

Sunday, March 9, 2025—Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*
Lesson 257 Assessing the Printed History of the King James Text (Pre-1611 Use Of Italics)

Introduction

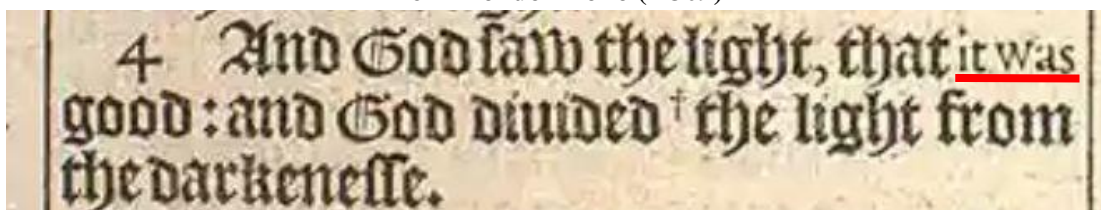
- Since Lesson 230 we have been Assessing the Printed History of the King James Text. All told, we have considered the following points regarding this topic over the course of the last 25 Lessons:
 - Which KJV? Argument (Lessons [230](#) & [231](#))
 - 1612-1617 (Lessons [232](#) & [233](#))
 - 1629 Cambridge Folio Edition (Lessons [234](#), [235](#), & [236](#))
 - The 1630s (Lesson [237](#))
 - 1638 Cambridge Folio Edition (Lessons [238](#), [239](#), & [240](#))
 - Politics Of Printing (Lesson [241](#))
 - Kilburne’s Dangerous Errors (Lessons [242](#) & [243](#))
 - Through 1660 (Lessons [244](#) & [245](#))
 - 1660-1713 (Lesson [246](#))
 - 1713-1760 (Lesson [247](#))
 - 1730-1760 (Lesson [248](#))
 - 1743 The Work Of F.S. Parris (Lessons [249](#), [250](#), & [251](#))
 - 1762 “You” & “Ye” (Lesson [252](#))
 - More On The Editorial Work Of F.S. Parris ([Bonus Lesson](#))
 - Blayney & The 1769 Oxford Text (Lessons [253](#), [254](#), [255](#), & [256](#))
- Before moving on from this topic there is matter that warrants detailed conversation regarding the printed history of the text. That topic is the use of *italics* in the AV. Discussions regarding the use of italics in the KJB have proven to be emotional and fraught with disagreement in the greater debate concerning text and translation. Over the course of the next couple Lessons, we will be endeavoring to investigate and unpack this topic in a reasonable and factual manner.

- To get started, this Lesson is devoted to looking at the historical use of italics before the AV of 1611.

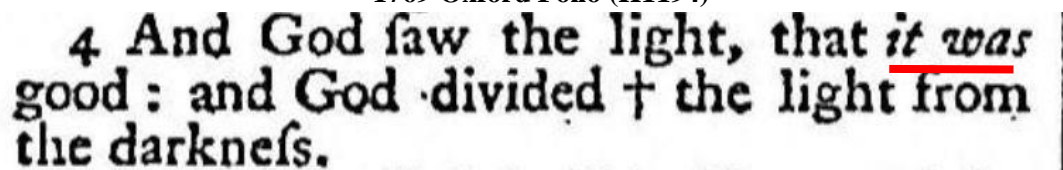
Pre-1611 Use of Italics

- One topic that we have not discussed related to the printing of the King James text is the use of italics by the King James translators. Since this subject is something of a hot potato in pro-King James argumentation and defense, we will endeavor to be thorough in our treatment of the topic.
- Appendix 2 of Dr. Laurence Vance's recently published book, *The Text Of The King James Bible*, discusses the historical use of italics in English Bibles before the AV of 1611.
 - "As mentioned on the first page of chapter one the text of the 1611 King James Bible is printed in black letter type. Smaller roman type is used to represent words that don't appear in the original languages but are necessary for good or accurate translation into English. Modern King James Bibles use italic type instead." (Vance, 457)
- To illustrate Dr. Vance's point please consider the following screenshots from a 1611 Bible and a 1769 Blayney text for Genesis 1:4.

1611 London Folio (H309)



1769 Oxford Folio (H1194)



- Vance continues his discussion of the historical use of italics as follows.
 - "The first English Bible to do this was the Whittingham New Testament of 1557, followed by the Geneva Bible of 1560. The Bishops' bible of 1568, which was printed in black letter, used black letter printed in a slightly smaller type enclosed in brackets to indicate words not in the original languages. The 1602 Bishops' bible, which was still printed in black letter, used roman type without brackets to represent these words. The first editions of the Authorized Version to be printed in roman type with italics, were the quarto and octavo editions of 1612." (Vance, 457)

- In [Lesson 125](#) we discussed the prefatory material of the 1557 Geneva New Testament. In a section titled “To The Reader” William Whittingham stated the following.

