Sunday, September 18, 2011—Grace Life School of Theology—*Church History: A Tale of Two Churches*—Lesson 37 Unrivaled: A Study of the Cultural and Linguistic Impact of the King James Bible

Introduction

- Read from the introduction to *In the Beginning*.

- "The King James Bible became part of the everyday world of generations of English-speaking peoples, spread across the world. It can be argued that, until the end of the First World War, the King James Bible was seen, not simply as the most important English translation of the Bible, but as one of the finest literary works in the English language. It did not follow literary trends; it established them." (McGrath, 3)

- "Until very recently, the KJV was the world's best selling Bible in English. Sometime in the 1980s it was supplanted by the New International Version, which remains tops today. Still, there are more than one billion English-speakers in the world today, and there are at least two KJV Bibles in existence for each of them." (Sweeney, 27)

A Brief History of the English Language

- "The English language, like all languages, has been evolving for centuries and will continue to do so throughout the twenty-first century. . . Compared with language development of many civilizations, however, English developed relatively rapidly. For instance, while the development of Greek and other ancient languages spanned several thousand years, the time it took for the Anglo-Saxon language (forerunner of modern English) to develop into words similar to those we speak today can be measured in a few hundred years." (Brake, 21)

- Three distinct periods mark the development of English:

  - Old English—6th century to the Norman Conquest of 1066
  - Middle English—1100 to 1500
  - Modern English—1500 to the present

- When the Romans landed on the island of England a few years before the birth of Christ, English did not exist. The language of this time and place included both Germanic and Celtic elements. It was not until the sixth century that a small percentage of people in Britain spoke a prototype of English. (Brake, 22)

- "During this period, from the sixth century until the Norman Conquest, the British were tossed about by an influx of invasions and missionary endeavors that added to the flavor and texture of the English language. The development of English was shaped, in part, by the Germanic tribes, Angles, Saxons, Jutes, who battled for supremacy among themselves and with tribal Picts, Scots, and Gaels who inhabited the island. Then in the sixth century, Pope Gregory, who viewed the island dwellers as pagans, sent a monk named Augustine to convert King Ethelbert to

Christianity. . . Augustine's mission was successful, and over time Latin and Greek words found their way into the English vocabulary. Over the course of one thousand years, these combined cultural forces created a hybrid language that assimilated elements of Roman, Saxon, Danish, and Norman into a new strain of English." (Brake, 22)

- "The politics of invasion and conquest take language captive, along with its people. The early invaders' language, today known as Old English or Anglo-Saxon English, formed a rudimentary base for the English we speak today. The Anglo-Saxon conquest was so successful that very few words have survived from the original British language (Celtic)." (Brake, 22-24)

- Viking invasions between 750 and 1050 also impacted the development of Old English. Monosyllabic words such as sky, skin, and root have their roots in the Old Norse language. (Brake, 24)

- "The English Language went through a period of severe neglect in the Middle Ages. The conquest of England by the Normans in 1066 (Battle of Hastings) had led to the suppression of English in public life. French—or, more accurately, the form of Anglo-French that arose after the Norman conquest—dominated public discourse, particularly government departments and courts. The English upper class spoke Anglo-French as a matter of principle, to distinguish themselves from the lower classes, who spoke Middle English. . ." (McGrath, 26)

- "The widespread perception that French had established itself as the lingua franca of the cultural elite of Europe inevitably led to English being dismissed as a crude language, incapable of conveying the subtle undertones necessary for diplomacy, the fine distinctions of philosophy, and the complexities of legal and financial negotiations. English would do very well for the common laborer; French was the language of choice for the elite." (McGrath, 27)

- It was during this Middle English period that John Wycliffe began the process of translating the Bible into the vernacular English of his day. There was much anxiety amongst the academic elite of England whether English as a language was capable of expressing the deep nuanced truths of the Bible in particular and the Christian faith in general. (McGrath, 33)

- In 1401 a debate over the use of English in church life ensued at Oxford. In 1407, Thomas Arundel, archbishop of Canterbury issued the following statement:

  o "We therefore legislate and ordain that nobody shall from this day forth translate any text of the Holy Scripture on his own authority into the English, or any other, language, whether in the form of a book, pamphlet or tract; and that any such book pamphlet or tract whether composed recently or in the time of John Wycliffe, or in the future, shall not be read in part or in whole, in public or in private."

