

Sunday, December 6, 2020—Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*
 Lesson 128 The Complete Geneva Bible: Production & Influence

Introduction

- Last week in [Lesson 127](#) we wrapped up our discussion of the 1557 Geneva New Testament. All told we considered the following points about the Genevan New Testament.
 - Religious make-up of the Genevan exiles
 - Possible translator(s)
 - Many believe William Whittingham was primarily responsible.
 - Prefatory information and features
 - Title Page, Calvin’s Introduction, and Address to the Reader
 - Font, Verse Numbers, and Italic
 - Book & Chapter Headings (Arguments) and Marginal Notes
 - Text
 - Comparing Tyndale (1534) with the King James
- Today in Lesson 128 we want to begin looking at the 1560 Complete Geneva Bible. In doing so we will cover the following points.
 - Death of Mary I
 - The Geneva Academy: Assessing the Geneva Bible’s Scholarship
 - Production & Influence

Death of Mary I

- The publication of the 1557 Geneva New Testament preceded the death of Bloody Mary (Mary I) by about one year. Mary’s death in November 1558 would alter the fortunes of both the Geneva exiles and the English Bible. Dr. Donald L. Brake author of *A Visual History of the English Bible* states the following about these events:
 - “The long exile for the Protestant Reformers was nearly over. The death of Queen Mary on November 17, 1558, and the accession of Elizabeth I to the throne signaled a safe return of the exiles back to England. A few remained in Geneva to complete the translation already under way. While contributors to the 1560 Geneva were Anthony

Gilby, Christopher Goodman, William Cole, and Thomas Sampson, the guiding force in its production was William Whittingham.” (Brake, 148)

The Geneva Academy: Assessing the Geneva Bible’s Scholarship

- The impact of the Geneva Bible on both English Christians and the English Language cannot be overstated. Once it appeared in 1560, the Geneva Bible became the Bible of the common Englishman for the next century.
 - “This compact volume, in size ‘a moderate quarto,’ with its excellent text generally in roman type, the numbered verses set out in two columns, had in addition what amounted to an encyclopedia of Bible information. It was very popular and successful indeed. It was a masterpiece of Renaissance scholarship and printing, and Reformation Bible thoroughness. Having been the people’s Bible in the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, it was driven out by political and commercial interests from 1611, and forced out of the public view from 1660.” (Daniell, 291)
- As we saw in [Lesson 125](#) in our discussion of the 1557 Geneva New Testament, Geneva Switzerland had established itself as a haven for the production of Protestant vernacular Bibles.
 - “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)
- This was in no small measure due to the academic and scholastic climate and established by The Academy of Geneva under the leadership of Theodora Beza. Dr. David Daniell states the following about Beza’s Academy in *The Bible in English: Its History and Influence*:
 - “The Academy of Geneva under Beza was based on the model established at Strasbourg. The aim was the specialized one of educating men, in large numbers: a learned ministry was always the goal of the reformers, in whatever country. The academy began with 162 students, but five year later, in 1560, it had 1,500. The educational ideal was much broader than studying theology. . . In the last decades of the sixteenth century Geneva became for many distinguished Englishman a necessary place in which to study. Beza’s scholars were the ‘specialist experts’ in the ‘humane’ work of editing ancient texts. The first texts that Calvin edited were classical, and his love for, and knowledge of, the Greek and Roman writers, were profound. The weightiest work, however, was the making of vernacular Bibles from the best Hebrew and Greek texts.” (Daniell, 291-292)
- As usual, Dr. Daniell offers the most detailed information on the Academy of Geneva. That said, his comments are simply too long and would require more time to cover than I would like to devote to this point to consider them in detail. Therefore, we will look at the pared down comments of Dr. Brake on the scholarship of the men responsible for the Geneva Bible.

- “When we consider the credentials of the men involved in this translation, there is little room left to quibble about the quality of its production. Some of the greatest theologians in Christian history, including John Calvin (whose Introduction to the 1557 New Testament appeared in English), John Knox, and Theodore Beza (known for publishing several Greek New Testaments), took part in the Geneva Bible project. Modern scholars have no problem admitting that it was one of the finest translations ever made. Charles Butterworth acknowledges the influence of the Geneva Bible when he writes, “In the lineage of the King James Bible, this volume is by all means the most important single volume.” He adds, “It was for the fifty years (1570-1620) the household Bible of the English people.” It was the Bible of Shakespeare after about 1597 and the Bible of the Puritans coming to America. Even some of the translators of the 1611 King James Version continued to use it as late as the mid-1620s.

