

Devotional: Thy Word Is A Lamp

Jack C. Whytock

“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.”

Psalm 119:105 (KJV)

“...The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth for ever . . .”

1 Peter 1:24, 25 (KJV)

I have quoted both texts of Scripture above from the King James Version of the Bible for three reasons: first, 2011 was the 400th anniversary of the King James Version of the Bible; second, these verses illustrate the powerful and majestic style of the most significant English Bible version ever printed; third, and most importantly, they speak of profound truth.

Allow me to begin with a few words of background comment on the 1611 King James Version of the Bible and also its impact before making comment on these scriptures.

1611 and the King James Version

The origins of the King James Version of the Bible can be traced back to 1604 and a suggestion by John Rainolds, who proposed that there be a new English Bible translation. Rainolds made this proposal at the Hampton Court Conference, and King James VI of Scotland and I of England immediately agreed. Of course, King James saw this to his political advantage, nevertheless it set in motion “the most important publication in the whole of history”, as one BBC reporter recently wrote. An illustrious group of Bible scholars was assembled; one had the distinction of being hailed as the “most able linguist in Christendom”. The scholars who revised, compared and translated were certainly the greatest body of scholars who had ever been engaged in producing an English Bible. The work was chiefly undertaken by teams at Oxford, Cambridge and Westminster Abbey. In the final stages, intensive editing that included an oral reading of the text was carried out at Stationers’ Hall in London. This reminds us of the profound strength of the King James Bible – it was a work to be read out loud. Some title pages still include this instruction, “Appointed to be read in Churches”.

As an English text it fuses plain Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman vocabulary, yet at times a more technical language is used – some have called this the Latinate influence. In terms of English language history, the King James is reflective of the end of Middle English and the formative early period of

Modern English. Thus the King James Bible and William Shakespeare represent a critical juncture in the evolution of the English language.

The Diffusion of the King James into English Culture

Our culture has been profoundly impacted by the King James Version of the Bible even if we are not always conscious of such. Many of our English idioms come from the King James Bible; for example, “*out of the mouth of babes*”, “*holier than thou*”, “*labour of love*”, “*how are the mighty fallen*”, etc. At each performance of the great oratorio by George Frederic Handel, the *Messiah*, we are being impacted by the King James Bible. The second most popular English religious book, *Pilgrim’s Progress* by John Bunyan, has too often been ignored, yet it helped to popularize the language and style of the King James Bible for generations. Without a doubt the King James version of the Bible has been at the heart of the diffusion of the English language in the modern period.

PSALM 119:105-112

King James Version (KJV)

105Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.

106I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments.

107I am afflicted very much: quicken me, O LORD, according unto thy word.

108Accept, I beseech thee, the freewill offerings of my mouth, O LORD, and teach me thy judgments.

109My soul is continually in my hand: yet do I not forget thy law.

110The wicked have laid a snare for me: yet I erred not from thy precepts.

111Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever: for they are the rejoicing of my heart.

112I have inclined mine heart to perform thy statutes alway, even unto the end.

Thy Word Is a Lamp

The best way to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the King James version of the Bible is to actually engage with it – take it up and read! Of course, you may have a good contemporary English version beside you, but I think you will be amazed by the power that remains in this great-grandfather Bible in the history of the modern period of English Bibles. It may appear “an-

cient” – 1611 is really not ancient, and you may discover again that yes, the grass does wither and the flowers fade and the petals drop, but the Word of God is still relevant and speaks to the abiding state of all humanity and the human need – it is still alive.

Many argue over Scripture, but far better to take it up and read it. There have been many who have begun by arguing with Scripture; however, when they in humility have actually read the Scriptures they have been brought to faith and have confessed how powerful the Word has been upon their souls – it has been life-transforming.

In a world of darkness, there is a path which is lit by the Scriptures and this path always leads us to One, Christ Jesus, Who said, “*I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.*” (KJV) Engage with the Word that endures forever and follow the path to the Light.

