

Sunday, September 24, 2023—Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*
Lesson 212 The AV 1611: Examining The Marginal Notes (Types Of Notes)

Introduction

- In [Lesson 211](#) we discussed two different categories of errors of the press in the 1611 AV: 1) typographical errors and 2) hidden errors.
- In this Lesson we want to continue our study of the 1611 as a historical artifact by looking at the marginal notes found therein. In order to accomplish this task, we will consider the following points:
 - Review Past Discussion of the Marginal Notes
 - Types of Marginal Notes
 - Examining the *Literatura Bautista* Article

Review Past Discussion of the Marginal Notes

- In [Lesson 203](#) we discussed what Myles Smith said in the Preface regarding the marginal notes found in the AV. Titled “Reasons Moving Us To Set Diversity of Senses In the Margin, Where There Is Great Probability For Each”, subsection fourteen dealt with this subject matter in detail. Rather than repeat all that information in this Lesson we will summarize some of the main points:
 - King James strongly objected to the Geneva Bible on account of its marginal notes. In William Barlow’s account of the Hampton Court Conference as set forth in the *Sum and Substance*, King James is reported to have stated the following:
 - “Whereupon his Highness wished, that some especial pains should be taken in that behalf for one uniform translation (**professing that he could never, yet, see a Bible well translated in English, but the worst of all his Majesty thought the Geneva to be**) . . . withal, he gave this caveat (**upon a word cast out by my Lord of London that no marginal notes should be added, having found in them which are annexed to the Geneva translation (which he saw in a Bible given him by an English Lady) some notes very partial, untrue, seditious, and favouring too much of dangerous, and traitorous conceits**) . . .”
(Barlow, 47)
 - Bancroft set forth the following “Rules” to govern the use of marginal notes in the AV.
 - 6—No marginal notes at all to be affixed, but only for the explanation of the Hebrew or Greek words, which cannot without some circumlocution so briefly and fitly be expressed in the text.
 - 7—Such quotations of places to be marginally set down as shall serve for the fit reference of one scripture to another.

- According to Bancroft’s Rules there were two allowable reasons for the use of marginal notes in the AV. First was to explain Hebrew and/or Greek words that could not “briefly” or “fitly be expressed in the text.” Second was to produce a system of Biblical cross-references to “serve for the fit reference of one scripture to another.”
- While Smith’s Preface sets forth a rationale for why the translators included marginal notes in the AV of 1611, it does not comment further upon the nature of the notes or their number. According to the Preface the reasons for marginal notes are as follows:
 - Difficult Words & Sentences—“. . . it hath pleased God in his divine providence, here and there to scatter words and sentences of that difficulty and doubtfulness, not in doctrinal points that concern salvation, (for in such it hath been vouched that the Scriptures are plain) but in matters of less moment, that fearfulness would better beseem us than confidence, and if we will resolve upon modesty with S. *Augustine* . . . “it is better to make doubt of those things which are secret, than to strive about those things that are uncertain.”
 - Singular Word Occurrences & Rare Animals Etc.—“There be many words in the Scriptures, which be never found there but once, (having neither brother or neighbor, as the *Hebrews* speak) so that we cannot be holpen by conference of places. Again, there be many rare names of certain birds, beasts and precious stones, etc.”
- According to F.H.A. Scrivener’s 1884 publication *The Authorized Edition of the English Bible* there are 8,422 total marginal notes in the AV of 1611. This total breaks down as follows:
 - Old Testament—6,637
 - Apocrypha—1,018
 - New Testament—767 (Scrivener, 56)
- Timothy Berg, author of the article “[Five Types of Marginal Notes In The King James Bible](#)”, on the *King James Bible History* blog offers some slightly different numbers via a computer calculation of the number of marginal notes. Please note that Berg’s statistics do not include the Apocrypha.
 - Old Testament—6,565
 - New Testament—777
 - Total—7,342 (Berg)
- There is a webpage on the *Literatura Bautista* website titled “[An exhaustive listing of the marginal notes of the 1611 edition of the King James Bible](#)” that catalogues every marginal note from the 1611 in canonical order.

