

Sunday, May 10, 2020—Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*  
 Lesson 116 The Coverdale Bible: Assessing Coverdale as a Reviser of Tyndale

## **Introduction**

- Last week in [Lesson 115](#) we noted that Coverdale’s Bible needs to be evaluated on the following two fronts:
  - Coverdale as a Translator: Poetry & Prophecy
  - Coverdale as a Revisor: Reworking of Tyndale
- Donald L. Brake author of *A Visual History of the English Bible* offers the following analysis of Coverdale’s skills as a translator:
  - “Coverdale only slightly revised Tyndale’s translation of the New Testament, Pentateuch, Jonah, and the historical books [Dr. David Daniell proved that Tyndale’s version of Joshua through II Chronicles was not in print until the Matthew’s Bible of 1537.]. His original and most creative translation came in his work on the poetic and prophetic books. Without Tyndale to follow, he was left to his own stylistic contributions. He emphasized the readability of the receptor langue rather than the source language in which he clearly was not competent. His translation of the Psalms become the standard for the Psalter for years to come and was used in the Common Book of Prayer (1549-1860).” (Brake, 118)
- J. I Mombert in his *English Versions of the Bible* (1883) makes some interesting comments regarding Coverdale’s Bible that we have not had the time or space to consider in our previous Lessons. Regarding Coverdale’s competency in the original languages and how the original titled page printed in Antwerp would have impacted sales, Mombert states the following:
  - “Turning to the Version itself, it is impossible, to reach any other conclusion than that it is a secondary, eclectic translation. The Pentateuch and Jonah (probably also Job) and the whole of the New Testament are Tyndale’s version revised by Luther, the Zurich, Sanctes Pagninus and, in the subsequent revisions, especially by Munster. The clause in the title of his first edition of 1535 “faithfully translated out of Douche and Latin,” must be admitted, after the thorough examination to which his version has of late years been subjected, to be literally true. The reason of its withdrawal from the title page of subsequent editions can only be conjectured, and no conjecture appears to me fairer than that the alteration was not due to Coverdale, but to those who bore the expense of the undertaking, and took umbrage at that phrase, which, at that time, seemed to give it an odor of heresy (for “Douche” or German, on account of Luther, was viewed in that light) and interfere with its circulation. But be that as it may, the later editions simply stated in the title: “faithfully translated into English” (1535-36), and “translated in English” (1537 and the subsequent issues). In connection with his first edition he stated distinctly in the

Dedication: “I have with a clear conscience purely and faithfully translated this out of five sundry interpreters, having only the manifest truth of the Scriptures before mine eyes,” and he says to the Christian Reader: “To help me therein, I have had sundry translations, not only in Latin, but also of the Douche interpreters, whom, because of their singular gyftes and special diligence in the Bible, I have been the more glad to follow for the most part.” Whether these five interpreters include Tyndale, whom he certainly most freely consulted, cannot be determined, but that he consulted the Vulgate, and Pagninus in Latin, and Luther and the Zurich in German is certain; it is also highly probable that he consulted the Worms translation and the Biblia Sacra of Rudelius, with marginal renderings, Cologne, 1527.” (Mombert, 162-163)

- In support of these claims Mombert includes a tri-fold parallel comparison between the Latin text of Pagninus, the Zurich Bible, and Coverdale. This comparison includes the following three passages: 1) Numbers 24:15-17, 2) Isaiah 12:1-6, 3) Jonah 4:6, and Malachi 4. Regarding this collation, Mombert states the following:

- “I have collated this chapter [referring to Malachi 4] with Luther, the Zurich, the Worms edition of Peter Schofer (1528, 16mo.), and the Combination Bible of Wolff Kopphl (Strassburg, 1529-32, folio), with the result, that there is hardly a word that cannot be referred to one or more of them. It would lead me too far, to state the details here, but many will be supplied in the chapters on the German versions. Unless I am mistaken, the peculiar character of the Combination Bible, with which Coverdale must have been very familiar, suggested to him the adoption of the same principle in his own versions.

