

Sunday, January 21, 2024—Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*
Lesson 222 The AV 1611: Early Reception

Introduction

- Since Lesson 186 we have been looking at the AV of 1611 as a historical artifact. In doing so we have considered the following topics.
 - Bancroft’s 14 Changes & The Question of Authorization ([Lesson 186](#))
 - Confronting the Copyright Myth & Early 17th Century Printing ([Lesson 187](#))
 - More On the “Copyright Myth” & A 1612 New Testament ([Lesson 188](#))
 - The First Edition & The “He/She” Bible Controversy ([Lesson 189](#))
 - Assessing Its Preliminary Contents (Title Page) ([Lesson 190](#))
 - Assessing Its Preliminary Contents, Part 2 (Title Page & Epistle Dedicatory) ([Lesson 191](#))
 - Assessing Its Preliminary Contents, Part 3 ([Lesson 192](#))
 - Producing A Proper Perspective Of The Preface ([Lessons 193-209](#))
 - Page Layout & Typography ([Lesson 210](#))
 - Errors of The Press ([Lesson 211](#))
 - Examining The Marginal Notes ([Lessons 212-221](#))
- Having already covered a wide swath of information regarding the 1611, there are a couple more topics on this matter that I would like to address. These include:
 - Early Reception
 - Early Criticism
 - Early Sales
- The focus of this Lesson will be on the matter of Early Reception. In tackling this topic, we will cover the following points:
 - Common Misconceptions
 - Early 17th Century English Preaching
 - Sermon Evidence: Early Use of The AV 1611-1630

Early Reception

Common Misconceptions

- Mordechai Feingold, in his essay “Birth and Early Reception of a Masterpiece: Some Lose Ends and Common Misconceptions,” addresses the early reception of the AV after it was first published in 1611.
 - “Curiously the received view among scholars today is that the publication of the KJV proved anticlimactic. They, directly or indirectly, on an assertion made as long ago as 1881 by Randall Davidson, the future archbishop of Canterbury, according to whom not only was there no attempt to impose the new version upon the church, but for a least until the 1630s, many bishops continued to use other translations in their sermons, primarily the Geneva Bible. My reading of contemporary sermons suggest that Davidson appears to have based the latter claim on the epigraphs [A short quotation or saying at the beginning of a book or chapter, intended to suggest its theme.] that preachers affixed to their sermons, rather than on their content. And, unfortunately, complacency with this rather impressionistic take on the immediate impact of the KJV structures the conclusions reached by more recent scholars as well.” (Feingold, 12-13)
- Feingold suggests three things in the above citation: first, the notion that the AV was not widely used until the 1630s and has its origin in a piece written by Randall Davidson for *Macmillan’s Magazine* in 1881 titled “The Authorization of the English Bible,” second, Davidson based his assertion upon the “epigraphs” affixed to the sermons rather than on the content of the sermons themselves, thirdly, Davidson’s suggestions have been accepted and passed on by more recent scholars, with little critical analysis.
- Feingold cites Professor David Norton, author of *A Textual History of the King James Bible*, as a leading advocate for Davidson’s analysis. Dr. Norton stated the following regarding the early reception of the AV in his book *A History of the English Bible As Literature*:
 - “If there was instant acclaim for the KJB, all evidence of it has been lost, whereas evidence of dissatisfaction has survived. In short, there has been a reversal in the KJB’s literary fortunes, from vilification to the highest praise, that must be recognized and account for.” (Norton, 90)
- Feingold goes on to state the following regarding Norton’s analysis:
 - “Indeed, he [Norton] conjectured, ‘people were relatively indifferent to the precise verbal form’—and, therefore, to differences between various translations. Hence the KJV’s ultimate triumph ‘owed nothing to its relative merits as a translation.’ Norton reiterated his position in a subsequent publication: ‘Whatever we now think of the 1611 as a defining moment in the history of the English Bible, it hardly appears so at the time. The KJB occasioned scarcely a remark in its early years. Geneva remained the Bible of the people, and, in spirit of the official status of the Bishops’ Bible and the KJB, for the clergy when they needed an English version.’ Other scholars followed his lead. Hannibal Hamlin, for one, concurred with Norton’s perception that ‘the early reception of the King

James Bible was at best lukewarm.’ Perhaps, he conjectured, ‘the deafening silence with which the King James Bible was received may be partly because many did not think of it as anything especially new.” (Feingold, 13)

