

Sunday, November 23, 2025—Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*
Lesson 268 Assessing the Printed History of the King James Text (American Text 1783-1820)

Introduction

- [Lesson 267](#) explored the early history of the King James Bible (KJB) in America, focusing on its first printing on American soil. It follows up on previous discussions about British editions, particularly the 1769 Blayney revision, and shifts attention to the American context.
- The following two points dominated our discussion in Lesson 267.
 - The Colonial Period
 - Before the American Revolution, English Bibles were imported from Britain due to the Crown's monopoly on Bible printing.
 - Colonial printers feared legal repercussions for unauthorized reprints.
 - Practical challenges like cost, lack of materials, and limited demand also hindered local printing.
 - No confirmed English Bible was printed in the colonies before independence, though some non-English editions (e.g., Algonquin and German) were produced.
 - First American Printing
 - During the Revolutionary War, Bible shortages prompted a petition to the Continental Congress in 1777.
 - Congress considered printing but ultimately opted to import Bibles due to logistical challenges.
 - Printer Robert Aitken took initiative and printed the first English New Testament in 1777, followed by the first complete English Bible in America in 1782.
 - Congress officially endorsed Aitken's Bible, praising its accuracy and significance.
 - Aitken's edition differed slightly from the standard 1769 Blayney text, and his source text remains unknown.
 - Spelling variations appeared immediately in the first American printing ("establish" for "stablish," and razor with s/z)

- Despite his efforts, the return of British imports after the war undercut Aitken's sales, leading to financial hardship.
 - The Presbyterian Synod later purchased and distributed his Bibles to the poor.
- In this Lesson we will continue of look at the American text by considering the following points:
 - Post-Revolutionary King James Bibles (1783-1800)
 - Matthew Carey's Collation and Editions
 - The Impact of Stereotyping and the American Bible Society
 - Orthography and the ABS Text
- Once again, the content for this Lesson was taken from my book *The King James Bible In America: An Orthographic, Historical and Textual Investigation* published by Dispensational Publishing House in 2019.

Post-Revolutionary King James Bibles (1783-1800)

- During the seventeen years between the end of the Revolution and the turn of the century, four significant editions of the KJB were printed in America. These were the editions printed by Isaac Collins (1789), Isaiah Thomas (1791), the Brown's Self-Interpreting Family Bible (also known as Brown Family Folio Bible, 1792), and Hugh Gaine (1792). Other minor printings of the New Testament also occurred during this period. For a complete list of editions of the post-Revolutionary era, interested parties are encouraged to consult Margaret T. Hills' book *The English Bible in America: A Bibliography of Editions of the Bible & New Testament Published in America 1777-1957*.
- Advertisements for the editions of Collins, Thomas, and Brown alarmed theologians in the newly formed republic who were concerned with the purity and uniformity of the text. While the core text of these Bibles was the King James text of 1769, it was clear that publishers were already seeking to embellish their editions by adding ancillary material such as marginal notes, references, concordances and the like. As a result, the subject was brought before the Congregational Ministers of Massachusetts at their Annual Convention in 1790. On 27 May 1790, the Convention passed a resolution to be sent to the Congress of the United States regarding regulating Bible printing in the Republic. The petition reads in part:
 - “. . . to the Congress of the United States a petition requesting the attention of that Hon'ble Body, to the subject of the several impressions of the Bible now making; respecting the importance of accuracy in these impressions; and earnestly praying that they would take such measure, as the Constitution may permit, that no Edition of the Bible, or its translation be published in America without its being carefully inspected

and certified to be free from error.” (Senate Journal, 107)

- The petition was read in the United States Senate on June 10, 1790, where it was immediately tabled for future consideration. In January 1791 the Baptist Associations of New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and Vermont also submitted petitions to Congress “to adopt measures to prevent the publication of any inaccurate editions of the Holy Bible”. Later that same year in December 1791, the First Amendment was ratified and added to the Constitution which stated in part, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech or the press. . .” Thereafter, all such petitions regarding the regulation of Bible printing in the United States were not acted upon by Congress as they were viewed as clear violations of the First Amendment.
- Thus, were the conditions created for the unregulated publication of the KJB in the United States. First, after the Revolution American printers felt no compulsion to heed the British Crown’s patent for printing the King James text. Second, on account of the First Amendment the United States government took no steps to limit or regulate its publication. Consequently, it would not be long before Americanized editions of the King James text began to appear in the United States.

