

The
Exegetical Labors
of the
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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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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

sufficiently known, to say nothing of many others of that religion. Amongst the Reformed churches, there hath been a learned Piscator in Germany, Junius and Tremellius elsewhere, who did the same things; but all these wrote their notes in Latin, not in the peculiar language of any country. The ancientest notes we have in English were those ordinarily known by the name of the Geneva Notes, after two years labour finished 1560, by those good men who, flying from Queen Mary's persecution, took sanctuary there. A work so acceptable to protestants in the beginning of our Reformation, that their Bible with those Notes annexed was (as is observed by the authors of our Late English Annotations¹) printed above thirty times over by Queen Elizabeth's printers and their heirs and successors. There wanted not one indeed who fifty years after boldly reflected on that excellent work in the most public pulpit of our University of Oxford; but how grateful his reflections were to the University at that time may be read in the preface to the English Annotations: he was in the same pulpit checked and confuted by the doctor of the chair, and suspended by the governors of the University.² The labours of Erasmus in his Paraphrase on the New Testament were so acceptable, that by public order they were to be in every church exposed to public view and use, and (if we mistake not) ought to be so still. After these, were published Diodate's Notes written in Italian, since translated into English.³ About the year 1640 some deliberations were taken

Roman Catholic theologian. Although he never left the Roman Church, he sought the reformation of its corruptions, and he contributed greatly to the Reformation through the production of his various editions of the Greek New Testament. He was certainly one of the greatest and most influential scholars of his time.

¹ The English Annotations were the product of some notable members of the Westminster Assembly, but, although they are often referred to as the "Westminster Annotations," they were not in fact an official production of that Assembly. The English Annotations are more accurately described as a production commissioned by Parliament which included the work of some members of that august Assembly. The contributors include: The Pentateuch by John Ley (with Bishops Richardson and Ussher, and Thomas Gataker contributing to the Genesis portion in the second edition); 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, and Job by William Gouge; Psalms by Meric Casaubon; Proverbs by Francis Taylor; Ecclesiastes by Edward Reynolds; Song of Solomon by Mr. Smallwood; Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Lamentations by Thomas Gataker; Ezekiel, Daniel, and the Minor Prophets by Mr. Pemberton (revised in the second edition by Bishop Richardson); the Gospels by John Ley; and Daniel Fealty commented on the Pauline Epistles. The remaining books are thought to have been completed by John Downham and John Reading, and the overall production was supervised by John Downham.

² This incident occurred in 1612. Dr. Robert Abbott protested that the Geneva Notes were "guiltie of mis-interpretation, touching the Divinitie of *Christ* and his Messiahship, and as Symbolizing with *Arrians* and *Jews*," a charge which was refuted by Sir Thomas Bodley, founder of the Bodleian Library.

³ The *Annotationes in Biblia* were published by Giovanni Diodati (1576-1649), a Swiss Protestant and delegate to the Synod of Dordt. He published his annotations in

for the composing and printing other English notes (the old Geneva Notes not so well fitting our new and more correct translation of the Bible). These were at first intended to be so short, that they might be printed together with our Bibles in folio or quarto. But those divines who were engaged in it found this would not answer their end; it being not possible by so short notes to give people any tolerable light into the whole text; yet we cannot say it gave so general a satisfaction (by reason of the shortness of it) as was desired and expected. So as upon the second edition it came forth quite a new thing, making two just volumes. This was so acceptable to the world, that within sixteen years it was ready for a third edition, with some further enlargements; before which also were published the Dutch Annotations translated into our language.¹

So that at this day (besides the shorter Geneva Notes) we have three sorts of annotations in our own language; those of famous Diodate, the Dutch Annotations, and those of our own divines (originally so wrote). After which, new annotations may seem superfluous. It seems therefore reasonable that we should give our readers some short account of our undertaking. We dare say nothing could be farther from the thoughts of our reverend brother (now at rest with God) who at first began this work, than to reflect any dishonour upon those eminent persons who laboured before in works of this nature, nor is any thing further from our thoughts. (They all of them did famously in their generations.) And if it should appear to any of our readers that any of us have seen further into any particular texts than those did who went before us, yet we hope all our readers will understand there is little honour due to us upon that account, because we had all their shoulders to stand upon.