- "English thus became the language of the religious underground. To write in English was tantamount to holding heretical views." (McGrath, 33)

- "The Hundred Years War (1337-1453) served to consolidate the growing popular impression that French was the language of England's enemy. . . The war with France at an end, English became the language of choice of the upper class and government departments. No longer was English dismissed as the language of the lower classes; it was now the language of choice of a nation with an increasing sense of national identity and shared purpose, strengthened by England's growing maritime enterprise." (McGrath, 29-31)

- "The story of the King James Bible cannot be told without an understanding of the remarkable rise of confidence in the English language in the late sixteenth century. What was once scorned as the barbarous language of plowmen became known as the language of patriots and poets—a language fit for heroes on the one hand, and for the riches of the Bible on the other. Gone were any hesitations about the merits of the English language. Elizabeth's navy and armies had established England's military credentials; her poets, playwrights, and translators had propelled English into the front rank of the living European languages. The King James Bible consolidated the enormous advantages in the English language over the centuries, and can be seen as the symbol of a nation and language that believed that their moment had finally arrived." (McGrath, 24-25)

- "In his 1589 *Art of English Poesy*, written at the height of the Elizabethan Age, George Puttenham declared that English was just as sophisticated as Greek or Latin, and perfectly capable of expressing the full range of human emotions and thoughts." (McGrath, 25)

- "To write in English—or translate into English—was a political act, affirming the intrinsic dignity of the language of a newly confident people and nation. Any way should not that nation have its own bible in its own language?" (McGrath, 26)

The Decision to Translate

- "In the silence of her bedchamber, the question was asked of her (Elizabeth I). Whom she appointed to ascend to the throne upon her death? With one final act of will Elizabeth gathered her wits and spoke—the Son of Mary Queen of Scots, James VI. "Who but our cousin of Scotland should sit on my throne?" (Brake, *KJV* 78)

- "On March 22, 1603, the Privy Council drafted a statement naming the successor to the throne of England. The next morning Elizabeth, the most powerful monarch in England's long and storied history and the last reigning monarch of the House of Tudor (Henry VII through Elizabeth I), fell asleep for the last time. James VI of Scotland and the House of Stuart was proclaimed King James I of England, France, Scotland, and Ireland." (Brake, *KJV* 78)

- "Even as he traveled to London in preparation for his coronation, James found himself under pressure from English Puritans. They had long been irritated by what they regarded as the compromise of the Elizabethan Settlement of 1559. Elizabeth had retained both bishops and the distinctive robes of the clergy. These were widely seen as vestiges of the popery Puritans had

hoped would be eliminated from England. . . Her death in 1603 seemed to throw open the door to Puritan aspirations." (McGrath, 149)

- "While journeying south from Scotland in 1603, James was met by a Puritan delegation and presented with the Millenary Petition, so called since it was signed by more than one thousand ministers of the Church of England." (McGrath, 150)

- The well written document, made all the right appeals to the king's vanity even though it had little chance of being accepted. The Millenary Petition outlined all the abuses yet being practiced and remaining within the Church of England, according to the Puritans. For example, the use of the cross in baptism, or rings in the wedding ceremony, the rite of confirmation, terms like priest and absolution, and many more. (Teems, 152)

- "Elizabeth established her famous *via media* (the middle way). She would be the head of a church that was Roman Catholic in appearance and Protestant in doctrine and belief. She was determined to end what she considered madness . . . James saw no reason to change anything. He embraced Elizabeth's middle way. And other than a few extremists from either camp Catholic or Puritan, it worked." (Teems, 156)

- "On October 24, 1603, James issued a proclamation stating that he had convened a conference to be attended by himself, the Privy Council, and various "bishops and other learned men" to deal with these issues at Hampton Court in January of the following year. The conference was to prove of decisive importance in bringing the King James Bible into being." (McGrath, 155)

- "Puritan hopes for the Hampton Court Conference were high. James had agreed to consider their complaints—something Elizabeth had resolutely refused to do." (McGrath, 155)

- On the second day of the conference, after being almost completely shut down by James, John Reynolds concluded the long list of Puritan grievances with the suggestion that a new Bible was needed for use in all the churches. (Nicholoson, 57)

- "Implicit in the Puritan divine's request was a criticism of the official Elizabethan Bible, known as the Bishops Bible after the bishops who had translated it in 1568. It was a royalist and anti-Puritan document, larded with a frontispiece showing Queen Elizabeth and her ministers presiding over a bishop-dominated church. It was a bible of the hierarchy, not of the people, and no Puritan liked it." (Nicholoson, 58)

- See Nicholson page 58

- At the king's request six companies—two from Westminster, two from Cambridge University, and two from Oxford University. Each company was assigned nine Translators, one of whom was the director of the company. . . Each company was assigned a different set of Scriptures to work on.

