

# Manifold Greatness: The Creation and Afterlife of the King James Bible Traveling Exhibition

## Text and Images Featured on Panels

### Panel 1 | Manifold Greatness: The Creation and Afterlife of the King James Bible

Originally intended as a revision of translations used by the Church of England, the King James Bible, or Authorized Version, became the most influential English translation of the Bible and one of the most read books in the world. This landmark publication was the culmination of a long and often unquiet history dating back as far as 1000 CE, when portions of the Bible appeared in Old English. It built upon the struggles of religious reformers who risked their lives by committing the heresy of translating the Bible into English. It borrowed freely from the labors of scholars who produced translations once the religious and political tides had changed. About four dozen men chosen to work on the King James Bible revised the translations of their predecessors with no idea of how influential and long-lasting their results would be. One can hear the language of the King James Bible echoing from English cathedrals to rural American churches, from traditional Anglican hymns to Jamaican reggae music, from John Milton to Toni Morrison. For over two centuries, it was the predominant English-language Bible in the United States, where it is still widely used, owned, and read today. The total number of editions printed worldwide since 1611 would be impossible to tally. Similarly, it would be impossible to track and measure its entire social, cultural, literary, and religious influence over four centuries. Marking the 400th anniversary of the first printing of the King James Bible, this exhibition chronicles the conception and creation of the King James Bible and explores its far-ranging influence: a story too massive to tell in its entirety, expanding well beyond the confines of this exhibition space.

Image: John Milton detail

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*The traveling exhibit was organized by the Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, D.C., and the American Library Association Public Programs Office. It is based on an exhibition of the same name developed by the Folger Shakespeare Library and the Bodleian Library, University with assistance from the Harry Ransom Center of the University of Texas. The traveling exhibition was made possible by a major grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.*

## Panel 2 | Martyrs and Heretics

The old and new testaments of the Christian Bible first circulated in manuscripts written in the books' original languages: Aramaic, Hebrew, and Greek. In the late fourth century, Saint Jerome (c. 347–420) produced a Latin translation referred to as the Vulgate (Latin for “common”), which became the official translation used by the church. Centuries passed before translations into other vernacular languages became readily available. Portions of the Bible were translated into Old English as early as the year 1000, but complete English translations did not appear until the late 1300s. During this time, the followers of religious reformer John Wyclif produced translations against opposition from the church, which was concerned about the accuracy of translation and believed scripture was intended for the clergy, who then communicated it to the people. Thus, translating the Bible into English was an act of heresy in England until 1539. More than a century later, William Tyndale (c. 1494–1536) argued eloquently for the need for an English Bible. He risked (and ultimately lost) his life in the service of translating and printing a complete English version of the New Testament (1526) and the five books of Moses (1530).

### Images:

- 1) *Portions of the Old Testament rendered into Old English (Anglo-Saxon) verse survive in the “The Cædmon Manuscript,” c. 1000 CE. Pictured here is an illustration of Noah’s Ark in a poetic adaptation of the biblical story. (Bodleian Library MS Junius 11)*
- 2) *This richly illuminated page is the beginning of the “Sauter” or Psalms from a c.1415–1430 Wycliffite Bible. (Bodleian Library Mss 277)*
- 3) *First published in Antwerp in 1528, Tyndale’s Obedyence of a Chrysten Man argues “That the scripture ought to be in the mother tong[u]e.” This book and others by Tyndale were banned by Henry VIII in 1530. (Folger STC 24447.2)*
- 4) *Surviving fragments from Tyndale’s translation of the Pentateuch or the five books of Moses (1530) were discovered as waste used in the binding of another unrelated book. (The Ohio State University)*
- 5) *Woodcut illustrations from John Foxe’s Actes and Monuments or Book of Martyrs (1570) depict the fate of two early English reformers and Bible translators. Decades after his death, John Wyclif’s bones were exhumed and burned in 1427. William Tyndale was executed in 1536. (Folger STC 11223)*

