

Sunday, October 31, 2021— Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*
Lesson 154 The Hampton Court Conference: Historical Significance, Dates, & Accounts

Introduction

- Two weeks ago, in [Lesson 153](#), we considered the Millenary Petition and its connection with the Hampton Court Conference of 1604. Ultimately, we want to ascertain what transpired at Hampton Court and how it impacted the English Bible. Understanding some of the historical background for the meeting will assist us with this task.
- In this Lesson we will consider the following regarding this important meeting.
 - Historical Significance
 - Date
 - Accounts

Hampton Court: Historical Significance

- Many historians believe that Hampton Court was a pivotal meeting for reasons beyond the decision to create the King James Bible. The outcomes of this meeting potentially sowed the seeds of the English Civil War as well as spurred the English colonization of the New World.
- Once again, Timothy Berg does an excellent job covering these matters in three entries on the Hampton Court Conference on his blog [King James Bible History](#). In his entry from December 2, 2020, titled “[Hampton Court—Avenue and Dates](#)” Brother Berg states the following:
 - “The Hampton Court conference in 1604 was described by Frederick Shriver as, “one of the most significant events in the political and religious history of England.” It set the course for the future of the Church of England and determined the role that the Puritans would – or rather, wouldn’t – play in the official Church. Some have perceived the seeds of the English Civil War (now more commonly called “the wars of the three kingdoms”) being planted at this conference. Indeed, given the colonization of the New World by the Puritans as they increasingly found less room for them in the English church, one could even say that this conference shaped the future of religion and politics in North America. In terms of both religion and politics, it is thus an event of historical importance worth exploring.

We have traced already the discontent with the elizabethan settlement [See [Lesson 151](#).] that found new life breathed into it at the coming of King James VI of Scotland to the English throne. Some were content with the way religion had settled under Elizabeth. Others, primarily the Puritans, were convinced that the English church, which retained so much ceremony from the traditional church, was, “but halfway reformed.” They were

deeply troubled and discontented with this state of affairs. We have looked in depth at the **Millenary Petition** [See [Lesson 153](#).], which was the prime expression of such discontent, and at some of the specific **requests** which it made of the new king. The king eventually arranged the Hampton Court conference to deal with the issues these Puritans kept raising and complaining about. Or, more accurately, to deal with the pesky Puritans who were always raising them.

Our primary interest is, of course, more narrowly on the history of the King James Bible itself. Yet it was at this conference that the King James Bible was first conceived, and because the politics of the conference heavily shaped the end product, the conference is worth looking at in some detail in its own right.” (Berg, 12/2/21)

- For the sake of time and space we will pass over Berg’s fascinating comments regarding the architecture and physical layout of the palace at Hampton Court. Interested parties are encouraged to read this information as it is interesting to consider though it is beyond the scope of our focus in this lesson.

Hampton Court: Dates

- Originally planned for November 1603, the Conference was delayed by an outbreak of plague. The meeting was moved out of London to Hampton Court and set for mid-January 1604. (More & Reid, 48) On October 24, 1603, James issued a proclamation announcing the change of date and venue. Titled *Concerning Such As Seditiously Seek Reformation In Church Matters*, James’ proclamation is very telling in terms of his opinion of the Puritan cause.
- In his blog post, Berg mentions that a certain level of confusion existed as to the actual start for the rescheduled conference in January.
 - “It seems that the conference was first rescheduled for Thursday, 12 January 1604. But given that it was a hectic time of attending to visiting dignitaries, at the last minute the plans were changed again and it was rescheduled to start Saturday, 14 January. While rumors of the latest change spread as late as the night of the 11th, the bishops apparently were not sure how true they were, and so they showed up on the morning of the 12th ready to start the conference as originally planned. This resulted in what we could call an unplanned “pre-conference” meeting between just the king and bishops that Thursday. Then followed, on three non-consecutive days (Saturday, Monday, and Wednesday), the three days of the conference proper.

