

A Music That Can Never Be Forgotten

GREG FREEMAN delves into chapter and verse on the 400th anniversary of the King James Bible.

THE FIRST BIBLE I bought was a blackletter Geneva Bible printed in 1607. As I prefer the path less travelled, buying that version was an intentionally defiant act against the ubiquitous King James Version. I wanted something different and unique, something to shock churchgoers who set the KJV at the beginning of everything. My purchase may seem like an innocent act now, but in King James's eyes it could have been a militant inroad upon his kingship.

King James famously said, "No bishop, no King," and my copy of the Geneva Bible—so-called because its New Testament was first published at Geneva by English exiles in 1557, three years before the entire Bible was first published in England in 1560—constantly refers to kings as tyrants in the margins along with other conveniently placed Calvinist, anti-episcopal nuggets.

Despite this, some verses in the KJV are identical, or nearly so, to those in the Geneva; both draw heavily on William Tyndale's New Testament of 1525–26. (Not long ago I came

The 400th Anniversary of the
KING JAMES BIBLE

1611–2011
CELEBRATING
A CULTURAL
& SPIRITUAL
LANDMARK

VANCOUVER WILL MARK
THIS ANNIVERSARY WITH
THREE FREE PUBLIC EVENTS:

Tuesday, September 6th, 7 pm.
**"AN EIGHTY-ONE YEAR JOURNEY:
THE MAKING OF THE KING JAMES BIBLE"**
A Lecture by Professor E. Gerald Hobbs
Vancouver School of Theology
Location: Irving K. Barber Learning Centre
UBC Library's Rare Books & Special Collections
Followed by Official Opening of the Exhibition & Reception

Saturday, September 17th, 7 pm.
**"MEMORY, MEANING, AND RHETORICAL
POWER: THE KJV AND ITS LEGACY"**
A Lecture by Professor David E. James,
Distinguished Professor of Literature
& the Humanities, Baylor University, Waco, Texas
Location: Chapel of the Holy Trinity,
Vancouver School of Theology

September 27th–October 29th, 2011. Open: Mon.–Fri. 9 am–5 pm; Sat. 12–3 pm.
AN EXHIBITION OF RARE BOOKS ILLUSTRATING THE STORY OF THE KING JAMES BIBLE
Location: Irving K. Barber Learning Centre, UBC Library's Rare Books & Special Collections

Sponsored by Rare Books & Special Collections, University of British Columbia
Vancouver School of Theology • University Hill United Congregation • Regent College

across a 1610 Geneva on Flickr; the owner told me it had the KJV alterations handwritten between the lines throughout.) It wasn't until after the Restoration in 1660 that the KJV finally began to supersede the Geneva; and yet the Geneva was still used, though long forced out of print. My own 1607 edition illustrates this, with its numerous ownership inscriptions beginning in 1661 and dated through the first half of the 18th century. It was the people's hand-held Bible and not easy to be rid of. How times change.

RARE BOOKS AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS at the University of British Columbia collaborated with the Vancouver School of Theology and others this past September–October to hold an exhibition, *The 400th Anniversary of the King James Bible, 1611–2011*. Before entering the Chung Room, one first encountered two display cases. One held the huge 1841 *English Hexapla* and other items; the second case included John Bodley's remarkable second-folio Geneva

Bible in roman font, printed in 1561. (Bodley was the father of the bibliophile Sir Thomas.)

Displayed along the rear wall of the Chung Room were several examples of dictionaries and Bibles—in English, Latin and the original languages that preceded (and sometimes contributed to) the KJV. Each item was numbered to correspond with the exhibition catalogue. Item number 1 (out of about 30) was a gorgeous circa 1350 manuscript Vulgate vellum leaf of II Corinthians. This was displayed next to a page from the German Bible printed by Koberger (1475) to show how the early printers exactly imitated the mediaeval scribes.

While the exhibition comprised some fascinating and important single leaves, complete incunabula and post-incunabula works were featured as well. These included the *Biblia Sacra* (Venice, 1480) and Pagnini's important Hebrew-Latin dictionary (Lyon, 1528), the latter provided by Professor Gerald Hobbs of the Vancouver School of Theology, who gave the exhibition's opening lecture.

