

The Textual History of the English Bible

**Discerning the State of the Text
Before 1611**

Personal Beliefs

- I am a King James Bible believer. I believe that the King James Bible is God's word for English speaking people.
- I am also a mid-Acts Pauline dispensationalist who believes some very specific things regarding God's working in time during the dispensation of grace.
- What I believe about one (the Bible) ought not to conflict with what I believe about the other (God's working in time during the dispensation of grace).
- Historically, the King James position has been championed by Acts 2 Baptists who detest our dispensational position.
- The available literature on the matter is full of problems:
 - Doctrinal/Dispensational
 - Academic dishonesty: 1) documentation problems, and 2) plagiarism
 - Ad Hominem (personal) attacks
 - Tabloid style sensationalism

Personal Beliefs

- With respect to the Bible issue we need to chart our own course.
- The King James Bible was the result of a nearly 100 year process of refinement that began with William Tyndale in 1526. Tyndale's rough draft was further refined through the publication of the following English translations of the *TR*:
 - Coverdale (1535),
 - Matthews Bible (1538),
 - Great Bible (1539),
 - Geneva Bible (1560), and the
 - Bishops Bible (1568).

Introduction

- Could any of these pre-King James English translations of the *TR* have rightly been called God's word for English speaking people?
- Was the King James textually necessary to establish all the correct readings in English?
- What was the state of the text in 1604 when the decision for an additional translation was made?
- In addition to seeking the answer these questions, the goal of this lesson is to investigate the historical context in which the decision to retranslate was made in 1604.

Introduction

- Was that decision the result of divine supernatural intervention whereby God pulled the political strings of King James to authorize a new translation?
- Or, was there already a movement within the Bible believing English speaking world before 1604 that saw the need for a new translation?
- In order to answer these questions and accomplish our purpose we will consider the following points and sub points.

Introduction

- Preliminary Political Considerations
- Hampton Court and the English Bible
- Discerning the State of the English Bible in 1604
 - Underlying Textual Comparisons
 - Dispensational Comparisons
 - Different Ways of Saying the Same Thing
 - Substantive Differences in Meaning
- Conclusion

Preliminary Political Considerations

- Queen Elizabeth I died March 24, 1603. Later that same day, James VI of Scotland was declared King James I of England.
- On April 5, 1603 James left Edinburgh for London. He met on the way by a delegation of Puritans carrying a document called the Millenary Petition.
- The Petition was carefully worded document expressed Puritan distaste regarding the state of the Anglican Church, and took into consideration James' religious views as well as his liking for a debate, as written in the King's *Basilikon Doron* (1599).
 - “Middle Path”

Preliminary Political Considerations

- The Puritans object to:
 - 1) The signing of the cross during baptism,
 - 2) Confirmation,
 - 3) the administration of baptism by lay people,
 - 4) the use of the rings in marriage ceremonies,
 - 5) bowing at the name of Jesus,
 - 6) requirement of the surplice and cap, and
 - 7) the awarding of multiple ecclesiastical positions, and receiving pay for each.
- There is no language regarding a desire for a new translation of the Bible into English.
- The Petition was the impetus for the Hampton Court Conference in January 1604 where the decision to authorize a new translation of the Bible into English was made.

Hampton Court and the English Bible

- By 1604, there were two Bibles vying for acceptance within in England; the Geneva and the Bishops.
 - Puritans used and favored the Geneva.
 - Bible used by Shakespeare in his plays.
 - Anglicans used and favored the Bishops.
- On Monday, January 16, 1604 John Reynolds, the Puritans chief speaker, asked for a new translation of the Bible.
 - “May your Majesty be please that the Bible be new translated?” (Nicolson, 57)
 - “. . . Moved his Majesty that there might be a new translation of the Bible, because those which were allowed in the reigns of Henry the eight and Edward the sixth were corrupt and not answerable to the truth of the original.” (Norton, *The KJB*, 83)

Hampton Court and the English Bible

- Reynolds' request for a new translation appears to have been a complete afterthought. There is no mention of any Puritan misgivings regarding the English Bible in the Millenary Petition or on the agenda of items submitted to the King before Hampton Court.
 - Norton— “appears almost as a casual interjection.”
 - Teems— “With all the Lightness of an Afterthought”
- Reynolds buttressed his request by citing three passages from the Great Bible (1539): Galatians 4:25, Psalm 105:25, and Psalm 106:30 that he believed were poorly translated, according to William Barlow's written account.