In fact, because some who write on the conference today don’t always canvass the whole range of sources (more on those sources in our coming posts), confusion about the dating still exists, made worse by the common confusions about the old and new style dating, and when to begin the new year. For example, **Thurly**, pg. 108, mistakenly dates this first “pre-conference” to 10 January, while **Gerald Bray** (pg. 820 fn. 1) following only the account of Patrick Galloway (who includes the pre-conference meeting and thus dates the

conference 12-18) states mistakenly that the three days of the conference were the 12th, 16th, and 18th. In reality, the dates as they ended up working out were as follows;

- Tuesday, 1 November, 1603 – Originally scheduled first day (cancelled)
- Thursday, 12 January, 1604 – Pre-conference meeting (unscheduled) between bishops and king
- Saturday, 14 January, 1604 – First day of the conference
- Monday, 16 January, 1604 – Second day of the conference
- Wednesday, 18 January, 1604 – Third (final) day of the conference, in two parts” (Berg, 12/2/21)

Hampton Court: Accounts

- Again, following Berg, this time from his December 9, 2020 blog post titled “[Hampton Court-Attendees](#),” we can observe the following:
 - “The Hampton Court conference in 1604 not only set the direction for the Church of England’s future, it also was the context in which the King James Bible was first conceived. At least, the mature form of it that later came to fruition. . . To fully grasp the import of the conference and its impact on the King James Bible, we must also say what we can about those who attended. Many men would work on the KJB, and we will specifically note which of those men were present at this moment in its prehistory. Yet this requires first saying something briefly about the contemporary sources that are extant.” (Berg, 12/9/20)
- There are two major accounts of what transpired at Hampton Court in January 1604. Berg states the following regarding the matter:
 - “The two major sources for the Hampton Court conference, sometimes at odds, are, first, the **semi-official account** which **William Barlow** was asked to write up, a participant in the conference, and later head of the **Second Westminster Company** of Translators for the KJB. In his, “[The Sum And Substance Of The Conference](#)...” he takes a decidedly more positive view of the bishops, and presents the king as supportive of episcopacy and dismissive of the Puritans. Second is an **anonymous account** printed in Usher (sometimes called the “[Harleian Account](#)”), which presents a more positive account of the Puritans, presents James as largely supportive of them, and takes a quite dim view of the bishops. There are also more than a dozen additional contemporary accounts that contribute to our picture of the conference. Because such data will likely interest only the super-nerds, we have placed it all in a separate post here which most readers can safely ignore. For reasons detailed in that post on sources, and contrary to Nicolson, Curtis, and

some others, we take Barlow as a largely faithful account that has been vindicated, and follow his narrative in this and the next few posts, supplementing it where needed with the other sources.” (Berg, 12/9/20)

- Since, the mid-17th century, the account of Barlow found in *The Sum And Substance* has been taken to be a reliable record of what transpired at the Conference.
 - “The longest and most well-known account of the conference is the semi-official, *The Sum and Substance of the Conference* by dean of Chester William Barlow. Regular spokesman for and defender of episcopacy, he would go on to serve as a Translator for the KJB, and as head of the Second Westminster Company which worked on the KJB Epistles (Romans-Jude). C. S. Knighton summarized (pg. 2) Barlow’s attendance at the conference and the writing of the account, explaining that, “by 8 May Barlow had been chosen dean of Chester, as which he was installed on 12 June.” Yet:

This office (perhaps reflecting his origins in the north-west) had little claim on his attention; its chief importance was that it gave him status to attend the Hampton Court conference of 14–18 January 1604. Barlow was commissioned to write the official account of these proceedings, in which the hierarchy confronted its puritan critics, with the king in the chair. Publication was delayed by Whitgift’s death (29 February). On 12 May Barlow invited Cecil to accept the dedication, but the latter prudently asked to see the text first, and then avoided Barlow until the book had gone to press. Bancroft, the king’s secretary (Sir Thomas Lake), and the king himself allegedly approved Barlow’s draft, which appeared on 25 May as *The Summe and Substance of the Conference* (1604; STC 1456).

