

# The 1537 Matthew Bible: More Anglican than Not

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*“Like any good Anglican, the Matthew Bible found itself caught between the Roman Catholics and the Puritans.”*

When the sixteenth century dawned in England, there were laws prohibiting the translation of the Bible into English. It was illegal even to own or to read English Scriptures.<sup>1</sup> These laws had been passed by Roman Catholic authorities in response to the Bible translations of John Wycliffe in the late fourteenth century, and were zealously enforced. The poor souls who dared to defy them were imprisoned, tortured, and burned at the stake.



**A Lollard Prison**

In the face of this danger and persecution, God moved three friends to give us a little-known English Bible, the Matthew Bible (‘MB’), first published in 1537. William Tyndale translated the New Testament and the first half of the Old, while Myles Coverdale contributed the other Scriptures and the Apocryphal books. The third man, John Rogers, compiled their work, added commentaries and other features that we will see, and oversaw production.

The Matthew Bible is important because, among other things, it is the “real primary version of our English Bible.”<sup>2</sup> It formed the base of the Great Bible, which was a minor revision that Coverdale himself performed. From there, it went also into the Geneva, Bishops’, and King James Versions, where it underwent further revisions. But a computer study has revealed just how much of Tyndale remains in the KJV:



**William Tyndale**

New Testament scholars Jon Nielson and Royal Skousen observed that previous estimates of Tyndale’s contribution to the KJV “have run from a high of up to 90% (Westcott) to a low of 18% (Butterworth)”. By a statistically accurate and appropriate method of sampling, based on eighteen portions of the Bible, they concluded that for the New Testament Tyndale’s contribution is about 83% of the text.<sup>3</sup>

Few people are aware the KJV owes so much of its truth and language to the Matthew Bible and the translations of William Tyndale, and, also, Myles Coverdale. Fewer yet realize that the MB was essentially an early Anglican Bible, made in the same spirit as the Book of Common Prayer and the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England.

### *William Tyndale (c. 1494-1536)*

England was unsafe for an unauthorized Bible translator, so Tyndale worked in exile from hiding places on the European continent. In 1524, he began the great work of translating the New Testament from Greek into English. His circumstances were difficult. As he put it, he worked in “very necessity and cumbrance (God is record) above strength.”<sup>4</sup> He believed God had called him to this task, and the longevity of his translations confirms his calling. He was a learned man, a lover of God’s word, and fluent in eight languages. He worked largely alone, using the Greek and Latin texts compiled by the Dutch scholar and textual critic Desiderius Erasmus. He also had a minimal number of other resources, including dictionaries, grammars, and Martin Luther’s 1522 New Testament.

Tyndale published his New Testament in 1526. The little books, so small they could fit in your hand, were smuggled into England in bales of cotton, where people hungry for truth purchased them at great personal risk. King Henry VIII immediately outlawed the New Testament, as indeed he did all Tyndale’s books and translations, but that did not prevent the people from buying it. Neither did it deter pirate printers: within a few years there were thousands of pirated editions circulating in the country.

The New Testament once complete, Tyndale set about working with the Hebrew Scriptures, and published his translation of the Pentateuch in 1530. He gave us many enduring coinages, such as ‘mercy seat’ and ‘scapegoat.’ The ringing passages of the books of Moses that we know from the KJV are in great part Tyndale’s gift to us:

**Genesis 1:1 in Tyndale’s Pentateuch (Matthew Bible):** In the beginning God created heaven and earth. The earth was void and empty, and darkness was upon the deep, and the Spirit of God moved upon the water.

The Pentateuch was followed by Jonah in 1531, the only prophetic book Tyndale was able to complete, and one of his favorites.

By the year 1534 Tyndale was living in Antwerp, where Rogers and Coverdale were too. Here he revised and fine-tuned his New Testament. He wrote prologues to some of the New Testament books, including a lengthy one on Romans that he translated largely from Martin Luther. He also added brief commentaries and notes in the margins, which he called “declarations” and “lights.” A final, minor revision of his New Testament followed in 1535, and this is the version that John Rogers took into the Matthew Bible.