### Panel 3 | Bible and Crown

In the early part of the sixteenth century, the Protestant Reformation saw religious figures such as Martin Luther and William Tyndale arguing for reforms to the Catholic Church that included translating the Bible into vernacular European languages so that people could have direct access to scripture. Luther published landmark German translations of the New Testament in 1522 and of the complete Bible in 1534. Shortly thereafter, Bible translation in England went from an act of heresy to an act of royal authority. In 1535, Miles Coverdale completed an English translation of the Bible and printed it in both Antwerp and in Southwark, England. He dedicated his work to King Henry VIII. But it would take four more years before Henry approved the first and only authorized English Bible, known now as the Great Bible. In the interim, William Tyndale had been imprisoned for his New Testament translation, reportedly exclaiming, “Lord, open the king of England’s eyes,” moments before his execution. Ironically, Tyndale’s translations were the foundation for Henry VIII’s authorized Great Bible, as well as most of the sixteenth-century English Bibles and thus the King James Bible itself.

#### Images:

- 1) *The Folger copy of the 1522 Luther New Testament (second edition or “December Testament”) survives in an early sixteenth-century half-pigskin binding with its original clasps. (Folger 218–036)*
- 2) *The Coverdale Bible (1535) was the first complete Bible printed in English. Although it was unauthorized, Coverdale optimistically suggested the consent of Henry VIII by depicting the king on the title page handing the Bible to his bishops. (British Library)*
- 3) *Like the Coverdale Bible, the title page of the Great Bible (1539) depicts Henry VIII handing out copies of the Bible to his clergy. He now appears in greater detail at the top of the page, while people below shout “Vivat Rex!” or “Long live the King!” (1540 edition, Folger STC 2070)*
- 4) *Timeline of English Bibles*

## Panel 4 | The Long Road the King James Bible

Several important English Bibles preceded the King James Bible. The most popular, the 1560 Geneva Bible, was printed from a translation prepared by English Protestant exiles during the reign of Catholic Queen Mary I. This edition is known for its extensive marginal annotations, some of which were quite combative and radically Protestant in nature. Some annotations aimed criticisms directly at the Catholic Church. In 1582, the Catholic Church published its first partial English Bible translation, the Rheims New Testament, which responded with annotations that argued against those found in the Geneva Bible. In 1568, attempts were made to supplant the Geneva Bible with the Bishops' Bible, a translation prepared by a dozen English bishops working under the guidance of the archbishop of Canterbury, Matthew Parker. Although it never enjoyed the popularity of the Geneva Bible, the Bishops' Bible was the translation approved of, and used in the services of, the Church of England. The men who would eventually work on the King James Bible were each given a copy of the 1602 edition of the Bishops' Bible with which to work.

### Images:

- 1) *The New Testament title page from the first edition of the Geneva Bible features a woodcut illustration depicting Moses (holding a staff), the pharaoh (being pulled in the chariot), and the Red Sea. (Folger STC 2093)*
- 2) *In glossing Revelation 12:1-6, the Geneva Bible (1560) argues that the figure of the Whore of Babylon represents "the Antichrist, that is, the Pope." The Rheims New Testament (1582) responds in its glosses, "The Pope can not be Antichrist." (Folger STC 2105.8 and STC 2884)*
- 3) *Ornately bound in red velvet, this copy of the Bishops' Bible (1568) is likely the one that Archbishop Matthew Parker presented to Queen Elizabeth I. (Folger STC 2099 copy 3)*

## Panel 5 | King James and the Hampton Court Conference

According to a contemporary account, the King James Bible was an idea suggested in a meeting between James I and his clergy in 1604. Now known as the Hampton Court Conference (named for James's royal palace where the conference took place), the three-day meeting was an attempt by James, who had just succeeded his late cousin Queen Elizabeth I, to appease Puritan leaders, who were fighting to reform the remnants of Catholic traditions. A revised Bible translation was not on the agenda until John Rainolds of Oxford proposed it. In the closing minutes of the second day, Rainolds reportedly "moved his majesty that there might be a new translation of the Bible, because those that were allowed in the reigns of Henry the eight, and Edward the sixth, were corrupt and not answerable to the truth of the Original." James liked the idea and put a plan in motion. Rainolds would serve as one of the translators.

