

Sunday, September 17, 2023— Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*  
Lesson 211 The AV 1611: Errors of The Press

### Introduction

- In [Lesson 210](#) we resumed class by looking at the page layout and typography of the 1611 AV. In this Lesson we want to continue our look at the 1611 as a historical artifact by considering the topic of printer errors. To accomplish this task, we will consider the following categories:
  - Typographical Errors
  - Hidden Errors
- We will once again be using Dr. David Norton's 2005 work *A Textual History of the King James Bible* to frame our discussion.

### Typographical Errors

- In the next section of Chapter 3 (titled The First Edition), Dr. Norton addresses the origin and scope of typographical errors in the 1611 text.
  - “Obvious errors (typographical or printer’s errors) show that the page does not perfectly represent the translators’ work: it is a product of human fallibility and needs correction. Moreover, the presence of obvious errors suggests that there may be hidden errors, as ‘but Abram’ appears to be. This, simple as it is, may be as much as we can legitimately conclude from the obvious errors, but there is perhaps a little more than curiosity value in examining them further.

Up to this point it has been possible to refer to the printer as if he were a single person. But, in looking at whatever the errors in the text might tell of how well the work was rendered into print, we have to look at several functions in the printer’s house, functions probably undertaken by several people at once since different parts may have been set simultaneously and several presses employed. The three most important here are those of the compositor, the proof-reader and the distributor of the type, presumably an apprentice. Compositors take type, a character at a time, from a case, a two-part box with compartments for each character. Printers did not have enough type to set the whole of the Bible at once, so parts had to be set and printed, then the type distributed to the case so that fresh text can be set. The apprentice distributing the type might mis-identify a character and so place it in the wrong compartment, or he might simply misplace a character. Consequently, a compositor could reach into the correct compartment and pull out an incorrect character. Such errors do not reflect on the accuracy of the compositor: it is as if there were a glitch in the programming of one’s keyboard so that once in a while when, say, the *u* key is struck, an *n* results.

Not all typographical errors, therefore, represent errors by the man with the first responsibility for rendering the text into print, the compositor. After the compositor, the proof-reader has prime responsibility for seeing that the text is as it should be. We can

never tell how badly the compositor worked because the proof-reader removed an unknown number of his mistakes. For the same reason, we can never tell how well the proof-reader worked: we cannot see what he did, only what he failed to do.

Because of the divided responsibility for errors, because they tell only part of the story of the accuracy of the work, and because there is also fallibility in the present identification of them, one should not depend much on generalizations from errors. But, with this caveat, some observations may be made from the list in appendix 1. I count 351 errors (247 in the text, 104 in the margins etc.), that is, not much more than one in every three and a half chapters. This, surely, is a remarkably low number. The commonest error is *u* for *n* (61), followed by *n* for *u* (20), *c* for *t* (9) and *e* for *t* (4). The commonest incorrect word is ‘aud’ (28). The confusion of *u* and *n* is probably an error of distribution not of setting, which comes from the great similarity of the characters. Its frequency as well as some of the particular examples suggest this; for instance, ‘soune’ for ‘sonne’ at Num. 10:24: the compositor is unlikely to have taken type from two different places for consecutive identical letters, so the u must have been with the *ns*. The other side of this argument holds with ‘bonnd’ for ‘bound’ (Jer. 30:13) and ‘nmm’ for ‘num’ (Ps. 103:8 m.): it is unlikely that the compositor would have reached into the same part of the case for two different letters; in both instances he picked a misdistributed *n* from the *u* compartment. Consequently 351 overstates the number of surviving typographical errors that are the fault of the compositor. This is important, because it is his (or, rather, their) accuracy that is of prime importance in establishing the text. If about 250 typographical errors are to be attributed (in the first place) to the compositor, that is certainly a low enough number to encourage a respect for the text’s standard of accuracy.

On the other hand, 351 errors, some of them blatant, suggest that standards of proof-reading were not particularly high. This is not a matter of attributing more errors to the proof-reader than the compositor; rather, it reflects the degree to which each task is prone to error. Proof-readers should be able to spot almost all typographical errors, but it would be unreal to expect anything less than a sprinkling of errors from compositors. I am inclined to think therefore that the compositor of the first edition did a good job and is, for the most part, to be trusted, but that ordinary proofreading was not as thorough as it should have been. If proof-reading was skimped, it is unlikely that a special effort was made to read the compositor’s work against the translators’ copy.