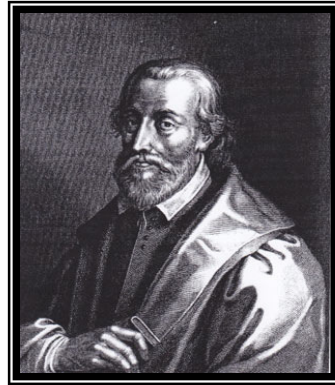
Tyndale also completed Joshua through Chronicles the Old Testament, but was then betrayed to enemies and captured. After a sixteen month imprisonment in Vilvoorde he was condemned as a heretic under an edict promulgated by Emperor Charles V to criminalize Lutherans. In October of 1536, still a young man about forty-two years old, he was degraded (stripped of priesthood in the Roman Church), strangled, and burned at the stake.

And thus did William Tyndale give his life, so that we could have God’s word.



*John Rogers (c. 1500-1555), aka Thomas Matthew*

John Rogers met Tyndale in Antwerp. Here Tyndale and Coverdale converted him from Roman Catholicism, and the three men worked together closely during 1534-35. After Tyndale's capture, Rogers took his work and set out to publish an annotated Bible as a comprehensive resource for the English Church. As mentioned, for the Scriptures Tyndale had not completed, Rogers used the Old Testament and Apocryphal translations of Myles Coverdale, taken from his 1535 Bible (discussed below). He also added a lengthy "Table of Principal Matters" (as I call it), which was a compendious concordance of Bible doctrines and teachings translated from the French Bible of the Reformer Pierre Olivetan. It had a truly "sweet" introduction:



**John Rogers**

As the bees diligently do gather together sweet flowers, to make by natural craft the sweet honey: so have I done the principal sentences [doctrines] contained in the Bible. The which are ordained after the manner of a table, for the consolation of those which are not yet exercised and instructed in the holy Scripture.

Rogers also added over two thousand marginal commentaries called "The Notes." Some were his own, and others were taken from Tyndale's 1534 New Testament, Luther's Bible, and elsewhere. In the Old Testament, many of his notes interpreted Hebrew idioms that are commonplace now, but were evidently new to sixteenth century English readers, such as what it means to "pour out your heart" or to "be the apple of (someone's) eye." In addition to all this, he added summaries upon every chapter of every book of the Bible, including each Psalm.

Rogers did a yeoman's job of compiling, editing, and organizing this large volume, and very shortly published it in 1537. When it arrived in England, Lord Thomas Cromwell recommended it to King Henry, who licensed it almost immediately. Cromwell and Archbishop Cranmer then both issued injunctions to the clergy requiring English Bibles to be set up in the churches.<sup>5</sup> Parish records show purchases of both Coverdale's and Rogers' Bibles,<sup>6</sup> and the unthinkable came to pass: English Scriptures were now read and heard in the Church.

Rogers wrote a dedication to King Henry in his Bible, but he signed it as "Thomas Matthew," and the cover leaf also stated that the translator was Thomas Matthew. This of course explains why it is referred to as the Matthew Bible or Matthew's Version. The subterfuge was meant to conceal Tyndale's involvement, since his translations had been banned. Nonetheless, we see God's providence, and perhaps his humour, in that the illegal work was received in England and licensed for the Church by the very king who had outlawed it. As the Scripture says, no prophet is accepted in his own country (Luke 4:24), but, also, the least shall be the greatest (Luke 9:48): despite official condemnation, Tyndale's translations have informed every major Bible since he died a "heretic."

How or why Rogers chose the pseudonym 'Thomas Matthew' remains a mystery, but the biblical inspiration, the names of Jesus' two disciples, is obvious. I have speculated that the 'T' of Thomas stands for Tyndale, and the 'M' of Matthew for Myles. Cover-

dale's involvement also needed to be concealed, of course, to secure the perception of authorship by Mr. Matthew.

But after Queen Mary ascended the throne in England, Rogers was seized, imprisoned, and identified as using the alias 'Matthew.' He was examined for heresy and condemned as a "Child of Wickedness" for "detestable, horrible, and wicked offences of Heretical Pravity and Execrable Doctrine."<sup>7</sup> As a result, in 1555 our second Detestable Heretic went to the stake. He was burned alive in Smithfield, leaving behind a wife and ten children, one still sucking at the breast.

