

The Story of the King James Bible

ACT I Scene 1

- Narrator 1: *(Standing up in audience and walks towards front of theatre)*
Welcome to a time when there was great prosperity, a grand emphasis on learning, and an age when politics and religion co-mingled.
- It was a unique era, characterized by extravagance on every side. People were adorned in jewels, expensive fabrics and costly metals.
- Within society there was an emphasis on ceremony, majestic splendor, colorful literacy, and an atmosphere which was both kingly and Godly. *(Exit to left)*
- Narrator 2: *(Enters right of audience, book in hand)* From this age, the King James Bible was written, and would absorb the wide array of influence of that time.
(Opens Book as though reading dramatically)
Queen Elizabeth I sat firmly on the throne of England. Within her family, her nation and the nations around her, trouble was brewing as Catholic and Protestant leaders grappled for power both in Church and State.
- At this time in particular there was great distress in determining which Bible translation was most accurate. The Catholic Church had their own version – the Latin Vulgate Bible – which the Church felt was the most correct translation, and it was to be read **only** in Latin. *(Exit down middle of audience)*
- Priest: *(Curtain opens – center stage reading Psalm 23 from Latin Vulgate and walks lengths of stage)* latin vulgate Bible est plurrimi sagaciter Bible. Senior est meus upilio opilio , EGO vadum non volo , is planto mihi decumbo in viridis pastus , is plumbum mihi praeter etiam aequora. *(fades out while exits audience left)*
- John Rainolds: *(enters audience right shaking his head)* As you can see, a big problem for the average person is that no one can understand what the Priests and Bishops are saying!
- Now, let us listen to the same passage in the Geneva Bible, which is the primary Bible that **we**, *(hold hand to chest)* the Puritans, use.
- Psalm 23: “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want, He maketh me lie by green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters”.
- Truly, **this** is the **only** Bible that should be read. Who can even understand the Latin Vulgate? *(pause)*
- The other Bible that Queen Elizabeth would have us read is the Bishops’ Bible. **That** Bible follows all the pomp and ceremony of the Church of England – the kind of worship that I am **sure** that our God would not be interested in... *(Exit audience left)*

Queen Elizabeth *(enter audience right confident and strong-minded)*: The ultimate problem with the Puritan's **Geneva Bible** is that it has **too many commentaries** which are heavily slanted towards Protestant ideologies. Its interpretive style is **much** too biased. **We** have the Bishop's Bible, written by some of the most scholarly Bishops, and I, Elizabeth, Queen of England, hereby proclaim and reinforce that all peoples and churches are to read the Bishop's Bible **only**! Any church choosing otherwise is reckoned to be guilty of heresy. *Exit audience left with power*

Scholar: *(Enters from back of audience)* I honestly don't know what to make of this battle between Bible versions. They all have their own strengths and weaknesses – the Latin Vulgate is confusing for its translation; the Geneva Bible is more accurately translated, but its commentaries are too biased and slanted towards Puritan beliefs. The Bishop's Bible is not translated as well as the Geneva Bible, and it does have more ceremony in it than necessary.

(Distraught) How am I, an upstanding textual scholar, going to be able to speak with enough authority to bring all of these religious leaders to agreement on one Bible version? *(Shaking head hopelessly as he exits audience right)*

Scene 2

Narrator 1: *(Entering Audience left)* As the years wore on, Queen Elizabeth grew old and frail. Having never married, she had no heir to the throne, and the question of who would rule after her loomed like a dark cloud over England. *(Exits audience left)*

Small bed on stage, Courtier to the side of the bed dabbing wet cloth on QE forehead. Queen Elizabeth is lying on bed with her feet propped up on pillows:

Queen Elizabeth: Ohhhh, I feel *so* ill *(say this dramatically with hand up to your forehead)*, and have not left this room for some time. I fear that my duties are not being carried out to the degree that I demand, and I really should talk to James Bancroft to make sure the people still maintain the beliefs of the Church of England.

Courtier: Your majesty, you have been in bed for a week now and have not even changed your dress....in light of your failing health, it seems that the time has come that you must appoint a successor to your throne.