Two editions of Erasmus's works, one in English (Whitchurche, 1548) and the other in Latin (Estienne, 1551) were also on display. The latter was the *Novum IESU Christi D.N. Testamentum* . . . ([Geneva]: Ex officina Roberti Stephani, 1551), the very first New Testament ever to be printed with the versification we know today. The printer Stephani (Estienne) devised this versification, which became standard when the Geneva Bible followed suit in 1557. Previously, all Bibles were read by chapter without any verses at all. This seminal volume was on loan from Professor Bernard Roussel of the Sorbonne.

ONE MUCH INFLUENCED by Erasmus was William Tyndale (1494?–1536), represented by the 1976 facsimile of his first-edition 1526 New Testament. It's lazily said that Tyndale translated the first English Bible: Tyndale was rather the first to translate from the original languages (Hebrew and Greek, not Latin) into English, having done at least the Pentateuch, Jonah and the entire New Testament. By the Oxford Constitutions of 1408,

it was forbidden to translate the Bible into English in England without the approval of a bishop, and Cuthbert Tunstall, Bishop of London, had refused Tyndale. English Bibles sanctioned by the Church and portions even printed on a printing press already existed. The real issue behind Tunstall's refusal was Tyndale's heretical Lutheran beliefs; it had nothing to do with the English language.

For this Bible, which he did not complete, Tyndale was treacherously captured, imprisoned

*Tyndale's words are still
on our tongues today:
sign of the times;
eat, drink and be merry;
let there be light; the
powers that be;
my brother's keeper;
filthy lucre; fight the
good fight; scapegoat;
beautiful; landlady;
seashore; fisherman.*

and burnt at the stake. Tyndale's works (his theological books too) are of spectacular magnitude. His books were smuggled by merchants into England, where they were eagerly read by the public, who bought copies for a few pence; some of them too were burnt, both books and people, just as the followers and Bibles of Wycliffe had been about 120 years before. Tyndale's words are still on our tongues today: sign of the times; eat, drink and be merry; let there be light; the powers that be; my brother's keeper; filthy lucre; fight the good fight; scapegoat; beautiful; landlady; seashore; fisherman. His translations make up much of the KJV, with minor alterations.

Also represented in the exhibition was Miles Coverdale, with the *Whole Byble*



Above: Leaf from a Latin manuscript Bible probably produced in a Carthusian monastery c. 1350. Right: Page printed by Anton Koberger in Nuremberg, Germany, in 1475. The earliest printed Bibles closely imitated the manuscript Bibles they supplanted. Images courtesy of UBC Rare Books and Special Collections

There Rogers became friends with Tyndale, and compiled his Bible from the Coverdale and Tyndale translations. Rogers has the distinction of being the first Protestant to be burnt at the stake by Queen Mary, February 4, 1555. This particular copy printed in 1551 features a 16th-century handwritten prayer facing the New Testament title page: “[G]raunt that my body sleeping my minde / May watch in the[e] and be made merie . . .”

Also translated by Coverdale was the Great Bible, *The Byble in Englishe* (Nycolas Hyll, London, 1552). This was the first Authorized Version, published in April 1539. Printing was begun in Paris in 1538 but its progress was stopped by the French Inquisition. The inquisitor happened to be a day late, as Coverdale was then smuggling out as much of

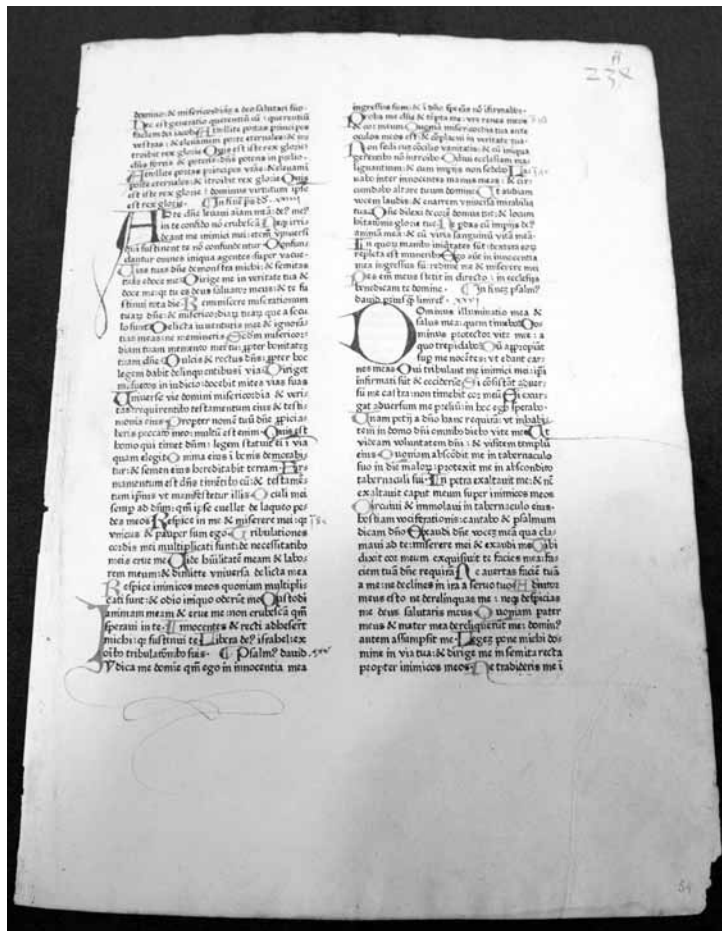
(C. Froschover, Zurich, 1550). This is the second edition of the Coverdale Bible, first printed in 1535. While Tyndale the perfectionist was busy constantly revising his work and being engaged in dispute by Thomas More, Coverdale forged ahead. He compiled and translated from several versions, without possessing the great linguistic skill of Tyndale (though he was fluent in German), and thus became the first to have a complete Bible printed in English.

