

Sunday, November 1, 2020—Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*  
Lesson 123 The Great Bible: Editions & the Taverner Bible

### **Introduction**

- Thus far we have had two studies looking at the Great Bible. In [Lesson 121](#) we considered the following points:
  - The Death of John Rodgers
  - The Great Bible: Assessing Its Origin, Impetus, & Production
  - The Great Bible: What's in a Name?
- Last week in [Lesson 122](#) looked at the following regarding the Great Bible:
  - Title Page
  - Text
- Today, in Lesson 123, we want to conclude our discussion of the Great Bible by considering the differences between the 1539 and 1540 editions as well as consider a lesser known Bible published in 1539, the Taverner Bible.

### **Great Bible: Editions**

- Recall from Lesson 121 that there were two different editions of the Great Bible, one from 1539 and a second printed in 1540. Historians distinguish between the two by calling the 1539 printing “Cromwell’s Bible” and the 1540 “Cranmer’s Bible.” J.I. Mombert covers this point in his book *English Versions of the Bible* from 1883. Consider the following screen shot from page 210 of Mombert’s book on this point:

Here it is proper to state that the first edition of 1539, was again revised in 1540 (Cranmer), and that there appeared not less than seven editions of the Great Bible in a comparatively brief space, viz., April, 1539; April, July, and November, 1540; May, November, and December, 1541.

The first of these (1539) is properly speaking Cromwell's Bible for which he received the Royal Patent, dated November 14, 1539, conferring on him the sole and unlimited power of licensing the printing and publication of English Bibles for the next five years, as is clear from this extract: "We have therefore appoynted oure right trusty and wel beloved counsellour the lorde Cromwell, keeper of our pryvye seale, to take for us, and in oure name, special care and charge, that no manner of persone or persones within this our realme shall enterprise, attempt, or sett in hand, to print any Bible in the English tonge of any manner of volume, duryng the space of fyve yeres next ensuyng after the date hereof, but only suche as shall be deputed, assignid, and admitted, by the said lord Cromwell. Willing and commanding all maires, shirefes, bailiffes, constables, and all other oure officers, ministres, and subjectes, to be ayding to our said counsailour in the execution of this oure pleasure, and to be conformable in the accomplishment of the same, as shall apperteigne."\*

From Cranmer's connection with this Bible, which seems to begin on the same day, Nov. 14, 1539, it is often called Cranmer's Bible. The edition, in which his Prologue appears for the first time, is that of 1540. An extract from the Prologue will be given below.

- According to Mombert, Coverdale was also “the editor of the Great Bible of 1540 (Cranmer’s).” (Mombert, 220) On pages 220 through 222 Mombert includes the following analysis of the Prologue to the 1540 Cranmer edition.

The prologue written by Cranmer, is marked by great sagacity and earnestness. It begins: “Concerning two sundry sorts of people, it seemeth necessary that something be said in the entry of this book, by way of a preface or prologue; whereby hereafter it may be both the better accepted of them which hitherto could not well bear it, and also the better used of them which heretofore have misused it. For truly some there be which be too slow, and need the spur; some other seem too quick, and need more of the bridle. Some lose their game by short shooting, some by overshooting. Some walk too much on the left hand; some too much on the right. In the former sort be all they that refuse to read, or to hear read, the Scripture in the vulgar tongue; much worse they that let also, or discourage the other from the reading or hearing thereof. In the latter sort be they which, by their inordinate reading, indiscrete speaking, contentious disputing, or otherwise by their licentious living, slander and hinder the word of God most of all other, whereof they would seem to be the greatest furtherers. These two sorts, albeit they be most far unlike the one to the other, yet they both deserve in effect like reproach. Neither can I well tell, whether of them I may judge the more offender, him that doth obstinately refuse so godly and goodly knowledge, or him that so ungodly, and so ungodly abuseth the same.” After a defence of the English translations; and a long extract from Chrysostom favoring the reading of the Bible, Cranmer resumes thus: “Therefore, in few words, to comprehend the largeness and utility of the Scripture, how it containeth fruitful instruction and erudition for every man,

