

Comparison of the King James and Geneva Bibles

by *Raymond C. Faircloth*

In translating from the Roman Catholic Latin Vulgate of the day, John Wycliffe gave us the first translation of the Bible into English. It was called Wycliffe's Bible and was completed in 1384. However, it didn't remove the errors of the original Latin Vulgate completed in AD 384 by Jerome or the many errors that had accumulated in it over time. Then William Tyndale planned to translate the Bible into English from the original languages, rather than from the corrupted Latin Vulgate. He had studied at Oxford University and later at Cambridge. He was fluent in 7 foreign languages including Greek, Hebrew, and Latin, and so was very well qualified for this task.

In 1526, whilst at the university of Wittenberg, Germany, Tyndale completed his full printed translation of the Tyndale New Testament (revised in 1534). This was the first English translation directly from Greek texts – the Textus Receptus produced by Erasmus. Then around 1529 he began translating the Old Testament directly from Hebrew texts, but only completed the Pentateuch and the nine historical books.

In 1535 Miles Coverdale completed the parts of the OT that Tyndale had not completed and then, with Tyndale's revised New Testament, Coverdale had the complete Bible in English printed (probably at Hamburg). This became known as the Coverdale Bible. Now Tyndale was viewed as a heretic, firstly because he criticized Henry VIII for his plan to divorce Catherine of Aragon and secondly, because in his translation, Tyndale had shown that words such as "priest," "church," "penitence," and "charity" as used in the then current versions were incorrect and should be rendered as: "elder (senior)," "congregation," "repentance," and "love." He was executed in 1536. Nevertheless, others carried on this work so that:

In 1537 John Rogers (pseudonym "Thomas Matthew") made a compilation of all of Tyndale's translation work i.e., the 1534 New Testament, the Pentateuch, and the nine historical books. Where there were gaps in Tyndale's work, Rogers used the translations by Miles Coverdale (1535). This compilation of the complete Bible was called the Matthew's Bible.

In 1539 a revision of the Matthew's Bible was printed and was called the Great Bible. This version was accepted by Henry VIII (died 1547) to be read in the churches.

The Geneva Bible

During the six year reign of Edward VI, Protestantism advanced rapidly in England, until Catholic Mary became Queen in 1553 and which resulted in persecution of Protestants, many of whom left England. These included William Wittingham, Thomas Sampson, and Anthony Gilby, who all arrived in Geneva, Switzerland. During their time there they revised Tyndale's translation of the New Testament with the use of the third edition of Stephanus' Greek New Testament and with the help of noted Biblical scholar Theodore Beza.

In 1557, William Wittingham printed what was later called the Geneva New Testament - the first English Bible that included verse divisions. This translation was considerably more scholarly than all the preceding versions, especially the Great Bible which had been adapted to please Henry VIII.

Wittingham, Sampson and Gilby remained in Geneva after Queen Mary's death in 1558 so that they could complete a revision of the Old Testament. This finally resulted in the production of the Geneva Bible in 1560. The scholarship and purity of English found in this Bible were of the highest quality.

The Divine Right of Kings Issue Leads to a Lower Quality Version

THE GENEVA BIBLE BANNED FROM CHURCHES

The problem with the Geneva Bible was that it contained marginal notes that disputed the claim of the divine right of Kings. So because the new queen, Elizabeth I was so upset by these marginal notes in the Geneva Bible, she refused its use in the churches and ordered a revision of the Great Bible by eight of the C. of E. bishops. So:

□ In 1568 the Bishops' Bible became the official Bible of the English Church. Yet this version was significantly inferior to the Geneva Bible both in scholarship and linguistic eloquence.

THE EFFECT OF KING JAMES I ON PURITY OF TRANSLATION (1604-1611)

In 1604, at Hampton Court Palace, King James I of England was persuaded by the Puritans that the issue of the differences between the Geneva and the Bishops' Bibles should be settled by having a new translation of the English Bible. However, James stipulated that: The Bishops' Bible must be the basis of the translation.

THE COMMITTEES, SCHOLARSHIP AND THE RESULTING KING JAMES VERSION

To undertake this work, which took nearly seven years, three committees of the best of scholars were established. These were at: Westminster, Cambridge University and Oxford University and produced the King James Version in 1611. Because the Bishop's Bible contained very significant amounts of Tyndale's work, it is estimated that 83% of the NT in the KJV is directly from Tyndale's NT. However, because the remaining 17% of the NT had to be based on the Bishops' Bible and other sources the final result did not match the Geneva Bible in purity. Indeed, the King James Version was basically rejected by the Puritans, the scholarly community, and many church leaders who recognized the Geneva Bible to be superior and so continued to use it in preference to the KJV.

