 1.

⁸⁹ *Religious Herald*, April 4, 1851.

⁹⁰ Thomas Curtis to the Secretaries of the Cambridge University Press, January 27, 1832, quoted by Howsam, *Cheap Bibles*, 111-112.

⁹¹ *Religious Herald*, May 10, 1855.

⁹² *Truth and Progress*, July 1868, 144-148; November 1868, 222; cited by Ken Manley, “‘Sound the Battle Cry!’ –Australian Baptists and the Bible,” I am grateful to Dr Manley for allowing me to see a copy of this unpublished paper.

⁹³ J.B. Lightfoot, *On a Fresh Revision of the English New Testament* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1871), 80; cited by Bebbington, “King James Bible,” 9.

⁹⁴ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, preface, in Hannah C. Conant, *The English Bible: History of the Translations of the Holy Scriptures into the English Tongue with Specimens of the Old English Versions* (London: Arthur Hall, Virtue and Co., 1859), x-xi.

The vast majority of Baptists, together with a similar proportion of Christians of other traditions favoured this revision. As a result a first official Bible translation in English since 1611 would be produced. A new era in Bible production and revision was about to commence.

Baptist Responses to the publication of the Revised Version

Sales figures for the Revised Version (RV) were astonishingly high. In London, two million copies, half of them orders from America, were sold in the first four days alone. In the USA New York city had the highest sales, but other north-eastern cities also saw brisk trading. Boston booksellers sold twenty thousand copies on the first day and Philadelphia's early sales exceeded one hundred thousand copies. In the Southern States, despite a severe economic depression, sales were still encouraging. Yet denominational assemblies were reluctant to pronounce on the RV. American Baptists were the only denomination that formally endorsed the Revised New Testament. It was, though, in church magazines and denominational newspapers that the endorsements for the revision were found in America.⁹⁵ Charles Spurgeon's review of the new version was mixed. He judged the RV as "strong in Greek, but weak in English".⁹⁶ Sales in New Zealand were also strong. C. Dallaston, pastor of Oxford Terrace Baptist Church, Christ Church, gave a lecture on the new version to his congregation. In his conclusions he said:

The authorised version, notwithstanding all its imperfections, is truly loved, and to many it will be a sacrifice, indeed, when another is allowed to take its place. This revised version will have to win its way; its worth will have to be recognised by the members of our churches before it receives its due appreciation.⁹⁷

An article on the Revised New Testament, in the February 1882 issue of the *New Zealand Baptist*, noted: "Notwithstanding all that may be said against the new translation, it must be admitted that in a multitude of passages, the meaning of the writers is much more apparent; what might have been obscure has been cleared away, the truth shining forth with greater brightness."⁹⁸ On the completion of the Old Testament, the same periodical heartily endorsed it and after offering examples of textual improvement concluded that it: "should prove sufficient to induce all who [love the Bible] that they HABITUALLY USE the Revised Old Testament [sic]".⁹⁹ A reviewer in the English *Baptist Magazine*, described the RV as "a decided literary success".¹⁰⁰ Contemporary review articles of the New and Old Testaments of the Revised Version were also praised in the pages of *The Queensland Baptist*, Australia, with no apparent negative criticisms printed in its pages.¹⁰¹ Henry Fox, at a meeting of the Devon Association of Baptist Churches in Totnes, England, delivered a paper praising the new version in June 1881. The assembled gathering of Baptists, at the end of his paper, passed a resolution offering "thanks to Almighty God for His great goodness in permitting

⁹⁵ Thuesen, *In Discordance with the Scriptures*, 51-54.

⁹⁶ *Evangelical Repository and Bible Teacher*, 58, (October 1881), 153; cited by Thuesen, *In Discordance with the Scriptures*, 55.

⁹⁷ C. Dallaston, "The Revised Version of the New Testament," *New Zealand Baptist*, (September 1881), 113-114.

⁹⁸ William Morgan, Pukekohe East, Auckland, "Can That Faith Save Him?" *New Zealand Baptist*, (February 1882), 17.

⁹⁹ *New Zealand Baptist*, (August 1885), 120-121.

¹⁰⁰ J.S. "The Revised Bible," *Baptist Magazine*, (July 1885), 316-323.

¹⁰¹ *The Queensland Baptist*, articles between 1881 and 1904. I am grateful to Dr David Parker for checking the records of this newspaper on this subject for this paper.

the labours of the New Testament Revision Committee to be successfully completed...”¹⁰² John Clifford, the prominent English General Baptist minister, while acknowledging the number of people using the RV in personal devotions, enthusiastically wished “a speedy introduction of the Revised Version into family worship, Sunday Schools and our public services”.¹⁰³ It was inevitable that the growth in usage of the new Bible version would be gradual. Henry Fox predicted that it would be “many years before the New Version has been generally adopted for use in public worship as well as private reading”.¹⁰⁴ It was noticeable after its publication that the RV was the version chosen as a gift to present to church members being honoured in some way, for example, for years of service as an organist or choir-master.¹⁰⁵ New Zealand Baptist congregations were encouraged to persist with using the RV for public Scripture readings, despite the fact that it has “marred the music of the Authorised Version”.¹⁰⁶ Some ministers made a point of illustrating how the RV has improved the text of Scripture, for example, American Baptist minister, Dr A.J. Gordon, of Boston, in a sermon on “The Ministry of Women”.¹⁰⁷ Yet, despite the warm welcome given to this new translation, it did not displace the KJV in the affections of the vast majority of churchgoers, nor did it replace it on the majority of church lecterns or in the typical church pew. The KJV was still predominant amongst Baptist Christians at the end of the nineteenth century.

