

# The Authorised Version of the Bible

as remembered by Marion Richardson



For my ninth birthday on August 2nd 1953, my parents gave me a Bible. It is printed on what I believe is India paper, very thin and with reddish gold edges to the pages. It has thumb index cut outs with little black labels with abbreviated names of the books in gold lettering to help find the book that you want to read. I remember what a special present it seemed to me at the time and I carefully wrote my name and address and the date on the fly leaf.

On the first page I read that it was "*Translated out of the original tongues and with the former translations diligently compared and revised by his majesty's special command.*" I wanted to know which "His Majesty" this was and why he had made such a command and why it needed to be "*Appointed to be read in Churches*". I learnt from my father about King James and what was meant by the Defender of the Faith and how all the Churches in the land should have the Bible in them in English so that people should be able to read it and understand the Christian faith for themselves.

I was taught to read it every night in bed before saying my prayers and going to sleep and was given Scripture Union notes to help me understand it. Sometimes my mother would read it with me and sometimes I would read it on my own. And sometimes I would lapse and not read it for weeks! But it was always there and I would start again and take it up with renewed interest and vigour.

With my mother's help I soon learnt to find my way around the Old and New Testaments and quickly to find the book I wanted. The Psalms are the easiest to find, as they pretty much bang in the middle.

I was particularly fascinated by the stories in the Old Testament, with the tales of the good and the bad, punishments and rewards and promises made by God. I gained a very clear picture in my mind of the doings of the Israelites. I recently attended a school Advent Mass at Edward Betham School and heard the children sing a familiar hymn, the second verse of which seems to sum up a lot of the ideas in these stories.

I the Lord of snow and rain  
I have born my people's pain  
I have wept for love of them  
They turn away.  
I will break their hearts of stone  
Give them hearts for love alone  
I will speak my word to them  
Whom shall I send?



I would try to follow their history and to find logical conclusions to the stories. However, I was puzzled and confused by the apparent contradictions and lack of continuity through the Bible as a whole, but particularly in the Old Testament, in what I thought should be a narrative like any other good story book. Also, if the four Gospels were all telling the story of Jesus' life why were they so different? It was not until many years later, when Neil was studying Theology at Salisbury College that he was able to explain to me why this was. These are the writings, not of one person, or even of one person per book, but a collection of writings

from many different sources and different times which have been put together over a long period of time and made into a collection of books bound together and called The Bible. It was a revelation to me at the time that even within one book there are texts by several different writers, stitched together at some time in history by person or persons, supposedly following diligent study of the writings. Sometimes repeating the same narrative but slightly differently, sometimes leaving gaps in the story. This explained the rather disjointed flow of the stories with gaps and repetitions. It was as though a light had been switched on in my head and I began to understand that the Bible is best regarded not as “literally true” but “as full of Truth”. This makes it much easier to make sense of it.

The Psalms were interesting to read as they seemed to me to give a glimpse of a very personal relationship of the writer to God. One of my favourites is Psalm 121. *“I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth.”* What a wonderful and comforting phrase that is. I found The Psalms were also easier to understand as a nine year old because, as I was taught, they are really the Jewish hymn book of the time and a hymn book was a very familiar thing to me.

The old language of the King James Version did not bother me at all, as it was as familiar to me as everyday language, hearing it every Sunday in Church. It was just a part of everyday life to me and seemed appropriate for Bible reading and Church worship. Now, having become familiar with the modern language version, the old language, although still familiar and delightful, does seem very old fashioned and I would not want to return to reading from it regularly in Church.

The Bible is such a huge book and so many thousands of people have written about it with much deeper knowledge and insight than I have that I feel rather inadequate to say much more. However, it is interesting to note that the opening words in Genesis are *“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.”* And the final words at the close of the Book of Revelation are *“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen”* Everything in between is there for us to take if we wish.



Marion reading the Authorised Version of the Bible in the rectory