

Sunday, February 25, 2024—Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*
 Lesson 226 The AV 1611: Early Sales (Ecclesiastical & Private Sales)

Introduction

- In [Lesson 224](#) we began looking at the “early sales” of the AV by considering the following aspects of the early 17th century Bible market.
 - Printing Capacity of the King’s Printer
 - Bible Production Before The AV
 - Financing & Printing Rights
- This discussion continued in [Lesson 225](#) as we studied the following additional points:
 - Variety of Formats & Sizes
 - Market Structure: Monopoly & Book Sales
- In the current Lesson we want to conclude our consideration of this topic by looking at one final point:
 - Ecclesiastical & Private Sales

Understanding the Early 17th Century Bible Market

- For this Lesson we will be using Professor Kenneth Fincham’s 2020 article for the *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* titled “The King James Bible: Crown, Church, and People,” to frame the discussion.

Ecclesiastical Sales

- In [Lesson 186](#) we discussed the question of whether the Crown ever officially “authorized” the AV. In his essay, Fincham brings up this topic within the context of “early sales” of the AV.
 - “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 Jacobeans.” (Fincham, 87)
- Put another way, if the Crown was not mandating that parish churches replace older editions such as the Bishops Bible for pulpit use, what motivation was there for local bishops to spend money

on the new Bible. This in turn would have an impact on the “early sales” of the AV. Fincham explores these issues in greater detail and depth than we have seen in any other source.

- Part two of Fincham’s essay opens with the following question, “In the absence of a royal injunction for parishes to buy the new translation, how rapidly did folio versions of the King James Bible reach parish lecterns and become part of regular worship?” (Fincham 87) According to Fincham there are three relevant sources of historical data to answer this question: 1) visitation articles, 2) church court records, and 3) churchwardens’ accounts.
 - “Diocesan and parochial evidence indicates that the acquisition of folio or ‘church’ Bibles was often quite protracted and stretched, in some dioceses, well into the 1630s. There are three principal sources for this investigation: visitation articles, church court records and churchwardens’ accounts, and they need to be read together and against each other.” (Fincham, 87)
- Of these three sources, “only visitation articles” have been consulted by previous studies, according to Fincham. (Fincham, 87)
 - “These articles of enquiry, issued by bishops and other ecclesiastical ordinaries, suggest that there was little concern to see parishes purchase the new translation: merely 35 per cent mentioned it in 1612-24, rising to 50 per cent for 1625-41. Such bald figures are somewhat misleading, since these articles were often formulaic, and sometimes adopted wholesale from earlier visitations, and so do not necessarily disclose the priorities of the visitor, which might be read out or circulated in a ‘charge’ at meetings during the visitation. Articles of enquiry need supplementing by churchwardens’ presentments recorded in consistory court and visitation books, and by surveys of church furnishings which took place in some jurisdictions. These court records, in turn, are complemented by evidence of the purchase and selling of Bibles in churchwardens’ accounts, even though these survive for only about 8 per cent of English parishes.” (Fincham, 87-88)
- The triangulation of these three factors paints the following picture of early ecclesiastical sales for the AV.
 - “Some parishes bought the new translation at once, without prompting from higher authority. A good example, albeit in a highly unusual parish, is the university church of St. Mary the Great in Cambridge, which bought its copy very shortly after publication, a thoroughly appropriate acquisition given the university’s immense contribution to the translation project. However, given the costs involved, most waited to be prodded. The bishops themselves moved at very different speeds. Bishop John King of London, not a translator but an intimate of Archbishop Abbot, was the first to require purchase by the parishes at his primary visitation of September 1612, and large numbers of parishes duly complied. Bishop Smith of Gloucester, a translator and author of the preface, did likewise at his primary visitation in 1613: some 260 Gloucestershire parishes, about 95 per cent of the total, were ordered to acquire a copy of the new translation within a month or two,

