THE KING JAMES BIBLE

The King James Bible (KJB) was the result of an extraordinary effort over nearly a century to take many good English translations and turn them into what the translators called ‘one principal good one, not justly to be excepted against’. David Norton traces the work of Tyndale and his successors, analysing the translation and revisions of two representative passages. His fascinating new account follows in detail the creation of the KJB, including attention to the translators’ manuscript work. He also examines previously unknown evidence such as the diary of John Bois, the only man who made notes on the translation. At the centre of the book is a thorough discussion of the first edition. The latter part of the book traces the printing and textual history of the KJB and provides a concise account of its changing scholarly and literary reputations.

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THE KING JAMES BIBLE

A Short History from Tyndale to Today

DAVID NORTON
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10 Genesis 17–18, Blayney’s 1769 folio with annotations showing differences from the original text. Adv.bb.77.2. Reproduced by permission of the Bible Society and of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library

11 Genesis 16–17, *The New Cambridge Paragraph Bible*. Extracts from the Authorized Version of the Bible (The King James Bible), the rights in which are vested in the Crown, are reproduced by permission of the Crown’s Patente, Cambridge University Press
This heading is homage to William Tyndale, who used the same form for his prologue to his 1534 New Testament. It was Tyndale who began the writing in English of what became the King James Bible and did most to make it what it is. Of course he had to have a Bible to translate, so I begin with the Bible itself and a selective look at the resources available to the Reformation translators. The English story of the King James Bible starts with Tyndale, and I explore how he and his successors collectively created it. In part this is done through the history of their work, in part through showing how they developed two brief passages. Then I trace the history of the work on the King James Bible itself, and examine the translators’ scholarship particularly through the library of one of the translators and the previously unknown diary of another. At the heart of the story is the first edition of 1611, explored from title page through to minute details of the text. Then comes a survey of the printing history of the King James Bible through to the establishment of the standard text in 1769, followed by a more selective look at later editions. The King James Bible was not always admired as it has been over the last two and a half centuries of its life, so I conclude with a sketch of its changing reputation. It is a story that I hope will increase understanding and appreciation of the prime Bible in English.

There have been accounts of the English Bible, many of them excellent, from as early as 1645. Like the creation of the KJB, gathering information has been a collaborative process over centuries, so some of what is offered here can be found in many other books, and I have been glad to draw on them. I have not made this into a colourful picture of the time of the translators: translation is above all a matter
of weighing the finest details of words, and I have attempted to give as genuine an impression of this as possible, hoping that the reader is willing to share the attention to detail that made the King James Bible what it is. I have also drawn on some of my earlier work on the Bible, and occasionally repeated myself, for which I hope to be forgiven.

The availability of digital images of early books, notably in *Early English Books Online* (Chadwyck-Healey) and *Eighteenth-Century Collections Online* (Gale), besides making so much more available, has allowed me to cite original editions in most cases, but I have used modern spelling for the quotations.

Besides the indebtedness to other writers on the English Bible in general and the King James Bible in particular, I owe debts of thanks to Ward Allen, pioneering scholar of the King James Bible, Jim Urry, self-appointed indefatigable research assistant, Art Pomeroy and Peter Gainsford, who have given me invaluable help in understanding John Bois’s diary, Tatjana Schaefer and Jack Thiessen, who have helped me understand Luther’s German, Paul Morris, Kathryn Walls, Glyn Parry, Michael Wheeler, Laurence M. Vance, and many Cambridge librarians and scholars, including Alan Jesson and Rosemary Matthews (Bible Society), Nicholas Rogers (Sidney Sussex), David McKitterick (Trinity), Scott Mandelbrote (Peterhouse), Helen Carron (Emmanuel), and the staff of Gonville and Caius library.

This is also an opportunity to thank correspondents who helped me to find the errors in *The New Cambridge Paragraph Bible*: their interest was helpful and heartening. I am especially grateful to Raoul Comninos, who sent detailed notes and suggestions on the entire text, and to Thomas L. Hubeart.

Reflecting on what long seemed a curious moment in my career that led to my working on the Bible, it seems now to have a kind of inevitability, so I come to my greatest debt of gratitude, to my mother and her ongoing love of the Bible. Her Welsh Methodist heritage, going back to one of the founders of Methodism, Daniel Rowland, influenced me more than I knew. The presence of a variety of Bibles in our house, including J.B. Phillips and James Moffatt’s translations, and E.S. Bates’s *The Bible Designed to be Read as Literature*, helped
D.N. unto the reader

shape my consciousness of the Bible. That she had read from The New Cambridge Paragraph Bible, sometimes aloud to my father, was a strange, deep-felt pleasure for me. This book was originally dedicated to her, but now I must inscribe it thus:

In memory of my mother, Margaret Norton, whose loving kindness taught us all how to live
Abbreviations

Bod 1602 1602 Bishops’ Bible with the KJB translators’ annotations
KJB King James Bible
NCPB New Cambridge Paragraph Bible
NT New Testament
ODNB Oxford Dictionary of National Biography
OED Oxford English Dictionary
OT Old Testament