

Sunday, November 20, 2022— Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*  
 Lesson 186 The AV 1611: Bancroft's 14 Changes & The Question of Authorization

## **Introduction**

- The last time we met, in [Lesson 185](#), we considered the following points:
  - Bancroft, Bilson, Smith & The Finishing Touches
  - Publisher: Robert Barker The King's Printer
- In this Lesson I would like to cover the following point regarding the publication of the King James Bible.
  - Bancroft's 14 Changes
  - The Question of Authorization

## **Bancroft's 14 Changes**

- One of topics discussed in Lesson 185 was the long-standing rumor regarding Archbishop Richard Bancroft having altered fourteen readings before the text went to print. My friend and fellow research partner Christopher Yetzer commented on last week's video on YouTube and directed me to look at *King James His Bible And Its Translators* by Laurence M. Vance. Vance references a document held by Lambeth Palace Library that extends the charge of textual tampering on the part of high church Bishops beyond Bancroft.
  - "A manuscript about the translators in the Lambeth Palace Library, apparently written about 1650, record that Richard Brett (1567-1637), a translator on the Oxford Old Testament company, reported that "the Bps. altered very many places that the translators had agreed upon: He had a note of the places. Bishop Bancroft, the "chiefe overseer," is said to have made fourteen changes. He died on November 2, 1610, never seeing the translation published that he had overseen." (Vance, 52)
- Dr. B.F. Westcott reproduces this Lambeth Palace MS in Appendix XII (see pages 343-350) of his book *A General View of the History of the English Bible*. The name of the MS is *Gibson Papers, Vol. 5, No. 41*. Moreover, Charles C. Butterworth mentions this in his 1941 book *The Literary Lineage of the King James Bible, 1340-1611*:
  - "It remains to add that a series of memoranda concerning the translators, set down about 1640, in speaking of Richard Brett, who worked with the first Oxford companies, contains this comment: "Dr. Bret reported that the Bps. [Bishops] altered very many places that the translators had agreed upon: He had a note of the places. According to

another report, Archbishop Bancroft himself insisted upon certain changes being made in a few places.” (Butterworth, 213)

- Thanks to the fine work of Timothy Berg, I have been able to view an image of the MS in the Lambeth Palace library that mentions Dr. Brett and his report regarding the bishops altering “many places”. Due to copyright limitations, I am not at liberty to share the image publicly at this time. Internal evidence suggests that the MS was written in about 1651 as it mentions the late wife of translator John Harding who died in 1650. Friend and fellow researcher Christopher Yetzer has also pointed out that this document testifies to the fact that as early as 1650 several people were already trying to gather histories on the translators.
- In a sermon dated [April 3, 1648](#), Dr. Thomas Hill, Master of Trinity College in Cambridge delivered a sermon in which he mentions fourteen changes to the translation that had been made by “prelates” of the “Church of England.”
  - “I have it from certain hands, such as lived in those times, that when the Bible had been Translated by the Translators appointed, the New Testament was looked over by some of the great Prelates, (men I could name some of their persons) to bring it to speak Prelatical Language, and they did alter (as I am informed by the means of one that was a great observer in those times, and lived them) fourteen places in the New Testament, to make them speak the Language of the Church of England, that was so cryed up: and I'll tell you some of them.” (Hill)
- Hill then goes on to identify half a dozen or so of the changes made by Anglican Bishops to the text after the translation work had been completed.
  - “First,\* In the first of the Acts, speaking of Judas, Let another man take his Bishoprick; it is forc'd, it signifies Charge or Inspection: but that you may believe that the Bishops are the Apostles Successors, let another man take his Bishoprick.

Again, In the second of the Acts, it is Not suffer my Soul to lie in Hell; this is clear, Former Translations have it, not suffer my Soul to lie in the Grave; But it was learned Bilsons Opinion, and thrust into the Thirty nine Articles, that Christ did Locally descend into hell; and to make that Translation agree with the Articles, they must change Grave into Hell.

Also the Fourteenth of the Acts,\*They ordained them Elders, they loved to cry up Consecration of Churches, and Dedication, and such kinde of things, and Episcopal Ordination too (for these all advanced the power of the Priests and the Bishops, which brought in Transubstantiation amongst Papists) and therefore in the Geneva Translation,\* that was render'd, chosen by suffrages, by lifting up of hands, the word Primarily imports that, it may be in some of the Fathers it includes both, they will tell you, because afterwards having chosen Elders by Suffrages or Voyces, they did Ordain them.

Next, I come to the first of the Corinthians, 12.28. An abominable violence offered to the Original, God hath set in the Church, Apostles, Teachers, Helps, Governments, and you shall finde here a great imposture, it may be now altered, appearing so gross, but I have seen it, and read it in some Translations, Helps in Government;\* which is a most horrible prodigious violence to the Greek words, for they are both the Accusative case, Helps; there are Elders, Government, there are Deacons; now to obscure these, you must put it, helps in Government.

