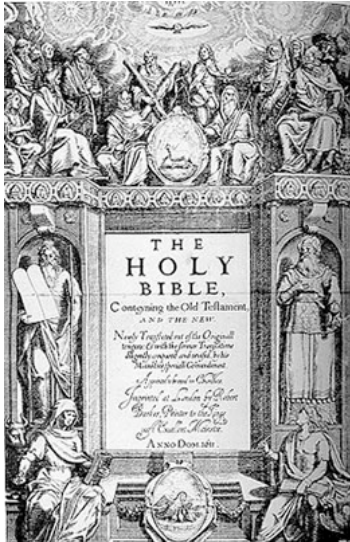


The People's Bible

Lent Course



Thank you for taking the time to read this introductory material produced for the Darwen Churches' Partnership Lent study course for 2011. This year we commemorate the 400th anniversary of the publication of the King James Bible. This course is made up of six sections, each of which is based on well known phrase or sayings from the King James Bible.

This course has been designed to be used both by groups of people exploring the ideas together and by individuals thinking about these themes alone or in family/friend/neighbour groups, either because they find organised groups uncomfortable or because of their own circumstances. There are a number of weekly meetings where each section will be explored in turn organised by Partnership churches of which details are in Church News, displayed on notice boards and available on the website.

Sessions will be taking place over the six weeks of Lent, commencing on the 11th and 12th March 2011

Mondays	12.30 pm to 1.30 pm 7.30 pm to 8.30 pm	Central URC Springvale Methodist Church
Tuesdays	7 pm to 8 pm	Central URC

The course material is available as a supplement to Church News and via the Partnership website. The page on the website includes space for comments and feedback.

To get the most out of the material, it is suggested that you have to hand a copy of the King James Bible and a Bible in a modern translation. You might also find it useful to have a pen and paper available to keep a record of your own thoughts and questions that arise to return to later.

For those using the material in a group, each session is planned to take around an hour. If you are using the material alone as part of your own prayer and reflection, it can take as much or little time as you wish!

If you would like to know more about this subject, a list of books, articles and websites are listed at the end of this short background article.

Some background

The King James Bible (often called the Authorised Version) was published in 1611 and was translated from the original Greek and Hebrew by 47 biblical scholars organised into six committees. The translation was commissioned by the Stuart king, James I of England/VI of Scotland and authorised by him for publication.



Text of a copy of the Hebrew Bible

The King James is not the earliest English translation of the Bible. Older versions include a translation by John Wyclif in 1382, by William Tyndale in 1528 and work by Miles Coverdale in the 1530s. In fact, the King James Bible contains large portions of Tyndale's work. In 1600, there were seven different translations available in English. Most popular was the Geneva Bible which had been produced by Protestant exiles to continental Europe during the reign of Mary I and then brought back to England. The Geneva Bible was deeply antagonistic towards the Pope and Catholic faith and was designed to be a cheaply available study Bible with notes and explanations for the devout reader. These annotations were deeply Calvinist in terms



of background theology and this was uncomfortable for the young Anglican tradition even then trying to steer a middle way between Catholic and Protestant traditions. King James wanted to commission a single translation for all his subjects, that was faithful to the original Hebrew and Greek versions, was suitable to be used in church services and was free of notes and annotations that might be hijacked by the translation committees. This campaign for King James version dominance was largely successful. For around 270 years, in practical terms, it was the only translation available. It was the only book owned by many families. Children learned to read from its pages and this shaped their language, spoken and written. Its teachings guided the development of the English speaking world.

The King James Bible has had a massive role in the development of the English language over the last four hundred years. Historians and literary scholars (as well as biblical scholars and theologians)

hold it in high regard and consider it as being as important and significant in linguistic terms as the Complete Works of Shakespeare and the Oxford English Dictionary. After Shakespeare, the King James Bible is the most common source of well know phrases and proverbs in English. Many of these are still used today and form some of the best known and most loved sayings of the English language.

More than a hundred sayings are found in or are inspired by the King James Bible. Some of these include:

A labour of love	All things to all men	As old as the hills
A house divided against itself cannot stand	A wolf in sheep's clothing	As white as snow
Can a leopard change its spots?	An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth	At one's wits' end
Bite the dust	By the skin of your teeth	Pearls before swine
Eat drink and be merry	Eye to eye	Fall from grace
Fat of the land	Fight the good fight	Flesh and blood
From strength to strength	Gird your loins	Give up the ghost
Harden your heart	He who lives by the sword, dies by the sword	Heart's desire
Holier than thou	How are the mighty fallen	In the twinkling of an eye
The land of Nod	Let not the sun go down on your wrath	Living off the fat of the land
No rest for the wicked	Out of the mouths of babes	Patience of Job
Pearls before swine	Physician, heal thyself	Pride goes before a fall
Put words in one's mouth	Put your house in order	Red sky at night
Set your teeth on edge	Sign of the times	Sour grapes
Strait and narrow	Sweat of your brow	The apple of my eye
The blind leading the blind	The ends of the earth	The letter of the law
The powers that be	The root of the matter	The salt of the earth
The writing is on the wall	Wash your hands of the matter	Way of all flesh
Wheels within wheels	Woe is me	

Questions: How many of these are familiar to you?

