

Sunday, April 19, 2026—Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*
Lesson 284 Assessing the Printed History of the King James Text (*New Cambridge Paragraph Bible*)

Introduction

- In [Lesson 283](#) we brought our extended examination of the Pure Cambridge Edition (PCE) position to a close by assessing its final theological, logical, and historical claims in light of the documented printed history of the King James Bible. Since teaching Lesson 283, I published a PDF document containing all of the notes on the topic of the PCE in one document. Interested parties can access that document at the following [link](#).
- The current Lesson will examine David Norton's *New Cambridge Paragraph Bible* by distinguishing between his valuable historical documentation of the King James Bible's printed history and his more debatable editorial reconstruction of the text.

New Cambridge Paragraph Bible

- In 2005 Professor David Norton of Victoria University of Wellington (New Zealand) was commissioned by Cambridge University Press to edit a new edition of the King James Bible, *The New Cambridge Paragraph Bible* (NCPB). The five page "Editor's Introduction" (vii-xi) explains the purpose, scope, and methods used throughout the work. Recall from [Lesson 270](#) that F.H.A Scrivener had previously edited the *Cambridge Paragraph Bible* for Cambridge University Press in 1873.
- Norton's other 2005 publication *A Textual History of the King James Bible* was written to be a companion volume to the NCPB. Part 2 of the *A Textual History* contained a more exhaustive explanation of the editorial principles used to create the NCPB than was provided by the "Editor's Introduction." What follows hereafter is a discussion of the NCPB based upon both Part 2 of *A Textual History* and the "Editors' Introduction" to the NCPB.
- All these notes will consider the following points regarding Norton's NCPB.
 - Understanding Norton's Editing Principles
 - Why The NCPB: Scrivener & Norton
 - Variant Readings
 - Understanding Norton's Hosea 6:5 Example
 - Spelling
 - Punctuation, Speech Marks, and Paragraphing

- Poetic Structure
- Marginal Notes
- Italics
- Headers & Chapter Summaries

Understanding Norton's Editing Principles

- Norton begins by asserting that, despite its immense cultural and religious importance, the King James Bible (KJB) has never been perfectly printed. This imperfection is not a failure of the translators' work itself, but the result of centuries of transmission, editorial intervention, and changing printing practices. The aim of NCPB is therefore not to modernize the Bible's language or theology, but to present as faithfully as possible the text that the original King James translators actually intended while removing obstacles that prevent modern readers from hearing that text clearly.
 - "Though it is the most important book in the religious life and the culture of the English-speaking world, the King James Bible or Authorised Version of 1611 has never been perfectly printed. This is not to say either that it is badly printed or that absolute perfection can be achieved, but that the text and its presentation can be improved. First, what we now read as the King James Bible contains numerous deliberate and some accidental changes to the text, and these can be revised to make it more faithful to the King James translators' own decisions as to how it should read. Second, the presentation of the text - spelling, punctuation and formatting - interferes with the clarity with which it speaks to the minds and souls of present-day readers. Unnecessary background noise gets in the way." (NCPB, vii)
- In Part 2 of *A Textual History of the King James Bible*, Norton laid out his "two principles" for editing the NCPB.
 - "The text needs to be revised in two basic ways: one is to undo mistaken changes, the other is to revive the work of modernisation that, in the English text, stalled in the eighteenth century.

The first principle is that the text should be that of the translators, not that of subsequent revisers, and that the text of the translators is the first edition. Variant readings should be decided in the light of the deliberate decisions of the translators, even if the reasons for those decisions are not necessarily apparent. The test is not whether a later variant can be argued to be better in some way, but whether there is a strong likelihood that an error of copying or printing is involved in the first edition. No attempt should be made to correct perceived errors of scholarship.

The second principle is that the text should be modernised. This is not to change the text but to continue to allow it to speak as clearly as possible in its own authentic voice to the contemporary reader. The basic elements of the modernisation are spelling and punctuation. From the variety and inconsistency of the 1611 text it is clear that, for the most part, neither of these involve deliberate intentions of the translators and so do not demand respect and reverence in the way that the readings do. A reader troubled by this principle has two alternatives available: the first is to read a facsimile or exact reprint of the first edition, the second is to agree that modernisation is acceptable, but not beyond eighteenth-century standards, and so to read a text that is neither as the translators presented it nor genuinely modernised.” (Norton, 131)

