

Sunday, March 14, 2021— Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*  
Lesson 140 The Bishops' Bible: The Old Testament

### **Introduction**

- Last week in Lesson 139 we looked at the process used by Archbishop Parker to produce the Bishops' Bible in 1568.
- Today, in Lesson 140 we want to consider the Old Testament text found in the Bishops' Bible.

### **The Bishops' Old Testament**

- Last week in Lesson 139 we observed that Archbishop Parker's appropriately titled Bishops' Bible was a revision of Cranmer's 1540 edition of the Great Bible. Blackford Condit stated the following regarding the matter in his 1882 publication *The History of the English Bible*:
  - "Cranmer's Bible, 1540, was chosen as the basis of the revision. While it was the accepted version of the English Church, yet it was so inferior to the Genevan Bible that it was unacceptable to many who were prominent in the episcopal party. Complaints were made even before the issue of the Genevan Bible against Cranmer's version, although at the same time it was admitted that as a version it was "nearer the Hebrew than the translation usually ascribed to Jerome." Parker's first rule for the guidance of the revisers was: "To follow the common English translation used in the churches." (Condit, 277)
- Multiple sources report that the Bishops' Old Testament exhibits a strong propensity toward following this rule when compared to the New Testament. For example, Condit states, "this rule was specially carried out in revising the Old Testament." (Condit, 278)
- Gerald Hammond states the following regarding the matter in his *The Making of the English Bible*:
  - "... the most important instruction was the first, to the effect that the translators should 'follow the common English translation used in the churches'—in other words, the Great Bible—and not to recede from it but where it varieth manifestly from the Hebrew or Greek original'. 'Manifestly' is obviously the let-out clause here, and most were happy to take it. It is doubtful, anyway, if any of Parker's team of bishops had the ability to make such a judgment, and for the most part they happily reprinted the Great Bible text with, now and then, a revision introduced from the Geneva Bible." (Hammond, 139-140)
- Hammond goes on to illustrate this point using Jeremiah 6 as an example.
  - "Take, as an example, the thirty verses of Jeremiah 6, where there are only seven differences between the text of the Great Bible and the Bishops' Bible, and this despite

the fact that the Geneva Bible had altered every other phrase. The changes the Bishops' Bible makes are these:

Verse #	Great	Bishops
3	everyone shall feed them that are under his hand	every one shall feed in his place
12	when I stretch out mine hand	for I will stretch out mine hand
20	your burnt offerings	your whole burnt offerings
21	I will make this people fall	I will lay stumbling blocks among this people
21	and therefore shall fall from among them	and there shall fall at them
24	The cry of them have we heard	The fame of them have we heard

Of the changes, those from verses 3 and 12, and the first in verse 21, are taken directly from the Geneva Bible, and in verse 24, 'fame' comes from Geneva's 'We have heard their fame'. So, only 'whole' in verse 20, and 'there' and 'at' in verse 21 are original Bishops' Bible revisions." (Hammond, 140)

- Hammond goes on to excoriate Parker's Bishops in terms of their work on the Old Testament. In a lengthy section, Hammond uses their work in the Psalms as a case in point.
  - "Sometimes the 'translator' copied as much, or more, from the Geneva Bible as from the Great Bible; but in only a few books of the Old Testament is there any recognizably original work. This laziness might not seem such a bad thing, however, if we look at a part of the Bible where one of Parker's team had laboured to produce an original translation—better a sleeping bishop than an active one. The book in question is the Psalms, where the translator achieved some bizarre renderings, many of them apparently inspired by his peculiar attitudes towards the original and towards English style. In the opening verse of Psalm 2 the Hebrew splits into two short parallelistic lines:

Why they-rage nations  
and-the-people they-imagine-vanity

Coverdale translated it like this in the Great Bible—not unattractive, but characteristically windy:

Why do the heathen grudge together? and why do the people imagine a vain thing?

