

The Learned Men

The Translators of the
Authorised Version of the Holy Bible in
English A.D. 1611

*“We commend thee to God, and to the Spirit of
His grace, which is able to build further than
we can ask or think. He removeth the scales
from our eyes, the vail from our hearts,
opening our wits that we may understand
His Word, enlarging our hearts, yea,
correcting our affections, that we may
love it above gold and silver, yea, that
we may love it to the end.”*

The Translators' Preface to the Authorised Version

This edited reprint of *The Learned Men* is presented because of continuing interest in the work of the men who laboured on the Authorised (King James) Version. This greatly influential version was itself a revision of the Bishops' Bible. The work of these men relied heavily on the magnificent translation work of William Tyndale. The importance of Tyndale's work must not be underestimated. David Daniell, a leading Tyndale scholar, has estimated that 92% of the New Testament of the Authorised Version is the same as that of the Tyndale New Testament. This sheds light on the statement found on the title page of the Authorised Version: "Translated out of the original tongues: and with the former translations diligently compared and revised ...". May this generation learn and emulate the work of these Learned Men.

The Learned Men of the Authorised Version

*“There were many chosen that were greater in
other men’s eyes than in their own,
and that sought the truth rather
than their own praise.”*

The Translators to the Reader

Advocates of the modern versions often assume that these versions are the product of scholarship far superior to that of the translators of the Authorised Version of 1611, but this assumption is not supported by the facts. The learned men who laboured on our English Bible were men of exceptional ability, and, although they differed among themselves on many matters of church order, administration and doctrine, they approached the task of translation with a reverent regard for the Divine inspiration, authority and inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures. To them it was God’s sacred Truth and demanded the exercise of their utmost care and fidelity in its translation.

The most learned men in the land were chosen for this work and the list below shows a high proportion of men with a profound knowledge of the languages in which the Bible was written. Of the fifty-four who were chosen, some died or withdrew before the translation was started; the final list numbered forty-seven men. They were divided into six committees, two each at Westminster, Oxford and Cam-

bridge, and a portion of Scripture was assigned to each. Every man in each committee translated the entire portion before meeting to compare the results and agree upon the final form. They then transmitted their draft to each of the other companies for their comment and consent. A select committee then went carefully through the whole work again, and at last two of their number were responsible for the final checking.

The Old Testament Committees

The **first Westminster Committee**, which translated Genesis to 1 Chronicles, was attended by:

1. Dr. Lancelot Andrewes (1555-1626), Fellow of Pembroke College, Cambridge. Andrewes had his early education at Coopers Free School and Merchant Taylors' School where his rapid progress in the study of the ancient languages was brought to the notice of Dr. Watts, the founder of some scholarships at Pembroke Hall, Cambridge. Andrewes was sent to that College, where he took his B.A. degree and soon afterwards was elected Fellow. He then took his Master's degree and began to study divinity and achieved great distinction as a lecturer. He was raised to several positions of influence in the Church of England and distinguished himself as a diligent and excellent preacher, and became Chaplain to Queen Elizabeth I. King James I promoted him to the position of Bishop of Chichester in 1605 and also gave him the influential position of Lord Almoner. He later became Bishop of Ely and a Privy Counsellor. Toward the end of his life he was made Bishop of Winchester.

It is recorded that Andrewes was a man of deep piety and that King James had such great respect for him that in his presence he refrained from the levity in which he indulged at other times. A sermon preached at Andrewes' funeral in 1626 paid tribute to his great scholarship: "His knowledge in Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Chaldee, Syriac and Arabic, besides fifteen modern languages was so advanced that he may be ranked as one of the rarest linguists in Christendom. A great part of five hours every day he spent in prayer, and in his last illness he spent all his time in prayer – and when both voice and eyes and hands failed in their office, his countenance showed that he still prayed and praised God in his heart, until it pleased God to receive his blessed soul to Himself."

2. William Bedwell (1561-1632), M.A., St. John's College, Cambridge. He had established his reputation as an Arabic scholar before 1603 and is recognized as "the Father of Arabic studies in England". He was the author of the *Lexicon Heptaglotton* in seven folio volumes, including Hebrew, Syriac, Chaldee and Arabic. He also commenced a Persian dictionary and an Arabic translation of the Epistles of John, which are now to be found among the Laud MSS in the Bodleian Library.

3. Dr. F. Burleigh, B.D. 1594, D.D. 1607, Fellow of King James' College, Chelsea.

4. Dr. Richard Clarke, D.D., Fellow of Christ's College, Cambridge. He was one of the six preachers at Canterbury.

5. Professor Geoffrey King, Fellow of King's College, Cambridge, and Regius Professor of Hebrew. Liveley, Spalding and Byng from the first Cambridge Committee also held this professorship.