- o 1st Westminster—Genesis through 2 Kings
- o 1st Cambridge—Chronicles through Song of Solomon
- o 1st Oxford—Isaiah through Malachi
- o 2nd Cambridge—Apocrypha
- o 2nd Oxford—Gospels, Acts, Revelation
- o 2nd Westminster—New Testament Epistles (Teems, 171-172)

- 15 Rules were also drafted for the translators to follow.

The Age of Shakespeare, James, and the Translators

- "The demise of the Roman Catholic Church in England—outlawed as it was from the days of Henry VIII, confiscated as all its properties were, abbeys, castles, lands—left a hole in culture, a big gaping hole." (Teems, 180)

- "In 1576, James Burbage built the first theater in London. There had not been a theater in town for more than a thousand years, since the Roman occupation. . . What was lost to the people with the pageantry of the Roman Catholic Church was returned to them with the rise of the theater. This great gaping hole in culture gave them a new champion, indeed, a new kind of church, a new priesthood. And it was so very English." (Teems, 181)

- "The pulpit was exchanged for a stage, and the language of plays was reminiscent of the high tone of the Mass. It was after all, a listening culture, a culture of the word, a peculiarly English occupation. Other forms of art—sculpting, painting, music, even architecture—with only a few exceptions were to be found elsewhere, outside the little island, in Italy, Holland, Germany, France. English captures its reflection in words, in the subtleties of the human voice." (Teems, 181)

- "It should be little wonder that English had become the *lingua franca* of the civilized world, or that English dominates music, film, literature, the dramatic arts. . . The English imagination was, and remains, aural. It expressed itself in sound, and the culture was tuned for it. . . Shakespeare and others, would not have written the way they did had the audience not been able to understand. . . .Touching Englishness to the quick, the play was the very soul of the English Renaissance. It is a key to understanding the age itself." (Teems, 181-182)

- "To ignore the development of the theater is to ignore the spirit of the age, the powerful linguistic tide that swept everyone up, that saturated a culture. In the years between 1584 and 1623, hardly more than a single generation, more than fifty million people passed through theater doors." (Teems, 183)

- ". . . the King James Translators were steeped in this Elizabethan aesthetic, this powerful linguistic vitality, this Hamletized soul of the age that was characterized by a penetrating, high-velocity whit and melancholy that spun forth the finest lines ever written in any language." (Teems, 187)

- "The Translators were all Elizabethans, all passionately literate. This aesthetic could only enhance the beauty and magnificence that was already there in the fold of Scripture. It had the ability to make beautiful even more beautiful . . . The Elizabethan aesthetic was the filter through which the King James Translators tested every word. . . It was a literary spirit that governed culture, a spirit of the word, a profoundly English spirit that had risen to its zenith in the age of Elizabeth." (Teems, 189-190)

- "The plays of William Shakespeare were never written to be read, or worse, studied. He did not publish his plays in his own lifetime. . . The King James Bible was appointed to be "read in the churches. . . One of the last steps of the translation was a hearing, an aural review." (Teems, 175)

- John Bois records in his notes from the final review committee that in the final step one man read from the translation and the others sat around and listened. . . It was an auditory review. It was an auditory enterprise. (Teems, 209)

    o Andrew Downes—"Jesus Christ, yesterday, and to day the same, and for ever."
    o Final Version—"Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever." (Hebrews 13:8)

- Read examples from Teems on pages 212, 214, 229

- One of the major factors that led to the retention of Archaic forms stems from literary views of the translators themselves.