- The question of whether the thousands of marginal notes exclusively fit the framework laid out by Myles Smith in the Preface was beyond the scope of Lesson 203. Put another way, were the marginal notes limited to the following two categories that Smith enunciated in the Preface: 1) Difficult Words & Sentences, and 2) Singular Word Occurrences & Rare Animals Etc.; or did they extend beyond these two general categories? This will be the focus of the current Lesson.
- Smith’s purpose in the Preface was not to expound upon or defend every individual marginal note. Rather, his focus was to address the general practice and principles for the translators’ use of marginal notes in the face of those who opposed the practice.

Types of Marginal Notes

- In *A Textual History of the King James Bible*, Professor David Norton identifies “three kinds of annotation,” observable in the margins of the 1611 AV.
 - “There are literal translations designated with a †, alternative English renderings with double vertical lines, and cross references with an asterisk.” (Norton, 49)
- According to Dr. Norton, the marginal notes are marked as follows:
 - † = literal translations
 - || = alternative English renderings
 - * = cross references
- In the anthology published by the Society of Biblical Literature titled *The King James Version At 400: Assessing Its Genius as Bible Translation and Its Literary Influence* there is an essay titled “The Role Of the Metatexts In the King James Version As A Means of Mediating Conflicting Theological Views” by Jacobus A. Naude. Subsection 6 of Naude’s essay is titled “The Antimarginal Note Policy of the King James Version As A Silencing Tool” in which he states the following:
 - “Another way in which the translators mediated the conflict was to restrict the nature of the marginal notes. As explained in “The translators to the Reader,” notes were restricted to mainly three kinds. An asterisk in the texts (5,200 cases) alerts the reader to cross-references in the margin where related passages are indicated. A dagger in the text (about 4,000 passages) indicates a note providing the Hebrew form of a word, the Hebrew meaning of a word or phrase, or the literal form of a Hebrew idiom underlying the translation. There are also more than 2,500 Old Testament passages where parallel vertical bars point to some comment in the margin, which may explain a Hebrew unit of weight or measure, flag an ambiguity in the original text, present an alternative rendering for the original text, or propose an alternative reading for the original text. In the New Testament the dagger and parallel vertical bars are used rather interchangeably to indicate examples of ambiguity, literal translation of Hebrew idioms, or where the wording of the original text is in doubt.

The translators' position concerning notes was a reaction especially to the numerous interpretative, polemical, antimonarchical, and devotional notes that cluttered the margins of the Puritans' Geneva Bible. But more importantly, this policy concerning restricting the metatextual material in the notes played a role in mediation between the viewpoints of the Anglicans and the Puritans. To illustrate the role of the presence or absence of notes in restricting or opening up the interpretation of the biblical text, we will examine representative examples of the interplay between translated text and metatextual note with respect to central issues in the debate between Anglicans and Puritans—the king and the monarchy, Calvinistic theology, and church polity involving especially bishops.” (Naude, 169-170)

- Naude goes on to explore numerous examples on pages 170 to 179 that while interesting are beyond the scope of this class.
- Timothy Berg, curator of the blog [King James Bible History](#), has an entry on the marginal notes in the AV titled, “[Five Types of Marginal Notes in the King James Bible](#).” While noting the three different types of markings/symbols identified above, Berg sees five different types of marginal notes as the title of his article suggests.
 - “The kind of notes printed in the margin could be categorized several different ways. There are three different symbols (†, ||, *) used to express marginal notes that serve five basic functions. Thus, one could speak of three categories of notes (classifying by symbol or form, as Norton does), or five categories of notes (classifying by basic function). The 1611 in fact includes numerous inconsistencies and errors in its presentation of these symbols. For example, in Gen.17:4, one can see an * meant to indicate a marginal note not included, and while the text has || that indicate a note with an alternate translation or reading, the margin has a † that would indicate a more literal translation. They also often employ the symbols in a rather inconsistent way, and so categorizing by function seems the best track.” (Berg)
- According to Berg these “five categories of notes” can be classified according to the following basic functions:
 - More Literal Translations—“These are prefixed by the dagger sign “†” and then, “Heb.,” “Cal.” or “Gr.” noting a more literal translation of the original languages than was deemed suitable for the text. Scrivener counts 4,111 of these in the Old Testament, (77 of which relate to the Aramaic portions), and 112 in the NT.” (Berg)
 - Alternate Translations—“These are in a sense one part of a larger category of notes dealing with “alternate readings.” These are prefixed by double vertical lines “||” and then, “Or,” noting that there is another equally probable way that the text may be translated other than that expressed in the text. Scrivener counts 2,156 of these in the OT, and 582 in the NT.” (Berg)
 - Textual Variants/Alternative Textual Readings—“These are also in a sense a smaller subcategory of “alternate readings” like the alternate translations above. They are

