

The Geneva Bible on Names for Children

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IN 1560, OR JUST OVER 400 YEARS AGO, an English Bible was first printed in Geneva and, later, took its name from the city of publication.¹ The translation and editing was done by Marian exiles. William Whittingham, editor, was assisted by Gilby, Sampson, and others. This Bible gained immense popularity during the Elizabethan and Jacobean reigns. From 1560 to 1644 it is estimated that at least 140 editions were published.² These facts are generally well known. Apparently, there is less familiarity with the apparatus criticus, that is, the marginal commentaries, the glossaries and summaries, the catechistical questions, and the interpretation of Biblical names. Only with the names am I directly concerned in this essay.

At the end of the II Maccabees in this edition is "A Brief Table of the Interpretation of the proper names which are chiefly found in the olde Testament." This table contains, in alphabetical order, approximately 1,000 personal names together with their primary meanings as rendered from the Hebrew. This collection of names was continued, generally at the end of Revelation, in many, but by no means all, subsequent editions to 1616. The reasons for including such a table are stated in a memorable paragraph preceding the listed names. Although J. R. Dore quoted this passage from

¹ Frequently referred to also as the "Breeches Bible," from the rendering of *Genesis* 3:7 "and they sewed figge tree leaues together and made themselves breeches."

² The estimate of 140 editions is that of T.H. Darlow and H. F. Moule (*Historical Catalogue of Printed Editions of Holy Scripture in the British and Foreign Bible Society* [London, 1903. 2 Vols.]; see I. 61.). J. R. Dore (*Old Bibles*, 1888, p. 208) guesses there were 200 editions. Dore's contemporary, Nicholas Pocock, states that there were "certainly not less than 130 different editions, though perhaps Mr. Dore's estimate of 200 is somewhat excessive." ("The Bible in the British Museum," *The Quarterly Review*, 178 (1894), 164.)

For the references to Dore and Pocock, I am indebted to Miss Kathleen Blow, Chief Reference Librarian, University of Texas.

a 1569 Geneva Bible,³ and it may have been reprinted elsewhere, it seems but little known. For this reason, I transcribe below the heading of "a brief table," the preface, and selected names and definitions. These are from a 1576 folio edition of the Geneva Bible, the first edition that was printed in England.

"A BRIEF TABLE OF THE INTERPRETATION
OF THE PROPER NAMES

which are chiefly founde in the olde Testament.

"Whereas the wickednesse of time, and the blindenesse of the former age hath bene such, that all thinges altogether haue bene abused and corrupted, so that the very right names of diuers of the holy men named in the Scriptures haue bene forgotten, and nowe seeme straunge vnto vs, and the names of infantes that should euer haue some godly aduertisementes in them, and should be memorials and markes of the children of god receiued into his houshold, hath bene hereby also chaunged and made the signes and badges of idolatrie and heathenische impietie, we haue nowe set forth this table of the names that be most vsed in the olde Testament with their interpretations, as the Hebrewes importeth, partly to call backe the godly from that abuse, when they shall knowe the true names of the Godly fathers, and what they signifie, that their children nowe named after them, may haue testimonies by their very name, that they are within that faythfull familie that in all their doings had euer God before their eyes, and that they are bounde by these their names to serue God from their infancie, and haue occasion to praise him for his workes wrought in them and their fathers: but chiefly to restore the names to their integritie, whereby many places of the Scriptures and secret mysteries of the holy Ghost shall better be vnderstand . . ."

From the list of proper names referred to in the "brief table," I select the following entries as typical:

Abigail, the fathers ioye.
1 Kings 25. 3.

Adoniah, the Lord is ruler.
2 Sam. 3. 4.

Babel, confusion. Gen. 10. 10.

Baldad, old loue, or without loue.
Iob. 8. 1.

Canaan, a merchant. Gen. 9. 18.

³ Dore, *ibid.*, p. 212.