Hampton Court and the English Bible

- Galatians 4:25—“the Greek word *sustoicheo* (“answereth” in the King James) is not well translated, as now it is; Bordereth, neither expressing the force of the word, nor the Apostle’s sense, nor the situation of the place.” (Barlow)
 - Great Bible (1539)—For mount Syna is Agar in Arabia, and **bordreth** upon the city, which is now called Jerusalem, and is in bondage with her children.
 - Geneva Bible (1560)—(For Agar or Sina is a mountain in Arabia, and it **answereth** to Jerusalem which now is) and she is in bondage with her children.
 - Bishops Bible (1568)—For Agar is the mount Sina in Arabia, and **bordreth** upon the city, which is now [called] Jerusalem, and is in bondage with her children.

Hampton Court and the English Bible

- Psalm 105:28—“They were not obedient; the original being, They were not disobedient.” (Barlow)
 - Great Bible (1535)—He sent darkness, & it was dark, and they were **not obedient** unto his word.
 - Geneva Bible (1560)—He sent darkness, and made it dark: and they were **not disobedient** unto his commission.
 - Bishops Bible (1568)—He sent darkness, & it was dark: and they **went not** from his words.
- Psalm 106:30—“Then stood up Phinees and prayed, the Hebrew hath executed judgement.” (Barlow)
 - Great Bible (1535)—Then stood up Phinehes and **prayed**, & so the plague ceased.
 - Geneva Bible (1560)—But Phinehas stood up, and **executed judgment**, and the plague was stayed.
 - Bishops Bible (1568)—Then stood up Phinehes, he **executed justice**: and so the plague ceased.

Hampton Court and the English Bible

- Barlow's notes record the reaction of Richard Bancroft, the soon to be named Archbishop of Canterbury, "if every man's humour should be followed, there would be no end of translating." (Barlow)
- The King's response no doubt surprised Bancroft and disappointed Reynolds. James supported the notion of a new translation while denying Reynolds' implicit request for the royal sanctioning of the Geneva Bible.
 - Read quote from notes.
- It turns out that James also believed that there needed to be "one uniform translation" but he would never sanction or recognize the Geneva on account of its marginal notes that he viewed as seditious and undermining the Divine Right of Kings.
 - "Yes, I will give you the opposite of what you want."
(Nicolson)

Hampton Court and the English Bible

- James' decision to retranslate the Bible was his *Irenicon* or "message of peace, meant to reconcile the differences."
 - "middle path"
 - Show him sympathetic to the puritans while allowing him to strike a blow at the mainstay of their beliefs (the Geneva Bible).
 - Would keep the leaders of all parts of the Church busy and working together.
 - Quintessential James
- How does one explain the swift and decisive nature of James' decision?
- James was already of a mind that the English Bible needed to be retranslated before 1604.
 - Read quote from [Spotswood](#).

Hampton Court and the English Bible

- Prior to Hampton Court in 1604, James, through his own study of the English Bible, had come to believe that all was not as it should be.
 - James' own translation work in the Psalms
 - Independent of Puritan prodding
- Spotswood depicts James as having fulfilled his purpose from 1601 to “perfect” the English Bible via the translation of the King James Bible.
 - “. . . yet the king did not let his intention fall to the ground, after his happy coming to the Crown of England; which with great and pains and the singular profit of the church they perfected.” (Spotswood, 465)

Hampton Court and the English Bible

- King James and the Church of Scotland were not the only ones clamoring for a new translation of the Bible into English before 1604.
- Historical evidence from the 1590s proves that a growing chorus of Bible believing Christians within the English speaking world had come to believe that a retranslation of the English Bible was in order and were calling for such a revision.
 - Hugh Broughton
 - *An Epistle to the Learned Nobility of England Touching Translating the Bible from the Original* (1597)
 - Letter to Queen Elizabeth dated 21 June 1593
 - “Act of Parliament for a New Version of the Bible”

LIX. DRAFT FOR AN ACT OF PARLIAMENT FOR A NEW VERSION
OF THE BIBLE.¹

From British Museum Add. MS. 34729, fol. 77.