Greke copies mencion, it was wont to be vsed. And because the Hebrewes and Greke phrases, which are strange to rendre in other tongues, and also short, shulde not be to harde, I haue sometyme interpreted them without any whit diminishing the grace of the sense, as our lāgage doth vse them, and sometyme haue put to that worde, which lacking made the sentence obscure, but haue set it in such letters as may easely be discerned from the cōmun text.

- Consider the following examples of the various types of italics, discussed above by Dr. Vance, and utilized by English Bibles before the AV.

Luke 16:11

1557 Geneva New Testament (H106)

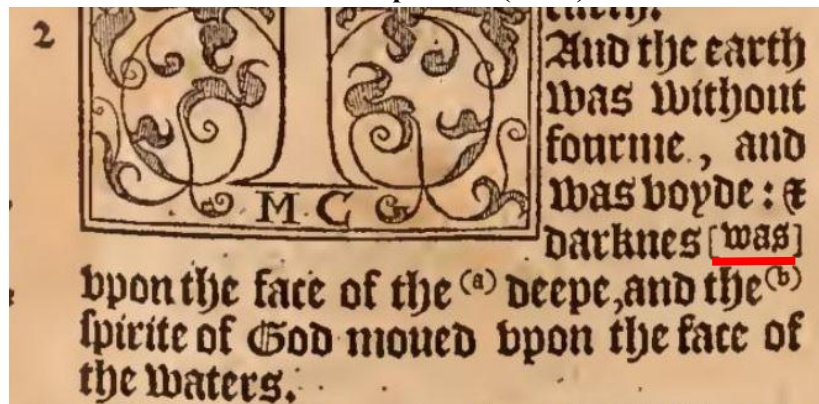
11 So then, yf ye haue not bene faithful
 in ^d the wicked riches, who wil trust you
 in the true treasure?

Genesis 1:2

1560 Geneva Bible (H107)

2: And the earth was ^b
 without forme & voy-
 de, and ^c darkenes was
 vpon the depe, & the
 Spirit of God ^d moued
 vpon the waters.

Genesis 1:2
1568 Bishops Bible (H125)



Genesis 1:2
1602 Bishops Bible (H271)

2 And the earth was ^a without forme, and was voyd: and darke-nes was vpon the face of the deepe, and the ^b Spirit of God moued vpon the face of the waters.

- As noted above in the citation from Vance in 1612, the AV was published in both Octavo and Quarto sizes in Roman Font. Consider the following screenshots of how the italics appeared in these editions.

Genesis 1:4
1612 London Octavo (H315)

4 And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darknesse.

Genesis 1:4

1612 London Quarto (H313)

4 And God saw the light, that it was
good: and God diuided † the light from the
darkeneffe.

- In his unpublished essay titled “Italics in the KJV”, Christopher Yetzer explores the use of italics in published editions of the Bible that predate the 1557 Geneva New Testament.
 - “It has been a long and enduring tradition for translators to mark their texts with some sort of sign to indicate where words were added or others were in doubt. As far back as Origen and Jerome this method has been applied to the practice of copying and translating Scripture. “When Origen revised the Septuagint, he collated it throughout with the Hebrew, and wherever he found any words in the Greek to which there was nothing correspondent in the original, he marked them with an *obelos*, to denote their absence from the latter. Jerome used the same mark, for the same purpose...” [Friends’ Intelligencer 1880 Vol. 36, p. 278.] . . .

From 1534-35 three different Bibles were printed in three different languages and all three included slightly different methods for identifying words which the translators supplied. The first was Sebastian Münster’s parallel Hebrew\Latin Old Testament. It was printed in two volumes from 1534-35.

Münster had a high respect for the Hebrew Bible and accurate translating. He used parentheses for words which were added to his Latin translation not represented by the Hebrew. In 1535 Olivetan’s French Bible was printed for the Waldensian community in Piedmont. Olivetan used an almost unnoticeable smaller type for the words which he added. The third Bible was Coverdale’s English translation printed in 1535. Coverdale’s text generally used parentheses for the same purposes as Tyndale except that he also used them for some words which he felt were not represented in the underlying original language texts.

