

Sunday, November 15, 2020—Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*
 Lesson 125 The 1557 Geneva New Testament: Origin, Translators, & Prefatory Material

Introduction

- Last week in Lesson 124 we looked at the fortunes of the English Bible between the publication of the Great Bible in 1539 and the Geneva New Testament in 1557. We accomplished this by looking at the following three time periods:
 - The Latter Reign of Henry VIII (1539-1547)
 - The Reign of Edward VI (1547-1553)
 - The Reign of Bloody Mary (1553-1558)
- During the reign of Mary I, we observed that “no Bibles were printed in England between 1553 and 1558, . . .” (Daniell, 263) Today in Lesson 125 we will begin looking at the 1557 Geneva New Testament. One cannot adequately accomplish this, however, without saying a few more things about the reign of Bloody Mary.

Further Thoughts on the Reign of Bloody Mary

- In order to adequately understand how the Englishmen who produced the Geneva Bible in Geneva Switzerland came to reside there, we need to look at a bit more concerning Bloody Mary. Recall that Mary I wanted to bring England back under the authority of the Pope. This also meant that all the Protestants living in England needed to be dealt with.
 - “They [English Protestants] all agreed they had to leave England for the sanctuary of Europe, where the Reformation could survive and grow. To stay would mean certain arrest and the choice of the hangman’s noose or the executioner’s fire. They knew they must be freed in order to worship and to write about the Reformation hope. The success of the English Reformation rested on these men and those who would follow.

Their fears were well founded, for as soon as the new queen was crowned she instituted far reaching anti-Protestant reforms. The accession of the Catholic Queen Mary I to the throne of England in 1553 signaled a period of intense Protestant persecution. Mary, the daughter of Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon, fervently embraced the Catholic faith of her mother and was determined to restore England to loyalty to the pope. Her humiliation with the divorce of her parents in 1533 and the failed plot of John Dudley to give the throne to the great granddaughter of Henry VII, Lady Jane Grey, further shaped Mary’s attitude toward Protestants.

Mary was not satisfied with reform results begun early in her reign, so she dismissed married clergy and attempted to restore Catholic dogma. Thomas Cromwell’s destruction of monasteries in the 1530s was so successful that Mary could do little to restore them. Totally frustrated, she began embracing more stringent measures. John Rodgers, Thomas Cranmer, Hugh Latimer, and Nicholas Ridley were arrested in Mary’s first year as queen.

John Rodgers, responsible for the famous Matthew's Bible (1537), was the first to suffer martyrdom under Mary (1555). John Foxe records the horrible deaths of Latimer and Ridley as they were burned at the stake. Public reaction to Mary's chancellor and henchman Stephen Gardiner's inhumane burnings and beheadings of Protestants backfired. English indifference to Protestantism now turned into sympathy to its cause. Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* (1576) popularized and perhaps overdramatized the events under Mary. Her nearly 300 victims were embedded in the national conscience.

It will not come as a surprise that some of the greatest scholars and theologians in England's history were among those fleeing their beloved homeland. Miles Coverdale (translator of the Coverdale Bible, 1535) and many English Protestant leaders fled England from Switzerland and Germany, where they took refuge. Among the notable continental exiles were: William Williams, William Whittingham, Anthony Gilby, Christopher Goodman, Thomas Wood, Thomas Cole, John Bale, John Knox, John Bodley, William Kethe, and John Foxe. Almost immediately the exiles began writing books and pamphlets defending their reformed convictions. From this group came the translators of the Geneva Bible. . .

We simply cannot blame or credit Mary for the production of the Geneva Bible. Her active persecution of Protestants did provide the context that led to the freedom for publication. Fleeing to the continent gave the Reformers the opportunity to operate freely in a society that would tolerate academic and religious freedom." (Brake, 143-145)

- I agree with Dr. Brake, Mary cannot be blamed or credited with the production the Geneva Bible. She can, however, be credited for creating the conditions in England which caused these men to flee. Once in Europe they were free to translate God's word afresh for the kinsman.
- Once free from the clutches of Bloody Mary, the need for a new English translation can largely be attributed to issues related to cost, size, and readability, according to Dr. Brake.
 - "... The English Bibles previously published were large, cumbersome, and expensive, the awkward block letters (often called Old English or Gothic) and lack of verse divisions made imperative a new translation that would accommodate the growing reading public." (Brake, 145)
- Conditions in Geneva Switzerland facilitated the production of such a volume in 1557.