An act for the reducinge of diversities of Bibles now extant in the
Englishe tongue to one setled vulgar translated from the originall.

For avoydinge of the multiplicite of errors, that are rashly conceaved by the
inferior and vulgar sorte by the varietie of the translacions of Bible to the most
daungerous increase of papistrie and atheisme. And whereas many from the high to
the lowe of all sortes have bene desierous greatly and a longe time to have the holy
booke of god which for the olde testament is in Hebrewes for the new all originally in
Greeke to be translated in such sorte, that such as studie it, shoulde in noe place be
snared, which worke noe doubt the lordes spirituall of this Parliament with the pain-
full travailes of such of both Vniversities as they shall or may call vnto them, may
with the grace of Allmightie god perfect, which will tende to her Majesties immortall
fame beinge amongst the Christian princes universally knowen to be not inferior to
any in the furtheringe and defendinge of the faith of [Christ, And whereas] the chiefest
obstacle to the buildinge of this godly worke heretofore hath bene discerned to be for
that noe compulsarie meanes hath bene had ne made whereby the students of both

¹ This draft clearly belongs to the reign of Elizabeth, probably to the primacy of Whitgift, but with whom it originated appears not to be known.

Hampton Court and the English Bible

- So by 1604, the idea that a new translation was needed had been around for some time. A cross section of the English speaking world, represented by both secular and religious authorities in Scotland and England had supported the idea even though no decisive action was taken prior to 1604. David Norton writes, “it seems that England did not have the pure truth of the Bible, and there was uncomfortable awareness of errors, in both versions, especially in the Bishops’ Bible.” (Norton, *The KJB*, 81)
- The question is; why? Why had the conclusion been reached that a further translation of the Bible into English was in order?
- It is to answering these questions that we will now turn our attention.

The State of the English Text in 1604

- It is important to note that the King James translators viewed themselves as revisers, not as creators of a new translation. In the preface to the 1611, the translators stated,
 - “Truly, good Christian reader, we never thought from the beginning that we should need to make a new translation, nor yet to make of a bad one a good one . . . but to make a good one better, or out of many good ones one principal good one, not justly to be expected against, that hath been our endeavor, that our mark.”
- This statement is consistent with the rules provided to the translators.
 - Rule 1: The ordinary Bible read in the Church, commonly called the Bishops’ Bible, to be followed, and as little altered as the truth of the original will permit.
 - Rule 14: These translations to be used when they agree better with the text than the Bishops Bible, viz.: Tyndale’s, Matthew’s, Coverdale’s, Whitechurch’s, and Geneva.

The State of the English Text in 1604

- Using Rule 1 as a starting point, a recent collation of the King James New Testament with the Bishops New Testament was conducted by Lawrence Vance. Vance's findings published in his 2015 book *The Making of the King James New Testament* reveal that the King James and Bishops Bibles are essentially identical in 91 % of the New Testament readings.
 - See notes for further elaboration.
- In order to ascertain the text's state in 1604 we will compare the King James with its two immediate predecessors vying for dominance at the time of Hampton Court, namely the Geneva and Bishops Bibles. To accomplish this task, we will look at the following four types of comparisons and provide at least three examples for each type:
 - Underlying Textual Comparisons
 - Dispensational Comparisons
 - Different Ways of Saying the Same Thing
 - Substantive Differences in Meaning

Underlying Textual Comparisons

- Comparing the Geneva and Bishops Bibles with the King James is not even remotely the same as comparing the King James with a modern version (NIV or ESB). The King James and its English predecessors originate from the same underlying Greek text, i.e., the *Textus Receptus*.