Matthew Carey’s Collation and Editions

- Shortly after the turn of the century in 1801, Matthew Carey of Philadelphia printed a Quarto edition of the King James Version. This was not Carey’s first foray into Bible printing; previously in 1790 he printed 471 copies of the Catholic Douay Rheims Bible. (Gutjahr, 23-24) In preparation of the proof sheets for his 1801 edition of the King James, Carey conducted a collation comparing eighteen editions: four London, three Cambridge, three Oxford, six Edinburgh; and two American, those of Isaac Collins and Isaiah Thomas. (Carey, 230) After completing his collation Carey identified five kinds of variants between the editions surveyed: 1) punctuation, 2) orthography, 3) use of italic, 4) verbal differences without affecting the sense, and 5) variations in both words and sense. (Carey, 232) Regarding the “Orthographical Variations” Carey wrote:
 - “These are not as numerous as the former; but they are by no means inconsiderable. Among these that attracted most attention, in the progress of the work, were—besides, beside; towards, toward; among, amongst; vallies, valleys; champion, champaign; subtil, subtile; divers, diverse; aught, ought; born, borne; &c., &c.

Diverse and divers are miserably confounded together. They appear to be regarded as synonymous, which is an egregious error. Divers signifies many; diverse, different.” (Carey, 232)
- Laurence M. Vance also discusses the work of Matthew Carey in this recently published work *The Text of the King James Bible* (See page 233). Carey’s work from the early 19th century highlights the fact that variations in orthography between British editions as well as between American editions and British printings existed from very early in the print history of the KJB in the United States.

- Google Books has a digital copy of an 1813 edition of the King James published by Matthew Carey. According to Margaret T. Hills' book *The English Bible in America*, Carey released two different editions in 1813 from standing type. The first edition was printed in quarto size and contained ten maps, thirteen historical engravings, and Brown's Concordance. (Hills, 39) In contrast, the second 1813 edition printed by Carey did not contain these ancillary materials and answers to Carey's duodecimo edition from 1802/03. (Hills, 40) Hills further reports that Matthew Carey's 1802/03 duodecimo edition contained an Order of Books for the Old and New Testaments as well as an Account of Dates that preceded the Old Testament text. A Table of Kindred in addition to a Table of Time was also included following the Old Testament. Lastly, a Table of Offices followed the New Testament. (Hills, 19)
- Therefore, the 1813 KJB furnished by Google Books answers to the 1802/03 edition of Matthew Carey seeing that it was reprinted in 1813 from identical standing type. (Hills, 40) According to Margret Hills, in about 1803 Carey purchased the standing type used to produce his duodecimo from printer Hugh Gaine who had also printed a duodecimo edition in 1792. (Gutjahr, 27) A comparison between Gaine's duodecimo (1792) with Carey's (1803) reveals that they are identical in terms of their preliminary and ancillary additions. Both editions include an Order of Books and an Account of Dates before the Old Testament Text and a Table of Kindred and Table of Time following it. Moreover, both editions included a Table of Offices at the end of the New Testament. The only major difference is that Carey did not include the Apocrypha in his duodecimo whereas Gaine did. (Gutjahr, 9)
- Therefore, the form of the King James text exhibited by Carey's 1813 duodecimo printing answers to and is identical with his 1802/03 text since they were both produced using the same standing type. Furthermore, given the fact that Carey purchased the standing type used to print his 1802/03 edition from Gaine's who used it to produce his 1792 duodecimo, the form of the text exhibited by Carey's 1802/03 and 1813 editions, represents a form of the King James text in America that dates from 1792 within fifteen years of the advent of Bible printing in this country.
- An examination of the Gaine/Carey Text reveals the existence of orthographical variations in the King James text from the inception of its printing on American shores. Please consider the following evidence of orthographical changes in early American printings of the KJB (The follow table was taken from page 111 of *The King James Bible In America*).

