

The King James Bible

Its History, Revisions, and Preservation

I understand the original King James Version may have had errors. Is that true? If so, what were they, and how many revisions or reprints occurred before the current version?

Yes, that is correct. The original 1611 King James Version had a number of printing errors, spelling inconsistencies, and later revisions. Some were simple printer mistakes, while others involved wording, punctuation, or standardizing the English language.

But it is important to understand this: The errors were not doctrinal corruption. Most were ordinary printing or editing issues.

The Original 1611 KJV Is Not Exactly the Same as the KJV Used Today

Another important fact is that the King James Bible most people use today is not exactly the same as the original 1611 edition.

The 1611 King James Bible used older spelling, older punctuation, and some words that looked different than they do today. For example, the letter “v” was often printed where we would use “u,” and the letter “i” was often used where we would use “j.”

Over time, the KJV went through several updates and corrections. These changes were mostly spelling, punctuation, printing errors, and wording adjustments. They were not a whole new translation.

Most King James Bibles printed today are based on the 1769 Oxford edition, edited by Benjamin Blayney.

So, when someone says, “I only use the 1611 King James Bible,” they usually are not using the exact 1611 text. Most likely, they are using the later 1769 edition.

Between 1611 and 1769, thousands of small changes were made. Most were minor, but they show that the King James Bible we commonly use today went through a process of editing and standardizing over time.

What Kinds of Errors Were in Early KJV Printings?

The early King James Bibles were printed by hand-operated presses. Every letter had to be set by hand, so printing mistakes were common. These were not usually translation errors. Many were spelling mistakes, misplaced letters, missing words, or inconsistent wording between printings.

Some of these printing mistakes became famous.

The “**Wicked Bible**”, 1631

One of the most famous printing errors happened in 1631. In Exodus 20:14, the word “**not**” was accidentally left out of the seventh commandment.

Instead of reading: “**Thou shalt not commit adultery.**”

It read: “**Thou shalt commit adultery.**”

This became known as the “Wicked Bible.” The mistake was considered very serious, and the printers were heavily fined. Many copies were destroyed.

The “He Bible” and “She Bible”

Another famous example is found in Ruth 3:15. In one early printing, the verse said: **“he went into the city”**

In another printing, it said: **“she went into the city”**

Because of this difference, these editions became known as the **“He Bible”** and the **“She Bible.”**

This kind of difference came from early printing and editing inconsistencies. It also shows why later editions of the KJV were corrected and standardized over time.

These examples help explain why the KJV most people use today is not the exact 1611 printing. The text went through many small corrections, especially in spelling, punctuation, and printing mistakes, before becoming the more standardized KJV commonly used today.

2. Spelling and Language Differences

Another major difference between the original 1611 King James Bible and modern KJV editions is spelling. In 1611, English spelling had not yet been standardized. Printers and writers often spelled the same word in different ways, and there were no universally accepted spelling rules.

For example, words in the 1611 edition often appeared as:

- “sonne” instead of “son”
- “euill” instead of “evil”
- “mooued” instead of “moved”
- “speake” instead of “speak”
- “booke” instead of “book”

These spellings can make the original 1611 edition difficult for modern readers.

The original KJV was also printed in a Gothic-style typeface known as blackletter, which looks very different from modern print. To many readers today, a page from the 1611 Bible appears almost like a foreign language, even though it is English.

Adding to the confusion, some letters were used differently than they are today:

- The letters “u” and “v” were often interchangeable.
- The letters “i” and “j” were often interchangeable.
- The letter “s” was sometimes printed in a form that resembles a modern “f.”

For example, a word such as “Jesus” might appear with different letter forms than modern readers expect.

These differences can make the original 1611 Bible challenging to read, but they do not represent doctrinal changes. Most of the later revisions simply updated spelling, punctuation, and typography so that readers could more easily understand the text.

This is one reason why the King James Bible most people use today looks very different from the original 1611 printing, even though the translation itself remains substantially the same.

3. Punctuation and Wording Revisions

Many of the changes made to the King James Bible between 1611 and 1769 were simply editorial improvements. Editors worked to make the text more consistent and easier to read by correcting grammar, punctuation, capitalization, spelling, and wording variations.

Over the years, English usage changed, and editors updated the text to reflect more standardized forms of the language.