with Smith himself often presiding in court. Churchwardens who would not comply were threatened with punitive fines of 20s.; many returns were submitted certifying the purchase of the book, and almost all the surviving churchwardens' accounts for the diocese record expenditure on a new Bible in the years 1613-15. More common was the gradualist approach adopted in dioceses such as Bath and Wells, Exeter and Norwich, where individual parishes were pushed to buy the new translation over more than a decade from 1612 to the mid-1620s, usually on the basis of churchwardens' presentments but also, in the archdeaconry of Norwich, through annual inspections of church fabric and furnishings. At Bath and Wells, and elsewhere, parishes which pleaded that their Bible was in good condition, though not of the new translation, or else that they were too poor to afford the new translation, were sometimes excused. The first unequivocal sign that Archbishop Abbot himself was instructing parishes to buy the new translation was not until 1616, in the diocese of Coventry and Lichfield during a vacancy, which was then followed up by the in-coming bishop, John Overall.

Elsewhere, the approach was slower still. In Peterborough diocese there is little sign of pressure on the parishes to acquire the new translation until 1619, a campaign which continued intermittently into the mid-1630s. This is not an isolated example. In the early 1630s parishes in Durham diocese were acquiring the new Bible or else being presented for not possessing it including, somewhat surprisingly, John Cosin's church of Brancepeth, in about 1634. In 1632-3 a run of parishes in Leicester archdeaconry still lacked the new translation, while in 1636, 14 per cent of parishes in Chichester archdeaconry were ordered to buy a copy of the King James Bible. St Stephen's Norwich, which had been repeatedly instructed to acquire a copy, finally succumbed in 1638-40. All this suggests that the completion of a fitful Jacobean drive to install the King James Bible in parish churches is a neglected, albeit fairly minor, element in Laud's reformation of the English Church in the 1630s. The Laudian project, of course, extended across the British churches. The Scottish Church had continued to use the Geneva Bible throughout James VI's reign, and this may have also been the case in Ireland. In the Irish canons (1635) and Scottish canons (1636) every parish church was required to possess a copy of the King James Bible. The latter had been printed at Edinburgh for the first time in 1633, to coincide with Charles I's coronation, with subsequent editions in 1634 and 1637-8, and the Scottish prayer book of 1637 incorporated its translation for its readings of the Gospels, Epistles and Psalms. However there is little sign that the King James Bible was much used before the Covenanter revolution of 1638-9 swept away Laudianism and with it the new canons and prayer book.

The slow purchase of church Bibles by the parishes provides a fresh view of its publishing history before 1640. Five folio versions of the King James Bible were printed between 1611 and 1617, and then there was a gap of twelve years before the next, followed by a further seven editions and reprints, printed in London and Cambridge, between 1629 and 1640. Folio Bibles were purchased by a range of institutions, including the chapel royal, cathedral and collegiate churches, and by individuals such as the scholar and bibliophile Philip Bisse, but the single largest market was the English parishes. The

relatively slow uptake in acquiring church Bibles in the 1610s implies that the twelve-year secession in printing them was not because the potential market was sated, as has been suggested, but rather because there was still stock available as increasing numbers of parishes between 1617 and 1629 adopted the new translation. By the late 1620s, however, demand had overtaken supply. Here the subsequent Laudian drive to ensure that all parishes owned a King James Bible is one explanation for the numerous folio editions from 1629 onwards, though London's attempt to undercut their rivals at Cambridge may be another significant driver." (Fincham, 88-90)