The collation of these passages with the Vulgate and Luther, as well as the Zurich and Pagninus on the one hand, and the Hebrew on the other, shows very plainly that they cannot have been translated from the original. A similar process of collation has been pursued by Professors Westcott and Eadie with references to other passages, and by Dr. Ginsburg, who was the first to call attention to it, in Koheleth [Hebrew word for Ecclesiastes], and as the portions examined belong to the various books of the Old Testament and have uniformly led to the same result, it may be regarded as proven that Coverdale’s translation is decidedly secondary and eclectic. In the Apocrypha, however, he is much more independent, while the New Testament, based in the first instance on the first edition of Tyndale, was revised by the second and the German of Luther (see above).” (Mombert, 167-168)

- After looking at many examples in Lesson 115 of Coverdale’s work in the Poetic and Prophetic books as well as scholarly commentary and analysis from Blackford Condit, S.L. Greenslade, Donald L. Brake, and Gerald L. Hammond we concluded the following regarding Coverdale’s abilities as a translator.
  - “. . . it would appear safe to conclude that in those areas where Coverdale’s work was unique to himself, i.e., previous groundwork laid by Tyndale was not available to draw upon, Coverdale is a bit of a mixed bag. His translations range from sound and enduring

as in the Psalms to almost nonsensical and incoherent in other sections of the Poets and Prophets.” (Lesson 115)

- Today, in Lesson 116 we want to assess Coverdale’s skill as a revisor of Tyndale.

### Coverdale as a Revisor: Reworking of Tyndale

- Regarding the places for which Tyndale was available to serve as base, Blackford Condit states the following about Coverdale’s work:
  - “. . . it is understood that the portions of the Scriptures already translated by Tyndale were used by Coverdale as the basis of his translation, especially the Pentateuch and the New Testament. The following specimens from Coverdale’s translation of the New Testament will illustrate but imperfectly his work as a reviser, since in many instances his changes are rather for the worse than otherwise.” (Condit, 164)
- Consider the following examples from Matthew 6 and Romans 8.

Verse #	Tyndale (1534)	Coverdale
Mt. 6:9	After this manner pray ye. O our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.	After this manner <b>therefore shall ye pray:</b> O our father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
Mt. 6:10	<u>Let</u> thy kingdom come. Thy will be fulfilled, as well in earth, as it is in heaven.	Thy kingdom come. Thy will be fulfilled <b>upon earth as it is in heaven.</b>
Mt. 6:11	Give us this day our daily bread.	Give us this day our daily bread.
Mt. 6:12	And forgive us our trespasses, even as we forgive our trespassers.	And forgive vs our <b>detes, as we also</b> forgive our <b>deters.</b>
Mt. 6:13	And lead us not into temptation: but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power, and the glory for ever. Amen.	And lead vs not into temptation: but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory for ever. Amen.

- The above comparison between Tyndale and Coverdale in their respective renderings of the Lord’s Prayer show only a few verbal changes. The same, however, could not be said for Romans 8.

Verse #	Tyndale (1534)	Coverdale
Ro. 8:1	There is then no damnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, which walk not after ye flesh: but after ye sprite.	Then is there now no damnation unto the that are in Christ Jesus, which walk not after ye flesh, but after ye sprite
Ro. 8:2	For the law of the sprite that bringeth life through Jesus Christ hath delivered me from the law of sin and death.	For ye law of ye sprite (it bringeth life in Christ Jesus) hath made me free from the law of sin & death.
Ro. 8:3	For what the law could not do inasmuch it was weak because of the flesh: that performed God, and sent his son in the	For what impossible was unto ye law (in as much as it was weak because of the flesh) it performed God, & sent his son in ye similitude of sinful flesh,