For example:

- “towards” became “toward”
- “amongst” became “among”
- “lift up your heads, O ye gates” might receive updated punctuation without changing the meaning

Capitalization was also made more consistent. Early editions often capitalized words differently than modern editions. Punctuation marks such as commas, semicolons, and colons were revised to improve readability and clarity.

In some cases, wording was adjusted to match the translators’ intended meaning more accurately or to correct inconsistencies between printings. These were generally minor changes and did not alter the doctrines or teachings of Scripture.

The vast majority of the thousands of differences between the 1611 and 1769 editions involve spelling, punctuation, grammar, typography, and editorial standardization rather than changes in biblical doctrine.

As a result, when readers compare a modern KJV with the original 1611 edition, many of the differences they notice are simply the result of the English language becoming more standardized over time.

How Many Changes Were Made to the King James Bible?

Scholars estimate that there are approximately 20,000 to 30,000 differences between the original 1611 King James Bible and later editions, particularly the 1769 Oxford edition that most modern KJV Bibles follow.

At first glance, that number may sound alarming, but it is important to understand what those differences actually are.

The overwhelming majority involve:

- Spelling updates.
- Punctuation changes.
- Capitalization changes.
- Changes in the use of italics.
- Standardization of wording.
- Corrections of printing errors.

For example, a single spelling change from “sonne” to “son” counts as a difference. A comma added or removed counts as a difference. A word changed from “towards” to “toward” counts as a difference. When thousands of these small editorial changes are added together, the total becomes quite large.

Only a relatively small number of differences involve actual wording changes, and most of those are minor adjustments rather than changes in meaning. The doctrines and teachings of the Bible remained the same throughout the revision process.

This is why scholars often say that the large number of differences between the 1611 and 1769 editions sounds more dramatic than it really is. Most changes were editorial improvements designed to make the text more accurate, consistent, and easier to read.

In short, while thousands of changes were made between 1611 and 1769, the vast majority were not changes to doctrine or major translation decisions. They were primarily corrections and updates that reflected the development of the English language and improvements in printing.

Major Revisions of the King James Bible

The King James Bible did not remain unchanged after its first publication in 1611. Over the next 150 years, a series of revisions corrected printing errors, standardized spelling and punctuation, and improved consistency throughout the text.

The major revision stages were:

Year	Revision
1611	Original KJV
1629	First major correction
1638	More corrections
1762	Standardization revision
1769	Blayney Oxford edition (most modern KJVs)

1611 Original Edition

The first King James Bible was published in 1611. Like other books printed during that era, it contained printing errors, inconsistent spelling, and typographical variations that would later be corrected.

1629 and 1638 Revisions

The first major revisions were completed at Cambridge University. Scholars reviewed the original translation, corrected printing mistakes, and compared the English text more carefully with the Hebrew and Greek sources. Several of the men involved in these revisions were connected to the original translation tradition.

1762 Revision

Francis Sawyer Parris produced a major revision that updated spelling, punctuation, italics, and cross-references. By this time, English spelling had become much more standardized, making such revisions necessary.

1769 Blayney Oxford Edition

Benjamin Blayney's revision, published by Oxford University Press in 1769, became the standard form of the King James Bible. Blayney carefully reviewed earlier editions and introduced thousands of editorial corrections and standardizations.

Most King James Bibles printed today follow the 1769 Oxford text, either directly or with only minor variations. As a result, when people refer to the “King James Version,” they are usually referring to the 1769 edition rather than the original 1611 printing.

Understanding these revisions helps us see that the King James Bible itself underwent a process of correction and refinement over time. The text that millions of Christians read today is the product of both the original translators and generations of editors who worked to preserve and standardize their work.

Did the King James Translators Expect Future Revisions?

Yes.

One of the most overlooked facts about the King James Version is that its translators never claimed their work was perfect or beyond improvement. In the original 1611 preface, *The Translators to the Reader*, they spoke with humility about the work of Bible translation and acknowledged their dependence on earlier translators.

The translators recognized that:

- Translation work can be improved.
- Revisions and corrections are beneficial.
- Earlier English Bibles helped make their work possible.
- Future generations might further refine the translation.