I had it related since the delivery of this plain Sermon, by one who most confidently affirmed it,\* That the learned man to whom it belonged to Translate the first Book of Samuel, having rendered that which Samuel from God spake concerning Saul, 1 Sam. 8. 11. This shall be the maner of the King that shall reign over you, He will take your sons, &c. He was sent for to Lambeth, and there perswaded to make the words Will take your sons, &c. Shall take; which he conscienciously refused, well knowing it was not spoken by Samuel to Saul, by way of direction for duty what he should do, but Prophetically and Eventually what he would do.” (Hill)

- Hill’s sermon also contains discussion of the word “Easter” in the late translation. These comments are nebulous, and no specific scripture reference is cited. While Hill’s list is helpful for identifying a handful of readings that were influenced by Anglican Bishops, he does not name names with the exception of Bilson. According to Brother Berg, it is in a 1671 biography of Henry Jessy that the charges of textual tampering are ascribed to Bancroft. Finding the notes of Dr. Brett, one of the translators, would prove to be a massive find and go a long way toward clearing up the confusion.
- Suffice it to say that from very early in its printed history, while many of the translators were still alive, complaints had arisen among the translators themselves that Bishops of the Anglican Church, up to and including Archbishop Richard Bancroft had altered the text without the consent of the other translators. For the time being, this must remain one of the unsolved mysteries related to the publication of the King James Bible.