6. Dr. John Layfield (*d.* 1617), Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge 1585 and Greek lecturer 1593. He was specially skilled in architecture, and his judgment was indispensable regarding passages describing the Tabernacle and the Temple.

7. Dr. John Overall (1560-1619), Fellow of Trinity and Master of St. Catherine's College, Cambridge. He later became Dean of St. Paul's and successively Bishop of Coventry, Lichfield and Norwich. He took his D.D. in 1596 and became Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge.

8. Dr. Adrian Saravia (*also called Hadrian à Saravia; 1531-1613*), Professor of Divinity at Leyden University 1584, Prebendary of Canterbury and Westminster. In the controversies of that period he is often referred to as "that learned foreigner". His Spanish descent and residence in Holland qualified him to assist the translators with his first-hand knowledge of the work of Spanish and Dutch scholars. He was also proficient in Hebrew.

9. Dr. Richard Teigh, Archdeacon of Middlesex, Rector of All Hallows, Barking-by-the-Tower. He was described by Wood as "an excellent textuary and profound linguist".

10. Richard Thomson (*d. 1613*), M.A., Fellow of Clare College, Cambridge, B.D. 1593, described by Richard Montagu as “a most admirable philologist . . . better known in Italy, France and Germany than at home”.

The **first Cambridge Committee**, which translated from 2 Chronicles to Song of Solomon, numbered eight scholars:

1. Dr. Roger Andrewes, Fellow of Pembroke, Master of Jesus College, D.D., brother of Lancelot Andrewes.

2. Professor Robert Byng (*1574-1651*), Fellow of Peterhouse, Cambridge, and Hebrew professor.

3. Dr. Laurence Chaderton (*1546-1640*), Fellow of Christ’s College, D.D., Master of Emmanuel. Chaderton entered Christ’s College in 1564 and embraced the Reformed doctrines. He had been brought up a Roman Catholic, and his father offered him an allowance of thirty pounds if he would leave Cambridge and renounce Protestantism; “otherwise I enclose a shilling to buy a wallet – go and beg”. Chaderton acquired a great reputation as a Latin, Greek and Hebrew scholar and was also proficient in French, Spanish and Italian. Among the treasures of Emmanuel College is a Hebrew Bible with his annotations, providing evidence of his rabbinical learning. For fifty years he was Afternoon Lecturer at St. Clement’s, Cambridge, and forty of the clergy said that they owed their conversion to his preaching.

4. Francis Dillingham (*d. 1625*), Fellow of Christ’s College, Cambridge, M.A. 1590, B.D. 1599. According to Fuller, he was “an excellent linguist and subtle disputant”.

5. Dr. Thomas Harrison (*1555-1631*), St. John’s College, Cambridge, B.A. 1576, Fellow, Tutor and Vice-Master of Trinity, D.D., noted Hebraist and chief examiner in Hebrew. According to Professor W.F. Moulton in *History of the English Bible*, he was also credited with an excellent knowledge of Greek. He was a convinced Puritan.

6. Edward Liveley (*1545-1605*), Trinity College, Cambridge, B.A. 1568, M.A. and Fellow 1572, Regius Professor of Hebrew 1575. He enjoyed the reputation of an acquaintance with the oriental languages unequalled at that period. He died in May, 1605.

7. Dr. John Richardson (*d. 1625*), Fellow of Emmanuel College, D.D., Regius Professor of Divinity 1607, Master of Peterhouse and later Master of Trinity.

8. Professor Robert Spalding, Fellow of St. John’s College, Cambridge. He succeeded Edward Liveley as Regius Professor of Hebrew.

☞ The **Oxford Old Testament Committee**, which translated from Isaiah to Malachi, was comprised of:

1. Dr. Richard Brett (*1560-1637*), Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford, D.D., well versed in classical and eastern languages, Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Chaldee, Arabic and Ethiopic.

2. Richard Fairclowe, Fellow of New College, Oxford.

3. Dr. John Harding, President of Magdalen College and Regius Professor of Hebrew. He presided over this committee.

4. Dr. Thomas Holland (*d. 1612*), Balliol and Exeter Colleges, Oxford, B.A. 1570, M.A. 1575, B.D. 1582, D.D. 1584, Master and Regius Professor of Divinity 1589. He achieved so much distinction in many fields of learning that he was not only highly esteemed among English scholars but also had a good reputation in the universities of Europe. He was mighty in the Scriptures and faithful in explaining them. His example went hand-in-hand with his precepts and he himself lived what he preached to others. His biographer writes, “He loved and he longed for God, for the presence of God, and for the full enjoyment of Him. His soul was framed for heaven, and could find no rest till it came there. His dying prayer was, ‘Come, O come, Lord Jesus, Thou Morning Star! Come, Lord Jesus; I desire to be dissolved, and to be with Thee!’”

