
A table of contents for the *Calvary Baptist Theological Journal* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_cbtj.php

CBTJ 12 (Spring/Fall 1996) 116-134

A Seventeenth Century English Bible Controversy

Clint Banz

Librarian, Calvary Baptist Theological Seminary
Lansdale, Pennsylvania

The twentieth century has witnessed a phenomenal number of new English Bible translations and paraphrases. Since 1900 nearly 200 new English translations have rolled off the presses.[1]

Such tremendous growth has fostered a great deal of confusion and suspicion among many Fundamental Christians. Questions are raised such as, "Why give up the tried and tested King James version?" or "What's wrong with continuing to use the version that Bible-believers have always used?" Groups have sprouted up and formed associations with slogans such as "KJV Only" and "Only KJV." All too often, the very mention of possibly using an alternative translation instigates hostility and separates brethren.

This situation, however, may be remedied in many cases by reflecting upon similar events in history. Questions such as: Is the King James Bible the *original* English Bible? Was it always the English Bible used by those who profess faith in Christ? How was it received when it was the 'contemporary' translation of the day? How

[1]Bruce Metzger, "Recent Translations: A Survey and Evaluation," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 34 (Spring 1992): 5.

and why did it become the predominant translation of the English-speaking world? It is the purpose of this article to address those questions surrounding the provenance of the King James Bible and the process of its attaining predominance. This will be done first by looking at a brief survey of the English translations of the sixteenth century; second, the origin and initial reception of the King James Bible will be considered; and third, the process by which the King James Bible became the prominent translation will be traced. Hopefully this retrospective glance will give added perspective on the contemporary discussion of Bible versions among Fundamental Baptists.

English Translations 1525 to 1604

Growth of English Translations

Although the growth of modern translations is phenomenal, it is not the first time that multiple English translations were made available and read in the churches. Following the publication of Erasmus' Greek New Testament, a number of vernacular translations were produced. The first individual championing an English vernacular from the Greek and Hebrew was William Tyndale. Tyndale was committed to having the Bible in the language of the people. Permission, however, was denied him by Church authorities. Tyndale resolved the dilemma by moving to Holland to work on this endeavor. His New Testament was translated and printed in 1525. From Holland his translation was smuggled into England and the first attempt had been made to supply the English people with a translation from the original languages.

Tyndale continued his translation work until his betrayal and execution in 1536. By this time, however, others arose who shared Tyndale's mission. This resulted in a number of Bible translations which were heavily indebted to Tyndale's work: the Coverdale Bible (1535), Matthew's Bible (1537), Taverner's Bible (1539), and finally

the Great Bible in 1539 which during the reign of King Henry VIII became the Bible "appointed to the use of the churches."[2]

The Geneva Bible

Production of Geneva Bible. Following the accession of Mary Tudor to the throne in 1553, England experienced a Catholic resurgence. Many Protestants fled into exile and settled in Geneva. Convinced of the need for another translation, they set to work on what would be known as the Geneva Bible. The Geneva Bible was printed in 1560 and immediately became the Bible of the people. It contained many features which commended its popularity. Among other things, it was a superior translation to those that preceded it. Also it was the first English Bible to use Roman as opposed to the Gothic (i.e. black letter) type. This allowed for ease of reading. More importantly, its size permitted greater portability being quarto rather than the standard folio.[3] This in turn permitted it to be sold for a modest price and as one writer observed, "within the average householders of England, Scotland, and Ireland."[4] Another feature was that it was the first English Bible that included verse division–each verse thus was treated as a separate paragraph.

Along with all of these traits, it contained a great deal of notes to facilitate the readers' understanding. Many of these notes represented a reformed point of view. Some, especially those that were added in 1576 by Laurence Tomson, emphasized to a greater degree predestinarian theology. A new set of annotations were added in 1602 to the book of Revelation. This became known as the

---

[2]F. F. Bruce, *History of the Bible in the English*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 80.

[3]This quarto size was 6 1/2 x 9 3/4 inches. Bruce Metzger, "The Geneva Bible of 1560," *Theology Today* 17 (October 1960): 343.

