

Sunday, February 14, 2021— Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*
Lesson 136 The Complete Geneva Bible: The Latter History

Introduction

- Today, will be our ninth and final Lesson on the 1560 Geneva Bible. Over the preceding eight Lessons we have considered the following aspects this important Bible.
 - Production & Influence ([Lesson 128](#))
 - 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.
 - The Old Testament (Lessons [129](#), [130](#), & [131](#))
 - So much time was spent on the Old Testament because the Geneva Bible marks the first time that the entire Old Testament had been translated out of Hebrew into English. Recall that William Tyndale had translated portions of the preserved Hebrew text into English before his martyrdom but was unable to complete the entire translation. Later translators, such as Coverdale, were not proficient in Hebrew and therefore relied on translations into other languages such as Latin and German.
 - The New Testament ([Lesson 132](#))
 - The New Testament text of the 1560 Geneva Bible was a slightly revised presentation of the text found in the 1557 Geneva New Testament.
 - Contents & Features (Lessons [133](#) & [134](#))
 - Title Page
 - Table of Contents
 - Epistle Dedicatory to Queen Elizabeth
 - Address to the Reader
 - The Arguments & Chapter Summaries
 - Illustrations & Maps
 - Tables & Concordances

- Marginal Notes ([Lesson 135](#))
 - Here we looked at three categories of marginal notes: 1) Anti-Papal, 2) Calvinistic, and 3) Anti-Monarchical. We further noted that it was this third category of notes that was the particular ire of King James and motivated him to authorize a New Translation in 1604.
- Today, we want to conclude our study of the Geneva Bible by considering the details of its later history.

Later History of the Geneva Bible

- In Lesson 128 we presented a mountain of statistical data in terms of editions and printings bearing witness to the immense popularity of the Geneva Bible. Blackford Condit summarizes the popularity of the Geneva Bible in his 1882 publication, *The History of the English Bible*:
 - “The Genevan Bible was a decided advance upon all former translations. The accuracy of its scholarship and the plainness of Saxon English commended it both to the learned and unlearned. It became more popular than any previous version. Though not printed in England for several years after it was first issued, yet it very soon became the Bible of the household; and for more than a century and a half it maintained its place as the Bible of the people. Born of persecution and in exile, it was regarded as the peculiar child of Protestantism. A lively bond of sympathy existed between the brethren at home and those at Geneva during the Marian persecution; so that whether at home or abroad, they all suffered in a common cause. This fruit, therefore, of the labors of the brethren abroad was the more highly prized.” (Condit, 245)
- Condit suggests that Queen Elizabeth’s policies regarding public preaching served to reinforce the popularity of the Geneva Bible on account of its extensive marginal notes and study helps.
 - “And as Queen Elizabeth’s policy developed, she became more and more opposed to the preaching of the Gospel, consequently the people were dependent for instruction upon the annotations of the Holy Scriptures. Upon the accession of Queen Elizabeth high expectations were entered by Protestants of royal favor, and on this account undue license was taken by them; so that partly on this account, and partly on account of her aversion to the plain Gospel, she required Archbishop Grindal to abridge the number of preachers, and to put down the religious exercise of prophesying, ‘urging, that it was good for the church to have few preachers, that three or four might suffice for a country, and that the reading of Homilies to the people was sufficient’.” (Condit, 247)
- While Queen Elizabeth may have been averse to public preaching, she did not move to officially suppress the English scriptures. That said, it would be fifteen years before the popular Geneva

Bible would be published on English shores. Condit suggests that this points toward the fact that some within the Anglican Church did not relish the popularity of the Geneva Bible.