- In the “Editors’ Introduction” to the NCPB Norton uses the metaphor of cleaning an old master painting: the artwork remains the same, but dust, grime, and later distortions are carefully removed so its original power and beauty can be seen again.
 - “To use another image, there is dust and dirt on the old master, the paint is darkened and cracked: we can still see that the picture is a great one, but not how great it is.” (NCPB, vii)
- The 1611 first edition of the King James Bible is uniquely authoritative because it was prepared under the supervision of the translators themselves. Nevertheless, it contained typographical errors, mistakes inherited from the printer’s copy, and even some errors made by the translators (in Norton’s opinion). Subsequent seventeenth-century printings corrected some errors while introducing others, causing variant readings to proliferate.
- As Bible printing became both a commercial enterprise and a scholarly activity, editors introduced small but deliberate changes—often to make the English more literal relative to Hebrew or Greek, but sometimes for stylistic reasons. Over time, these changes subtly transformed the translators’ original decisions. This process effectively ended with the Oxford edition of 1769, which became the received text of the King James Bible. Its greatest virtue was stability, not absolute accuracy. From that point on, editors preferred preserving the established form rather than revisiting the translators’ intentions.
 - “This work of accidental and deliberate textual development came to an almost complete stop with an Oxford edition of 1769, which thereafter became accepted as the standard. It is still, with very little change, the received text that we read as the King James Bible.” (NCPB, vii)
- Norton acknowledges that altering a revered religious text invites resistance, something the King James translators themselves anticipated in their original preface. Nevertheless, he argues that change is necessary because:

- The received text is not the translators' final text, but a lightly revised version shaped by later editors.
- Translator manuscripts now available (MS98, Bod. 1602, & Bois's Notes) sometimes show exactly what the translators chose, correcting later editorial "improvements."
- Spelling, punctuation, and formatting belong to neither the seventeenth century nor today and can obscure meaning.
- Verse-by-verse formatting disrupts contextual reading and comprehension.

Why The NCPB: Scrivener & Norton

- In his *Textual History* Norton provided some context and history for how and why the NCPB came about.
 - "*The New Cambridge Paragraph Bible* began to take shape in 1994 when Cambridge University Press decided it needed to reset its text, but first made inquiries of various people. The following extract from a letter written by the Bible Publishing Manager to myself raises curious echoes of the situation Thomas Curtis encountered in the 1830s as well as giving what is needed of the background:

I am at the point in which decisions have to be made on what changes/corrections we will put into our KJV database files. The film we print from is showing its age and we need new images. The KJV files that we have purchased need to be proofed out, read and corrected, and then used to create camera-ready copy for our forthcoming KJV Bible printings. I can no longer put the decision off as to what to use as a basis for this 'correction'.

It has been suggested to me that the answer – or at least as good a one as any – is to use Scrivener's Paragraph Bible as the Cambridge standard, and to correct the database to mirror that edition. I am told that it is far better than a lot of other efforts, is thorough and reasonably consistent, and S's explanation and justification of his choices fills a book. It has stood the test of years and no one can say that it is not 'The Real KJV' . . .

The other way to go about it would be simply to use our current Concord KJV edition as the basis. It was prepared/edited by someone from Oxford and an opposite number from Cambridge after the second War, and it is supposed to incorporate 'modern' spelling and good editorial practice. No names seem to be attached to the enterprise, and no documentation can be found. So if we were to use this as the basis we would do so without making a show about it and without being able to back it up in the same way as we could with Scrivener.

But the market doesn't really require us to do this, nor does the scholarly community. What we do have to have is a respectable, defensible and (reasonably) consistent text we can use for all our AV editions."

In short, institutional memory had been lost, and while there appeared to be no compelling need to work at the text, the Press wished to act responsibly. Eventually it was agreed that the spelling needed attending to, and that the current Cambridge Concord text should be collated with Scrivener's text (something that was done).

As work progressed, it became clear that more than spelling needed attending to. As with the spelling, so the punctuation was neither right by current standards nor that of the translators. It too had to be revised. Moreover, examination of the invaluable list of variants in Scrivener's book suggested that some of the changes that had happened in the text were questionable and that all the variants needed to be examined. In due course the importance of the manuscript annotations in Bod 1602, especially in the OT, were realised, and their evidence along with that of MS 98 was incorporated into the examination. Presentation also was antiquated, so this too was attended to.