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| <i>Dalilah</i> , a bucket or consumer. Iudg. 16. 4. | <i>Jonathan</i> , the gift of the Lord. Iudg. 18. 30. |
| <i>Deborah</i> , a word or a bee. Gen. 35. 8. | <i>Ira</i> , a watchman. 1 Chro. 11. 28. |
| <i>Elihu</i> , he is my God. 1 Chron. 12. 10. | <i>Malachi</i> , my messenger. Mal. 1. 1. |
| <i>Elisha</i> , my God saueth. 1 Kings 19. 16. | <i>Magdalena</i> , magnified, or exalted. Mat. 27. 56. |
| <i>Ephraim</i> , fruitful or increasing. Gen. 41. 52. | <i>Michael</i> , who is like God? 1 Chron. 7. 3. |
| <i>Ethan</i> , strength. 1 Kings. 4. 31. | <i>Miriam</i> , exalted or teaching. Exod. 16. 20. |
| <i>Gabriel</i> , Gods reward. Act. 5. 34. | <i>Nimrod</i> , rebellious. Gen. 10. 8. |
| <i>Gazabar</i> , a treasurer. Ez. 1. 8. | <i>Obadiah</i> , seruauant of the Lord. 1 Chron. 3. 21. |
| <i>Gedeon</i> , a breaker or destroyer. Iudg. 6. 13. | <i>Omar</i> , speaking or exalting. Gen. 36. 11. |
| <i>Hanameel</i> , the mercie of God. Ier. 32. 7. | <i>Penuel</i> , seeing God. 1 Chro. 4. 4. |
| <i>Hiram</i> , the height of life. 2 Sam. 5. 11. | <i>Shamgar</i> , desolation of the stranger. Iudg. 3. 31. |
| <i>Ichabod</i> , where is glory? 1 Sam. 4. 21. | <i>Sheba</i> , a compasse. Gen. 10. 7. |
| | <i>Tubal-kain</i> , worldly possession. Gen. 4. 22. |

A few of the less well-known words from the table, I herewith list without their interpretations or references:

Bar-ionah, Caseluhim, Eliehoenai, Eutyclus, Keren-happuch, Lappidoth, Lysimachus, Meshelemiah, Mephibosheth, Sabteca, Shelomoh, Shephatiah, Tagarmah, Tanmumeth.

In addition to a "brief table" giving the primitive meaning of the Hebrew proper names and with the running title "The First Table" (5½ pp.), there is always a second alphabetical list, with the running title "The Second Table" (13 pp.). Though twice as long as the first table, the second is a short index to "principall things" in the Bible, giving Scriptural references but making no attempt to define proper names. Our concern here is with the prefatory address and the matter of the first table.

Although the exhortation to parents quoted above and the illustrative entries derive from a folio edition of the Geneva Bible, printed in England in 1576, there were before and after this date a great many other editions — folio, quarto, octavo — containing

the preface and the tables. After 1587 when Laurence Tomson's translation of the New Testament was annexed to the Geneva version of the Old Testament, the Geneva-Tomson text gained great popularity. It was generally printed in roman type and contained the shorter tables. There were 33 editions of the Geneva-Tomson in quarto from 1587 to 1615.⁴ The result was that the advice on choice of names and the list from which to choose were disseminated in thousands of copies of the Geneva Bible.

How far such advice supplemented by the word list and interpretations served to determine the choice of children's names, it is hardly possible to say with precision. From the baptismal records of parish registers and from other sources there is abundant evidence of the preference for Biblical names from 1560. Canon Bardsley writes that the rage for Bible names dates from the decade 1560–1570, a decade which marks the rise of Puritanism.⁵ Bardsley quotes four baptismal entries in the Canterbury Cathedral Register:

"1564, Dec. 3. *Abdias*, the sonne of Robert Pownoll.
 1567, April 26. *Barnabas*, the sonne of Robert Pownoll.
 1569, June 1. *Ezeckiel*, the sonne of Robert Pownoll.
 1572, Feb. 10. *Posthumus*, the sonne of Robert Pownoll."⁶

The author cites many other examples.

As late as 1652 William Jenkin, mentioned by Bardsley, writes, "Our baptismal names ought to be such as may prove remembrances of duty. . . . 'Tis good to impose such names as expresse our baptismal promise. A good name is as a thread tyed about the finger, to make us mindful of the errand we came into the world to do for our Master."⁷ This sentiment is similar to that in the Geneva preface, if not actually an echo of it.

It is a fair assumption that the exhortatory preface and the tables which appeared from 1560 on in so many of the Geneva Bibles had a far-reaching influence. Not to be confused with those I

⁴ Pocock, *op. cit.*, 167. See also *STC* under the entry *Bible – English*, # 2146, and numerous others specified as "Geneva-Tomson."

⁵ Canon Charles Wareing Bardsley, *Curiosities of Puritan Nomenclature*. A New Edition (London, 1897), 39.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 47.

have referred to above is a series of black-letter quarto editions, published at fairly regular intervals from 1580 to 1616. These Bibles have two alphabetical tables, with the running titles "The First Table" and "The Second Table," and with a "Preface to the Christian Reader." On the title page of the Bible proper in these quartos the tables are referred to as a *Concordance*. The sources, authorship, and the history of this concordance will require detailed discussion in another essay.

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