

A Brief Historical Account of the Spanish Bible

Part 1: The Events Leading Up To the 1602 Valera

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In order to appreciate the importance of the issues involved, an understanding of the history behind the traditional Spanish Bible text is paramount. In these next 2 chapters, we will briefly discuss the process by which the Reina Valera Bible came about. There were many portions of the Bible that were translated into Castilian, the purest form of Spanish, before Cassiodoro de Reina first began his translation of the scriptures into Spanish. But in this chapter we will only discuss the major contributing factors as they relate to the making of the Reina Valera Bible.

You should notice that the history behind the Spanish RV is similar to the English KJV in regards to the underlying texts. An understanding of the history behind the RV should also bring the Bible-believer to the conclusion that the RV is the standard Spanish Bible text that God has placed his stamp of approval upon. Therefore, it should never be replaced. Revision is one thing, but replacement is another.

The Ferrara Bible

The first translation of the entire Hebrew Old Testament into Spanish was done in 1553 by two Spanish-speaking Jews named Duarte Pinel (aka Abraham Ben Salomon Usque) and Geronimo de Vargas (aka Yom Tob Levi Atias). After dedicating their translation to Ercole II d'Este, the Duke of Ferrara, it became known as the Ferrara Bible. It was printed by a Jewish press in Ferrara for circulation amongst the Spanish-speaking Jews that lived in Spain. This Spanish OT was an extremely literal word-for-word translation of the Hebrew Masoretic text (which is also the underlying basis for the OT in the KJV). The books of the OT were arranged according to the traditional Hebrew canon. Concerning the highly literal style of this translation it is stated in the Cambridge History of the Bible (pg 127):

“The translation was made word-for-word from the Hebrew, and its syntax is therefore peculiar. The abundant archaisms and ‘intolerable Hebraisms’- the consequence of its compilation, perhaps, from manuscripts used for instructional purposes in medieval Spanish synagogues - add to the bizarre character. Nevertheless, it sometimes has (as the preface states) ‘the gravity that antiquity often has’. This frankly Jewish Bible gave immense help to later translators of the Old Testament, Catholic and Protestant alike. For it was used both by Reyna in the sixteenth century and by Father Scio de San Miguel in the eighteenth... There are many later editions of the Ferrara Bible, mostly published for the Jews at Amsterdam.”

The Work of Francisco de Enzinas

Francisco de Enzinas (1520-1553) was born in a wealthy family. His parents sent him and his two brothers, Jayme and Juan, to Louvain University in Belgium. It was there that all three brothers were saved and rejected Roman Catholicism. The Spanish Inquisition was in full swing in those days and it wasn't long before the Inquisitors captured Juan and burned him at the stake.

That the Protestant Reformation had much influence upon Francisco de Enzinas is evident by his friendship with Philip Melancthon, the famed assistant of Martin Luther. Enzinas lived with Melancthon in Wittenburg for a while. He eventually mastered the Greek language. And at the suggestion of Melancthon, it wasn't long before he put his knowledge of the Greek language to work by translating the NT into Spanish using the Greek text of Desiderius Erasmus. It was printed in Antwerp in 1543 with the title *"El Nuevo Testamento, o sea, el Nuevo Pacto de Nuestro Único Redentor y Salvador Jesucristo, traducido del Griego al Castellano"* which is interpreted into English as *"The New Testament, that is, the New Covenant of our Only Redeemer and Saviour Jesus Christ, translated from the Greek to the Castillian language."*

It should be noted that by this time Erasmus' Greek text had already served as the basis for Luther's German translation as well as William Tyndale's English one. There was a famous saying amongst Protestants which stated that *"Erasmus laid the egg that Luther hatched"*. Thus, Erasmus' Greek text spearheaded a movement of Bible translating that characterized the Protestant Reformation in a time when the common man began looking more towards the scriptures themselves for truth rather than the Roman Catholic church. It was this demand all over Europe for access to the scriptures that fueled the Protestant Reformation. And while it is true that Erasmus was a Catholic who never left Rome, God greatly used the influence of this man through his outspokenness against the corruptions of the Catholic church as well as his writings to stir much dissent from the Papal institution. But it was Erasmus' Greek NT that really lit the fuse of Protestantism on fire. For the word of God is quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword. Erasmus' Greek text became the first in a pure line of revisions of the Greek NT that we now know as the Textus Receptus.

Francisco de Enzinas had an opportunity on Nov. 24th, 1543 to present his Spanish NT to the Emperor Charles V in Brussels hoping to receive approval for distribution. Charles V appeared to be somewhat open-minded to Enzinas' work and even offered his endorsement of it if upon examination his NT was found to be acceptable. The Emperor gave a copy to his confessor Pedro de Soto for examination. But after no short period of time, Pedro de Soto reported back with a stern rebuke rather than approval. The emperor's confessor labeled Enzinas an enemy of religion and a traitor to his country. As a result, Enzinas was imprisoned by the Catholic inquisitors with the charge of heresy.