The result is, it is hoped, more scholarly and trustworthy than any of its predecessors because of its first principle and because the manuscript evidence of the translators' work has been consulted. It is also readable in a way no other reference editions (that is, editions retaining the chapter and verse system of reference) have ever been through its consistent use of modern spelling and its reformation of the punctuation and presentation." (Norton, 131-133)

- It is important to note that David Norton's approach does not represent a radical departure from previous King James scholarship, but is rather a continuation and attempted clarification of it. Nineteenth-century scholars such as F. H. A. Scrivener, author of the original *Cambridge Paragraph Bible* published in 1873 (See [Lesson 270](#) for more information.) already recognized that the punctuation, paragraphing, and general presentation of the 1611 text were inconsistent, incomplete, and frequently the product of printers rather than translators. Scrivener himself described the original punctuation as difficult and sometimes harmful to public reading. Norton builds upon these long-standing observations but advances them with greater documentary precision, treating punctuation and layout explicitly as post-translational and non-authoritative layers of transmission. In this respect, Norton is not overthrowing the King James tradition but articulating more clearly the limits of what that tradition can reasonably be said to sanctify.

Variant Readings

- In the "Introduction" to the NCPB Norton illustrates editorial distortion with Hosea 6:5. The first edition reads "I have shewed them by the prophets", while later editions changed this to "hewed them". Editors assumed "shewed" was a printer's error because the Hebrew implies judgment.

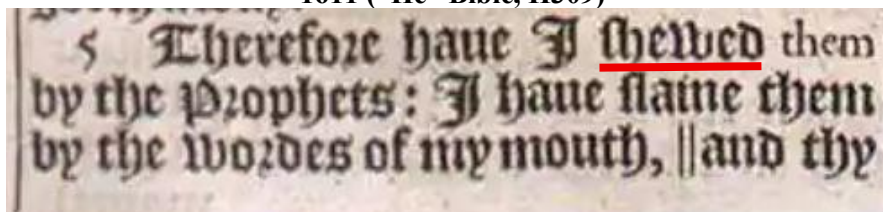
However, translator manuscripts reveal that “shewed” was deliberate, reflecting a different interpretive tradition and a less violent theological reading. A single letter, Norton notes, can profoundly affect meaning and theology.

- “One example must serve to illustrate the kind of changes editors have made and the light that the manuscript work can give. It turns on a single letter. Hos. 6:5 reads in the first edition, ‘therefore haue I shewed them by the Prophets’. The second edition removed an s, creating the reading of the received text, ‘therefore have I hewed them by the prophets’. ‘Shewed’ is generally reckoned a misprint because the literal sense of the Hebrew is ‘cut down’, as in the earlier English translations. However, the King James translators’ manuscript work shows it was not a misprint: they struck through ‘cut down’ in their source text and substituted ‘shewed’. In doing so they followed an Aramaic reading from Targum Jonathan, and the general sense of the note to this verse in the popular Geneva Bible: ‘I haue still laboured by my prophets, and as it were, framed you to bring you to amendement, but all was in vaine: for my word was not meate to feede them, but a sworde to slaye them’ [See screenshot from the Geneva Bible below.]. To put it another way, God’s word, which should have led to reform of life, has been ignored, so, rather than saving, it condemns. Figuratively, what should have been food has become a sword. Troubled as others had been before them at the violent picture of God hewing people down, the King James translators chose what we may think of as a gentler reading. Theology may lie in a single letter, and an apparently correct change may remove the translators’ understanding of the original.” (NCPB, viii)
- The NCPB systematically examined every difference between the 1611 first edition and later Cambridge and Oxford texts. Its guiding rule is to restore first-edition readings unless there is strong evidence that they do not represent the translators’ decisions. As a result, the NCPB aims to deliver “the translators’ Bible”, not a historically accumulated editorial hybrid.
 - “. . . *The New Cambridge Paragraph Bible* gives the reader as closely as possible the exact text that the King James translators themselves decided on - but which was far from perfectly realised in the first edition. *The New Cambridge Paragraph Bible* is the translators’ Bible.” (NCPB, ix)

Understanding Norton’s Hosea 6:5 Example

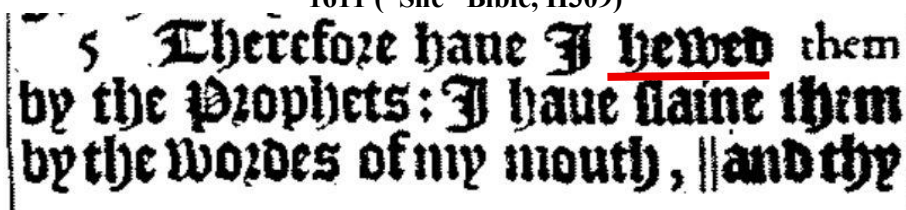
- Let’s breakdown Norton’s mythology by looking at screenshots from the relevant documents for his Hosea 6:5 example from the introduction.