Numbers 7:13-14

1534 Münster: Eratque sacrificium eius paropsis argentea una, centum & triginta siclorum: phiala una argentea, septuaginta siclorum, iuxta pondus sanctuarii: et utraque plena fuit simila oleo per mixta, pro sacrificio Minha. Cochleare unum aureum, decem (siclorum.) plenum incenso.

son filius Amminadab, de tribu Iehuda: Eratq; sacrificium eius^b paropsis argentea una, centum & triginta siclorum: phiala una argētea, septuaginta siclorum, iuxta pondus sanctuarij: et utraq; plena fuit simila oleo permixta, pro sacrificio Minha. Cochleare unū aureum, decem (siclorum,) plenum incenso. Iuuenus unus filius bouis, aries unus, a

1535 Olivetan: Et estoit son present ung plat d'argent de cent trente sicles/une phiole d'argent de septante sicles/du poidz du sanctuaire/toutes deux pleines de fine farine pestree avec shuyle pour lofferte/ung cuillier dor de dix sicles plein de perfume/

la lignee de Iehudah offrit son oblatiō. Et estoit sō present vng plat d'argent de cent trēte sicles/vne phiole d'argent de septāte sicles/du poīdz du sactuaire/toutes deux pletnes de fine farine pestree avec shuyle pour lofferte/vng cuillier dor de dix sicles pleins de parfum/vng bou:

Ruth 1:9

1535 Coverdale: The LORDE graunte you, yt ye maie fynde rest ether of you in hir husbades house (whom ye shal get) and she kyssed them. Then lift they vp their voyce, and wepte,

2 on me. The LORDE graunte you, y ye maie fynde rest ether of you in hir husbades house (whom ye shal get) and she kyssed them. Then lift they vp their voyce, and wepte, & sayde vnto her: We wil go with the vnto

Often the specifics of these tools of the text were not clearly differentiated or mentioned. However Olivetan did say in his 1535 preface, "In some cases one may find words in smaller characters inserted into the text, they do not make part of it but were added to

render more smoothly the reading which would otherwise result difficult in our language...” In the preface to Coverdale’s English translation of the Vulgate New Testament in 1538, he explained, “Whereas by the authority of the text I sometimes make it clear for thy more understanding, there shalt though find this mark [] which we have set for thy warning, the text nevertheless neither wrested nor perverted. The cause whereof is partly the figure called Eclipsis diverse times used in the scriptures, the which though she do garnish the sentence in Latin, yet will not so be admitted in other tongues: wherefore of necessity we are constrained to enclose such words in this mark. Partly because that sundry, and sometime too rash writers out of books, have not given so great diligence, as is due in the holy scripture, and have left out, and sometime altered some word or words and another using the same book for a copy, hath committed like fault. Let not therefore this our diligence seem more temerarious unto thee (gentle reader,) than was the diligence of S. Jerome and Origen unto learned men of their time, which using sundry marks in their books, showed their judgment what were to be abated or added unto the books of scripture, that so they might be restored to the pure and very original text.” [To the Reader, p. 1]

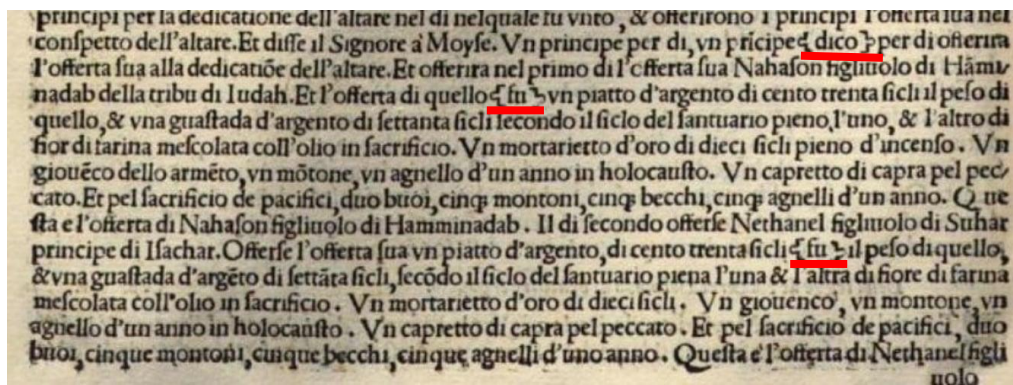
The Great Bible used both parentheses and a smaller type to set off portions of the text which were derived from Latin, “Whereas, oftentimes ye shall find a small letter in the text, it signifieth that so much as is in the small letter doth abound, and is more in the common translation in Latin than is found either in the Hebrew or the Greek; which words and sentences we have added, not only to manifest the same unto you, but also to satisfy and content those that here beforetime have missed such sentences in the bibles and New Testaments before set forth.” [Great Bible 1539 preface]. It also seems that the Great Bible used parentheses for parenthetical phrases, just as the previous editions had done, and possibly for words added to the text apart from any Latin base. For instance, the Great Bible reads at Matthew 21:11, “Jesus the Prophet of Nazareth (a cyte) of Galile”. The words “a city” are not in Greek or in the Vulgate, but are words which had been traditionally in the English translations since Tyndale.