	similitude of sinful flesh, and by sin damned sin in the flesh:	
Ro. 8:4	that the righteousness required of the law might be fulfilled in us, which walk not after the flesh, but after the sprite.	& by sin dammed sin in ye flesh: that the righteousness required of the law, might be fulfilled in vs, which walk not after the flesh, but after the sprite.
Ro. 8:5	For they that are carnal, are carnally minded. But they that are spiritual, are ghostly minded.	For they that are fleshly, are fleshly minded: but they that are ghostly, are ghostly minded.
Ro. 8:6	To be carnally minded, is death. But to be spiritually minded is life and peace.	To be fleshly minded, is death: but to be ghostly minded, is life and peace.
Ro. 8:7	Because that the fleshly mind is enmity against God: for it is not obedient to the law of God nether can be.	For to be fleshly minded is enmity against. God, since it is not subdued unto ye law of God, for it cannot also.
Ro. 8:8	So then they that are given to the flesh cannot please God.	As for them that are fleshly, they cannot please God.
Ro. 8:9	But ye are not given to the flesh, but to the sprite: if so be that ye sprite of God dwell in you. If there be any man that hath not the sprite of Christ, the same is none of his.	Howbeit ye are not fleshly, but ghostly, if so be that the spirit of God dwell in you. But who so hath not the spirit of Christ, the same is not his.
Ro. 8:10	If Christ be in you, the body is deed because of sin: but the sprite is life for righteousness' sake.	Nevertheless if Christ be in you, then is the body deed because of sin. But the spirit is life for righteousness sake.
Ro. 8:11	Wherefore if the sprite of him that raised up Jesus from death, dwell in you: even he that raised up Christ from death shall quicken your mortal bodies, because that this sprite dwelleth in you.	Wherefore if the spirit of him, that raised up Jesus from the deed, dwell in you, then shall even he also that raised up Christ from the deed, quicken your mortal bodies, because that his sprite dwelleth in you.
Ro. 8:12	Therefore brethren we are now debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh.	therefore brethren we are now debtors, not to the flesh,
Ro. 8:13	For if ye live after the flesh, ye must die. But if ye mortify the deeds of the body, by the help of the sprit, ye shall live.	to live after the flesh: for if ye live after the flesh, ye must dye: but if ye mortify the deeds of the body through the spirit, ye shall live.
Ro. 8:14	For as many as are led by the spirit of God: they are the sons of god.	For whosoever are led by the spirit of God, are Gods children:
Ro. 8:15	For ye have no received the spirit of bondage to fear any more, but ye have received the sprite of adoption whereby we cry Abba father.	for ye have not received the spirit of bondage to fear any more, but ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry: Abba, dear father.
Ro. 8:16	The same spirit certifieth our sprite that we are the sons of God.	The same spirit certifieth our spirit, that we are the children of God.
Ro. 8:17	If we be sons, we are also heirs, the heirs I mean of God, and heirs annexed with Christ: if so be that we suffer together, that we maybe be glorified together.	If we be children, then are we heirs also, namely the heirs of God, and heirs annexed with Christ, if so be that we suffer together, that we maybe be also glorified together.
Ro. 8:18	For I suppose that the afflictions of this life, are not worthy of the glory which shall be shewed upon vs.	For I suppose, that the afflictions off this time, are not worthy of the glory, which shall be shewed upon vs.

Ro. 8:19	Also the fervent desire of the creatures abideth looking when the sons of God shall appear	For the fervent longing of the creature looketh for the appearing of the children of God,
Ro. 8:20	because the creatures are subdued to vanity against their will: but for his will which subdueth them in hope.	because the creature is subdued unto vanity against her will, but for his will that hath subdued her upon hope.
Ro. 8:21	For ye very creatures shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption, into the glorious liberty of the sons of God.	For the creature also shall be free from the bondage of corruption, unto the glorious liberty of the children of God.
Ro. 8:22	For we know that every creature groaneth with us also, and travaileth in pain even unto this time.	For we know, that every creature groaneth, and travaileth with us in pain until the same time.

- The following table notes other verses given by Condit where Coverdale make improvements to Tyndale's original English renderings.

