

Miles Coverdale and the Rise of King James [one]

1. If they thought that strangling and burning Tyndale was going to end the spread of the English Bible, they were wrong. If anything, it broke open the floodgates. The people were hearing sermons not just from scripture and about scripture but also about freedom and about the right to challenge authority. Others were ready to step into the gap left by Tyndale. Today, we look at Miles Coverdale. [two]
2. King Henry VIII wanted the Bible available in England in English but because of his rift with Tyndale, he didn't want his name on it. Coverdale asked for and got permission to print the Bible, but King Henry demanded that Tyndale's name not be on it. [three] Coverdale and his friend, John Rogers, printed the Bible and added the name "Matthews" to honor the One Who Could Not Be Named.
3. A note here: you had to have a license to print a book. [four] In Britain to this day, a crown on a product indicates that the producer has a royal warrant to make and market the product. While it is not required of every publication and product today, the Official Secrets Act and other rules strictly limit what can be printed in the UK – and that is normal in most countries to this day. We are one of the few countries where we are able to print what we wish...and we don't read. Sigh.
4. The license Coverdale and Rogers got was for one bible for every church in England. [five] They were expressly ordered NOT to print or supply Bibles or portions of scripture for personal use. Between 1539-1541 what became known as the Great Bible entered English churches by authority of the King. Individuals were still not allowed to own it but, to be fair, that law was not strictly enforced. People who went to churches could read the Bible there or listen to it read IF their clergy could and would read it.
5. Henry VIII couldn't live forever. When he died in 1547, [six] Edward VI came to the throne and one of his first acts was lifting the printing ban on Bibles. For the first time, English presses could print and sell scriptures freely. The devil was not going to let this go unchallenged, however, and Edward VI died suddenly merely six years in his reign. He was replaced by the ultra-

conservative Catholic, Mary. [seven] For the next 5 years she would imprison, burn, and harass believers all over England and Wales. More than 300 reformers would be killed by their own government during those 5 years.

6. Coverdale and his friend, John Foxe, had to run. They got to Geneva, [eight] Switzerland and found safety within the city walls. John Calvin ran Geneva and its protestant army protected any who could get there. It was a city of refuge – as long as you didn't cross Calvin. There, Coverdale and others continued to rework their translation and produced the Geneva Bible in 1560. [nine] It was really Tyndale's work and Coverdale, Rogers, Foxe and the others involved made sure everyone knew that. They added thousands and thousands of notes to help people understand what they were reading (local meanings of terms, links with other scriptures, etc.). It was the world's first study Bible, designed for both home and public use.
7. In Geneva and other protestant strongholds, it became the homeschool textbook (McGuffey Readers). It became the wellspring of independent churches, free churches, and new ideas about government and where Christians' loyalties should lie. This created nightmares among princes, knights, and kings. It was the beginning of the end of serfdom and inherited power.
8. This infuriated Queen Mary back in England. After consulting with her lords and the clergy she realized she could not wipe out the Bible in England so she had to create her own. She commissioned the Bishops Bible [ten] and made two rules: it was to be the only version allowed and it was to be owned and used only by church leaders. All explanatory and commentary notes were removed. It was a giant step backward but there was a plus side: the Catholic Church had its first official English Bible. The year was 1582 and the Catholic Church had finally translated and printed the Vulgate Bible. Tyndale had only been dead for 46 years but it was clear he had won.
9. The Bishops Bible never caught on. It wasn't as beautiful in language. It was stilted and artificial. Shakespeare and Spenser used Tyndale's version of English to craft their plays and poems. If you studied English Literature in school, you know how language changed at that time. Now you know why.

Some of the changes changed theology – such as using the more familiar and friendly “thee” and “thou” rather than the formal “you” and “your.” I cannot help but smile when I hear some old time prayer being offered up using lofty tones full of KJV elements, knowing that the prayer giver is unwittingly using the common farmer’s language gifted to him by Tyndale so very long ago. And that that language was given to the common man expressly so that he could be freed from the stilted language of the bishops and nobility complete with its “you” and “yours.”

- 10. Meanwhile...in the political world...**The protestants fought each other, most famously the followers of Luther and Zwingli but also the Calvinists. Calvinism came into Scotland in a major way through John Knox. [eleven] Mary, Queen of Scots was Catholic and that caused great division in the nation. [twelve] (long, complicated story we don’t have time for here but hit the highlights). She would be driven from the throne by her nobles backed by Knox and the Protestants. Her son, King James, would be made king. Shortly after Queen Elizabeth of England died, he would be invited down to take the throne of England as well as that of Scotland. It is important to note that church and state were still entwined and even the reformers believed that it should and must be that way. Why they wanted the church to rule the church, they would be aghast at the idea of it being separate: established churches were assumed to be the will of God. So when it comes to Bibles, the government was still in charge of translation and distribution, etc.
- 11.** The Bible in use when King James came to the throne in 1603 was the Geneva Bible. The Bishops Bible and the Great Bible had failed to find their audience among the common people though they lived on in churches and seminaries and universities. John Knox pressured King James, a fellow Scot, to make the Geneva Bible the official and only Bible of Great Britain. But unbeknownst to Knox, King James did not like the Geneva Bible at all. He intended that it be destroyed and replaced. That is where our story next takes us for there is no question that in the history of the English Bible, no version stands out more powerfully than the King James Bible.
- 12.** Queen Elizabeth had reigned 45 years. [thirteen] She had expanded the British empire worldwide, broken the backs of the Spanish (destroying the