### Images:

- 1) *This detail from Antonis van der Wyngaerde's Panorama of London shows the palace at Hampton Court as it looked in the mid 16th-century. (Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, WA.C.LG. IV.9b)*
- 2) *William Barlow's The summe and substance of the conference . . . in his Maiesties priuy-chamber, at Hampton Court. Ianuary 14. 1603 is one of the only surviving documents detailing the Hampton Court Conference and Rainolds's proposing a new Bible translation. (Folger STC 1456)*
- 3) *John Rainolds proposed the idea of a new translation of the Bible. This portrait of Rainolds remains in Corpus Christi College, Oxford, where he served as president and worked on the King James Bible until his death in 1607. (Corpus Christi College)*
- 4) *This portrait of James I comes from the Trevelyon Miscellany, a large, beautifully illustrated manuscript created by a London craftsman named Thomas Trevelyon in 1608. (Folger V.b.232)*

## Panel 6 | “Reaping Good Fruit”: Creating the King James Bible

The King James Bible was the work of about four dozen translators divided into six companies: two each at Cambridge, Oxford, and Westminster. Each translator was given a copy of the 1602 edition of the Bishops’ Bible with permission to consult translations such as William Tyndale’s and the Geneva Bible. Evidence shows that they also used the Catholic Rheims New Testament and other Bibles and sources in different languages. Of all the source texts, Tyndale’s translations were the most influential. The work of the translators in “reaping good fruit,” to quote from the Bible’s dedication, took more than six years to complete. Although King James I wrote original works and translations, including poetry, a tract on witchcraft (*Daemonologie* 1597), and metrical translations of the psalms, he did not contribute to the Bible translation. The King James Bible is named for him simply because he was its royal sponsor.

### Images:

- 1) *A rare surviving manuscript at the British Library begins with this list of the translators and the sections of the Bible for which they were responsible. Note that the translators’ names are organized by location: Westminster, Cambridge, and Oxford. (British Library Harley MS 750)*
- 2) *“The Rules to be observed in Translation” are listed on the next two pages of the manuscript. Rule number one establishes the Bishops’ Bible as the foundation of the translation. (British Library Harley MS 750)*
- 3) *Revisions made by translators are recorded in manuscript annotations found in a 1602 Bishops’ Bible. (Bodleian Library Bibl. Eng. 1602 b.1)*
- 4) *Revisions made to the New Testament Epistles by translators from the Westminster Company are preserved in a manuscript held at the Lambeth Palace Library. (Lambeth MS 98)*

## Panel 7 | Printing the King James Bible: Misprints and Misfortunes

Printed in 1611, the first edition of the King James Bible was a large book with double columns of black-letter type, a style often used for English Bibles. The book's engraved title page depicts Moses and Aaron flanking the title. The Gospel writers, Matthew, Mark, John, and Luke (moving clockwise from the upper left), each hold a book and quill. The remaining apostles line the upper part of the page, surrounding the Lamb of God. Top center are the Holy Spirit (the dove) and the Tetragrammaton, the four Hebrew letters used for the name of God. At the bottom a pelican feeds her young with her own blood, symbolizing Christ's Passion. The Bible was an expensive venture for printer Robert Barker. Financial troubles compelled him to take on investors, leading to legal battles over his royal patent for printing English Bibles. Early editions are known for a few egregious typos, such as mistaking "Judas" for "Jesus" and the misprint "Thou shalt commit adultery" in the so-called "Wicked Bible" of 1631.

Images:

- 1) *The title page to the first edition of the King James Bible, reproduced in actual size. (Bodleian Library Bib. Eng. 1611 b. 1)*
- 2) *The text of the King James Bible was set in double columns of large black-letter type. Words in the text that appear in small roman type are words that were not in the original languages, but were supplied by the translators to help render the English translation. (Folger STC 2216)*
- 3) *This elaborately decorated copy of the King James Bible was bound for James I's son, Prince Henry, whose coat of arms may be found stamped in the center of the front board. (Washington National Cathedral)*
- 4) *A typo in the so-called "Judas Bible" of 1613 mistakes Judas for Jesus. In this copy, the mistake is corrected by covering "Judas" with a small slip reading "Jesus." (Folger STC 2224 copy 1)*
- 5) *The "Wicked Bible's" misprint "Thou shalt commit adultery" even caught the eye of King Charles I, who had succeeded James I in 1625. Most copies were recalled and destroyed, thus very few survive. (Bodleian Library Bibl. Eng 1631 f.1)*