The preface to the 1543 Latin Bible printed in Zurich says, “if it was necessary to add one or two words to complete the sentence ... [the translator] presently included his supplement with marks of this kind [] ...” [Biblia 1543 Lectorem Præfatio]. The 1546 Italian Bible by Marmocchino used { } as is said in the preface, “where you see this sign { it will tell you that those words are not in the text, but are themselves understood in that place.” [La Bibbia 1546 Marmocchino al Lettore Salute Sempiterna].

1546 Marmochino Italian Bible

Numbers 7

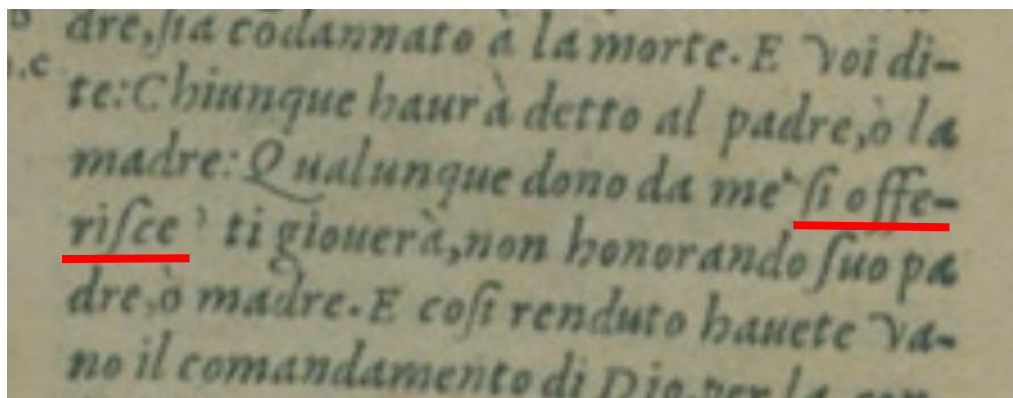
{ } can be seen around {dico} {fu} {fu}.



The preface to the 1551 Italian Bible translated by Massimo Theofilo, which is said to have mimicked the previously mentioned Zurich Latin Bible, explained, “We notify you the pious reader that in reading this New Testament you will find some words enclosed between these two signs, namely: ‘ ’ the which are intended to be understood as not being of the text, but wisely added by the translator. And this not only to render the style of speech more relaxed and clear, but almost necessitated by the accurate method and rule of translating one language well into another (which without adding and at times removing something of a small significance cannot be done). Which necessity, or should we say liberty, he used very religiously, letting you know with such signs what is of his own and what changes were made, and that which is the sacred and inviolable Scripture, and what a sacrilege it would be to take back or add to it.”[Il Nuovo ed Eterno Testamento 1551 Al Lettore]”

1551 Massimo Theofilo

Matthew 15



When revisions of Olivetan's French text began to be printed in Roman type, they put the added words in brackets. However, the 1548 French Bible printed in Lyon (possibly a reprint of one dated 1547) seems to be the first French Bible to use italics for supplied words.

1548 French
Numbers 7

espaules. Et les princes offrirēt pour la dedicace de l'autel, au iour qu'il fut oinct, leur oblation deuant l'autel.
 Le Seigneur aussi dict à Moyse: Vn prince offrira en vn iour, & vn autre prince en l'autre iour, son oblation pour la dedicace de l'autel. Au premier iour donc Nahafon filz d'Aminadab de la lignée de Iuda offrit son oblation. Et estoit son present vn plat d'argent de cent trente *sicles*, vne phiole d'argent de septante *sicles*, du poidz du sanctuaire, toutes deux pleines de fine farine pestrie avec l'huile pour l'offerte, vne cuillier d'or de dix *sicles* pleine de parfum, vn bouueau, vn mouton, vn agneau d'un an pour l'holocauste, vn cheureau des cheures pour le peché. Et pour le sacrifice des pacifiques deux boeufz, cinq moutons, cinq boucz, & cinq agneaux d'un an. Ceste est l'oblation de Nahafon filz d'Aminadab. Au second iour Nathanaël filz de Zuar, prince de la lignée d'Isa-

Later the Genevan printer Jean Crespin more rigorously applied Italics in his 1553 French New Testament, followed by his Italian New Testament in 1555.