Geneva tightened this up, making its rendering close to the 3:3 stress balance of the Hebrew:

Why do the heathen rage, and the people murmur in vain?

The Bishops' Bible translator works on the principle of the more words the better, adding even to Coverdale's rendering:

Why do the heathen so furiously rage together? and why do the people imagine a vain thing.

More striking is his treatment of Psalm 23. In the Great Bible rendering the simplicity of the original had tended to get lost, especially in the second verse:

The Lord is my shepherd, therefore can I lack nothing. He shall feed me in a green pasture, and lead me forth beside the waters of comfort.

The Geneva Bible had shortened this almost to the version made famous by the Authorized Version's rendering:

The Lord *is* my shepherd, I shall not want.  
He maketh me to rest in green pasture, *and* leadeth me by the still waters.

But when we turn to the Bishops' Bible we find a profusion of unnecessary words:

God is my shepherd, therefore I can lack nothing: He will cause me to repose myself in pasture full of grass, and he will lead me unto calm waters.

Words and more words is the great belief of this translator, borne, no doubt, out of his belief in what constitutes good English style. In Psalm 10:8 he inherited these two renderings, an unusually compact one from the Great Bible, slightly amplified in the Geneva Bible:

*Great:* He sitteth lurking in the streets, and privily doth he murder the innocent: his eyes are set against the poor."

*Geneva:* He lieth in wait in the villages: in the secret places doth he murder the innocent: his eyes are bent against the poor.

The Bishops' Bible translator happily continued the process of padding it out:

He sitteth lurking in thievish corners of the streets, and privily in lurking dens he doth murder the innocent: he eyeth diligently him that is weak.

This is continued in the next verse, where he again inherited reasonably controlled renderings:

*Great:* For he lieth in wait secretly—even as a lion lurketh he in his den—that he may ravish the poor. He doth ravish the poor, when he getteth him into his net.

*Geneva:* He lieth in wait secretly, *even* as a lion in his den. He lieth in wait to spoil the poor: he doth spoil the poor when he draweth him into his net.

*Bishops':* He lieth in wait lurking as a lion in his den. He lieth in wait lurking, that he may violently carry away the afflicted: he doth carry away violently the afflicted, in haling him into his net. (Hammond, 140-142)

- Hammond also cites how the Bishops' translators handled the names of God in the Old Testament as a further example of the oddities found in this Bishops' Bible.
  - “A greater source for the strangeness of this translator's renderings, and one which throws light upon the complete lack of any editorial policy for the Bishops' Bible, was his peculiar reliance upon his own notions of what the Hebrew meant, rather than the consensus of earlier translators. This is most apparent in his translation of the names of God. Tradition had long held that *Yahweh* should be translated as 'Lord' (Tyndale's 'Jehovah' was only for the few contexts where God was naming himself), and *elōhim* as 'God'—'Dominus' and 'Deus' in the Latin versions. The Bishops' Bible translator was probably the only one who ever disagreed with this, and he reverses these terms throughout the Psalms—although the rest of the Bible kept the traditional forms. Hence we get 'God is my shepherd' at the opening of Psalm 23. In the opening of Psalm 82, however, he meets a complication which defeats him. Here the Hebrew uses *elōhim* twice, as well as a third name of God, 'ēl. Both of these names have alternative translations to 'God': *elōhim* is plural in form, and can therefore be taken to mean 'gods'; and there is also a tradition which makes it mean, in some places, 'judges'—as in Exodus 21:6, where Tyndale had added the simple explanatory note, 'Gods are the judges which are in God's stead'. 'ēl can also mean 'mighty one'. The Hebrew of this verse reads: '*Elōhim* stands in-the-assembly-of-'ēl in-the-midst-of *elōhim* he-judges.'

[cites two Latin examples] . . . And the three English translations give three further possibilities:

*Coverdale:* God standeth in the congregation of the gods, and is a judge among the judges.

*Great:* God standeth in the congregation of princes: he is a judge among gods.