## Panel 8 | A Variety of Forms for a Variety of Readers

Like many earlier translations, the King James Bible was first published in the large folio format best suited for church lecterns and public reading. Soon after 1611, however, it began to be published in an increasing number of sizes and formats, designed for different readers in different contexts. Royal presentation copies were among the largest and most elaborate, often richly bound. For those who could afford them, Bibles could be purchased with fine embroidered bindings. The King James Bible was first printed during a period in which small-format devotional books were in fashion; pocket-size editions were thus made available for those who wanted a Bible to carry with them in their travels at home and abroad. Soldiers in the English Civil War of the 1630s could take into battle *The Soldier's Pocket Bible*, a compact selection of scripture passages of particular value to those in combat. Similar volumes were produced for soldiers in the American Civil War. The soldiers' Bibles of Oliver Cromwell's army drew from the Geneva Bible, but American soldiers' Bibles used the King James Bible.

### Images:

- 1) *Gilt tooled dark blue goatskin and large silk ties with gold tassels adorn this 1701 King James Bible bound for Queen Anne of Great Britain. (Folger 207- 237b)*
- 2) *Bibles with embroidered bindings were very popular in the early part of the seventeenth century. This 1633 Bible is decorated with a pelican, a medieval symbol for Christ. It was believed that mother pelicans would feed their young with their own blood, a sacrifice linked with Christ's Passion. (Folger stc 2308)*
- 3) *According to the inscription found in this copy of a soldier's New Testament (1863), it belonged to a Union soldier named Thomas P. Meyer, a prisoner of war being held in Belle Isle Prison in Richmond, VA. The Bible was given to him "through the rebel authorities" by the United States Sanitary Commission, an organization that provided relief to Union soldiers. (Rare Bible Collection, Museum of Biblical Art)*
- 4) *A manuscript inscription records that Justinian Isham carried this small 1626 Bible in his pocket when he "travelld beyond ye seas." (Folger stc 2278 copy 1)*

## Panel 9 | Family Bibles

From the sixteenth century, printed Bibles seem to have had an important place in the home, used not only for family scripture reading but also for recording genealogical information such as births, marriages, and deaths. At first, such information was penned in Bibles on the blank pages at the beginning and end and between the Old and New Testaments. Family records became more formalized as the practice became standard, however, and later publishers began to include pages preprinted with appropriate lines and columns. In the later nineteenth century, after the development of photography, some elaborate family Bibles even came with built-in photo albums. The large, often attractively bound family Bible became as common and important a piece of furniture in the Victorian home as the sideboard or piano.

Images:

- 1) *Facing each other at the beginning of this King James Bible from 1676 are a printed book label and a manuscript inscription. The label records the birth and baptism date of Rebekah Fisher. The inscription notes that the Bible was a gift given to Rebekah Fisher from her Father. (Folger 265076)*
- 2) *Further personalizing the book, "Fisher 78" is engraved on the back of a remaining book clasp. (Folger 265076)*
- 3) *This 1639 edition of the King James Bible was being used as a family Bible two centuries after it was printed, as members of the Dewitt family recorded their family history from 1800 to 1811. Note that the page has been ruled to facilitate neat handwriting. By this time, recording family histories in Bibles had become a more formal exercise. (Folger stc 2335)*
- 4) *Many U.S. presidents, including Grover Cleveland, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, Ronald Reagan, George H. W. Bush, and Bill Clinton, have taken their oath of office on their family Bibles. The inscription shown in this King James Bible confirms that it was the family Bible used in the inauguration of Chester A. Arthur. (Library of Congress BS185 1857 .PS rare Bk. Coll Bible Coll.)*
- 5) *Manuscript notes in a 1630 edition of the King James Bible record major events in the Hart family from 1626 to 1673. Blank pages in Bibles were popular sites for documenting family histories. These notes were written on the blank side of the Bible's title page. (Folger stc 2290)*

## Panel 10 | Sailing to America

The first copy of the King James Bible in America likely arrived on the *Mayflower* in 1620 with John Alden, a carpenter in the *Mayflower's* crew. The ship's Pilgrim passengers had brought Geneva Bibles, the translation favored by the separatist Protestants. Bibles continued to be imported from England for many years. Not until 1663 was the first Bible printed in America, and it was not printed in English, but in Algonquin, part of translator John Eliot's missionary efforts to convert the Massachusetts Indians. The first American Bible in English was printed in Philadelphia by Robert Aitken in 1782, when imports ceased during the Revolutionary War. Given the war with Britain, Aitken carefully omitted any mention of King James, even though it was the King James Bible. Aitken's Bible was recommended by a Congressional resolution. Sales of King James Bibles were spurred on by traveling Bible salesmen and the American Bible Society, which published and distributed millions of copies after its founding in 1816. The King James Bible was carried into battle by soldiers on both sides in the Civil War, as Abraham Lincoln acknowledged in his second inaugural address of 1865.