Hosea 6:5
1611 (“He” Bible, H309)



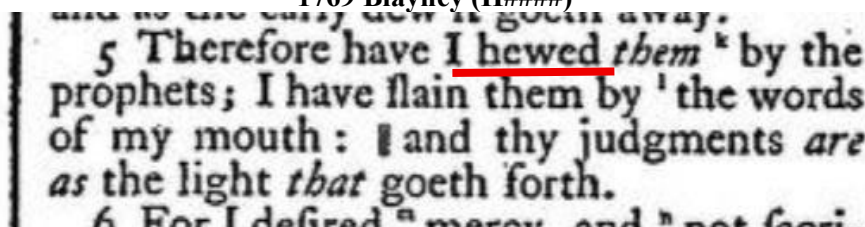
- The original printing of 1611 (“he” Bible) read “shewed” i.e., showed in Hosea 6:5. This was viewed as a printer’s error and corrected in the 2nd edition of 1611.

Hosea 6:5
1611 (“She” Bible, H309)



- The second printing of 1611 (“she” Bible) changed “shewed” to “hewed” in Hosea 6:5. This became the standard reading.

Hosea 6:5
1769 Blayney (H####)



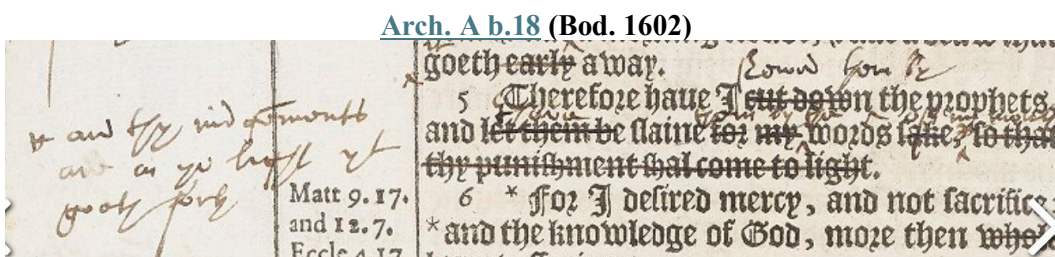
- All standard KJBs read “hewed” in Hosea 6:5.

2005 New Cambridge Paragraph Bible

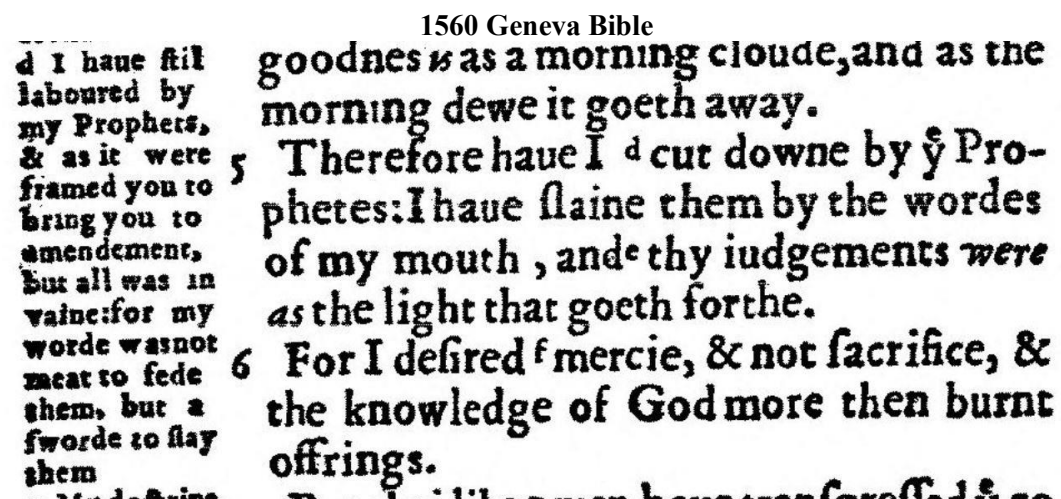
⁵ Therefore haue I shown them by the prophets:
I haue slaine them by the words of my mouth:
and thy judgements are as the light that goeth forth.
⁶ For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice;

- In editing the NCPB, Norton reinstated the original AV reading of “shown” or “shewed” from 1611. Norton does this based upon the authority of the annotated 1602 Bishops Bible in the

Bodleian Library, [Arch. A b.18](#) (Bod. 1602). Consider the following screenshot from the Bodleian document.



