



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on April 24, 2011

On Its 400th Anniversary, King James Bible Still Popular With Americans

“Among those who read the Bible regularly the percentage of KJV owners is even higher,” reported the [Baptist Press News](#). “A full 82 percent of Americans who read the Bible at least once a month own a KJV. Sixty-seven percent of American adults who own a Bible have a KJV.”

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Commissioned in 1604 by England’s King James I, and known officially as the Authorized Version, the KJV Bible was the work of a team of nearly 50 of the best Bible scholars of the day, and following its first publication in May 1611 quickly spread across the English-speaking world, remaining the dominant Protestant scriptural reference up until the very end of the 20th century. Even in today’s churches across the world, the KJV continues to be the standard by which many Protestant believers judge all other versions of Scripture.

“Christians believe that God’s Word is truth and that truth is conveyed through language,” Scott McConnell, director of LifeWay Research, told Baptist Press. “Thus, translations have always been integral to the spread of Christianity. It is hard to overstate the influence of the KJV not just on language and idioms, but because it brought the Word of God to English-speaking peoples in the first widely available format.”

Age and generational differences play a big part in who owns and reads the KJV, with 76 percent of Americans 55 years and older who own a Bible saying they have a KJV, compared to only 67 percent of those in the 35 to 54 age group. As for those under 35, the percentage of ownership drops to around 56 percent, with a third in that age group saying they have never even read the KJV.

While the King James Version has been treasured over the centuries for its powerfully expressed eternal truths as well as for the poetic beauty of its language, it has also been criticized as archaic and difficult to understand. Queried on these elements of the translation, 31 percent said they found the language beautiful, and 23 percent said it was “easy to remember.” Another 16 percent, however, said the KJV’s language was outdated, and 27 percent found it “hard to understand.”

Because women in general tend to own more copies of Scripture than men do, it came as no surprise that they possess more copies of the KJV, with 72 percent of women who own a Bible saying they have a KJV copy, compared with 62 percent of men.

While there is little debate that the KJV has been the most influential English language Bible translation, it is certainly not the only one. In fact, in the past half century there has been a dramatic proliferation of Bible translations and paraphrases, with dozens for sale today. The LifeWay researchers found that with all translations included, 89 percent of American households own at least one Bible, with the average household having around four copies of Scripture.

Yet there is a significant gap in Bible ownership between those who read the Scriptures regularly and those who do not, the researchers noted, with Americans who read the Bible at least once a month owning an average of nearly six Bibles, while those who read it less than once a month owning, on average, about two copies of Scripture.

McConnell noted, however, that merely owning a copy of Scripture — King James Version or any other — and believing it to be God’s Word are not sufficient for the truth of it to make a difference in one’s



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life. “The power and inherent truth of Scripture comes from having God as its author,” he told Baptist Press, but an individual’s “willingness to engage the Bible determines its effect upon a life. Numerically, Bible ownership is similar to the percentage of Americans who indicate they are Christian. But owning a Bible and reading it are two different things.”

Graphic: Title page to the 1611 edition of the King James Bible

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