One further thing relates to this supposition: the first edition is almost entirely homogeneous, but there are at least eight variations to be found between copies. All but one reflects work done after printing had begun rather than as part of the regular process of composition, proof-reading and correction. The exception is ‘40’ for ‘46’ (1 Macc. 13 summary), where I think it likely that the up-stroke of ‘6’ has broken off; what is left of the character happens to be identical in size to a zero. Three of the variations show typographical errors being corrected (a misplaced annotation at Joel 3:14, ‘seters’ at 1 Esdras 5:58, and ‘Tyranuus’ at 2 Macc. 4:40 m.), and are useful in indicating that the printer was willing to correct such errors when they were noticed. More interesting are the three or four changes of reading (‘them’ to ‘him’ (Exod. 21:26), ‘she’ to ‘he’ (Song 2:7),<sup>10</sup> and ‘by their knowledge of’ inserted (Ecclus. 44:4)). The possible fourth is ‘Abigal’/‘Abigail’ (2 Sam. 17:25); if the change was to ‘Abigail’, it is an erroneous

regularisation of spelling, but if it was to ‘Abigal’ it was scholarly in the light of the Hebrew. These changes appear to come from scholarly observation of the text as it is being printed. There is no telling whether such observation was thorough or random, but the survival of blatant errors suggests it was the latter.

All one can reasonably conclude is that the common-sense view is right: the first edition is to be treated with critical respect – respect, because it is made directly from the translators’ own work and, probably, with their collaboration, and because it is well done; critical, because it is not perfectly done and may not have been checked against the manuscript.” (Norton, 54-57)

### **Hidden Errors**

- In the last section of Chapter 3, Professor Norton addresses the possibility of “hidden errors” or wording “that might well have been invisible to a proof-reader because the printed text appears to make sense.” (Norton, 57) Please note that while I hold Professor Norton’s work as indispensable, I do not always agree with the way he chooses to word things. Consider the following discussion and examples of “hidden errors.”
  - “By ‘hidden’ errors, I mean those that might well have been invisible to a proof-reader because the printed text appears to make sense. There are various sources of these errors. The received text may be uncertain or corrupted in some way, earlier translations may have made a mistake that is accidentally retained, the translators themselves may have erred, they may not have written down what they meant to write, their draft may have been incorrectly copied in making the master copy, and the printer may have gone wrong in ways that are hidden.

Here we enter difficult territory because there is usually a degree of doubt as to whether these really are errors. The range is from near-certainty to the faintest suspicion, so there is not always a correct answer as to what the text should be. I want now to discuss some representative examples of each kind of possible error.

As examples of problems arising from the originals, three similar problems of gender are illuminating. I have already noted the omission of a marginal alternative at Ruth 3:15, where the first edition reads, ‘he went into the citie’. This follows the received Hebrew text, but the problem is that the context seems to demand that it is Ruth, not Boaz, who went. Many manuscripts and various translations including the Geneva and the Bishops’ Bibles make the verb feminine. Bod 1602 shows that the translators originally left ‘she’ unchanged, and the second edition, followed by most subsequent editions, has ‘she went’. Moreover, only if the translators had followed the practice recorded in the report to the Synod of Dort of noting alternative readings in the margin could one have been certain that ‘he went’ was deliberate. There is, then, a good case that ‘he went’ is an error. Two points go against this. First, the reading is true to the Hebrew; second, ‘he went’ is a hard reading and therefore difficult to take as a copying or printing error. In this case, I think one must trust the first edition: the original may be wrong, but the translators appear to have followed it deliberately.

The gender of a Hebrew verb also causes problems in the final verses of Job 39 and in Song 2:7. In the latter the context seems to demand a masculine verb: although one might take the verse as an interpolation by the man, the woman appears to be speaking, as in the surrounding verses, giving a command about her lover: 'I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem... that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, till he please'. The Hebrew has a feminine verb, 'till she please', and various translations, including the Vulgate, Geneva and the Bishops' Bible have followed this. The Bishops' Bible reads, 'nor touch her, till she be content her self'. Now, there appears to be no doubt that the KJB translators decided to treat the Hebrew as an error: they struck through all but 'nor' and 'be', and substituted 'awake my loue till he please', which is the rendering I quoted above. However, some copies of the first edition read 'till she please'. Because we do not know whether 'he' was corrected to 'she' or the other way round, we do not know whether the translators changed their mind and decided to be literal in spite of the context, or whether the printer, misled by the Bishops' Bible feminine reading because he was working from an annotated text like Bod 1602, incorrectly printed 'she'. So, 'until she please' could have been the translators' final decision, but the presence of 'till he please' in the majority of copies and in the second and subsequent editions means that one must take this as the intended reading. In short, the translators decided the Hebrew text was wrong, and the source of the variation in some copies may go back to the nature of the copy the printer worked from.

