

[In the Beginning: The Story of the King James Bible and How It Changed a Nation, a Language, and a Culture](#)

by Alister McGrath

(New York, NY: Doubleday, 2001), 339 pp., hardback.

Alister McGrath has provided a very readable and informative treatment of the origin of the King James Bible and its influence upon England, America, and the English language. The author provides more background than most other authors concerning the complex social, political, and technical developments which all contributed to the development of the KJV. His treatment of the tension which existed between King James and his belief in the “divine right of kings” vs. the desire of Puritan elements for reform helps one to understand why the KJV translation was undertaken at a time when a much more popular English translation was already available (the Geneva Bible).

The author describes the hostile reception which the KJV translation initially met and helps the reader to understand after such an inauspicious beginning how the KJV managed to ultimately eclipse the Geneva Bible as the “translation of the people.”

The author treats some aspects of the development of the KJV in greater detail than other books on the subject. For example, his discussion of the technical challenges involved in typesetting, printing, and binding were quite illuminating.

The author writes almost like a novelist—the book is difficult to put down because it is so readable. I would recommend this book to anyone who is interested in the origin and influence of the King James Version of the Bible and especially to those who are not fond of overly technical or historically detailed treatments.

Review by [Tony Garland](#) of www.SpiritAndTruth.org.