if anything be necessary to be learned, of the Holy Scripture we may learn it. If falsehood shall be reprov'd, thereof we may gather wherewithal. If anything is to be corrected and amended; if there need any exhortation or consolation, of the Scripture we may well learn. In the Scriptures be the fat pastures of the soul; therein is no venomous meat, no unwholesome thing: they be the very dainty and pure feeding. He that is ignorant shall find there what he should learn. He that is a perverse sinner shall there find his damnation to make him to tremble for fear. He that laboureth to serve God shall there find his glory, and the promise of eternal life; exhorting him more diligently to labour. . . . . Wherefore I would advise you all, that come to the reading or hearing of this Book, which is the Word of God, the most precious jewel, and most holy relic that remaineth upon earth, that ye bring with you the fear of God, and that ye do it with all reverence, and use your knowledge thereof not to vain glory of frivolous disputation, but to the honor of God, increase of virtue, and edification both of yourselves and others. . . . .” After a long extract from Gregory Nazianzen on those who do not considerately read and study the word of God, he concludes thus: “Every man that cometh to the reading of this Holy Book ought to bring with him first and foremost this fear of Almighty God; and then, next, a firm and stable purpose to reform his own self according thereunto; and so to continue, proceed, and prosper from time to time; showing himself to be a sober and fruitful hearer and learner. Which if he do, he shall prove at length well able to teach, though not with his mouth, yet with his living and good example; which is sure the most lively and effectuous form and manner of teaching. He that otherwise intermeddleth with this Book, let him be assured that once he shall make account therefore, when he shall have said to him, as it is written in the prophet David, ‘Peccatore dicit Deus.’” etc.

This edition of the Great Bible, which is properly Cranmer's Bible, is a further revision of Coverdale of the edition of 1539, and has the following title:

*“The Byble in Englyshe, that is to saye the content of al the holy scrypture, both of the olde, and newe testament, with a prologe therinto, made by the reverende father in God, Thomas, archbysshop of Cantorbury. This is the Byble apoynted to the use of the churches. Prynted by Richard Grafton.\* Cum privilegio ad imprimendum solum, M. D. XL.”*

The colophon reads: *“The Ende of the newe Testament, and of the whole Byble, fynished in Apryll, anno M. CCCC. XL. A Domino factum est istud.”*

Although a revision, the changes introduced by Coverdale chiefly from Münster in the Old Testament, and from Erasmus in the New, are not always improvements, as may be seen by reference to the examples already given above.

- In reference to the textual variants exhibited between the 1539 and 1540 editions of the Great Bible, Mombert provides the following textual examples on pages 216 through 219.

The influence of Münster is undeniable not only in these passages, but in the others produced by Westcott and Eadie. The manner in which Coverdale successively corrected his own work is strikingly brought out in the former's collation of Isaiah liii., where the text of Coverdale (Matthew) is compared with Cromwell's edition of 1539, and Cranmer's of 1540, with the Zürich version and Münster's translation. A single clause may suffice to bring this out very clearly.

V. 5. Coverdale (Matthew): *a.* For the pain of our punishment *b.* shall be laid upon him, *c.* and with his stripes shall we be healed.

*a.* (1539):—pain of our punishment (die busz unserer straaſ. Zürich).

(1540):—chastisement of our peace (castigatio pacis nostræ. M.).

*b.* (1539):—shall be laid (wirt jm auffgelegt. Z.).

(1540):—was laid (fuit . . . super. M.).

*c.* (1539):—shall we be healed (werdent wir gesund. Z.).

(1540):—are we healed (medicatum est nobis. M.).

Two or three more examples, collated by Eadie, lead to the same result:

## PROVERBS XVII. 1.

1539. Whoso hath pleasure to sowe dyscorde, pycketh a quarrell in every thyng (after the Zürich).

1540. He accompanieth hym selfe with all steadfast and helthsome doctrine, that hath a fervent desyre to it, and is sequestrate from companie.

