



The Geneva Bible History

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Since the early 1600's Protestants believe(d) they are the heirs of the Reformation, the Puritans, the Calvinists, and the Pilgrims who landed at Plymouth Rock.

None of those religious groups used a King James Bible nor would they have used it if it had been given to them free or forced at gunpoint. Pilgrims "escaped King James" by fleeing to America.

The Bible in use by those groups until it went out of print in 1644, was the Geneva Bible. The first Geneva Bible, both Old and New Testaments, was first published in English in 1560 in what is now Geneva, Switzerland,* William Shakespeare, John Bunyan, John Milton, the Pilgrims who landed on Plymouth Rock in 1620, and other luminaries of that era used the Geneva Bible exclusively.

King James of England and James I later tried to disclaim any knowledge of the Geneva Bible, though he quotes the Geneva Bible in his own writing, As a Professor Eadie reported it:

". . . his virtual disclaimer of all knowledge up to a late period of the Genevan notes and version was simply a bold, unblushing falsehood, a clumsy attempt to sever himself and his earlier Scottish beliefs and usages that he might win favor with his English churchmen." ¹

The irony goes further. King James did not encourage a translation of the Bible in order to enlighten the common people. His sole intent was to deny them the marginal notes of the Geneva Bible. The marginal notes of the Geneva Bible scholars made it popular to common people.

The King James Bible was, and is for all practical purposes, a government publication. There were several reasons for the King James Bible being a government publication.

First, King James I of England was a devout believer in the "divine right of kings," a philosophy ingrained in him by his mother, Mary Stuart. ² Mary Stuart may have been having an affair with her Italian secretary, David Rizzio, at the time she conceived James. There is a better than even chance that James was the product of adultery* (G.P.V. Alerigg Jacobean Pageant p.6.).

Apparently, enough evidence of such conduct on the part of Mary Stuart and David Rizzio existed to cause various Scot nobles, including Mary's own husband, King Henry, to drag David Rizzio from Mary's supper table and execute him. The Scot nobles hacked and slashed at the screaming Rizzio with knives and swords, and then threw him off a balcony to the courtyard below where he

landed with a sickening smack. In the phrase of that day, he had been scotched. 3

Mary did have affairs with other men, such as the Earl of Bothwell. She later tried to execute her husband in a gunpowder explosion that shook all of Edinburg. King Henry survived the explosion, only to be suffocated later that same night. The murderers were never discovered. Mary was eventually beheaded at the order of her cousin, Elizabeth I of England. 4

To such individuals as James and his mother, Mary, the "divine right of kings" meant that since a king's power came from God, the king then had to answer to no one but God. This lack of responsibility extended to evil kings. The reasoning was that if a king was evil, that was a punishment sent from God. The citizens should then suffer in silence. If a king was good, that was a blessing sent from God. Amazingly American Pastors give that same false authority to our POTUS instead of holding them accountable to God's word as citizens, the highest office.

This is why the Geneva Bible annoyed King James I. The Geneva Bible had marginal notes that simply didn't conform to that point of view. Those marginal notes had been, to a great extent placed in the Geneva Bible by the leaders of the Reformation including John Knox and John Calvin. Knox and Calvin could not and cannot be dismissed lightly or their opinions passed off to the public as the mere dithering of dissidents.

First, notes such as, "When tyrants cannot prevail by craft, they burst forth into open rage," (Note i, Exodus 1:22) really bothered King James

Second, religion in King James' time was not what it is today. In that era, religion was controlled by the government. If someone lived in Spain at the time, he had three religious "choices":

1. Roman Catholicism
2. Silence.
3. The Inquisition.

The third "option" was reserved for "heretics," or people who didn't think the way the government wanted them to. To governments of that era heresy and treason were synonymous.

England wasn't much different. From the time of Henry VIII on, an Englishman had three choices:

1. The Anglican Church.
2. Silence.
3. The rack, burning at the stake, being drawn and quartered, or some other form of persuasion.

The hapless individuals who fell into the hands of the government for holding religious opinions of their own were simply punished according to the royal whim or mood of the day.

Henry VIII, once he had appointed himself head of all the English churches, kept the Roman Catholic system of bishops, deacons and the like for a very good reason. That system allowed him a

"chain of command" needed for any bureaucracy to function, passed down to future generations.

This system became a little confusing for English citizens when Bloody Mary ascended to the throne. Mary was the Daughter of Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon. She became queen in 1553 after her brother, Edward VI, died.

Mary demanded everyone to switch back to Roman Catholicism alone. Those wanted to remain Protestant she burned at the stake - about 300 people in all. She intended to burn a lot more, but the rest of her intended victims escaped by leaving the country.