- Notice that the Bishop’s wording of “cut down” is stricken and replaced with “shewed” above the line. Based on this document, Dr. Norton reasons that the translators intentionally decided against the “cut down” or later “hewed” reading thereby parting with the literal Hebrew reading as well as all prior English translation in favor of a less literal Aramaic reading and the sense of the Geneva marginal note at Hosea 6:5. Norton, therefore based upon the authority of the Bodleian manuscript, restores the “shown” reading in Hosea 6:5 thereby, in his opinion, restoring the original intent of the translators.



- In [Lessons 171 through 178](#) of this class, we studied the impact of the Bodleian edition upon the creation of the King James text. At the time I accepted the notion that [Arch. A b.18](#) (Bod. 1602) was a primary source work-in-progress document created by the King James translators. Since May 15, 2022, when I taught Lesson 178, the document was digitized and made available to the world to study online at the Bodleian website. My friend and fellow researcher Christopher Yetzer has been able to spend some considerable time studying the annotations in the Bodleian document. Brother Yetzer has drafted a seventeen-page article ([Arch. A b.18](#)) questioning the prevailing wisdom regarding the document, suggesting that the annotations bespeak a post-1611 creation and are therefore not indicative of a pre-AV work-in-progress document.

- Herein lies my problem with Dr. Norton’s work on the NCPB, he overturns long established AV readings based on questionable documentary evidence.

Spelling

- Spelling is modernized to improve readability, but without changing words or grammar. Norton emphasizes that 1611 spelling was inconsistent and unreliable as a guide to pronunciation. Thus,
 - “spake” becomes “spoke”
 - Obsolete spellings are restored when modern spellings obscure meaning (“in stead” vs. “instead”).
 - Misleading later spellings like “shamefacedness” are corrected to “shamefastness.
 - “In short, what *The New Cambridge Paragraph Bible* does is to modernize the spelling of the Bible without sinning against the language of the translators.” (NCPB, x)
- Consistency is not imposed rigidly. Just as the translators used lexical variety, the NCPB preserves acceptable alternatives (“among / amongst”), resisting eighteenth-century standardization that erased original diversity. (NCPB, ix-x)

Punctuation, Speech Marks, and Paragraphing

- Norton insists that punctuation is not part of the inspired text, that it was frequently supplied by printers, and that it must therefore never be treated as authoritative. Where doctrine is attached to punctuation or paragraphing, theology has been displaced from Scripture to typography.
- Norton explains that the punctuation found in most modern King James Bibles is not original to 1611, but largely the product of eighteenth-century editorial practice, especially solidified in the 1769 Oxford edition. That punctuation often feels heavy, rigid, and cluttered to modern readers, creating unnecessary syntactical barriers rather than aiding understanding. Ironically, this later punctuation is frequently less helpful than the original, since seventeenth-century punctuation—though inconsistent—often followed the rhythm and rhetorical flow of speech, which aligns more closely with modern preferences that one might expect.
- Norton’s editorial strategy with the NCPB was selective restoration, not mechanical reproduction. For example,
 - Where early punctuation (especially that of the first edition) works well by modern standards, it is restored.

- Where early punctuation would confuse modern readers, later punctuation is retained or lightly revised.
- Decisions are made case by case, with clarity as the guiding principle.
- The result is punctuation that clarifies clause structure, reduces over-punctuation, and helps the reader hear the sentence as meaningful speech, not as grammatical scaffolding. This strategy reflects Norton’s broader aim: to remove interference between the text and the reader without imposing a modern stylistic layer.
- Regarding speech or quotation marks, virtually all early editions of the King James Bible—and most editions ever printed— contained no quotation marks. Therefore, some modern readers struggle following dialogue within the text. Norton sought to remedy that in the NCPB by adding quotation marks to the text. The NCPB systematically introduces speech marks to indicate:
 - Both the beginning and end of speech.
 - Changes of speaker.
 - Complex embedded dialogue.
- This is one of the most visible and reader-friendly changes in the edition. Importantly, Norton does not alter the words of the text. He simply adds typographic clarification. The speech marks function as interpretive aids, similar to punctuation. Speech in Scripture often carries theology, argument, narrative tension, or poetic force. By marking speech clearly, the NCPB, makes doctrinal arguments easier to follow (e.g., in Paul’s letters), clarifies prophetic dialogue, and reveals literary complexity, especially where a speaker quotes another speaker or a narrator frames speech within speech. Norton presents this as serving the text’s meaning rather than reshaping it. (NCPB, x)
- According to Norton, paragraphing is perhaps the most structurally neglected feature of the King James Bible. Norton points out that:
 - The first edition’s paragraphing was rushed and incomplete.
 - In the New Testament, no new paragraph breaks are marked after Acts 20.
 - This defect was never systematically corrected in later editions.
- Some King James advocates have sought doctrinal/theological explanations for why there are no paragraph markings (pilcrow) in the 1611 after Acts 20:36. In a video titled “[Why is the last pilcrow in the KJB found in Acts 20:36? Q&A 294](#)” the speaker suggests a theological explanation, presented explicitly as a personal, non-dogmatic opinion. He proposes that God

