

The
Exegetical Labors
of the
Reverend Matthew Poole

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Edited by R. Andrew Myers

Volume 1: Genesis 1-9

2nd Edition

Containing:

- I. *A Synopsis of Interpreters, Both Critical and Otherwise, of the Sacred Scripture*
- II. *Annotations upon the Holy Bible*

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Preface to the *Annotations*: Genesis-Isaiah

Wherein the *Authors* of the ensuing *Annotations* (Supplemental to Mr. *Poole*)¹ present to the *Reader* an *Historical Account* of the *Translation* of the *Scriptures* into our *English Tongue*, the *mighty Workings* of *Divine Providence* conducive to it, and the several *Notes* or *Annotations* which have been published, and a particular *Account* of the *Reverend Mr. Poole's*, and Their present *Undertaking*, with the *Reasons* of it.

The same reason which teacheth us to conclude that there is a First Being, and must be a First Cause and Mover, (whom we call God,) “that it is he who hath made us, and not we ourselves,” and that “we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture,” will also oblige us “to enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise,” and to “be thankful unto him”² by fulfilling his will; which we cannot do without some revelation of it to us. God therefore having ceased to speak to men face to face, as to Abraham, and Moses, etc., (which he never ordinarily did but to some particular favourites,) we are by reason enforced to conclude that there are some books in the world in which this revelation is to be found. The church of God (the mother of us all) hath constantly held forth the books of the Old and New Testament (which we have in our Bibles) for this sacred revelation, which hath justly obliged all her children to look upon them as hung out to them for that use upon that noble pillar, the church,³ looking into them upon the church’s notice, (as the child does upon the mother’s telling it, That is the sun,) every reasonable man finds them of so venerable antiquity, and discerneth in them such stamps of divinity, in the majesty of their style, the purity of the matter, the sublimeness and spirituality of the propositions contained in them, the self-denial of the penmen, the heavenliness of the scope and end of those sacred writings, the harmony of the parts, the seal of miracles, and principally in the mighty power

¹ The authors and the portions contributed: John Jackson (Isaiah 59, 60 [according to Calamy]) (Isaiah 57, 58 [according to Thoresby and Sampson]); Dr. John Collingess (the remainder of Isaiah; Jeremiah; Lamentations; Gospels; 1 and 2 Corinthians; Galatians; 1 and 2 Timothy; Titus; Philemon; Revelation); Henry Hurst (Ezekiel; Minor Prophets); William Cooper (Daniel); Peter Vinke (Acts [according to Thoresby and Sampson]); Richard Mayo (Romans); Edward Veale (Acts [according to Calamy]; Ephesians; James; 1 and 2 Peter; Jude); Richard Adams (Philippians; Colossians); Matthew Barker (1 and 2 Thessalonians); Obadiah Hughes (Hebrews); John Howe (1, 2, and 3 John).

² Psalm 100:3, 4.

³ 1 Timothy 3:15.

and efficacy of them upon the souls and consciences of multitudes, both for conviction, and for support and consolation, that he easily concludes, This is the voice of God, and not of man; and looks back upon his mother the church, (as a child upon his nurse,) thanking her for showing him such a treasure, and saying, as the Samaritans to their countrywomen, John 4:42, Now we believe these books are the word of God, not because of thy saying so, but because we have looked upon them ourselves, and find them of a different style, nature and matter, to have a different scope, end, power and efficacy of them upon the souls of men, from what any other writings in the world have. Though the truth is, that until a man comes to be fully persuaded of the truth of them from the same Spirit that dictated them, every soul will be as apt to waver in his faith, concerning their being the word of God, as he in Tully,¹ who only believed in the immortality of the soul from the reading of Plato's book, which (if I remember right) the Roman orator expresseth in words to this sense: I have read over Plato's book again and again; but I know not how it comes to pass, so long as I am reading I agree with it; but no sooner is the book out of my hands but *de immortalitate animæ dubitare cœpi, I begin to doubt whether the soul be immortal*, yea or no. But, however, in one degree or other every Christian makes that the principle of his religion, that the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are the word of God. Some believe it more faintly and uncertainly, some more fixedly and firmly; and accordingly the faith of persons, as to them, is more or less operative.