Passage	Standard Text (1769)	Gaine/Carey Text (1792, 1803, 1813)
I Chron. 17:12	<i>stablish</i>	establish
I Chron. 18:3	<i>stablish</i>	establish
II Chron. 7:18	<i>establis</i>	stablish
II Pet. 2:6	<i>ensample</i>	example
Gen. 11:3	<i>thoroughly</i>	thoroughly
Job 6:2	<i>thoroughly</i>	thoroughly
Ps. 51:2	<i>thoroughly</i>	thoroughly
Jer. 50:34	<i>thoroughly</i>	thoroughly
Ez. 16:9	<i>thoroughly</i>	thoroughly
Luke 3:17	<i>thoroughly</i>	thoroughly
II Cor. 11:6	<i>thoroughly</i>	thoroughly
II Tim. 3:17	<i>thoroughly</i>	thoroughly

- The facts presented in this table prove that spelling changes such as these are not a “new attack” on the KJB as has been asserted by Local Church Bible Publishers (LCBP) and other King James Only proponents. Rather, orthographical variations in American printings of the KJB are as old as the printed history of the text in the United States. Were Gaine and Carey seeking to “corrupt” the text? Before answering, please bear in mind that during the time period in question 1792 through 1813 there was no such thing as a modern version. There was no textual debate, the critical text of Westcott and Hort had not yet been developed. Codex Sinaiticus (1844) had not even been discovered yet. If corruption was the goal, there were certainly more effective measures that could have been taken to undermine the veracity of the text than to change the spellings of these words. Moreover, as Part I of this book established, there is no substantive difference in meaning between the various spellings of these words to begin with.

The Impact of Stereotyping and the American Bible Society

- The execution of Carey’s strategy of maintaining standing type for various sized editions required an entire room to house the preset blocks for a single edition. While it was still cheaper than typesetting an edition from scratch for each printing, it remained a costly enterprise to house all the standing type necessary to print multiple editions. (Guthjahr, 13) In the early nineteenth century a new method of typesetting was introduced called stereotyping. “Stereotype plates of type were made from plaster of paris that allowed printers to print certain works without having to reset the type every time or keep large volumes of loose type set standing in molds.” (Guthjahr, 13) This process arrived in the United States in 1812 and was immediately applied in the Bible printing industry.
- In 1812, the Philadelphia Bible Society acquired stereotyped plates from England from which they printed the first stereotyped book in America. By 1815, publishers were using American-made stereotyped plates to print Bibles in this country. Five years later in 1820, fifty percent of American Bible editions declared their stereotyped status on the title page. “Stereotyping

revolutionized American book publishing in the first third of the nineteenth century and no book was so radically touched by this revelation as the Bible.” (Guthjahr, 29)

- The formation of Bible Societies as non-commercial printers and distributors of the text also appeared in the early nineteenth century. In the United States, the Philadelphia Bible Society was the first to organize in 1808 after the model of the British and Foreign Bible Society founded in London in 1804. (Hills, xix) Soon after, many other local societies were formed around the country buying their Bibles from local publishers. Given the need for the production of inexpensive Bibles as the country expanded westward, the local societies decided to combine their efforts in 1816 and form the American Bible Society (ABS). (Hills, xix)
- The advent of stereotyping and the formation of the ABS forever changed the production of Bibles in the United States. The ABS sought to utilize the new technology of stereotyping to fulfill the ambitious goal of providing a Bible for every household in America.
 - “No publisher more enthusiastically embraced stereotyping than the American Bible Society. Using the British and Foreign Bible Society as its model, the Society adopted a vision of encouraging the widest possible circulation of the “Holy Scriptures without note or comment.” So central was stereotyping to this vision that the Society initially advertised a mission of providing “a sufficiency of well printed and accurate editions of the Scriptures; but also to furnish great districts of the American continent with well executed stereotype plates, for their cheap and extensive diffusion throughout regions which are now scantily supplied at discouraging expense.” (Guthjahr. 30)
- By 1820, the Society possessed ten different sets of stereotyped plates capable of producing five different types of KJBs and New Testaments. In this regard, the ABS was trend setting. The first large publishing house to adopt stereotyping was Harper and Brothers and they did do so until the 1830s. A normal press run for a commercial printer in the 1820s was around two thousand copies. In contrast, the Society printed 20,000 copies of a stereotyped Bible in 1816, and by 1830 was producing 300,000 copies a year. (Guthjahr. 30) It is important to note that all of these Bibles were copies of the common English Bible otherwise known as the King James Version.