Our foundational English Bible was, therefore, given to us anonymously, by men who cared not for their names, but only died for the truth they wanted us to have. They bore their cross and followed in the footsteps of their Lord. The Matthew Bible is the true fruit of martyrs' pens—the word of God purchased with blood, and the only English Bible so to be.

### *Myles Coverdale (c. 1487-1569)*

Coverdale was the only one of the Matthew men who died naturally, but he endured no less than three exiles abroad to escape persecutions under both King Henry and Queen Mary. During his first exile, he worked with Tyndale in Hamburg and assisted him in translating the Pentateuch. Later the men met up again in Antwerp, where they joined with Rogers. It was here that Coverdale worked on his 1535 Bible, which Henry received and licensed in England in early 1536, a full year before Rogers' Bible was allowed. The reception of Coverdale's Bible by the king was a momentous historical event, but is often overlooked. Coverdale must be credited with translating the world's first whole printed English Bible, and the first to circulate lawfully in his country.<sup>8</sup>

A natural question to ask is why Coverdale set about to make a Bible in the first place, since he knew Tyndale was already on the job and was better gifted in the biblical tongues. He addressed this directly in his 1535 preface. First, he longed for England to have her own Bible, and saw that while other countries had theirs, England was still



**Myles Coverdale**

without. He also saw that "them of ripe knowledge" who "with all their hearts" wanted to give England a Bible, had not been able to do so due to the adversity they faced.<sup>9</sup> This must be a reference to Tyndale. Coverdale knew his friend's life was threatened by enemies who wanted him dead, and that he might not live to finish his translation. Furthermore, even if he did live, his work would be outlawed and routed out. A Bible from someone else stood a better chance of acceptance. What's more, the time was ripe: once his Bible got to England, he could count on the assistance of his long-time friend, the great reformer Thomas Cromwell, to advance it. In the providence of God, Cromwell was now chief minister to Henry VIII.

Coverdale translated mainly from the German Bibles that were newly available, and therefore his work benefited from Martin Luther's clarity and understanding. Of course, he had access to other helps, and he conferred with Tyndale. But then Tyndale was captured, and it became evident that Coverdale had chosen wisely. In the end it must be acknowledged that it was he who brought everything to fruition. Without Coverdale,

England would indeed have been left without a whole Bible. But now she received two: his own and, also, the Matthew Bible, which was made complete with his translations.

In the year 1569 Coverdale died, an aged man full of good fruit, in his home in England. He is especially remembered for his Psalms, which were used in the Book of Common Prayer, and where they remain to this day.

### *The Matthew Bible: An Anglican version*

The 1537 Matthew Bible is the most manifestly Anglican and (small 'c') catholic English Bible we ever received. It reveals the reverence for tradition and the ancient Church that characterized the early Reformation. In his commentaries, Rogers often referred to the teaching of the Church fathers, including Augustine, Hilary, Ambrose, and Chrysostom. He even went out of his way to defend the perpetual virginity of Mary.<sup>10</sup> His polemical notes were milder and fewer in number than has been falsely alleged, and for the most part were confirmed in the Articles of Religion, such as those that argued against purgatory or defended salvation by grace alone.

The Matthew Bible contained the Church Calendar along with an Almanac to calculate the dates of moveable feasts for the years 1538-57. Rogers, as Coverdale and Tyndale had also done, simply assumed that life would be organized around the Calendar, as it had been for centuries. At the back of the volume was a "Table ... Wherein ye shall find the Epistles and the Gospels after the use of Salisbury." Tyndale had the same thing in his 1534 New Testament, and even translated the traditional Old Testament passages for reading on the "holy days," as he called them.

These features of the Matthew Bible, together with its calm though not dogmatic acceptance of episcopacy and the general tenor of its teaching, fit it well for the Church that Cromwell and Cranmer were attempting to build. But not everyone appreciated it. Like any good Anglican, the Matthew Bible found itself caught between the Roman Catholics and the Puritans.

### *The Roman Catholics objected to the notes*

The Roman Catholics especially resented Rogers' Protestant notes and commentaries. To appease them, Cromwell commissioned Coverdale as chief editor to work on a new Bible. The Matthew Scriptures were chosen as the base for a minor revision. Coverdale got to work with his usual dispatch, and in 1539 we received the Great Bible, which became the official version of the young CofE.