This revelation of the Divine will was made perfect gradually, (as it pleased God in succeeding times to reveal what was his secret will before, but hid from ages,) so as (if chronologers compute right) there were more than fifteen hundred years passed betwixt the writing of the first book of Genesis by Moses, and the Revelation (which was the last) by John; and divines generally judge that he sealed up the book by those words, Revelation 22:18, 19. So that, as to things to be believed or done, we are to expect no further revelation.

When "the mighty God, even the Lord," had thus spoken, and God had thus "shined out of Zion, the perfection of beauty,"² it was but reasonable that his people should come to the knowledge of what he had said, that they might answer the end of the revelation both by believing and obeying.

The Old Testament being written in the Hebrew tongue, when great numbers of the Hebrews or Jews, by their captivity in Babylon, had much forgotten or corrupted their own language, it was thought reasonable there should be a Chaldaic paraphrase; and the wisdom of Divine Providence

¹ Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 BC) is considered to be the greatest of the Roman political rhetoricians. *Tusculanæ Quæstiones* 1:1.

² Psalm 50:1, 2.

provided a Septuagint version, as for the benefit of others, so possibly of the Jews themselves, the most of whom, before Christ's time, were more Grecians than Hebricians; and it is generally thought that all the books of the New Testament were written in the Grecian language.

When it pleased God that the gospel should be preached to all nations, and the sound of it go to the ends of the earth, he so ordered it also, that soon after true religion came into any place, some were stirred up to translate those holy books into the language of that country; and he so far assisted them, that though in many lesser things they failed through want of a knowledge of the just propriety of some words in Hebrew or Greek, or the use of particles in those languages, yet they fail not in anything whereby the reader might be led into any pernicious error touching his salvation. And we shall observe the penmen of the New Testament giving such a deference to the commonly received version in their times, that although the Septuagint version which we have appears to us more dissonant from the Hebrew than any other, yet most of the quotations of the Old Testament which we have in the New are apparently from that version; which teacheth us, that it is not every private minister's work to make a new version of the Scripture, but he ought to acquiesce in the version which God hath provided for the church wherein he lives, and not ordinarily, or upon light grounds, to enter into a dissent to it; and if in any thing he sees it necessary to do it, yet not to do it (as to a particular text) without great modesty, and a preface of reverence.

This translation of the Scriptures into a language understood by all people in that country into which the church came was looked upon as so reasonable and necessary, as it was opposed by none till the papists had patched up a religion, for the upholding of which it was necessary for them to maintain, that ignorance was the mother of devotion; after which it was very difficult in any places where these spiritual tyrants had a dominion to get the Scriptures translated into the language of that country. Not to instance in other places, we shall give some short account of England. Our records tell us of a translation of some part of them into the Saxon language (which was then a great part of ours) within seven hundred years after Christ, and of the translation of the whole into the same language by Beda¹ within forty years after. Beda was himself a papist, but the mystery of iniquity grew up gradually to its height. Soon after, Bibles which the people could understand were very scarce commodities in England, and thus it continued for six hundred years. Wickliff,² who lived in the time of Richard II., and died in AD 1384, being the

¹ The Venerable Bede (672-735) was one of the great Fathers of the Church in England. He lived the life of a monk and devoted himself wholly to his studies. He is most remembered for his *Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation*.

² John Wycliffe (c. 1320-1384) was an English theologian. Many of the central tenets

first we know of afterward who translated the Scriptures into a language understood by any who were not skilled in some or other of the three learned languages. That great man easily understood, that without the Scriptures in their own language the people must take all for the will of God that their priests told them was so, and that the popish priests were generally persons of ignorance, and impudence enough to entitle God to any of their own blasphemies and superstitions. But within thirty years after the death of Wickliff, viz. AD 1414, the council (or conventicle rather) of Constance¹ decreed all Wickliff's books to the fire; and though some were spared, yet the battle was so hard that there were very few that escaped. This was our state till the year AD 1527, (in all which year the poor people of the land of our nativity were without a teaching Bible, [as to the common people,] and indeed without a teaching priest,) yea, and for some time after this, as we shall hear.