- Leland Ryken commenting on I Corinthians 13:3-4, 7 states the following: "The passage flows in a wave-like cadence out of the rise and fall of sound. The passage also shows how the unaccented *eth* verb endings keep the rhythm flowing smoothly. Robbed of these verb endings, modern translations often bump along in staccato fashion." (Ryken, 140)

Literary Forms and Features

- Another factor to consider is that King James translators tried to reproduce the Hebrew and Greek texts as literally as possible in English. Therefore, many of the features modern readers find strange are not Renaissance or Elizabethan traits but Hebrew and Greek traits. (Ryken, 135)

- One of these features that slides right by us as modern readers relates to the genitive or possessive construction. A common biblical formula is the construction noun plus the preposition *of* plus noun (noun + *of* + noun). The Standard English way of achieving the same effect is to turn the second noun into a modifying adjective placed in front of the first noun. (Ryken, 135-136)

    o Genesis 1:24—"beast of the earth" (land animal)
    o Psalm 2:9—"rod of iron" (iron rod)
    o Isaiah 5:22—"men of strength" (strong men)

- o John 4:7—"woman of Samaria" (Samaritan woman)

- A subcategory of the noun + *of* + noun construction occurs when the same noun appears in both halves of the formula. The effect is to suggest the quality of being superlative—the most heightened form that can be imagined. (Ryken, 136)

  - o I Timothy 6:15-"King of kings, and Lord of lords."
  - o Song of Solomon 1:1—"song of songs"
  - o Ecclesiastes 1:2—"Vanity of vanities"

- Even when the noun-of-noun formula does not meet the special conditions noted in the preceding paragraphs, it is simply a common formulation in the King James Bible. (Ryken, 136)

  - o Psalm 34:7—"angel of the LORD"
  - o Psalm 65:9—"the river of God"
  - o Proverbs 4:17—"the bread of wickedness"
  - o James 3:18—"fruit of righteousness"
  - o Ecclesiastes 10:18—"idleness of hands"

- "Once alerted to the noun-of-noun construction, we can find it nearly continuously in the King James Bible. In addition to preserving the word order of the original, the King James Bible gains rhythmic smoothness with this construction." (Ryken, 136)

- Another formula that is vintage King James are the words lo and behold. The grammatical term for them is interjection. The function of the formula is to signal the spectacular nature of an event or the profound importance of a statement. The effect is awe-inspiring. (Ryken, 136-137)

  - o Revelation 3:20—"Behold, I stand at the door and knock"
  - o Acts 12:7—"Behold, an angel of the Lord came upon him"
  - o Matthew 28:20—"Lo, I am with you always"

- Did your English teacher ever tell you never to begin a sentence with the word "and." It so happens that the ancient Hebrews and Greeks absolutely loved the conjunction translated as "and." In Hebrew the prefix *waw* has this meaning and in the Greek the word is *kai*. The effect of this frequent *and* in the King James Bible is to create a tremendous sense of continuity. Everything flows in sequence. The construction often shows a sense of cause and effect, as one thing produces the next, which produces the next. (Ryken, 137)

  - o Judges 3:21-22

- "One of the most fundamental factors of this willingness to accept and use verbal immigrants at this formative period was the influence of the King James Bible. Many phrases having their origins in Hebraic, Hellenistic, or Latin context have been naturalized in English through the simple yet inexorable force of their regular use in biblical contexts. . . "Biblical English" came to

possess a cultural authority on the same level as that of Shakespeare. As a result of centuries of use, many Hebraic phrases and idioms have become so common in normal English use that most modern English speakers are unaware of their biblical origins." (McGrath, 259)

- "One of the results of this important decision (literal translations) is that a significant number of essentially Hebrew ways of speaking became incorporated into the English language. This approach to translation has resulted in the receptor language being enriched by idioms drawn from the donor language." (McGrath, 252)

  o "to lick the dust" (Psalm 72:9, Isaiah 49:23, Micah 7:17)
  o "to fall flat on his face" (Numbers 22:31)
  o "a man after his own heart" (I Samuel 13:14)
  o "to pour out one's heart" (Psalm 62:8, Lamentations 2:19)
  o "the land of the living" (Job 28:13, Psalm 27:13, 52:5, Isaiah 38:11, Jeremiah 11:19, Ezekiel 32:23-27)
  o "under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 1:4 and twenty other times in this book)
  o "sour grapes" (Ezekiel 18:2)
  o "from time to time" (Ezekiel 4:10)
  o "pride goes before a fall" (Proverbs 16:18)
  o "the skin of my teeth" (Job 19:20)
  o "to stand in awe" (Psalm 4:4; 33:8)
  o "to put words in his mouth" (Exodus 4:15, Deut. 18:18, II Samuel 14:3; 14:19, Jeremiah 1:9) (McGrath, 263)