1553 French NT

Matthew 4:21

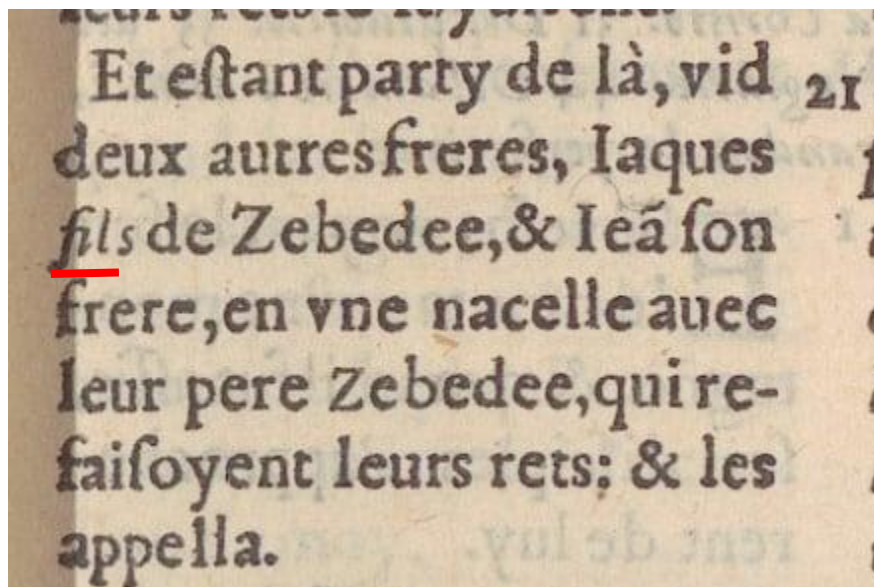
"fils" = James "son" of

ment laiffans leurs rets le fuyurent. Et estant parti de là, veit deux autres freres, Iaqués *fils* de Zebedée, & Iean son frere, en vne nacelle avec leur pere Zebedée, qui refaisoyent leurs rets: & les appella.

In the preface to the second printing of the Italian New Testament (printed the same year as the first), is found this description, “all those [words] that have been added [are] of another letter: so that one can easily know which are the pure words of the Greek text and which are the additions.” [Del Nuovo Testamento 1555 Giovan Luigi Paschale à I Christiani Lettori S.] (Yetzer, 1-3)

1555 Italian NT

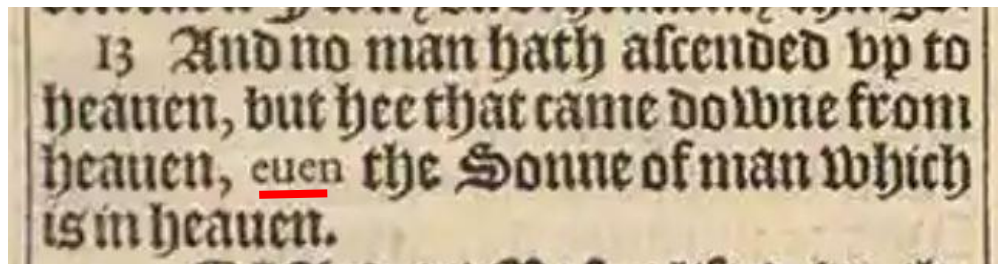
Matthew 4:21



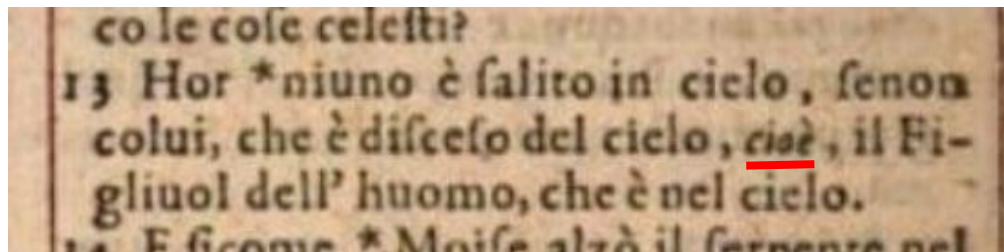
- Later in his essay, Brother Yetzer points out that the various Protestant Era Reformation Bibles often “borrowed from the typographic practices” of each other.
 - “At times translators not only borrowed from the typographic practices of previous translations, but in certain occasions they also seemed to apply those practices in the same places.

John 3:13

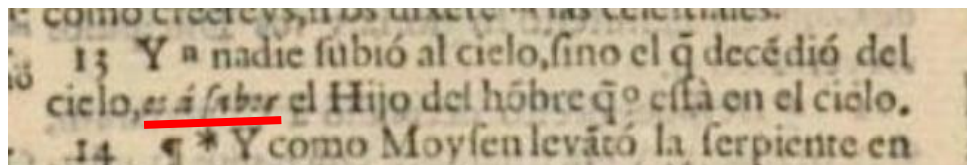
KJV 1611: ...but hee that came downe from heauen, euen the Sonne of man which is in heauen.



