

Sunday, February 9, 2020—Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*
 Lesson 109 William the Translator: Tyndale and the Biblical Narrative

Introduction

- Three weeks ago, in [Lesson 106](#), I mentioned that I obtained Gerald Hammond's 1983 book *The Making of the English Bible* late in the game in my studies of William Tyndale. My decision to purchase the book came as I realized that Dr. David Daniell and Dr. David Norton were referencing Hammond's earlier work in their scholarly discussions of Tyndale and his translation work.
- In 2011, at the Great Lakes Grace Bible Conference in Wilmot, OH, I taught a Lesson titled [The Language and Readability of the KJV](#). One of the points that I covered in this Lesson was "Literary Forms and Features" in which I touched upon the following with respect to the King James Bible:
 - The noun+of+noun construction
 - Use of the words "behold" and "lo"
 - Heavy use of the conjunction "and" (*waw* in Hebrew & *kai* in Greek)
 - Incorporation of Hebrew idioms or ways of speaking into the English language:
 - "to lick the dust" (Psalm 72:9, Isaiah 49:23, Micah 7:17)
 - "to fall flat on his face" (Numbers 22:31)
 - "a man after his own heart" (I Samuel 13:14)
 - "to pour out one's heart" (Psalm 62:8, Lamentations 2:19)
 - "the land of the living" (Job 28:13, Psalm 27:13, 52:5, Isaiah 38:11, Jeremiah 11:19, Ezekiel 32:23-27)
 - "under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 1:4 and twenty other times in this book)
 - "sour grapes" (Ezekiel 18:2)
 - "from time to time" (Ezekiel 4:10)
 - "pride goes before a fall" (Proverbs 16:18)
 - "the skin of my teeth" (Job 19:20)
 - "to stand in awe" (Psalm 4:4; 33:8)
 - "to put words in his mouth" (Exodus 4:15, Deuteronomy 18:18, II Samuel 14:3; 14:19, Jeremiah 1:9) (McGrath, 263)
 - Words and idioms introduced into English by William Tyndale:
 - "fight the good fight"
 - "my brother's keeper"
 - "the apple of his eye"
 - "the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak"
 - "sign of the times"
 - "in the cool of the day"
 - "ye of little faith"
 - "a law unto themselves"
 - "peace-maker"

- “long-suffering”
 - Passover, Jehovah, scapegoat, atonement, landlady, seashore, fishermen, stumbling block, taskmaster, two-edged, viper, zealous, and beautiful (Teems, 227-228)
- This section from my 2011 Lesson was heavily reliant on the following outstanding books celebrating the 400th Anniversary of the KJB.
 - *In the Beginning: The Story of the King James Bible and How It Changed a Nation, a Language, and a Culture* by Alister McGrath
 - *The Legacy of the King James Bible* by Leland Ryken
 - *Majestie: The King Behind the King James Bible* by David Teems
- More recent studies have caused me to realize that many of the features noted above from the King James are due in large measure to translational decisions of William Tyndale. As a rough draft for the King James, Tyndale set the precedent for how narrative sections of the English Bible would be handled by later 16th century revisers and ultimately the King James translators.
- Consequently, I would like to consider the following observations from Hammond’s outstanding chapter titled “Tyndale and Biblical Narrative.”

Tyndale and the Biblical Narrative

- In Lesson 106 we observed the following statement from the Preface to Tyndale’s *Obedience of a Christian Man*:
 - “Saint Jerome also translated the Bible into his mother tongue. Why may not we also? They will say it cannot be translated into our tongue, it is so rude. It is not so rude as they are false liars. For the Greek tongue agreeth more with the English than with the Latin. And the properties of the Hebrew tongue agreeth a thousand times more with the English than with the Latin. The manner of speaking is both one so that in a thousand places thou needest not but to translate it into the English word for word, when thou must seek a compass in the Latin, and yet shall have much work to translate it well-favouredly, so that it have the same grace and sweetness, sense and pure understanding with it in the Latin, as it hath in the Hebrew. A thousand parts better it be translated into the English than into the Latin.” (Quoted in Norton, 13)
- Regarding this statement from the pen of William Tyndale, Gerald Hammond wrote the following in *The Making of the English Bible*:
 - “Tyndale’s claim for the superiority of English over Latin is, in essence, a matter of comparative syntax, and, broadly speaking Tyndale is right. The only major variation between Hebrew and English word order are that in the Hebrew the verb normally precedes its subject—e.g. ‘and said Moses’—and the adjective often following the noun. In all other respects, in particular the use and disposition of qualifying clauses, the

sixteenth-century translators followed Tyndale's lead in letting their renderings be governed by the syntax of the original. The result was the fluid and rhythmical prose which marks the narrative and prophetic books of the English Bible, as in these two verses from the beginning of Deuteronomy 9 [9:1-2]:

- Hear Israel, thou goest over Jordan this day, to go and conquer nations greater and mightier than thy self, and cities great and walled up to heaven, and people great and tall, even the children of the Enakims, which thou knowest, and of the whom thou hast heard say, Who is able to stand before the children of Enak?" (Hammond, 45)

- Regarding this example from Deuteronomy 9 Hammond states the following:
 - "Here Tyndale's only deviation from his original is the placing of 'this day' after 'Jordan'—The Hebrew has "you pass-over this-day the-Jordan"—otherwise his rhythmical assurance is virtually the Hebrew's. Three times he reproduces the noun-adjective-adjective order—"nation greater and mightier. . . cities great and walled up. . . people great and tall"—and, by trusting the syntactic rapport between English and Hebrew, he threads his way through the multiple qualifications: first, of the journey's purpose—to go and conquer nations, cities and peoples—and then, of the people who present the greatest threat, the Enakims which they know, and of whom they have heard say who can stand before them. A clumsiness here would have been more than normally damaging to the narrative because this is a moment of high drama, as Moses steels the people to challenge a formidable enemy. He needs, and the translation must evoke this, the rhythmical certainty of the prophet.
- Translating before the use of verse numbers with the Geneva Bible, Tyndale was able to think in paragraphs rather than in verses, according to Hammond.
 - "By thinking in paragraphs rather than verses Tyndale was able, when the context required it, to link together a succession of qualifying clauses to make one elaborate statement. For instance, in Numbers 14:20-25, God explains to the children of Israel why, with the exception of Caleb, they will not be allowed to see the promised land. This is Tyndale's beautifully articulated rendering of the promise:
 - And the Lord said, I have forgiven it, according to thy request. But as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with my glory. For all those men which have seen my glory and my miracles which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and yet have tempted me now these ten times, and have not harkened unto my voice, there shall not one see the land which I sware unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that railed upon me see it; but my servant Caleb, because there is another manner spirit with him, and because he hath followed me unto the utmost, him will I bring into the land which he hath walked in, and his seed shall conquer it, and also the Amalechites and Canaanites which dwell in the low counties. Tomorrow turn you and get you into the wilderness, even to the way toward the red sea.

- There is a mass of varied information given here, but the reader finds his way through it surefootedly; and this is because of, and not despite, the fact that from ‘For all of these’ to ‘low countries’ is, in practice one sentence (the original punctuation has a stop after ‘see it’). That is three and half verses turned into an English sentence of well over a hundred words.” (Hammond, 46)
- When compared against the King James rendering for the same passage Hammond observes the following:
 - “In fact, very little has changed. There are some ‘improvements’ in vocabulary—notably, ‘provoked’ replaced ‘railed upon,’ and ‘fully’ replaces ‘unto the utmost’—but the Authorized Version’s word order is basically Tyndale’s, and, therefore, the Hebrew’s too. Even so, the effect of reading the two is not the same. Tyndale’s flow has been replaced by a more halting rendering [On account of the punctuation.].” (Hammond, 47)
- Hammond’s observations regarding the similarities between the Old Testament renderings of William Tyndale and the Authorized Version suggest yet again that Tyndale’s Old Testament work, where available, served as the rough draft for the KJV in the Old Testament as well as the New.
- After quoting Tyndale’s rendition of the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, Hammond notes the following regarding how Tyndale’s propensity to follow the Hebrew word order gives the English rhythm and strength.
 - “The power of this passages lies in its revelation of how disturbingly close to comedy this archetypal tragedy comes, in the contrasts of God’s omniscience and the serpent’s guile with the humans’ ignorance and naivete. What gives the contrasts their strength is the unsophisticated sequential narrative. Tyndale seldom ignores the Hebrew *waw* and rarely gives it any other form of translation than ‘and.’ And to a remarkable extent the original’s word order is followed, even to the point of reproducing most of the subject-verb or verb-qualifying clause ‘inversions’ of the Hebrew. Their narrative function is that they come to present the voice of God, giving his works a rhetorical emphasis which detaches it from the more common discourse of the snake and Adam and Eve. It occurs first in Eve’s recollection of God’s injunction: ‘of the fruit of the trees in the garden we may eat,’ and ‘of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden. . . see that ye eat it not (and the phrase I omitted there is the parenthetical ‘said God’).’ It recurs in Adam’s frightened response, ‘thy voice I heard in the garden,’ but comes to a fullness in the curses administered to the three fallen creatures: ‘Upon thy belly shalt thou go . . . earth shalt thou eat. . . with pain shalt thou be delivered. . . in sorrow shalt thou eat thereof. . . in the sweat of they face shalt thou eat bread . . . unto earth shalt thou return.’” (Hammond, 49)
- Earlier in his book, on pages 26-29, Hammond discusses the importance and use of the English conjunction “and” (*waw* in Hebrew) in the KJB and how the trend for doing so was set by William Tyndale.