Although the Great Bible retained many or most of John Rogers' chapter summaries, it contained no marginal notes.<sup>11</sup> Coverdale would have liked to include some, but it was thought best to avoid occasion for controversy. However, as time would tell, this left a vacuum that the early Puritans, hostile to the CofE, were swift to fill with their controversial commentaries in the Geneva Bible. In fact, the unrest caused by their teachings, and their war against "Romish" and "idolatrous" traditions, were behind Queen Elizabeth's decision to commission the Bishops' Bible and, later, King James' version. They each hoped to displace the troublesome Geneva Bible and diminish its influence.

### *The early Puritans*

A note on terminology: when I use the term “Puritans” for the authors of the Geneva Bible, I mean it in its classic, original sense. It refers to those zealous men who felt called to “purify” the Church and restore it to its “true” state. They began with attacks on externals – vestment, ceremony, images, and so forth – but soon took aim at the CofE Prayer Book, governance, and Calendar. This was inextricably tied in with their postmillennial doctrine and their mission to grow the Church in power and glory.<sup>12</sup>

The Oxford English Dictionary records the first written use of the term ‘Puritan’ in 1565,<sup>13</sup> but it was certainly in use before that time. A nascent Puritan spirit was manifest as early as the 1540s in London, but grew in Geneva in the 1550s when the Protestants went into exile during the Marian persecutions. There can be no question about the Puritanism of the authors of the Geneva Bible. Condemnation of ceremony is frequent in their notes, and the groundwork is laid for a Presbyterian form of Church government, postmillennialism, and the rest of the Puritan platform. They may also be considered Calvinists, because they were followers of John Calvin, and I have seen his influence in their commentaries. But it is as yet unclear to me (and not necessary to understand for my purpose here) the extent to which Calvin may have influenced their extremism. He died in 1564, so was certainly alive when they published, but it may be that they were more radical than he.

In any event, the complete Geneva Bible was published in 1560. There is no doubt in my mind that the major reason for its publication was to advance the Puritan cause. It was intended to assist in cleansing, restoring, and making converts for the “True Church.” Had the conservatives foreseen the difficulties it would cause, they might rather have tolerated Matthew’s version than suppressed it. It could have checked the Puritan influence. Rogers’ rare Zwinglian comments on the Sacraments<sup>14</sup> amount to nothing in comparison to the invective in the Geneva Bible. (Indeed, they can be of no real moment, since no man’s words can make or break the Sacraments; it is the word of the Lord that makes them.) But the Geneva commentaries chopped at the foundations.

### *The Geneva Bible attack on “outward things”*

Ceremonies were an especial target of the Geneva notes. I did a computer search of the Psalms in the 1599 version and found notes to the effect that ceremonies are impure (note on Psalm 4:5), and do not belong in New Testament worship any more than candles or “lights” (33:2). They are nothing in respect of real spiritual service (40:6). Numerous comments disdain ceremonies and traditions as “outward” and hypocritical things. They stress that ceremonies were appointed for a time under the law, but under the gospel have been abolished (81:1, 138:2).

The Matthew Bible, on the other hand, accepts ceremonies without question. True, the Matthew men were concerned that ceremonies be rightly regarded and not abused: they must be meaningful and not overdone. But Tyndale expressly approved of ceremonies in the Church because, as he put it, they “preach” Christ visually, in a way that words cannot.<sup>15</sup> See Rogers’ simple acceptance of a Lenten tradition arising from the tearing of the temple veil when Jesus died:

**Matthew Bible note upon Mark 15:37:** This veil that tore in two pieces was a certain cloth that hung in the temple dividing the most holy place from the rest of the temple, as our cloth that is hung up during Lent divides the altar from the rest of the church. The tearing of this veil signified that the shadows of Moses' law were to vanish away at the flourishing light of the gospel.

But consider how this vitriol in the Geneva Bible might have affected the people:

**Geneva Bible summary of Psalm 50:** Because the Church is always full of hypocrites which do imagine that God will be worshipped with outward ceremonies only without the heart: and especially the Jews were of this opinion, because of their figures and ceremonies of the Law, thinking that their sacrifices were sufficient. Therefore the Prophet doth reprove this gross error, and pronounceth the Name of God to be blasphemed where holiness is set in ceremonies. For he declareth the worship of God to be spiritual, whereof are two principal parts, invocation and thanksgiving.