likewise typically prefixed by double vertical lines || and then, “Or” noting that there is a textual variant in the passage, and an equally probable textual form that may better represent the wording of the original autographs [Caution needs to be exercised when it comes to this category identified by Berg. First, the number of marginal notes that fit this category is very small. Second, the King James translators noting variant readings in TR editions is not the same thing as engaging in modern Textual Criticism.].” (Berg)

- Miscellaneous Information—“There are three basic kinds of information given in this type of note. In the OT, 63 notes give the meaning of Proper names; 240 provide harmonizing information with a parallel text or explanations. In the NT, 35 marginal notes provide miscellaneous information relating to explanations or brief exposition. These can be introduced in almost any of the ways described for the types of notes listed above.” (Berg)
- Cross References—“These are prefixed with an asterisk (*) and then an abbreviated Scripture reference judged to be relevant to the present context.” (Berg)
- Judging from personal correspondence, Berg has changed his mind since originally penning his blog article in March 2020. Rather than categorizing the marginal notes by function into five different categories, he seems to be arguing for seeing three different categories and then subdividing how these categories were employed.
- Judging from the work of Naude and Berg cited above, it seems clear that while there are three types of markings identifying the presence of a marginal notes, they do not correlate perfectly with the function of each individual note. Put a different way, a given marking was used for a variety of different purposes.
- Translator Samuel Ward’s testimony before the Synod of Dort in 1618 is also relevant to this discussion. Ward stated the following regarding the purpose and function of marginal notes in the AV.
 - “Secondly, no notes were to be placed in the margin, but only parallel passages to be noted.

Thirdly, where a Hebrew or Greek word admits two meanings of a suitable kind, the one was to be expressed in the text, the other in the margin. The same to be done where a different reading was found in good copies [See the bracketed statement above in the quote from Timothy Berg about “Textual Variants/Alternative Textual Readings.”].

Fourthly, the more difficult Hebraisms and Graecisms were consigned to the margin.” (Pollard, 339)

- Samuel Ward’s testimony seems consistent with the following understanding of the marginal notes.
 - † = literal translations
 - “Fourthly, the more difficult Hebraisms and Graecisms were consigned to the margin.”
 - || = alternative English renderings
 - “Thirdly, where a Hebrew or Greek word admits two meanings of a suitable kind, the one was to be expressed in the text, the other in the margin. The same to be done where a different reading was found in good copies.”
 - * = cross references
 - “Secondly, no notes were to be placed in the margin, but only parallel passages to be noted.”

Examining the *Literatura Bautista* Article

- In 2010, Calvin George authored an article for *Literatura Bautista* titled “[An Exhaustive Listing of the Marginal Notes of the 1611 Edition of the King James Bible](#).” As the title suggests, the bulk of George’s work is an exhaustive listing of the marginal notes found in 1611 minus the Apocrypha. Before presenting his list, George includes some interesting front material that is helpful at this point in our study. A note of caution is in order regarding this website as I have found some entry errors on the site.
- In the section titled “Ways in which the marginal notes are valuable” George provides the following bulleted list:
 - “Sometimes the notes shed light on an obscure passage.
 - The meaning of the names of Bible characters revealed in the notes are often of interest.
 - Also, the meaning of some biblical terms are defined (such as Bethel, meaning house of God).
 - It reveals that Bible translation work is not as simple and straightforward as some people imagine.
 - It illustrates the absurdity of never deviating from translating in a literal fashion. The notes for a verse that illustrates this vividly is Genesis 25:18, where “he did eat of his venison” in literal Hebrew would have been “venison was in is mouth” according to the marginal notes.” (George)