5. Dr. Richard Kilby (*1561-1620*), Lincoln College, Oxford, B.A. 1578, M.A. 1582, B.D. and D.D. 1596 and Regius Professor of Hebrew 1610. He was the author of a work on Exodus prepared from Hebrew commentators.

6. Dr. John Reynolds (*Rainolds; 1549-1607*), Merton College, Oxford, moved to Corpus Christi and became Fellow in 1566. He took his D.D. in 1585 and became Regius Professor of Divinity. After several years as Dean of Lincoln he was made

President of Corpus Christi College in 1598. He represented the Puritans at the Hampton Court Conference at which he suggested that a new translation of the Bible should be undertaken. His reputation as a Hebrew and Greek scholar was sufficient warrant for his inclusion among the translators, and Hall relates that “his memory and reading were near to a miracle”. He worked on the translation of the Prophets until his death in 1607. During this period the Oxford translators met at his residence once a week to compare and discuss their work. (His brother, William, was equally able in languages. He was, however, a Romanist and worked on the Rheims Bible.)

7. **Dr. Miles Smith** (*d. 1624*), M.A., D.D., Corpus Christi and Brasenose Colleges and Christ Church, Oxford, Bishop of Gloucester 1612. He provided more evidence of his contribution than any of the others, as it was left to him to write the long Translators’ Preface, “The Translators to the Reader”, which used to be printed at the beginning of most English Bibles. His knowledge of the oriental languages made him well qualified for a place among the translators of the Authorised Version of the Bible. He had Hebrew at his fingers’ ends, and he was so conversant with Chaldee, Syriac and Arabic that he made them as familiar to him as his native tongue. He persisted in this task from its commencement to its completion and was himself the last man engaged in the translation. The work of the whole company was revised and improved by a small group selected from their number, and was then finally examined by Bilson and Miles Smith.

The New Testament Committees

The **Oxford New Testament Committee**, which translated the Gospels, Acts and Revelation, was comprised of the following men:

1. **Dr. George Abbot** (*1562-1633*), began his university studies at Balliol College, Oxford in 1578 and soon became known for his strong Calvinism and Puritanism. In 1593 he took his B.D., in 1597 his D.D., and in the same year became Master of University College at the age of thirty-five. A few years later he was Vice Chancellor. He very strongly opposed the Romanising influence of Laud and was very severe in his denunciation of anything which savoured of ‘popery’. Nevertheless he accepted some high offices in the Church of England. In 1609 he became Bishop of Lichfield, and in 1611 Archbishop of Canterbury. He was regarded as the head of the Puritans within the Church of England and vigorously opposed the King’s declaration permitting sports and pastimes on the Lord’s Day.

2. **Dr. Richard Eedes** (*d. 1604*), Dean of Worcester.

3. **Dr. John Harmar** (*1555-1613*), M.A., New College, Oxford, Professor of Greek in 1585, Headmaster of Winchester 1588, Warden of St. Mary’s College 1596. He was well read in patristic and scholastic theology and a noted Latinist and Grecian. His works include translations of Calvin’s sermons on the Ten Commandments, several of Beza’s sermons and some of the Homilies of Chrysostom.

4. **Dr. John Perin**, Fellow of St. John’s College, Oxford, Canon of Christ Church and Regius Professor of Greek.

5. **Dr. Ralph Ravens**, Fellow of St. John’s College.

6. **Dr. Thomas Ravis** (*1650-1609*), Christ Church, Oxford, B.A. 1578, M.A. 1581, B.D. 1589, D.D. 1595, Vice Chancellor 1597. He was one of the six deans who attended the Hampton Court Conference in 1604 and was made Bishop of Gloucester in that year. He died in 1609.

7. **Sir Henry Savile** (*1549-1622*), Brasenose College, Oxford, Fellow of Merton College 1565 and Warden 1585, Provost of Eton 1596, Tutor to Queen Elizabeth I. He was a pioneer in many branches of scholarship and the founder of the Savilian Professorships of Mathematics and Astronomy at Oxford. His works include an eight-volume edition of the writings of Chrysostom.

8. **Dr. Giles Thompson** (*d. 1612*), Dean of Windsor, Bishop of Gloucester, a man of high repute as scholar and preacher.