Mark 1:1-2

Geneva	Bishops	NIV
1) The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. 2) As it is written in the Prophets , Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.	1) The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the son of God. 2) As it hath been written in the prophets : Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.	1) The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, 2) as it is written in Isaiah the prophet : "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way"

Underlying Textual Comparisons

Colossians 1:14

Geneva	Bishops	NIV
In whom we have redemption through his blood , that is, the forgiveness of sins,	In who we have redemption through his blood , the forgiveness of sins:	In whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Galatians 2:16

Geneva	Bishops	NIV
Know that a man is not justified by the works of the Law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ , even we, I say, have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ , and not by the works of the Law, because that by the works of the Law, no flesh shall be justified.	Know that a man is not justified by the deeds of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ : And we have believed on Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ , and not by the deeds of the law, because by the deeds of the law no flesh shall be justified.	Know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ . So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.

Dispensational Comparisons

- Dispensational truth remains intact in both the Geneva Bible and Bishops Bible as the following verses demonstrate.

Galatians 2:7

Geneva	Bishops	NIV
But contrariwise, when they saw that the Gospel over the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the Gospel over the circumcision was unto Peter;	But contrary wise, when they saw that the Gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the Gospel of the circumcision was committed unto Peter.	On the contrary, they recognized that I had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the uncircumcised , just as Peter had been to the circumcised .

Dispensational Comparisons

Ephesians 3:6

Geneva	Bishops	NIV
That the Gentiles should be inheritors also, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the Gospel,	That the gentiles should be inheritors also, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ, by the Gospel:	This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

II Timothy 2:15

Geneva	Bishops	NIV
Study to shew thyself approved unto God a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, dividing the word of truth aright.	Study to shew thy self approved unto God, a workman not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.	Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

Different Ways of Saying the Same Thing

- The Geneva Bible's reading in II Timothy 2:15 highlights an important consideration, while the wording between the King James and the Geneva Bible's is not exactly the same, the meaning is identical, i.e., a different way of saying the same thing.
 - Geneva: "... **dividing the word of truth aright.**"
 - King James: "... **rightly dividing the word of truth.**"
- We should not demand **exact sameness** or **verbatim wording** as our definition of inerrancy. The King James Bible is inerrant because it does not report/convey any information that is **FALSE**. Modern versions err, because they and their underlying Greek text have been altered so drastically, as to affect Bible doctrine, i.e., they report information that is false.

Different Ways of Saying the Same Thing

- Many of the differences between the Geneva, Bishops, and King James are just different ways of saying the same thing. In other words, they are not substantive differences in meaning. Please consider the following examples.

Job 15:2

Geneva	Bishops	King James
Shall a wise man speak words of the wind , and fill his belly with the East wind?	Shall a wise man's Answer be as the wind , and fill a man's belly as it were with the wind of the east?	Shoul a wise man utter vain knowledge , and fill his belly with the east wind?

Different Ways of Saying the Same Thing

Job 16:20

Geneva	Bishops	King James
My friends speak eloquently against me: but mine eye poureth out tears unto God.	My friends Give me many words to scorn, and mine eye poureth out tears unto God.	My friends scorn me: but mine eye poureth out tears unto God.

Mark 8:24

Geneva	Bishops	King James
And he looked up, and said, I see men, for I see them walking like trees.	And he looked up, & said, I see men: for I perceive the walk as [they were] trees.	And he looked up, and said, I see men as trees, walking.

Luke 13:3

Geneva	Bishops	King James
I tell you, nay: but except ye amend your lives, ye shall all likewise perish.	I tell you nay: but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.	I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

Different Ways of Saying the Same Thing

Acts 9:28

Geneva

And he was **conversant** with them at Jerusalem,

Bishops

And he had his **conversation** with them at Jerusalem,

King James

And he was **with them coming in and going out** at Jerusalem.

Substantive Differences in Meaning

- For our purposes a substantive difference in meaning is a difference of the sort that affects the inerrancy of Scripture. In other words, the difference is so great that it affects the doctrine being taught and/or the details or order of events. In short, these are examples that affect the veracity and trustworthiness of the text.