However, as it came off the press, “It was immediately criticized for misrepresentation; in particular, for making the king side comprehensively with the bishops.” This wasn’t news to Barlow. Knighton continues, “He had foreseen controversy,” offering as a disclaimer that he was only giving the “substance” of the conference, and not always recording verbatim everything said. In fact, he published as an appendix four different Puritan-slanted accounts; representatives of what he claimed to be a current bias in the opposite direction.

Shortly, this skepticism about Barlow’s accuracy was overcome and his account came to be almost universally trusted by standard historians. Fuller noted in his 1655 history that, “Others complain that this Conference is partially set forth only by Dr. Barlow, dean of Chester, their professed adversary, to the great disadvantage of their divines” (pg. 193), yet used it as the basis for his own recasting of the conference in the form of dialogue. Strype in 1718, did likewise, suggesting (pg. 492) that it was “an authentic relation” written by Barlow “that the very truth of [the conference] may appear.” Cardwell in 1840 used Barlow as one of the main foundations of his treatment of the conference. Later in the century and after its turn, classic treatments of the conference like those by the

eminent English historian S. R. Gardiner in 1883 and Roland Greene Usher in 1910 relied almost exclusively on Barlow's account, revealing that while different interpretations of the conference had emerged, Barlow's account had come to be accepted as a largely historically accurate picture. But would this trust last?" (Berg, 12/19/21)

- Trust in Barlow's account went virtually unchallenged for three centuries until the 1961 publication of "Hampton Court Conference and Its Aftermath" by Mark H. Curtis. Once again, we turn to Timothy Berg's excellent work for a summary of the situation:
 - "Mark Curtis raised again the question in 1961, "How reliable is Barlow's account?" He concluded that it was little more than, "a skillful piece of party propaganda." He thus gave new prominence to the previously neglected "Anonymous Account" that had been printed in Usher (Harley MS 828), judging it "the best guide through this whole body of material," which is "at all important points...consistent with the rest of the evidence." He was influential and his conclusions were widely followed. Adam Nicolson, echoing Curtis without citing him, suggested that Barlow "was the official propagandist for the bishops' cause, and his pamphlet was a carefully slanted version of events," and even went so far as to claim boldly that, "Barlow...was lying." Knighton represents this renewed distrust for Barlow's account well:

The extent to which Barlow's summary does indeed convey the substance remains central to the historiography of the conference. His report was long accepted as authentic, though differing interpretations were drawn from it. It has since been shown how he shaped his account for dramatic as well as polemical purpose. It is Barlow who gives James his famous line 'No bishop, no king', and who had him, riled by the advocacy of presbyterianism, bring the second day's session to a close with the words 'I shall make them conforme themselves, or I wil harrie them out of the land, or else doe worse' (Barlow, Conference, 82, 83). Other testimony confirms that while the king made a spirited retort, he did not end the day on this bitter note. To an extent the truthfulness of Barlow's version is of less consequence than the impact that it made. This lent powerful support to the view that the Stuart monarchy and the puritans were from this moment destined to collide.

Yet this distrust in Barlow prompted by Curtis may turn out to have been short lived. In 1981 Frederick Shriver pushed back against Curtis, suggesting that, "The 'Anonymous Account' cannot take the place of the Summe and Substance. It is far too short and far too thin...It is useful – even important – but supplementary only." Hill pointed out that, historically, it has always been common to report the events of the conference with a certain bias. Patrick Collinson, in his earlier treatments of the conference (here and here), seemed largely to accept the judgement of Curtis, asserting that the Sum and Substance, "was itself a skillfully tendentious piece of party propaganda" (pg. 37), and a "journalistic coup" that "was not so much an exercise in fair and objective reporting as 'a skillful piece of party propaganda'" (pg. 29). Yet in his most mature reflection on the conference before his passing, after the developments we will trace below, he came to the

slightly more nuanced conclusion that, “The various accounts of the conference are all episodic and biased in one way or another, and all must be read with care” (pg. 199).” (Berg, 12/19/21)

- The chief concern in assessing the validity of Barlow’s account centers around the following: did the Puritans receive a fair and impartial hearing at Hampton Court or was the King firmly anti-Puritan as Barlow seems to suggest? Timothy Berg believes that two lines of evidence vindicate Barlow’s account of the Hampton Court proceeding as factually accurate though somewhat biased. These lines of evidence include: 1) Laurence Chaderton’s copy of *The Sum and Substance*, and 2) The Thesis of William Craig.