Verse #	Tyndale (1534)	Coverdale
Mt. 3:14	But John forbade him saying: I <b>ought</b> to be baptized of the: and comest thou to me?	But Iho forbade him, saying: I <b>have need</b> to be baptized of the: and comest thou to me?
Mt. 5:36	nether shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make <b>one white hair or black:</b>	nether shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make <b>one hair white or black:</b>
Mt. 13:58	And he did not many miracles there for their <b>unbelief's sake.</b>	And he did not many miracles there, because of <b>their unbelief.</b>
Mt. 21:42	Jesus said unto them: did ye never read in the scriptures? The stone which ye builders refused ye same is <b>set in the principal part</b> of the corner: this was the lord's doing and it is marvelous in our eyes.	Jesus said unto them: Did ye never read in the scriptures: The same stone which the builders refused, is <b>become the head stone</b> in the corner? This was the <b>LORDES</b> doing, & it is marvelous in our eyes
Jo. 1:14	And the word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we saw <b>the glory of it, as the glory</b> of the only begotten son of the father, <b>which word was</b> full of grace and <b>verity.</b>	And the worde became flesh, and dwelt among us: and we saw <b>his glory</b> , a glory as of the only begotten son of the father, full of grace and <b>truth.</b>
Jo. 3:15	that <b>none that</b> believeth in him perish: but have <b>eternal</b> life.	that <b>who so ever believeth</b> in him, <b>should not</b> perish, but have <b>everlasting</b> life.
Jo. 14:27	Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you. Not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your <b>hearts be grieved</b> nether <b>fear ye.</b>	Peace I leave unto you, my peace I give you: I give not unto you, as the world giveth. Let not your <b>heart be troubled</b> , nether <b>let it be afraid.</b>
Jo. 15:19	If ye were of the world, the world would love his own. Howbeit because ye are not of ye world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore <b>hateth you the world.</b>	If ye were of the world, the world would love his own. Howbeit because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you from the world, <b>therefore the world hateth you.</b>
Jo. 18:38	Pilate said unto him: what <b>thing is truth?</b> And when he had said it he went out	Pilate said unto him: What <b>is the truth?</b> And when he had said that he went out again to the

	again unto the Jews and said unto them: I find <b>in him no cause at all.</b>	Jews, and said unto them: I <b>find no guiltiness in him:</b>
Jo. 19:2	And the soldiers <b>wound</b> a crown of thorns and put it on his heed. And <b>they did on</b> him a purple garment	And the soldiers platted a crown of thorns, and set it upon his head, and <b>put</b> a purple garment <b>upon</b> him,

- It is clear from the readings noted in the above table that Coverdale's strength as an English linguist was employed to improve Tyndale's renderings in certain passages.
- Regarding obsolete or archaic words in Coverdale's Bible, Blackford Condit states the following:
  - "In respect to obsolete words, whole chapters may be read in Coverdale's Bible without meeting a single example though three and a half centuries have passed since the translation was made. There are such words, however, and as examples the following will suffice: *barowes*, couches; *bugges*, goblins; *chaftes*, jaws; *creshettes*, torches; *flawe of wynd*, tempest of wind; *hantch*, snatch or devour; *hand reaching*, a favorite term with Coverdale for the act of ministering relief; *lyuelod*, land; *maundes*, baskets; *roweth*, whispereth; all of which are found below in the several connections.
    - Job 29:17—I break the *chaftes* [jaws] of ye unrighteous. . .
    - Psalms 7:2—Lest he *hantch* [snatch] up my soul like a lion. . .
    - Isaiah 5:9—The LORDE of hosts *rowneth* [wispereth] me thus in mine ear. . .
    - Jeremiah 24:1—he LORDE shewed me a vision: Behold, there stood two *maundes* [baskets] of figs before ye Temple of the LORDE. . .
      - John 18:3—. . . he came thither with *creshettes* [torches], wt lanterns, and with weapons.
    - Acts 5:3—. . . and withdraw away part of the money of the *lyuelod* [land]?
    - Acts 5:15—In so much that they brought out the sick into the streets, and laid them upon beds and barowes [couches]. . .
    - Acts 6:1—. . . because their windows were not looked upon in the daily *handreachinge* [ministration].
    - Acts 27:14—But not long after, there rose against their purpose a flawe of wynde [tempest of wind], which is called the Northeast.
  - Archaic forms and contractions abound in Coverdale's Bible. These, together with the strange orthography, render his printed page somewhat obscure. The following are inserted as examples: *hir*, their; *her*, them; *his*, its; *nee*, nor; *y*, the; *hi*, him; *hogrie*,

hungry; *Jho*, John; *lodes*, lands; *loge*, long; *stoble*, stumble; *the*, them or then; *upo*, upon; *axe*, ask; *rote*, root; *sprete*, sprit, *the*, thee; *thorow*, through; *twolve*, twelve; *wawes*, wave; *yee*, yea.” (Condit, 168-169)

