

1-2019

Question 87 - What are the facts regarding the Bishop's Bible?

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Recommended Citation

Willmington, Harold, "Question 87 - What are the facts regarding the Bishop's Bible?" (2019). *101 Most Asked Questions*. 84.

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101 MOST ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE BIBLE

87. What are the facts regarding the Bishop's Bible?

A. This version was translated because of the following reasons:

1. The Church of England did not like the notes in the Geneva Bible.
2. The Geneva Bible was undermining the authority of the Great Bible and that of the bishops.

It was translated by Matthew Parker, archbishop of Canterbury, who was aided by nine other bishops; thus its name, the Bishop's Bible. The Bishop's Bible was the second "authorized version" of the church, but it was never accepted by the common people. In fact, Queen Elizabeth simply ignored it. The Bishop's Bible has gone down in history as the most unsatisfactory and useless of all the old translations.

B. Occasion – The widespread popularity of the Geneva Bible was undermining the authority of the Great Bible, and also the power of the bishops. Puritanism, influenced by the reformers on the Continent, was springing up; nonconformity was in the air. Archbishop Parker and the bishops felt that something should be done in Bible translations. In 1564 Parker organized a revision committee containing some 8 or 9 bishops, hence the name, Bishop's Bible.

The Translation – The plan was to follow the Great Bible, except where it clearly varied from the Hebrew and Greek, to attend well to the Latin versions of Munster (often inaccurate) and Pagninus, to avoid bitter notes "in places of controversy," to mark genealogies and "places not edifying" so that they may be passed over, and to displace words which would offend good taste by "more convenient words and phrases." There were numerous tables, calendars, maps, and other helps.

Reception – The Bishop's Bible was not popular. Elizabeth took no public notice of it, nor did she ever give it her formal sanction and authority. It was authorized by the bishops, and was designed to displace the Great Bible. But it was cumbersome and costly, not suited to the general public nor satisfying to scholars. The translation is often stiff, formal, and difficult, and the high-sounding words and ecclesiastical terms, savoring of church and state, made it unpopular with the people. It could not displace the Geneva Bible. Different parts being translated by different men in different fields, with no method for comparison and harmonization, the contents are of unequal merit. The whole work is described as "the most unsatisfactory and useless of all the old translations." For 40 years it was held in ecclesiastical esteem, and 20 editions were issued, the last being in 1606.

(*General Biblical Introduction*. H. S. Miller. Word-Bearer Press. Houghton, N.Y. 1952. p. 354)

- C. Bishop's Bible - In 1559 Queen Elizabeth ordered that a copy "of the whole Bible of the largest volume in English" be placed in every parish church. The Great Bible was reprinted, but Archbishop of Canterbury Matthew Parker wished to have a new translation suited for reading aloud in church. In 1566 he assigned sections of the Great Bible to a team of revisers, most of them bishops. The group was to depart from the Great Bible only to correct inaccuracies or clean up offensive language and to mark dull passages, such as lengthy genealogies, so that readers could bypass them. The revision was completed in 1568.

Though approved by the Convocation of Canterbury, the Bishops' Bible apparently did not receive Elizabeth's authorization. It was a conservative and dignified translation, less radical in its language and tone than the Geneva Bible but borrowing from it at various points. The notes retain a Protestant flavor but avoid harsh comments on the Roman Catholic Church and hierarchy. As the Bible of the Church of England, the Bishops' Bible went through 20 editions in 42 years and served as the official basis for the King James Version, which took from it a number of well-known phrasings.

(*The Bible Through the Ages*. Reader's Digest. Pleasantville, N.Y. 1996. pp. 314, 315)