[4]Ira Jay Martin, "The Geneva Bible," *Andover Newton Quarterly* 1 (March 1961): 49.

Geneva-Tomson-Jurius version, and contained harsh condemnation of the papacy.[5]

Popularity of the Geneva Bible. The Geneva Bible was the first English translation to be published in Scotland. John Knox and other Presbyterian reformers adopted its usage in their churches. In fact, by 1580 an Act of Parliament in Scotland made it essential for all households above a certain income to own a Geneva Bible.[6] Even as late as 1674, records show its usage in Kintore, in Aberdeenshire, Scotland.[7]

The Church of England, however, responded quite differently. It made no official adoption of it, but on the contrary discouraged the usage of the Geneva Bible. Nevertheless, it did receive permission to be printed in England in 1575. Prior to that, however, the Church sought to counter its success with another translation, a revision of the Great Bible which became known as the Bishops' Bible. This revision of the Great Bible was a definite improvement of the Great Bible, but did nothing to supplant the popularity of the Geneva Bible.

Despite its popularity, the Geneva Bible was never authorized by either Queen Elizabeth or Parliament. This status had been given to the Great Bible and was assumed for the Bishops' Bible. Consequently, the Church of England had more than one authorized version (the Great Bible and the Bishops' Bible). Nevertheless, even though two Bibles had been officially approved by the authorities, the Geneva Bible was the Bible preferred by the people.

---

[5]Maurice S. Betteridge, "The Bitter Notes: The Geneva Bible and Its Annotations," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 14 (Spring 1983): 45.

[6]John Eadie, *The English Bible: An External and Critical History of the Various English Translations of Scripture*, vol. 2 (London Macmillan and Co., 1876), 46.

[7]Bruce, *History of the Bible in English*, 92.

The Quest for an New 'Authorized' Bible

In order to understand the rationale behind the authorities advocating another English translation of the Bible, it is necessary to have some historical background of the political and religious context of Great Britain during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

England's Political and Religious Situation

Queen Elizabeth had died in 1603 with no immediate heirs to the throne. Consequently, James VI of Scotland, being the nearest legal heir, inherited the crown as James I. England's Puritans were hopeful of this transfer of power, for they envied Scotland's reform and had become restless under Elizabeth.

On the other hand, the Church of England still had many who desired the *via media* (i.e. compromise) of Elizabeth's reign. Even more importantly, James did not share the same concerns as most Puritans. To resolve matters, James I called a meeting at Hampton Court with representatives of these two groups. During this council, a Puritan named John Reynolds addressed the problem of multiple versions, declaring their inadequacy. Interestingly, his comments reflected mistakes of contemporary versions with the exception of the Geneva Bible. It has been conjectured that Reynolds was indirectly advocating the authorization of the Geneva Bible.[8] James, however, expressed dissatisfaction with all English translations, *especially* the Geneva Bible. His objections were with reference to the annotations of the Geneva Bible. He declared that some were, "very partial, untrue, seditious, and savouring too much of dangerous and traitorous conceits."[9] He cited two examples (Exod 1:19 and 2 Chron 15:16) both of which reflected contemporary political concerns of James

---

[8]S. L. Greenslade, *Cambridge History of the Bible*, vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 164.

[9]Bruce, *History of the Bible in English*, 97; Dan G. Danner, "English Calvinists & the Geneva Bible," in *Later Calvinism: International Perspectives*, W. Fred Graham, ed. (Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1994), 500.

rather than theological issues. In short, he thought the notes of the Geneva Bible could be interpreted as sanctioning disobedience to monarchs.[10]

James may also have had additional reasons for this contempt of the Geneva Bible. As the son of the Catholic Monarch, Mary Queen of Scots, he was aware that Mary's fall from power was greatly influenced by Presbyterian reformers such as John Knox. It had been these reformers and their annotated Bible, the Geneva Bible, that had helped to generate reform in Scotland, despite their having a Catholic queen. James, moreover, was not in sympathy with much of the reform in Scotland. He despised presbyterianism and applauded the hierarchy of the episcopacy, for it alone he claimed insured the monarchy.[11] His prejudice against the Geneva Bible was disclosed in 1601, when as King James VI of Scotland he had attempted to move the Scottish Parliament to authorize a new translation due to his dissatisfaction with the annotations of the Geneva Bible; no such action was taken, however.