(Münster: Qui in votis est et quærit sequestrari, hic immiscet se omni solidæ et sanæ) [doctrinæ].

## ECCLES. XI. 5.

1539. As thou knowest not the waye of the wynde, nor how the bones are fylled in a mother's wombe.

1540. As thou knowest not the waye of the spirit howe he entred into the body beinge yet in a mother's wombe.

(Münster: Sicut tu nescis qua via (ingrediatur) spiritus in corpus culum cum adhuc est in utero pregnantis).

## ZECHARIA IX. 16.

1539. For the stones of his sanctuary shal be set vp in his lande.

1540. Ffor as precious stones of a dyademe they shall be sett vp ouer his lande.

(Münster: Quia ut lapides coronæ elevabuntur super terram ejus.)

And the following from the New Testament. In the first set the influence of Erasmus is very pronounced. The examples are those taken by Canon Westcott, and Professor Eadie from the list of variations in Mr. Francis Fry's *A Description of the Great Bible*, etc., London, 1865, which exhausts the subject, and is a marvel for minute and scrupulous accuracy.

## ROM. I. 25.

1539. which is blessed forever.  
 1540. which is to be praised forever.  
 (E.: qui est laudandus in secula).

## ROM. V. 15.

1539. which . . . was given by one man . . .  
 1540. which . . . was of one man . . .  
 (Erasmus: quæ fuit unius hominis).

## PHIL. I. 23.

1539. is much better.  
 1540. is much and far better.  
 (E.: multo longeque melius est.)

## REV. XVI. 9.

1539. repented not.  
 1540. repented not of their evil deeds.  
 (E.: neque egerunt scelerum pœnitentiam.)

## REV. XXII. 6.

1539. The Lord God of saints and prophets.  
 1540. The Lord God of the holy prophets.  
 (E.: Dominus Deus sanctorum prophetarum.)

## ST. JAMES I. 13.

1539. For God cannot tempt with evil, because he tempteth no man.  
 1540. For as God cannot be tempted with evil, so neither he himself tempteth any man.  
 (E.: Nam Deus ut malis tentari non potest, ita nec ipse quemquam tentat.)

There is a complete theological somersault in the rendering of 1539, answering to the Vulgate's: "Deus intentator malorum est," to the Erasmusian rendering of 1540, which

takes ἀπειραβτος κακῶν passively (retained in A. V., 1611, and in the Wesminster, with the marginal note, "Gr., *evil things*").

In the next set the revision returns with Erasmus to the Vulgate.

## ROM. IV. 25.

1539. For to justify us.

1540. For our justification.

(Vulgate: Propter justificationem nostram.)

## GAL. I. 10.

1539. Do I now speak unto men or unto God? either go I about to please . . .

1540. Do I now persuade men or God? either do I seek to please . . .  
(Vulgate: Modo enim hominibus suadeo, an Deo? an quæro hominibus placere?)

## I TIM. III. 16.

1539. . . . was beleued on erth . . . .

1540. . . . was beleued on in the worlde.

(Vulgate: creditum est in mundo).

In addition to the influence of Erasmus, that of the Complutensian Polyglot was very great. In Revelation alone ninety textual changes were made on its authority; *e. g.*,

- x. 6. 1539 omits the entire clause, which in that of  
1540 reads (*and the earth and the things that therein are*).
- xxi. 16. 1539. measured the city with the reed.  
1540. measured the city with the (*golden*) reed.
- xxii. 9. 1539. the sayings of this book.  
1540. the sayings of (*the prophecy of*) this book.

In addition to these, the following changes are very remarkable, and to be explained on the same principle:

1539 (*Cromwell*).

1540, April (*Cranmer*).

- Joshua xiv. A. gaue them their enheritance by lotte, as the Lord commaunded. distributed to them. By lotte they receaued their possessions as the Lorde commaunded.