Armada, the pope's invasion force) and Portuguese, and kept the French shut down in their few colonies. As a Protestant, she welcomed back the refugees who fled during the reign of Queen Mary and established rules for protestant churches...even though she had little interest in religion herself (she only was interested in it as a tool to advance government). The Pope was her enemy and had issued letters inviting her subjects to overthrow her to none effect. Because it was believed that the Pope wanted her replaced with the Queen of Scotland, the Catholic Mary, Elizabeth executed Mary in 1587. Six years later, she died and the son of the woman she killed would be invited to take her throne.

- 13.** When Elizabeth died, her nation was divided. The Protestants wanted the Catholics banned. Sections of the nation that were Catholic were huddling in their castles and glens, waiting for civil war (several of which took place). The Protestants themselves were divided. The official church, the one established by Henry VIII, was the Church of England. It had a purifying, reform wing known as the Puritans who demanded overhauls to the national church. Elizabeth had decreed that clergy were to wear vestments when they directed worship or engaged in the sacraments. Puritans thought this was soft popery. The official prayer book was also a matter of contention, Puritans viewing it as intrusive and unauthorized. They disagreed with kneeling to receive communion or making the sign of the cross at baptism.
- 14.** Elizabeth and, later, James knew that they had powerful protestant enemies who controlled Geneva and other European continental enclaves. Thrones were not held forever and were always in doubt so enemies and friends had to be constantly measured and counted. This is Game of Thrones for real. Both Catholics and Protestants assailed James to get him to make changes in their favor. His grip on the kingdom was very tenuous.
- 15.** For the years James ruled in Scotland before moving south, his kingdom was Presbyterian – taking the Puritan, Geneva version of Protestantism as its rule and model. [fourteen] What the people didn't realize was that James hated it. He much preferred church rule by bishops. He went so far as to say "no bishop, no king" for he feared that rule by the people in the churches would lead to egalitarianism and republicanism in the kingdom.

The Scots had been very open with James: he was king in public but, in reality, only Christ was king. This made James view Presbyterianism with great suspicion. Once he came to England, he had no intention of letting Puritans or other Protestants run things. He wanted the Church of England, which was a royal run church, to be the only church. While he supported puritans in public, in private he undermined them and weakened their position in the court and in public institutions.

- 16.** One of the things he would have to fight and overcome was the Geneva Bible for its notes led people to believe in freedom and in the lordship of Jesus as supreme over national kings. James believed in the traditional “divine right of kings” and set out his beliefs in a paper in 1598. An early sonnet called *Basilikon Doron* summarized his beliefs: [fifteen]
- a. “God gives not Kings the style of Gods in vain, For on His throne his Sceptre do they sway; And as their subjects ought them to obey, So Kings should fear and serve their God again.”
 - b. Anglicans welcomed this teaching. Puritans feared it as did the Scots James left behind. James’ opponents went to the Geneva Bible and its notes on Daniel to show that God can and did and should displace kings when they pretend to be in charge of matters of church OR earth. The notes said that Daniel disobeyed his king but that was just because kings have no right to rule in matters of God.
 - c. James taught that kings must rule the nations of the world to promote justice and dispense wisdom. Kings, therefore, must be obeyed unconditionally and in all circumstances. The Geneva Bible’s notes were a problem. They had to go away.
- 17.** While James was on his way from Scotland to England to take the throne, he was met on the road by a large number of Puritans [sixteen] and presented with what they titled a “millenary petition.” It was signed by over a thousand ministers of the Church of England. It said “Now we, to the number of more than a thousand, of your Majesty’s subjects and ministers, all groaning as under a common burden of human rites and ceremonies, do with one joint consent humble ourselves at your Majesty’s feet to be eased and relieved in this behalf. Our humble suit then unto your Majesty is, that

of these offenses following, some may be removed, some amended, some qualified.”

18.They asked that some rites be no longer required and we’ve mentioned them: making the sign of the cross, kneeling at communion, wearing vestments, using a ring in a marriage service, bowing at the name of Jesus, etc. They also asked for relief from inappropriate tithes – a traditional way of funding bishop’s palaces from special taxes on the people. The bishops, once they heard of this, sent their own delegation to James. One of them would be tasked with making James turn against Puritanism. His name was Richard Bancroft and we will pick up his tale next week.