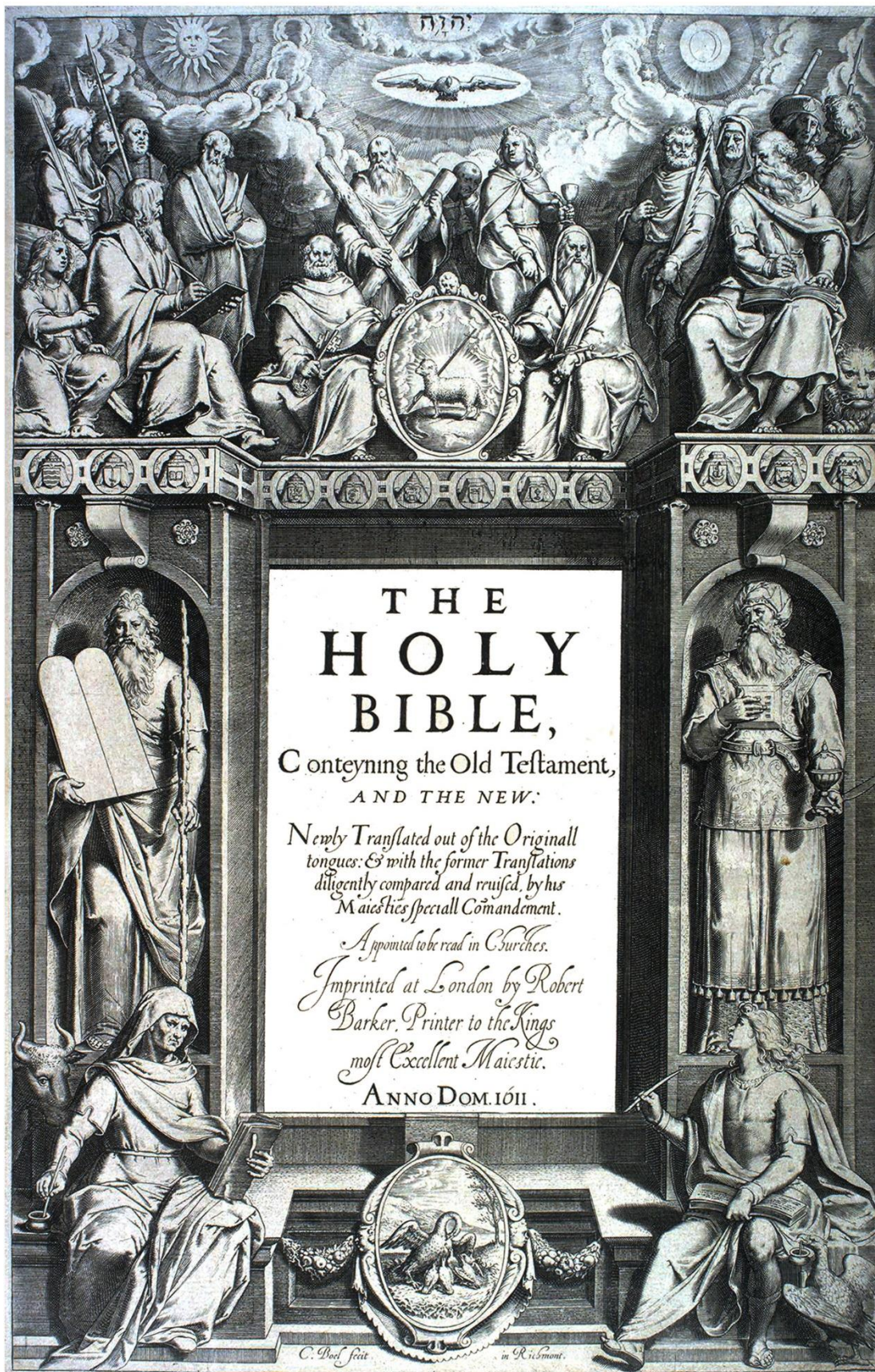
### **The Question of Authorization**

- In addition, to not knowing when it was first published, the KJB appears to never have been officially “authorized” despite being known commonly as the Authorized Version. Dr. Norton states the following regarding this question:
  - “Though commonly known as the Authorised Version (AV), it appears not to have been officially authorised. A royal proclamation of 1541 had ordered a ‘Byble of the largest and greatest volume, to be had in euery churche’.<sup>1</sup> First the Great Bibles then the Bishops’ Bibles had supplied this need. The first edition of the KJB was also a Bible ‘of the largest and greatest volume’, and so replenished the supply of church Bibles. The finely engraved title page, by Cornelis Boel, reads:

The Holy Bible, Conteyning the Old Testament, AND THE NEW: Newly Translated out of the Originall tongues: & with the former Translations diligently compared and reuised: by his Maiesties speciall Comandement. Appointed to be read in Churches. Imprinted at London by Robert Barker. Printer to the Kings most excellent Maiestie. ANNO DOM. 1611.

The use of ‘appointed’ and the absence of ‘authorised’ are striking – the more striking in that the Bishops’ Bible after 1585 had been ‘authorised and appointed to be read in Churches’ (H188). Moreover, there is no official record of authorisation (for these reasons I prefer to call this Bible the King James Bible). When after 1611 church officials, in keeping with the 1541 injunction, needed a new church Bible, they generally specified either ‘a Bible of the latest edition’ or ‘of the last translation’, or they used the injunction’s phrase ‘a bible of the largest volume’.<sup>2</sup> The designation (or, perhaps, nickname) ‘authorized’ crept in. In 1619 Archbishop Abbott, who had been one of the translators, describes the KJB as ‘the Bible of the New Translation, lately set forth by His Majesty’s authority’, and in 1620 Ambrose Ussher describes it as ‘the authorized bible’. (Norton, 46-47)







- Dr. Fincham offers an interesting counter argument for maintaining that the translation was “authorized” by King James. Please note that I have Americanized some of Fincham’s British spellings.
  - “Contrariety, there is plenty of evidence that some contemporaries did see the new translation as ‘authorized’, given James I’s widely-reported sponsoring of it at Hampton Court, and his public undertaking there that, once the text was finalized, it would be ratified by royal authority. Certainly the king’s commissioning of the project and its publication with the title page stating that it was ‘newly translated’ by ‘his majesties special commandment’ was evidently regarded as sufficient authorization by many bishops, divines and parish officials. A number of ecclesiastical ordinaries, like Bishop Smith of Gloucester, referred in their visitation articles to the ‘new translation lately set forth by his majesties authority’ (and Smith’s voice carries weight, as a translator and author of the preface to the Bible); Smith’s phrase was also used by John White in an anti-Catholic tract of 1614, while in the same year, in a diocesan mandate, Archbishop Matthew of York simply called it ‘the kings Bible’. Churchwardens’ presentments in several dioceses sometimes referred to the new Bible as ‘the king’s translation’, or ‘lately set forth by his majesties authority’ or else ‘allowed and commanded by his majesty’. This took visual form at St Mary’s Lancaster, with a pulpit erected in 1619, two years after James I’s visit on his return from Scotland. The tester or sounding-board of the pulpit, recently reconstructed along the original lines, carries a carved copy of a Bible surmounted by the crown, a tribute to James I as supreme governor and surely a monument to the new translation as authorized by the king. This widespread belief that the new translation was authorized matters to us, since it provided the legality for bishops to require its purchase and replace a serviceable older translation, and it explains why no churchwarden challenged their right to do so. It is true that the ‘authorized version’ as a phrase only dates from the 1820s, but its meaning was familiar to many Jacobean. (Fincham, 86-87)
- Regarding the “authorization” question, Dr. Norton agrees with the following statement made by Alfred W. Pollard in his famous work from 1911 *Records of the English Bible*:
  - The word 'Appointed ', is considerably weaker than the 'Authorised and Appointed' which it replaced. By itself 'Appointed' means little more than 'assigned' or 'provided ', and the words 'Appointed to be read in Churches' literally expressed the facts that this Bible was printed by the King's printer with the approval of the King and the Bishops for use in churches, and that no competing edition 'of the largest volume' was allowed to be published.” (Pollard, 60)

### Works Cited

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