Queen Elizabeth: *(in a weak voice)* Indeed....my time is coming to an end and life has all too quickly passed me by. *(Pausing, and then raise voice)* Our cousin, James of Scotland, will be the next successor and king of England. *(pause)* I pray you, be gone now, and trouble me no more.

Courtier: As you wish your majesty. I will arrange for Sir James to hear of this appointment and I am sure that James Bancroft has all of your affairs in order....you must rest now... *(curtain closes)*

Scene 3

King James enters audience right as narration begins, reading a book

Narrator 2: *(Enters audience left)* King James was a wonderfully clever man – extravagant, vain, conceited and argumentative. He was meticulous and thorough, and saw the

importance of a broad approach in all matters. He was **obsessed** with words and knowledge, and this passion would later enflame his desire to create a new version of the Bible.

Courtier 2: *enter audience right and approach king – bow*

Your Majesty, it is with sadness yet commendation that I come to you with this news. Your cousin, Queen Elizabeth of England has passed away, (*pause while King James reacts by taking off his hat and bowing his head*) **but** in her last words, she has appointed you to be the successor to the throne of England. At your earliest convenience, you must quickly make your way from Edinborough to London.....

King James: (*feigning sadness*) This indeed is bittersweet; however, I have waited a long time for this! It is finally my time.....A parade must be arranged for my entrance – England has never witnessed a king such as I will be – I will bring great things to this people. This is good news.....

King James puts arm around courtier and they exit up center aisle.

Scene 4

MUSIC/BUSTLE SOUND EFFECTS – fades as Clergyman starts his lines.

Half of group enters from audience left, half from audience right. Speaking roles move to center aisle.

Clergyman: (*Look out at audience*) Well, we shall see what this new king brings to England. The people certainly seem excited to welcome him. (*pause*) We all know that the king has power to raise up and cast down, to sentence life and death, and to judge over all his subjects...and yet, they are accountable to none but God only.....

Priest: (*Annoyed*) He should be accountable to priests! The Catholic Church is the founder of all Christianity and it should stay that way - God has appointed priests to be his mediators and to translate for the people. The king should **not** have such control. His authority is too great.

Clergyman: He certainly doesn't have the best reputation in Scotland. He squanders his money and his religious devotion is only as great as the money you are willing to offer for it. This is highly frustrating to say the least.

Scholar: He is an interesting bloke for sure. (*Looking at the crowd*) Have you ever seen such fanfare? He certainly knows how to draw attention to himself!

James Bancroft: We need a king with a **backbone**; that's the kind of man I would support. (*Proudly*) As Queen Elizabeth's most trusted religious advisor, **I**, James Bancroft, will be right by the King's side, to make sure that the Church of England rules. I will bet that Puritan, John Rainolds, is going to try and sway the king, but he will not be successful – I will see to that!!!

Scholar: Look, here he comes!

Trumpet blasts, and announces King James' arrival

All: "God save the king!!" 3 times

Music and Fanfare plays as King James greets crowd while walking up aisle; crowd then disperses

Curtain opens – King James approaches center stage, sits on chair. A small table, paper, pen are on the table

King James: **My word**, I have only just come to the throne and there is so much bickering among the churches, and who will have the authority. *Shakes head and scratches head, thinks a little, and then stands up and puts finger in the air*

I will call a conference to decide once and for all which church is to have the support of (*proudly*) James, King of England. (*Sit down and write out on paper invite to Hampton Conference.*)

(*Loudly and rudely*) Courtier!!

(*Courtier enters stage left and approaches the king, bows*)

I will be holding a conference at the Hampton Tudor Hall. You must send out this invitation to all those that I have invited – do so at once. I want to put a stop to this quarrelling nonsense!!

Courtier 2 Yes, your majesty.....

Courtier bows, departs in haste. Curtain closes.

Scene 5

As curtain opens, all reach simultaneously for drinks on table at center stage

John Rainolds: This should be a most interesting conference whereby I have high hopes for the people of England – I should think that King James will see through all of these (*stand*) other **pompous** religions (*hands on hips and glares at Bancroft*) and recognize that the ceremony and rituals of these churches are ungodly and must be done away with (*hand in the air with this part of the sentence and look very passionate*)!