A tremendous number of those intended victims settled in Geneva. Religious refugees from other countries in Western Europe, including the French theologian Jean Chauvin, better known as John Calvin, also settled there.

Mary died and was succeeded to the throne by her Protestant cousin, Elizabeth. Her Anglican Church bureaucracy returned, less a few burned at the stake by Bloody Mary. In Scotland, John Knox led the Reformation.

The Reformation prospered in Geneva. Many of those who had fled Bloody Mary started a congregation there. Their greatest effort and contribution to the Reformation was the first Geneva Bible.

More marginal notes were added to later editions.

By the end of the 16th Century, the Geneva Bible had about all the marginal notes there was space available to put them in.

Geneva was an anomaly in 16th Century Europe. In the days of absolute despotism and constant warfare, Geneva achieved her independence primarily by constant negotiation, playing off one stronger power against another. While other governments allowed lawyers to drag out cases and took months and years to get rid of corrupt officials, the City of Geneva dispatched most civil and criminal cases within a month and threw corrupt officials into jail the day after they were found out.

The academy that John Calvin founded there in 1559 later became the University of Geneva.

Religious wars wracked Europe. The Spanish fought to restore Roman Catholicism to Western Europe. The Dutch fought for the Reformation and religious freedom. England, a small country with only 4 million people, survived because of the natural advantage of the English Channel.

The Dutch declared religious freedom for everybody. Amsterdam became an open city. In those days an "open city" was where inhabitants were allowed to believe in or print what they preferred.

At the time Geneva, was a city-state. Geneva did not become part of Switzerland until 1815.

English Puritans arrived by the boatload. The 1599 Edition of the Geneva Bible was printed in Amsterdam and London in large quantities until well into the 17th Century.

King James, before he became James I of England, made it plain that he had no use for the "Dutch" rebel who had rebelled against their Spanish King.

Another of the ironies left us from the 16th Century is that freedom of religion and freedom of the press did not originate in England, as many people commonly assume today.

Those freedoms were first given to Protestants by the Dutch, as the records of that era plainly show. England today does not have freedom of the press the way we understand it (There are things in England such as the Official Secrets Act that often land journalists in jail.)

England was relatively peaceful in the time of Elizabeth I. There was the problem of the Spanish Armada, but that was brief. Elizabeth later became known as "Good Queen Bess," not because she was so good, but because her successor was so bad.

Elizabeth died in 1603 and her cousin, James Stuart, son of Mary Stuart, who up until that time had been King James VI of Scotland, ascended the throne and became known as King James I of England.

James ascended the throne of England with the "divine right of kings" firmly embedded in his mind. Unfortunately, that wasn't his only mental problem.

King James I, among his many other faults, preferred young boys to adult women. He was a flaming homosexual. His activities in that regard have been recorded in numerous books and public records; so much so, that there is no room for debate on the subject.

The King was queer. The very people who use the King James Bible today would be the first ones to throw such a deviant out of their congregations.

The depravity of King James I didn't end with sodomy. King James enjoyed killing animals. He called it "hunting." Once he killed an animal, he would literally roll about in its blood.

James was a sadist as well as a sodomite: he enjoyed torturing people. While King of Scotland in 1591, he personally supervised the torture of poor wretches caught up in the witchcraft trials of Scotland. James would even suggest new tortures to the examiners.

One "witch" Barbara Napier, was acquitted. That event so angered James that he wrote personally to the court on May 10, 1591, ordering a sentence of death, and had the jury called into custody. To make sure they understood their particular offense, the King himself presided at a new hearing (which could hardly be called a trial) and was gracious enough to release them without punishment when they reversed their verdict.

History documents King James was also a great coward. On January 7, 1591, King James was in Edinburgh and emerged from the toll booth. A retinue followed that included the Duke of Lennox and Lord Hume. They fell into an argument with the laird of Logie and pulled their swords. James looked behind, saw the steel flashing, and fled into the nearest refuge which turned out to be a skinner's booth. There, to his shame, he "fouled his breeches in fear." 5

In short, King James I was the kind of despicable creature honorable men loathed, Christians would not associate with, and the Bible itself orders to be put to death. 6

Knowing what King James was we can easily discern his motives.

King James ascended the English throne in 1603. He wasted no time in ordering a new edition of the Bible in order to deny the common people the marginal notes they so valued in the Geneva Bible. That King James I wasn't going to have any marginal notes to annoy him and lead English citizens away from what he wanted them to think is a matter of public record.