The “heresy” that Enzinas was accused of involved the words “New Covenant” in the title of his NT as such terminology was labeled by the Catholics as “Lutheranism”. The words “Only Redeemer and Saviour” also infuriated the Catholic church because of its exclusion of the Pope. But the straw that broke the camel’s back were the passages that Enzinas had capitalized in bold letters which dealt with the doctrine of justification by faith such as Rom. 3:22 & 28.

While in prison, Francisco was visited by his family only to be condemned as one who brought a reproach upon their name. Enzinas was incarcerated for fifteen months. He was able to escape, however, before the Inquisitors could kill him and he fled to Antwerp. He eventually moved to England where he served as a Greek instructor at Cambridge. In 1553, Enzinas died of the plague in Strasbourg.

The Opposition of the Catholic Church

Because of the influence of Francisco de Enzinas and other Protestant Reformers who were on a mission to get the word of God into the respective languages of the common people, the Roman Catholic Church printed their first Index of the Spanish Inquisition in Toledo, Spain in 1551.

In the Index, it was declared illegal for anyone to translate the scriptures without the approval of the Catholic church. They prohibited the:

“...Bible in Castilian romance or in any other vulgar tongue’, the Spanish New testament of Francisco de Enzinas and those ‘Old and New testaments, Gospels, Epistles and Prophecies and any other books of Holy Scripture in Castilian romance, French or Flemish or any other tongue which have prefaces, notes or glosses that reveal erroneous doctrines repugnant or contrary to our holy Catholic faith or to the sacraments of Holy Mother Church.”

In 1559, another Index was issued which also prohibited:

“The Bible in our vernacular or in any other, wholly or in part, unless it be in Hebrew, Chaldean, Greek or Latin...And because there are some pieces of Gospels and Epistles of St Paul and other parts of the New Testament in the Castilian vernacular both printed and in manuscript from which certain objectionable consequences have followed, we order such books and treatises to be shown and handed over to the Holy Office, whether or not they bear their authors’ names, until the Council of the Holy General Inquisition shall determine otherwise.”

Non-conformity to the Index of the Roman Catholic church rendered severe consequences. But God’s soldiers marched on, getting the word to the common people, choosing to fear and obey God rather than man.

The Work of Juan de Pineda

Another man burdened with the desire to get the word of God to his people was Juan Perez de Pineda (1490-1567). He was educated in Seville, Spain where he received a Doctorate in Divinity and became the headmaster of the Colegio de los Niños de la Doctrina. Like Enzinas, he was greatly influenced with Protestant thought having been a member of a small Protestant church in Seville.

After fleeing from Inquisitors of Spain, he eventually became a member of a panel of Pastors that worked with the famous John Calvin in Geneva. From 1556-1560 he published many works that promoted Protestant ideas and doctrine to be smuggled into Spain.

Perez is responsible for translating the second complete New Testament by a Protestant. For his work he used Erasmus' Greek text as the basis and relied heavily upon the NT of Enzinas. Juan Perez's NT was published in Geneva in 1556. He also had the book of Psalms published in 1557.

In 1556, John Calvin took a team of delegates with him to help settle a dispute over the observance of Holy Communion in a church in Frankfurt. Juan Perez was one of Calvin's delegates. After the controversy was dealt with, Calvin and his delegates returned to Geneva but Juan decided to remain there in Frankfurt. He dwelled in Frankfurt until June of 1558. While there, he started a fund with plans of eventually publishing the entire Bible in Spanish. This fund later aided the translator, Cassiodoro de Reina.

The Catholic Inquisitors never were able to capture Juan Perez de Pineda so they had to settle for burning a sculptured image of him in Seville in 1560. Perez died in Paris of a disease in 1567. He left behind all of his fortune for the printing of the Spanish Bible, no doubt laying up for himself treasure in heaven.

The Monastery in Seville, Spain

While Europe was being turned upside down through the preaching of the Protestant Reformers, God did a great work amongst 12 monks and other members of a monastery located in Santiponce near Seville, Spain. This monastery was known as San Isidro del Campo. The Superior of this monastery was Dr. Blanco Garcia Arias.

Dr. Blanco was greatly influenced by the preaching of the Waldenses and their Old Latin Bible. The Old Latin Bibles of the Waldenses were very pure versions of God's words with a trail that can be traced back to the Apostolic age. These Old Latin Bibles also serve as some of the greatest evidences for the authenticity of the Johannine Comma (I Jn. 5:7).

Thanks to the courageous exploits of another Protestant, Julian Hernandez, copies of both Enzinas' and Juan Perez's New Testaments as well as many literatures promoting Protestant teachings were smuggled into this Monastery in casks of wine. These works had a great effect on the monks in that Monastery, most especially the man Cassiodoro de Reina. Unfortunately, Julian the Bible smuggler was betrayed by a "friend" and imprisoned for his "crime". He was brutally tortured by the Catholic Inquisitors for 3 years. But after 3 years of remaining firm in the faith despite the torture in prison, refusing to denounce his convictions, Julian was burned alive at the stake. The Spanish world owes its gratitude to such heroes of the faith such as Julian Hernandez who though he was physically a man of small stature, thus his nickname as Julian the Little, he had the spirit of a warrior and the heart of a lion.