Priest: I don't know about that Sir John. King James was raised by his very Catholic mother, Queen Mary – he may think that the Catholic Church should be **the** church for the people of England!

Scholar: (*Nodding head, sarcastically*) Yes, indeed. Queen Mary **was** highly dedicated to her faith **and** committed treason because of it!

James Bancroft: (*shakes his head in disgust, looks at the time, speaks belittling the others*) I can hardly stomach the nonsense that I am hearing in this room. You will soon see that King James, like Queen Elizabeth before him, is only interested in preserving and advancing the Church of England, and all those who don't (*stare directly at John Rainolds*) will surely regret that decision!

Scholar: *(Acting as a peace keeper between the groups)* It does seem that this conference is quite necessary, given the disagreement amongst us.

Clergyman: *(Growing impatient, looking at the clock)* King James asked us to meet today at 9:00 **precisely!** Look at the time, *(point to clock)* it is almost 11:00 – where could he be? I hope he hasn't gone hunting and lost track of the time!!

King James *(enters stage left, looking a little disheveled)* A very fine morning to you gentlemen. Thank you for your patience, I was attending to a **very** pressing matter in the king's forest. *(Clears throat)* Please take your seats. *(Pause)* Men, our country is at a crossroads, and is looking to **us** to provide direction. We need to clarify a number of church doctrines, and determine which religious body will be the reigning church in England. It is a great privilege that we have to come before the Almighty God *(take off hat and put it back on)* to determine such matters. *(Pause)* Sir Rainolds, as representative of the Puritans, *(gesturing with his hand to take the floor)* if you please... *(sits down)*

Sir Rainolds: *(Rising and bowing)* Your majesty, might I point out the many flaws of the Church of England – there is no adult baptism, and the use of the cross is like a magic symbol. There is much superstition in their ceremonial rituals and their Bishop's Bible has strayed far away from the worship our God would be pleased with.

James Bancroft: *(Rising, responding quickly)* You Puritans are nothing but schismatic scholars and breakers of the law! You should all be done away with! Your Majesty, surely you won't let this kind of petty influence sway a respected man such as yourself.

King James: Sir Rainolds, I will hear nothing of your antibaptist lunacy! There has been much discussion over the months, and I hear nothing new from your today. It's time we put this long-standing debate to an end. *(With finality)* The Church of England will rule, and I appoint James Bancroft as our Archbishop to oversee the affairs of the Church.

(Bancroft looks to audience with a very pleased and pompous face – he then stares at Rainolds and sits down)

Rainolds: *(looking disappointed but not ready to give up)* If it pleases your Majesty, **at least** may a new translation of the Bible be developed that will reflect the intent of the original language – a Bible that can be understood by the common man.

Everyone stares in surprise at each other

James Bancroft: *(jumps to his feet in utter disagreement)* If every man's ideas were followed, there should be no end of translating!

Priest: It is true. There does not seem to be a Bible that suits all of us. But to allow such freedom, as to let the common man read and try to understand the word of God – this is the duty of the priests alone! We can never allow the common man to read in his own language and think that he can interpret for himself.

King James: *(Slowly, thinking while ignoring what the priest said; stands up)* I confess that I have never seen a Bible well translated. *(Long pause, facial expression as if a new idea came to mind, then proclaim)* We need the best learned men. James Bancroft, your first duty as archbishop is to see that this project gets underway immediately.

Scholar: A new translation? How exciting!

Priest clearly not excited

Curtain closes

Narrator 1: *(Enters from audience left)* With this commission, the door for a new translation swung wide open. The room buzzed at the prospect. It was Monday, January 16th, 1604. From these outbursts of emotion, a writing project began that would change the world of literature in English forever. The seed that Rainolds sowed that day soon gave birth to the most influential book ever published in the English language. *(exits audience left)*

ACT II

Scene 6

Narrator 2: *(enters from back middle)* Although the news of a new translation made many in England rejoice, there was a strong minority who vehemently opposed the idea. Many Catholic leaders were adamant that the effort had to be stopped, that it was against the will of God for the common man to have the Bible in his own language. And thus in the dark shadows of the streets of England, a plan was hatched... *(exits stage right)*

Thomas Percy and Jack Wright are sitting at center table already looking around nervously, chatting quietly. Extras sitting at table off to side eating, drinking, talking as serving wench serves

Thomas Percy: Are you sure, Jack, that we were to meet here at the Lion's Inn?