The sources for the translation of the Geneva Bible can be traced to Greek, Hebrew, Latin, French, and English forerunners. The Greek text of Stephanus (1551) and Beza’s Latin (1555) were used in the New Testament. The English text source was primarily the 1557 Geneva with reference to Tyndale’s edition published by Richard Jugge in 1552 and the Great Bible (1539-41). The French Bible by Pierre Olivetan (cousin of John Calvin), the Latin Bible of Pagninus, the Hebrew-Latin of Sebastian Munster, and the Latin of Leo Juda were also sources consulted.” (Brake, 149)

- Professor Daniell offers the following comment about the scholastic and literary context of Geneva during those years. In addition to Calvin and Beza, “The scholar-printers in Geneva—Robert Estienne [Stephanus], Conrad Badius, Jean Crespin, Jean Girard, Nicholas Brabier, Thomas Courteau, Jean Rivery—made twenty-two French Bibles. This was the context in which there appeared in April 1560 the first English Geneva Bible.” (Daniell, 293)

Production & Influence

- According to Dr. Brake, the volume was financed by John Bodley whose family is the namesake of the famous Bodleian Library in Oxford.
 - “Behind many great projects and deeds in history, a businessman can be found funding the dreams of scholars and entrepreneurs. The Geneva Bible was primarily financed by the English exiles’ benefactor, John Bodley, the father of Thomas Bodley, after whom the famous Bodleian Library in Oxford is named. Bodley was granted an exclusive seven-year printing license in England in 1560, which was renewed in 1565 for twelve more years. However, it was not printed in England. Alfred Pollard, recognized historical scholar, suggests that because the renewal calls for letting the archbishop of Canterbury and the bishop of London make conditions, such as the omission of the notes, Bodley did not want to print it under these conditions. It was printed in England for the first time under the license purchased from Queen Elizabeth by Christopher Barker in 1576.” (Brake, 150)
- Dr. Daniell concurs with Dr. Brake on the details regarding who financed the 1560 Geneva Bible.

- “The costs of the making were borne by the English congregation generally, and by one member, the wealthy merchant John Bodley, whose son Thomas would later found the Bodleian Library at Oxford.” (Daniell, 294)
- The circumstances that culminated in the publication of the 1560 Geneva Bible are as follows:
 - “The ‘simple lambs’ on the Continent and in England, so helped by Whittingham’s New Testament, surely needed a complete Bible on the same model. It was begun a few months after the 1557 New Testament was published, and continued, we are told, ‘for the space of two years and more day and night.’

So, the first Geneva Bible was made, printed by [Rowland] Hall [one of the English exiles] at his Geneva press in April 1560. . . . Though Queen Mary had died on 17 November 1558, and all over the Continent exiles (said to number 800 in total during Mary’s reign) returned to Protestant England under Good Queen Bess, some of the men who made the Geneva Bible remained there until it was completed in April 1560—probably Whittingham, Gilbey and Sampson, and probably Cole, Kethe and Baron. An early copy was presented to Queen Elizabeth.” (Daniell, 294)

- The impact and influence of the Geneva Bible was felt far and wide.
 - “This remarkable volume, ‘the first great achievement in Elizabeth’s reign,’ printed in London and in Edinburgh after 1575, and always in large quantities, became at once the bible of the English people. It remained so, through 140 editions—editions, not simple reprintings—before 1644. As will be seen in later chapters (20 and 22), the New Testament was revised by Laurence Tomson in 1576, and the new notes by ‘Junius’ replaced those to Revelation in 1599. In 1610, fifty years after the first making, all three versions were in full printing flood, 120 editions of all sizes having been made. It seemed that nothing would stop them. The translators working for King James after 1604, in aiming ‘to make a good one, better’ were referring to the Geneva Bible, and in the KJV long Preface, ‘The Translators to the Reader,’ they quoted Scripture almost always from there [i.e., the Geneva]. But politics ruled. Even the inception, in January 1604, of the 1611 KJV was a political act by reactionary bishops against Geneva Bibles. As will be seen, the large printing of the “King James’ version in 1611, in spite of its immediate unpopularity, was organized in order to push out the Geneva Bibles. Ugly and inaccurate quarto editions of the Geneva Bible, all falsely dated 1599, were printed in Amsterdam, and possibly elsewhere in the Low Countries, up to 1640, and smuggled into England and Scotland against Establishment wishes. The last full text and notes in England were printed in 1644. Between 1642 and 1715, eight editions of the KJV were published with Geneva notes, seven of them in folio, and two of them in one year (1679), statistics which tell their own story...