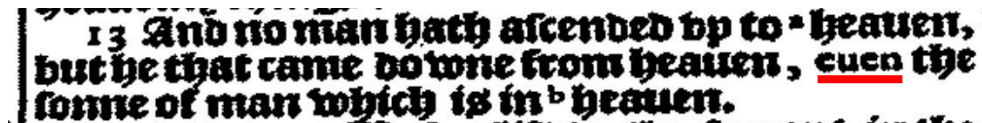
1607 Diodati Italian: ... senon colui, che è disceso del cielo, cioè, il Figliuol dell' huomo, che è nel cielo.



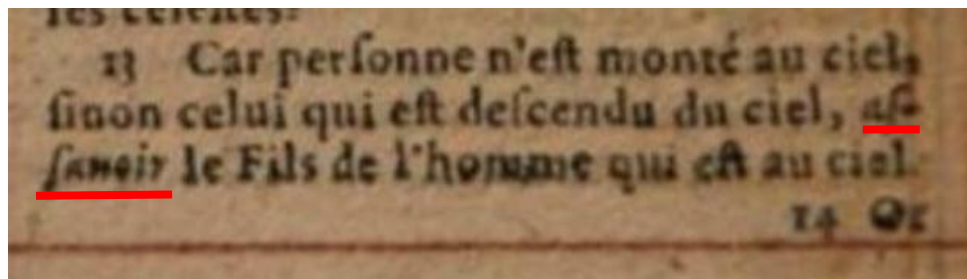
1602 Valera Spanish: ... fino el q̄decēdió del cielo, es á saber el Hijo del hōbre q̄ está en el cielo.



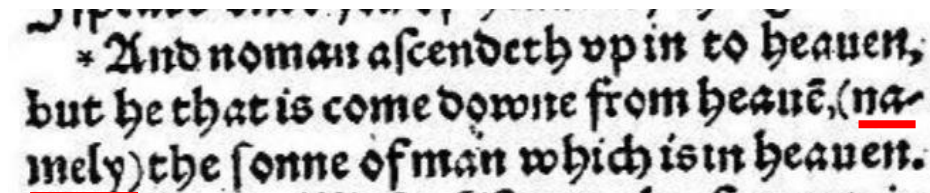
1602 Bishops': ...but he that came downe from heaven, even the sonne of man which is in heaven.



1588 French: ...sinon celui qui est descendu du ciel, assavoir le Fils de l'homme qui est au ciel.

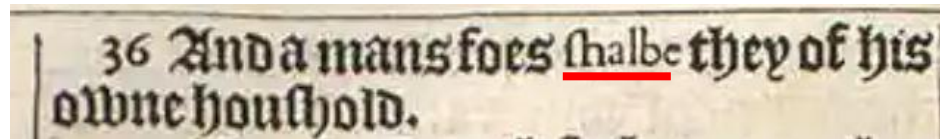


1535 Coverdale: ...but he that is come downe from heaue, (namely) the sonne of man which is in heauen.

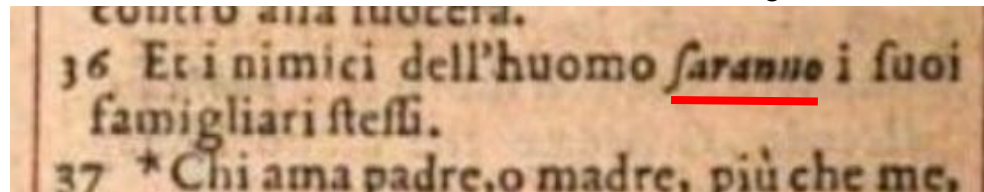


Matthew 10:36

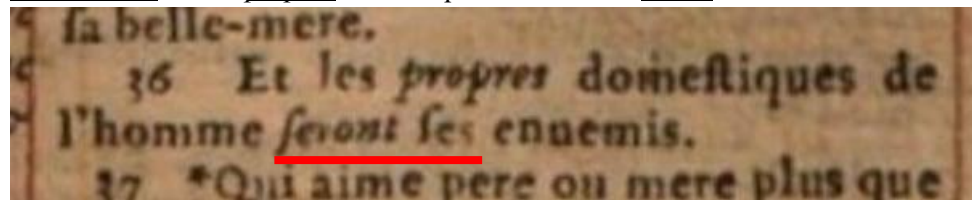
KJV 1611: And a mans foes shalbe they of his owne houshold.