Did you know that all of these come from or are closely inspired by the Bible?
Have any surprised you?

When have you come across the phrase or used it for yourself?

Many people consider the Authorised Version to be one of the finest pieces of English literature of all time, whatever their faith/religious commitment and views might be.

Winston Churchill is reported as saying,

“The scholars who produced this masterpiece are mostly unknown and unremembered. But they forged an enduring link, literary and religious, between the English-speaking people of the world.”



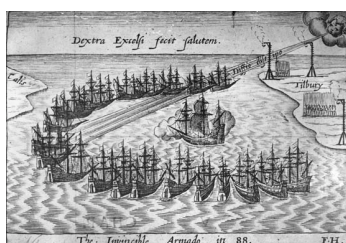
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Richard Dawkins, an Oxford scholar and author who is well known for his anti-religious views, has said the following about the King James Bible,

“You can't appreciate English literature unless you are steeped to some extent in the King James Bible ... people don't know that proverbial phrases which make echoes in their minds come from this Bible. We are a Christian culture, we come from a Christian culture and not to know the King James Bible, is to be in some small way, barbarian.”

Questions: Do you agree with Churchill and/or Dawkins?

What impact do you think the Bible has on modern life and culture?

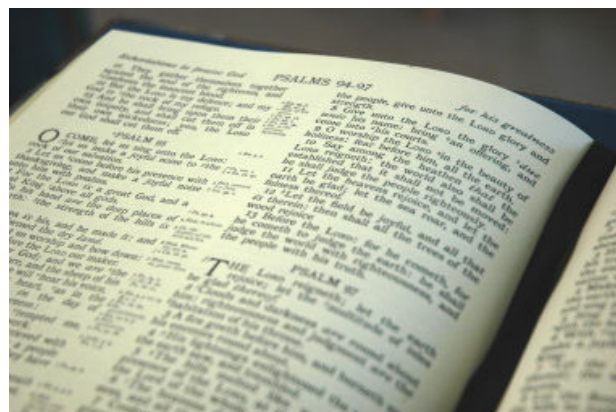


The King James Bible does have an agenda which comes from its origins of authorisation by a Church of England king who was not unaware of other translations in existence at the time. In 1611, England was a lone Anglican country in a Europe that was still mostly Roman Catholic with pockets of Lutheran Christians in some of the northern areas and Reformed Christians in the centre and in Scotland. England experienced political tension with Spain (Francis Drake and the Armada had not been that long previously) and with France. England and Scotland shared a King but were still independent nations. The age of Empire was yet to begin.

The Text Itself

The text of the King James Bible is sometimes described as having a beauty within it that is lacking in more modern translations. There is a school of thought within some churches that the King James is 'the' true Bible and that other translations are either wrong or of less value! What is important to remember is that for many years, centuries in fact, the King James was the main translation available to ordinary people in English.

When we read some favourite passages, we might see the beauty of the version for ourselves. For example, compare Psalm 23 in the King James version with the modern Good News Bible, popular in many of our churches.



*The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:
he leadeth me beside the still waters.
He restoreth my soul:
he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil: for thou art with me;
thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.
Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies:
thou anointest my head with oil;
my cup runneth over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life:
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever. [King James Version]*

*The Lord is my shepherd;
I have everything I need.
He lets me rest in fields of green grass
and leads me to quiet pools of fresh water.
He gives me new strength.
He guides me in the right paths,
as he has promised.
Even if I go through the deepest darkness,
I will not be afraid, Lord,
for you are with me.
Your shepherd's rod and staff protect me.*

*You prepare a banquet for me,
where all my enemies can see me;
you welcome me as an honored guest
and fill my cup to the brim.
I know that your goodness and love will be with me all my life;
and your house will be my home as long as I live. [Good News Bible]*

Compare Luke's version of the birth of Jesus,

And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:;) To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn. [Luke 2.1-7, King James Bible]

At that time Emperor Augustus ordered a census to be taken throughout the Roman Empire. When this first census took place, Quirinius was the governor of Syria. Everyone, then, went to register himself, each to his own hometown. Joseph went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to the town of Bethlehem in Judea, the birthplace of King David. Joseph went there because he was a descendant of David. He went to register with Mary, who was promised in marriage to him. She was pregnant, and while they were in Bethlehem, the time came for her to have her baby. She gave birth to her first son, wrapped him in cloths and laid him in a manger - there was no room for them to stay in the inn. [Luke 2.1-7, Good News Bible]

If you are used to reading from a different translation, then look up the passages in your own Bible if you prefer.