The **second Westminster Committee**, which translated the Epistles, included:

1. **Dr. William Barlow** (*d. 1613*), St. John’s College, Cambridge, B.A. 1583, M.A. 1587, Fellow of Trinity 1590, B.D. 1594, D.D. 1599. He represented the “Church Party” at the Hampton Court Conference and wrote “The Summe and Substance of the Conference”, which the Puritans criticised as being biased against their cause. He was made Bishop of Rochester in 1605, “one of the youngest in age, but one of the ripest in learning” of all those that had occupied that position. He later became Bishop of Lincoln.

2. **Professor William Dakins** (*d. 1607*), Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, M.A. 1594, B.D. 1601, Greek Lecturer at Trinity, and Professor of Divinity at Gresham College, 1604.

3. **Dr. Roger Fenton** (*1565-1616*), Fellow of Pembroke College, Cambridge, D.D., one of the popular preachers of the day. Bishop Felton wrote, “never a more learned man hath Pembroke Hall, with but one exception”.

4. **Dr. Ralph Huchinson** (*1553-1606*), President of St. John’s College, Oxford, B.A. 1574, M.A. 1578, B.D. 1596, D.D. 1602.

5. **Michael Rabbett**, Rector of St. Vedast, Foster Lane.

6. **Dr. Thomas Sanderson**, Rector of All Hallows.

7. **Dr. John Spenser** (*1559-1614*), President of Corpus Christi College, Oxford.

The **second Cambridge Committee**, which translated the Apocrypha, included:

1. **John Boys** (*or Bois; 1561-1644*). Fellow of St. John’s College, Cambridge, and Greek lecturer there. He was born in 1561 and at a very early age showed an unusual interest in languages. He began to read Hebrew at the age of five years and was admitted to St. John’s College, Cambridge, when he was fourteen. There he very soon distinguished himself by his knowledge of the Greek language, which he sometimes studied in the library from 4 a.m. until 8 p.m. After studying medicine for some time he gave up this course and applied himself to the study of Greek. For ten years he was the chief Greek lecturer in his college, and with Andrew Downes was largely responsible for the revival of Greek learning in the English Universities. After twenty years of university life he became Rector of Boxworth in Cambridgeshire. When the translation of the Bible was begun he was chosen to be one of the Cambridge translators; eventually he not only undertook his portion but also the part allotted to another member of the committee. When the work was completed John Boys was one of the six translators who met at Stationers’ Hall to revise the whole. This took them about nine months. After a long life of profitable study, ministry, translating and writing, he died at the age of 84, “his brow without wrinkles, his sight quick, his hearing sharp, his countenance fresh and his body sound.”

2. **Dr. William Branthwaite**, Fellow of Emmanuel College, Deputy Margaret Professor of Divinity, and late Master of Gonville and Caius College.

3. **Professor Andrew Downes** (*1549-1628*), St. John’s College, Cambridge, B.A. 1567, Fellow 1571, M.A. 1574, B.D. 1582, Regius Professor of Greek 1585. Downes and Boys revived the study of Greek at St. John’s. Downes was Professor of Greek for nearly forty years, and was acknowledged to be one of the best Greek scholars of the age. These two men joined Miles Smith on the subcommittee which subjected the whole translation to a final, careful process of checking and correction.

4. **Dr. John Duport** (*d. 1617*), Jesus College, M.A. and Fellow before 1580, Master of Jesus College, four times Vice-Chancellor of the University.

5. **Dr. Jeremiah Radcliffe**, Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge.

6. **Dr. Samuel Ward**, Fellow of King’s College, Cambridge, D.D., Prebendary of Chichester.

7. **Dr. T. Ward**, Emmanuel College, Cambridge, D.D., Master of Sidney Sussex College and Lady Margaret Professor.

No reasonable person imagines that the translators were infallible or that their work was perfect, but no one acquainted with the facts can deny that they were men of outstanding scholarship, well qualified for their important work, or that with God’s blessing they completed their great task with scrupulous care and fidelity.

It is remarkable that the literary style of individual members of the company of translators was generally inferior to that of the version which they jointly produced. The explanation of this is that they exercised their wisdom in leaving undisturbed the simple style and vocabulary of the earlier translators, such as Tyndale. If they had cast the translation in the mould of the more ornate style of their own period it is doubtful whether their work would have triumphed for so long as it has. They made many thousands of small changes, most of which improved the rhythm, clarified the meaning or increased the accuracy of the translation.

They were indeed ‘learned men’ – and their scholarship was accompanied by a deep conviction of the Divine origin of the records which they were translating. Learn-

• *The Learned Men* •

ing and faith went hand in hand to open the storehouse of God's work of Truth for the spiritual enrichment of millions from generation to generation, over a period now of nearly four hundred years.