Psalm xxviii. B.	For they regarde not the worckes of the Lorde.	For they regarde not in ther mynde the worckes of the Lorde.
Prov. xviii. A.	Who so hath pleasure to sowe dyscorde, pycketh a quarell in euery thyng.	He accompanieth hym selfe with all steadfast & helthsome doctryne, that hath a feruent desyre to it and is sequestrate from companye.
Ecclesiastes xi. A.	Sende thy vitayles ouer the waters, and so shalt thou fynde them after many dayes.	Lay thy brede vpon weate faces, & so shalt thou finde after many dayes.
Isaiah ii. B.	they go farre beyonde theyr fathers.	they go farre beyond the east countries.
— iii. D.	brusses, and headbandes.	brooches and headbandes.
— —	glasses and smockes.	glasses and cypresses.
— xxxviii. B.	in my beast age.	when myne age was shortened.
Jeremiah xi. D.	I am (as a meke lambe).	I am (as a meke lambe an oxe).
Joel i. D.	O what a syghyng make the euell?	O what a syghyng make the kyne?
Nahum ii. A.	His archers are well deckte and trimmed.	and his spere shaftes are soked in venim.
Romans i. A.	that are called of Jesu Christ.	the electe of Jesu Chryst.
— C.	which is blessed for euer.	which is to be prayesd for euer.
— xvi. B.	whych wemen labour in the Lorde.	whych labour in the Lorde.
Ephesians iii. C.	all generacyons from tyme to tyme.	all ages worlde without ende.
James i. B.	for God cannot tempte vnto euyll, because he tempteth no man.	for as God can not be tempted with euill, so neither he hymselfe tempt the eny man.
2 Peter ii. C.	exercysed with couetousnes.	exercysed with robrie.*

\* Francis Fry, *A Description of the Great Bible*, etc., London, 1865.

- Mombert reiterates what we saw from the pen of Drs Donald L. Brake and David Daniell in Lesson 121; the Great Bible was the only English Bible to be officially authorized by the English Crown. Consider the following extract from page 222.

This seems to be the proper place for stating that this Bible, of which six editions were published between April, 1540, and December, 1541 (see above), was the Authorized Version for twenty-eight years,—and, according to Eadie, “in the strict sense it is the only Authorized Version still, for the Bishops’ Bible and the present” [1611] “never had the formal sanction of royal authority.”

- Mombert asserts that the Great Bible is inferior to the Matthew’s Bible in many ways. This assessment is largely due to Coverdale’s reliance upon the Latin Vulgate.

It is unquestionably inferior to Matthew’s Bible as to translation, and objectionable, on account of numerous paraphrastic and supplementary clauses drawn from the Vulgate, of which the following are specimens:

Gen. iv. 8, Cain spake with Abel hys brother [let us go furth].  
 Josh. ii. 11, As we hearde these thynges [we were sore afraied, &] our heartes dyd fainte.  
 Judg. ix. 49, so that [with smoke and fyre] all the men of the tower of Sichem were slayne.

Psalm xxix. 1, Syng unto the Lorde, O ye mightie [brynge younge rammes unto the Lorde] ascrybe unto the Lorde worshippe and strengthe.

This is a most remarkable rendering, as the reader will perceive by perusing the following translations:

The Hebrew original reads: "Give unto the Lord, ye sons of the gods [*i. e.* ye angels], give unto the Lord glory and might," translated by the LXX: "Bring unto the Lord, ye sons of God, bring unto the Lord the sons of rams, bring unto the Lord glory and honor," and in the Vulgate: "Bring unto the Lord, ye sons of God, bring unto the Lord the sons of rams, bring unto the Lord glory and honor."

Psalm cxxxii. 4, nor mine eye lyddes to slomber [nether the temples of my heade to take anye rest].

Acts v. 15, That the shadow of Peter myght shadowe some of them [and that they myght all be delyuered from their infirmytyes].

Romans v. 2, The glory [of the chyldren] of God.