Baptists and the KJV in the Twentieth Century

In the twentieth century an increasing number of Bible translations took a share of the market for Bibles. The American Standard Version (1901) was commended, but despite its many endorsements the uptake of this version was modest.¹⁰⁸ A minority of more progressive British Christians were attracted, for example, to the translations of individual scholars such as R.F. Weymouth (1903) or James Moffat (1913), or after the Second World War to the version produced by J.B. Phillips and most recently Eugene Peterson’s *The Message* (2002). However, these versions were never seriously considered for use in churches. The most significant of the numerous new translations included the Revised Standard Version, first published in the USA in 1952. It was widely accepted in the UK, as well as in the USA, because its language echoed the KJV and was also suitable for public reading,¹⁰⁹ though it received strong criticism from many Conservative Evangelicals.¹¹⁰ By 1990 more than fifty-five million copies of this version had been sold.¹¹¹ The Good News Bible (GNB, 1976), written in more contemporary English and a simplified vocabulary has proved particularly popular in the wider Christian community and in schools in the United Kingdom, but the New International Version (NIV, 1978) is the one that has attracted the greatest support from

¹⁰² H.C. Fox, *The Revised Version of the New Testament* (Plymouth: William Brendon and Son, n.d. [1881]), 2.

¹⁰³ J. Clifford, “The Revised Version of the New Testament,” *General Baptist Magazine*, (June 1881), 250-253.

¹⁰⁴ Fox, *Revised Version of the New Testament*, 7, 12.

¹⁰⁵ For example, to Miss Firth and Mr Frew in Wellington Baptist Church, *New Zealand Baptist*, (March 1887), 39.

¹⁰⁶ H.H. Driver, “Our Sabbath Worship,” a paper read at a Baptist Union of New Zealand conference in Christchurch, on 13 November 1888, and published at the request of the Assembly, *New Zealand Baptist*, (January 1889), 9-12.

¹⁰⁷ A.J. Gordon, “The Ministry of Women (concluding section),” *New Zealand Baptist*, (May 1895), 70-71.

¹⁰⁸ Thuesen, *In Discordance with the Scriptures*, 69-72.

¹⁰⁹ Daniell, *Bible in English*, 738-743.

¹¹⁰ A good Evangelical scholarly example is American Presbyterian O.T. Allis in his *Revision or New Translation? Revised Version or Revised Bible?* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1948).

¹¹¹ Thuesen, *In Discordance with the Scriptures*, 152.

Baptists and other Evangelicals,¹¹² and now tops the best seller list of English-language Bibles. This is true not just in Western Europe, but also in other parts of the world. Amongst Malaysian Baptists, for example, usage of the KJV began to decline significantly in the 1980s, with the NIV predominant by the early 1990s in the English-language congregations.¹¹³ However, especially in the USA, there has been some scholarly Evangelical support, together with strong popular sales figures for a revised KJV, *The New King James Version* (1982),¹¹⁴ although some scholars have questioned whether it is accurate to call it a further revision of the KJV, rather than a new translation.¹¹⁵ The NKJV has also been popular with a more conservative strand of Australian Evangelicals.¹¹⁶ In the last quarter of the twentieth century a survey was conducted amongst Scottish Churches, in 1984, to ascertain which Bible versions were most commonly used. The KJV at 40% came top, followed by the New English Bible at 23% (popular with Episcopalians); and the Good News Bible at 20%, largely due to a significant take up amongst Church of Scotland congregations. Three versions were prominent amongst Scottish Baptists. The NIV unsurprisingly came top with 53%, yet overall as a new version had only been taken up by 6% of Scottish Churches; the RSV second for Baptists with 33% and the KJV third with 27%.¹¹⁷ A follow-up survey in 1994 about Bible version usage revealed that the percentage of congregations using the KJV had declined to 17% from 40% in a decade, though it was still the third most popular version in the pews. In second place overall was the GNB with 24%. Topping this poll was the NIV with 35%. Amongst Scottish Baptists the RSV had almost disappeared at 3%, almost certainly losing ground to the NIV which came first with a 76% uptake. The KJV was the only other Bible version with a significant uptake in Baptist Churches at 12%, but still it was rapidly losing its market share.¹¹⁸ It is unlikely that Scottish Baptists are unrepresentative of the majority of their Baptist colleagues in other English-speaking countries.¹¹⁹ Assuming the accuracy of this claim, it is clear that by the end of the twentieth century the KJV is rapidly disappearing from our pulpits and pews.