- In the next paragraph Feingold expresses his thoughts on the thinking of Norton and Hamlin noted above.
 - “To my mind, such judgements ignore a considerable body of evidence; what they fail to systematically take into account is the profound scholarly character of Bible study and the pervasive habit of referencing the original languages in tandem with translations—and not only by scholars. Nor have historians given sufficient attention to explicit statements of contemporaries regarding the non-fixity of any one translation and the place of all translations in the enduing process of comprehension.” (Feingold, 13)

Early 17th Century English Preaching

- Put another way, Feingold is bemoaning superficial thinking regarding the early reception of the AV that is limited to conclusions drawn from “epigraphs” and a lack of understanding regarding early 17th century preaching. In a lengthy section of his essay, Feingold discusses the intricate interplay between the Protestant call for *ad fontes* [back to the sources i.e., Hebrew and Greek] and the need for vernacular translations in preaching. According to Feingold, the arrival of the AV into the English-speaking church cannot be properly ascertained without understanding these dynamics.
 - “Close scrutiny of sermons that were delivered in the immediate aftermath of 1611—including sermons purporting to illustrate the lackluster reception of the translation—further illuminate the nuanced manner in which the KJV entered the highly erudite culture of exegesis in Jacobean and Caroline England.” (Feingold, 18)
- Feingold cites a piece from 1607 by the Puritan minister Richard Bernard titled [*The Faithful Shepherd: Or the Shepherds Faithfulness*](#) on the need for caution in “selecting and presenting texts” when preaching to a non-scholarly audience.
 - “Reade it in the translation to vulgar people, and in that which is most commonly received, and best approved; and even as it is there set down, without addition, detraction or change of anything therein. It is not fit that every one be a public controller of a public received translation. As it may argue some presumption and pride in the Corrector, so it may breed contention, and leave a great scruple, and cast doubts into the hearers minds, what reckoning to make of a translation; and it gives great advantage to the Papists; who hereby labor to forestall many, that they smally account of our translations; which we see can never be so well done and generally approved of, but some particular persons will be censuring the same, and that not only in private (a thing happely tolerable if the censure bee true, and wisely proceeded in) but also they must needs shew their skill in Pulpits. It may seem. . . It is very necessary that the translation be most sound.” (Bernard, 16)
- In this piece Bernard is arguing for the reading of the “vulgar” transition when preaching to the common man. Furthermore, this should be done as “set down, without addition, detraction or

change of anything therein.” Four reasons are given for why this ought to be the case: 1) “may argue some presumption and pride in the Corrector,” 2) it “may breed contention, and leave a great scruple,” 3) “cast doubts in the hearers minds, 4) “it gives great advantage to the Papists.” In short, the principle advocated for herein by Bernard is that a minister ought to use a vernacular text that the audience is familiar with. The preacher should not overly “correct” the “commonly received and best approved” translation and thereby sow the seeds of doubt regarding the word of God in the minds of the hearers.

- Writing nearly a decade and a half later, in 1623, Stephen Edgerton also commented on the “duties of sermon goers” in a piece titled [*The Boring of the Eare*](#). In this work Edgerton stated the following:
 - “First, let such as bee able to read, bring with them to the public Assemblies the holy Bible, to the end that they may not only join with the Church in singing of Psalms, but also readily turn to the principal places of Scriptures that are read, expounded, and repeated by the Minister: by which means they shall greatly further both their attention and memory, having the help, not only of their Eare in hearing, but also of their Eye in perusing those scriptures, that are alleged, to see whether they be truly alleged or no: by which means also the Minister shall bee made more careful to take heed, that he do not but upon very good ground, swerve from the words of the common Translation.” (Edgerton, 38-39)
- According to Edgerton, literate people should bring their own Bibles to church and follow along with the minister as he expounds upon the text. Not only does this aid the hearer in both retention and understanding, it also serves to keep the minister honest. Furthermore, a minister needs to have “very good ground[s]” and not to “swerve from the words of the common Translation.”
- When the AV first appeared in 1611 it entered a preaching culture that was varied depending on the audience. For example, King James translator Lancelot Andrews was educated and erudite, using his own rendering of texts, when preaching before King James. At the same time, men such as Richard Benard were advocating for straight forward preaching from the “commonly received, and best approved” translation for the common man.
- With these factors and context in mind Feingold uses John Boys’s sermon [*An Exposition of the Last Psalme*](#) from 1613 as an example.
 - “Hardly surprising, then, to find the immediate aftermath of the publication of the KJV, preachers and authors presenting as base texts the more familiar renditions of biblical verse and only afterwards embarking on expositions that incorporated, in part or in full, the new translation. Consider John Boys, dean of Canterbury. On 5 November 1613, he delivered a Gunpowder Plot sermon at St Paul’s which took Psalm 150:1: הללו־אל־בְּקִדְשׁוֹ (‘O Praise God in his holiness’ in the Geneva Bible translation). However, in his sermon Boys expounded far longer on the alternative offered by ‘our new translation’—‘praise God in his sanctuary’—than on ‘holiness’, indicating that he did not simply allude to the KJV, but made a concerted effort to impress on his auditors the import of the sense conveyed by the new version.” (Feingold, 19)