By way of contrast, below is what Rogers wrote on this Psalm. He does not overlook the prophet's condemnation of false self-righteousness, but note the difference in tone and emphasis. See also how he saw a promise of the gospel that was missing from the Geneva version:

**Matthew Bible summary of Psalm 50:** He prophesieth that God will call all nations of the earth unto him by the Gospel: And that he will require the confession and praising of his name, and not sacrifice. And how greatly he will abhor them which boast themselves to be religious and holy, and are in deed nothing less [no such thing].

Many Geneva notes also insist that musical instruments have no place in the Church. On Psalm 92:3, which calls for praise with harp and strings, there is a note, "These instruments were then permitted, but at Christ's coming abolished." At Psalm 150:3, which calls for praise with trumpet, viol, and harp, the note says, "Exhorting the people



only to rejoice in praising God, he maketh mention of those instruments which by God's commandment were appointed in the old Law, but under Christ the use thereof is abolished in the Church." This teaching inflamed superstitious fears, and people began to attack and damage church organs. Irony reigned supreme during the Puritan Interregnum, when ordinances were made requiring organs to be destroyed as "Monuments of Idolatry and Superstition."<sup>16</sup>

However, music was never an issue in the Matthew Bible.

### *Puritan attacks on priests*

The Puritans demonized anything that smacked of Rome, including the priestly office. Consider the 1560 commentary on Revelation 16:2, the noisome botch that fell upon people who had the mark of the beast:

**1560 Geneva Bible note on Revelation 16:2** This was like the sixth plague of Egypt, which was sores and boils or pocks: and this reigneth commonly among Canons, monks, friars, nuns, priests, and such filthy vermin which bear the mark of the beast. [Note removed in 1599]

How might this have poisoned people against their priests? Rogers never indulged in such invective. True, he had a note protesting abuses of clerical office, but that is quite a different thing and should offend no sincere person:

**Matthew Bible note on 1 Timothy 3:1, as updated in the October Testament:** *A bishop* is as much as to say one who sees to things, who watches over: an overseer. When he desires to feed Christ's flock with the food of health – that is, with his holy word, as the bishops did in Paul's time – he desires a good work and the very office of a bishop. But he who desires honour, looks for personal advantage, is greedy for great revenues; who seeks pre-eminence, pomp, dominion; who wants more than enough of everything, rest and his heart's ease, castles, parks, lordships, earldoms, etc. – such a man does not desire to work, much less to do good work, and is anything but a bishop as Saint Paul here understands a bishop.

Rogers' note accepts Anglican polity. The objection against covetous clergy simply reflects the state of affairs at the start of the Reformation and is reasonable.

Therefore, Matthew's Version might have served as a soft foil against the Puritan influence. But the Roman Catholics wanted none of it, and so it was replaced by the Great Bible. This appeared to satisfy the conservatives, but not so the Puritans.

### *Puritan attacks on the Scriptures*

Moderns often assume the Geneva Bible was a close cousin to Matthew's version, but nothing could be further from the truth. Its eschatology, ecclesiology, and much more, departed far from the beliefs of the Matthew men (and early Reformers such as Martin Luther). It taught a different form of "Protestantism." Furthermore, it is also widely assumed nowadays that the Puritans were superior scholars, and that they improved and corrected Tyndale and Coverdale's translations. Indeed, this is what they told us. This is what they wanted us to believe.

