FAMILY GUIDE

MANIFOLD GREATNESS

The Creation and Afterlife of the King James Bible

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King James was king of England from 1603 to 1625. He did not write or translate any part of the King James Bible. It has that name because the king agreed to a new English translation of the Bible and it is dedicated to him.

If you bought a copy of the King James Bible in 1611, you would probably buy only the pages, which would be stitched together without a cover. You would then take the pages to a bookbinder to be placed in a binding, or cover.

In 1968, the astronauts of Apollo 8, the first mission to go around the moon, read aloud from the King James Bible in a TV broadcast during their mission.

Many United States presidents have taken their oath of office using a King James Bible, including Abraham Lincoln, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush. Barack Obama used the same Bible that Abraham Lincoln did!

For hundreds of years, most copies of the Bible were in Latin. In 1539, King Henry VIII made a law requiring that every church in England have a copy of the Bible in English; this and other English translations influenced the language of the King James Bible.

Discover! Learn more about the King James Bible at www.manifoldgreatness.org/kids
Many of the books of the Bible were originally written in Hebrew and Greek. From these early texts, Latin manuscripts, or handwritten copies, were made throughout the middle ages. Gradually, the Bible was also translated into languages people spoke in everyday life; these are called vernacular languages. The first English translations of the entire Bible were made in the late 1300s.

**Try it!**

Which description matches which Bible?

_____A. This plain Latin manuscript of the book of John was produced in Italy in the 500s or 600s, which means it is almost 1,500 years old!

_____B. This Hebrew Bible was printed in Paris in 1539. It shows the prophet Isaiah.

_____C. A beautiful pattern and a very fancy letter B decorate this Greek copy of the New Testament.

_____D. The Gutenberg Bible was printed in Germany, the first place in Europe to have a printing press. The decorations on this page were added by hand after the book was printed.

**Explore** Learn more about early Bibles at www.manifoldgreatness.org/earlybibles
King James I, who had recently become king of England, met with church leaders at the royal palace of Hampton Court in 1604. John Rainolds, one of the men at the meeting, asked the king to consider creating a new Bible in English. The king agreed. For the next seven years, a special group of translators worked on the king's project. The result was the King James Bible.

Try It!
The translators dedicated their work to King James, but the letters in these words are mixed up. Can you unscramble them?

Ot het somt ighh dna ighmty pinrec Jmaes yb het racge fo Gd ikng fo reaGt Birtian Farnce dna lerandl

Answer: To the most high and mighty prince, James, by the grace of God, King of Great Britain, France, and Ireland.
King James I
Ruled Scotland 1567–1625
Ruled England, Ireland, and Scotland 1603–1625

James was crowned king of Scotland when he was just thirteen months old. He also became king of England and Ireland in 1603, after his cousin Queen Elizabeth I died without any children.

King James did not write or translate any part of the Bible that bears his name. However, he did write other religious books and poetry, including poems in Latin for his wife, Queen Anne, and his older son, Prince Henry! James also enjoyed the arts. Many new plays were performed during his reign—including William Shakespeare’s Macbeth.

Did you know?
Prince Henry owned a copy of the King James Bible. It was bound in a special binding that has two tiny squirrels as part of the design!

Can you find the squirrels?

Answer: Both squirrels face the crown.
Translation is taking words from one language and finding ways to say them in a different language. People who work with written words are called translators. People who hear words in one language and speak them in another so that others can understand them are called interpreters.

Six committees of translators worked for almost seven years to produce the King James Bible. Each committee was called a company and they worked in Westminster, Oxford, and Cambridge.

Many of the translators could read and write several languages. The translators used Greek, Hebrew, and Latin texts, as well as previous English translations of the Bible, in their work.

Imagine! Which of these items would a King James Bible translator need to do his job?

Hint: the translators made many notes, so they needed things to write with.

- Quill pen
- Inkwell
- Paper
- Computer
- Pen knife
- Bishops’ Bible
- Hebrew book
- Paper clips
- Stapler
- Greek book

Answer: Quill pen, inkwell, paper, pen knife, Bishops’ Bible, Hebrew book.
Try it! Compositors put letters in backwards (and upside down) so they would print right-side up on the page. Can you match the phrase from the compositor’s stick with the way it printed in the King James Bible?

From the printed pages of the King James Bible:

1. Translation it is that openeth the window, to let in the light
2. Honor thy father and thy mother
3. Give us this day our daily bread
4. In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth
5. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want
6. Arise, shine, for thy light is come

From the compositor’s stick:

A. Give us this day our daily bread
B. Translation it is that openeth the window, to let in the light
C. Honor thy father and thy mother
D. Arise, shine, for thy light is come
E. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want
F. In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth

The King James Bible was first printed in 1611 in London.

Printing a book took many steps. It was a slow and messy process. We are not sure how many copies of the King James Bible were first printed, but the number is probably close to 1,000. It took about a year to print them!

Make it! Print your own page at www.manifoldgreatness.org/printer

Did you know? Printers kept lowercase letters in one case and capital letters in another. Sometimes the cases were stored on two different shelves, an “upper” one and a “lower” one. This is how we got the terms uppercase and lowercase letters!
In the early 1600s, most books were sold without covers! Imagine that you have just bought a new book and are taking the pages to a bookbinder to be placed in a cover. Use this space to draw what you would like on the cover. In the early 1600s, book covers often included decorative lines and patterns. Sometimes very thin sheets of gold called gold leaf were placed on top to make these patterns shiny and beautiful.

Explore!
Learn more about how bindings were made and design your own at www.manifoldgreatness.org(binding)
The King James Bible is still read today, and its words are found in songs, stories, movies, TV shows, and even a broadcast from the Apollo 8 mission!

Because of its historical importance and the ways that it is used in music, entertainment, and other types of culture, the King James Bible is one of the world’s most famous books.

Try it!
Many phrases from the King James Bible are still part of our everyday conversations. Can you guess which ones?

A. salt of the earth
B. in a pickle
C. the blind lead the blind
D. apple of his eye
E. not a mouse stirring
F. at their wit’s end
G. the skin of my teeth
H. budge an inch
I. turn the other cheek
J. many are called, but few are chosen
K. a tower of strength
L. for goodness sake
M. your own flesh and blood
N. one fell swoop
O. foul play
P. without rhyme or reason
Q. a laughingstock

Answers: A, C, D, F, G, I, J; the rest are from Shakespeare.
About Manifold Greatness

The Manifold Greatness project marks the 400th anniversary of the King James Bible of 1611. A joint project of the Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, and the Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, DC, with the assistance of the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, it includes major exhibitions at the Folger and Bodleian libraries and the Harry Ransom Center; a touring panel exhibit in the US in association with the American Library Association; a website; a book; scholarly conferences; and events and programs for the public.

The title Manifold Greatness is taken from the 1611 Bible’s dedication to King James, which begins, “Great and manifold were the blessings” when God made James the king of England.

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Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in the Manifold Greatness exhibition or related publications do not necessarily represent those of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

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