### Images:

- 1) *This oil painting by Marshall Johnson depicts the Mayflower carrying the Pilgrim's across the Atlantic. Aboard the ship was John Alden and his copy of the King James Bible. (Private collection/ Peter Newark American Pictures/ The Bridgeman Art Library)*
- 2) *John Alden, said to be the first person from the Mayflower to set foot on Plymouth Rock, also brought with him a copy of the King James Bible. Alden was not a separatist, but a crewman who joined up with the Pilgrims only after arriving in America, which probably explains why he brought a copy of the King James Bible and not the Geneva Bible. (Pilgrim Hall Museum)*
- 3) *The first English Bible translation printed in America was a King James Bible produced by Philadelphia printer Robert Aitken. Although the Continental Congress praised it in a resolution, the Congress declined to contribute financially. A plan to purchase copies for retiring soldiers of the Continental Army also fell through. Aitken went bankrupt. (Library of Congress bs185 .1782 .p5)*
- 4) *The first Bible printed in America was not in English but in the Algonquin dialect of Massachusetts, translated by the missionary John Eliot. This Bible was a considerable achievement of both linguistics and printing, given the limited resources in the colony in the 1660s. (Library of Congress BS345.A2 E4 1663 Bible Coll.)*
- 5) *The sitter in this etching by Wenceslaus Hollar has been identified as a Munsee-Delaware Algonquian-speaking warrior called Jaques. Hollar encountered Jaques in Amsterdam after the Native American had been transported there in 1644. The title of the etching, Unus Americanus ex Virginia, uses "Virginia" generically to refer to the New World colonies. (Folger ART Box H737.5 no.29)*

## Panel 11 | Literary Influences

The King James Bible caught on slowly, replacing the popular Geneva Bible only in the 1640s. Ironically, the first major English writers to show the influence of the “Authorized Version” (as it is often called) in their work were John Milton and John Bunyan, both religious and political radicals strongly opposed to church and state authorities. Milton’s great biblical poem *Paradise Lost* is full of the language of the King James Bible, as is Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*. American literature has been steeped in the language of the King James Bible since its origins. Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick* features characters with strikingly biblical names, and echoes the book of Jonah as it portrays a man fleeing God who is swallowed up by a great fish. Allen Ginsberg, like Walt Whitman before him, was deeply influenced by the style of the Old Testament. African American literature has been especially strongly influenced by the language, names, and stories of the King James Bible, from the works of Frederick Douglass to those of Toni Morrison.

### Images:

- 1) *Toni Morrison is among the most biblically allusive of contemporary American novelists. The biblical Song of Solomon is known for the proud assertion of Solomon’s lover that “I am black but comely” (Song of Solomon, 1:5), suggesting the “black is beautiful” movement of the 1960s. (Folger Shakespeare Library)*
- 2) *Allen Ginsberg’s Howl was published in 1956. The poem is a Beat Jeremiad, an angry prophecy of decline and destruction in the mode of the biblical Jeremiah, who uses the word “howl” (“Howl, ye shepherds, and cry,” Jer. 25:34). Like Walt Whitman before him, Ginsberg modeled his prosepoetic verse line on the style of the Old Testament prophets in the King James Bible. (©Heather Faulkner/Getty Images)*
- 3) *John Milton was given a copy of the King James Bible as a child. Earlier Puritans favored the Geneva Bible, but by the mid seventeenth century the King James translation had become “the” English Bible. In his “prequel” to Genesis, Milton recounts the stories of the Creation, of Satan’s Fall, and of Adam and Eve driven from Eden. Milton knew the Bible in many languages, including Hebrew and Greek, but when he quotes or alludes to it in Paradise Lost, it is usually in the language of the King James Bible. (Folger M2150)*
- 4) *Few writers have been so thoroughly immersed in the Bible as John Bunyan, whose Pilgrim’s Progress was the most popular book in English, after the King James Bible itself, for centuries. Bunyan knew the Geneva Bible too, and often quoted biblical verses from memory, occasionally putting them in his own words, but he most often used the specific language of the King James Bible. (Folger 267214)*
- 5) *Moby-Dick is a densely biblical novel, and tells the story of Ahab narrated by Ishmael—names borrowed from Kings and Genesis respectively. The biblical story of Jonah, the reluctant prophet swallowed by a whale, is alluded to many times in the novel, as in the sermon by Father Mapple, here illustrated by Rockwell Kent. (Library of Congress PS2384 .M6 1930)*