Laurence Chaderton’s Copy of The Sum and Substance

- Regarding this line of evidence Brother Berg states the following:
 - “First, the recently discovered papers of Laurence Chaderton contain, among other things, his personal annotated copy of Barlow’s account. Arnold Hunt examined this document here. Chaderton was not only present at the conference on the important second day, he was also, as we noted in our last post, one of the leading spokesmen for the Puritans (whether he himself should be referred to as one is a debated point). He went on to be one of the notable King James Translators, in the First (Hebrew) Company at Cambridge which worked on I Chronicles-Song of Songs. He was educated at Christ’s College Cambridge, and was probably still a Catholic when he came, though he quickly converted to the Cambridge Protestantism. While a highly respected trilingual biblical scholar and theologian, he was perhaps most well known as a preacher and evangelist. When he gave up his weekly lecture in the pulpit at St. Clement’s Church in Bridge Street, which he had held for half a century, “forty divines signed a testimonial to the effect that they owed their conversion to his teaching” (Collinson, pg. 1).

Few could have more reason to see things differently from Barlow, and, perhaps more importantly, to contradict him in his annotations when given the chance. Indeed, among the numerous annotations he made in his copy there are a few that reveal his own memory clashing with Barlow’s printed report. Perhaps most important is in how the Puritan spokesmen were described. We noted in our last post some diverse views in characterizing these four men. Barlow had described them as “Agents for the Millenary Plaintiffs.” Yet at this point in his account, Chaderton took issue with this description, countering in the margin,

“patients rather, being commanded to attend, nor but to hear [“and obey” written then crossed out] his majesty’s pleasure. God forbid we should be agents for any sect in religion or for any faction. Neither could we be for these, seeing none ever required this at our hands. No learning therefore can justify this, nor excuse the breach of charity.” [Spelling lightly updated]

For Chaderton, rather than agents they were patients, in the older sense of the word meaning, “A person who or thing which undergoes some action, or to which something is done; a (passive) recipient. Chiefly in contrast with agent.” (OED 4a). When Barlow later wrote that “the most grave, learned, and modest of the aggrieved sort” (the Puritans) were summoned by the king to the conference, Chaderton, as Hunt notes, “pounced on the contradiction,” arguing in the margin, “Being sent for how could they be agents for others? Being willed to speak how could they be plaintiffs?” As Hunt points out, “Barlow’s choice of vocabulary was clearly designed to serve a polemical purpose, but Chaderton’s efforts to disassociate himself from the puritan radicals were equally disingenuous” (pg. 212).

Some have emphasized this disagreement by Chaderton, like Collinson, who notes that Chaderton’s annotations show that he “took strong exception” to Barlow’s account (pg. 3). Yet for most, what is ultimately striking is how little he contradicts the historical scheme of Barlow. He seems to have accepted it as accurate except at a few minor points. Hunt noted that, “There is no doubt that Hampton Court was a fairly comprehensive defeat for the puritan cause,” and qualified that, “Admittedly, Barlow’s narrative may exaggerate the scale of that defeat,” but concluded that ultimately, “what Chaderton says here is arguably less significant than what he fails to say elsewhere.” The most crucial events of the conference “attracted no marginal comment” from Chaderton, and his annotated copy thus implies that at the crucial points, “Barlow’s account is a tolerably accurate record of what actually took place” (pg. 223).