Orthography and the ABS Text

- As the practice of stereotyping expanded the production of the KJB in America, the number of orthographic variants also increased given that there was no uniformity of spelling in the different sets of stereotyped plates produced. Once again, Google Books has a copy of an American Bible Society stereotyped text from 1819. This particular edition was stereotyped by E & J White for the American Bible Society and printed by D. Fanshaw of New York. According to the bibliographic information provided by Margaret T. Hills, it is a reprint of the Society’s 1816 Duodecimo sized Bible. (Hills, 61) Both the 1816 and 1819 printings contain minimal ancillary additions, only an Order of Books in the front and Tables of Scripture Measures, Weights and Money, and Time have been added following the Old Testament. (Hills, 50) Therefore, the 1819 edition of the ABS text was printed using the same stereotyped plates as the 1816 edition, the very first one printed by the Society.

- An examination of the ABS text from 1816 reveals further changes in orthography to the King James text from the Gaine/Carey Text (1792, 1803, and 1813) noted above. Concerning the pairs of words we have been comparing throughout this book (“throughly/ thoroughly”, “alway/always”, “ensample(s)/example(s)” and “stablish/ establish”) it is important to note that only the word “ensample(s)” remains unchanged in the ABS text of 1816 when compared against the standard British text of 1769. As the next chapter illustrates, (see pages 123-129 of *The King James Bible In America*) in every occurrence where the words “throughly,” “alway,” and “stablish” occur in scripture, the ABS edition of 1816 has updated the orthography to reflect contemporary American conventions in the early 19th century.
- In order to ascertain the extent of the orthographical changes, I have conducted a comparison between the list of spelling changes identified by Local Church Bible Publishers in their booklet, *Have You Seen Some of the Changes That Publishers Are Making in Your King James Bible* and the King James text of the ABS from 1816. The results of this comparison are presented in the following table (An * indicates that an entry was added by the author.). Please note that a blank in the “ABS 1816 Convention” column indicates that it utilized the same spelling as the Standard 1769 text (The following table are from pages 116-120 of *The King James Bible In America*.).

Standard 1769 Spelling Convention ¹³²	ABS 1816 Spelling Convention	Modern Spelling Convention ¹³³
afterwards		afterward
alway	always	always
apparellled		appareled
armour		armor
armoury		armory
asswage(d)	assuage(d)	assuage(d)
astonied	astonished	astonished

Standard 1769 Spelling Convention¹³²	ABS 1816 Spelling Convention	Modern Spelling Convention¹³³
baken		baked
Balac	Balak	Balak
basons	basons & basins	basins
behaviour		behavior
behoed	behoed & behooved	behooved
brasen	brazen	brazen
broided	broidered	braided
broidered		embroidered
caterpillar	caterpillar	caterpillar
chesnut		chestnut
clamour		clamor
cloke	cloak	cloak
colour		color
counsellor		counselor
defence(d)		defense(d)
diddest*	didst	didst
distil		distill
Elias		Elijah
enclose(d)		inclose(d)
endeavour		endeavor
enquire(d)	inquire(d)	inquire(d)
ensample		example
fats		vats
favour		favor
forbad	forbade	forbade
fulness		fullness
fulfil		fulfill
furbrushed	furished	furished
grisled	grizzled	grizzled
heretick	heretic	heretic

Standard 1769 Spelling Convention ¹³²	ABS 1816 Spelling Convention	Modern Spelling Convention ¹³³
honour		honor
Esaias		Isaiah
intreat	entreat	entreat
Jonas		Jonah
jubile	jubilee	jubilee
knop(s)		knob(s)
labour		labor
lentiles		lentils
lien	lain	lain
lothe(d)	loathe(d)	loathe(d)
marvelled		marveled
morter	mortar	mortar
musick	music	music
neesings		sneezing
neighbour		neighbor
Noe		Noah
odour		odor
offence		offense
Osee		Hosea
payed		paid ¹³⁴
publick	public	public
rebukeable		rebukable ¹³⁵
recompence	recompence & recompense	recompense
repayed	repaid	repaid
reproveable		reprovable ¹³⁶