Questions What do you like about the King James Version?

What do you like about the other version(s) you have access to?

What don't you like?

What is more important, beauty or function?

You can see that while it is the same story being described, the language is different. Some of this is because the King James does come from a different time in English history, but it would make sense to suppose that this is not the only reason. It is difficult to imagine that even in 1600, an engaged woman would be described by a group of people sitting in a pub or at market as 'espoused'.

Sometimes our understanding of words changes over time. We can see an example of this in the pages of the King James Bible.

And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them: and his disciples rebuked those who brought them. But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. [Mark 10.13-14]

Look up this passage in a modern version of the Bible.

Today, we would probably not be comfortable putting the words 'children' and 'suffer' in the same sentence. It is easy for those who are regular members of a church community or who have an understanding of older usage of the English language to comment, 'well, of course here is Jesus welcoming children' but to those without this background this could be read as Jesus saying that young children will have a difficult time with Jesus!



<http://breadsite.org>

This is one reason why the King James Bible has fallen out of use as the version usually read in our churches. Another reason is a move away from formal sounding language with a belief that people can understand and connect more closely with the Bible and with questions of faith if they are put in an everyday way.

What is important to remember is that no translation of the Bible is ever completely neutral. In places, the original Hebrew and Greek language is sometimes vague and occasionally impossible and individual translation committees will have their own policy on how to deal with this. Sometimes translators will be commissioned by particular denominations who might be (for example) traditional, conservative, liberal or catholic or who might have an agenda of liberation (perspective of the world's poorest and most oppressed people), or feminist (perspective of women), or womanist (perspective of black women). The King James Bible was translated during an age of religious tension in Europe and less than a century after the events known as the Reformation.

Session Outlines

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|-----------|--|
| Session 1 | Put your house in order/A house divided against itself |
| Session 2 | A broken heart/Harden your heart |
| Session 3 | Fight the good fight/An eye for an eye/He who lives by the sword |
| Session 4 | Salt of the earth/The ends of the earth/Red sky at night |

Session 5 The writing is on the wall/Wheels within wheels/The powers that be

Session 6 By the skin of your teeth/Gird your loins

The sessions can be used in any order although the groups meeting formally will follow the study in the order laid out here. The sessions stand independently of each other so if you are only able to attend one or two meetings you are welcome to do so and will not be at any disadvantage.

Two or three sayings form the basis for discussion within each session. If you find that only one really catches your or the group attention, then please feel free to keep with one and having an in depth discussion about that.

Remember, the themes for discussion are simply suggestions and are not intended to be a straight-jacket! Do follow what interests you (and the group).

If you are using this material as part of a group, remember that you don't have to share anything that you are not comfortable with. It is OK to keep quiet during some parts of discussion if you prefer and also keep in mind that other people might not want to share details of their lives and thoughts so be willing to back off if someone doesn't want to speak.

Want to find out more?

Grosser, S., (2011) 'The Origins of the King James Bible' Quadrant Magazine, Vol. 55 Issue 1/2, p64-66,

King James Bible Trust (2010) 'Richard Dawkins lends his support to The King James Bible Trust' King James Bible Trust, <http://www.kingjamesbibletrust.org/news/2010/02/19/richard-dawkins-lends-his-support-to-the-king-james-bible-trust>

Martin, G. (2010) 'Biblical Phrases, Sayings and Expressions' at Phrases, Sayings, Idioms and Expressions at The Phrase Finder, <http://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/bible-phrases-sayings>

Tomkins, S. (2011), 'King James Bible: How it changed the way we speak', BBC, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-12205084>

Wilson, D. (2011) 'The King's Good Book', History Today, Vol. 61, Issue 1

Available via BBC iPlayer

James Naughtie, 'The Story of the King James Bible', BBC Radio 4 - 3 episodes available

Adam Nicholson, 'When God spoke English: The Making of the King James Bible', BBC 4 (aired on 2 March 2011)

Melvyn Bragg, 'The King James Bible: The Book that Changed the World', BBC 2 (aired on 12 March 2011)