*Geneva:* God standeth in the assembly of gods: he judgeth among gods.

In the face of this diversity the Bishops' Bible translator was justified in making his own interpretation, but it stands as the most curious of all in its insistence that all three words should be taken to mean the same thing:

God standeth in the congregation of God: he judgeth in the midst of God.

Most ironic is that this is the one place in the Psalms where the traditional ascriptions of ‘God’ to *elōhim* is followed, but then ‘Lord’ would have read even stranger in this context.” (Hammond, 142-143)

- After his analysis of the Bishops’ text, particularly in the book of Psalms, as cited above, Hammond pulls no punches in clearly stating his feelings regarding the Bishops’ Bible:
  - “For the most part the Bishops’ Bible is either a lazy and ill-informed collation of what had gone before, or, in its original parts, the work of third-rate scholars and second-rate writers. In no way could it hold comparison with the Geneva Bible. . .” (Hammond, 143)
- All of the sources I consulted in preparation for this Lesson were in general agreement with the following statement from the pen of J.I. Mombert in *English Versions of the Bible*, “In the Old Testament the Great Bible was not only the basis of the Bishops’, but to a considerable extent remained unchanged.” (Mombert, 276)
- Blackford Condit concurs with Mombert and offers the following extract from Genesis 45 as evidence on pages 278 and 279 of his book *The History of the English Bible*.

- Gen. XLV. 1. Joseph could no longer refrayne before all thē that stode by him, wherfore he cryed, *Cause euery man to auoyde.* Cranmer's Bible reads: *brynge furth all the men frō me.*
2. And he wept aloude, *and* the Egyptians, and the house of Pharao hearde. Cranmer's Bible reads: *so that the Egyptians, and the house of Pharao heard it.*
4. And Joseph sayde vnto his brethren, Come neare to me, *I praye you.* These words are not in Cranmer's Bible, 1540.
5. Now therefore be not greeued *herewith*, . . . for God dyd sende me before you, *to preserue life.* Cranmer's Bible has: *therewith*, . . . . and *to saue life.*
7. Wherfore God sent me before you, *to preserue you a posteritie* in the earthe. Cranmer's Bible reads: *to make provision that ye might continue* in y<sup>e</sup> earth.
8. So nowe it was not *ye* that sente me hyther, but God, which hath made me a father *to* Pharao, and Lord of all his house. Cranmer's Bible has: *you*, and *unto.*
10. And thou shalte dwell in the lande of Gosen, "and *be a neyghboure vnto me.*" Cranmer's Bible has: and *be by me.*
11. And there will I *provide thee sustenance.* Cranmer's Bible has: And there wyll I *make provision for thee.*
13. Therefore tell my father of all my *glory* in Egypt. Cranmer's Bible has: *honoure.*
16. And the *fame (therof) was heard in* Pharao's house. Cranmer's Bible reads: And the *tydynge*s came vnto Pharao's house.
17. . . . This doe yee, lade youre beastes, and *goe (and) retourne* vnto the land of Chanaan. Cranmer's Bible reads: *get you hence* vnto the land of Canaan.
18. . . . and ye shall eate the fat of the lande. Cranmer has: *of* the fat of the lande.
19. . . . *Thus* do yee. Cranmer has: *this* do yee.
20. Also "regard not your stuffe, for the good of the land of Egypt is yours. Cranmer reads: *all* the land of Egypt is yours.
23. . . . laden with corne, *and* bread, and meate. Cranmer has: corne, bread and meate.
24. So sente he his brethren away, *and they departed*; and he sayde vnto them, See that ye fall *to no strife* on the way. Cranmer's Bible reads: So sente he his brethren away, *to departe*; . . . fall *not out by* the way.

- Rounding out our look at the Bishops' Old Testament, Mombert presents the finding of Professors Westcott and Eadie. The following screen shots are taken from pages 276 and 277 of Mombert's book.

