

Why We Hold to the KJV

Part 7 – The Unmatched Heritage of the KJV

Text: Psalm 16:6

Introduction:

1. The King James Bible has an unmatched heritage and we are taking the time to trace that heritage as a part of this series so you get a sense for just how precious the Bible you hold in your hand really is.
2. In our last lesson we considered the life of William Tyndale, arguably the most important name in the history of the English Bible. In this lesson we want to cover 5 pre-KJV Bibles that form an important part of the history of the English Bible. These Bibles built on the pioneering work of Wycliffe and especially Tyndale and form a very important part of the heritage of the KJV. The KJV was really the crowning achievement of over 200 years of history in relation to the English Bible. We will also briefly consider the first Catholic Bible in English.
3. Note: The majority of the information below is drawn from David Cloud's book, "Faith vs. the Modern Bible versions" as well as Robert Sargent's excellent course entitled "English Bible Manuscript Evidence".

I. THE COVERDALE BIBLE (1535)

A. Miles Coverdale (1488-1569)

1. Born in York and ordained a priest in the Augustinian order in 1514.
2. Educated at Cambridge and was there converted through reading the Scriptures.
3. By 1528, Coverdale left the Augustinians and was preaching against Catholic errors.
4. Coverdale was exiled thrice for his faith and in 1546 his books were burned at St. Paul's Cross. He was imprisoned for two and a half years under Queen Mary.
5. In early 1548 Coverdale returned from his first exile and became chaplain to Katherine Parr, the sixth and final wife of Henry VIII. She was sympathetic to the Protestant cause. John Foxe tells us that Katherine became "very zealous toward the gospel, and the professors thereof."
6. Coverdale was described by John Bale in 1548 as follows: "Under the mastership of Robert Barnes he drank in good learning with a burning thirst. He was a young man of friendly and upright nature and very gentle spirit, and when the church of England revived, he was one of the first to make a pure profession of Christ. ... he gave himself wholly, to propagating the truth of Jesus Christ's gospel and

manifesting his glory. ... His style is charming and gentle, flowing limpidly along: it moves and instructs and delights” (James Mozely, *Coverdale and His Bibles*, 1953, p. 3).

7. Coverdale was associated with William Tyndale. According to Foxe, he spent from Easter to December 1529 working with Tyndale in Hamburg. Coverdale also helped proofread manuscripts as they went to press in Antwerp before Tyndale’s arrest.

B. The Coverdale Bible

1. It was shipped to England in 1536, shortly after Tyndale’s death.
2. It was the first entire Bible in English.
3. Used Tyndale’s N.T. and the 20 books he had completed in the O.T. The rest was translated from German and Latin.
4. Coverdale was more of an editor than a translator. His work was a revision of Tyndale’s work, comparing it with other German and Latin versions (Sargent).
5. The Coverdale Bible was intended to be a study Bible. The page layout was clear, with summaries at the head of each book and chapter.
6. Coverdale taught his readers some of the important principles of Bible interpretation. He wrote in one section of his Bible: “But who so ever thou be that readest scripture, let the holy ghost be thy teacher, and let one text expound another unto thee: as for such dreams, visions, and dark sentences as be hid from thy understanding, commit them unto God, and make no articles of them: but let the plain text be thy guide, and the spirit of God (which is the author thereof) shall lead thee in all truth.”
7. The Coverdale Bible had more than 150 pictures.
8. Coverdale translated the Psalms and these were included in the 1549 Book of Common Prayer and were read as part of Anglican services until the 1960s.
9. Much of Coverdale’s work in the Psalms was carried over into the KJV. Two examples:
 - a. “The heavens declare the glory of God: and the firmament sheweth his handiwork..” Ps. 19:1
 - b. “Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands.” Ps. 100:1
10. Coverdale influenced the Bible through his excellent literary style and cadence.
11. Some words and phrases in the King James Bible were brought in from Coverdale:
 - a. winebibber
 - b. tender mercies

- c. lovingkindness
 - d. saving health
12. It has sometimes been nicknamed the “Bug Bible” after its rendering of Psalm 91:5 - “Thou shalt not need to be afrayed for any bugges by night.”