The Geneva New Testament (1557)

- That the next English translation of the Bible would originate in Geneva is befitting its history as a haven for printing the vernacular language Bibles of the Reformation.
 - "The year 1557 and the city of Geneva were both the time and the place for a new English translation. For twenty years, revisions of Olivetan's French New Testament had been published in Geneva, revised by Calvin and Genevan ministers, the latest in 1556. Italian exiles there printed a revised Italian New Testament in 1555, on the way to a

whole Bible. A revised New Testament in Spanish was printed there in 1556.”
(Daniell, 277)

- Professor David Daniell gives the most detailed account of the men responsible for the Geneva Bible and how they came to take refuge there. Dr. Daniell states the following in *The Bible in English: Its History and Influence*:
 - “Two months after Queen Mary’s coronation on 19 July 1553, William Cecil, formerly Secretary of State (as he would be again, famously, under Elizabeth) began to put into operation a plan for the migration of British Protestants to the Continent. This was supported by English merchants out of Protestant belief but also with an eye to further trade. The great movement of Protestants to the Continent in January and February 1554 happened before the most serious persecution got under way: the first burning, of John Rogers, maker of Matthew’s Bible, took place on 4 February 1555. In the eighteen months before that martyrdom, the migration had been carefully organized.

To settle in one of the continental Cities of Refuge, the migrants had to be religious refugees, that is, they had to be, in the modern phrase, asylum seekers, fleeing persecution. . . The dangers in England were real; the restriction of Protestants began within a few days of Mary’s accession. . .

In 1555, Calvin had welcomed into Geneva what one might call second-stage English refugees, that is the groups formerly under John Knox in Frankfurt, who had quarrelled with the original settlers there over the need for Anglicanism to reform further, in the direction of the supreme authority being vested in the congregation, as in Geneva under Calvin. The forty-six English who moved to Geneva were given their own place of worship, to be shared with the Italians, and on 15 November 1555 held their first service in their own language according to the rites of the Geneva Reformed Church. One of them was William Whittingham.” (Daniell, 277-278)

- History is unclear as to whom is due the credit for the Geneva New Testament. That said, Professor Daniell discusses a manuscript, *Life*, on the life of William Whittingham in Bodleian Library in Oxford that offers the best clues. Regarding this manuscript Dr. Daniell states:
 - “. . . tells of a group of ‘learned men’ in Geneva meeting to ‘peruse’ the existing English versions of the New Testament (thus making, as David Alexander pointed out, the first such revision committee in English Bible history). The ‘learned men’ mentioned were indeed learned: Miles Coverdale; Christopher Goodman, another Oxford man, from Brasenose, and then Christ Church, who had become Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity; Anthony Gilbey; Thomas Sampson, from Oxford and Cambridge, who went on to be Dean of Christ Church, Oxford—he had most recently been close the Hebrew scholar Immanuel Tremellius at Cambridge and Strasbourg; Dr. William Cole; and William Whittingham himself. They were possibly joined in committee by John Knox, and certainly later for the whole Bible by William Kette (or Kethe), John Baron, John Pullain, John Bodley, and W. Williams. . .

How much the ‘learned men’ who were in Geneva contributed to the New Testament (as opposed to the whole Bible that followed) is unclear: there has been persistence in the statement, certainly implied in the Preface, that one man, Whittingham, did it all alone. Not only does the 1557 New Testament itself, however, say nothing about that: the writer of the manuscript *Life* does not mention that he translated the New Testament. It seems a large item to omit. Perhaps assumption of a large share by Whittingham is safest.” (Daniell, 278-279)

- In terms of its physical features, such as size and font to name but a few, the 1557 Geneva New Testament stood in stark contrast to the Great Bible and other earlier English Bibles for the following reasons.
 - “After the Great Bible of 1539, the next newly prepared English New Testament was printed in Geneva in June 1557. It [Geneva New Testament] marked both a great contrast to the Great Bible, and—though at first it might not seem so today—a long stride forward.