In the Old Testament the Great Bible was not only the basis of the Bishops', but to a considerable extent remained unchanged. Professor Westcott, who has carefully examined Isaiah liii., reaches the result that of twenty-one corrections, five are due to the Genevan version, five agree with Pagninus, three with Leo Judæ, three with Castalio and one with Münster; one is simply linguistic, and three are apparently original. These last are:

Great Bible, v. 3: “. . . . yea he was despised and therefore we regarded him not,” *omitted* in the Bishops'. 4: “. . . . taken on him our infirmities . . . .” “infirmity,” Bishops'. “. . . . cast down of God *and punished,*” *omitted* in the Bishops'.

Professor Eadie notices twelve changes in the first twenty verses of Genesis xxxvii., and they contain only two places, which possibly may be called original in a restricted sense; they are:

Great Bible, v. 19: “this dreamer”; Bishops': “this *notable* dreamer”; marginal note: Hebrew, maister of dreams. 20: “a wicked beast”; Bishops': “some naughtie beaste.” (*Bestia mala*, Münster; *böses Thier*, Luther.)

Among the seven changes in Ezekiel xxxvii., I cannot find a single original one. Among twenty-five changes, found in Psalm xix., Professor Westcott notices five original ones, viz.:

Great Bible, v. 2: “One day telleth another, and one night certifieth another”; Bishops': “A day occasioneth talk thereof unto a day, and a night teacheth knowledge unto a night.” (Compare Genevan, Pagninus,

and Münster, which have certainly suggested the latter clause.) 5: “. . . *he* heaven . . . .”; Bishops’ *omitted*. 8: “and righteous altogether”; Bishops’: “and . . . . altogether: they be just in all points.” (*justificata pariter*, Pagninus, Münster, Judæ.) 12: “. . . . sins”; Bishops’: put in brackets. 13: “O Lord”; Bishops’: “O Lord, God.”

Professor Moulton, *History of the English Bible*, has examined Numbers xxiv. 15–24, and finds “eyes” for “eye” in v. 15, “falleth and his eyes are opened” for “falleth with open eyes” in v. 16, and “Italy” for “Chittim” in v. 24. In 2 Samuel xxiii. 1–7, he notices eighteen variations from the Great Bible, of which fifteen are taken from the Genevan version. In Job xix. 25, 26, he notices a remarkable change. It reads in the Great Bible: “For I am sure that my Redeemer liveth, and that I shall rise out of the earth in the latter day; that I shall be clothed again with this skin, and see God in my flesh.” The Bishops’ of 1568 reads: “For I am sure that my Redeemer liveth and that *he shall raise up at the latter day them that lie in the dust*; and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet shall I see God in my flesh.” The words in italics are a new rendering; verse 26 is a correction from the Genevan Bible.\*

The conclusion to be drawn from these and other examples is one that does not redound to the praise of those revisers who had in hand the Old Testament and the Apocrypha. Most of the changes introduced are derived from other versions, and they are not by any means uniformly improvements, with this further aggravation, that many unquestionable improvements in those very versions were neglected by them, while their original renderings are not, as a rule, very meritorious. Westcott says of these last: “As a general rule they appear to be arbitrary and at variance with the exact sense of the Hebrew text.”

### Conclusion

- The textual evidence suggests that the Old Testament text as presented in the Bishops’ Bible was inferior to that of the Geneva Bible. This helps explain why many scholars such as Gerald Hammond viewed the Geneva as the base text for the King James Bible and not the Bishops’. While it is not accurate to say that the King James translators did not follow Rule 1, one must acknowledge that in those places where the Bishops’ text was altered in making the King James, the Geneva Bible was often followed, particularly in the Old Testament.
- Next week in Lesson 141 we will look at the Bishops’ New Testament.

### Works Cited

Condit, Blackford. *The History of the English Bible: Extending from Earliest Saxon Translations to the Present Anglo-American Revision*. New York & Chicago: A.S. Barnes & Company, 1882.

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