As King James I, however, his desire for a new translation began to materialize as a result of the meeting at Hampton Court. His order was for a revision of the Bishops' Bible. Among the fifteen rules given by the king to govern this revision, the first is quite revealing, "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."[12] Thus the translation which has become known in America as the King James version is a revision of the

---

[10]Christopher Hill, *The English Bible and the Seventeenth-Century Revolution* (London: Penguin Press, 1993), 60.

[11]This view of the church is reflected even in one of his rules to the translators that the use of the old ecclesiastical term "church" be used instead of the word "congregation" which was sometimes the rendering of ἐκκλησία in the *Geneva Bible*.

[12]Alfred W. Pollard, "The Bible of 1611," in *The Holy Bible: A Facsimile in a Reduced Size of the Authorized Version Published in the Year 1611, with an introduction by A. W. Pollard*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1911), 29.

Bishops' Bible. Interestingly enough, however, it had greater literary affinity to the Geneva Bible than to any other translation.[13]

Early Reception of the King James Translation

Although the King James Bible has been the most popular English Bible for over three hundred years, there was a 'King James controversy' shortly after its publication–one of an entirely different nature, however, than the one present among some Fundamental Baptists today. Not only did the Geneva Bible continue as the most popular version after the advent of the King James version, but also the disapproval of this 1611 translation was evident and expressed in a number of ways. As Weigle remarked, criticism and rejection did follow,

> For eighty years after its publication in 1611, the King James version endured bitter attacks. It was denounced as theologically unsound and ecclesiastically biased, as truckling to the king and unduly deferring to his belief in witchcraft, as untrue to the Hebrew text and relying too much on the Septuagint.[14]

The most apparent disclosure of its controversial beginning is found in the very preface of the 1611 edition, "The Translators to the Reader."[15] In their preface, the translators disclosed the process of this revision, their aims, and methods. They made no claim that their translation is the *original* English translation or that it was a unique,

---

[13]Butterworth, Charles C. *The Literary Lineage of the King James Bible: 1340-1611* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1941), 163.

[14]Luther A. Weigle, "English Versions Since 1611," in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, vol. 3, S.L. Greenslade, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 362.

[15]Goodspeed urged publishers to restore this preface to the readers, contending that its absence has led to a number of misconceptions that would have shocked the translators themselves in, Edgar J. Goodspeed, "The Translators to the Reader," *Religion in Life* 1 (Summer 1932): 407-418.

divinely authorized product infinitely superior to former translations.

> Truly (good Christian Reader) we never thought from the beginning, that we should need to make a new translation, or 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, ...[16]

Knowing the controversy surrounding this additional translation, they expressed their endeavor with prudent modesty, being fully aware that criticism was forthcoming. Several excerpts suffice to illustrate this,

> Zeal to promote the common good, whether by devising any thing ourselves, or revising that which hath been labouored by others, deserveth certainly much respect and esteem, but yet findeth but cold entertainment in the world. It is welcomed with suspicion instead of love, and with emulatation instead of thanks. . . .
>
> . . . as oft as we do anything of note or consequence, we subject ourselves to every one's censure . . . .[17]

Moreover, the translators of the King James Bible also understood and were prepared to face the fact that many would reject a new translation for it meant change from that which they had become accustomed:

> Whosoever attempteth any thing for the public (specially if it pertain to religion, and to the opening and clearing of the word of God) the same

---

[16]Alfred W. Pollard, ed., *Records of the English Bible: The Documents Relating to the Translation and Publication of the Bible in English, 1525-1611* (London: Oxford University Press, 1911), 369.

[17]Ibid., 340.

> setteth himself upon a stage to be glouted upon [frowned upon] by every evil eye, yea, he casteth himself headlong upon pikes, to be gored by every sharp tongue. For he that meddleth with men's religion in any part, meddleth with their custom, nay, with their freehold [i.e. personal property]; and though they find no content in that which they have, yet they cannot abide to hear of altering.[18]

Not only were the translators aware of the criticism that would be raised against them, but they sought to avert criticisms indirectly by admitting the imperfection and yet the commendation of earlier translations.