David Norton, one of the world’s leading scholars today on the KJB, in his earlier work seemingly concurred with Curtis, cautioning that, “The accuracy of Barlow’s report is questionable. It was written at Bishop Bancroft’s request, read by the King before publication and scorned by those who were not of the Church party” (pg. 5, f.n. 3). Yet in his most recent work he seems to have been persuaded to a slightly different view by the evidence of Chaderton’s copy, noting that, “Chaderton, who was present at the conference, noted some vehement disagreements with Barlow’s designation of himself, Rainolds and two other puritans as ‘agents for the millenary plaintiffs’ (p. 2) in his copy of *The Sum and Substance*...but his silence on the discussion of a new translation suggests that there is nothing significantly wrong with it” (pg. 83, f.n. 6).” (Berg, 12/19/20)

The Thesis of William Craig

- This second line of evidence for the veracity of Barlow’s account is presented as follows by Berg:
 - “The second development is the thesis of William Craig (noted in our last post) which examines each of the extant accounts of the conference. It is likely the most exhaustive examination of the sources to date, and it seeks to vindicate Barlow at length. Through a historical-critical analysis of the documents, Craig argues that Barlow’s account is a well-sourced eye-witness account, largely accurate (though not completely without bias), and,

most importantly, corroborated by multiple outside sources at numerous decisive points. On the other hand, most of the accounts that agree with the Anonymous Account in Usher which has been championed against Barlow can be traced back to that account itself as a single source, and an anonymous one of doubtful provenance at that. The Anonymous Account itself, upon close inspection, “shows many signs of being not an eye-witness account but a composite of other earlier accounts of the conference” (pg. 246).

He thus concludes that, “Barlow’s *Summe and Substance* is not only indispensable because it is the longest and most detailed source we have, but also because it seems quite accurately to convey the substance of the conference” (pg. 247). In the official ODNB entry, Kenneth Fincham concurs (though apparently ignorant of Craig’s thesis), suggesting that, “Although Barlow’s account is relentlessly deferential to the king and spiky towards the puritans, it is the indispensable foundation text, three times the length of the ‘Anonymous account’ and broadly reliable, to judge from Laurence Chaderton’s annotated copy, in which he accepts large parts of Barlow’s narrative.” It would seem that, contrary to the claims of Nicolson, Barlow was not the one “lying.” The judgement of the editor of an 1804 reprinting of Barlow’s account is found to be relevant again in striking ways:

- With respect to ourselves, when we consider that Bishop Barlow’s account of this famous Conference is admitted, by all parties, to be the only one set forth, and is accordingly by all parties continually quoted; that it was set forth, not upon his own authority alone, but with the assistance and allowance of several of the great men then present; that no objections to the authenticity of this account, of any consequence, were brought forward for a considerable time after it took place; and that the best of those objections were weakly and suspiciously urged, and never proved....without hesitation, we offer this Tract to the notice of the public, as well deserving attention; it has passed the ordeal of its enemies’s utmost malice, and is found to be a true and faithful work. [Spelling lightly updated]” (Berg, 12/19/20)
- In the final section of his post, Berg reports the total number of contemporary accounts of the Hampton Court Conference according to Craig’s reckoning is seventeen. These accounts comprise “short summaries in letters or diaries, nine of which come from participants or attendees of the conference, the rest of which are anonymous.” (Berg 12/19/20) Of these seventeen accounts, Berg breaks them down into the following three different categories.
 - Those that agree with Barlow’s account
 - 4 entries
 - Those that agree with the Anonymous Account in Harley MSS 828
 - 4 entries

- Those that do not give enough detail to be grouped with either
 - 9 entries
- After noting that a case could be made for including a letter by King James in the first category, Berg concludes his blog entry with the following statement regarding the veracity of Barlow's account:
 - "We have now briefly noted each of the extant primary sources from which an examination of the Hampton Court conference must be made. We have suggested that contrary to once-commonly accepted notions, Barlow's account is the most reliable source for reconstructing the conference, supplemented in important ways by other sources." (Berg, 12/19/20)
- In our next Lesson we will look at the men who participated in the meeting.

Works Cited

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