Jack Wright: I'm sure Thomas – noon today at the Lion's Inn. The message from Robert Catesby was clear enough.

Robert Catesby and Guy Fawkes enter from stage right

Thomas Percy: *(looking up with relief)* Ah look, here comes Robert now. And who does he have with him? Oh look Jack – I believe it's Guy Fawkes!

Robert Catesby: *(Shaking hands with men)* Jack, Thomas, glad to see you both were able to make it. You remember Guy Fawkes, yes?

Jack Wright: *(excitedly, shaking hands)* Of course we remember him, how could we forget?

Robert Catesby: *(looking around)* So we're just waiting for Thomas Wintour then....

Thomas Wintour: *(Walking up behind him from the right)* And here I am. Glad you remembered me, dear cousin of mine.

Men all shake hands while Catesby continues

Robert Catesby: *(while men are shaking hands)* Well, thank you all for coming to meet today – please gentlemen, have a seat. *(pause while all are seated)* I think you would agree that ever since King James has taken the throne, there has been little relief from the persecutions against us or our Catholic brethren.

Thomas Percy: Certainly not! The King has just declared that all Jesuit priests must leave the country immediately or face arrest!

Robert Catesby: *(responding quickly with hushed energy)* And that is precisely why I have brought you all here today. *(growing more emphatic and getting louder, rising to his feet as he continues)* I have an idea; one that, if planned well, will remove this godless man, and restore England to its true papal heritage! *(Robert looks around, realizing he is making a scene. The men hush him and pull him down, and lean forward to listen carefully as he grows hushed again)* Next year on the opening day of parliament, the King, his Lords, his Bishops, the Members of Parliament and the high officials will all be gathered in one place.

Thomas Wintour: Disgusting. I plan to be as far away as possible from that awful place...

Robert Catesby: You'd better be Thomas – *(pulling out pouch of gunpowder and sprinkling it down the table)* **Gunpowder.** We will plant enough gunpowder under the floor that when we light the fuse, the hole that's blown in England will go half way to the Orient.

Jack Wright: *(standing up with growing excitement)* It's a master plan Robert! Completely insane really – blowing up Parliament! Who would think up such a thing? It will change the whole political structure of England in a moment! It's brilliant!

Thomas Wintour: *(Pulling Jack down)* Settle down there Jack, hang on to your britches. The plan has great potential indeed, and I'm sure you have already thought of this Robert, but what will we do once the king and his officials have been *(pause, slyly)* disposed of?

Robert Catesby: *(With increasing self-confidence)* Simple my friend – both of the King's sons will be with him in Parliament that day, and they'll all go down together. **BUT** *(raises finger)*, his young daughter Elizabeth is currently staying at Coombe Abbey. With her family dead, we will kidnap Elizabeth and declare her queen of England, and then have her placed in a good Catholic home to be groomed as a Catholic queen who will finally bring us relief.

Men all nod heads in approval of plan while looking around suspiciously

Thomas Percy: *(slyly)* Ah, Robert, *now* I see why you have brought Guy along – his prior experience in the Spanish army as an explosive expert will come in veerrry handy.

Thomas Wintour: Well we've got a lot of work to do. We'll need to get organized; we'll need to be able to find a location close to the house of Parliament; and we'll need more supporters, preferably a few filthy rich men to finance the purchase of a whole heap

of gunpowder. Men, we are going out with a bang. (*gesturing with hand*) A new day will soon dawn over England.

(*Men at table all shake hands as curtain closes*)

Scene 7

Curtain opens – Guy Fawkes standing beside barrels counting them

Guy Fawkes: (*speaking to himself*) Not enough, 20 barrels is just not enough. We'll need to bring in another 16 at least, and we're running out of time!