> . . . we do not deny, nay we affirm and avow, that the very meanest translation of the Bible in *English* set forth by men of our profession . . . containeth the word of God, nay, is the word of God . . . . A man may be counted a virtuous man, though he have made many slips in his life, (else there were none virtuous, for, *in many things we offend all*, [italics original]) also a comely man and lovely, though he have some warts upon his hand, yea, not only freckles upon his face, but also scars. No cause therefore why the word translated should be denied to be the word, or forbidden to be current, notwithstanding that some imperfections and blemishes may be noted in the setting forth of it.[19]

One last quotation from the preface of the 1611 King James version will be made for it reflects the appreciation of other contemporary English translations.

---

[18]Ibid., 344-345.
[19]Ibid., 362.

> [The] variety of translations is profitable for the finding out of the sense of the Scriptures . . . .[20]

History reveals that many of the apprehensions of the translators were not in vain. In spite of its merit as a translation, the King James Bible did not immediately displace the Geneva Bible. This can be adduced from the extent in which contemporary writers preferred quoting from the Geneva Bible even into the 1630s.[21] Early English Baptists quoted from the Geneva Bible in their tracts against persecution.[22] In colonial America, the translation carried on the Mayflower by the pilgrims was the Geneva Bible. William Bradford used it when he wrote his history *Of Plymouth Plantation* in the mid-seventeenth century. John Winthrop used the Geneva Bible when he wrote *A Model of Christian Charity* in 1630. During the English Civil War, Cromwell's soldiers were issued a small booklet of Bible verses, all of which were quotations from the *Geneva Bible* (*Soldiers Pocket Bible*, 1643).

The popularity of the Geneva Bible did not extend only to those who were nonconformists, but to many others as well. Bishop Lancelot Andrews (1555-1626), one of the translators of the King James Bible, continued to use the Geneva Bible in his sermons.[23] Biblical scholar John Eadie gives an account of others who continued to use the Geneva Bible:

> Walter Balcanqhall, Dean of Rochester, in a sermon preached before the king, and published by his majesty's command, in

---

[20]Ibid., 373.

[21]Norton, David, *A History of the Bible as Literature*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 120.

[22]Leonard Busher, *Religion's Peace*, or *A Plea for Liberty of Conscience* (1614) and John Murton, *Persecution for Religion Judg'd and Condemned* (1615 and 1620) found in H. Leon McBeth, *ed., A Source Book for Baptist Heritage* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1990).

[23]Randall T. Davidson, "The Authorization of the English Bible," *Macmillan's Magazine* (October 1881): 441-442; quoted in Danner, "English Calvinists & the Geneva Bible," 502.

> 1632 uses the Geneva Bible. The 'ever memorable' John Hales, of Eton, often quotes the same version. Dr. Skinner . . . does the same in two sermons published by royal command in 1634. Dr. Gervase Babington . . . one of the members of the Hampton Court conference, uses the Genevan version in his sermons preached at court and in his theological works. . . . The same practice is usually followed by Bishop Overall, one of King James' translators, in his 'Convocation Book,' which when first printed in 1689 carried the license of Sancroft, Archbishop of Canterbury. Dillingham, another of King James' translators, continued to quote the Genevan after 1611.[24]

Others made use of both the Geneva and the King James Bibles. Roger Williams, for instance, used both in his tract condemning religious persecution, *Bloudy Tenant of Persecution* in 1644. John Eliot, America's missionary to the Indians used both the Geneva and the King James Bible for his Indian Bible in 1655. John Bunyan (1628-1688) used the Geneva Bible with as equal frequency as the King James.[25] As mentioned earlier, in Scotland the most popular English Bible well into the seventeenth century remained the Geneva Bible.[26] In short, the King James Bible did not immediately receive the universal accolades that many have assumed. With this being the case, the next question to be addressed is how and when did the King James Bible displace the Geneva Bible and become the predominant Bible used among English-speaking people?