Where does this leave the KJV in the twenty-first century? There will be clear memories of significant Baptist leaders like Martin Luther King whose famous speeches drew on the KJV in particular. Utterances like: “We cannot be satisfied as long as a Negro in Mississippi cannot vote and a Negro in New York believes he has nothing for which to vote. No, no we are not satisfied, and we will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.” This is a quotation from Amos 5:24 in the KJV. Another example comes from King’s “I have a Dream” speech that reached its crescendo with the quotation of Isaiah 40:4-5, again from the KJV.¹²⁰ It is probable that support for the 1611 version will only decline gradually for the foreseeable future as there are still a significant

¹¹² D.A. Carson makes this point in his *The King James Version Debate: A Plea for Realism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 84. It has also been strongly marketed with books like K. Barker, ed., *The Making of a Contemporary Translation* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1987), advocating its cause.

¹¹³ Information provided by Dr John Kok, Kuala Lumpur Baptist Church, July 7, 2011.

¹¹⁴ A.L. Farstad, *The New King James Version in the Great Tradition* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1989). From the same school of thought came a critical appraisal of the NIV in E. Radmacher & Z. Hodges, *The NIV Reconsidered* (Dallas: Redencion Viva Publishing House, 1990).

¹¹⁵ J.P. Lewis, *The English Bible From KJV to NIV* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), 329-362.

¹¹⁶ B. Zwartz, “The Book That Changed The World,” *THE AGE*, May 27, 2011, 11. *THE AGE* is an Australian newspaper, based in Melbourne, Victoria. I am grateful to Ken Edmonds for a copy of this publication.

¹¹⁷ J. Drane, “Bible Use in the Scottish Churches,” in P. Brierley & F. Macdonald, *Prospects for Scotland: From a Census of the Churches in 1984* (Bromley, Kent: MARC Europe, 1985), 26-29.

¹¹⁸ P. Brierley & F. Macdonald, *Prospects for Scotland 2000* (London: Christian Research, 1995),

¹¹⁹ The King James Version is still the predominant version amongst Baptists in the Bahamas. I am grateful to Clinton Minnis for drawing my attention to this fact, July 8, 2011.

¹²⁰ S.S. Montefiore, *Speeches that Changed the World* (London: Quercus, 2005), 151-2.

number of older churchgoers in particular who are fiercely loyal to the version with which they grew up, but younger people will prefer newer translations. How will the KJV be viewed in the wider culture of the English-speaking world? It is most probable that it will be lauded most for its literary excellence. A representative commendatory article appeared in the British tabloid newspaper *Metro*, in the approach to the 400th anniversary of the publication of the KJV, by journalist Graeme Green, in which he from a secular perspective viewed the significance of the KJV. He wrote:

The tome, which first went on sale on 2 May, 1611, took previous English language versions and created a definitive Bible that became the most influential book ever written, a cornerstone of British society, permeating everything from art and literature to politics and morality, here and around the world.¹²¹

Of this we can be certain, the KJV has a secure place both in British history and in the culture and religious heritage of the English-speaking world.

¹²¹ G. Green, “The King James Bible to celebrate 400th Anniversary,” *Metro*, April 26, 2011, accessed on May 4, 2011 at <http://www.metro.co.uk/lifestyle/861738-the-king-james-bible-to-celebrate-400th-anniversary#ixzz1LQrjRyPO>

The impact of the King James Bible, which was published 400 years ago, is still being felt in the way we speak and write, says Stephen Tomkins. No other book, or indeed any piece of culture, seems to have influenced the English language as much as the King James Bible. Its turns of phrase have permeated the everyday language of English speakers, whether or not they've ever opened a copy. The Sun says Aston Villa "refused to give up the ghost". King James Bible Anniversary! of the King James Version. With its start in 1611, the King James Bible 400th Anniversary is celebrated in 2011.Â Written over a span of 1,000 or more years³. Written by more than 40 authors, including kings, prophets, poets, musicians, and fisherman⁴. Books include letters, poetry, songs, legal documentation, eyewitness accounts, biographies, historical literature and documents⁵.Â A committee of 54 translators worked for 7 years to complete the King James translation¹⁵. References: 1. <http://www.kingjamesbibletrust.org/files/kjbt-booklet.pdf> 2. Ibid. Here you can see a p The King James Bible after 400 years - Hannibal Hamlin (ed.) I did not read this book completely. I was only looking for the references to another book I am reading with great attention" Absalom, Absalom!Â A really thorough look at the KJB via its language, its own history, and its influence on a wide variety of authors over the centuries since. Very interesting and comprehensive - though for now I am mostly interested in the language, and so only some of this was a timely read for me. Certainly recommended, though, if you are interested in a book that has Very timely, as this little atheist recently cited the King James Bible as a literary influence A present from my Mum, an honest believer. 1611 - 2011 - 400 Years of the King James Bible.Â See more of King James Bible 400th Anniversary on Facebook. Log In. or. Create New Account. See more of King James Bible 400th Anniversary on Facebook. Log In. Forgotten account?