

February 2011

Dear neighbours,

The Queen significantly introduced her Christmas speech talking about the Authorised Version of the Bible, it being 400 years ago this year that it first appeared in print. The Post Office will issue commemorative stamps in 2011, and events will be held across our land to remind us of the part the Bible has played in our history.

The Bible was written in 3 Languages, the Old Testament in Hebrew, the New in Greek with a little Chaldee in the Old. The book of Job may be contemporary with Abraham ie 1900BC, though the account of Abraham in Genesis was written later, for Moses lived around 1500BC. It is convenient to think of David who wrote many of the psalms as living around 1050BC. The New Testament was completed in the first century AD. So the Bible is considerably older than the translation made available in 1611 in English.

Christians believe that what makes the Bible so special is that it reveals in a way full of variety what the living God would have us know about Himself; about His Son the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit; about the origin of man (none of us was there when the world originated), why we are sinful (with all that follows from that), the way of salvation, what happens after death (the judgment) and the glories of eternal life for those who are redeemed by the Saviour, Jesus Christ.

God has revealed these things because the fall of Adam has rendered us incapable of desiring, understanding, or unearthing such things for ourselves, and there was a necessity that God Himself should break through and teach us what we must know to please Him and be personally saved. Though human authors conveyed God's message in their own styles, yet Christians believe that God so directed their minds that error was impossible in these things which could not otherwise be known.

Christians believe that what makes the Bible so relevant is that, notwithstanding cultural changes, the passage of history and a quantum leap in understanding, human nature itself has not changed and the blindness of the human heart towards unseen things and the inclination towards evil persists. The Apostle Paul wrote, "The good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do...O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?...I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 7.19,24,25) and it finds an echo within us which may prompt us to an empathy with him and hopefully to investigate Paul's solution as it is found in the scriptures.

Most of us do not know Hebrew, Chaldee or Greek so we need a translation to bring these things home to us. The AV in 1611 was not the first in English, nor thought at the time by many to be the best; but true worth will shine through and it has become well-nigh universally accepted as supreme. Here or there some of you might prefer another rendering. If choir days are still precious to you, you may recall (Psalm 23.1) "The Lord is my shepherd; therefore will I lack nothing" which is earlier than the AV's "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want". But overall the AV commends itself.

Because the things which are eternal are unseen; because the things which are of the greatest significance thrill the soul; because the language of the originals is exalted, excellence of translation is most important - to give wings to the noblest aspirations expressed there, to make loftiest thoughts memorable, and to match the glory of the original language. Excellence (though not perfection) is the defining characteristic of the AV; particularly in the rhythmic flow of words which make it easy to read publicly and memorise – and for these things it was designed. The original languages had this characteristic; it was Tyndale (whose earlier translation was already a national treasure and was a great influence on the AV's translators, indeed much quoted by them) who had the flair for the sound

and flow of English words which enabled him to see that English could recapture the melody of Hebrew and Greek.

The Authorised Version had a great influence on our land, for it came across fresh and made Christian teaching available in a new and exciting way. Personal salvation, personal honesty and standards, a new impetus towards the founding of schools and hospitals, freedom for slaves, the legal system (innocent until proved guilty) - all these things fired the souls of thousands in all walks of life and affected the moral fabric even of those who did not believe. One 18th century German wrote, "I believe we may credit one great superiority in England over other countries to the circumstance that there the Holy Scripture is found in every house, as is the case nowhere else in the world. It is, so to speak, the good genius of the place, the protecting spirit of the domestic hearth and family." It would be politically correct to pooh-pooh such sentiments now; but it was true, and if it were true today our land would be a better place.

In that sense it united our nation, its principles being near universally accepted and defining the ethos of the land. The Queen, after speaking of the Bible, went on to say that sport nowadays is the uniting factor in our land. But the ethics of sport, the behaviour of players and fans, is not governed by the sport itself but by that which moulds society, which is what the Bible in the Authorised Version did.

There is a sense in which sport divides fans of particular sports and clubs. But those who love football, cricket or whatever (notwithstanding their club loyalties) may be said to be united by that sport. And though religion may be said to divide, it may be readily understood that it is a cohesive force in mankind. In that sense this translation of the Bible has bound this nation together in past times. The commemoration of 400 years will perhaps serve us to rethink what made the nation great. Queen Victoria, in a famous quotation, declared it to be the Bible.

And the Bible declares that, "Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people" (Proverbs 14.34).

At each of our services we read a portion from this very version of the scriptures and explain a selected passage. We pray and sing hymns. We do nothing more complicated than this though the things themselves may be a little new to you. You would be welcomed on Sundays at 10.45am and 2pm and on Tuesdays at 7.30pm.