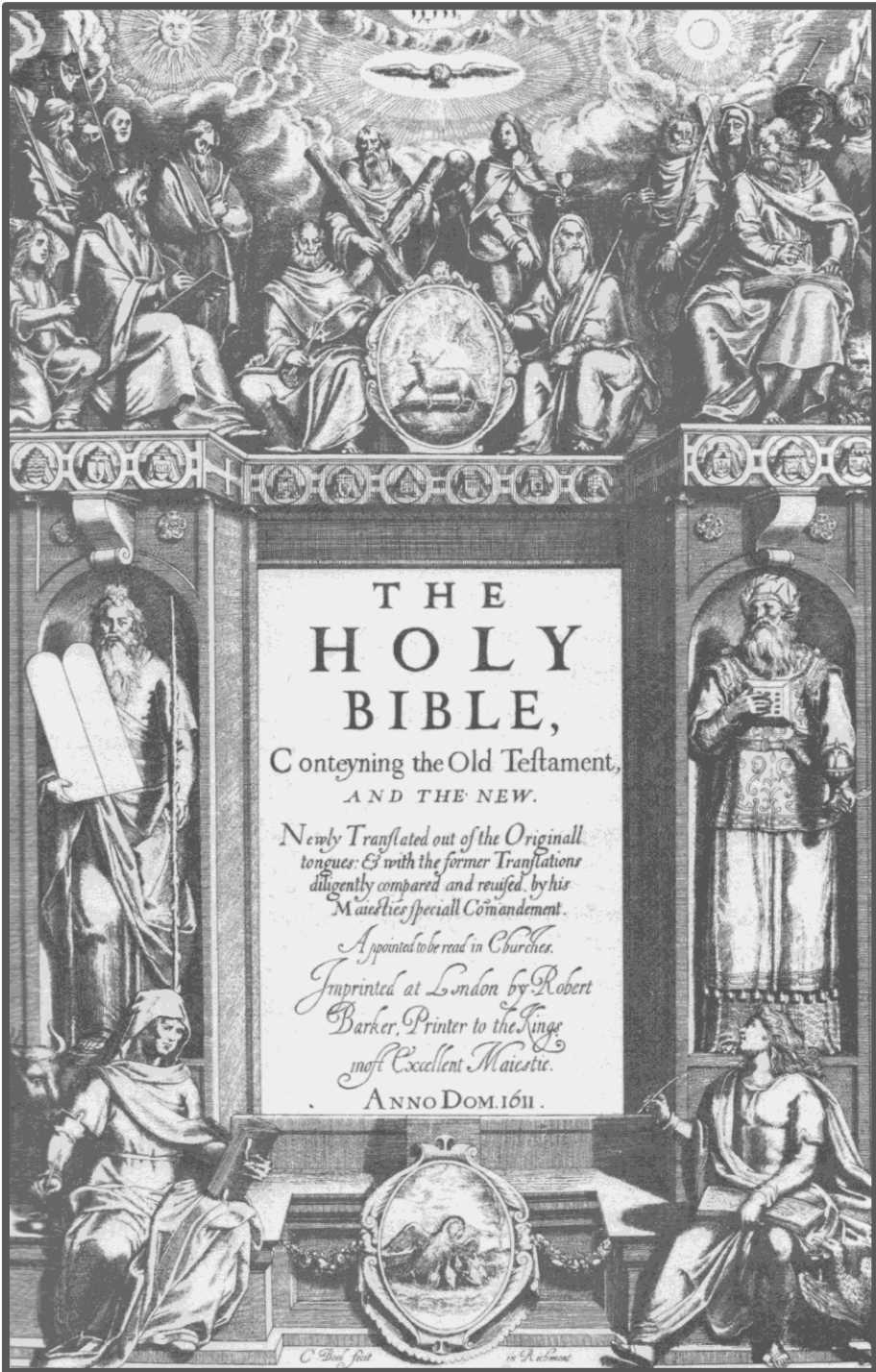
A Brief Outline of Psalm 119:105-112

Verse 105 is really a thematic statement for this section of Psalm 119. The Word of God is a light to guide us through this world of sin. God’s Word is clear, powerful and profound and should be taken up by all – it is not the reserve of clergy only!

Verse 106 is a personal covenant that the writer will follow the laws of the Lord. What a great general covenant! Sometimes believers make some very bizarre personal covenants which are very precise but not universal. This is surely a universal covenant for all believers.

Verses 106b-110 affirm that God’s Word gives us *direction in right living*; it *brings renewal* in days of struggle, suffering and discouragement; it surely *affects, inspires and fills our worship*; and it guides us through the *traps of relationships* in which we live daily.

Verses 111-112 affirm the blessed heritage of believers by means of the Word of God. What contentment, joy, peace and blessing we find through the Word. Finally, as in a great coda in music, the writer personally concludes with a resounding resolve to keep his heart obediently seeking to live in the way of the Lord to the day of his death.



Facsimile of the title leaf of the 1611 King James Version of the Bible