The pains which our reverend brother (ὁ μακαρίτης, *the blessed dead*) took in his *Synopsis Criticorum* is such, as not only will make his name live in the churches of Christ, but also eminently fitted him for giving the sense of the whole Scripture in Annotations of this nature, which he undertook and carried on by his own hand to Isaiah 58, designing that two volumes should comprehend the whole, and that the first should determine with his notes upon the Song of Solomon. What occasioned his first thoughts and undertaking himself tells us in his paper of proposals published with reference to that work, in these words: “But although there are many excellent comments upon divers parts of the Scripture, and some entire comments, or large annotations, upon the whole, in the English tongue; yet because of the too much brevity of some, and the unequal composure of others, as being done by divers hands, and the

Italian in 1607, and they were translated into English in 1648.

¹ The Synod of Dordt commissioned a translation of the Bible, with annotations, into Dutch, all which was translated into English and published by Theodore Haack in 1657.

prolixity of those that have been written upon particular books, it hath been often and earnestly wished that there were some short and full comment, wherein all those passages which need the help of an interpreter might be sufficiently cleared," etc. As the first edition of our English Annotations, after which followed the translation of those of the learned Diodate into our language, and then those of the Low Country divines of Holland, (though all of them deservedly valuable,) seemed much too short to satisfy the thirst of many pious souls after the fuller knowledge of the Scriptures; so the larger edition of our English Annotations seems capable of some amendments, by which they might be made more serviceable to those that use them, especially in these particulars.

1. The whole text is not printed in them, so as those who will use them must make use of a Bible also for the understanding of them. Our reverend brother (with whom also we concur) rightly judged that it would be of more advantage to have the entire text in the reader's eye while he is seeking the sense of any particular place, and while he reads a chapter to have a commentary under his eyes in which he might find the sense of any part of it, and satisfy himself as to any difficulty occurring in it.

2. As some (very eminently learned men) had been too large in those Annotations, (saying almost all that hath been said by any upon the texts they handled,) so others had been as much too short, and that especially in the New Testament (which seems to Christians to need the fullest explication); and others, from their variety of learning, had mixed several quotations out of the fathers, and critical and philological notions, possibly not so proper for the end for which such annotations are designed, which is to give the unlearned Christians the true sense of the Holy Scriptures, that those who can, might read and understand the will of God.

That our reader may not mistake our design or undertaking, we desire that he should know, that we do not pretend (as some have vainly fancied) to translate Mr. Pool's *Synopsis Criticorum*; that would have asked six volumes instead of two; and when it had been done, would have signified very little, unless for those who (being learned men) needed no such translation:¹ possibly in a whole leaf of that book six lines would not serve our purpose. Nor have we had any ambition either to say something that none had said before us, (we have observed that those who have had such an itch have for the most part happened to say what those who came after them would not subscribe,) nor yet to say all that we knew was said before us; (that had been to have confounded our readers only with a variety of senses;) we have only hinted the senses which

¹ Whereas Latin is no longer a part of regular ministerial training, and whereas the *Synopsis* is full of profitable matter for the motivated layman, a translation is warranted.

in our judgment have seemed fairest, and least constrained, and shortly showed the consonancy of them to other scriptures. We have avoided all polemical discourses, as no way proper to our design, and very rarely hinted those practical conclusions which have arose from the text when opened (the most we have done of that nature is in our discourses upon the parables).

Our reverend brother (designing but two volumes, and the first to end with the Song of Solomon, though since it hath been determined to conclude it with the prophet Isaiah, that all which he lived to finish might be comprehended in one volume) had a hard task to contract his discourses so as to bring them within that compass, and thereby was necessitated not to give the entire sense of each verse in his notes, but only of those words or terms in the verse which he conceived to stand in need of explication, referring by letters in the text to the parts of the commentary. This was not necessary in such parts of the Scripture where the entire sense of the whole text is given; nor indeed as to some parts is it possible (such we mean as are opened harmonically); of which nature are the three first evangelists. It is confessed by all, that the evangelists make up but one entire history, though some of them have some things which the others have not, and they seldom agree in the phrases and circumstances of any one piece of history. This made it reasonable that, with the interpretation of one evangelist, should be joined what the others had with reference to the same piece of history; which method hath been accordingly pursued (being the same in which the most judicious Mr. Calvin and others have gone before us); nor indeed could any other course have been taken without a needless writing the same things over and over again; so as that in our notes upon Mark we have only enlarged in the explication of what he hath which we did not meet with before in Matthew; and in the explication of Luke, we have only opened what he hath which was not in Matthew or Mark. Where they all three concurred, or but two of them concurred, in any story, we have opened what they all or both say in our notes upon the first of them; and when we have come to it again in one or both the other, we have only referred to our former notes. John (having little which the other evangelists have) we have considered by himself mostly, yet sometimes taking in something from him, where we found it complectory of any thing related by the other evangelists.