In the year AD 1527 God put it into the heart of Mr. Tindall² to translate the New Testament into English; as also the five books of Moses (he being then an exile in Germany for his religion). But he lost all his papers by a shipwreck in his passage to Hamburg, and had his work to begin again; which yet that faithful and most unwearied servant of God did accomplish, adding some prefaces to the several books, and some notes to the particular chapters and verses; the publishing of which much nettled the popish bishops in England, and all means were then used to suppress it. Amongst others, the then bishop of London advised with one Packington a merchant of that city concerning the most accommodate mean to that design. The merchant could think of none so probable, as with a sum of money to buy up the whole impression. The bishop approving it, furnished him with a round sum for that purpose; which the merchant (being more a friend to Mr. Tindall than the bishop knew) sent to Mr. Tindall, and had the impression sent him (some few copies being [as we must imagine] first sold off). With this money Mr. Tindall supported himself in his exile, and was also enabled to go on with his translation of the other part of the Bible,³ and to prepare a perfect English Bible (Scultetus'⁴ *Annales* in anno 1532). In the meantime, a passage happened so pleasant, that I shall think

of the Reformation were anticipated in Wycliffe's thought.

¹ The Council of Constance was convened to address the papal schism and to continue reform within the Roman Church. However, it condemned the reforming efforts of John Wycliffe and John Huss, who was granted a safe passage to the council and then condemned to be burned at the stake in 1415.

² William Tyndale (c. 1494-1536).

³ See John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* 12.

⁴ Abraham Scultetus (1566-1624) was a German, Calvinist historian, whose *Annals of the Renewal of the Gospel throughout Europe* provides an account of the first twenty years of the Reformation. Scultetus was also a professor at the University of Heidelberg and a delegate to the Synod of Dordt.

it worth the while here to relate it: Sir Thomas More¹ being lord chancellor, and having several persons accused for heresy, and ready for execution, offered to compound with one of them for his life (George Constantine), upon the easy terms of his discovery to him who they were in London that maintained Tindall beyond sea. After that the poor man had got as good a security for his life as the honour and truth of the chancellor could give him, he told him it was the bishop of London maintained him, by sending him a sum of money to buy up the impression of his Testaments. The chancellor smiled, saying that he believed he said true. Thus was the poor confessor's life saved.² But to return to our story. In the year 1536 Mr. Tindall was martyred at Villefort in Flanders, for translating into English the New Testament and part of the Old (saith Sir Richard Baker, *Chronicle* 282³). But his great adversary, Sir Thomas More, was the year before gone to his own place, being executed for treason. Mr. Tindall and Mr. Coverdale,⁴ (as Mr. Fox telleth us,) before Mr. Tindall's death, had translated the whole Bible. But it came not out till after his death, under the name of Thomas Matthews (with the addition of the Apocrypha, translated by John Rogers⁵). The Lord Cromwell,⁶ with Archbishop Cranmer,⁷ presented it to the king, and obtained an order from his majesty for leave for any of his subjects to read it; but this was not without the great regret of the bishops.

About thirteen years after this (or not so much) the Lord Cromwell obtained letters from King Henry VIII for a subject of his to reprint at Paris the Bible in English; the king also wrote a letter to Bonner⁸ (at that time his

¹ Sir Thomas More (1480-1535).

² See Foxe, *ibid*.

³ Sir Richard Baker (1568-1645) was learned in matters of religion and history. His *Chronicle of the Kings of England, from the Time of the Romans' Government unto the Death of King James* is here cited.

⁴ Miles Coverdale (1487-1568) began his career as an Augustinian monk, but he embraced the Reformation. His work as a translator was his most important contribution to the English Reformation.

⁵ John Rogers (c. 1500-1555) was a minister and a Bible translator. Tyndale persuaded him to leave the Roman Church. He was the first to be martyred under Mary's persecution.