- Another list worthy of our attention is titled “Miscellaneous technical details of interest:”
 - The famous phrase “rock of ages” is not found in the text of the KJV, but rather in the margin at Isaiah 26:4.
 - The very last marginal note in the 1611 was a typo at Rev. 20:13. For the word hell in the text, it had the marginal note “Or, hell.”
 - There are no notes for the entire book of Philemon.
 - At least nine entire verses were rewritten in marginal notes.
 - There are 6,565 marginal notes in the OT, and 777 in the NT, for a total of 7,342 marginal notes*
 - *Apocrypha not included. Scrivener’s totals were 767 for the NT, 6,637 for the OT, for a total of 7,404 marginal notes. We used a spreadsheet program to help avoid human error in counting.” (George)
- George describes his “methods” as follows:
 - “We did not include the cross-references from the margins, nor the chapter headings. The notes of the Apocrypha were also not included. To make the notes more user-friendly, we recreated them more-or-less in modern spelling. When an archaic word in the notes was not recognized, the spelling was left “as is.”

The text of 1611 used the symbols † and || in the text to indicate the word or the start of a phrase for which there is a marginal note. When a phrase was involved, in a few cases it was difficult to determine the exact length the phrase should be. When doubts surfaced, I used a Hebrew-English or Greek-English interlinear in an attempt to determine the exact phrase that the notes corresponded to. At times the determination of the length of the phrase was unavoidably subjective. The † symbol was used when the margin displayed a more literal Hebrew meaning. A || symbol was used to express another way in which the underlying Hebrew could be translated. The notes themselves in the Old Testament start with the abbreviation Hebr. for Hebrew and “or” to designate alternative translations. On a few occasions the notes are preceded by “i.” or “That is,” instead. In some rare cases it was obvious that the † and || symbol should have been moved back a word or two. (i.e., 2 Kings 8:29, first marginal note, 2 Chronicles 32:6, etc) “&c.” was replaced with the more modern “etc.”

After the reference, the relevant portion from the text of the 1611 is listed, followed by the marginal note corresponding to that portion with a colon between them. When a colon was used in the original notes, we used a comma instead to prevent confusion. Sometimes the notes capitalized words in what seemed to us an inconsistent manner, but we have attempted to retain the capitalization of the notes as in the original 1611 edition.” (George)

- Under the heading “Heeding the warning of the KJV translators” George states the following:
 - “Many of the marginal notes reveal thousands of instances in which the KJV translators were forced to interpret as part of their translation work. The KJV translators were not always certain that they had made the correct interpretation, and hence the marginal note. In the preface of the 1611 they explained that we should not dogmatize on the basis of their interpretation:

...it hath pleased God in his divine providence, here and there to scatter words and sentences of that difficulty and doubtfulness, not in doctrinal points that concern salvation, (for in such it hath been vouched that the Scriptures are plain) but in matters of less moment ... in such a case, doth not a margin do well to admonish the Reader to seek further, and not to conclude or dogmatize upon this or that peremptorily? ... They that are wise, had rather have their judgments at liberty in differences of readings, then to be captivated to one, when it may be the other.

Although we believe the KJV is trustworthy, we warn the reader that some in their zeal to defend the KJV go too far, and are guilty of what the KJV translators warned about.

The notes indicate a desire on the part of the KJV translators to be very accurate and as literal as possible, in part because they sometimes noted matters where the departure from the original language was very slight. However, at other times some departures may seem surprising, such as when their notes reveal that they left out “spirit” in Genesis 7:22. The object of the marginal notes are usually to expand the meaning of a single word or short phrase. In some cases, lengthy phrases or in rarer cases an entire verse is rewritten in the margin. The marginal notes reveal some italics were inconsistent (though perhaps they should be considered vindicated by the content of the marginal notes).” (George)

- Regarding the question why the original marginal notes are no longer printed in modern printings of the King James Bible, George states,
 - “Extra material as in marginal notes costs more to print.
 - Popularity of study Bibles that do not leave room for these marginal notes.
 - Lack of demand, as the notes often deal with technicalities that do not concern the overwhelming majority of Bible readers.” (George)
- Lastly, for the sake of brevity, George listed marginal notes that modern readers of the AV might find humorous due to language change over the past 400 years.
 - “Psalm 80:4 – wilt thou be angry: Heb. wilt thou smoke?
 - Isaiah 29:4 – whisper: Heb. peep or chirp
 - Isaiah 34:14 – shrichowle: Or, night monster

- Jeremiah 13:18 – principalities: or, head tires” (George)
- In the next Lesson we will look at examples of marginal notes to see what we can observe for ourselves.

Works Cited

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