- Like Condit, Mombert also notes areas where Coverdale shined as well as fell somewhat flat.
  - “It were a great mistake to suppose that in spite of this unquestionable dependence of Coverdale’s version, it is a poor version. The very opposite may be maintained, and he certainly possessed admirable taste and an uncommonly correct ear. Many of his renderings are decided improvements on those of Tyndale, and not a few are retained in the Authorized Version. Some of these may be seen in the collations given before, e. g., in i John ii. 16, 17, where his “pride of life” & “the world passeth away” are vastly better than Tyndale’s “pride of goods,” and “the world vanisheth away.”
  - Among those preserved in the A. V. are these: “a righteous man’s reward,” Matth. x. 41; “there will the eagles be gathered together,” xxiv. 28; and among those not retained, very meritorious, the following: “that we might receive the childship,” Gal. iv. 5; and “with the angels of his power,” 2 Thess. i. 7.
  - A few specimens of antique and quaint expressions may be added. “Laved the fleshe in a maunde and put the broth in a pot,” Judges vi. 19; “and brake his brain panne,” x. 53; “the man Micah had a god’s house and made an overbody cote” (ephod), xvii. 5; “then answered the tydinge bringer,” i Sam. iv. 17; “it is man that is borne vnto mysery, lyke as the byrde for to fle,” Job v. 7; “he that is a blabbe of his tonge maketh devysion,” Prov. xvi. 28; “graven vpon the edge of your aulters with a pen of iron and with an adamant clawe,” Jer. viii. 52; “the erth shal geue a greate crack, it shal haue a sore ruyne, and take an horrible fall,” Is. xxiv. 20; “because of his unshamefast begging,” Luke xi. 8; “not loked vpon in the daylie handreachinge,” Acts vi. i; “one member hangeth by another thorowout all the iontes,” Eph. iv. 16; “but waysteth his brayne aboute ques tions and stryuynges of wordes, i Tim. vi. 4.
  - And the following obsolete terms, or only surviving in dialects: to clyp (=shear sheep); a maund (=large basket); body (=man); to spar a door (=close it); rowles (=waves); bug (=bugbear, object of fear); symnel (=a cake).” (Mombert, 169-170)
- In conclusion it is important to note that Coverdale relished his eclectic translational method of utilizing “sundry translations” as the basis for his work as the following words from his *Prologue: Myles Coverdale to the Christian Reader* testify.
  - “Whereas some men think now that many translations make division in the faith and in the people of God, that is not so: for it was never better with the congregation of God, than when every church almost had the Bible of a sundry translation. Among the Greeks had not Origen a special translation? Had not Vulgarius one peculiar, and likewise Chrysostom? Beside the seventy interpreters, is there not the translation of Aquila, of

Theodotion, of Symachus, and of sundry other? Again among the Latin men, thou findest that every one almost used a special and sundry translation: for in so much as every bishop had the knowledge of the tongues, he gave his diligence to have the Bible of his own translation. The doctors, as Hireneus, Cyprianus, Tertullian, S. Jerome, S. Augustine, Hilarius and S. Ambrose upon diverse places of the scripture, read not the text all alike.

Therefore ought it not to be taken as evil, that such men as have understanding now in our time, exercise themselves in the tongues, and give their diligence to translate out of one language into another. Yea we ought rather to give God high thanks therefore, which through his spirit stirreth up men's minds, so to exercise themselves therein. would God it had never been left off after the time of S. Augustine, then should we never have come into such blindness and ignorance, into such errors and delusions. For as soon as the Bible was cast aside, and no more put in exercise, then began every one of his own head to write whatsoever came into his brain and that seemed to be good in his own eyes: and so grew the darkness of men's traditions. And this same is the cause that we have had so many writers, which seldom made mention of the scripture of the Bible: and though they sometime alleged it, yet was it done so far out of season and so wide from the purpose, that a man may well perceive, how that they never saw the original.

