

What are the Revisions to the King James Bible?

The King James Bible was first published in 1611, as a completed translation based on the 'Textus Receptus' (TR) set of Greek New Testament manuscripts, and the 'Masoretic' Hebrew text of the Old Testament.

The King James Version has had various revisions by different printers (Oxford, Cambridge, and others). As far as I have been able to identify, revisions were released in 1612, 1613, 1616, 1629, 1638, 1659, 1660, 1683, 1701, 1727, 1760, 1762, 1763, 1769, 1860, 1873, 1932, 1962, and 1985 (at least).

That's a lot of revision dates for a Bible version, but not all of these publications included text revisions. Also, consider the fact that this is over 400 years of continuous publication, and that the translation is comprised of over 750,000 wordsⁱ.

Of interest is the exact nature of these revisions, and what degree of changes have been applied through the years. **The answer, in summary, is that most correct typos and none revise the 1611 translation.**

Multiple Printers

The initial publisher of the 1611 KJV, Robert Barker, subleased the effort to two other printers, Bonham Norton and John Bill, and all three ended up printing their own versions.

By 1629, both Cambridge and Oxford universities obtained separate licenses to print the Bible. The first of these were revisions from Cambridge in 1629 and 1638.ⁱⁱ Initially therefore, there were 5 separate printing companies each making their own revisions, and each with their own copy/print errors.

Early Examples of the Errors:

- 1611 – Matthew 26:36 uses 'Judas' instead of 'Jesus'
- 1611 – Ruth 3:15 used 'He' instead of 'She' of Ruth.
- 1612 – Psalm 119:161 'Printers' instead of 'Princes' are the persecutors.ⁱⁱⁱ
- 1631 – Exodus 20:14 omitted 'not' from the command against Adultery
- 1641 – Revelation 21:1 omitted 'no' from "no more sea"
- 1653 – 1 Corinthians 6:9 omitted 'not' before 'inherit'
- 1653 – Romans 6:3 uses 'righteousness' instead of 'unrighteousness'
- 1716 – Jeremiah 31:34 uses 'on' instead of 'no'

Gothic Typeset, Archaic Spelling, and Punctuation

Besides fixing instances where the printer made an error, versions also updated from Gothic to Roman type, and updated spellings.

Changing the Gothic Typeset to Roman Typeset only affected the appearance of the letters, but a Roman 'J' looks like an 'I' in Gothic, 'S' can look like 'F', and 'U' looks like 'V'.

Spelling has also changed a lot. ‘Sheep’ used to be ‘sheepe’ and ‘saith’ used to be ‘sayth,’ for example. In the same category as spelling is punctuation, which has also seen extensive revision through the years.

The Dates of James Ussher

In the 1701 edition of the King James Bible, Bishop Lloyd added the dates of James Ussher to the reference columns^{iv}. This has provided a de facto dating standard for the Bible which is still used today. This is not content, but external notation, but is certainly worth mentioning.

Cambridge and Oxford Revisions:

From 1611 to 1628, 72% of around 400 printing corrections had been applied^v. Major efforts for (printing correction) revisions were later made by both Cambridge and Oxford, with Cambridge releasing a major edition in 1760. This was also released in 1762 and 1763 editions without further corrections from the 1760 edition. This was followed by the Oxford edition published in 1769, which became the “Oxford Standard,” which is still used by most Bibles and electronic texts today. The ‘final’ version of the Cambridge text came over 100 years later, in 1873. This is the definitive version of the Cambridge text. The 1769 Oxford and 1873 Cambridge have been the standards for each university since their respective publications.

“King James” vs “Authorized”

The King James Version’s proper name was given as, “The Holy Bible, containing the Old Testament and the New; Newly translated out of the Original tongues: and with the former Translations diligently compared and revised, by his Majesty’s Special Commandment.” Historically, it was not commonly referred to by that title. The version was instead (circa 1700’s) commonly referred to as ‘our English Bible,’ ‘King James’ Bible,’ and ‘our Authorized version,’ as well as by other designations. Both the ‘King James Version’ and the ‘Authorized Version’ represent popular names assigned to the translation. The two different names do not indicate any distinction of version revision, but see “Electronic Editions”, below.

Electronic Editions:

Electronic editions of the King James Version have used the (free) Oxford 1769 version of the text universally, as the Cambridge versions are still under copyright protection in the UK. Recently introduced has been the (not free) KJV 1900 text (the “Pure Cambridge Edition”) which is now the standard for Logos software. Note that Logos uses the Oxford 1769 version for their ‘Authorized Version’, and the KJV 1900 for their ‘King James Version.’^{vi}

Conclusion: What Has and Has Not Changed?

From the original 1611 publication, the King James Version has NOT had any revisions to the text based on reinterpretation of the manuscripts used, nor has it been revised based on interpretations of other manuscripts. The translation content, word for word, is unchanged.

Only spellings and punctuations have been changed, typeset has been updated, and printer errors (errata) have been corrected. Other revisions represent the multiple publications by the version’s multiple printers, including features such the addition of Ussher’s dating in the notes column.

ⁱ Retrieved from https://wordcounter.net/blog/2015/12/08/10975_how-many-words-bible.html, viewed 8/20/2022

ⁱⁱ Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King_James_Version#:~:text=The%20KJV%20was%20first%20printed,the%20second%20had%20been%20the, viewed 8/20/2022

ⁱⁱⁱ Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bible_errata, viewed 8/20/2022

^{iv} “The English Bible from KJV to NIV by Jack P. Lewis, Baker Book House, 1992, pg 39.

^v Retrieved from <https://www.chick.com/information/article?id=has-kjv-been-changed>, viewed 8/20/2022

^{vi} Retrieved from <https://community.logos.com/forums/t/65179.aspx>, viewed 8/22/2022