

Sunday, April 18, 2021— Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*
 Lesson 144 The Bishops' Bible: Latter History & The Impact of Miles Coverdale

Introduction

- Last week in Lesson 143 we conducted our seventh study related to the Bishops' Bible. Thus far we have considered the following regarding this important edition.
 - Understanding the King James Connection ([Lesson 137](#))
 - Understanding the Elizabethan Context ([Lesson 138](#))
 - Understanding the Scope & Process of the Project ([Lesson 139](#))
 - The Old Testament ([Lesson 140](#))
 - The New Testament ([Lesson 141](#))
 - Contents and Features ([Lesson 142](#))
 - Linguistic Features ([Lesson 143](#))
- This morning we conclude our study of the Bishops' Bible by reviewing its latter history and discussing the impact of Miles Coverdale.
- As things stand right now, there is one more pre-1611 English Bible that requires our attention before we begin discussing the Authorized Version next Fall, the Rheims New Testament of 1582.
- Before, commencing our discussion of the Rheims New Testament, prudence dictates that I say a few words about the death of Miles Coverdale.

Latter History: Post-Parker Fortunes of the Bishops' Bible

- Professor David Daniell author of *The Bible In English: Its History and Influence* reports the following printing statistics for the Bishops' Bible.
 - “The Bishops' Bible was always a lavish production, as a piece of book making, even in smaller size. There were fourteen editions up to Parker's death in 1575, and a further twenty-two to 1611.” (Daniell, 346)
- Laurence M. Vance author of *The Making of the King James Bible New Testament* (2015) highlights the fact that the publication figures offered by Dr. Daniell in the above quote are not set in stone. On pages 25 through 27, Vance identified at least 24 different authors who wrote

about the history of the English Bible all of whom provide different publication statistics for the Bishops' Bible. Meanwhile, Vance counts eighteen different editions of the Bishops' Bible, the last of which was the folio published in 1602, according to his reckoning. (Vance, 28-40)

- “There were eighteen editions of the Bishops' Bible, and they were published from 1568 to 1602. Eleven were folios and seven were quartos, although one of the quartos is described by some as an octavo. When it comes to the editions of the Bishops' Bible New Testament, it is difficult to determine just how many editions there were and when they were published.” (Vance, 25)
- Meanwhile, A.S. Herbert's *Historical Catalogue of Printed Editions of The English Bible 1526-1961* contains entries for printings for a complete Bishops' Bible in 1606 along with New Testaments in 1613, 1614, and 1617, beyond which I can find no entries. All things considered, it seems that these post-1602 printings were reprints of earlier editions, not entirely new editions.
- Recall from [Lesson 139](#) that Archbishop Parker never succeeded in securing an exclusive license or authorization from Queen Elizabeth for the Bishops' Bible. When the project was completed, Archbishop Parker presented a copy of the Bishops' Bible to Queen Elizabeth along with dated letters to the Queen and her secretary of state William Cecil. Included within the material dated October 5, 1568 that Parker sent to Cecil was a letter to Queen Elizabeth from the Archbishop. J.I. Mombert reproduced the letter as follows on page 270 of his 1883 book *English Versions of the Bible*.

Among divers observations which have been regarded in this recognition, one was, not to make it vary much from the translation which was commonly used by the public order, except where either the verity of the Hebrew and Greek moved alteration, or where the text was, by some negligence mutilated from the original. So that I trust your loving subjects shall see good cause in your majesty's days to thank God and to rejoice, to see this high treasure of His holy word to set out as may be proved (so far forth as man's mortal knowledge can attain unto, or as far forth as God hath hitherto revealed) to be faithfully handled in the vulgar tongue, beseeching your highness that it may have your gracious favour, license, and protection, to be communicated abroad, as well for that in many churches they want their books, and have long time looked for this, as for that in certain places be publicly used some translations which have not been laboured in your realm, having inspersed diverse prejudicial notes, which might have been also well spared. I have been bold in the furniture with few words to express the incomparable value of this treasure.

- Despite the Archbishop's request that Elizabeth “license” the new Bible, official royal sanction would not be forthcoming. That said, the volume was received and endorsed by ecclesiastical

authorities i.e., the Bishops of the Anglican Church. Consider the following citations from the pens of Mombert, Brake, and Daniell.