## Panel 12 | Shakespeare and the KJB: Debunking the Myth

In the late nineteenth century, the myth arose that Shakespeare was involved in the translation of the King James Bible. For the previous century, Shakespeare's plays and the King James Bible had been idolized as the twin pillars of English language, literature, culture, even morality. Since they originated at roughly the same time, it seemed natural to connect them, even though there is no evidence for Shakespeare's involvement, and abundant reason to doubt it. The translators would have found the suggestion that he should have been consulted ridiculous, since he was not a clergyman and knew none of the biblical languages. They were not aiming at a "literary" translation anyway, but rather one that was literally accurate. The legend of Shakespeare the Bible translator persists due to a clever bit of "code breaking." If you count 46 words from the beginning of Psalm 46 in the King James Bible, you find the word "shake," and 46 from the end is "speare." Since Shakespeare was 46 years old in 1610–11, this seemed coded proof of his covert involvement in the translation, though why he should leave so obscure a clue is anybody's guess.

### Images:

- 1) *Pamphlets and publications like this one by the pseudonymous "Goldie Jr." (printed in London early in the twentieth century) spread the myth of Shakespeare as Bible translator. (Folger Sh.misc. 770)*
- 2) *This calendar testifies to the popular link between Shakespeare and the Bible in the English cultural imagination. One nineteenth-century scholar wrote, "It is but natural for an Englishman, whether he believes in the full inspiration of the Bible or not, to couple it and Shakespere's works together; for these books are the two which have most influenced the English mind." (Folger Scrapbook E.4.1)*
- 3) *Published in The Strand magazine in 1934, Rudyard Kipling's short story "Proofs of Holy Writ" imagines a conversation between Shakespeare and fellow playwright Ben Jonson. Shakespeare produces "a mass of printed papers" and explains that he has been "privily" approached by Miles Smith of Oxford to help him with his translation work on the King James Bible. (Folger F265425)*
- 4) *The coincidence of the placement of "shake" and "speare" in Psalm 46 seems less remarkable given that these words appear in earlier English Bible translations in roughly the same places. The count of 46 also depends on leaving out the mysterious Hebrew word "selah" which is part of the text. Additionally, there is no evidence that the translation of Psalm 46 was actually done when Shakespeare was 46, rather than earlier. (Folger STC 2216)*
- 5) *One of the earliest appearances in print of the Psalm 46 encoding of Shakespeare's "signature" was in an article in The Flaming Sword. In the 1870s and 80s, Cyrus Teed founded the Koreshan Unity, a utopian society that published this periodical. (Harvard College Library, Widener Harvard Depository Soc 705.2 (v.13 1898))*

## Panel 13 | The Sounds of the King James Bible

From shortly after its publication, the language of the King James Bible was set to music for use in church and at home. Among the countless compositions spreading the sounds of the Bible, none is better known than Handel's *Messiah*. First performed in Ireland in 1742, it has continued to be a favorite with audiences in Great Britain, America, and around the world. African American slaves were introduced to the King James Bible during their generations of bondage, but they soon found in it the inspiration for their dreams of emancipation, creating out of its language the spirituals which followed St. Paul's instruction to sing with "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs" (Ephes. 5:19). Rastafarians like Bob Marley sang spiritual songs based on the King James Bible texts, and many secular musicians have also turned to biblical language. With the advent of new technology, the Bible began to be heard in different media: through radio programs like the hugely popular Old-Fashioned Revival Hour, as well as on record and CD players.