II Samuel 21:19

Geneva	Bishops	King James	NIV
And there was yet another battle in Gob with the Philistines, where Elhanah the son of Jaare-oregim, a Bethlehemite slew Goliath the Gittite : the staff of whose spear was like a weaver's beam.	And there was another battle in Gob with the Philistines, where Elhanan the son of Jaere Oregim a Bethlehemite slue Goliath ye Gethite : the staff of whose spear was as great as a weaver's cloth beam.	And there was again a battle in Gob with the Philistines, where Elhanan the son of Jaareoregim, a Bethlehemite, slew <i>the brother of Goliath the Gittite</i> , the staff of whose spear <i>was</i> like a weaver's beam.	In another battle with the Philistines at Gob, Elhanan son of Jair-Oregim the Bethlehemite killed Goliath the Gittite , who had a spear with a shaft like a weaver's rod.

Substantive Differences in Meaning

- Both the Geneva and Bishops readings in this case contradict themselves when they report in 1 Chronicles 20:4-5 that Elhanan slew Lahmi the brother of Goliath. The King James Bible corrects the reading and the contradiction by inserting the phrase “the brother of” into II Samuel 21:19.
 - I Chronicles 20:5— And there was yet another battle with the Philistines: and Elhanan the son of Jair slew Lahmi, the brother of Goliath the Gittite, whose spear staff was like a weaver’s beam. (Geneva)
 - I Chronicles 20:5— And there was battle again with the Philistines, & Elhanan the son of Jair slue Lahemi the brother of Goliath the Gethite, whose spear was like a weaver’s beam. (Bishops)
- This is an example of a substantive difference in meaning that is corrected in the King James. The King James corrected the error and presents a pure reading.

Substantive Differences in Meaning

Malachi 2:16

Geneva	Bishops	King James
<p>If thou hatest her, put her away, saith the Lord God of Israel, yet he covereth the injury under his garment, saith the Lord of hosts: therefore keep yourselves in your spirit, and transgress not.</p>	<p>If thou hatest her, put her away, saith the Lord God of Israel: yet he couereth the injuru under his garment, saith the Lorde of hosts, and be ye kept in your spirit, and transgress not.</p>	<p>For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away: for <i>one</i> covereth violence with his garment, saith the LORD of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously.</p>

- Both the Geneva and Bishops readings make out like God is okay with the practice of divorce. Meanwhile the King James text states very clearly that God “hateth putting away,” i.e., divorce

Substantive Differences in Meaning

John 1:1-4

Geneva	Bishops	King James
1) In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and that Word was God. 2) This same was in the beginning with God. 3) All things were made by it , and without it was made nothing that was made. 4) In it was life, and the life was the light of men.	1) In the beginning was the word, & the word was with God: and that word was God. 2) He was with God in the beginning 3) All things were made by it : and without it , was made nothing that was made. 4) In it was life, and the life was the light of men,	1) In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2) The same was in the beginning with God. 3) All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made. 4) In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.

- Christ's deity is undermined by the readings found in the Geneva and Bishops Bibles by referring to the second member of the Godhead as an "it" as opposed to "him" in the King James.

Substantive Differences in Meaning

- I am absolutely convinced that the King James Bible needed to happen as a further revision of the text in order to accurately establish all the correct readings in English. While the Geneva and Bishops would still be preferable when compared with modern versions all was not as it should have been in these earlier translations.
- Given the fact that the Bishops New Testament essentially agrees with 91% of the King James New Testament it would be fair to say that what the English speaking world possessed in 1604 was very good but needed a final polishing to establish all the correct readings in English. With the King James all the readings that should be there are present and all the readings that are not accurate are left out.

Conclusion

- How do we explain this accomplishment?
- Was the King James Bible the result of divine miraculous supernatural intervention as many King James supporters have asserted?
- Did God providentially intervene to pull James' political strings thereby causing him to capitulate to Reynolds' request for a new translation?
- Were the translators inspired in the same sense as Paul when he wrote Romans?
 - Pauline dispensational cannot hold this view and remain consistent.
- Or were there Bible believing English Christians who knew all was not as it should be in their English Bibles prior to 1604?
- Was God working in and through these Bible believing saints who cared about the state of the English text to further refine the text?
- Which answer is more in line with what we believe about God's working in time as mid-Acts Pauline dispensationalists?