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# 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the King James Bible

by Bill Leader

The world is celebrating the 400th anniversary of the introduction of the Holy Bible translated into English.

There had been two earlier translations into English -- the first under King Henry VIII. He reigned from 1509 until 1547. But during the reign of James I -- 1603 to 1625 -- the Puritan faction of the Church of England raised the issue of mistakes in translation.

Shortly after his coronation, King James I presided over the Hampton Court Conference. The result of this was the hiring of 47 scholars to produce an accurate version of the Holy Bible and the king emphasized that they should "conform to ecclesiology." The Old Testament of the Holy Bible was translated from Hebrew and the New Testament from Greek.

On May 2, 1611, the Holy Bible, now known as the King James I version, was introduced. Melvyn Bragg, an author and one of Britain's leading intellectuals, in a recent article published by The Daily Telegraph, points out it is fashionable to say that The Holy Bible has created nothing but strife and wars -- the medieval Crusades for instance.

But Bragg also points out that The Holy Bible has been the inspiration for many noble causes --the abolition of slavery for one.

There were other evils eradicated, for which the Holy Bible was the inspiration; the use of torture, inhumane prison conditions and abject poverty.

William Wilberforce, born of a wealthy Yorkshire, England, family, enjoyed late night drinking sessions, gambling and the company of bawdy women. But at the age of 25, during a trip through Europe he went through a transformation. He began to rise early in order to read The Holy Bible -- the King James I version.

On his return to England -- and already a Member of Parliament - he began campaigning for the abolishment of slavery. He was ridiculed and had to employ body guards for his protection. His position on the issue was not welcomed. Some referred to him, sarcastically, as "creeping Jesus."

Wilberforce was more convinced his cause was just after reading letters and articles written by two men, who'd both escaped slavery. They were Ottobah Cugoano and Olaudah Equiano, who lived as free men in England. They formed an association called The Sons of Africa.

Wilberforce was joined in his efforts by John Newton, an Anglican parson but former slave captain. In 1748, in a powerful storm and with his ship filling with water, Newton prayed to God stating if he were permitted to survive he would take up the service of God, and campaign against the evil trade. His prayers were answered and Newton began studying to become an Anglican parson. He later wrote the famous hymn Amazing Grace.

Wilberforce gradually began to draw more people to his way of thinking. And on July 29, 1833, the Slavery Abolition Act was passed by Parliament and signed into law by King William IV. Wilberforce died four days after the passage of the act, which he had campaigned so hard. He was 74.

In his article, Bragg writes: "It is one thing to lose faith in the Christian faith; it is another to amputate and take away from our past the powerful positive force the King James Bible has had."