- Next, after stating, “nor were key figures in the KJV enterprise reticent to use the new translation in their sermons, as is often argued, relying on the Geneva Bible instead,” Feingold cites sermons by translator Lancelot Andrews as a case in point.
 - “Consider Lancelot Andrews. In many of his sermons preached before James I, Andrewes relied not on any vernacular rendering but his own original translations and commentaries—obviously expecting the king’s approbation for his display of erudition, even when it meant veering away from the KJV. Thus, in a sermon he delivered on [25 December 1619](#), at the outset Andrewes appeared to be following the Geneva Bible in translating Luke 2:14 as: ‘Glorie be to God in the high Heavens [the KJV reads: ‘in the highest’], and peace upon earth and toward men good will.’ An alternative to the last four words was offered in the margin: ‘or, in men.’ In the course of the sermon, however, he wove in effortlessly, and without comment, the KJV rendering of ‘in the highest’; later, upon reaching ἐν ἀνθρώποις, Andrewes explained the alternative reading he had furnished: ‘It may be turned two ways’, the preacher noted, and ‘it will bear both.’ He then articulated what just may be termed a translator’s creed: ‘for my part I wish no word ever narrowed by a translation, but as much as might be, left in the latitude of the Original language.’ Therefore, ‘no hurt’ would follow the reading ‘in man’ rather than ‘toward men’; indeed, the ‘best way is, where there are two, to take in both: So we shall sure to leave out neither.” (Feingold, 20)
- Feingold cites additional examples of sermons from Lancelot Andrews. While Andrewes did not hesitate to express his personal “dissatisfaction” with certain KJV renderings he did not hesitate to weave a discussion of the “new translation” into his sermons.
 - “With such an awareness of Andrewes’s independent state of mind on the matter of translation, we are in a better position to appreciate the choices he made in the sermon he delivered at the opening of the 1621 Parliament. Andrewes settled as his text on Psalm 82:1 [Hebrew]. He presented his auditors with five renditions of the verse. His own translation of the Hebrew in Latin . . .; an identical rendering of the same into Greek; the version of the first part as printed in the Psalter (‘God standeth in the congregation of Princes’); the Geneva Bible (‘in the assembly of gods’); and the ‘new translation’ ([in the congregation] of the mighty’).” (Feingold, 20-21)
- Andrewes erudite style was employed when addressing audiences that were capable of interacting/understanding with the intricacies of his exegesis. Immediately following his discussion of Lancelot Andrewes, Feingold states:
 - “Nor would it be correct to claim that other Jacobean bishops were reticent to cite the KJV, or that they simply continued to take their texts from the Geneva Bible. They may have lacked Andrewes’s virtuosity in yoking together a variety of originals and translations, but they shared his independence of mind and conception of translation.” (Feingold, 21-22)

