

James I of England and Scotland (1566-1625) arguably exerted one of the most significant impacts on the Christian faith among monarchs, predominantly through the commissioning of the King James Bible, also known as the 'Authorized Version.' This enduring work has left an indelible mark on virtually every Christian today, reflecting the complex and often controversial legacy of this monarch.

## INTRODUCTION TO THE KING AND HIS REIGN (1603-1625)

James I's rise to the thrones of England and Scotland initiated the unification of both kingdoms. Born James Charles Stuart in 1566, he became Scotland's king, James VI, in 1567 after his mother's forced abdication. Despite a tumultuous start due to regencies during his infancy, he established stable rule by adulthood.

The crowns' union resulted from dynastic succession rather than a historical inevitability. England's Elizabeth I died childless in 1603, and James VI, her closest living Protestant relative, succeeded her due to his lineage to Henry VII. Elizabeth's preparation and little opposition allowed a smooth transition.

The union under James I was a personal, not political, union. Both countries retained their sovereignty, laws, and institutions. However, James I's accession marked a significant change in their relationship, paving the way for an integrated British Isles.

James proposed a united kingdom, facing resistance from both countries. His reign was symbolically significant, laying the groundwork for the formal union of England and Scotland in 1707.

James I's ascension reshaped the political landscape of the British Isles, setting a path towards a more unified kingdom.

During his politically tumultuous reign, James survived the Gunpowder Plot assassination attempt, ended a war with Spain through the Treaty of London, and fostered a colonial spirit in the Americas, establishing Jamestown in 1607.

King James I was highly educated, fluent in multiple languages and versed in various academic disciplines, embodying the Renaissance ideal of a well-rounded ruler. His interests spanned theology, philosophy, and the sciences. As a patron of the arts, he supported "The King's Men," a theatrical group including Shakespeare, whose later works are believed to have been influenced by James I's patronage and reign.

The King also wrote several works himself, which are studied to the present, including,

- "Daemonologie" (1597), a treatise on witchcraft that reflects the era's fascination with the supernatural.
- "Basilikon Doron" (1599), a political treatise written for his son, which provides insights into his views on kingship and governance.

Because of his intellectual prowess and long reign, King James I would have been remembered down through the ages even if the Authorized Version had never been written.

## KING JAMES' RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL IDEOLOGY

James I staunchly supported the Divine Right of Kings, arguing that kings derive their power from God, not subjects, leading to absolute authority. His treatise, "The True Law of Free Monarchies," defended this view, a stance opposed by the U.S. founders, as expressed in the constitution. Misusing Scripture, he backed his views.

James I was a Protestant, initially tolerating Catholics. However, after the 1605 Gunpowder Plot, his stance hardened. He opposed the Puritans and Separatists, leading to the American Colonies' establishment.

## THE COMMISSIONING OF THE KING JAMES BIBLE

Before the King James Bible, King Henry VIII approved The Great Bible in 1539, mainly based on translations by William Tyndale and Myles Coverdale. In 1568, Archbishop Matthew Parker revised it for accuracy, creating the Bishop's Bible with Queen Elizabeth I's approval, but it didn't gain popularity.

The Geneva Bible of 1560 was the leading English Bible, popular among Puritans. It was created by Protestant reformers, influenced by John Calvin, and notable for extensive marginal notes providing interpretation. However, these notes often challenged monarchy and advocated for local congregation freedom. James I, aiming to unify Puritans and Anglicans, sought a new Bible free from bias. He wanted a linguistically accurate, poetically written Bible without specific bias, reflecting the monarchy's and church's dignity and gaining universal acceptance.

From January 14 to 18, 1604, King James I held the Hampton Court Conference at Hampton Court Palace, London, in response to Puritan petitions within the Church of England. Alongside Bishops and Puritan leaders, King James I actively participated, although he showed little interest in the desired changes in Church leadership and structure. However, he wanted religious unity and agreed to a proposal for a new English translation of Scripture.

The King insisted on the following:

- **No Marginal Notes:** James specifically directed that the new translation should not contain any marginal notes, which were present in the Geneva Bible and were seen as politically charged.
- **Accuracy and Clarity:** Emphasized the need for the translation to be accurate, clear, and understandable to the common people.

## TRANSLATION AND COMPILATION

### CREATION OF RULES FOR TRANSLATION

Prior to starting, King James established 15 "Rules for Translators" for the new Bible translation, ensuring it was balanced, well-researched, and well-received from the beginning.

The Bishop's Bible was used as a foundation to avoid reinventing the wheel and to ensure familiarity for acceptance. The instructions also stated to consult other English translations if they better agreed with the text. Essentially, the aim was to create the best English translation that accurately reflected the original Hebrew and Greek. If an accurate translation already existed, it should be used.

The rules retained traditional ecclesiastical terms, mandating the use of 'Church' over the Puritan-preferred 'Congregation' for 'ekklesia', enabling potential separation from the established church.

The rules mandated preservation of chapter and verse divisions, acknowledging they were not part of the original inspiration, despite limiting alterations.

A key rule that ensured the translation's longevity was that "No Marginal Notes should be added, except for explaining Hebrew or Greek Words, which can't be briefly and aptly expressed in the Text without circumlocution." By limiting notes to language aids in the most succinct way, the translation remained focused on the timeless, not the timely.

The King insisted that the translation be done in consultation with both the larger group of translators and, at times, with the religious community at large. Since the translation committee was made up of both Puritans and Anglicans, this helped ensure that no individual or faction would have undue influence on the translation.

In summary, the rules were brilliantly designed to create a Bible that would be well-received by the public. More importantly, they ensured that the Bible would not be used as a tool in current religious-political controversies, unlike the Geneva Bible, which had been due to its annotations.