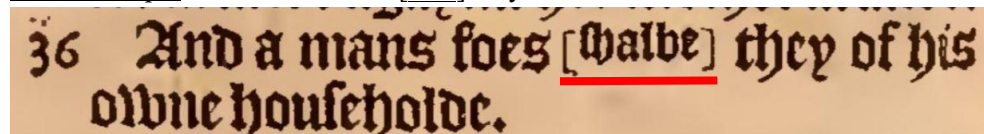
1607 Diodati Italian: Et i nimici dell'huomo saranno i suoi famigliari stessi.



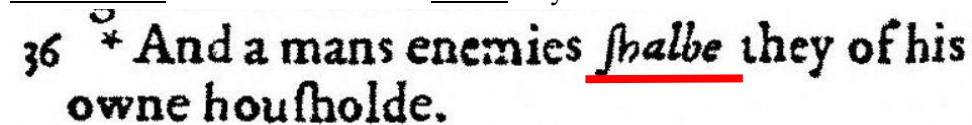
1588 French: Et les propres domestiques de l'homme seront ses ennemis.



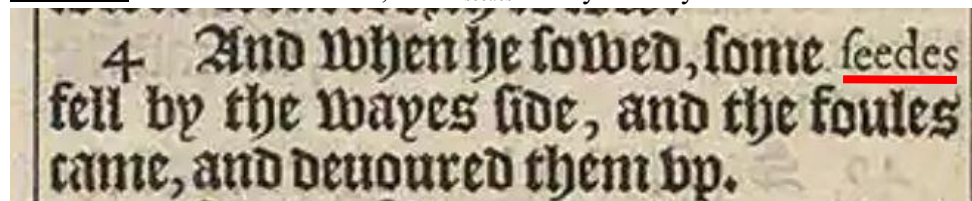
1568 Bishops': And a mans foes [shalbe] they of his owne householde.



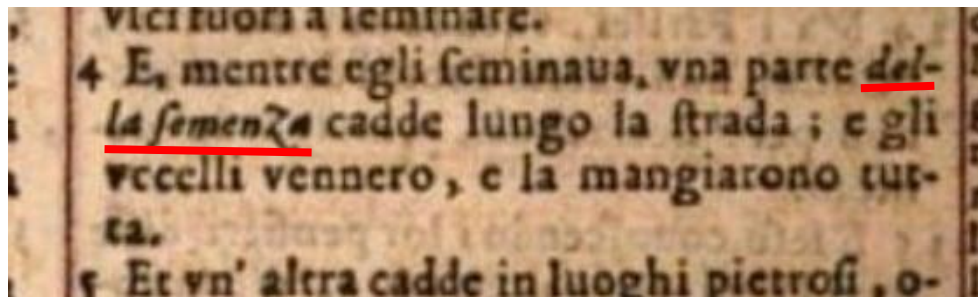
1560 Geneva: And a mans enemies shalbe they of his owne housholde.

**Matthew 13:4**

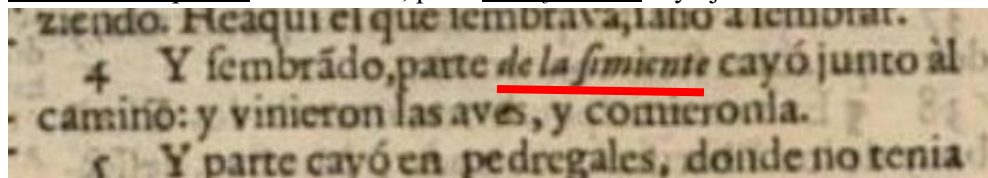
KJV 1611: And when he sowed, some seedes fell by the wayes side...