- Read selected portion of Hammond.
- Tyndale’s trust in the original’s word order is at least partly responsible for one other rhythmic effect in the English Bible,” according to Hammond.
 - “This is the noun+of+noun constitution which is commonly used to translate the Hebrew construct form. This form most often expresses a genitival relationship between the two nouns, and is by far the commonest way for biblical Hebrew to express such a relationship. So, instead of forms like ‘Moses’ book,’ Hebrew puts first the object of possession, and then the possessor, i.e., “the-book-of Moses.’ I should add that the construct form is not limited to genitival relationships: its other uses cover many of the areas where an English reader would normally expect an adjective, so that instead of saying, for instance, ‘a strong man,’ Hebrew is more likely to say ‘man of strength.’ The construct is almost invariably used to express a superlative: instead of ‘the best song’ or the holiest place,’ Hebrew has ‘the song of songs’ and ‘the holy of holies’ . . .

Tyndale’s allegiance to the Hebrew word order accordingly encourages him to use the noun+of+noun construct and the appropriate English equivalent—any other would mean either paraphrase or a reversal of the Hebrew word order. His constant use of the one form robs his translation of the kind of variety which English is capable of . . . What he gains, however, is a rhythmic repetitiveness, a pattern of description which extends through the narrative.

the beasts of the field. . . the fruit of the trees. . . the midst of the garden. . . the voice of the Lord God. . . the cool of the day. . . the face of the Lord God. . . the trees of the garden. . . the beast of the field. . . all days of thy life. . . the voice of thy wife. . . all the days of thy life. . . the herbs of the field. . . the sweat of thy face.

And it does not end here. In the next three verses there are five more noun+of+noun constructions:

And Adam called his wife Heva [Eve], because she was the *mother of all that liveth*. And the Lord God made Adam and his wife *garments of skins*, and put them on them. And, the Lord God said, Lo, Adam is become as it were *one of us*, in *knowledge of good and evil*. But now, lest he stretch forth his hand and take also of the *tree of life* and eat and live for ever.

The consequences for Bible English of Tyndale’s literal rendering of the construct are enormous. He set the pattern for the succeeding translations, with the result that many of the most distinctive biblical phrases have this form—as in this by no means comprehensive list from Psalms alone: ‘the seat of the scornful’ (1:1), ‘a rod of iron’ (2:9), ‘the mouth of babes and sucklings’ (8:2), ‘the fowl of the air. . . the fish of the sea...the paths of the seas’ (8:8), ‘the shadow of thy wings’ (17:8), ‘the wings of the wind’ (18:10), ‘the words of my mouth and meditation of my heart’ (19:14), ‘a reproach of men and despised of the people’ (22:6), ‘the valley of the shadow of death’ (23:4), ‘the sins of my youth’ (25:7), ‘the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living’ (27:15), ‘the

beauty of holiness' (29:2), 'the strife of tongues' (31:20), 'in time of trouble' (41:1), 'the end of the earth' (46:9), 'the voice of charmers' (58:4), 'the help of man' (60:11), 'a father of the fatherless and a judge of widows' (68:5), 'the wings of a dove' (68:13), 'the bread of tears' (80:5), 'the house of my God. . . the tents of wickedness' (84:10), 'the snare of the fowler' (91:3), 'a pelican of the wilderness. . . an owl of the desert' (102:6), 'a flower of the field' (103:15), 'the fear of the Lord . . . the beginning of wisdom' (111:10), 'the sight of the Lord . . . the death of his saints' (116:15), 'the tents of Kedar' (120:5), 'the bread of sorrows' (127:2), 'the rivers of Babylon' (137:1), 'the songs of Zion' (137:3), 'the wings of the morning . . . the uttermost parts of the sea' (139:9), 'the son of man' (146:3), 'the strength of the horse. . . the legs of a man' (147:10), 'fettters of iron' (149:5). (Hammond, 49-51)