In an account corrected with his own hand dated February 10, 1604, he publicly proclaimed:

“That a translation be made of the whole Bible, as consonant as can be to the original Hebrew and Greek; and this to be set out and printed without any marginal notes, and only to be used in all churches of England in time of divine service.”

King James, much like politicians, acted to immediately set up private rules that made it impossible for anyone involved in the project to make an honest translation, some of which follow:

1. The ordinary Bible read in the church, commonly called the Bishop's Bible to be followed and as little altered as the truth of the original will permit.

Or, since the common people preferred the Geneva Bible to the existing government publication, let's see if we can slip a superseding government publication onto their bookshelves, altered as little as possible.

2. The old Ecclesiastical words to be kept, viz. the word "church" not to be translated "congregation," etc.

That is, if a word should be translated a certain way, let's deliberately mistranslate it to make the people think God still belongs to the Anglican Church - exclusively.

3. No marginal notes at all to be affixed, but only for the explanation of the Hebrew or Greek words, which cannot without manipulation, so briefly and fitly be expressed in the text.

King James didn't want those marginal scholar notes cropping up, not even once. That was fine for the common herd, but not for James' own bishops. Many of their writings and sermons alluded to the Geneva Bible and its marginal notes decades after the King James Bible was published.

The bishops had good reason to be confused. They needed those marginal notes. King James had just obliterated a procedure that kings and governments had used for thousands of years. Because words and phrases quite often had several meanings all important state or royal decrees, treaties, and agreements contained marginal explanations or commentaries in order to remove all doubt from the mind of the reader. In the 16th century those marginal notes were called "glosses." Today the members of the legal profession use almost the same system in the form of footnotes and case cites.

The King James Bible was finally printed in 1611. It was not technically a translation. What the flunkies employed by King James did was revise to suit the King and compare other translations of which they simply plagiarized about 20% of the Geneva Bible. Translations from one language to another almost never come out word-for word identically, so manipulation for agendas is historic.

In their New Testament translation, the King James "translators" didn't even revise and compare.

What they did was simply copy – almost word for word - William Tyndales' 1525 New Testament.

At the time of his translation Tyndales' New Testament had been labeled as "seditious material" by Henry VIII and copies discovered on ships reaching English ports were confiscated and destroyed. William Warham, archbishop of Canterbury, even went so far as to buy all the copies he could get in Europe in order to destroy them.

Tyndale was hounded from London to Cologne to Worms. He settled in Marburg under the protection of Philip, landgrave of Hesse. Nobody messed with Big Phil.

Philip didn't care what anyone thought. If he felt like telling the emperor to "stuff it," he did. If neighboring royalty wanted to rumble, Philip showed up with troops. If Philip decided one wife wasn't enough for him, he just took another one. In March of 1540, after Martin Luther and other prominent Protestant theologians had expressly approved polygamy according to the Scriptures, Philip became Europe's best-known bigamist.

Unfortunately, even Philip couldn't cope with treachery. Tyndale was betrayed by his personal Judas, Henry Phillips. He was tried for heresy, condemned, strangled at the stake, and his body afterwards burnt.

It is interesting to note that the Geneva Reformers- men such as John Calvin - expressed opinions in the marginal notes that would be simply unacceptable to the "scholars" of today. For example, the passage in Genesis 12:2-3, that reads:

"And I will make of thee a great nation, and will bless thee, and make thy name great, and thou shalt be a blessing. I will also bless them that bless thee, and curse them that curse thee, and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

Our ministers today tell us this refers to Jews. That isn't the way the Geneva translators understood it:

The world shall recover by thy seed, which is Christ, the blessings that were lost in Adam. 7

Twentieth century scholarly works, such as the Scofield Reference Bible, published by Oxford University Press, hold that the 38th Chapter of Ezekiel refers to an invasion of Jerusalem by Russian armies leading the Northern European powers.

John Calvin and scholar friends notes in the Geneva Bible, understood it a little differently:

Signifying all the people of the world should assemble themselves against the Church and Christ their head. 8

The Reverend Scofield and his fellow "scholars" hold up Satan as some sort of boogey-man.

The Geneva translators, as in Psalm 109:6, simply translated the word, "adversary." In Mark 8:33, Christ said to Peter, "Get thee behind me, Satan." The Geneva translators understood exactly what the word meant and apparently didn't figure anyone else would be dumb enough to equate Peter with the Evil One. On that, the Geneva and King James translate the word the same.

King James never stopped censoring the Bible. He carried his "divine right of kings" to the point that he dissolved Parliament. That institution was to King James simply a convenience he needed to raise money for his endless pursuit of pleasure and depravity. When Parliament balked at his requests for money James dissolved it.