Sermon Evidence: Early Use of The AV 1611-1630

- After citing examples of sermons that chose to utilize the Geneva Bible as the base text on political grounds, Feingold offers a series of examples that demonstrate the inclusion of King James readings into sermons preached between 1611 and 1615 i.e., within the first half decade of the AV’s existence. Please consider the following examples:
 - 1612—Thomas Adams, [*The Happiness of the Church*](#).
 - “For his part, Thomas Adams, who in 1612 still followed the Geneva Bible, soon switched to the KJV. He often compared the two translations, as he did when sermonizing on the second part of Psalm 66:12 [Hebrew]. His base text followed the KJV: ‘We went through fire, and through water: but thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place’, and he explained his choice in the following terms: Some translations ‘have it: Wee went into fire, and into water: which extends their persecution to our death, and comprehends the latitude of mortal martyrdom. And thus understood, the next words of deliverance (Thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place) must be meant of our glory in heaven. But the evident circumstances following deny that interpretation: therefore I adhere to the latest and best Translation; Wee went through fire and through water.’” (Feingold, 23)
 - 1614—John Chadwick, [*A sermon preached at Snarford in Lincolnshire at the funerals of Sir George Sanct-Paule*](#).
 - “. . . John Chadwick preached the funeral service of Sir. George Saint-Paul, taking his epigraph (from the KJV) Isaiah 57:1. The base text, Psalms 37:37 [Hebrew], combined the Geneva Bible and the KJV: ‘Mark the perfect man, and behold the just.’ His word play is prefaced by: ‘Which words I confess are diverly understood; but I follow the last and best translation, which is most agreeable to the original.’” (Feingold, 23)
 - 1615 (20 March)—John Bury, *The Schole of Godly Feare*.
 - “John Bury preached on 20 March 1615 a sermon at Exeter on I Peter 1:17. His epigraph followed, with minor personal substitution, the KJV, while the base text combined elements of the Geneva and KJV version.” (Feingold, 23)
- After citing these examples, Dr. Feingold turned his attention to the following oft-cited words of Thomas Fuller regarding the Puritan attitudes towards the AV, “were not well pleased with this translation, suspecting it would abate the repute of the Geneva.” (Fuller, 409-410) Feingold offers the following response to these statements by Fuller:
 - “. . . it is important to point out that many of them [Puritans] embraced the KJV. The Puritains, Fuller went on to suggest, feared that without the ‘spectacles’ of the Geneva annotations, they would be deprived of the precise meaning of Scripture: ‘for, although a good translation is an excellent comment on the Bible . . . yet some short exposition on the text was much desired of the people.’ Fuller’s assessment is not without merit, but

Puritans preachers did embrace what quickly became established as the better translation, irrespective of their sentiments regarding the Geneva notes.” (Feingold, 23-24)

- In 1616 Puritan minister John Traske preached a sermon titled *Christ’s Kingdom Discovered* in which he stated:
 - “. . . and know that the last Translation is followed, as that by the which the Writer hath often confessed, that he hath received more benefit, then by all the Expositors that ever he read. And thou art desired withal to esteem that translation highly, and make it one cause of hearty thanksgiving to GOD, who hath given, & continued to us a King that had been a principal mover in such a great business; as also gift unto Men, that such much light spring out by their means. Albeit thou shalt happily meet with some private Spirits that will bee ready to censure sharply that, by the which the Church of GOD, will (certainly) at length reap great benefit.” (Feingold, 24)
- 1618 saw the publication of a sermon titled [*HALLELV-IAH: Praise yee the Lord, FOR THE VNBVRTHENING of a loaden Conscience*](#) by Puritan minister Richard Kilby in which he stated the following about the AV, “and in my weak judgment, the best translation of the Bible.” (Kilby, 78)
- Two years later in 1620, Puritan Robert Sherrard stated the following in his *The Countryman With his Household*, “I have strictly followed the last translation of the Bible, done by his Majesties special commandment, & appointed to be read in the Churches.” (Feingold, 24)
- In addition to the Puritan sermons cited above, Dr. Feingold goes on to provide more examples.
 - 1621—George Hackwill, [*King David’s Vow for Reformation*](#).
 - “In a sermon he delivered in 1621 on Psalm 101, George Hackwill declared upon presenting his base texts: the Psalms, ‘according to our last and most approved Translation: which I chiefly follow in my ensuing Exposition.’” (Feingold, 24)
 - 1627—William Sclater, [*A Brief Exposition with Notes, Upon the Second Epistle of the Thessalonians*](#).
 - “William Sclater followed suit in 1627: ‘Our English last and best Translation.’” (Feingold, 24-25)
 - 1628—Henry Burton, *A Tryall of Private Devotions*.
 - “Nor did Henry Burton find any contradiction between following the Geneva Bible in his epigraph, while referring to the KJV in the text as “our last and best English Translation.” (Feingold, 25)
- The citations furnished by Dr. Feingold in his essay call into question the long-standing narrative that the AV was not widely accepted until at least 1630. While it is true that use of the “last translation” i.e., the AV, gained ground over time, it is certainly not the case it was desired and/or

ignored until after 1630. As Feingold has demonstrated, this was not true of either Anglican or Puritan ministers. John Day, fellow of Oriel College, Oxford delivered a series of lectures during 1612 and 1613 that were published in 1614. Day's comments "to the reader" capture a common sentiment among ministers in the early years after the release of the AV in 1611.