allowed the paragraph markers to stop deliberately at Acts 20:36 to signal the conclusion of a significant phase in Paul’s ministry—specifically, Paul’s “Acts ministry.” Acts 20 is understood as containing Paul’s farewell address to the Ephesian elders, which the speaker views as setting forth the normative pattern for ministry in the present age of grace. Also see [“The Last Paragraph Mark \(Acts 20:36\)”](#) by Dave Reese.

- According to this interpretation, the remainder of the book of Acts represents a transition period, moving away from earlier characteristics of Paul’s ministry (such as miraculous healing and a “Jew first” emphasis) toward what later becomes his prison ministry, reflected in the Pastoral Epistles. The absence of further paragraph markers is taken as symbolically reinforcing this shift, visually marking the close of one dispensational phase and the movement into another. The speaker notes that this idea has been discussed by others (specifically mentioning “Brother Reese”) and encourages listeners to study the matter further, suggesting that the typographical feature is significant but often overlooked.
- The alternative explanation for why paragraph markers (pilcrows) stop at Acts 20:36 in the King James Bible claims that this was intentional and meaningful, marking the end of a significant phase of Paul’s ministry. However, once natural explanations (such as printing haste or incompleteness) are rejected, this view logically requires divine causation. In effect, the explanation assumes that God supernaturally or providentially prevented the printers from placing any further paragraph markers after Acts 20:36 and also prevented later editors from correcting the omission. Without such intervention, the stopping point would have to be accidental—and accidents cannot reliably carry doctrinal meaning. Claims that it was never correct are factually incorrect because Benjamin Blayney’s 1769 Oxford edition inserted pilcrows throughout Acts 21-28.
- This leads to a key implication that the view treats a typographical feature (a printer’s paragraph symbol) as theologically significant and divinely controlled. This goes beyond traditional ideas of biblical inspiration and preservation, which apply to the text itself, not to later formatting conventions such as paragraphing, punctuation, chapter divisions, or verse numbers. By contrast, the historical explanation (such as David Norton’s) understands the missing paragraphing as a known production defect of the 1611 printing—unfinished, inherited, and overlooked (Norton never mentions the 1769 Blayney edition)—not as a doctrinal signal. If a typographical absence is claimed to teach doctrine, then one must also claim special divine intervention in the printing process. That is a much stronger claim than the evidence supports, and it risks grounding theology in accidental features of Bible layout rather than in the inspired text itself.
- Consider the following example of the paragraphed layout from Genesis 1 in the NCPB. Note also the quotation marks within the text.

THE FIRST BOOK OF MOSES, CALLED GENESIS

1 In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. ²And the earth was without form, and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. ³And God said, 'Let there be light': and there was light. ⁴And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness. ⁵And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.

⁴the light from: Heb. *between the light and between the darkness*
⁵And the evening: Heb. *And the evening was, and the morning was, &c.*
⁶firmament: Heb. *expansion*

⁶And God said, 'Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters'. ⁷And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so. ⁸And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day.

¹¹grass: Heb. *tender grass*

⁹And God said, 'Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear': and it was so. ¹⁰And God called the dry land Earth, and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas: and God saw that it was good. ¹¹And God said, 'Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth': and it was so. ¹²And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind: and God saw that it was good. ¹³And the evening and the morning were the third day.

¹⁴the day: Heb. *between the night and between the day*

¹⁶to rule the day: Heb. *for the rule of the day, &c.*

¹⁴And God said, 'Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night: and let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years. ¹⁵And let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth': and it was so. ¹⁶And God made two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also. ¹⁷And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth, ¹⁸and to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness: and God saw that it was good. ¹⁹And the evening and the morning were the fourth day.