The third example of this sort concerns the eagle at the end of Job 39. In the Hebrew it is consistently masculine, but the KJB makes it feminine except in v. 30, which reads, 'her young ones also suck up blood: and where the slain are, there is he'. This appears to be a muddle, possibly going back to incomplete alteration of the Bishops' Bible, which makes the eagle masculine throughout. The translators made no change to 'there is he' in Bod 1602. The change to 'there is she' was first made in 1616 and then confirmed by the Cambridge edition of 1629. Scrivener's judgement on this seems exactly right: 'the "eagle" should have been masculine throughout vers. 27–30, but after having regarded it as feminine thus far, it is too late to change here' (p. 165 n.). The use of the masculine cannot be justified by reference to the Hebrew without impeaching the use of the feminine up to this point. The 1611 reading is an error, ultimately going back to the nature of the original (although that does not have an error here), but apparently having an immediate cause in imperfectly carrying out the decision to change the eagle's gender.

Two of the examples just discussed may well involve an influence from the Bishops' Bible. I have already noted one example of a Bishops' Bible mistake creeping apparently unnoticed into the KJB text, 'man of actiuitie' at Gen. 47:6 (see above, p. 36). Another reading that appears to be a printer's error in the 1602 Bishops' Bible is 'upon earth' instead of 'upon the earth' in the phrase, 'since the day that God created man upon earth' (Deut. 4:32). The Hebrew has the definite article and other editions of the Bishops' Bible (as also the Geneva Bible) have 'upon the earth'. No correction was noted in Bod 1602, but the article reappears in the KJB in the 1612 quartos. A more blatant error from the 1602 text is 'the Lord your God' (1 Kgs 8:61). The Hebrew, correctly followed by the original Bishops' Bible and brought back into the KJB in 1629, means 'the Lord our God'. Again the translators failed to correct Bod 1602.

This kind of error may come from moments of inattention by the translators or from failure to mark intended corrections, in which case it relates to the next group, errors that come from the Bod 1602 scribes. At Exod. 35:11 the translators revised ‘and his rings, his boards, his bars’ towards Geneva’s ‘and his taches & his boards, his barres’, but the scribe omitted ‘and his boards’. The omission was rectified by the second Cambridge edition (1638). At Eccles. 8:17 there is a reading that seems to make sense: ‘because though a man labor to seek *it* out, yea further though a wise man thinke to know *it*, yet shall he not be able to finde *it*’. However, a phrase from the Hebrew is missing after ‘to seek *it* out’, and it was supplied in 1629, ‘yet he shall not find *it*’. The omission goes directly back to the Bod 1602 scribe. Just possibly he struck through more of the text than he meant to, but the likelihood is that he failed to write in a revision, for the Bishops’ Bible phrase – ‘yet he cannot reach unto them’ – does need revision. The Hebrew is [Hebrew word]: there is nothing to justify ‘cannot’, and ‘cannot reach unto’ is vague and awkward. The verse ends, [Hebrew word]: the KJB has added ‘yet’ and ‘it’ to fill out the sense of a literal rendering, ‘yet he shall not be able to find it’. 1629’s insertion is exactly in keeping with this and is in all probability exactly what the translators intended to write. A similar incomplete correction also produces sense at Dan. 1:12. ‘Vs haue’ is struck through in Bod 1602’s ‘let vs haue pulse’, and ‘them giue’ is inserted. Here too it was the 1629 edition that noticed that something from the Hebrew was omitted; it corrected the reading to ‘let them give us pulse’.