- "First, whereas in all my Lectures I follow our *Former* Translation, not our *Last*, it is not for I mislike the *Last*, or prefer the other before it. But the truth is owing unto the *Former*, as much as mine own Salvation, in regard it first taught me to know what I know, I for my part cannot so easily be weaned from it,* & therefore account it my bounden dutie to follow it with honor to the Graue." (Day, "[To The Reader](#)")
- Days use of the "former translation" was not that he disliked "the Last" translation (AV) or thought it was in error or corrupt. Rather that he owed his very salvation and edification to the "former." I submit that there were many in early 17th century England who would have echoed Day's sentiments. In 1620 over half a decade later Day stated the following in a sermon titled, [Day's descant on Davids Psalmes: or A commentary vpon the Psalter, as it is vsually read throughout the yeere, at morning, and euening prayer And first, of the first eight Psalmes, appointed to be read, the first day of the moneth:](#)
 - "In regard hereof I have First made choice of that Translation, which the Selfe-same Church useth in her daily Devotions unto God. I know the last Translation is more agreeable unto the Hebrew, the Original of the Psalmes, whereunto in matter of Controversy, we are rather to refer ourselves, howbeit since our Mother the Church notwithstanding that Translation hath retained THIS still . . . let vs follow our Mothers steps, and seeing she gives vs these PSALMES as a daily portion to feed upon, eat wee our Meat without grudging. . . in all Quotations of Holy Scriptures, the Psalmes excepted only, for that by reading them in the Church so often, they are more familiar to vs in that Dialect, I shall wholly follow the last Translation, unless peradventure sometimes some occasion may bee given of a grateful Remembrance of the Former. Nor shall this prejudice their Paines who have by his Excellent MAIESTIES Princely Care been imploied in the Latter, forasmuch as they themselves in their own very Words commend the Former so much." (Day, "To The Reader")
- Put another way, Day will use the AV in all his Biblical quotations except when quoting the Psalmes. Note that Day has gone from not "misliking" the "last translation" but preferring the "former" in the early 1610s to following "the last translation" in 1620.

Conclusion

- Dr. Feingold states the following in the conclusion to his groundbreaking essay:
 - "As in the case of any new contribution to knowledge, a phase of acculturation was required before the KJV could establish itself as the paramount vernacular version of the Bible—assisted by commercial incentives of interest published. However, scholars and the reading public more widely began engaging seriously and approvingly with the KJV from the start." (Feingold, 27)

- On 3 November 1605 Sebastian Benefield preached a sermon on the book of Amos titled, [*A commentary or exposition upon the first chapter of the prophecy of Amos delivered in xxi. sermons in the parish church of Maisey Hampton in the diocese of Gloucester.*](#) In this sermon Benefield mentions King James's commissioning of the AV along with his expressed delight in the Kings decision and his anticipation for the completion of the work. (Feingold, 27)
 - “The much preaching & often reading of Gods holy word in the congregations of this land in the days of her, whom of late you loved, Queene ELIZABETH, have set up, & established her never dying praises. And is not God much to bee blessed for our good Josiah, our most dread sovereign, King IAMES? His heart is from above replenished with a religious zeal to free the passage of Gods most holy Gospel. His desire to have God sincerely worshipped throughout this land, is made known by the good order he hath takē to set before you, & al other his liege people, Gods word, if possible, in greatest purity. Let God be with the workmeñ, I mean, the translators of the old and new testaments; Let God be with them in their holy labors; and let the remembrance of our King for it, be like the composition of the perfume that is made by the art of the Apothecary.” (Benefield, 3-4)
- In 1629 Benefield's sermon was reprinted to which he added the following marginal comment, “Since: the translation is preerected and published, the exactest that ever this Land had.” The fact that Benefield was a “steadfast Puritan” significantly challenges the standard narrative regarding the early reception of AV.
 - “And, to reiterate, while many of the brethren remained attached to the dogmatic doctrinal annotation of the Geneva Bible, few faulted the translation itself. Grumblings regarding the KJV arose over specific renderings of a word or a phrase, not over the translation as a whole. Only one individual, Hugh Broughton, denounced it tout court, but then, he was deeply offended for having been excluded from among the rank of translators. He also took umbrage because the translators had refused to incorporate his prophetically grounded emendations into the KJV.” (Feingold, 27-28)
- In future Lessons we will consider Broughton's objections as well as the early sales of the AV.

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