²⁰moving: or, *creeping*
²⁰life: Heb. *soul*
²⁰[fowl: Heb. *let fowl fly*]
²⁰open: Heb. *face of the firmament of heaven*

²⁰And God said, 'Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven'. ²¹And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind: and God saw that it was good. ²²And God blessed them, saying, 'Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth'. ²³And the evening and the morning were the fifth day.

²⁴And God said, 'Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his

- As a result, readers have been expected to rely almost entirely on verse numbers, reading Scripture as a sequence of isolated units rather than as coherent discourse. The New Cambridge Paragraph Bible re-paragraphs the entire text, guided by: logical development of thought, narrative transitions, rhetorical units, and modern expectations of textual coherence. The goal is not to impose a modern outline but to restore intelligible flow. (NCPB, x)

Poetic Structure

- In terms of poetic structure, the NCPB sets the text in verse lines. Norton is careful to note that not all biblical poetry is easy to identify and that the King James translators worked primarily in prose. Consider the following sample from Psalm 138.

PSALM 138
A psalm of David.

¹ I will praise thee with my whole heart:
before the gods will I sing praise unto thee.

² I will worship towards thy holy temple, and praise thy name
for thy loving-kindness and for thy truth:
for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name.

³ In the day when I cried thou answeredst me,
and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul.

⁴ All the kings of the earth shall praise thee, O LORD,
when they hear the words of thy mouth.

⁵ Yea, they shall sing in the ways of the LORD:
for great is the glory of the LORD.

⁶ Though the LORD be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly:
but the proud he knoweth afar off.

⁷ Though I walk in the midst of trouble, thou wilt revive me:
thou shalt stretch forth thy hand against the wrath of my
enemies,
and thy right hand shall save me.

⁸ The LORD will perfect that which concerneth me:
thy mercy, O LORD, endureth for ever:
forsake not the works of thy own hands.

- This type of layout out visually signals the genre i.e., poetry, helps reveal parallelism and structure, and sometimes recovers rhythm otherwise lost in block prose.
- Taken together, punctuation, speech marks, and paragraphing in the NCPB form a single editorial aim, to let the King James Bible be read as language again—not as a relic formatted by habit and tradition. Norton is explicit that these changes do not modernize theology or diction but instead remove typographic obstacles and restore coherence. According to Norton, these changes allow the translators’ English to speak with clarity, force, and literary dignity.

Marginal Notes

- Regarding the marginalia found in the NCPB Norton wrote:
 - “The King James translators were instructed that ‘no marginal notes at all [were] 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’. Consequently they supplied in the margin notes that give either alternative translations or literal renderings of the original (most of these begin ‘Heb.’ or ‘Gr.’ for Hebrew or Greek). Subsequent editions added a few more such notes. The reader may find these additional notes helpful, so The New Cambridge Paragraph Bible keeps them within square brackets, thus making clear which notes are original and which are not.” (NCPB, xi)
- Original translator-supplied marginal notes explaining Hebrew or Greek meanings are retained. Later-added notes are also included but placed within square brackets so readers can clearly distinguish between original and subsequent material.

Italics

- Another feature worth mentioning briefly is the use of italics in the King James Bible. Contrary to popular assumption, italics were never intended to mark inspired emphasis, nor do they indicate special authority. They were a scholarly device used by the translators to signal English words supplied to smooth translation where no direct equivalent existed in the original languages. Over time, italics multiplied, shifted, and were inconsistently applied by later editors, making them an unreliable guide even to translation technique. For this reason, David Norton regards italics as part of the *presentation layer* of the text rather than the text itself, a judgment reflected in the decision not to include them in the body of the New Cambridge Paragraph Bible.
 - “Consequently they are not included in The New Cambridge Paragraph Bible, except, as noted below, in the margin.” (Norton, 162-163)
- Norton’s choice to eliminate the italics altogether in the NCPB seems out of step with his stated desire to present the text of translators.

Headers & Chapter Summaries

- A similar judgment applies to headers and chapter summaries found in many early King James printings. These elements were never part of the translated text itself, but editorial additions intended to assist navigation and comprehension. While often helpful, they regularly reflect theological interpretation rather than neutral description, sometimes steering the reader toward a particular understanding before the text is even read. Norton treats these features as belonging to the *historic artifact* of the King James Bible rather than to the authoritative text proper, and they

are therefore excluded from the New Cambridge Paragraph Bible as interpretive accretions rather than textual components.