- “It is vain to speculate on the reasons for which the *royal* authority was not accorded to the Bishops’ Bible, which not until 1577 was “set forth by authority”; *i.e.*, by episcopal authority.” (Mombert, 270)
 - “Although the Bishops’ Bible was never officially licensed as the authorized Bible, the church and state enthusiastically received it. Clearly superior to the Great Bible, its actual translation fell short of the quality and simplicity of the Geneva translation. It never gained the popular support that many had hoped it would.” (Brake, 165)
 - “Queen Elizabeth did not do what her Archbishop requested, and acknowledge the Bishops’ Bible as the standard English church text.” (Daniell, 346)
- Recall from [Lesson 141](#) that Richard Jugge was the Queen’s printer when the Bishops’ Bible was published in 1568. Prior to its release in 1566 Jugge issued a reprint of Tyndale’s New Testament exhibiting some of the textual changes, particularly in Matthew, that would ultimately end up in the Bishops’ Bible. Regarding the connection between Richard Jugge and Archbishop Parker, Charles C. Butterworth states the following in *The Literary Lineage of the King James Bible, 1340-1611*:
 - “As long as Archbishop Parker lived, Richard Jugge enjoyed what amounted to a monopoly as a printer of Bibles. He brought forth nine or ten editions of the Bishops’ version in all, some folio, some quarto. Nothing further is heard of Bodley’s patent to publish the Geneva version. But when Parker died in 1575, Jugge immediately felt the loss of his patron, for the New Archbishop, Grindal, was inclined to be sympathetic towards those who were trying to promote the use of the Geneva Bible. A sort of compromise between these conflicting interests was arranged by the Stationers’ Company, whereby Jugge was allowed the exclusive right to publish Bibles of a certain size, while others were allowed the right to publish them in other sizes.” (Butterworth, 186)
 - Recall from [Lesson 136](#) that, despite the fact that Queen Elizabeth had issued a patent to print the Geneva Bible “for seven years” to John Bodley, the Geneva Bible was not printed on English shores until after the death of Archbishop Parker in 1575.
 - Dr. Daniell offers the following interesting perspective on these details.
 - “The list of fourteen editions before Parker’s death conceals an interesting insight. Though he and the Bishop of London, Grindal, as mentioned above, had recommended that John Bodley’s exclusive privilege for printing the Geneva Bible for another twelve years be extended from 1565, even though the bishops were putting out a new Bible for church use, on the grounds that diversity is healthy, Parker and Grindal carefully kept a

proviso of their approval in fact, which they withheld. No Geneva Bibles were printed in England in the ten years until Parker's death in May 1575 (when they instantly began being printed again in volume) allowing the Bishops' a clear run at the field. A.W. Pollard wrote:

It is impossible, therefore, to avoid the conviction that to the very end of his life Parker used his control over the Stationers' Company to prevent the Geneva version being printed in England, and also to secure for Jugges the monopoly of printing the Bishops' Bible. . . It seems certain that the Archbishop cared little for providing Bibles for private reading. He saw and met the need of suitable editions for the service of the church, but. . . he did not 'trust the people' with cheap editions of the Bible, and his lack of confidence sealed the fate of the Bishops' Bible.

Perhaps this would not have mattered too much for readings in church while everyone had a Geneva at home. But the aim over the next fifty years was, for political reasons, to oppose Geneva, even as it grew in force and influence, and eventually kill it outright. This aim was successful. The replacement from 1611 of the remarkable, accurate, informative, forward-looking Geneva even at the time of its greatest growth and power, with the backward-looking, increasingly Latinist, often baldly unhelpful KJV is one of the tragedies of our culture—the exact reverse of what has been said for so long. One must regret that King James in 1605 gave each member of his panels of revisers this Bishops' Bible (in the second 1572 folio edition, with small New Testament revisions) as their base text.” (Daniell, 346-347)

- While I do not share Professor Daniell's negative attitude toward the King James Bible, it is important to note that the Bishops' Bible was the Bible of the Anglican Church, not the common Englishman. Had it not been for Rule 1 given the King James translators to follow the Bishops' Bible as their base text, it is quite probable that this volume would be remembered as one of the most unpopular Bibles in the history of our language. That said, the Bishops' Bible remains of the utmost importance to our purposes as we seek to understand the making of the King James Bible.

The Impact of Miles Coverdale

- In his *The History of the English Bible* from 1882, Blackford Condit is correct in pointing out that the name Miles Coverdale is conspicuously missing from the list of men who worked on the Bishops' Bible. This is important to note given that it was Coverdale's prior work on the Great Bible from 1539/40 that Archbishop Parker was revising in the 1560s. Condit states the following regarding the matter:
 - “During the revising of the Bishops' Bible, there was one man, the venerable Myles Coverdale, who must have been deeply interested in the work; and yet so far as the records go he had no share in it. His advanced age is a sufficient reason for this, since

now, 1568, he is full eighty years of age, and is drawing very near to the end of his pilgrimage.” (Condit, 293)