The Puritans entered onto the field after the battle was over and English Scriptures were established in the Church. They took up the soldiers' work and claimed they could do a better job because they had superior knowledge of the biblical languages and a new revelation of "clear light" from God. Though Coverdale and Tyndale were of the same generation, and Coverdale was in fact still living, the Geneva revisers characterized their work as immature, or from "the infancy of those times." In their 1560 preface they demeaned the original translations, saying they "required greatly to be perused and reformed" – that is, they must be reviewed and corrected by the Puritans:

**Preface, 1560 Geneva Bible:** We thought that we should bestow our labours and study in nothing which could be more acceptable to God and conformable to his Church than in the translating of the Holy Scriptures into our native tongue; the which thing, albeit that divers heretofore have endeavoured to achieve [i.e. Tyndale and Coverdale], yet considering the infancy of those times and imperfect knowledge of the tongues, in respect of this ripe age and clear light which God hath now revealed, the translations required greatly to be perused and reformed.<sup>17</sup>



Here are two justifications for “reforming” the original translations. One is their alleged infancy and imperfection. What temerity. Space does not allow for discussion of this,<sup>18</sup> but I do not doubt that the real problem was that the existing Bibles did not assist the Puritans, and so they needed to find fault. They also needed to establish themselves as biblical authorities. And so they took in hand first Tyndale’s New Testament, and then the Old Testament of the Great Bible,<sup>19</sup> and “perused and reformed” them. On top of that, they added copious commentaries promulgating their doctrine.

To return one last time to the issue of ceremonies, and to illustrate how thoroughly the Puritans remade the Bible, observe how they took care even with page headers. Earlier Bible headers made generous mention of “Ceremonies” in the book of Leviticus, but the 1560 Geneva avoided this:

**Page headers, Leviticus:**

<b>Bible version</b>	<b>‘Ceremonies’</b>	<b>‘Sacrifices’</b>	<b>Other or blank</b>
1535 Olivetan	17	0	4
1537 & 1549 Matthew Bible	23	0	2
1540 Great Bible	15	2	8
1560 Geneva Bible	5	8	15

***The Puritan “light”***

The second reason the Puritans gave for making their Bible was that they had received a revelation of “clear light” from God. And what was this light? They do not say, but the massive number of commentaries relating to prophecies of the Church – a theme that is nowhere to be found in the Matthew Bible, but which is everywhere in the Geneva version – tells me their new light was their postmillennial doctrine of the Church. This also explains why they went against Tyndale in the controversy about the translation of ‘ecclesia,’ and rendered it ‘Church’ instead of ‘congregation’ – thus ironically taking the Roman Catholic side.

Closely bound up with all this was the Puritan conviction that they were the prophets, “reformed” Protestants, who would restore the Church. With the sword of their mouth (and whatever else it might take<sup>20</sup>), they would destroy Antichrist; that is, the papacy. This the Reformation had failed to accomplish, but they would do it, and in a future millennium the True Church would be perfected.<sup>21</sup> They saw such prophecies everywhere in the Old Testament. Where Rogers saw Christ triumphant, they saw their Church triumphant – or at least, like any good Roman Catholic, could scarcely see Christ without their Church.<sup>22</sup> Below are only two examples from among hundreds:

**Chapter summaries, Isaiah 2**

**Matthew Bible:** Of the coming and death of Christ: and of the calling of the heathen.

**Geneva Bible:** The Church shall be restored by Christ, and the Gentiles called. The punishment of the rebellious and obstinate.

### Chapter summaries, Psalm 87

**Matthew Bible:** He praiseth the heavenly Jerusalem, that is, the congregation of the faithful, unto which he prophesieth that very many shall come of [from] all nations.

**Geneva Bible:** The holy Ghost promiseth that the condition of the Church, which was in misery after the captivity of Babylon, should be restored to great excellency. So that there should be nothing more comfortable than to be numbered among the members thereof.

To restore the New Testament Church, now in Babylonian captivity under Rome, the Puritans believed that all things “Romish” must be overthrown – and that included the young CofE with its “popish dunghill” (the Book of Common Prayer),<sup>23</sup> its idolatrous ceremonies, and its unenlightened Bibles.

Obviously the purpose and teaching of the Geneva version were of a very different spirit. The Matthew men intended only to give us God’s word as plainly as they could. They were fighters for truth. The Puritans, however, were fighters for the True Church. Indeed, they were like the Roman Catholics in their zeal, except that now the holy war went from “Mother Church vs. Heretic” to “True Church vs. False Church.” And their Bible was an important weapon in their arsenal.

Thus Matthew’s version (along with its close cousin, the Great Bible) was caught in the middle, authored by Detestable Heretics for the False Church. Ironically, in the end it was the new Protestants who made the greatest inroads against it.