The bulk of the hidden errors appear to be the fault of the printer:

Ref.	1611 ‘hidden’ error	Correction	Date
Exod. 38:11	hoopes	hooks	1611 2nd edn
Isa. 49:20	straight	strait	1611 2nd edn
Mal. 1:8	if hee offer	if ye offer	1611 2nd edn
Ecclus. 44:5	reiected	recited	1611 2nd edn
John 15:4	and in you	and I in you	1611 2nd edn
1 Cor. 7:32	things that belōgeth	things that belong	1612
Ezek. 6:8	that he may haue	that ye may have	1613
Wisdom 10:14	gaue them	gave him	1613
Lev. 26:40	the iniquitie of their fathers	their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers	1616
2 Esdras 16:52	yet a little iniquitie	yet a little, and iniquity	1616

Ref.	1611 'hidden' error	Correction	Date
1 Cor. 15:6	And that	After that	1616
2 Tim. 4:13	bring with thee	bring <i>with thee</i> , and the books	1616
Ps. 69:32	good	God	1617
Jer. 51:12	watchman	watchmen	1629
Ezek. 34:31	yee my flocke of my pasture	ye my flock, the flock of my pasture	1629
Dan. 6:13	the captiuity of the children	the children of the captivity	1629
1 Esdras 2:9	very free gifts	very many free gifts	1629
1 Macc. 5:65	townes thereof [second occurrence]	towers thereof	1629
1 Macc. 10:25	vnto him	unto them	1629
2 Cor. 11:32	the citie	the city of the Damascenes	1629
Rev. 13:6	them that dwelt	them that dwell	1629
Ezek. 36:2	had said	hath said	1630
Ezra 2:22	children	men	1638
Ezek. 5:1	take the ballances	take thee balances	1638
Ezek. 24:5	let him see the	let them see the	1638
Ezek. 46:23	a new <i>building</i>	a row of <i>building</i>	1638
Heb. 11:23	they not afraid	they were not afraid	1638
1 Macc. 16:14	threescore and seuenth	threescore and seventeenth	1769

Sometimes there is clear evidence of what caused him to go wrong. As noted above, p. 32, the error of 1 Cor. 15:6 comes from the printer's eye slipping back to the previous verse. Ezra 2 lists at length the Israelites who returned from the Babylonian exile. For the most part the Hebrew uses [Hebrew word], which the KJB renders as 'the children of', but at vv. 22, 23, 27 and 28 the Hebrew varies things by using [Hebrew word]. The Bishops' Bible gives 'the men of', and Bod 1602 shows that the translators intended to follow this literal rendering. But, forgivably lulled by the long succession of 'children', the printer put 'children' instead of 'men' at v. 22. The mistake was corrected by the second Cambridge edition, 1638. Sometimes the printer simply misunderstood what he was setting. At Ezek. 5:1 he put the apparently sensible 'take the ballances' where it should have been 'take thee balances' as in the similar phrases earlier in the verse. This error was sufficiently natural and inconspicuous that it too survived until 1638.

On occasions the printer misread his copy (the marvel is that this happened so rarely if his copy was Bod 1602 or anything like it). This is the likeliest explanation for the strange reading at Ecclus. 44:5, ‘such as found out musical tunes, and reiected verses in writing’. ‘Reiected’ surely comes from mistaking ‘recited’, which is what the subsequent editions have. And carelessness presumably caused ‘threescore and seuenth’ instead of ‘threescore and seuteenth’, the Bishops’ Bible reading, at 1 Macc. 16:14. The interesting thing is that this simple error of translation was not corrected until 1769. The two testaments were checked against the originals for some of the editions, but there was much less checking of the Apocrypha.

Not all the hidden errors fit readily into the groups I have identified. When Scrivener comments that ‘vnfaithfull’ instead of ‘unthankful’ for [Hebrew word] (Wisdom 16:29) is ‘evidently an oversight’ (p. 180 n.), he is going as far as is reasonable in many instances. What is crucial is that there are errors in the text and that they come from a variety of sources. If they can be convincingly referred to the printer or to one of the scribes preparing the manuscript or to failure to notice a mistake in the Bishops’ Bible, then it is clear that they should be corrected. When they involve a sense of mistaken judgement on the translators’ part, things become much more doubtful. Such doubtful things become a major part of the subject as we turn to the development of the text as we now have it through the work of successive printers and editors.” (Norton, 57-61)

- Interested parties are encouraged to see “Appendix 1 Printer’s Errors in the First Edition” on pages 167-172 of Dr. Norton’s book for a complete list of printer errors in the 1611. In addition, Dr. Lawrence Vance’s work *The Text of the King James Bible* would be another important work to consult.

### Works Cited

Norton, David. *A Textual History of the King James Bible*. Cambridge University Press, 2005.