⁶ Lord Thomas Cromwell (c. 1485-1540) was an English statesman, instrumental in Henry VIII's break with Rome. Eventually, he fell out of favor with Henry and was executed.

⁷ Thomas Cranmer (1489-1555) contributed significantly to the theological defense of Henry VIII's divorce from Catherine of Aragon. Consequently, he was soon made Archbishop of Canterbury. He vigorously promoted the Reformation until his martyrdom under Queen Mary.

⁸ Edmund Bonner (c. 1500-1569) was Bishop of London. He was given the moniker, "Bloody Bonner," for his persecution of Protestants under Queen Mary. He died in prison under Queen Elizabeth.

ambassador in France) to further it. Grafton and Whitchurch¹ undertook the work, upon what seeming encouragement from Bonner may be read in Mr. Fox's 2nd volume of his Martyrology, 1641 edition, 515-516. But how it came to pass I cannot tell, (though Bonner's treachery was suspected in the case,) when it was upon the point finished, the copies were seized, and ordered to be burnt, and the work had wholly ceased but for the covetousness of the officer, who sold four great dry fats filled with them to a haberdasher to lay caps in. By this means having recovered some copies, they came to London, and there made a new impression.

But after this, my Lord Cromwell being put to death, the bishops and popish party made so great complaint to the king, (whose warmth for the Reformation much abated in the latter part of his life,) that the sale of the English Bible was again prohibited, and the printer imprisoned; and although the bishops promised the king they would make a more correct translation, yet it was never done during that king's reign.

But in AD 1577, which was the nineteenth or twentieth of the reign of Queen Elizabeth, some bishops published a new translation; but till that time the Bibles used in churches were Tindall's and Coverdale's, being allowed by the public authority of King Edward VI, AD 1549-1552. And to this day the Psalms in our Service Book are according to Tindall's and Coverdale's Bibles; which should make us wary in our censures of that translation, though we see reason in many things to dissent from it. Only we having a more correct translation established by authority, why (for the avoiding the offence of the less knowing people) we have not made use of that, but retained a translation not undertaken by any public authority, and confessed to be more imperfect, is what I cannot, nor count myself obliged to account for. Possibly God for the honour of his martyr hath so ordered it.

After this, King James coming to the crown, being a prince of great learning and judgment, and observing the different usage of some words in his age from the usage of them in King Henry VIII or in Queen Elizabeth's time, and also the several mistakes (though of a minute nature) in those more ancient versions, was pleased to employ divers learned men in making a new translation, which is that which at this day is generally used. With what reverence to former translators, what labor, and care, and pains they accomplished their work, the reader may see at large in their preface prefixed to those copies that are printed in folio, and in their epistle to King James in our Bibles of a lesser form; of which translation (though it may not be without its more minute errors) yet I think it may be said that it is hardly exceeded by

¹ Richard Grafton (c. 1513-1572) and Edward Whitchurch (c. 1520-1580) were English printers; they produced the 1537 Matthew's Bible and the Great Bible, as well as the Book of Common Prayer.

that of any other church.

By this history (reader) thou mayst understand the mighty workings of Divine Providence, and wonderful goodness of God to this nation in the plenty we have of Bibles, and that of a very correct translation (though possibly not in every little thing perfect). Mr. Fox (if we remember right) tells us a story of two maids in Lincolnshire, that in Queen Mary's time parted with a considerable part of their estate for a few leaves of the Bible. How good is God to us, that we for a few shillings can have the whole revelation of the Divine will! upon which account we offer it to the consideration of any thinking English man or woman, what he or she will answer for his or her ignorance in the Holy Scriptures, or for the ignorance of his or her children, if (having so much means as we have to learn to read) and shall neglect the teaching of their children to read it, or learning themselves, in case their parents have neglected them; or, being able to read, shall neglect the practice of it, in exercising himself in the law of the Lord day and night, and living up to the rule of it. The English Bible is come to us at the price of the blood of one martyr, and the unwearied labour of a multitude of holy and learned men, succeeding one another for more than sixty years, before we had the translation so perfect as now it is in all hands.