- “The many excellencies of the Genevan Bible gave it a wide circulation. Though not printed in England till 1575, yet like the New Testament of Tyndale it was printed abroad and scattered broadcast throughout England and Scotland. So universal was this Bible accepted, that it was read from the pulpit, quoted in sermons, cited by authors, and adopted in the family. The bishops and those who stood at the head of the University gave their preference to this version, though many of them from their ecclesiastical connections, might justly be supposed to have been prejudiced against it. This marked superiority of the Genevan to the Bishops, as well as to the Great Bible, gave it a place independent of its Free Church origin. But while it enjoyed this preeminence, the fact that it was not printed in England until fifteen years after its publication at Geneva, argues that it could not have been altogether acceptable to those in high places. It is true that Queen Elizabeth issued a patent to John Bodleigh ‘for the term of seven years. . . to imprint. . . The English Bible . . . finished in the present year of our Lord God, a thousand, five hundred and three score.’ Notwithstanding this, the Geneva Bible was not printed in England previous to the death of Archbishop Parker. To this fact joins another quite as significant, which is, that it was often printed after his death, and there seems abundant ground for the supposition that the archbishop used his influence against it. Henceforth, however, the Genevan Bible was more frequently printed than any other version. It became popular, particularly in Scotland. It was first printed in Scotland, which was in 1576-1579. After the issuance of the Bishop’s Bible in 1568, a version intended by the Episcopal authorities to supersede the Genevan Bible, the latter was by no means set aside. An estimate made by Mr. Anderson shows, that of the one hundred and thirty editions of the Bible and Testaments published from 1560 to 1603, ninety were of the Geneva version. And if the comparison be limited to Bibles alone, then of the eighty-five editions issued, sixty were of the Genevan version. These facts show that there was freedom in the reign of Elizabeth for printing and circulating the Scriptures; and especially, that the people were partial to the Genevan version.” (Condit, 251-252)
- The influence on the Geneva Bible upon English culture cannot be overstated.
 - “The Genevan Bible was the book of the household when such men as Bacon, Raleigh, Herbert, Hooker, Spenser, Sidney, and Shakespeare were growing into manhood. Through its general use this Bible became not only the standard of the language, but a powerful influence in withstanding the public taste, furnishing, as it did, a noble example in word and phrase of pure English.” (Condit, 256)
- After its publication in 1560, the Geneva Bible went through at least two revisions in 1576 and again in 1599. The 1576 revision was undertaken by Lawrence Tomson. Condit states the following regarding Tomson’s work:

- “On account of the high esteem in which this translation was held, it was often substituted in the Genevan Bible for the New Testament version of 1560. Tomson was a noted linguist, commanding as he did a knowledge of twelve languages.” (Condit, 259-261)
- A.S. Herbert’s *Historical Catalogue of Printed Editions of The English Bible 1525-1961* contains an entry for Tomson’s 1576 revision of the Geneva Bible which reads in part:
 - “The first edition of Tomson’s revision of the Geneva New Testament.

The alterations are mainly due to a comparison with Beza’s Latin version of 1565. Tomson’s emphatic rendering of the Greek article, e.g., John i:1: In the beginning was that Word, and that Word was with God, and that Word was God, exaggerates a tendency which Beza also displays. The notes are generally based on Beza’s.

... This became the final and popular form of the Geneva Testament.” (Herbert, 83)
- Professor Daniell informs his readers that while Tomson made small changes to the text he completely rewrote and replaced the marginal notes of the original 1560 Geneva Bible.
 - “. . . Tomson’s revision of the Geneva English New Testament, based on Beza’s important Latin edition of 1565, which also incorporated his [Beza’s] latest edition of the Greek New Testament. The notes to the English 1557 and 1560 Geneva versions were completely replaced, and there are many small changes to the text in the light of Beza’s Latin, and Greek, readings. Tomson’s new edition was published in 1576, and then incorporated into the standard Geneva Bible from 1587, so that from that date on, all Geneva Bibles are either ‘Geneva’ or, for about half the editions, ‘Geneva-Tomson’.” (Daniell, 352)
- So, from this point forward there were two different Geneva Bibles - the original 1560 edition and the Geneva-Tomson editions. Noting this difference is crucial to understanding the printed history of the Geneva Bible. There are many more marginal notes in the Geneva-Tomson editions along with slight alterations to the Biblical text itself. For more information on Laurence Tomson, as well as his revision to the Geneva Bible, interested parties are encouraged to read “Chapter 20 Laurence Tomson and the Revision of The Geneva New Testament, 1576” in Dr. David Daniell’s book *The Bible in English: Its History and Influence*.
- Before commenting on the 1599 edition of the Geneva Bible we should note the 1579 Scottish printing of the Genevan text. Regarding this Scottish printing, Mombert states the following:
 - “The first Bible printed in Scotland in 1579. . . was an exact reprint of the Genevan edition of 1561, with all the notes and facsimilies of the cuts and maps . . .” (Mombert, 256)

- Herbert states the following regarding the Scottish edition in his *Historical Catalogue*:
 - “By order of the General Assembly every parish in Scotland subscribed to the purchase price 4£ 13s before the work was undertaken. An Act of the Scottish Parliament passed in 1579 ordered every householder with 300 merks of yearly rent, and every yeomen or burgess worth 500£ stock, to have a Bible and Psalms Book, in the vulgar language in his house, under the penalty of ten pounds.” (Herbert, 89)
- The Scottish edition of 1579 seems to have been undertaken to aid in satisfying this Act of the Scottish Parliament which dates from the same year.
- Herbert’s *Historical Catalogue* also contains an entry for the 1599 revision of Junius. The entry reads in part:

- “Geneva version; with Tomson’s NT, but with Junius’ Revelation.