- Regarding church court records and churchwarden accounts, Fincham writes:
 - "Church court records and churchwardens' accounts throw some light on attitudes towards the King James Bible in the parishes. A few wealthy parishioners stepped forward to buy a copy for their parish, but more common was a reluctance by churchwardens to purchase the new Bible. Some had to be cited repeatedly before they would comply; others claimed that they had an adequate edition, even though it was not the King James version, or else pleaded poverty. No doubt the price was a major deterrent. Churchwardens' accounts allow us, for the first time, to establish some firm data on typical prices for the two types of bound folio volume, one large and the other smaller and cheaper. They ranged from 56s. down to 37s., with slight regional variations, the average representing twice the cost of Jewel's *Works* of 1609; the real cost was lower than this, since many parishes sold off their old Bible, perhaps to local clergy, for about 10s. Nevertheless, buying a church Bible could generate friction since it often required a special parish rate to be levied, which might lead to disputes over individual contributions, and to presentments in the church courts. For these reasons, it is no surprise that some churchwardens sat on their hands and awaited direct orders to purchase the new translation. This opposition seems to be practical rather than ideological. Indeed, on the rare occasions that we learn which translation these laggard parishes had been using, it seems that it was a mix: in the diocese of Peterborough, with a sizeable Puritan presence, there was a preference for the Geneva Bible, but a number of other churches used the Henrician Great Bible or the Bishops' Bible.

The fear of hostility to the new translation was articulated in the preface to the King James Bible: 'Many mens' mouths have been open a good while (and yet are not stopped) with speeches about the translation so long in hand, or rather perusals of translations made before: and aske what may be the reason, what the necessitie of the employment: Hath the Church bene deceived, say they, all this while?' Perhaps this is why its author, Miles Smith, gave his flock in Gloucestershire no choice but to purchase the new translation. Yet Smith went on, inadvertently, to justify this reluctance to acquire the new Bible with the famous statement that the aim of the translators was not 'to make of a bad one a good one' but to make 'a good one better'; in other words, if the Bishops' Bible was 'a good' translation, why not retain it, at least until the volume wore out and needed replacing? Thomas Fuller, writing in the 1650s, suggested that 'some of the brethren' (in other words, Puritans) disliked the King James Bible 'suspecting it would abate the

repute of that of Geneva', and reported that others regretted the loss of the marginal notes, complaining 'that they could not see into the sense of the scripture for lack of the spectacles of those Geneva annotations'. One answer came in 1642–9, when enterprising Dutch printers published the King James Bible with Genevan notes; the fact that the chosen text was the new translation acknowledged its broad acceptability.” (Fincham, 90-92)

Private Sales

- Thus far Fincham has only been considering the sales data for large folio pulpit editions for ecclesiastical use. When one considers the market for smaller personal sized Bibles the picture changes dramatically.
 - “Fuller’s observations about the Geneva notes were less pertinent to church Bibles than to personal Bibles, usually in quarto, which was the most popular format for the Geneva Bible. They must be counterbalanced by the extraordinary number of editions of the King James Bible, in smaller and cheaper sizes other than folio (chiefly quartos, octavos, duodecimos), in different packages (the whole Bible, the New Testament and the ‘third part’ of the Bible) and often bound with the prayer book, for scholarly, devotional and household use. This demand started very early on, while the Geneva Bible was still being printed. Between 1612 and 1615, for example, there were ten editions in quarto and seven in octavo; while we do not know the print runs, which may have been initially small to test the market, the sheer number of editions indicates strong demand to own a copy, not necessarily to replace the Geneva or Bishops’ Bible, which presumably many had, but to add to them. There were about 140 editions of the King James Bible in 1611–40, as many as all other versions since 1535, and nearly all these 140 editions were nonfolio. Many of the smaller formats have no indications of ownership before 1640, but there are valuable exceptions which give us some insight into their various uses. In 1631 John Fisher, a yeoman of Burton on the Wolds in Leicestershire, bought a quarto published in 1630 and it became the family Bible, listing members of the family until the mid-nineteenth century. An octavo of 1627 was owned by a scholar, since it contained numerous annotations in Latin and Hebrew and with references to the patristics, while the owner of another octavo of 1639 may have been a lay person, who quoted contemporary writers in English such as Daniel Featley, Jeremy Taylor and John Boys. Justinian Isham, the future royalist, owned a duodecimo 1626. The third part of the Bible (the books of Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon) and inscribed in it that ‘This was the only booke I carried in my pocket when I travelled beyond the seas the 22d year of my Age’, 1633, ‘and many yeares after’; of the five books, he was particularly drawn to the Psalms.” (Fincham, 92-93)
- Records suggest that what was created for public worship and ecclesiastical use became a staple in the home before its widespread use in Anglican Churches.