- "A comparison of the King James Bible with the Geneva Bible suggests that the king's translators were much more likely to retain the Hebrew word order or structure, even when this resulted in a reading that did not sound quite right to English ears at the time. The passage of time, and increased exposure to their translation, has eliminated an awareness of its initial strangeness and led to its phrases being accepted as normal and standard English." (McGrath, 264)

- Another reason why the King James reads as it does is because of the specific instructions to use the Bishops Bible and other preceding English Translations as the default text. According to David Teems, despite being the default text, the Bishops Bible comprises only 8 percent of the King James Bible. (Teems, 176) In contrast, "estimates vary, some as low as 76 percent and some as high as 94 percent, but the general consensus among historians, Bible scholars, and biographers is that William Tyndale is responsible for at least 90 Percent of the King James New Testament." (Teems, 226-227)

- William Tyndale is responsible for introducing the following idioms and single word wonders into the English language.

  o "fight the good fight"
  o "my brother's keeper"
  o "the apple of his eye"

- o "the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak"
- o "sign of the times"
- o "in the cool of the day"
- o "ye of little faith"
- o "a law unto themselves"
- o "peace-maker"
- o "long-suffering"
- o Passover, Jehovah, scapegoat, atonement, landlady, seashore, fishermen, stumbling block, taskmaster, two-edged, viper, zealous, and beautiful (Teems, 227-228)

- In the Prologue to his 2010 book *Begat: The King James Bible & the English Language* David Crystal tries to assess the true impact of the KJB on the English Language. The surest way to analyze the effect of the KJB on the language according to Crystal is to look at how many expressions have become so thoroughly assimilated into the language that any sense of a biblical origin is lost. (Crystal, 5)

- After conducting a systemic study of the KJB, Crystal has concluded that there are 257 idioms in modern usage that were popularized by the KJB. No other work in English literature can make such a claim. (Crystal, 5)

Concluding Thoughts

- "The King James Bible was published within a window of opportunity, which allowed it to exercise a substantial and decisive influence over the shaping of the English Language. It is no accident that the two literary sources most widely identified as defining influences over English—the King James Bible and the works of William Shakespeare—both date from this critical period." (McGrath, 258)

- "There was virtually universal agreement in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that the King James Bible had made a massive contribution to the development of the English language in general, and English prose in particular. . . Yet there is no evidence that the translators of the King James Bible had any great interest in matters of literature or linguistic development. Their concern was primarily to provide an accurate translation of the Bible, on the assumption that accuracy was itself the most aesthetic of qualities to be desired. Paradoxically, the king's translators achieved literary distinction precisely because they were not deliberately pursuing it. Aiming at truth, they achieved what later generations recognized as beauty and elegance . . . elegance was achieved by accident rather than design." (McGrath, 254)

- The KJB is both simple and majestic. Adam Nicholoson, author of *God's Secretaries* writes, "One of the King James Bible's most consistent driving forces is the idea of majesty. Its method and its voice are . . . regal. . . Its archaic formulations, its consistent attention to a grand and heavily musical rhythm are the vehicles by which that majesty is infused into the body of the text. Its qualities are those of grace, stateliness, scale, power. There is no desire to please here; only a belief in the enormous and overwhelming divine authority." (Nicholoson, 189)

- "Translators of modern prosaic Bibles engage in a self-defeating venture when they produce Bibles that do not yield the effects common to readers of the King James Bible and its heirs. A Bible translation that sounds like the daily newspaper is given the same level of attention and credence as the daily newspaper. . . Someone has correctly said that modern colloquial translations 'slip more smoothly into the modern ear,' but they also slide 'out more easily; the very strangeness and antique ceremony of the old forms make them linger in the mind.'" (Ryken, 156-157)

- Leland Ryken, author of *The Legacy of the King James Bible* chronicles the following results of the ascendancy of modern versions.

    o   A common English Bible in both the church and culture has been lost.
    o   The authority of the Bible went into eclipse when we lost a common Bible.
    o   Biblical illiteracy has accompanied the decline of the KJB (Ryken, 230)

- Read from Ryken pages 230-231 in conclusion.

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