### Conclusion

The Matthew Bible is essentially an Anglican book. Though, as Myles Coverdale said, “There is no man living that can see all things, neither hath God given any man to know everything,”<sup>24</sup> Rogers’ notes were (I contend) excellent, despite a few that I question or dispute. They were of a reasonable and reverent Christian spirit following the *via media*. The Scriptures are rich in spiritual food, Christ-centered, amillennial, and accord with the Prayer Book creeds. Further, though the translations are older than the KJV, they are easier to understand due to their plainer style, and are also free of the Puritan influence.

Under unrelenting pressure, however, and besieged on all sides, the Matthew Bible was squeezed out. Most modern academics are under the Geneva spell. They admire the Matthew men as heroic, but accept the Puritan condemnation of their work; their mantra is, “Geneva was humming with scholarship.” Coverdale is dismissed because he did not translate directly from the biblical languages (though he certainly had some knowledge of them). Instead, he used other men’s translations as his base; that is, he used German Bibles that he trusted.<sup>25</sup> The manifold irony of this, however, is that the scholars who thus dismiss Coverdale have confirmed that the Puritans also used other men’s translations as their base: they used English translations that they condemned.<sup>26</sup>

In the end, God will judge the Bibles that we have received – both the first, blood-bought translations and all the revisions. In the meantime, the original Scriptures were so preserved in the King James Version that the Holy Spirit has used them mightily. When that Bible is read in the Church, we are still hearing the voices of Tyndale and Coverdale as they spoke to us in Matthew’s version almost five centuries ago.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> In 1401, under King Henry IV, parliament passed a statute called *De haeretico comburendo*, or *On the burning of heretics*, targeting Wycliffe's followers, the Lollards. Then in 1408 came the Constitutions of Oxford, prohibiting anyone from translating the Scriptures "by his own authority." More details are in my book *The Story of the Matthew Bible* (British Columbia, Canada: Baruch House Publishing, 2018), 23-25.

<sup>2</sup> A. S. Herbert, *Historical Catalogue of Printed Editions of the English Bible 1525-1961* (New York: The American Bible Society, 1968), 18.

<sup>3</sup> David Daniell, *The Bible in English* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2003), 448.

<sup>4</sup> In "To the Reder" [sic] in his 1526 New Testament, Tyndale wrote, "Moreover, even very necessity and cumbrance (God is record) above strength, which I will not rehearse, lest we should seem to boast ourselves, caused that many things are lacking." *Tyndale's 1526 New Testament* (Facsimile; Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers Inc., 2008), unnumbered page at the back of the book.

<sup>5</sup> For transcripts of the injunctions of Thomas Cromwell and Thomas Cranmer see Bishop Burnet, *History of the Reformation of the Church of England*, (London: Richard Priestley, 1820), Vol. I, Pt. II.

<sup>6</sup> J. F. Mozley, *Coverdale and His Bibles*, (1953; repr.; Cambridge, England: James Clarke & Co, 2005), 173.

<sup>7</sup> John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments of the Christian Church*, 1684 edition (facsimile; Litchfield Park, Arizona: The Bible Museum, 2008), Vol. III, 103.

<sup>8</sup> Herbert's *Catalogue* shows a printing of Myles Coverdale's Bible in 1537 just before Matthew's version, in which the title page says it was "set forth with the Kynges moost gracious licence." (Herbert, *Cat.*, 17-18.) But though this is (apparently) the first express mention of a license in his Bible, we know Henry actually allowed it the previous year.

<sup>9</sup> "Myles Coverdale unto the Christian Reader," prologue to his 1535 Bible, *Remains of Myles Coverdale*, ed. George Pearson, Cambridge: The University Press, 1846 (facsimile; LaVergne, TN, USA: BiblioLife, LLC), 12-13.

<sup>10</sup> Roger's note on Matthew 1:25 says Jesus was called Mary's first son "not because she had any after, but because she had none before."

<sup>11</sup> I have not examined every page, but where I checked in my facsimile of the 1540 Great Bible I found that, except for the Psalms, Coverdale kept Rogers' chapter summaries. These are a commentary of sorts.