The influence of the Geneva Bible is incalculable. Before the London printings, it was freely available in England in large enough numbers to stir Archbishop Parker into initiating his rival Bishops Bible in 1568. For over fifty years it was sometimes second to that in Anglican pulpits and on Anglican lecterns. Even so, a study of more than fifty sermons by bishops between 1611 and 1630, including Andrewes, the chief of the KJV

revisers, and Laud, the enemy of all things evangelical, shows that in twenty-seven sermons the preacher took his text from the Geneva version, and only in five from the Bishops'. Of the remaining twenty-odd, only about half quote from KJV, and half seem to have made their own version.

The Geneva Bible was, however, the Bible of the English and the Scots at home, and in local reading groups and 'prophesyings.' In Scotland, the Edinburgh 'Bassandyne Bible' of 1579, the first Bible printed in Scotland, a straight reprint of the first Geneva Bible in folio, made in 1561, was ordered to be in each parish kirk. It was dedicated to 'Prince James' — so much for his reported claim at the Hampton Court Conference in 1604 that he had only recently been shown a copy (see below, p. 433).

[A Scottish] Act of Parliament, passed soon after the publication of the Bible, made it mandatory that every householder worth 300 marks of yearly rent and every yeoman and burgher worth £500 in stock should have a Bible and a Psalm book, in the vulgar tongue, in their homes, under a penalty of ten pounds; and there is evidence that this act was enforced.

Early in the seventeenth century [1600s] the Geneva Bible was taken back to Europe, to Amsterdam and the other Netherlands Separatist centres, and from there to America, where, as successive waves of colonists landed, it flourished mightily. It was the Bible of the Elizabethan and Jacobean poets and prose writers, including Shakespeare. If Othello does say that the exemplar who 'threw the great pearl away' was 'the base Judean' as the Folio text has it, and not 'the base Indian', then he took the phrase, with many more, from the Geneva Bible." (Daniell, 294-295)

- J.R. Dore author of *Old Bibles: An Account of the Early Versions of the English Bible* states the following about the printed history of the Geneva Bible:
 - "The last quarto printed in England is dated 1615, and the last folio 1616. After this time a great many editions were printed in Amsterdam by Joost Broerss and other Dutch printers; the last folio bears the imprint of Thomas Stafford, and the date 1644.

It professes to be copied from the Bible printed by Andrew Hart, Edinburgh, in 1610.

. . . 150,000 copies were imported from Holland after this version had ceased to be printed in England. On account of the numerous errors in these foreign printed editions, Archbishop Laud prohibited their importation, and the Puritans brought this against him as a crime at the trial which terminated in his martyrdom." (Dore, 203-204)

- A.S. Herbert author of *Historical Catalogue of Printed Editions of The English Bible 1525-1961* offers some interesting statistics on the 1560 Geneva Bible.
 - "Between 1560 and 1644 at least one hundred and forty editions appeared of the Geneva Bible or Testament—one hundred and thirty-four of which are represented in the BH Library. Examination of the King James' Bible of 1611 shows that its translators in

correcting the Bishops' Bible were influenced more by the Geneva than by any other English version." (Herbert, 61-62)

- The Geneva Bible is often referred to as the "Breeches Bible" for its reading in Genesis 3:7, "They sewed fig tree leaves together, and made themselves breeches." As it turns out, this famous oddity is not unique to the Geneva Bible, "The Wycliffe New Testament (1382) and Caxton's edition of Jacabus de Voragines' Golden Legend (1483) also used the term "breeches." (Brake, 154-155)
- "By 1642 the King James Version was overtaking the Geneva in popularity. This led Joost Broerss in Amsterdam to print the KJV with the Geneva notes in the margins." (Brake, 155)

Works Cited

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