

# A Librarian's View of the Bible

*As Deputy Librarian at Cambridge University Library during the 1980s, Reg Carr was fascinated to trace the library's connections to the Bible. Even in such a prestigious collection of books, the Bible stands above other texts because of its enduring value and fascinating history.*

The city of Cambridge and its world-famous university is proud of its intimate association with the Bible. In printing, translation and preservation, this connection has been built over many centuries.

## Printing

The Cambridge University Press was founded in 1584, and was printing Bibles in English as early as 1591. This was when the University Printer, John Legate, published an edition of the Geneva translation of the Bible. This popular Bible was published in an unsuccessful attempt to break the monopoly of the London-based Queen's Printer, Christopher Barker.

This was the first complete Bible to be printed in Cambridge, and it predated the King James Version by some 20 years. Today, the University Press still publishes a wide range of Bibles, and these quality products continue to sell in large numbers all over the world.

## Translation

Not long after James I came to the throne of Great Britain after the death

of Elizabeth I in 1603, he ordered that a new translation of the Bible should be undertaken. We know this today as the King James, or Authorised Version. This is believed to be the most widely read work in English of all time.

On the advice of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Richard Bancroft, the King commanded that the translation work should be divided between six companies of scholars, two of which were in Cambridge. Of the 48 men appointed by the Crown, 14 were members of the Cambridge companies. There were also a few 'Cambridge' men who worked in the London translation companies, including Bishop John Overall, a former Master of St. Catharine's College, and Bishop Lancelot Andrewes, who had been Master of Pembroke College.

As recently as 2014, the work of these scholars has had further light thrown on it. In the archives of Sidney Sussex College, a notebook was discovered, which contained the work of one of the translators, Samuel Ward. The significance of this commentary is described by Jeffrey Miller, the scholar who identified it: *"It points the way to a fuller, more complex understanding than ever before of the process by which the King James Bible... came to be."*

## Preservation and Collection

The Cambridge University Library houses one of the most extensive and valuable collections of Bibles in the world. Since 1984 it has been home to

the library and archives of the British and Foreign Bible Society, which contains at least 40,000 Bibles.

The Library's own Bible collection is full of rare and interesting items, and it has been strengthened over the years by many generous gifts, such as the 150 Bibles donated in 1933 by Arthur Young. This endowment included a fine copy of the Gutenberg Bible of c.1455, the first book ever printed by the use of movable type.

More recently, too, in 2013–14, the Library was fortunate enough to be able to mount a successful £1.1m fundraising campaign to secure the Codex Zacynthius, a 7<sup>th</sup> Century Greek manuscript version of the text of part of Luke's Gospel.

From time to time, items from the Bible collection are publicly exhibited. This makes a very worthwhile visit for anyone interested in the Bible.

## Real Value

However, the real value of the Bible lies not in its monetary cost, its literary qualities, or even its history. Its worth lies in the nature of its author, and what it can do for those who read it and believe it.

The Bible makes a very clear statement, that it was inspired by God, and the people who wrote it down were writing God's words, not their own:

*No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20–21).*

The Bible provides ample evidence for this claim, which is often the subject of articles in *Glad Tidings*. The key proof is that it contains material

which could not have been known by those writing it down. This includes both highly accurate prophecies about future events, and scientific or geographic facts.

We also read that, if we believe the Bible and decide to obey what God asks of us, we share the hope of faithful men and women throughout its pages: to live for ever in the Kingdom of God:

*Having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:22–23).*

*The saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever (Daniel 7:18).*

These are life-changing truths. If you want to consider how God cares now for those who follow Him, then read Romans 8:28–39. This is the real value of this remarkable book.

**Reg Carr**



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