Galatians v. 13, but by loue [of the sprete] serue one another.

The whole of the Book teems with these curious and objectionable additions, showing very plainly the indecision and dependence, that is to say, the want of independent scholarship on the part of Coverdale. Sometimes whole verses, *e. g.* two long ones at the end of Prov. v. are added; here is one added to Prov. x. 4 [whoso regardeth leasynges fedeth the wynde, and doth but followe byrdes that have taken their flyght]; and another to Acts xiv. 7 [& all the multitude was moued at their doctryne, but Paul and Barnabas taryed styll at Lystra], after a gloss which crept into the Vulgate, where it continues in the Sixtine edition of 1590.

### Final Thoughts on the Great Bible

- Recall from Lesson 121 that Vice-Regent Cromwell was executed in July 1540. This action required some alterations to the Great Bible's Title Page. We touched upon this point in Lesson 122 when I showed you that the Title Page of the 1540 edition of the Great Bible was changed by the removal of Cromwell's coat of arms.

The four last editions of the Great Bible, namely those of November 1540, and of May, November and December 1541, exhibit in the frontispiece, fully described above, the space occupied with the heraldic shield of Cromwell in the first three editions, as a blank, and state in the title-page (of those of November 1540, May and November 1541) “oversene and perused at the commaundemente of the Kynges Hyghnes, by the ryght reverende fathers in God, Cuthbert bysshop of Duresme, and Nicolas bisshop of Rochester. Printed by Edward, Whitchurch”; and on that of the last edition of December 1541, “The Byble . . . with a prologe thereinto, made by the reverende father in God, Thomas archebisshop of Canterbury.—This is the Byble appoynted to the use of the Churches.—Printed by Richard Grafton: Cum privilegio ad imprimendum solum An. do. MDXL.” The colophon is—“The ende of the Newe Testamente, and of the whole Bible, Finysshed in December MCCCCXLI. †. A domino factum est istud. This is the Lordes Doynge.”

The omissions and changes are highly significant. The disappearance of Cromwell's arms denotes his fall and beheading which took place between the publication of the third and

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\* *Lives of the Archbishops of Canterbury*, Second Series, I. p. 334, 397.

fourth editions of the Great Bible. The editions of 1540 and 1541 with the official reference to a strictly nominal revision by the two bishops, Tonsal and Heath, indicate that they were published agreeably to the provisions of the Act of 1538 commanding that all published books should have the sanction of the king, a privy councillor, or a bishop. They were compelled to give their names to the work; and the title-page of those editions of the Bible is simply an imposture, for there is no evidence whatever that they had revised the version, and is a curious illustration of the mutations of human affairs, for this Tonsal is the self-same man who burned so many of Tyndale's Bibles, and was constrained finally to father a version, of which so great a portion was Tyndale's work.

It is instructive to supplement the preceding paragraph by a passage from *The Supplication of the Poor Commons to the King*, published not later than 1546, in which the bishops are referred to thus: "When your Majesty appointed two of them (Tonsal and Heath) to overlook the translation of the Bible, they said they had done your Highness' commandment therein: yea, they set their names thereunto: but when they saw the world somewhat like to wring on the other side, they denied it, and said they never meddled therewith, causing the printer to take out their names, which were erst set before the Bible, to certify to all men that they had diligently perused it, according as your Highness had commanded."\*

This would seem to account for their names being dropped from the title-page of the last edition of this series, printed by *Grafton*.

- Edited by Miles Coverdale, the Great Bible was a revision of the Matthew's Bible of 1537. Given that the Matthew's Bible was two-thirds the work of Tyndale, in an ironic turn of events, King Henry VIII licensed the work of William Tyndale via the Matthew's Bible and authorized it through the Great Bible.
- After the Great Bible, the English-speaking world would wait twenty years before the publication of a new English translation. The Geneva New Testament was published in Geneva Switzerland in 1557 by English exiles of the reign of Bloody Mary. In 1560 the complete Geneva Bible was published. Like the Matthew's and Great Bibles before it, the Geneva Bible continued in the line and tradition of William Tyndale.
- In a couple of weeks, we will study and consider the Geneva Bible. Next week we will consider the history of the English Bible between 1540 and 1560 when the Geneva Bible was published.