Catholic Influence on the KJV New Testament

The Catholic counter-reformation cause was furthered by the Bible translation work of English Catholics working in Rheims, France to produce a translation of the NT into English from the Latin Vulgate. The primary translator was Gregory Martin of Oxford and his work, the Rheims New Testament was published in 1582. The preface of the Rheims N. T. stated: "It [the Latin Vulgate] is truer than the vulgar Greek text itself. It is not only better than all other Latin translations, but than the Greek text itself, in those places where they disagree."

JOHN 1:1-4 RENDERED IN 1. THE BISHOP'S BIBLE AND 2. THE RHEIMS NEW TESTAMENT

1. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and God was that Word. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by it, and without it, was made nothing that was made. In it was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in the darknesse, and the darknesse comprehendeth it not"
2. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him: and without him was made nothing that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men."

Soon after, William Fulke published a work paralleling the Rheims New Testament with the N.T. of the 1572 Bishop's Bible. Although there is some debate over just how much the Rheims New Testament influenced the translation of the KJV New Testament, it is evident that, in being available in the form of Fulke's parallel editions for over 20 years before work began on the KJV, it did have some substantial influence, even though it was not listed as one of the earlier English translations to be consulted by the translators of the KJV. Nevertheless, James G. Carleton, in his book entitled: *The Part of the Rheims in the making of the English Bible*, argues for a very extensive influence. Certainly, there are a number of phrases directly attributable to the Rheims New Testament, and it has been demonstrated that much of the English of the 1611 KJV New Testament had adopted the same latinate terminology that is also found in the Rheims New Testament of the same text. Furthermore, the director of apologetics and evangelization for Catholic Answers, James Akin states that:

It is commonly acknowledged that, in preparing the KJV, the translators made use of the Rheims New Testament and adopted many of its readings in preference to those of other English editions. The KJV in many places thus bears a Douay-Rheims "slant" absent from prior translations.

So it is my contention that the change from "it" to "him" in John 1:3-4 in the KJV occurred because of the influence of the Rheims New Testament as well as the older Wycliffe Bible – both based on the corrupted Latin Vulgate.

William Laud Bans the Geneva Bible Completely

When Charles I ascended to the throne in 1625 after the death of his father King James he appointed William Laud to be dean at Canterbury. Among the first orders given by Laud was the banning of any further printing of the Geneva Bible in England. However, lovers of this translation were still able to obtain copies of it from Europe until Laud finally issued an edict forbidding the importing of the Geneva Bible saying that it would cause economic hardship to British printers.

THE POPULATION IS LEFT WITH A LESSER BIBLE - THE KJV

So, what really brought the KJV to the fore in time in the public mind had little to do with its quality and its merits as a translation, but rather to political and economic factors, as well as the fact that there was no longer any access to the superior Geneva Bible, the last printing of which was in 1644 in Amsterdam. So in summary, if it had not been for the dictates of queens, kings, and some of the church hierarchy for political reasons it could well have been that the Geneva Bible would have been the Authorized Version of the time. Moreover, rather than the KJV it was the Geneva Bible that the Pilgrims took with them when the Mayflower set sail from Plymouth for America on September 6, 1620.

Conclusions Regarding John 1:1-4 in the KJV and the Geneva New Testaments

In relation to the different renderings of John 1:1-4, all the translations from William Tyndale's NT through to the Geneva Bible render these verses in showing that "the word" is not a person but is neuter as shown by the Greek word *auto* being rendered as "it" rather than "he." The original of William Tyndale's The New Testament, 1534 reads as:

In the begynnyng was the worde, and the worde was with God, and the worde was god. The samewasin the begynnyng with god. All thinges were made by it, and without it, was made nothinge that was made. In it was lyfe, and the lyfe was the lyght of men, and the lyght shyneth in the darcknes but the darcknes comprehended it not"

William Wittingham's Geneva New Testament of 1557 reads as:

In the beginning was the worde, and the worde was with God, and that worde was God. The samewas in the begynnyng with God. Althinges were made by it, and without it was made nothing that was made. In it was lyfe, and the lyfe was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkeness, and the darknes comprehended it not"

NOTE: On the Geneva Bible. org website it states: "Not to be confused with 'The 1599 Geneva Study Bible' on www.Crosswalk.com which is not even a Geneva translation." This uses the rendering "him."

So it is evident that:

The line of Bible translations that were more directly from Tyndale and Wittingham (all directly from the Greek) render John 1:1-4 as showing that the "logos" was neuter and so not a second person, whereas;

The line of Bibles somewhat less directly from Tyndale and more from the Bishop's Bible and with a degree of influence from the Catholic Latin Vulgate with its abundance of errors and slants, via the Rheims NT, do not give this understanding.

So flying in the face of all the usages of the word "logos" as neuter throughout the Scriptures, church authorities have implanted Justin Martyr's pagan Greek concept into John 1:1-4 and so making the massive assumption that John 1:1 is supposed to mean: 'In the beginning was Jesus and Jesus was with God and Jesus was God.' But this really means: 'In the beginning was Jesus and Jesus was with the Father and Jesus was the Father.'

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