Conclusion

- Norton concludes his “Editor’s Introduction” with the following illustration and assessment of his work.
 - “Thousands of specks of dust have been blown away from the received text in The New Cambridge Paragraph Bible, leaving the King James Bible presented with a fidelity to the translators’ own work never before achieved, and allowing the most read, heard and loved book in the English language to speak with new vigour to modern readers.” (NCPB, xi)
- King James Only advocates commonly criticize David Norton’s work on the *New Cambridge Paragraph Bible* and by extension *A Textual History of the King James Bible* on the grounds that it undermines the authority and finality of the traditional King James text. From this perspective, the received form of the KJV—often identified with the 1769 Blayney edition or a modern Pure Cambridge Edition—is regarded as providentially perfected and therefore not subject to revision. Norton’s appeal to early printings and translator manuscripts is viewed as an attempt to “correct” Scripture after the fact, placing scholarly judgment above divine preservation. As a result, the NCPB is frequently characterized as a new or hybrid version rather than a true King James Bible, especially because of its restoration of unfamiliar readings, modernization of spelling, revised punctuation, re-paragraphing, and removal of italics.
- More broadly, KJV-Only critics object to Norton’s methodology, arguing that it treats the Bible like any other historical text rather than as a uniquely preserved and sacrosanct artifact. Features such as punctuation, paragraphing, italics, and headers are often assumed by these advocates to carry theological or doctrinal significance, so Norton’s insistence that they belong to the non-authoritative presentation layer of the text is taken as a denial of divine oversight in the Bible’s transmission. Ultimately, many of the criticisms rest not on counter-evidence from printing history, but on prior theological commitments about how God must have preserved Scripture. Consequently, Norton’s historically grounded explanations are frequently rejected because they unsettle a model of preservation that depends on typographical exactness and uniformity rather than documented textual development.
- I have a genuine respect for David Norton’s historical scholarship, particularly his work in *A Textual History of the King James Bible*. His careful cataloging of textual variants within the printed history of the Authorized Version represents a substantial contribution to the field. By documenting how the King James text developed across major early editions and later standardizations, Norton brings needed clarity to a subject that is often treated simplistically or ideologically. His work demonstrates convincingly that the history of the King James Bible is one

of transmission, correction, and editorial judgment rather than sudden textual perfection, and for that service to historical understanding he deserves serious consideration.

- That respect, however, is qualified. Norton’s textual history, helpful as it is, is not exhaustive. His analysis focuses almost entirely on a limited set of flagship folio editions—principally 1611, 1629, 1638, 1762, and 1769—while overlooking other streams of textual stewardship that operated alongside and sometimes independently of those editions. Most notably, Norton gives no meaningful attention to the editorial labors of Anthony Scattergood, whose work represents a distinct and significant chapter in the printed history of the King James Bible. The omission of Scattergood’s contributions introduces genuine gaps and blind spots into Norton’s reconstruction of the King James text’s development and limits the comprehensiveness of his historical conclusions. As a result, while Norton’s work is insightful, it does not fully map the breadth of editorial activity shaping the King James textual tradition.
- At the same time, I do not accept all of Norton’s editorial decisions, nor do I regard the *New Cambridge Paragraph Bible* as a normative or corrective edition of the King James Bible. While Norton’s historical analysis is often illuminating, his attempt to reconstruct the translators’ intended text necessarily involves conjectural judgment, particularly when appealing to translator manuscripts whose provenance, function, and dating remain disputed. In such cases, I am not persuaded that documentary uncertainty—especially when compounded by a selective editorial scope—justifies overturning readings that became firmly established within the printed tradition of the Authorized Version and received by the English-speaking church for centuries.
- For this reason, I view the *New Cambridge Paragraph Bible* not as a restoration of the King James Bible, but as a historically informed editorial experiment. Its value lies chiefly in what it reveals about the complexity of the Bible’s transmission and the challenges inherent in editorial work, rather than in providing a superior or authoritative form of the text. While I appreciate Norton’s methodological transparency and his refusal to treat later editorial conventions as sacrosanct, I remain unconvinced that a reconstruction built upon a narrowed evidentiary base should displace the historically received forms of the King James Bible.
- In short, I distinguish sharply between Norton’s descriptive historical work, which I regard as careful, instructive, and genuinely helpful—albeit incomplete—and his prescriptive editorial project, which I approach with reserve. I value the former as a meaningful contribution to understanding how the King James Bible came to exist in the forms we possess today, while regarding the latter as a curiosity of modern scholarship rather than a binding standard for faith, teaching, or use in the church.

Works Cited

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

Norton, David, *The New Cambridge Paragraph Bible*. Cambridge University Press, 2005.