II. THE MATTHEWS BIBLE (1537)

A. John Rogers the Translator

1. This Bible was translated by John Rogers, who used the pen name Thomas Matthews to conceal his identity. It is thought to stand for the apostles Thomas and Matthew. Being involved in Bible translation work was a dangerous thing in those days!
2. Christopher Anderson, in *Annals of the English Bible*, tells us that it was Tyndale who influenced Rogers to examine the Scriptures, which lead to his conversion to Christ and rejection of Catholic doctrine.
3. When Tyndale was imprisoned, John Rogers somehow got the manuscripts Tyndale and completed on the Old Testament Books. After Tyndale’s martyrdom Rogers completed the translation.
4. The Matthews Bible used the Tyndale N.T. and O.T. and for those portions Tyndale didn’t complete, he borrowed some from Coverdale and translated some parts afresh.

B. John Rogers Martyrdom

1. Rogers was imprisoned in Newgate on January 27, 1554, not long after the Roman Catholic Queen Mary ascended to the throne.
2. Rogers had a large family with 10 or 11 children including a breastfeeding infant. His wife, a German, was named Adriance de Weyden. His request that his wife be allowed to visit him before his death was cruelly denied by the ecclesiastical authorities. John Foxe notes that he earnestly requested that he might speak a few words with his wife before his burning but that was denied him. “Thus,” said he, “you show your charity, of what sort it is”.
3. While in prison, Rogers wrote some advice to his children, which was reprinted in the New England Primer, America’s first educational reader.
4. Roger’s wife brought the children to witness their father’s martyrdom “to strengthen him against the ordeal.”
5. Foxe’s Book of Martyrs – “When the time came that he should be brought to Smithfield the sheriff came to him, and asked him if he would revoke his abominable doctrines. To whom Mr. Rogers said, “That which I have preached I will seal with my blood!” Then said

the sheriff, "Thou art a heretic." "That shall be known", said Rogers, "at the day of judgment." "Well," quoth the sheriff, "I will never pray for thee." "But I will pray for you," replied Rogers. He was brought the same day, which was Monday, the 4th of February, towards Smithfield, repeating the 51st Psalm.

6. J.C. Ryle paints the scene in his book "Why Were our Reformers Burned", "An immense crowd lined the street, and filled every available spot in Smithfield. Up to that day men could not tell how English Reformers would behave in the face of death, and could hardly believe that Prebendaries (clergymen) and Dignitaries would actually give their bodies to be burned for their religion. But when they saw John Rogers, the first martyr, walking steadily and unflinchingly into a fiery grave, the enthusiasm of the crowd knew no bounds. They rent the air with thunders of applause. Even Noailles, the French Ambassador, wrote home a description of the scene, and said that Rogers went to death 'as if he was walking to his wedding.' By God's great mercy he died with comparative ease"
7. The Bible translator John Rogers was the first of almost 300 burned to death during the reign of Queen Mary. (Many others died in prison.)

III. THE GREAT BIBLE (1539)

- A. This was an edition of the Matthews Bible.
- B. Miles Coverdale oversaw the completing and printing of the first Great Bible, but there were several editions printed by other parties.
- C. This Bible was persecuted by the Roman Catholic authorities during its printing in France.
- D. The first printing of the Great Bible was completed in April 1539.
- E. Copies were placed in each church in England by royal command.
- F. It was called "great" because of its size. It was published in six volumes, each one measuring 14x9 inches (35x23 cm).
- G. It was the first English Bible to place the books in their present order.
- H. It is noted for its elaborately engraved title page.
- I. It was also called 'the Chained Bible' because it was chained to a reading desk that was attached to a church pillar to discourage theft.