- Since the publication of his complete English Bible in 1535, the ghost of Coverdale hung over almost every important revision that we have discussed in this class. Only William Tyndale had a greater impact upon the history and fortunes of the English Bible.
 - “Since 1535 he [Coverdale] has had to do with almost every important revision of the English Scriptures. He was an intimate friend of both Cromwell and Cranmer, and enjoyed their confidence till the last. In his long life he witnessed great changes both in Church and State. His life spanned the reigns of four English sovereigns, which constitute epochs most important and interesting in the history of Protestantism and the English Bible. From the beginning of his career Coverdale was a disciple of the New Learning. He was, however, always charitably inclined towards those of the Old learning. Though increasing in age he kept abreast with the progress of the Reformation. He was among the Genevan exiles during the fearful reign of Mary. Under Queen Elizabeth he was a Non-conformist. A father among the Elizabethan bishops, he was sadly neglected, and yet was not without his honors. In December, 1559, he was called to assist in the consecration of Archbishop Parker. In 1563, he was honored with the degree of Doctor of Divinity by the University of Cambridge; although already a bearer of this honor as conferred by the University of Tübingen. Through the agency of Bishop Grindal he received the rectorship of St. Mangus, near London Bridge; but this he resigned in 1566. He continued, however, to preach, and the people continued to throng together to hear him. Myles Coverdale stood first, in his day, among the preachers of the word. He stands second only to William Tyndale as a translator. While he was employed frequently in the discharge of important public duties both in Church and State, yet his life work was that of a translator and reviser of the Holy Scriptures. Eminent alike for piety and learning, he died in February, 1569, at the advanced age of eighty-one years. Upon the monument erected to his memory, in the parish of St. Mangus, in 1837, were inscribed these words from Is. lli. 7. HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THEM THAT PREACH THE GOSPEL OF PEACE, AND BRING GLAD TIDINGS OF GOOD THINGS.” (Condit, 293-294)
- Having survived so much religious and political upheaval to die of old age, Dr. Donald L. Brake is justified in describing Coverdale as being “politically astute” and “politically savvy.” (Brake, 111) The following “Events in the Long and Storied Life of Miles Coverdale” was presented in Dr. Brake’s *A Visual History of the English Bible*:
 - 1488—Born in Yorkshire
 - 1514—Entered Augustinian order as a monk
 - 1527—Won the favor of Thomas Cromwell

- 1528—Left priesthood for Lutheranism
- 1528—Fled to the Continent to avoid persecution
- 1529—Began first exile in Hamburg (lasted about seven years); perhaps met with Tyndale to assist in his translation of the Pentateuch
- 1534—Began translation, probably with some encouragement from More and Cromwell
- 1534—Coverdale joined by John Rogers (later translator of the Matthew's Bible)
- 1534-35—Took refuge in Antwerp and completed the translation of the Coverdale Bible
- 1535—Coverdale Bible, the first complete Bible in modern English, was printed in Antwerp on October 4
- 1537—Coverdale's first printed Bible was officially authorized [not sure about Brake's use of "authorized" in this sentence] by Henry VIII
- 1537—Coverdale commissioned by Cromwell to begin preparation of The Great Bible
- 1538—Coverdale approved third edition diglot printed in France
- 1538—Counter-Reformation destroys presses printing English Protestant Bibles
- 1539—Fled to England
- 1539—The Great Bible completed in April
- 1539—Act of Six Articles signed into law attacking those of the Reformation
- 1540—Deaths of prominent Reformers forces Coverdale into exile again, this time with his new wife, Elizabeth Macheson
- 1540-43—Exile in Strasburg
- 1540-47—Extended exile
- 1541 or 1542—Received Doctor of Divinity degree from Tübingen.
- 1546—Coverdale's books condemned by Bishop Bonner and several burned publicly
- 1549—Assisted Erasmus in his paraphrase, Volume II
- 1550—Reprint of his 1535 edition of the Coverdale Bible
- 1553—Death of Edward VI. The ascension of Mary signals another period of exile
- 1554—Released from prison for tax evasion and returned to Denmark

- 1558—Moved to Geneva where he had a minor role in the translation of the Geneva Bible
- 1559—Returned to his beloved England
- 1563—Contracted the plague but recovered
- 1563—Received Doctor of Divinity degree from Cambridge by incorporating his earlier work from Tübingen.
- 1569—Died on January 20 and was buried in the chancel of St. Bartholomew, London. The church was torn down in 1840, and Coverdale's remains were moved to St. Mangus Church near London Bridge. (Brake, 116-117)

Conclusion

- As things stand right now, there is one more pre-1611 English Bible that requires our attention before we begin discussing the Authorized Version next Fall, the Rheims New Testament of 1582.
- We will begin our study of the Rheims New Testament next Sunday.

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