- “If we put the rapid sale of the smaller formats of the King James Bible against the slow and uneven dissemination of folio or church Bibles, then it may well be that for many the new translation became familiar in the home before it was heard in church, and that its broad acceptance by 1640 owed as much to personal use as it did to hearing it in public worship. Part of its appeal must be linked to its non-partisan nature: the six teams represented the full spectrum of English Protestant churchmanship and two of the four Puritan delegates at Hampton Court, Rainolds and Chaderton, were translators. So much so that John Waters, a parishioner of Yapton, Sussex and a scoffer of the godly, could claim in 1623 that ‘a company of Puritans had translated the Bible falsly and had gott the king to put his hand thereunto’. Although modern scholars are quick to observe that the iconic status of the King James Bible was a creation of later generations, some contemporaries, both conformists and Puritans, did admire the new translation. Were Joseph Hall and John Day reflecting or creating opinion when in 1620 they called the translation an ‘exquisite edition’? Clearly, though, the success of the King James Bible owed most to its monopoly among Bibles printed in England after 1616–19. First, the king’s printers ceased printing the Geneva Bible in 1616. Though secondhand copies could be purchased or new editions imported from abroad, the Geneva Bible was no longer as freely available as once it had been. Then, three years later, in 1619, the last edition of New Testament portion of the Bishops’ Bible was printed.” (Fincham, 93-94)
- Fincham concludes his groundbreaking essay with the following paragraph.
 - “James I was better at initiating biblical projects than seeing them through. His sponsorship of a new Scottish translation in 1601 came to nothing, while his own translation of the Psalms was substantially the work of a collaborator and was published after his death. So, too, in 1604, he sponsored a new English translation of the Bible, but then allowed Archbishop Richard Bancroft to become its effective overseer as his attention moved on to more immediate issues. Bancroft’s death in November 1610, less than a year before the new translation was published, is probably why it was neither formally authorised nor required to be purchased in the parishes, for his successor, the translator George Abbot, was not prepared to damage Anglo-Scottish relations and therefore left individual bishops to determine if and when the new translation should reach the parish lecterns. It took a good thirty years for this to be accomplished across the country. In March 1642 Charles I visited the chapel of Little Gidding in Huntingdonshire and was pleased to note that the Bible was the translation sponsored by his father: even by that date, the use of the King James Bible in worship could not be taken for granted. Yet this slow dissemination of church Bibles sits uneasily with the growing acceptability of the King James version by the 1640s, when attempts either to re-introduce the Geneva Bible or to undertake a fresh translation failed. The explanation appears to be the sustained demand, in smaller formats, for the King James Bible from the 1610s, coaxed by some enterprising ‘product innovations’ by Barker, Norton and Bill. This challenges any sharp distinction between the ‘official’ King James Bible and ‘the people’s’ Geneva Bible. The widespread ownership and use of the King James Bible in household and private study, as well as its gradual appearance into public worship, meant that it would

survive when episcopacy and the prayer book were abolished in the 1640s in England. Within thirty years of its publication, the English people's Bible was fast becoming the King James version." (Fincham, 95)

Conclusion

- This Lesson concludes our discussion of the three subjects laid out in [Lesson 222](#) related to the early history of the AV.
 - Early Reception
 - Early Criticism
 - Early Sales
- Over the course of the last five Lessons, we have surveyed scholarly essays/journal articles that challenge the long-held view that the AV was not well received by the English-speaking world of the 17th century until the 1630s or later. Early 17th century sermons, in addition to early sales data, suggest that the AV was embraced and utilized in both public pulpits, Anglican and Puritan, as well as private homes during its first decade of existence between 1611 and 1621.
- In the next Lesson we will survey the political fortunes of the English Bible during the English Civil War and the final triumph of the AV.

Works Cited

Fincham, Kenneth. "The King James Bible: Crown, Church, and People," in *Journal of Ecclesiastical History Vol. 71, No. 1*. January 2020.