- In addition to noting Tyndale's utilization of the noun+of+noun structure of the Hebrew text, Hammond notes how Tyndale's mastery of prose rhythm brought interest and life to otherwise difficult passages.
 - "In Deuteronomy, for instance, he threads his way through the complexities of the Hebraic law with the same rhythmic clarity which he had brought to the opening chapters of Genesis. As there, the clue lies in his willingness to allow the Hebrew word-order to govern the English. Tyndale, incidentally, did not consider Deuteronomy a barren book... Much the opposite, he described it as 'a book worthy to be read in day and night and never to be out of hands. . . the most excellent of all the books of Moses' (in the preface to the book, in his Pentateuch). But in the hands of a modern translator large parts of it read like the relics of an inhuman past—for instance, the New English Bible's translation of 21:10-14, a passage describing the fate of a woman taken captive in war:

When you wage war against your enemy and the Lord your God delivers them into your hands and you take some of them captive, then if you see a comely woman among the captives and *take a liking* to her, you may *marry her*. You shall bring her into your house, where she shall shave her head, pare her mails, and *discard* the clothes which she had when captured. Then she shall stay in your house and mourn for her father and mother for a full month. After that you may *have intercourse* with her; you shall be her husband and she your wife. But if you no longer *find her pleasing*, let her go free. You must not sell her, nor treat her harshly, since you have *had your will* with her.

For the modern translator the feeling has gone out of the passage—understandably, perhaps, given the remoteness of the situation. The words I have italicized are a combination of the euphemistic and the technical, and because of them the situation becomes increasingly remote from the reader. Now look at the same passage in Tyndale's version:

When thou goest to war against thine enemies and the Lord thy God hath delivered them into thine hands and thou hast taken them captive, and seest among the captives a beautiful woman, and hast a fantasy unto her that thou wouldst have her to thy wife; then bring her home to thine house and let her shave her head and pare her nails and put her raiment that she was taken in from

her, and let her remain in thine house and beweepe her father and her mother a month long, and after that go in unto her and marry her and let her be thy wife. And if thou have no favour unto her, then let her go whither she lusteth, for thou mayest not sell her for money nor make chevisance of her because thou hast humbled her.

Tyndale avoids technicality and euphemism. The directness, even forcefulness, of the words he uses help to make so alien a code of behavior something which we can understand and feel human contact with. In effect a small tragedy is played out. The man has a ‘fantasy’ towards the ‘beautiful’ woman captive (as opposed to taking a liking towards a comely one). ‘He ‘has her’ to wife, and she ‘puts from her’ the remnants of her previous life (NEB marries and discards). She ‘beweeps’ her dead parents (NEB mourns), and then the man ‘goes in unto her’ (NEB has intercourse). Inevitably the infatuation palls; he has ‘no favour unto her’ and lets her go ‘whither she lusteth’ (NEB let her go free). But the legal proviso remains, that he must not exploit her because he has already ‘humbled’ her (NEB had his will with her). In each case Tyndale’s renderings are closer than the New English Bible’s to the simple root meanings of the Hebrew words and phrases.

Equally important, though, is the syntactical contrast between the two versions. The modern translators do their best to keep each item in sequence of events distinct and detached, while Tyndale’s version is, to all intents and purposes, one extended sentence...

I labour the analysis a little. In reality I am only explaining what every reader instinctively feels: that Tyndale moves continually towards the liveliness of narrative where modern translations retreat to the lifelessness of a scholarly document.” (Hammond, 53-55)

- More textual examples from “law-giving passages” like this one is cited by Hammond in his book. Hammond concludes his chapter on “Tyndale and Biblical Narrative” by framing a discussion of Tyndale’s narrative style in the historical books (Joshua to II Kings) with a lengthy discussion using Judges 19 as a case study.
 - “Immediately after the Pentateuch, those historical books from Joshua to 2 Kings contain the most sustained narrative sections of the Bible, and here Tyndale’s narrative based style reaches its fullest expression. His translation of them appeared posthumously in the Matthews Bible of 1537 [See Lesson 108]. We can see his work here at its best in one of the most powerful narratives of the Book of Judges, the which takes up the whole of chapter 19. The tale begins like this in Tyndale’s translation:

It chanced in those days, when there was no king in Israel, that a certain Levite dwelling on the side of mount Ephraim, took to wife a concubine out of Bethlehem Juda; which concubine played the whore in his house, and went away from him unto her father’s house, to Bethlehem Juda, and there continued four months. And her husband arose and went after her, to speak friendly unto her, and to bring her home again, and his lad with him, and a couple of asses. And

she brought him unto her father's house, and when the father of the damsel saw him, he rejoiced of his coming. And his father-in-law, the damsel's father, kept him that he abode with him three days, and so they ate and drank and lodged there.

Because Tyndale's translation did not get into print until 1537, these books give us our one real opportunity to measure his work against that of his chief contemporary, Miles Coverdale. (In the Pentateuch and New Testament of his 1535 Bible Coverdale used Tyndale's work as one of his chief sources. This is Coverdale's rendering of the four verses:

At the same time was there no king in Israel, and there was a man of Levi, which was a stranger beside mount Ephraim, and had taken him a concubine of Bethlehem Juda to wife. And when she had played the harlot beside him, she ran from him to her father's house, unto Bethlehem Juda, and was there four months long. And her husband gat him up, and whet after her, to speak friendly with her, and to fetch her again, and had a servant and a couple asses with him. And she led him into her father's house. But when the damsel's father saw him he was glad, and received him; and his father-in-law, the damsel's father, kept him, so that he tarried three days with him. Thus they ate and drank and remained there all night.

The differences between the two English versions may appear small but they are significant. Coverdale's narrative from its beginning, is a matter of qualification and expansion, where Tyndale qualifies and expands almost nothing. In Coverdale's rendering the central character is introduced like this: 'and there was a man of Levi, which was a stranger beside mount Ephraim.' Tyndale's introduction is terser: 'that a certain Levite dwelling on the side of the mount Ephraim.' This contrast is continued in the introduction of the central female character, in Coverdale's pluperfect, 'and had taken him a concubine,' set against Tyndale's 'took to wife a concubine;' and in the descriptions of her behavior, in Coverdale 'and when she had played the whore,' in Tyndale 'which concubine played the whore.' Tyndale, incidentally, is the more accurate in the last clause: the Hebrew also repeats the word translated as 'concubine.'

From the beginning of the chapter, Tyndale's syntax creates a rhythm ideally suited to the slow, repetitive, yet finally shocking story which the Bible has to tell. We read his first sentence and are immediately absorbed into the narrative, while Coverdale's is too obviously a matter of scene-setting and intimate explanation. The fact that this is not a king in Israel is going to be vitally important—the story is about the fatal disunity of the country—but Tyndale leaves his readers, as the Hebrew does, to make the connections and qualifications himself. Syntactically Tyndale's rendering is about as close to the Hebrew as it is possible for English to get. He follows the order of the Hebrew words right down to keeping back to the end of the sentence (in verse 3) the qualification 'and his lad with him, and a couple of asses.'" (Hammond, 58-60)

- Hammond concludes his chapter on "Tyndale and Biblical Narrative" with the following statement of Tyndale's enduring impact.

- “Tyndale’s translation of this narrative [referring to Judges 19] was written at a time when English prose was often an unwieldy, virtually styleless thing; and yet it has scarcely a word which a modern reader might find obscure or ill-placed, or a sentence which reads uncouthly—and its grip upon the reader is immediate and never lessens. This capacity to recreate biblical narratives so powerfully was Tyndale’s greatest contribution to the Authorized Version, and through that, to Bunyan and Defoe, the early Puritan pioneers and the greats of all narrative forms, the novel.” (Hammond, 66-67)

Conclusion

- In summation, I would like to leave you with the following citation from the pen of Gerald Hammond, regarding William the Translator:
 - “What it adds up to, then, is that Tyndale was a translator whose judgement was usually good. Working in extraordinarily adverse conditions, at his day’s frontiers of knowledge of biblical languages, he produced translations which set the pattern for all English translators who followed. Simple, flexible, but often surprisingly literal, and with a fine capacity to tap the emotional resources of his original—these are his chief qualities.” (Hammond, 42-43)

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