In magnis voluisse sat est, it is enough to have willed in great things.

We cannot say that we have left no room for others to come after us, and add to or correct what we have said. But this we can say in truth, that we have not willingly balked any obvious difficulty, and have designed a just satisfaction to all our readers; and if any knot remain yet untied, we have told our readers what hath been most probably said for their satisfaction in the untying of it.

If it had pleased God to have lent a little longer life to our reverend brother, the work had very probably been done to greater advantage, and more

general satisfaction. We are but entered upon his harvest, and have wanted his sickle; we cannot pretend to any double portion of his spirit. His mantle dropped from him before he was translated (we mean his *Synopsis*). We have taken that up; out of that great work of his we have taken so much as we judged proper for his design in this work, and made use of great number of other authors, some of which he left out, or very little considered, in his *Synopsis*, upon design to make a further use of them in this English work, as thinking their labours more proper for this than his other work.

Our design, good reader, was not to tell thee how the fathers interpreted texts, (Aquinas,¹ Justinianus,² and others have done that work,) nor yet to tell thee any grammatical niceties, or what learned men have critically noted upon terms or phrases, (that is done in the *Synopsis Criticorum*,) nor yet to tell thee what conclusions of truth may be raised from the verses, (that hath been done profitably upon many books of Scripture by Mr. Dickson,³ Hutchinson,⁴ Fergusson,⁵ Guild,⁶ Durham,⁷ and some others,) much less to handle the controversies that have risen from any portion of Scripture. Our work hath been only to give thee the plain sense of the Scripture, and to reconcile seeming contradictions where they occurred, and as

¹ Thomas Aquinas (c. 1224-1274) was perhaps the greatest of the mediæval scholastic theologians. He wrote on much of the Bible, gathering together the comments, observations, and interpretations of the Fathers.

² This is likely Agostino Guistiniani (1470-1536), a learned Dominican and Bishop of Nebbio. He was the first to occupy a chair of Hebrew and Arabic at the University of Paris, and he devoted himself to the production of a Polyglot Bible. Guistiniani perished at sea in 1536, and only the Psalter portion of his polyglot was published; it included the Hebrew text, the Septuagint translation, the Chaldean paraphrase, an Arabic version, the Vulgate translation, a new Latin translation, a Latin translation of the Chaldean, and a collection of Patristic scholia.

³ David Dickson (1583-1662) was a Scottish Presbyterian divine. Dickson served his church as a minister and Professor of Divinity at Glasgow and at Edinburgh. He was ejected in 1662, after the Restoration, and he died later that same year. He co-authored the *Sum of Saving Knowledge*, and he wrote commentaries on the Psalms, the Gospel of Matthew, and the Epistles of Paul, including Hebrews.

⁴ George Hutcheson (1618-1674) was a Scottish Presbyterian divine, who wrote commentaries on the Minor Prophets, Job, and the Gospel of John.

⁵ James Fergusson (1621-1667) was a Scottish Presbyterian divine, who wrote commentaries on Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians.

⁶ William Guild (1586-1657) was a Scottish minister and theologian. He served as Principal of King's College (1640), but, having allied himself with the Royalists during the Civil War, he was deposed in 1651. He wrote commentaries on the Song of Songs and Revelation.

⁷ James Durham (1622-1658) was a Scottish Presbyterian divine. He served as a minister and Professor of Divinity at Glasgow. He co-authored the *Sum of Saving Knowledge* and authored learned commentaries on the Song of Solomon and Revelation.

far as we were able to open scripture by scripture, which is its own best interpreter, comparing things spiritual with spiritual, “that thy faith might not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the wisdom and power of God.”¹ If we have reached this end, it is all we aimed at; if thou gettest any good by what we have done, remember thy sacrifice is due at another altar, even His who “ministereth seed to the sower,”² who both watereth the furrows of the field, and blesseth the springing of the corn; let Him have the praise, and we only thy prayers, that we may live a useful life, and die a happy death, and “attain to the resurrection of the dead,”³ in which we shall all see and understand more perfectly than we yet do.

¹ 1 Corinthians 2:5.

² 2 Corinthians 9:10.

³ Philippians 3:11.