IV. THE GENEVA BIBLE (1560)

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- B. It was produced by English refugees that settled in Geneva to escape the persecutions of the Roman Catholic Queen Mary, who reigned from 1553-58.
- C. He married Catharine Chauvin, the sister of John Calvin.
- D. Particularly in the translation work of the Old Testament, Whittingham was aided by other English exiles including Miles Coverdale.
- E. The Geneva Bible contained many notes explaining the text and teaching Protestant doctrine. The harlot of Revelation 17 was applied to the Pope: "This woman is the Antichrist, that is, the Pope with the whole body of his filthy creatures, as is expounded in verse 18."
- F. The first English Bible to contain verse divisions throughout.
- G. The first English Bible to use italics to indicate words added by the translators.
- H. The first English Bible in which the entire O.T. was translated direction from Hebrew.
- I. The Geneva Bible was often printed in small sizes that were convenient for missionary work. The page layout was uncluttered and attractive. It was printed in clear Roman type instead of the heavy Gothic Black Letter than had been commonly in Bibles before that. The headings across the top of the page told the reader at a glance what book he was reading. Each chapter was preceded by a summary of its content. There were many pictures including interesting drawings of Solomon's temple, and even maps.
- J. It has been called the "Breeches Bible" after the rending of Genesis 3:7 "They sewed figge tree leaves together, and made themselves breeches."
- K. The Geneva Bible was by far the most popular edition of the Tyndale English Bible prior to the publication of the King James. It wielded a powerful influence for almost 100 years until its popularity waned in favor of the King James Version.
- L. It was the first Bible carried to America.

V. THE BISHOP'S BIBLE (1560)

- A. It was produced during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I.
- B. The bishops wanted a Bible to compete with the popular Geneva Bible and that would replace the Great Bible.
- C. Matthew Parker, the Archbishop of Canterbury, oversaw the project. It was called the "Bishop's Bible" because most of those who worked on it were Anglican bishops.
- D. It was never popular with the people of England.

- E. Between 1568 and 1611, only 20 editions of the Bishops' Bible were printed whereas there 120 editions of the Geneva.

VI. THE RHEIMS-DOUAY BIBLE (1582) (CATHOLIC BIBLE)

- A. This Bible had **no influence** on the KJV but we note it for historical purposes as it was the first **Roman Catholic English Bible**.
- B. It was the work of Jesuit priests and was a counter reformation move on the part of the Catholic church.
- C. While still believing the Bible should be kept from the people, the English Catholics realized they could only counter the Reformation in England by supplying people with their own Bible.
- D. The Catholic church had viciously persecuted the Bible and Bible believers throughout the dark ages.
- E. The Jesuit order (society of Jesus) was founded by Ignatius of Loyola at the University of Paris in the 1530s.
- F. The Jesuits were the "Pope's Commandos" – their one mission was to regain lost territory for Rome by infiltrating the colleges and institutions of learning to win the minds of the young. (Sargent)
- G. The New Testament was published at Rheims in 1582 and the complete Bible in 1609 at Douay.
- H. Hence the name "Rheims Douay" Bible.
- I. The translation work was primarily done by the Catholic Priest, Gregory Martin.
- J. It was an English translation of the Latin Bible, based on the Latin Vulgate.
- K. It was very biased toward Catholic beliefs and contained many notations and interpretations. For example, it translates 'repentance' as "do penance" or "penance".
 1. Matthew 3:1-2 "And in those days cometh John the Baptist preaching in the desert of Judea. And saying: Do penance: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."
 2. Matthew 4:17 "From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say: Do penance, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."
 3. Luke 3:3 "And he came into all the country about the Jordan, preaching the baptism of penance for the remission of sins;"
 4. Luke 5:32 I came not to call the just, but sinners to penance.
 5. Luke 13:3-5 "No, I say to you: but unless you shall do penance, you shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen upon whom the tower fell in Siloe, and slew them: think you, that they also were debtors above all the men that dwelt in Jerusalem? No, I say to you; but except you do penance, you shall all likewise perish.

6. Luke 15:7 "I say to you, that even so there shall be joy in heaven upon one sinner that doth penance, more than upon ninety-nine just who need not penance."
7. 15:10 "So I say to you, there shall be joy before the angels of God upon one sinner doing penance."
8. Acts 17:30 "And God indeed having winked at the times of this ignorance, now declareth unto men, that all should every where do penance."
9. Acts 20:21 "Testifying both to Jews and Gentiles penance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ."
10. 2 Peter 3:9 "The Lord delayeth not his promise, as some imagine, but dealeth patiently for your sake, not willing that any should perish, but that all should return to penance."

CONCLUSION: These translations, with the exception of the Catholic translation, form an important part of the heritage of the KJV, in particular the Coverdale, Matthews, Great and Geneva Bibles. These Bibles built on the work of Tyndale and paved the way for the Bible of all Bibles in English, the King James Version.