

THE FIRST ENGLISH BIBLE

I. Early English Portions

1. Poem of Caedmon. 7th c. Quotes many Scrip. passages.
 2. Aldhelm (died 709) supposedly trans. Psalter. 1st 50 in prose, others in verse
 3. Bede (died 735) trans Lord's prayer, apos. creed, gospel Jn in Anglo-Saxon.
 4. Alcuin (died 804) trans Pentateuch.
 5. King Alfred trans 10 comm. (died 901)
 6. 9th c. gloss of Psalter. Written bet. lines of Latin text and word for word.
 7. Priest named Alfred did gloss of Gospels.
 8. Aelfric, end of 10th c., trans Pent., Josh, Jud, Kg, Est, Job, Judith, Macc, and gave brief account of books of OT and NT.
 9. 13th c. saw translations of portions in verse.
 10. Psalter in prose by William de Schorham about 1320.
 11. Psalter with commentary by Richard Rolle, died 1349.
 12. Psalms by John Hyde, middle 1300's.
- Concl. To 1360 Psalter only book trans entirely into Eng. Yet 22 yrs later Wycliffe gave England whole Bible and a revision by 1388 (6 more years).

II. Wycliffe's Era. The Age of W.

Age of reform before Reformation. Sec. (1) birth of English nationalism. Edward III came to throne in 1327 when 3-4 yrs old and held in supremacy of Eng. in time when church and realm were overrun with Italians and French sent by Pope.

(2) Eng. language emerged from chaos of centuries. 1362 Eng. became authorized lan. of law courts.

III. Wycliffe's Life and Reforming Work.

1. Early. Born 1320-30 in vicinity of Richmond, Yorkshire. Studied and taught at Oxford which was ultimate in education in that day except possibly Paris. Were 2 groups on campus--seculars (clergy) who appealed to king and more liberal and regulars (monks) who appealed to Pope and were more strict.
2. As a political reformer. In 1366 Pope Urban V demanded arrears of 33 yrs @ 12000 L/ yr tribute to be paid. W. argued before King's council that if Pope couldn't guarantee protection, he shouldn't have tribute. Further, head of ch is X, not Kg or Pope. Daring for this time but made W popular in eyes of people. Sent to Bruges to negotiate with rep. of Pope but instead of a reconciliation, breach grew wider.
3. As an ethical reformer. He condemned the popm, wealth, show, splendor pride and immorality of monks and friars who roamed countryside in name of RC. They had gained great power by this time. His preachers were Lollards, from lolium, tares, bec thot to be heretics or the tares among the true RC wheat. Also called "known men" based on W's trans of 1 Cor 14:38 which understood to mean if didn't understand NT you are an unknown man, so Lords known.
4. As a doctrinal reformer. In Feb. 1377 W. accused of heresy over denunciation of power and wealth of clergy. Trial ended in draw. 1378 summoned again and withstood rep. of Pope. In 1378 Urban VI Pope at Rome and Clement VII at Avignon. This was too much for W. and denounced Pope as "the anti-X, the proud, worldly priest of Rome and the most cursed of clippers and cut-purses." 1381 wrote against transsub. bread remained bread after consecration and it is the body of X figuratively, symbolically, sacramentally. Real presence but not corporeal presence. Also repudiated doct. of indulgences and worshiping of images. Must obey Bible, not Pope or ch. This led logically to need to produce an English Bible.
5. Later life. Stroke on Dec. 29 while saying mass at Lutterworth 1384. Had retired there in 1382. Died Dec. 31. While there had been translating and writing. Catalog of his written works covers 60 octavo pages and is incomplete at that.

IV. Wycliffe's Bible.

1. The Translation. W said: "X and His apostles evangelized the world by making known the Scrip. in a language which was familiar to the people." "Though there were an hundred Popes, and all the friars in the world were turned into Cardinals, yet should we learn more from the gospel than we should from all that multitude." W. did much of NT tho Nicolas Hereford did most of OT. Original (in Bodleian) breaks off at Baruch when Nicolas was summoned before synod in London for non-RC ideas and work on Bible. Completed by W and/or his secretary John Purvey. This original trans was quite literal, often obscure and sometimes incorrect. Word for word, construction for construction. Yet monumental task as anyone knows who has tried to trans even a few verses from Grk or Heb or Latin. About 30 known copies of this original trans.

2. The Revision. W noticed failures of original and started revision but didn't live to finish. Purvey did. Much more idiomatic and thus better. Caused much stir in Eng bec people could read God's word in own lang for 1st time and saw diff between what Pope said and what God said. In 1408 Arch bishp Arundel banned Eng trans. yet most copies made after that time. Mss cost about \$200. and leaf or so cost load of hay. Mine about 1430 so after ban and shows signs of being well used. Though our Eng Bibles follow Tindale tradition we do owe some phrases to W.

Matt 7:3--beam and mote.

Matt. 7:14--strait gate.

John 7:38--floods of quick water shall flow out of his womb.

John 4:14--well of water springing up into everlasting life.

1 Cor 2:10--dēep things of God.

Other interesting trans..1 Cor 14-language.

Presbyter trans by priest.

Eph 5:5--an avaricious man is in the thraldom of idolatrie.

1 Tim 2:4--no man holding knighthood to God inwrappith himself with worldly needs.

My copy is only NT ending with Heb 13:13.

3. The Publishing and Distribution

Mss publishing was well developed at this time so no prob when W's Bible appeared. Bookmen were stationers (stationarii=booksellers). Middlemen bet actual producers of mss and buyers. Linked with University so could commission mss. and sell them to scholars and students. Also U. could control contents somewhat. But were discount houses in that day too. They copied and sold without middleman and without control of U. W's Bible prob produced by private booksellers bec heresy trials were going on then. 10 months to copy. But still had wide circulation. There was one in the library at Oxford in 1490, yet in 1496 5 Lollards were burned in London. Foxe has many accts of people killed bec possessed or read or tried to teach Eng. Bible. Families spied on each other. One case of children compelled to set fire to own parents bec parents were caught reading English Bible. Persecution cont'd into 1500's. No Bible printed in Eng till 1525 tho printing first by Caxton in 1477. in Eng.

4. The Influence *... which has flowed a never-ending stream*

Synod decreed W's bones be exhumed and cast at a distance from church in 1413. Done in 1429--burned to ashes and cast into Swift river. Of this and W's influence Wordsworth wrote:

"Wycliffe is disinhumed,
Yea, his dry bones to ashes are consumed,
And flung into the brook that travels near;
Forthwith that ancient voice which streams can hear
Thus speaks (that voice which walks upon the wind,
Though seldom heard by busy human kind):
An emblem yields to friends and enemies, how the bold teacher's doctrine,
sanctified by truth, shall spread thruout the world dispersed."

As thou these ashes, little brook, will
bear
Into the Avon--Avon to the tide
Of Severn--Severn to the narrow
seas--
Into main ocean they,--this deed acc'd