

ESSAY FIVE

THE 1611 KING JAMES BIBLE

The King James Bibles that we see in abundance not only on bookshelves, desks, and coffee tables, but in bedrooms, living rooms, bathrooms, hotel rooms, pockets, purses, cars, and church pews, can be found in all manner of shapes, sizes, bindings, colors, and formats. The book is so ubiquitous that it is hard to imagine a time when there weren't any copies in existence.

That time is now almost four hundred years ago. We know that King James's Bible, as it was often referred to in its history, was first published in 1611, and not just because the date on the title page tells us so. The first notable critic of the new version, Hugh Broughton (1549-1612), who maintained: "I will suffer no scholar in the world to cross me in Hebrew and Greek, when I am sure I have the truth," authored in 1612: *A Censure of the late translation for our churches: sent unto a Right Worshipfull Knight, Attendant upon the King*. In that work he stated that he would "rather be rent in pieces with wild horses, than any such translation by my consent should be urged upon poor churches." In the same year, we see a reference in the visitation articles of John King (1559-1621), who was bishop of London from 1611 to 1621, to "a large bible of the last edition."

The pre-history of the Authorized Version from 1604-1611 is well known. There is information available about the translators and their work. What is not known is when in 1611 the new Bible was published. No historian of the English Bible that I have ever read has even conjectured what month the Authorized Version first appeared. It has been supposed that the reason we don't know the month of publication for the Autho-

ized Version is because, being a revision of the Bishops' Bible and not a new translation, it was not entered in the Stationers' Register—a journal documenting the publication of new works that was maintained by the Stationers' Company of London, a trade guild charged with regulating the publishing industry. Some have made statements about there being twenty thousand copies in the first print run, but this is pure conjecture as well.

The first edition of the 1611 Authorized Version—the *editio princeps*—was a large folio with a page size of roughly 11 by 16 inches. A folio consisted of two leaves (two pages printed on both sides for a total of four pages) printed on a large sheet of paper and folded. Other printing sizes at the time included the quarto (4to., four leaves per sheet), the octavo (8vo., eight leaves per sheet), the duodecimo (12mo., twelve leaves per sheet), and the sextodecimo (16mo., sixteen leaves per sheet). This first folio edition contained 366 sheets yielding 732 leaves or 1464 pages. These were grouped into 123 signatures of three sheets each (except for two signatures in the preliminary matter that had only one or two sheets). Other large folio editions

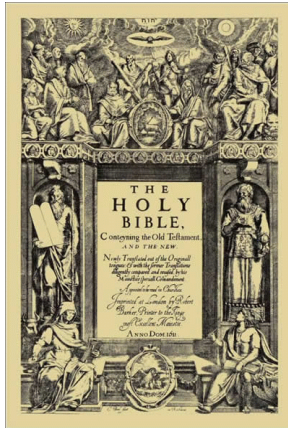


followed in 1613, 1617, 1634, and 1640. The text on each page was laid out in two columns of fifty-nine lines enclosed within ruled margins. This gave it a text area of approximately 9 by 14 inches. Recto pages had the chapter number in the middle of the header; verso pages contained the name of the biblical book. The subject matter of each page appeared on both sides of the header. There were no page numbers. There was a catchword at the bottom of the right-hand column that had a line to

itself. Each chapter begins with a summary of its contents. The first word of each chapter has a large initial capital, usually of five lines. A capital of nine lines usually appears at the beginning of a book. The second letter of the first word is always a capital. Each verse begins on its own line, with its number appearing at

the beginning of the line. Some verse numbers are followed by marks to indicate a new paragraph. The type is in ornate black letter, with roman type used for the material in the headers, the chapter summaries, words in the text that have no direct equivalent in the biblical languages (given in italics in modern editions), and the cross references in the margins, indicated by an asterisk. The other annotations in the margins were in italic type, and consisted of a dagger to indicate literal translations and parallel vertical lines to indicate alternate English renderings.

The beautiful engraving on the title page is signed *C. Boel fecit in Richmont*. This is Cornelis Boel of Antwerp (1576-



1621), who lodged for a time at Richmond Palace in England. Among his other works, he made engravings of Elizabeth and Henry, the two oldest children of King James I, and signed them *C. Boel fecit*, the word *fecit* perhaps signifying that the designs were his. He is also thought to have done the engravings of the king and his wife, but they are unsigned. The engraved title page depicts the Trinity in the upper panel in the form of the Divine Name, a dove, and a lamb. The oval frame

containing the lamb is surrounded by the apostles. At each corner of the engraving sits, with pen in hand, the writers of the four Gospels: Matthew at the top left, Mark at the top right, Luke at the bottom left, and John at the bottom right. Moses and Aaron stand in niches astride the title, which in modern English reads:

The Holy Bible, Containing the Old Testament, and the New. Newly Translated out of the Original Tongues: and with the Former Translations Diligently Compared and Revised by His Majesty's Special Commandment. Appointed to be Read in Churches. Imprinted at London by Robert Barker, Printer to the King's Most Excellent Majesty. Anno Dom. 1611.