### The Taverner Bible

- In 1539, the same year that the Great Bible was published, a lesser known English Bible appeared in print. This Bible was published by Richard Taverner and is known to history simply as the Taverner Bible.
- Dr. Donald L. Brake, author of *A Visual History of the English Bible*, presents this standard view of the Taverner Bible:
  - “Just before the Great Bible appeared, however, a revision of Matthew's Bible surfaced and competed for official recognition. A scholar in both Greek and Hebrew with a master's degree from Cambridge, Richard Taverner (1505-75) set his mind to the task of translation. His version, also published in 1539, would become popularly known as the Taverner Bible, but its official title was

“The Most Sacred Bible which is the holy scripture, containing the old and new testament, translated into English, and newly recognized with great diligence after most faithful exemplar by Richard Taverner.”

Taverner had been in the employment of Cromwell as a clerk. Did Cromwell encourage work or did Taverner know of Cromwell's admonition to Coverdale to do a revision? We do not know. Whatever the case, even though Taverner knew Greek and probably had some readings more accurate than his predecessor, his text had almost no influence on subsequent translations. F.F. Bruce points out one rendering that did survive: in Hebrews 1:3 the Son of God is called the “express image” of his person. Taverner also introduced “parable” for Tyndale's “similitude.”

Most differences between Taverner's version and Matthew's version are limited to style and idiomatic renderings. For example, I John 2:5 in Matthew's reads: “We have an advocate with the Father.” Taverner's reads, “We have a spokesman with the Father.” While both are acceptable translations, Taverner's use of “spokesman” reflects an attempt to be more idiomatic.” (Brake, 132-133)

- Regarding the Taverner Bible, Dr. David Daniell offers a more positive spin in *The Bible In English: Its History and Influence*:
  - “In 1539 there appeared a complete new English translation of the whole Bible by Richard Taverner, a scholar of Greek and Hebrew who held high office in the land. His name does not appear in the list of acceptable earlier translators given to King James’s scholars, and that may be why his has so readily been brushed aside, following Westcott’s sniffy dismissal of him as one who ‘exercised no influence,’ and who was ‘alien.’ Both judgments, though they appear to have been massively influential, are odd, making one wonder whether Westcott’s dislike had some hidden basis. Fortunately, he is being brought back into view. (A problem of access remains, in that there is not a published facsimile.) Taverner’s aims were compression and vividness, in which he succeeded. He has been misrepresented even by Darlow, Moule, and Herbert, as merely revising Tyndale and Coverdale in ‘Matthew’s’ Bible, where he was effectively starting again. Why Westcott found ‘alien’ and of ‘no influence’ the translator who restored to us the word ‘parable,’ (for Tyndale’s ‘similitude’) and others one cannot imagine. Taverner’s Bible went through eight further editions up to 1551.” (Daniell, 219)
- These comments from Professor Daniell reveal that he feels that Taverner’s contribution to the historical development of the English Bible has been greatly underappreciated and overlooked. Daniell’s argument for this phenomenon is largely related to the fact that Taverner’s Bible was left off the list of Bibles to be consulted by the King James translators, according to Rule 14:
  - “These translations to be used when they agree better with the Text than the Bishops Bible: Tyndale’s, Matthew’s, Coverdale’s, Whitchurch’s [Great Bible], Geneva.”
- This may in fact be the correct explanation by Dr. Daniell. Moreover, the fact that no modern facsimile has been produced has not helped historian’s awareness of this edition. That it went through eight editions between 1539 and 1551 demonstrates that this Bible was well received by a portion of the English speaking world. If this were not the case, Taverner’s Bible publishers would not have kept the volume in print.

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