<sup>12</sup> See Nick Schoeneberger, "The Biblical Case for Puritan Postmillennialism," for a brief summary of their doctrine: <https://purelypresbyterian.com/2015/12/12/the-biblical-case-for-puritan-postmillennialism>. Accessed May 2, 2018.

<sup>13</sup> Oxford English Dictionary online, s.v. 'Puritan.' The quotation: "1565 T. Stapleton Fortresse of Faith f. 134v 'We know to weare in the church holy vestements, and to be apparailled priestlike semeth..absurde to the Puritans off our countre, to the zelous gossellers of Geneva.'" Accessed March 20, 2018.

<sup>14</sup> Rogers wrote in the Table of Principal Matters: "Baptym [sic] bringeth not grace with it / as appeareth by Symon the soth-sayer. Act.viii.d." Such a comment would alienate both friends and foes of the Reformation. He took this from Pierre Olivetan's 1535 French Bible.

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<sup>15</sup> See for example William Tyndale, *An Answer to Sir Thomas More's Dialogue*, ed. Henry Walter, Cambridge: Parker Society, 1850 (facsimile; Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 59-60 and 97.

<sup>16</sup> A resistance to music in the Church was fomenting before the 1560 Geneva Bible was published, but in the 1570s it took off. It is difficult to imagine that the Geneva Bible did not contribute to the trouble. See <http://soundsmedieval.org/library/130302-removal-of-organs-from-churches.pdf>. Accessed May 5, 2018.

<sup>17</sup> Preface to the 1560 Geneva Bible. (Reproduced in 1599 Geneva Bible, modern spelling Tolle Lege edition, beginning at p. xxvii.) Later in their preface they also demeaned Tyndale and Coverdale's translations as "irreverent." This is also discussed in *The Story*.

<sup>18</sup> The Puritans adopted an eccentric model of literalism, which I hope to examine in Part 2 of *The Story of the Matthew Bible*. They claimed this was more "reverent."

<sup>19</sup> As to the Geneva sources, see S. L. Greenslade, "English Versions of the Bible," *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, Vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 156-57; see also F. F. Bruce, *The English Bible, A History of Translations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), 86, and Daniell, *Bible in English*, 284, 296. The Puritans published their revised New Testament in 1557, and a further revision of it along with the rest of the Scriptures and the Apocrypha in 1560.

<sup>20</sup> In their 1560 dedication to Queen Elizabeth, the Puritans exhorted her, by reference to Old Testament examples, even to "slay ... whosoever would not seek the Lord ... whether he were small or great, man or woman." Lest the Queen be reluctant to follow this counsel, they wrote, "If these zealous beginnings seem dangerous, and to breed disquietness in your dominions, yet by the story of King Asa, it is manifest that the quietness and peace of kingdoms standeth in the utter abolishing of idolatry, and in advancing of true religion."

<sup>21</sup> Schoeneberger, "Puritan Postmillennialism."

<sup>22</sup> There are related issues in the Geneva Bible, also apparently the fruit of postmillennialism. One is that New Covenant promises are sometimes associated with the Lord's second coming, not his first. Also, the "kingdom of Christ" refers not to his reign in the hearts and conscience of his faithful people, which was the pure Protestant teaching of the early Reformation, but to his reign in the Church, which is closer to Roman Catholicism.

<sup>23</sup> The 1572 Puritan *Admonition to the Parliament* accused the prayer book as "an unperfected booke, culled & picked out of that popishe dunghill, the Masse booke full of all abominations." Walter Howard Frere and C. E. Douglas, eds., *Puritan Manifestoes: A Study of the Origin of the Puritan Revolt*, London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1907 (facsimile; Delhi, India: Facsimile Publisher, 2013), 16.

<sup>24</sup> Coverdale, "Unto Reader," *Remains*, 14.

<sup>25</sup> Coverdale confirmed this in his preface to his Bible. He was not ignorant of the biblical languages. After all, he worked closely with Tyndale and worked on the Great Bible. However, his comments indicate that he respected Tyndale and Luther as the masters of direct translation.

<sup>26</sup> See note 19. Good scholars do not take someone else's lousy work, patch it up, and then call it their masterpiece, like the Geneva revisers did. This is inconsistent with integrity and with real scholarship. But through this device, God has preserved much of the original translations.