The Matthew’s Bible, *The Byble* (N. Hyl for R. Toye, London, 1551), was displayed in its fourth edition. It was first issued in 1537. Thomas Matthew was an alias for John Rogers, chaplain to the English merchants and exiles at Antwerp.

the printed sheets as he could. He was unable to remove everything, and the remainder, “four great dry-fats of them,” were condemned to be burned in Maubert Place. These were recovered through purchase, however: the Lieutenant Criminal of the Inquisition had neglected his duty and sold the sheets to a haberdasher. The edition displayed was sadly not the 1539 first edition, but rather a smaller in-quarto edition printed 1552 in the reign of Edward VI.

NEXT DISPLAYED were the Geneva Bible and the Bishop’s Bible, the two rival versions of Elizabeth’s reign, one being the people’s Bible (unauthorized) and the other the monarch’s Bible

(authorized). The distinction between the two is remarkable. The Bishop's version displayed, officially a revision of the Great Bible, was the first-edition folio of 1568, including all the fawning of Elizabeth's court, with portraits of Lord Burleigh and others. It was poorly translated on top of being a detestable show of aristocracy. Its infamous rendering of "Cast thy bread upon the waters" is the soggy "Lay thy bread upon wet faces." These two Bibles were in different ways the foundation for the next Authorized Version, the reason for this exhibition. The two opposing parties, Anglican and Puritan, convened at Hampton Court at the beginning of James's reign, resulting in the 1611 King James Bible.



The Holy Bible, conteyning the Old Testament, and the New; Newly translated out of the Originall tongues; & with the former Translations diligently compared and revised, by his Maiesties speciall commandement. Appointed to be read in Churches. The folio KJV on display was the muddled first (or second?) edition, dated both 1611 and 1613, with a famous error at Matthew 26:36, where "Judas" mistakenly is printed instead of "Jesus."

UBC's exhibition wonderfully displayed the historical progress of the Bible from the medieval Vulgate to the unforgettable King James Version. However, if one has an appetite for further early printed Bibles (UBC understandably only had so much space, and as the subject of this exhibition notes, "of books and scribes there is no end"), the Vancouver Public Library Special Collections holds several, including the *Sanctus Hieronymus* printed by Koberger at Nuremberg in 1513. I recently discovered that the penned inscriptions in these Bibles (some of which I transliterated

in English as far as the bookworm would allow) are that of at least one English Reformer—Richard Crowther, for example (1540s–60s), who quotes Don Benedetto's Benefit on the front pastedown. The *Sanctus Hieronymus* is one of many early Bibles available for reference in B.C. I would also suggest reading the Eric Abbott Memorial Lecture delivered by Richard Chartres, the bishop of London, which gives a packed history of the KJV and explains the debates about its use in the U.K. today (a transcript of the lecture is available online at <http://bit.ly/trRyAa>). Professor Hobbs repeated his exhibition opening lecture on October 3 for the camera, and the video will soon be posted online.

.....
 ~ Greg Freeman specializes in the collecting of Tudor and Jacobean imprints. He received the second-place award in the 2011 National Book Collecting Contest.