### Images:

- 1) *The librettist of Messiah, Charles Jennens, created his dramatic text by means of pastiche, weaving together disparate passages from the King James Bible into a single narrative about the coming of Christ. For many fans of Messiah around the world, Bible passages like "Every valley shall be exalted" are impossible to read without hearing in their heads Handel's musical setting. (Folger M2000. H13 M8 Cage Fo.)*
- 2) *Spirituals were popularized by African American singing groups. The Fisk Jubilee Singers, the most famous group, hailed from Fisk University in Nashville. The success of the Fisk Singers encouraged other groups, like the Selah Jubilee Singers, who recorded spirituals and gospel music in the 1930s and 40s. They were the first gospel group to perform at the Apollo Theater, in 1955. (Frank Driggs Collection/Getty Images)*
- 3) *From the 1920s, Bible shows like the Moody Bible Institute's were among the most popular for American radio listeners. Programs featured sermons, gospel singing, and readings from the King James Bible. During World War II, radio Bible shows were broadcast to American soldiers overseas. (Folger Shakespeare Library)*
- 4) *Originally sung by slaves, African American spirituals became widely popular after they were published in collections like William Francis Allen's Slave Songs of the United States (1867). Individual spirituals, some original, some written later in the same style, were sold as sheet music. This song, published in 1880, and dedicated to African American actor, singer, and songwriter Sam Lucas, refers to the "lamp" and "garment" of biblical parables. (Brown University Library)*
- 5) *Reggae musicians often incorporate text from the King James Bible into their lyrics. Author Vivien Goldman recalls Bob Marley never going "anywhere without his old King James Bible," which he had "personalized with photos of Haile Selassie," a revered figure in the Rastafarian movement. (Bob Marley (painted cement) by West Indian School/Bob Marley Museum, Kingston, Jamaica/Ken Welsh/The Bridgeman Art Library) & (Bible Collection of the Bob Marley Foundation/Courtesy of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum)*
- 6) *Folk music icon Pete Seeger adapted lines from Ecclesiastes 3:1 as they appeared in the King James Bible into the song "Turn! Turn! Turn! (To Everything There Is a Season)."*

*The version of the song recorded by folk rock band The Byrds in 1965 hit #1 on the US charts and remains a 60s classic. (Folger Shakespeare Library)*

#### **Panel 14 | An Ever-Widening Influence**

With the increasing number of new English translations of the Bible, now in the hundreds, the King James Bible is no longer king, but one among a democracy of Bibles. The richness of its language continues to draw readers, however, and make it the Bible of choice when a writer or speaker aims for oratorical grandeur and verbal majesty. In 1989, its enduring words found sculptural form in a civil rights memorial based on a scriptural quotation by Martin Luther King, Jr. Television viewers have heard the language of the King James Bible read by Linus in *A Charlie Brown Christmas* (1965) and by astronauts orbiting the moon. As today's digital and online media open the door to still more possibilities, the King James Bible remains as essential as ever to the continuing cultural conversation.

Images:

- 1) *Maya Lin's 1989 Civil Rights Memorial in Montgomery, Alabama, commemorates the deaths of 40 civil rights activists between 1954 and 1968 with the words from Amos that Dr. Martin Luther King made famous in 1963. The waters of the memorial fountain express concretely the waters of justice King hoped for. (© Todd Gipstein/CORBIS)*
- 2) *On Christmas Eve, 1968, the Apollo 8 astronauts orbiting the Moon became the first human beings in history to witness Earth rising over the lunar horizon. Hours later, Frank Borman, James Lovell, and William Anders read the opening of the Creation story in Genesis, in the words of the King James Bible, to a global audience some estimated at a billion listeners. (NASA)*
- 3) *Watching A Charlie Brown Christmas each year has become a tradition for millions of Americans, who may not realize that Linus is reciting from the King James Bible's version of the Nativity story from the Gospel of Luke (2:8-14) when he tells Charlie Brown "what Christmas is all about." (Lee Mendelson Film Productions/United Media/PEANUTS Worldwide)*
- 4) *Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his famous "I Have a Dream" speech from the Lincoln Memorial in 1963 as part of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. He said, "we will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream," quoting the prophet Amos 5:24. All but the word "justice" (from the American Standard Version) is in the language of the King James Bible. (Library of Congress)*