Ascendence of the King James Bible

Although evidence suggests that the Geneva Bible continued well into the seventeenth century as the preferred English Bible

---

[24]Eadie, *The English Bible*, 38.

[25]Christopher Hill, *A Tinker and a Poor Man: John Bunyan and His Church, 1628-1688* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1989), 169.

[26]Graham Tulloch, *A History of the Scots Bible* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1989), 18.

among Bible readers, by the latter half of seventeenth century, the King James Bible had displaced it. Precisely when and how this happened is not entirely clear. What can be said with some measure of certainty, however, is that the religious and political controversies of the day contributed to this transition. To show this correlation, a survey of the political events of Great Britain from Charles I to the restoration of the Stuart king, Charles II will be made. Then an attempt will be made to relate how these events may have influenced this transition from the Geneva Bible to the King James Bible.

Charles I, prior to the Civil War

Following the death of James I in 1625, his son Charles I inherited the throne. Charles I sought to continue the claims of his father's use of the new political theory, the Divine Right of Kings. This theory had been used effectively in France to centralize the power of the king against competing nobles. Charles, being impressed with France's success, embraced it and became more aggressive in implementing taxes and establishing laws independent of Parliament. Parliament, however, argued that the king was acting contrary to the tradition of English common law.

This conflict between Parliament and the king was spurred on by religious issues as well. In 1633, for instance, William Laud was appointed by the king to be the Archbishop of Canterbury. Laud accepted the conventional wisdom of his day in assuming that a strong unified England required a Church with uniform worship. He therefore immediately set out to implement those laws and regulations which both suppressed dissidents and advocated the doctrine of Divine Rights of Kings. Among other things, he sought to enforce a new liturgy in Scotland, he initiated oaths to uphold the episcopal hierarchy, and he dealt severely with those who criticized his reforms.

During this time, Laud did not enforce the King James Bible as the uniform Bible, but he did take steps to suppress the purchasing of the Geneva Bible. The Geneva Bible had to be imported from Holland, for after 1616 the King's printer and after 1619, Cambridge

University no longer printed the Geneva Bible in England.[27] This was likely due to the financial investment the King's printer had made for printing the King James Bible.[28] Despite the royal printer's refusal to print Geneva Bibles and Laud's efforts to suppress their import, the demand for Geneva Bibles continued.

The most likely reason for the suppression of the Geneva Bible was its annotations. Laud even alluded to this when he wrote, "that now of late these notes were more commonly used to ill purposes than formerly, and that was the cause why the High Commission was more careful and strict against them than before."[29] In fact, Norton alleges that the determining factor of this controversy between the Geneva Bible and the King James was not over the nature of the *translation*, but rather the nature of the *annotations*.[30] Puritan controversialist William Prynne appears to support this when he wrote that the Church authorities sought to suppress the Geneva Bible lest the notes, "should overmuch instruct the people in the knowledge of the Scriptures."[31] Thomas Fuller, another contemporary, asserted in 1655 that dependence upon the annotations in the Geneva Bible was the single most important factor that led to their rejection of what they referred to as the 'new translation' (i.e. King James Bible).

> Some of the brethren were not well pleased with this translation [King James Bible], suspecting it would abate the repute of that of Geneva, with their annotations made by English exiles . . . . Yea, some complained that they could not see into the sense of the scripture for lack of the spectacles of those Genevan annotations; for, although a good translation is an excellent

---

[27]David Norton, *A History of the Bible as Literature*, 1:212, n. 2.

[28]Ibid., 212.

[29]William Laud, *Works*, vol. 4, 262; quoted in Norton, *A History of the Bible as Literature*, 213.

[30]Ibid., 215.

[31]Davidson, "The Authorisation of the English Bible," 181; quoted in Norton, 213.