For one thing, it is small, an octavo for the hand or pocket (roughly the size of a Prayer Book in a church pew) as editions of the New Testament had been since Tyndale’s and Coverdale’s over twenty years before. That made a contrast to Henry VIII’s original huge folio Great Bible, or Matthew’s before that; but the contrast was not only in the pleasing small size.

It is also handsome. For the first time, an English Bible text was printed not in heavy ‘Gothic’ Black Letter in northern Europe by printers in Antwerp or London, but in Switzerland, by Conrad Badius, the son of the master-printer of Paris, in a clean, clear Roman, a French style also influenced by Italian printers trained in the more refined humanist manner. Its pages are uncluttered, the text ruled off with red lines, with wide margins at the sides, top and bottom, giving an attractive sense of space. The paper shows signs of having been carefully selected: . . . The neat notes, an average of two per page, are in the outer margins in roman, with occasional references in italic on inside margins. The thickest cluster of marginal notes accompanies the opening chapters of Matthew’s Gospel. Some pages, even of the Epistle to the Romans, have no notes at all. Also for the first time. . . the text is divided into numbered verses, following the Greek New Testament by Stephanus made in Geneva in 1551, . . . also for the first time in this 1557 New Testament—each verse starts a fresh line with its number, whether it is the beginning of a new sentence or not. This was again new, for the first time outside Latin or Greek. Again for the first time in an English Bible, words not in the Greek, thought to be necessary additions for English clarity, are in italic.” (Daniell, 275-276)

- Regarding the chapter divisions and verse numbers, Blackford Condit states the following in his 1882 work *The History of the English Bible*:
 - “It has been quite common of late years to rail against the verse division of the Holy Scriptures. Doubtless the sense of the text has sometimes been interrupted by this artificial system. It may possibly have given occasion also to the building of “doctrinal systems upon isolated texts.” And yet too often the practical benefits of easy reference,

and help to the memory, and adaptation for reading in public have been overlooked. The division of chapter and verse have no Biblical authority. Neither has that of the paragraph, neither has that of the comma, semicolon, or period in punctuation. [I believe that the English punctuation is necessary for accurately conveying the sense in English.] They are all of human invention, and something of the same arguments produced against the former maybe urge against the latter, the adoption, however, of paragraph and at the same time retaining the chapters and the numberings of chapter and verses, is doubtless the most desirable mode of printing the text of the Bible.” (Condit, 236-237)

- Even the title page was altogether different from the English Bibles that preceded it. Once again, Professor Daniell explains:
 - “The title-page is another contrast to that of the Great Bible. Instead of announcing its authority by declaring it to be the result of ‘the diligent study of diverse excellent learned men, experts in the . . . tongues,’ it states:

The New Testament of our Lord Jesus Christ. Conferred diligently with the Greek, and best approved translations. With arguments, as well before the chapters, as for every Book and Epistle, also diversities of readings, and most profitable annotations of all hard places: whereunto is added a copious Table.

In other words, critical study is invited. Further, the title-page does not announce absolute royal power, as in the Great Bible, in the later Bishops’ Bibles, and in the first KJV with massive constructions that block the entrance of the reader. It will be noticed that there are no names, unlike the central panel of the KJV, where King James and Robert Barker are prominent. Here, inviting the reader in, is a small, simple engraving in the middle of the page.” (Daniell, 276)

- The author(s) of the other prefatory matter found in the 1557 Geneva New Testament is difficult to discern. There are questions and debates regarding the degree to which John Calvin himself was involved in the Geneva New Testament. Once again, we turn to Dr. David Daniell for a detailed discussion of this matter.
 - “Not only is the whole work anonymous: how much Calvin associated himself with this New Testament, if he did at all, is also unclear. He apparently wrote an eight-page introductory Epistle declaring with good Epistle-to-the-Romans force ‘that Christ is the end of the Law’, an important endorsement of the new work. Yet this Epistle Dedicatory is a translation of a piece written twenty years before, and his second published work, Calvin’s Preface (in Latin) to the New Testament in Olivetan’s Bible of 1535, the first French Protestant Bible (Olivetan was Calvin’s cousin). The 1557 English translation of Calvin is well written, indeed lively, and has the distinction of introducing two words into the English language: one them, ‘goodhap,” meaning good fortune (OED cites this location as first use) did not survive; the other ‘bourgeois’ (which OED does not cite before 1654), certainly did. In the Epistles, Calvin traces the continuing providence of God from the Fall of man to his redemption through Christ Jesus. God has given two testimonies; of nature—‘everywhere, in all places, and in all things, he hath displayed in his ensings, yea, so clearly blazed his arms, that there was no such idiot which could