Jack Wright and Francis Tresham walk in together, checking cautiously over their shoulders

Jack Wright: Well then it's a good thing we still have another month before the big bang, and another set of hands here to help out.

Guy Fawkes: Jack, (*shaking hands*) glad to have you here, (*gesturing to Francis*) and who might this be?

Jack Wright: Guy, meet Francis Tresham. He recently joined the plot as one of our financiers, (*nudging Guy and under his breath with a devilish grin*) and a mighty rich one at that. I thought I would bring him down here tonight to show him our setup. He had his doubts whether this was planned as well as we claimed, (*confidently*) but I'm sure he will be satisfied after a look at your handiwork.

Guy Fawkes and Francis Tresham shake hands and nod

Francis Tresham: (*excitedly*) This is unheard of Jack; I just could not believe it when he said you managed to find a coal cellar for rent *directly below* the house of Parliament!

Guy Fawkes: Yes, it was a handy find. It saved all the tunneling that we expected to have to do. Now we just need to maintain the disguise that we are here as a simple firewood store.

Jack Wright: As well as move in another 16 barrels of gunpowder I heard you mumbling about!

Guy Fawkes: (*Nodding*) Well, if you'll excuse me gentlemen, I must be going. Jack, are you coming to the meeting now at the Lions Inn? Robert wants to go over the final plans for the capture of Elizabeth.

Jack Wright: Yes of course, in fact I'll come with you now if you don't mind Guy. (*Turning to Francis, devilishly*) I trust you are satisfied that your money is not going to waste?

Francis Tresham: (*deliberately, and equally devilishly*) Satisfied indeed...

Jack Wright & Guy Fawkes shake hands and nod to Francis Tresham before leaving.

Francis Tresham: (*speaking to himself as he reaches out to touch the barrels*) Gunpowder, it's a brilliant plan really. (*pause*) If only there was a way to save all those innocent

Catholics who will perish. My own brother-in-law! (*pausing*) My poor wife, I can't imagine how she'll react if she ever finds out that **I** was involved in the murder of Lord Montea­gle – her own **brother!** (*sitting down and thinking*) Perhaps there is a way!! Maybe, just maybe.... (*walks quickly out of the cellar*)

Scene 8

Lord and Lady Montea­gle is sitting in chairs enjoying a cup of tea.

Lord Montea­gle: (*affectionately*) My dear Lady Montea­gle, I'm so excited – only one more week until we leave for London and the opening of Parliament.

Lady Montea­gle: Yes my dear, and isn't it a relief to know that the King has personally invited you even though you've been part of two Catholic rebellions in recent years?

Lord Montea­gle: A relief indeed, (*sarcastically*) although I'm still not sure whether it's me or my money that the King is fond of.

Ward enters stage right and bows.

Ward: Lord and Lady Montea­gle, tea will be served in 15 minutes.

Lord Montea­gle: Thank you Ward.

Lady Montea­gle: Ward, please make sure the fire is properly stoked for the evening.

Ward: Yes, my Lady. (*Bows and leaves*)

Lord and Lady Montea­gle ad-lib a conversation

Ward returns in haste

Ward: (*While entering, still off stage*) My Lord, My Lord. (*coming on stage*) I apologize for interrupting you again my Lord, but an **urgent** letter has just arrived for you. (*handing letter to Lord Montea­gle*)

Lord Montea­gle: (*opens letter and begins to read, becomes more frazzled and distraught as he reads, dropping his tea cup*) Ward, Ward, this is unbelievable – simply unbelievable. Here, listen to this:

My Lord Montea­gle, because of the love that I have for some of your friends, I care for your safety. Therefore I would advise you, if you value your life, to devise some escape, and to cancel your attendance at this parliament. For God and man have joined forces to punish the wickedness of this time. Stay in the country and watch the event in safety. For though there is no appearance of any danger, the leaders of this great country shall receive a terrible blow at the opening of parliament, and yet their assassins shall remain unseen. Ignore this counsel at your own risk. As soon as you can, burn this letter. I hope you will have the wisdom to make good use of this protection.