> comment on the Bible . . . ; yet some short exposition on the text was much desired of the people.[32]

Michael Jensen has recently drawn some interesting conclusions concerning the influence of the Geneva Bible annotations.[33] He has claimed that they exercised a great deal of influence upon English Puritanism in its formative years. Moreover, he proposes that the notes not only interpreted the scriptures, but more importantly fashioned a new method and attitude to approaching Bible. The preface of the Geneva Bible speaks of the "simple meaning" of Scripture and of the "simple reader." Jensen defines the connotation of "simple reader" as "unadorned, innocent, naivete." He contends that, "The achievement of the Geneva Bible lay in so re-orienting its readers in the way they read the Bible that they became the 'simple readers,' the type of reader (and reading) for whom it was produced."[34] He also draws an interesting association between the Puritan, "predilection for the words 'simple' and 'simplicity,' whether in reference to character, dress, or prose style."[35] In other words, the annotations gave the 'common person' a sense of confidence in their ability to grasp the full meaning of Scripture; a confidence that they had not possessed up to that time.

Such a change among the 'common' person thus explains the negative attitude of many 'Higher Church' officials to the Geneva Bible and the potential influence it had upon the English common folk. These annotations helped to embolden confidence and to stiffen opposition toward those that were in religious authority. The next phase of England's history demonstrated that a new mentality toward authority had come about, helping to conceive the English Civil War. Duke Newcastle, a contemporary aristocrat during the events of the

---

[32]Thomas Fuller, *Church History of Britain* (London: Printed for John Williams, 1655; reprint, new ed., vol. 5, London: Oxford University Press, 1845), 409-410.

[33]Michael Jensen, "'Simply' Reading the Geneva Bible: The Geneva Bible & Its Readers," *Literature and Theology* 9 (March 1995): 30-45.

[34]Ibid., 32.

[35]Ibid., 33.

1640s, reflected this opinion as well when he claimed, "The Bible in English under every weaver and chamberlain's arm hath done us much hurt. . . ."[36]

English Civil War

In 1640, Charles I summoned Parliament to raise money to put down the Scottish revolt that had begun in reaction to Laud's church reforms. Thus began a major power struggle between the king and Parliament. By November 1641, after the king had once again summoned Parliament to raise funds to put down a revolt in Ireland, the two powers reached an impasse and civil war commenced in 1642. From 1642-1646, the royalist forces were led by the King, and the forces of Parliament were led by Oliver Cromwell. Cromwell's army consisted mostly of 'Independents'. In 1643, each man in his army was issued a booklet of verses taken from the Geneva Bible. Finally Cromwell defeated the king in a decisive battle in 1646.

Following Cromwell's victory, a series of reforms were introduced into Parliament. Puritan forces, however, could not come to terms on reform, for Cromwell and his independents were not in agreement to the Presbyterian reforms. Once again, civil war ensued (1648-1651), but this time lines were drawn between Cromwell and the Presbyterians. Cromwell once again was the decisive victor and Charles I was executed. The repercussions of this action shocked the western world. Cromwell followed his victory with a series of political experiments (1651-1658), but these were perceived as little more than the rule of a benevolent dictator. Shortly after his death in 1658, the Stuart line was restored along with the original Parliament.

Now the question is how these events relate to the context of the King James gaining preeminence. As has already been mentioned, the Geneva Bible had not been published in England since 1619. It

---

[36]L. Stone, "Communication on *The Alienated Intellectuals in Early Stuart England*," *Past and Present* 24 (1963): 101; quoted in Betteridge, "The Bitter Notes," 61.

was printed and imported, however, from Holland until 1644. The advent of Civil War, however, had no doubt caused serious consequences in relation to imports and exports between England and Holland, especially since Prince William of Orange was the son-in-law of Charles I. Without the means of purchasing the Geneva Bible, greater dependence would naturally be upon the King James Bible.

The question remains, however, why the Puritans did not renew the publication of the Geneva Bible after the Civil War. Norton asserts that the answer to the question was a commercial one.