Poor Christians in popish countries either have not this pot of spiritual food, or must cry out, "Death is in the pot."¹ Our English translators in their preface observe, that of late the church of Rome would seem to bear something of a motherly affection to her children, and allow them the Scriptures in the mother tongue, but it is indeed a gift not worthy of its name. They must first get a licence in writing before they use them, and, to get that, they must approve themselves to their confessors to be such as are, if not frozen in dregs, yet soured with the leaven, of their superstition. Yet this seemed too much to Clement the Eighth,² who therefore frustrated the grant of Pius the Fourth.³ They will allow none to be read but the Doway Bibles, and the Rhemish Testaments,⁴ (the corruptions of which have been sufficiently manifested by

¹ 2 Kings 4:40.

² Pope Clement VIII (1536-1605), under whose authority the Clementine Vulgate was published (1592) and declared to be the only authorized edition of the Bible (replacing the Sistine Vulgate), withdrew the right of bishops to grant licenses to the laity to read the Bible in the vernacular (1596), granted by Pope Pius IV (1564), limiting that power to the Papacy and Inquisition.

³ Pope Pius IV (1499-1565) reconvened the Council of Trent, confirmed its decrees, and promulgated the Tridentine Creed, Tridentine Index, and accompanying rules concerning prohibited books (1564), which conferred authority to the bishops to grant licenses to approved laity to read the Bible in the vernacular.

⁴ The Douay Old Testament (1609) and the Rheims New Testament (1587) constitute the Douay-Rheims Bible. It is a Roman Catholic English Version of the Latin Vulgate.

many learned men,) nor will they trust their people with these without the licence of their own bishops and inquisitors. This is the liberty they boast of giving to any of their religion to read the Scriptures in English; what it is worth let any man judge.

In the mean time, those who are not affected with the mercy of God to us in this particular, must declare themselves neither to have any just value for God in the mighty workings of his providence to bring this about; nor yet for the blood of holy Mr. Tindall, who died in his testimony to this truth, that no people ought to be deprived of so great a good; nor for the labours and pains of those many servants of God who travailed in this great work, and thought no labour in it too much; nor indeed for their own souls, to the salvation of which, if the Holy Scriptures in our language doth not highly contribute, we must lay the blame upon ourselves.

But although we have the Bible in a language we understand, yet we may see reason to cry out as Bernard¹ does with reference to the Song of Solomon, Here is an excellent nut, but who shall crack it? heavenly bread, but who shall break it?² For though the papists and such as have ill will to the good of souls make too great an improvement of the difficulties in holy writ, in making them an argument against the people's having them in a language which they can understand; (for Augustine said true when he said, There are fords in them wherein lambs may wade, as well as depths in which elephants may swim;) and what others observe is as true, that things necessary to be believed or done in order to salvation, lie plain and obvious in holy writ: yet it is as true, that there is much of holy writ of which the generality of people must say as the eunuch, "How can I understand, except some man should guide me!" Acts 8:31; (not to mention the seeming contradictions that are betwixt the holy penmen of those sacred books;) and indeed it is hard to say what book of Scripture is so plain that every one who runneth can read it with understanding³ (such a vast difference there is betwixt the capacities of those who yet have the same honest hearts). This hath made wise and learned men not only see a need of larger commentaries, but also of shorter notes, annotations, and paraphrases, etc. Nor is this a late discovery. It is upward of three hundred years since Lyra wrote his short notes upon the whole Bible. What Vatablus and Erasmus⁴ (though all of them papists) have done since is

¹ Bernard of Clairvaux (1091-1157) was a Cistercian monk and abbot, whose learning and austere piety made him very influential in his day. He wrote a commentary on the Song of Solomon.

² Sermon 1, "On the Title of the Song of Songs": *But who shall break it to us? Lo! we have here the Father of the family Himself, as it is written, you shall know the Lord in the breaking of bread. Who else but He is capable?*

³ See Habakkuk 2:2.

⁴ Desiderius Erasmus (1467-1536) was a Dutch humanist, a classical scholar, and a