**KJV 400: The Legacy and Impact of the King James Version**
Ray Van Neste, editor. Foreword by David S. Dockery
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With the 400th anniversary of the publication of the King James Version came numerous conferences and publications about this translation of the Bible that has had such a deep and far-reaching influence in western culture. The present volume is grounded in one such conference at Union University. What renders this collection of essays important is that, without sentimentality, it explores how the KJV has shaped the western intellectual tradition.

Leland Ryken, well-known for his many publications in literature and literary features of the Bible, opens the conversation by demonstrating why the KJV is great, and why it has had such a profound impact over these four centuries. The rest of the book is divided into two large sections, the “Setting from which the KJV Emerged” and the “Impact of the KJV,” which unfold the implications of Ryken’s essay. Six chapters in part one of the book explore earlier renderings of the Bible into English, along with the political, philosophical, and artistic contexts for the KJV translators as they began their work in 1604. Part two offers eleven chapters which investigate the influence of the KJV in almost every area of western life since the translators finished their work in 1611. What emerges from the pastiche is a picture of the deeply-enriching and pervasive influence of this Bible translation.

The chapters in the first part of the book contribute to our understanding of the contexts in which the KJV was translated. Timothy George demonstrates that Tyndale was laser-focused on translating the Bible into English, and Gavin Richardson shows that even Old English writers were interested in a Bible in English. Other chapters in this first part of the volume look at the broader cultural milieu of the early seventeenth century in England and how it affected the translation and even its cover page (Steve Halla).
The second part of the book, the “Impact of the KJV,” reveals the deep and wide influence of the Bible in western culture. It’s easy to state that the KJV was the most important book in English for 350 years, but the chapters in part two of the book illustrate some of the ways in which the DNA of the KJV has informed western culture for almost four centuries.

Four chapters explore the influence of the KJV on literature from William Wordsworth in early nineteen-century England to Flannery O’Connor, and even contemporary American poetry. Gene Fant Jr. pulls the discussion of literature together in his chapter on the simultaneous fascination and repulsion of secular writers with the “power of the KJV.” Following the chapter on literature are essays analyzing the role of the KJV in fields as disparate as psychology, music, and science. Even more broadly, later chapters consider the “KJV-Only” debate and the cultural and political milieu of the translation. The book concludes with Richard C. Wells’ chapter on how the KJV “recreated” preaching and gave us the mainstream of Protestant expository preaching ever since—a chapter as inspiring as it is illuminating.

Well-informed with rich scholarship, yet accessible to the non-expert, KJV 400 finds the right balance between re-tracing the old paths and providing new information and analysis that illuminates the importance of the KJV translation of the Bible. The present volume reminds its readers how the KJV of the Bible benefited from the best of a rich tradition of Bible translations in English and in turn largely shaped our cultural heritage until just recently. Readers will have their appreciation for this translation of the Bible in particular, and the work of God in His Word more generally, enriched in this volume. Highly recommended.

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