This is in most respects a reprint of the previous quarto Geneva Bibles in roman type. But the title-pages are new, and Junius’ Revelation here displaces Tomson’s version of that book. Junius’ Revelation appears in most of the folios and in most of the subsequent roman letter quarto Bibles.

. . . The section containing the Apocrypha, though included in the list of books, was apparently omitted from all except a few copies. . .

There are many editions bearing this date [1599], which while agreeing closely are yet distinct. No doubt a certain number of copies were originally issued in a mixed state. The nominal date, 1599, is probably untrue in almost every case; they were apparently published at different times in Amsterdam and Dort and adopted by Barker.

The phenomena of the various editions described under the year 1599, and the very similar edition of 1633, constitute one of the most curious problems in the bibliography of the English Bible.” (Herbert, 115)

- Regarding the 1599 revision, Professor Daniell states the following:
 - “Between 1560 and 1611 there were sixty-four separate editions of the 1560 Geneva Bible or New Testament. Between 1576 and 1611 there were fifty-six editions of Geneva Bibles or New Testaments only, all with Tomson’s revisions. Editions of the Geneva-Tomson Bibles from 1599 stay faithful to Tomson, except that many have completely new, and very full, notes on Revelation, reprinting the book by ‘Junius’. Where, in Tomson’s revision, the annotation to the short Epistle of James is fuller than to the whole of Revelation, now Junius’s notes to Revelation break all records, squeezing the text into a corner, and being twice as full as for a page, for example, of Romans.” (Daniell, 369)

- Therefore we must note that three distinct editions of the Geneva Bible were in print at the dawn of the 17th century: 1) Geneva (1560), 2) Geneva-Tomson (1576), and 3) Geneva-Tomson-Junius. For more information on the third edition, interested parties are encouraged to read “Chapter 22 Geneva-Tomson-Junius’, 1599” in *The Bible in English: Its History and Influence* by Dr. David Daniell.

The Geneva & King James Bibles

- In 1610 the Geneva Bible was fifty years old. The following year, in 1611 the Authorized Version would appear for the first time. Professor David Daniell sums up the situation with the Geneva Bible on the eve of the release of the King James.
 - “In 1610, when it was fifty years old, it was, as remarked above, in three versions, apparently unstoppable. It had already had 120 different editions—editions, not reprintings. It went through 140 editions all told, in under a century... It was the Bible of poets, politicians, and preachers (even anti-‘puritan’ preachers like Laud) as following chapters will show.” (Daniell, 311)
- Alister McGrath, author of *In The Beginning: The Story of the King James Bible and How it Changed a Nation, a Language, and a Culture* offers perhaps the most succinct and informative treatment of the history of the Geneva Bible after the publication of the Authorized Version in 1611. According to Professor McGrath, the King James did not immediately supplant the Geneva as the Bible among Englishmen.
 - “. . . The irrefutable evidence is that, far from rushing out to buy or make use of the new translation, people preferred to use an English translation from fifty years earlier—the Geneva Bible.

The simple truth is that the “new Bible” [King James] was initially regarded with polite disinterest. Nobody at the time really liked the new translation very much. Even some of those who were prominently involved in the translation of the King James Bible seemed hesitant to use it, preferring to cite from the Geneva Bible instead—hardly a commendation of their work. The King James Bible might be the Bible of the religious and political establishment; it had a long way to go before it became the Bible of the English people.” (McGrath, 277-278)

- Even though after 1616, the printing of the Geneva Bible on English shores ceased due to political pressure, the Geneva Bible remained the number one selling Bible in England as copies were easily imported from the European mainland. (McGrath, 280) English politics related to the English Civil War, that we will not delve into at this time, greatly impacted the fortunes of the English Bible. Suffice it to say now (We will study this history in more detail in a future Lesson.), between 1630 and Restoration of the Monarchy in 1660, the Bible of choice was impacted by who was ruling the nation. When Cromwell and Puritans were in charge, the Geneva Bible was the Bible of choice. When Charles II restored the monarchy in 1660 after a

period of Civil War, the Authorized Version finally supplanted the Geneva as the Bible of choice among Englishmen. That said, the enduring impact of the Geneva can be seen in the following statement from the pen of Alister McGrath:

- “The popularity of the Geneva Bible rested not so much on the translation itself, as on the explanatory material appended to the translation. So why, some reasoned should not the Geneva translation be replaced with the King James Bible, while retaining the Genevan notes? Between 1642 and 1715, at least nine editions—eight of which originated from Amsterdam—are known of the King James Bible with the Geneva notes.” (McGrath, 284)
- In our next Lesson we will begin a consideration of the Bishops Bible from 1568.

Works Cited

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