

A Forbidden Translation of the Bible Toppled Tyrants and Transformed the World

Based on authentic historical events

Participants (*No need to memorize lines; the aim is simply to inform, not to perform*)

Boniface

Sailor

Queen

Laud

James

Prompter. Prompter speaks a brief line and Echoes repeat it.

Echoes All who want to take part. Echoes simply repeat Prompter's words.

Librarian Welcome folks, to our time-travel library. Each side room opens into a past historical era. Watch your step; this gloomy room is poorly lit; it is in the Dark Ages, and the year is thirteen hundred and two. Meet Pope Boniface the 8th. Kiss his ring, or his swordsmen will run you through.

Prompter & Echoes Kiss his ring!

Boniface I cannot bless you yet, my children. The College of Cardinals awaits me, to announce the most momentous canon law of all time. Hear ye, all Christendom. I pronounce *ex cathedra*, from the throne of St. Peter: Almighty God's infallible truth:

We declare, we proclaim, we define that it is absolutely necessary for salvation that every human creature be subject to the Roman Pontiff.

Librarian Rome's Pope asserted that he alone holds the keys to heaven. This condemns even the older Eastern Orthodox Church, half of all Christendom. The church needs reformation, but it's hopeless while people have no Bibles.

Prompter & Echoes No Bibles!

Librarian Come to into this next room. Oh! I smell salt water. Here's an elderly sailor.

Prompter & Echoes Ahoy, mates!

Sailor Now hear this! I sailed across the Atlantic Ocean 39 years ago with Columbus, the same year we Spanish drove them bloodthirsty Muslims from Europe's soil. But alas! What we gained in the West we lost in the East. Muslims captured Constantinople, the center of eastern Christendom and power.

Prompter & Echoes How tragic!

Sailor Aye, mates, but good come of it. Christian refugees brought with them ancient Hebrew and Greek manuscripts. Now Scripture can be translated into our own tongues, if the good Pope allows. I would dearly love to read the Holy Book. Europe has only the obsolete Latin Vulgate Bible that none of us understands.

Librarian Let us step into another room, a century later. England is suffering from conflicting cultures, paganism, barbarity, drunkenness and corruption. Oh! Meet her Royal Highness, our Catholic queen,

Prompter & Echoes Bloody Mary!

Queen What? What did you dare call my royal person? Bloody, am I? Well, you will find just how bloody! Yes, rude minions, I shed blood and I am proud of it! Over 300 protestant heretics I have burned at the stake.

Prompter & Echoes Oh no!

Queen Ah, what a blessing to hear of the burning of that William Tyndale! He dared translate God's Holy Word into the vulgar tongue of you commoners. Fortunately, he died before he could get an accurate version; you common folk have no right to handle such sacred things!

And we drove off the likes of Wycliffe who dared start translating. The fool!

Librarian Your majesty, other reformers have fled to Switzerland; they are translating the Bible into current English, in John Calvin's free city.

Queen Fie! Let the apostates commit their crimes in Geneva. They'll never make a mark on my England! Never! I bid you goodbye.

Librarian Oh! Here's the Church of England's Archbishop Laud. It's the year 1557.

Laud Yes, my children, those villains in Geneva committed treason! They printed Geneva's *Breeches* Bible in English, and smuggled in 6,000 copies into England.

Prompter & Echoes Treason!

Librarian Most reverend Archbishop, why do you call it the "Breeches Bible"?

Laud It says God replaced Adam and Eve's fig leaves with "breeches" of animal skins. Such a vulgar word for Holy Writ!

I've tried to wipe that devilish book out, but it's wildly popular! They keep revising it, as our language is rapidly changing, from Middle English to Modern.

I have outlawed the Geneva Bible, under penalty of death. It misleads common rabble; sacred matters are far above the likes of them. I have stretched on the rack those sneaky Presbyterians who dared read it. Ah... As you leave, please do not overlook the alms coffer by the door.

Librarian We move to another room, to the year 1611. Meet the most high and mighty King James, and bow low. Very low!

Prompter & Echoes Or else!

James Hear my most recent and proudest announcement, my visitors! We have published the *Authorized Version* of Holy Scripture. Commoners call it the *King James Bible*, after our royal person. Bless them! I, king of the English Empire and its many colonies, Defender of the Faith, authorize my subjects to read only my authorized version... Or else!

- Librarian Your Majesty, why did you translate the Bible again? Was something wrong with the Geneva translation of the Bible?
- James The Geneva Bible was well translated; our scholars referred to it to translate my version. Shakespeare quoted it, as well as Milton in his *Paradise Lost*, and John Bunyan in his *Pilgrims' Progress*. Those pilgrims that escaped my dungeons in the *Mayflower* used only Geneva Bibles. Its error lies only in its marginal notes.
- Librarian Please, your Majesty, give us an example of an erroneous marginal note.
- James One dastardly comment deals with midwives defying Pharaoh's edict to drown all Hebrew boy babies in the Nile. It says that God's Word refutes the Divine Right of kings, denying our God-given power of absolute control over our subjects!
- Prompter & Echoes Sedition!
- James Alas! Even I, with the most powerful army on earth, cannot hold back the flood! The Geneva Bible has done its treacherous work. Mobs roam over England murmuring against my sovereign rule; some even rave about "freedom"!
- Librarian The monarch's fear was justified. His people yearned for freedom and found hope in those marginal notes. Shakespeare quoted from the Geneva Bible, as did Milton's in his *Paradise Lost*, and John Bunyan in *Pilgrims' Progress*. The impact led to sweeping changes in England's law and encouraged the colonists, all of which has profoundly influenced our world.
- Prompter & Echoes Jesus reigns!