Seeing then that this diligent exercise of translating doth so much good and edifieth in other languages, why should it do evil in ours? Doubtless like as all nations in the diversity of speeches may know one God in the unity of faith, and be one in love: even so may diverse translations understand one another, and that in the head articles and ground of our most blessed faith, though they use sundry words. Wherefore methinks we have great occasion to give thanks unto God, that he hath opened unto his church the gift of interpretation and of printing, and that there are now at this time so many, which with such diligence and faithfulness interpret the scripture to the honor of God and edifying of his people, whereas (like as when many are shooting together) everyone doth his best to be nearest the mark. And though they cannot all attain thereto, yet shooteth one nearer than another, and hitteth it better than another, yea one can do it better than another. Who is now then so unreasonable, so despitiful, or envious, as to abhor him that doth all his diligence to hit the prick [target], and to shoot nearest it, though he miss and come not nearest the mark? Ought not such one rather to be commended, and to be helped forward, that he may exercise himself the more therein?

For the which cause (according as I was desired) I took the more upon me to set forth this special translation, not as a checker, not as a reprover, or despiser of other men's translations (for among many as yet I have found none without occasion of great thanksgiving unto God) but lowly and faithfully have I followed mine interpreters, and that under correction. And though I have failed anywhere (as there is no man but he misseth in some thing) love shall construe all to the best without any perverse judgment. There is no man living that can see all things, neither hath God given any man to know everything. One seeth more clearly than another, one hath more understanding than



another, one can utter a thing better than another, but no man ought to envy, or despise another. He that can do better than another, should not set him at naught that understandeth less: Yea he that hath the more understanding, ought to remember that the same gift is not his but God's, and that God hath given it him to teach and inform the ignorant. If thou hast knowlege therefore to judge where any fault is made, I doubt not but thou wilt help to amend it, if love be joined with thy knowledge. Howbeit wherein so ever I can perceive by myself, or by the information of other, that I have failed (as it is no wonder), I shall now by the help of God overlook it better and amend it. . .

Now whereas the most famous interpreters of all give sundry judgments of the text (so far as it is done by the spirit of knowledge in the holy ghost) methink no man should be offended thereat, for they refer their doings in meekness to the spirit of truth in the congregation of God; and sure I am, that there commeth more knowledge and understanding of the scripture by their sundry translations, than by all the glosses of our sophistical doctors. For that one interpreteth something obscurely in one place, the same translateth another (or else he himself) more manifestly by a more plain vocable of the same meaning in another place. Be not thou offended therefore (good Reader) though one call a *scribe*, that another calleth a *lawyer*; or *elders*, that another calleth *father and mother*; or *repentance*, that another calleth *penance* or *amendment*. For if thou be not deceived by men's traditions, thou shalt find no more diversity between these terms than between four pence and a groat [four penny piece]. And this manner have I used in my translation, calling it in some place *penance*, that in another place I call *repentance*, and that not only because the interpreters have done so before me, but that the adversaries of the truth may see, how that we abhor not this word *penance* (as they untruly report of us) no more than the interpreters of Latin abhor *penitere*, when they read *resipiscere*. Only our hearts desire unto God, is, that his people be not blinded in their understanding, lest they believe *penance* to be ought save a very repentance, amendment, or conversion unto God, and to be an unfeigned new creature in Christ, and to live according to his law. For else shall they fall into the old blasphemy of Christ's blood, and believe, that they themselves are able to make satisfaction unto God for their own sins, from the which error God of his mercy and plenteous goodness preserve all his.”

## **Conclusion**

- After all that we have looked at it seems reasonable to conclude that Myles Coverdale was a shrewd, politically motivated, and eclectic translator. While he lacked proficiency in the original languages his strength resided in his use of English rhyme and cadence. While his work on the Psalms was legendary, being included in the Common Book of Prayer, there are other places where his work is clumsy and nearly incomprehensible.
- While his first attempt at a Crown sanctioned Bible would fail to materialize. It was to Coverdale that King Henry VIII would turn in 1539 when he sanctioned the translation of the Great Bible. Therefore, we will put up the trail of Coverdale as a translator again when we consider his work on the Great Bible.

- Next week in Lesson 117 we will look at the contents and organization of the first complete English Bible with a specific emphasis on how Coverdale handled the inclusion of the Apocryphal books.

### **Works Cited**

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