Standard 1769 Spelling Convention¹³²	ABS 1816 Spelling Convention	Modern Spelling Convention¹³³
rereward	rere-ward	rearward
rigour		rigor
rumour		rumor
Saviour		Savior
savour		savor
sceptre		scepter
sepulchre		sepulcher
serjeants	sergeants	sergeants
shew		show
shewbread		showbread
Sion	Sion & Zion	Zion
sith	since	since
specially*	especially	especially
spue		spew
stablish*	establish	establish
stedfast	steadfast	steadfast
straked		streaked ¹³⁷
subtil	subtile	subtile
subtilty		subtility
subtilly	subtilely	subtilely
succourer		succorer
sycamore	sycamore	sycamore
throughly	thoroughly	thoroughly
Timotheus		Timothy
traffick	traffic	traffic
traveller		traveler
to day*	to-day	today
to morrow*	to-morrow	tomorrow

Standard 1769 Spelling Convention¹³²	ABS 1816 Spelling Convention	Modern Spelling Convention¹³³
unblameable	unblameable & unblamable	unblamable
utter	utter & outer	outer
vail		veil ¹³⁸
valour		valor
vapour		vapor
wilfully		willfully
winefat	wine-fat	winevat
withs		withes
worshipped		worshiped
Zacharias		Zechariah

- The preceding tables contain a total of 100 words; 95 of which were identified by LCBP and five that were added by me. Of these 100 words that are spelled differently in modern printings of the KJB, 37 of them (37%) had already experienced orthographical changes in American printings of the KJB by 1816. In addition, another 16 words in modern printings exhibit a difference of only one letter. In these 16 cases the letter “u” was removed from words like “labour” so that the word reads “labor.” On pages 234 and 235 of *The Text of the King James Bible* Dr. Laurence M. Vance catalogues “American” spellings in an ABS edition from the 20th century (1974 edition).
- Many King James Bible believers utilize Noah Webster’s *American Dictionary of the English Language* as an authority for defining the English words found in their KJB. The pro-King James website “The King James Bible Page” contains a KJV Dictionary among its many useful and informative resources. The KJV Dictionary was created using Noah Webster’s dictionary to define the English words found in the KJB. It is important for King James advocates who utilize Noah Webster’s dictionary to realize that it is an “American Dictionary” of the English language. In other words, Webster is informing his readers how English words were used and spelled in America. If one were to take the above list of 100 words and search the Standard 1769 Spelling Convention (British Spelling) in Webster’s 1828 Dictionary, they would not find an entry for many of the words. For example, if one searched for “heretick” they would not find an entry. Conversely, if one were to search for “heretic” they would encounter various meanings for the word. When one compares American printings of the KJB against Noah Webster’s *American Dictionary*, they will see that the spelling changes in American KJBs coincide with how English words were being spelled in America.
- When afforded the opportunity due to the lack of copyright and Congressional oversight in terms of Bible printing, American publishers “Americanized” the text by continuing to update the orthography to suit their American readership. How is this any different from what occurred with the King James text between 1611 and 1769? Thus, America’s print culture gave birth to distinctly American editions of the KJB from very early in the life of the nation without altering the doctrinal content of the text. Over the course of the 19th century, as more American editions were produced, further Americanizing of spelling occurred and continued without any uniformity across the printed editions in the United States.
- Once again, the facts covered in this section bear out that American editions of the KJB were changing the orthography to reflect American conventions well before the textual and translational controversies of the later 19th century. By 1820 the ABS was using ten different sets of stereotyped plates to produce at least five different sized Bibles, yet even these plates contained spelling variants. What is more is that when one considers the sheer number of editions of the KJB printed on American shores between 1782 and 1881; one will search in vain for any two that are identical in their orthography throughout.

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