Ward: (*in disbelief*) My Lord, what do you recommend? What will you do?

Lord Monteagle: *(Looking up from the letter, hesitantly)* There is only one thing we *can* do. We must warn the King. *(rising up, grabbing his cloak)* Quickly Ward, saddle my horse! We will leave for London at once.

Ward and Lord/Lady Monteagle exit stage right

Scene 9

(Guy Fawkes on stage with barrels, settling in for the evening, checking his pocket watch periodically)

Guy Fawkes: Well, only 9 more hours until the course of history changes forever...I better get some rest – tomorrow's the big day.

(During previous line, soldiers slowly creep into scene from back with candles/matches burning, whispering to each other)

William: Well we've scoured the rooms upstairs, and found nothing suspicious.

Edward: Yah, I doubt we'll find anything down here in this dusty old cellar. Did the King mention anything about who...*(sees Guy Fawkes in far corner and soldiers draw swords)*...who are you!?

Guy Fawkes: *(jumping up)* John Johnson at your service. Welcome to our firewood shop – *(blows candles out)* You really ought to be careful with an open flame in a place like this! *(pulls at his collar, looking in direction of barrels/wood)*

William: A firewood shop open at this late hour? You wouldn't be hiding anything down here would you?

Guy Fawkes: Gentleman, Gentleman, I'm just a guy that works with fire...wood.

Soldiers roughly grab hold of Guy, and in the skirmish Guy's matches and kindling wood fall out of his costume

Edward: What have we here?! Matches?! Kindling wood?! In a firewood shop? Isn't that a bit dangerous Mr. Johnson?! William, search the room. I'll keep Mr. Johnson contained...

William searches room and finds gunpowder...

William: *(in a stage whisper)* Gunpowder?! *(loudly)* **Gunpowder?!** Edward, I think we've found what we're looking for. *(Getting into Guy's face and grabbing him by the collar, pulling him close)* Mr. Johnson, if that's even your real name, you're coming with us. The King would like a word with you.

Soldiers drag Guy Fawkes off stage right while he protests his innocence. Curtain closes.

Scene 10

Narrator 1: *(Enters audience left)* Guy Fawkes eventually confessed after severe torturing, and the names of the conspirators were all revealed. One by one, all of the conspirators were rounded up and sentenced to death.

It is amazing what power the addition of one match and a fuse could have unleashed. With James still safe on the throne, that great work of producing a new translation would continue, and the bright light of the Reformation would continue to burn.

Curtain opens

Scholar: Our translation has come together and we are quite sure that we have met King James' expectation. We have gone to great pains not to add any commentaries so that the reader can come to conclusions for himself. For example, let me read Acts 22:16: "And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord." This could indicate many thoughts on the idea of baptism, and we have left the reader to research for themselves what "baptism" is.

John Rainolds: It seems at last, that we have a translation that will please many....I hope that this Bible will inspire people to finally read their Bibles for themselves.

James Bancroft: I will send this final version off to the King and we will have it compiled. Many reputable scholars have worked tirelessly on this project and I am sure that the King will be pleased with the outcome.

(All hesitantly shake hands as curtain closes)

Narrator 2: *(Entering audience right)* No other text has matched the King James version. It has provided the backbone for Christianity around the world. The King James Bible is the most widely published text in the English language, and was first released 400 years ago, this year. Over the years, hundreds of millions of copies have been sold.

Narrator 1: *(Entering audience left)* This version of the Bible has had a lasting impact, not only on the Christian faith, but on the way English is spoken and written today.

Narrator 2: In 1611, it struck a critical balance in a world of religious conflict, and it has been used in churches around the world ever since. By the end of the 17th century it was, simply, the Bible.

Narrator 1: Thus the King James Bible came to be, and men throughout England, and eventually throughout the world, had Bibles in their own homes. 400 years later, the same translation is still commonly in use in homes throughout the world.

Narrator 2: Next time a day goes by and the Bible goes untouched in *your* home, remember...it **almost** never made it there.

Curtain opens with cast on stage for final bow