The Catholic church confiscated and burned the works that Julian Fernandez possessed. But it was too late. The scriptures and Protestant literature, as well as the teaching of Dr. Blanco Garcia Arias, had already taken its toll upon another monk in the monastery in Seville, the great Cassiodoro de Reina. A fire in his soul for the translating of the entire Bible into Spanish was already lit.

The Work of Cassiodoro de Reina

Cassiodoro de Reina (1520-1594) was probably the most influential of all the monks at the monastery in Seville during the revival that took place there. He was a native of Seville, Spain. Like all other Protestants that took a stand against the Catholic church, he also became a target of the wrath of the murderous Inquisitors. Evidently, Reina fled Spain never to return. 21 other monks were not so fortunate, however, and were burned at the stake in 1559.

That same year Reina took on the Pastorate of a group of Protestants in London who had also fled Spain. But again, the Catholic church pursued him as they brought their crusade of persecution to England. So he had to flee London.

He then moved to Geneva and there joined himself to a Spanish congregation of which the Pastor was Juan Perez de Pineda. Perez was still in Frankfurt during Reina's arrival to Geneva. It wasn't long before the Spaniards in Geneva began looking to Reina for leadership during Juan Perez's absence. So influential was Cassiodoro de Reina amongst these Spanish Protestants that he became known as the "The Moses of the Spaniards."

However, Reina did not approve of the Nicolaitan leadership of John Calvin in Geneva. Reina reproved Calvin and the leadership in Geneva for burning Servetus at the stake. He referred to Geneva as "a new Rome". Eventually, Reina and several other fellow-monks who had also served at San Isidoro left Geneva and moved to Frankfurt.

Concerning this period in Reina's life, in an article entitled The Reina-Valera Bible: From Dream to Reality by Jorge A. Gonzalez, the author offers some interesting speculation:

"It is not certain whether Reina and Perez met at this time in Frankfurt or in Geneva. It is most probable, however, that the two discussed some time during this period the possibility of publishing the Bible in Spanish, for it is from this time that Reina dates the beginning of his work on the Scriptures, as can be seen from the preface of his "Bear Bible" and from the autograph dedicatory of the copy which he donated to the University of Basel."

Reina originally only planned on translating the OT relying heavily upon the Ferrara Bible that was circulating amongst the Jews in Spain. His plan was to simply use the NT of Juan de Pineda. But on April 6, 1568, Phillip II ordered his ambassador in France to burn Juan de Pineda's NT. So Reina was forced to translate his own NT leaning much upon Enzinas' text. He did, however, receive the funds that Juan raised for the publishing of the Spanish Bible.

During Reina's work of translating the scriptures he was constantly pursued by the Catholic Inquisitors. He was labeled a heretic, a criminal, and even accused of being a Sodomite by the Catholic church and a price was placed upon his head. Reina was constantly on the move fleeing from town to town such as Antwerp, Frankfurt, Orleans, Bergerac, and others. But as a good soldier of Jesus Christ he endured such hardships and remain focused on his mission to translate the entire Bible into Spanish.

Finally, he settled down in Basle, Switzerland where he completed the first Protestant version of the entire Bible in Spanish in 1569. It is hailed by historians as "the greatest literary triumph in Spanish history." It was labeled by the Roman Catholic church as "a most dangerous edition of the Bible". But Satan and his cohorts of Rome could not stop the word of God.

Reina's Bible was known as The Bear Bible or La Biblia del Oso. For on the title page was a picture of a bear retrieving honey from a tree.

After completing his translation of the Bible, Cassiodoro de Reina pastured a Spanish church in Antwerp for the next 16 years. He died in 1594. But there was yet more work to be done.

The Work of Cipriano de Valera

Because of the disruptive pursuits by the Roman Catholic church that rendered Reina a transit, his translation of the Spanish Bible was done hurriedly. Thus it was still in need or revision. The man for this job was a friend of Reina by the name of Cipriano de Valera (1532-?). Valera was also a monk at the San Isidro

del Campo monastery who fled probably at the same time Reina did in 1557. And like Reina, Cipriano spent some time in Geneva working with John Calvin.

Cipriano had a fervent desire for the ministry. So he eventually moved to England to study at the University of Cambridge. Cipriano became an expert in 10 different languages. Due to this mastery of languages he made a name for himself as an instructor at Oxford University. He had no lack of translating experience as evidenced by his translation of John Calvin's Institutes. He also was known for writing a booklet entitled "El Papa y La Misa" (The Pope and the Mass) in which he vehemently rebuked the pagan practices of Rome. But he is most known for his work on the Spanish Bible.

Cipriano de Valera started his work of revising Reina's translation in 1582. He finished and published his final product in 1602. That's 20 years of his life that he invested into the word of God for the Spanish-speaking people. On the front page of this Bible that Valera called The Second Edition is a picture of two men, one sowing seed and the other watering the seed. Below the picture is the verse "*I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.*" from I Cor. 3:6. The Hispanic world is indebted to these great men of God for whom this epic version of the scriptures is named. The Reina Valera Bible. A heritage handed down from Almighty God to the Spanish-speaking world.

Jas 1:17 "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."