> The office of King's Printer had lapsed with the King, but the monopoly of the KJB text remained. Cromwell conferred it on Henry Hills and John Field in 1656, and at that time Field also became printer to Cambridge University. . . . [Field] was a 'monopolist on a grand scale' . . . and it was not in his interest that the Geneva Bible should be revived.[37]

Another reason why the Geneva Bible would eventually become less popular could have been due to the association some had made between its annotations and the political and religious instability of the revolution. For instance, Peter Heylyn, a contemporary of Oliver Cromwell who supported Laud and the royalist party, attributed a great deal of influence to the Geneva Bible when he claimed that after the restoration of the king in 1660 it, "was part of a base and subversive plot to bring in unlawful innovation in worship, heretical points of doctrine, and the destruction of the episcopal government."[38] Although Heylyn represented the more controversial voice in the Church of England, his was a voice nonetheless.

Meanwhile, the King James Bible was not without some measure of re-evaluation. Weigle cites that as early as 1645, "John

---

[37]Norton, *A History of the Bible as Literature*, 217.

[38]Peter Heylyn, *Aerius Redivivus*, or *History of the Presbyterians*, Book 6 (London, 1670), 214; quoted in Betteridge, "The Bitter Notes," 49.

Lightfoot, preaching before the House of Commons, urged it 'to think of a review and survey of the translation of the Bible', that 'the three nations might come to understand the proper and genuine study of the Scriptures, by an exact, vigorous, and lively translation.'"[39] This desire for revision persisted during the Commonwealth into the 1650s.[40] In fact, a bill was before the Rump Parliament advocating a new translation just prior to its dissolution in 1653.[41] Finally an official revision was decided upon in 1657, and Bulstrode Whitelocke was placed in charge of the committee. Opinion on the committee, however, seemed to shift toward merely a revision of the King James Bible rather than an entirely new translation. Norton conjectures that this compromise was likely due to the loss of will as a result of the inevitable collapse of the Commonwealth following Cromwell's death.[42] One scholar who vigorously supported a new revision was the Baptist theologian, Henry Jessey (1601-1613). Norton comments that,

> Jessey conceived it 'our duty to endeavour to have the whole Bible rendered as exactly agreeing with the original as we can attain'. This duty should be carried out under the supervision of 'godly and able men' appointed by public authority to ensure the soundness of the work. . . . This work 'was almost completed, and stayed for nothing but the appointment of commissioners to examine it and warrant its publication' . . . . No specimen of the work survives, or any account of why so much labour came to nothing.[43]

Weigle concludes, however, that with the "restoration of the Stuart dynasty" the discussion of proposed revisions was terminated.[44]

---

[39]Weigle, "English Versions Since 1611," 363.
[40]Norton, *A History of the Bible as Literature*, 1:218.
[41]Hill, *The English Bible and the Seventeenth-Century Revolution*, 65.
[42]Ibid., 219.
[43]Norton, *A History of the Bible as Literature*, 1:219-220.
[44]Weigle, "English Versions Since 1611," 364.

Restoration of the Stuart Dynasty

With the return of the King to England (i.e. Charles II) in 1660 and the restoration of the original Parliament of 1640, the commonwealth ended and the power of the Independents was diffused. The need for authority was met by the new Stuart King, Charles II. Charles II re-established the episcopacy of the Church of England and strict regulations were instituted, making it illegal for anyone to preach who was not authorized from Church authorities. One writer describes the situation as follows,

> The Civil Wars, and the radicalism which flowered in the 1640s and 1650s, did not encourage many people to reject or distrust the Bible, but those experiences did create a greater awareness of the need for the established Church, and other figures of authority, to take the lead on matters of interpretation.[45]

The reaction to religious innovation had furnished the nation and Church leaders with a desire to avoid unnecessary change. From this time on, the King James Bible became the predominant translation of Great Britain. It had taken fifty years to insure this position.

The King James Bible has enjoyed an unprecedented reign as the preferred Bible among English-speaking people of the world. Nevertheless, this position was not attained without a struggle–a struggle that included both economic and political factors With the advent of so many competing translations today, a new struggle has begun. What the long term results of this struggle will be has yet to be seen. Let it merely be said that such a controversy is not new, for it is not the first time that competing translations have led to controversy. Furthermore, it is likely that such controversies will continue as long as there remain people who find new translations

---

[45]Scott Mandelbrote, "The Revolutionary Bible," *Nederlands Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis* 72:2 (1993): 215.

personally beneficial in their own understanding of God's Word, while others oppose the demand to change.