pretend ignorance in not knowing so sovereign a lord'; and the testimony of the Law and the Prophets established an awareness in men of the confirmation of the Old Covenant in the New through Christ." (Daniell, 279-280)

- Also included in the prefatory martial is an unsigned three-page address to the reader that Dr. Daniell believes was written by Whittingham.
 - "The unsigned three-page address, probably by Whittingham, 'To the Reader Mercy and peace through Christ our Savior,' echoes Tyndale's *Obedience of a Christian Man* in its awareness of opposition to the Bible, and of Jesus' Parable of the Sower at Matthew 13, Mark 4, and Luke 8. It continues:

For this cause we see that in the Church of Christ there are three kinds of men: some are malicious despisers of the word, and graces of God, who turn all things into poison, and a farther hardening of their hearts: others do not openly resist and condemn the Gospel, because they are stroken as it were in a trance with the majesty thereof, yet either they quarrel and cavil, or else deride and mock at whatsoever thing is done for the advancement of the same. The third sort are the simple lambs, which partly are already in the fold of Christ, and so hear willingly their Shepherd's voice, and partly wandering astray by ignorance, tarry the time till the Shepard find them and bring them unto his flock. To this kind of people, in this translation I chiefly had respect, as moved with zeal, counselled by the goodly, and drawn by occasion, both of the place where God had appointed us to dwell, and also of the store of heavenly learning and judgment, which so aboundeth in this city of Geneva, that justly it may be called the patron and mirror of true religion and godliness.

The writer goes on to explain briefly his care with the Greek and with English phrasing, the division of verses, and the italic insertions. He explains that he has signaled variant Greek readings, especially the ones which make significant changes:

Moreover, the diverse readings according to diverse Greek copies, which stand but in one word, may be known by this note “, and if the books do state alter the sentence then it is noted with this star * . . .

There are nine of these occurrences. Thus, the sentence making Acts 14:7 in Tyndale, 'And there they preached the gospel', has become in '1557', 'preaching the Gospel,' with now added to it from some Greek manuscripts, the words 'In so much that all the people were moved at the doctrine. So both Paul and Barnabas remained at Lystra.'" (Daniell, 280)

- This is the first time that an alternative Greek reading had been so clearly marked in the margin of an English Bible. This is no doubt indicative of the influence of Robert Estienne (Stephanus) who had taken refuge in Geneva in about 1550. In the year 1551, Stephanus published his first edition of the *Textus Receptus* in which he noted some 350 variant Greek readings. This edition included the Greek text of Erasmus along with the first critical apparatus, noting variant readings from about sixteen Greek manuscripts including the *Complutensian Polyglot*. (Daniell, 281)

- The author of this three-page address, possibly Whittingham, also addresses the completeness of the “Arguments” found at the beginning of each book and chapter throughout the 1557 Geneva New Testament. Specifically, the author of the address states:
 - “I have endeavoured so to profit all [help everyone] thereby, that both the learned and other might be holpen: for to my knowledge I have omitted nothing unexpounded, whereby he that is exercised in the Scriptures of God, might justly complain of hardness...” (Daniell, 281)
- Professor Daniell believes this statement applies to the “arguments, the summaries of the contents at the head of each book.” (Daniell, 281) Please recall that the Coverdale, and Matthew’s Bible did similar things. That said, the book and chapter summaries found in the Geneva New Testament were fresh i.e., they were not simply reprints of earlier such material. The “Arguments” found in the 1557 New Testament were reproduced in the 1560 Geneva Bible. (Daniell, 282)
- In the next Lesson we will look at the text of the 1557 Geneva New Testament.

Works Cited

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