1607 Diodati Italian: E, mentre egli seminava, una parte della semenza cadde lungo la strada...

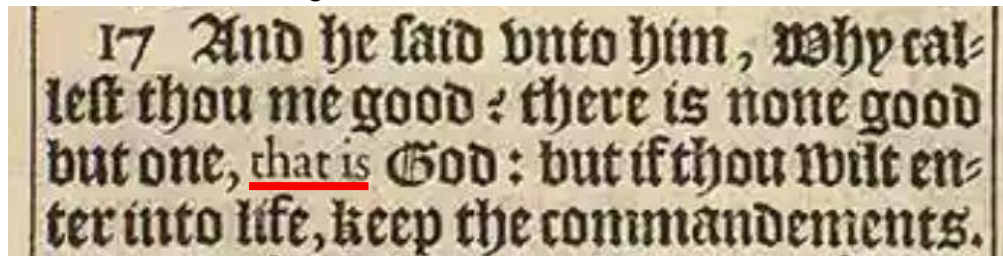


1602 Valera Spanish: Y sembrado, parte de la simiente cayó junto al camino...

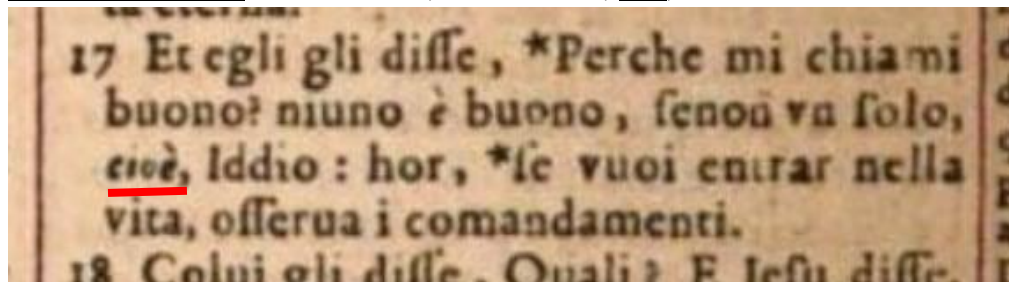


Matthew 19:17

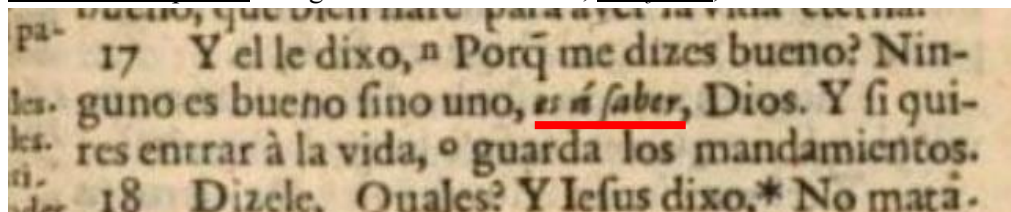
KJV 1611: There is none good but one, that is God:



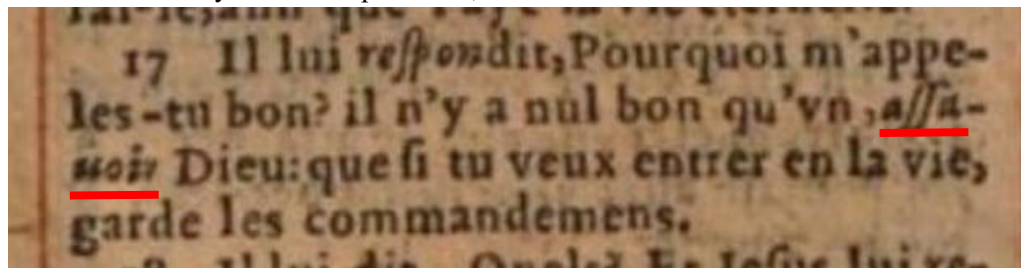
1607 Diodati Italian: niuno è buono, senon un solo, cioè, Iddio:



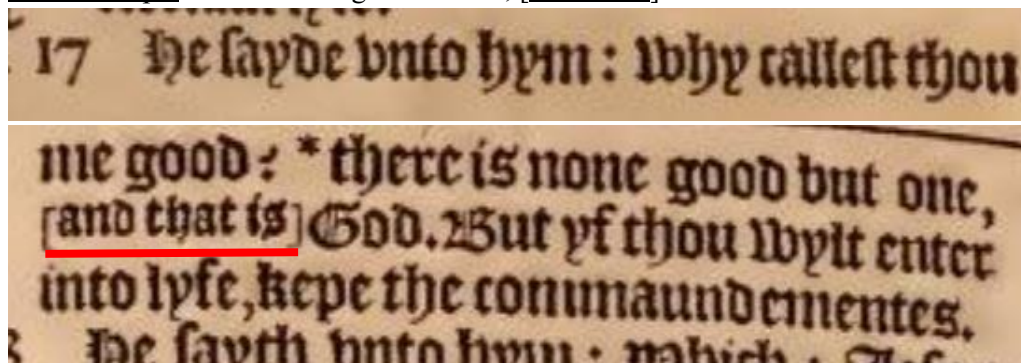
1602 Valera Spanish: Ninguno es bueno fino uno, es à saber, Dios.



1588 French: il n'y a nul bon qu'un seul, *assavoir* Dieu:



1568 Bishops': there is none good but one, [and that is] God."



(Yetzer, 3-4)

- The evidence cited above and furnished by Dr. Vance and Brother Yetzer proves that the AV of 1611 was not the first Bible to use italics. Prior English Bibles as well as other Reformation Era Bibles in other languages utilized this practice. The same could be said for Latin Bibles of the Reformation Era.
- In the next Lesson we will begin exploring the circumstances under which the King James translators elected to employ the use of italics.

Works Cited

Vance, Lawrence M. *The Text Of The King James Bible*. Vance Publications, 2025.

Yetzer, Christoper. "Italics In The KJV." Unpublished Essay.