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# The Family Bible

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# FAMILY TIES

## The Family Bible

BY SUSAN E. MURRAY

**W**hen the Pilgrims arrived in the New World, in 1620, they brought along supplies, a consuming passion to advance the Kingdom of Christ and the Word of God. Perhaps their most precious cargo was copies of the Word of God, specifically, the Geneva Bible.

All but forgotten in our day, this version of the Bible was the most widely read and influential English Bible of the 16th and 17th centuries. The first full edition of the Bible appeared in 1560, but it was not printed in England until 1575 (New Testament) and 1576 (complete Bible). More than 150 editions were issued, the last probably in 1655.

The Geneva Bible preceded the King James Version by 51 years and was the product of the best Protestant scholars of the day. It was the first Bible printed in Scotland in 1579, and that year (in Scotland) a law was passed requiring every household of sufficient means to buy a copy.

It became the Bible of choice for many of the greatest writers and thinkers of that time, including William Shakespeare, Oliver Cromwell, John Donne, John Milton and John Bunyan, author of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. William Bradford also cited the Geneva Bible in his famous book, *Of Plymouth Plantation*.

The Geneva Bible is unique among all other Bibles. It was the first Bible to be mechanically printed and mass-produced, with chapters and numbered verses. It became the most popular version of its time because of the extensive marginal notes written by Reformation leaders such as John Calvin, John Knox, Miles Coverdale, William Whittingham, Anthony Gilby and others. These notes were included to explain and interpret the scriptures for



the common people. It eventually became known as history's very first study Bible.

Our copy of the Geneva Bible was printed in 1585, and it has been in my husband's family since that time. Although we don't know what member of the family originally owned it or when it was brought

to America, we know it belonged to the Norrises (1600s), Tedburys (1700s), Eustaces (1800s), Arnolds (late 1800s and early 1900s). It was passed on to my husband through his mother's side of the family in 1975.

The solid base of a family includes the beliefs shaped by faith, the love that surrounds it, the commitment that drives it and the traditions that inspire it. Our Geneva Bible is an important part of this family's tradition and legacy as Christians. It serves as an important depository of family history in several ways. When I page through the leaves and see notations (including weddings, births and deaths), some handwritten by family members more than 400 years ago, I am in awe. What a miracle that this Bible has been cared for and passed down for centuries in the hands of common men and women—our family!

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Susan Murray is an associate professor of family studies who teaches behavioral science and social work at Andrews University. She is a certified family life educator and a licensed marriage and family therapist.

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Note: In 2006, a Restored Edition of the 1599 Geneva Bible was published by Tolle Lege Press and is available at [www.reformationbookstore.com](http://www.reformationbookstore.com). Sign up for daily Geneva Bible readings at their Web site.