They praised earlier translators such as William Tyndale, Miles Coverdale, and others who had labored to bring the Scriptures into English. Rather than criticizing previous translations, they viewed themselves as building upon the foundation that others had laid.

The translators compared Bible translation to polishing a precious stone or refining gold. Their goal was not to create an entirely new Bible, but to make a good translation even better.

One statement from the preface reflects their attitude well:

“Truly, good Christian Reader, we never thought from the beginning that we should need to make a new Translation, nor yet to make of a bad one a good one... but to make a good one better.”

This historical fact surprises some people today. Many assume the KJV translators believed their work would never need revision. In reality, they understood that translation is an ongoing task and that careful revision can help communicate God’s Word more clearly and accurately to future generations.

The King James translators produced one of the greatest Bible translations in history, but they did so with humility, recognizing both their debt to the past and the possibility of future improvements.

An Important Perspective

It is important to remember that every Bible translation in history has gone through a process of copying, printing, revision, and correction.

This includes:

- The King James Version (KJV)
- The Geneva Bible
- The Bishops’ Bible

Throughout history, Bible publishers have corrected:

- Copyist mistakes.
- Printer mistakes.
- Spelling errors.
- Punctuation inconsistencies.
- Formatting issues.
- Translation refinements.

This is not unusual. It has been part of the history of Bible transmission and publication for centuries.

The existence of revisions does **not** mean God failed to preserve His Word. Rather, revisions often demonstrate the care taken to preserve and accurately communicate God's Word. Scholars, translators, editors, and printers have continually worked to identify mistakes, correct errors, and improve clarity so that readers can have confidence in the text before them.

God's promise is that His Word endures forever, not that every printer, copyist, translator, or publisher would be perfect. The history of the Bible shows both God's faithfulness in preserving His truth and the diligent efforts of believers to pass that truth from one generation to the next.

For this reason, the existence of revisions should not weaken our confidence in Scripture. Instead, it should remind us of the remarkable way God has preserved His Word through centuries of copying, translating, printing, and distribution so that people around the world can read and know the message of salvation through Jesus Christ.

One Important Clarification

Sometimes people hear, "There are thousands of changes in the KJV," and assume the doctrine was constantly changing.

That is misleading.

Most of those changes were very small. For example:

- "faide" became "said"
- Spelling was updated
- Punctuation was corrected
- Capitalization was standardized
- Printer mistakes were fixed
- Italics were adjusted

Very few changes affected the meaning in any significant way.

So, the issue was not that the Bible's teaching was being changed over and over. Most revisions were simply corrections and updates that made the text easier to read and more consistent.

This helps us be honest about history without weakening our confidence in God's Word.

So, what KJV do people actually use today?

Usually:

- 1769 Oxford KJV
or
- editions very close to it.

That is the standard "King James Version" most churches use now.

My Conclusion

The King James Version has always been the standard by which I compare other Bible translations. I love its rich language, its influence on Christian history, and its faithfulness to God's Word. It has blessed my life, the ministry, and my walk with Christ for many years.

At the same time, my study of the history of the KJV has shown me that God used many faithful translators before 1611 and many faithful editors after 1611. The King James Bible itself is part of a long history of translation, revision, and preservation.

Over the years, I have not only experienced the rude and unkind behavior of some KJV-Only advocates, but I have also watched with sadness as some have used the issue of Bible versions to attack fellow believers. I have seen sincere Christians questioned, criticized, and even treated as though they were less spiritual simply because they did not place the same level of importance on the KJV.

I am convinced that many believers will one day give an account for the way they treated their brothers and sisters in Christ over this issue. It is one thing to strongly prefer the King James Version. It is another thing entirely to use that preference as a weapon against other Christians.

The spirit that produces pride, division, harshness, and condemnation is not the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit produces love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance. When discussions about Bible versions become opportunities to belittle, shame, or attack fellow believers, something has gone terribly wrong.

If you love the King James Version, I rejoice with you. I love it too. But if you find yourself constantly attacking other Christians because they value a different translation, or because they do not rate the KJV as highly as you do, then perhaps it is time for some honest self-examination before the Lord.

The Bible teaches us to contend for the faith, but it also teaches us to love one another. We should be known not only for our convictions, but also for our Christlike spirit.

My prayer is that we will love God's Word, study God's Word, obey God's Word, and extend grace to one another as we do.