Magna Carta and individual liberties of Englishmen were frivolities in the mind of King James.

As an illustration of the loathing and contempt Christians of that era held for the government of King James I, after the first brutal winter in New England when half their number died, not one Pilgrim survivor wanted to return to the England of King James I aboard the Mayflower.

King James' oldest son died and his second son, Charles, ascended to the throne after the death of James I, Charles also believed in the "divine right of kings." By 1642, English patience was at an end and civil war erupted. By 1649, the English Parliament had had enough of Charles, who apparently believed that one of his "divine rights" was to sign agreements and then break them any time he felt the urge. Charles was beheaded. Oliver Cromwell took over the government.

Oliver Cromwell, of Celtic and Welsh ancestry, made the same basic mistake that James I and his son, Charles, made. Cromwell believed, as James had professed to, that governments were for the common wealth (good) and not the common will. He tried to legislate moral codes that very few could handle. The prisons overflowed with his critics. During his invasion of Ireland, he slaughtered enough women and children to fill entire graveyard. Cromwell died in 1658. The English had had quite enough of his form of government and acquired another king, Charles II.

The last run of Geneva Bibles was printed in 1644. That was the year John Milton was invited to instruct the English Parliament on the actual teachings of the Bible regarding divorce (it was allowed). What Milton understood that none of our modern "experts" seem to was that "He who

divorces his wife and marries another," was not a prohibition of divorce, it was a prohibition against throw-away people. As John Milton in his *On Christian Doctrine* and Martin Luther in his essay on Deuteronomy 21:15 pointed out, having more than one wife was Scriptural. You just weren't supposed to throw them away when you got bored with them.

Four years after the last Geneva Bible was printed, the Thirty Years War (the last of the great religious wars of Europe) ground to a halt. Millions had died. Germany was so depopulated it took her two centuries to recover. The Reformation had survived. It didn't survive for long.

After several generations of English speakers grew up without the stabilizing influence of the Geneva marginal notes, the "interpret it any way you want" school of thought came into fashion. The "charismatic" movement was in full swing by 1730.

A few men here and there tried to show people what the religion of their ancestors actually was. A man named Ferrar Fenton published his own translation of the Bible in 1906, complete with a history lesson at the beginning of each set of books in the Bible. Another man named George Lamsa wrote "*Idioms of the Bible Explained*," and tried to show the errors of the modern scholars. They were drowned by the works of others.

Of course, there were those that went the other way. A backwoods preacher, Noah Fredericks, wrote a book titled, *Pilgrim Ships*, in which he claimed the people of the Old Testament came from outer space, Moses's rod was an electronic control used to open a fortress (mistranslated, "rock"), Elijah introduced a path for current to flow from the ionosphere to the ground in order to fry two platoons of Ahab's infantry, and other theological positions that will probably never be taken seriously by anybody (unfortunately).

During the 16th Century and the one preceding it, the Spanish Empire, a colossus larger than the Roman Empire, had been unable to stamp out the Reformation with the world's finest and most well equipped armies. The Spaniards needn't have bothered. What the armies of Catholic Spain were unable to do, one sadistic sodomite, King James I, did with censoring scissors.

The Reformation, and the blood of millions who fought for it, apparently went for nothing. Protestant churches of today hardly resemble the churches of the Reformation.

Today's preachers study the Scofield Reference Edition of the King James, a volume that contains marginal notes that would seem no more accurate to John Calvin and John Knox than Mother Goose. The blind are once more leading the blind.

The reprinted edition of the 1599 Geneva Bible is probably the last sputtering flame of the Reformation. The works of John Milton, John Calvin, John Knox, George Buchanan, William Tyndale, and the rest can still be found on the shelves in the public libraries.

Such works are checked out by apathetic, uninterested college students on an average of about one volume every ten years, no one in today's apathetic churches reads them, or even know they exist.

Footnotes:

1 Luther A, Weigle, The English New Testament, P.24. [\[back\]](#)

2 Otto J. Scott, James I, Passim [\[back\]](#)

3 Ibid [\[back\]](#)

4 Ibid, p. 212 [\[back\]](#)

5 Ibid, p. 211 [\[back\]](#)

6 Leviticus, 20:13 [\[back\]](#)

7 Genesis 12:2 note c 1599 Geneva Bible [\[back\]](#)

8 Ezekiel 38:7. note e 1599 Geneva Bible [\[back\]](#)

This essay by Michael H. Brown – 1988, was revised and updated by Louie E. Johnston Jr. 2014

For God Jehovah and Country,



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