

# Tower of Babel

Wycliffite Bible, Genesis Chap. XI.

John Wyclif was a highly educated priest who received a doctorate from Oxford in 1372. As his career advanced he grew increasingly unhappy with the ecclesiastical abuses he perceived, called for reform, and was rebuked by his superiors in 1382. About 1378 he began work on his translation of the Bible, which became, with the help of his followers after his death in 1384, the first complete Bible in English. The excerpt from the book of Genesis below gives parallel passages from two versions, one completed shortly before Wyclif's death and the other about a decade later.

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**early version c. 1382**

*later version c. 1395*

**1 Forsothe the erthe was of oo lip, and of the same wordis.**

*1 Forsothe the lond was of o langage, and of the same speche.*

**2 And whan men shulden go fro the est,**

*2 And whanne thei zeden forth fro the eest,*

**thei founden a feeld in the lond of Sennaer, and thei dwelleden in it.**

*thei fonden a feeld in the lond of Sennaar, and dwelliden ther ynne.*

**3 And the tother seide to his neizbore, Cometh, and make we tile stoons,**

*3 And oon seide to his neizbore, Come ze, and make we tiel stonys,*

**and sethe we hem with fier; and thei hadden tiles for stoons,**

*and bake we tho with fier; and thei hadden tiel for stonus,*

**and towz cley for syment.**

*and pitche for morter;*

**4 And thei seiden, Cometh, and make we to vs a citee and a towr,**

*4 and seiden, Come ze, and make we to vs a citee and tour,*

**whos heizt fulli ateyne vnto heuene;**

*whos hiznesse stretche til to heuene;*

**and halow we oure name, or we ben dyuydid into alle londis.**

*and make we solempne oure name bifor that we be departid in to alle londis.*

**5 The Lord forsothe descendide, that he myzte se the citee and the towre,**  
*5 Forsothe the Lord cam down to se the citee and tour,*

**the which the children of Adam bildeden;**  
*which the sones of Adam bildiden.*

**6 and seide, Se! the puple is oon, and oo lippe is to alle,**  
*6 And he seide, Lo! the puple is oon, and o langage is to alle,*

**and this thei han bigunnen to make, ne thei wolen leeuue of fro her thenkyngis,**  
*and thei han bigunne to make this, nethir thei schulen ceesse of her thouztis,*

**to the tyme that thei han fulfillid hem in dede;**  
*til thei fillen tho in werk;*

**7 thanne come ze, descende we, and confounde we there the tung of hem,**  
*7 therfor come ze, go we down, 7 and scheende we there the tunge of hem,*

**that noon here the vois of his neizbore.**  
*that ech man here not the voys of his neizbore.*

**8 And so the Lord deuydide hem fro that place into alle londis;**  
*8 And so the Lord departide hem fro that place in to alle londis;*

**and thei sesyden to bilde the citee.**  
*and thei cessiden to bielde a cytee.*

**9 And therfor was callid the name of it Babel,**  
*9 And therfor the name therof was clepid Babel,*

**for there was confoundid the lippe of al the erthe;**  
*for the langage of al erthe was confoundide there;*

**and fro thens the Lord disparpoilide hem vpon the face of alle regionis.**  
*and fro thennus the Lord scaterede hem on the face of alle cuntrees.*

**Spelling and Pronunciation**, keyed to the passage above. (Note that <t> indicates the spelling while [t] indicates the phoneme's sound.)

- <y> no longer used as the high rounded vowel in Old English, so the letter serves as a vowel, equivalent to <i>, and sometimes as the consonant [y]
- <ȝ> called *yogh* is a new letter form, adapted from the earlier Old English shape of the letter <g>; it is used for the fricatives [χ] and [ç] (*myȝte*) and the palatal [y] (*neizbore*).
- <k> and <q> are used along with <c> for the velar stop [k]
- <c> can be used for [s] especially in French borrowings like *citee*, *place*, *face*; note the variant spellings in the last line: *sesyden* and *cessiden*
- <w> replaces the Old English runic wynn
- <v> now appears as a separate letter form from <u>, from which it was derived, but each can be used both as a vowel (*vpon*) and a consonant (*dyuydid*). Note that it [u] appears where Old English would have <f> (*heuene* vs. OE *heofon*).
- <z> is available for the voiced sound [z] (though not used here).
- <j> or <g> used for the sound [j], *regiouns*
- new consonant combinations with the letter <h> appear replacing the OE patterns below:

ME form replaces	the OE
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<sh>, shulden	scoldon
<sch>, scheende	scendan
<ch>, children	cildru
<tch>, stretche	streccan
<wh>, whan	hwonne
<th>, erthe	eorðe

- Though not used here, OE thorn was still available, but not eth <ð>; thorn and <th> could be used for either the voiced or unvoiced sounds
- <dg> *edge* appears for OE <cg>
- doubled vowels like in *citee* can be used to indicate length
- <ou> and <ow> may indicate a long [u] like in *down*, *doun* and *towr* (neither one a diphthong yet)
- <ai, ay, ei, ey> like in *cley*, *thei*, *ateyne*, *seiden* are used for [æɪ]

## Canterbury Tales Transcription Exercise

The left column below contains the first 27 lines of *The Canterbury Tales*. To the right, the first 19 of those lines are transcribed into the International Phonetic Alphabet. Print this page, and at bottom or on another sheet of paper, write out your own transcription of the last eight lines.

Whan that Aprille with hise shoures soote	hwan ðat āprɪl wɪθ hɪs ʃʊrəs sōtə
The droughte of March hath perced to the roote	ðə drūχt əf mɑrʃ hɑθ pɛrsəd tō ðə rōtə
And bathed euery veyne in swich licour	and bāðəd ɛv(ə)rɪ væɪn ɪn swɪʃ lɪkʊr
Of which vertu engendred is the flour;	əf hwɪʃ vɛrtɪu ɛŋjɛndrəd ɪs ðə flʊr
Whan Zephirus eek wt his sweete breeth	hwan zɛfɪrʊs ɛk wɪθ hɪs swētə brɛθ
Inspired hath in euery holt and heeth	ɪnspɪrəd hɑθ ɪn ɛv(ə)rɪ hɔlt and hɛθ
The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne	ðə tɛndrə krɔppəs and ðə jʊŋgə sunnə
Hath in the Ram his half cours yronne,	hɑθ ɪn ðə rɑm hɪs hɑlvə kʊrs ɪrʊnnə
And smale foweles maken melodye,	and smalə fʊləs mākən mɛlədɪə
That slepen al the nyght with open eye—	ðat slɛpən al ðə nɪχt wɪθ ɔpən ɪə
So priketh hem nature in hir corages—	sɔ prɪkəθ hɛm natɪr ɪn hɪr kʊrɑjəs
Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages,	ðan lɔŋgən fɔlk tō gōn ɔn pɪlgrɪmɑjəs
And Palmeres for to seken straunge strondes,	and palm(ə)rəs fɔr tō sɛkən strɑʊŋjə strɔndəs
To ferne halwes kowthe in sondry londes	tō fɛrnə hɑlwəs kūθ ɪn sʊndrɪ lɔndəs
And specially fram euery shires ende	and spɛsɪjəlɪ frɔm ɛv(ə)rɪ ʃɪrəs ɛndə
Of Engelond to Caunterbury they wende	əf ɛŋgələnd tō kauntərbɪrɪ ðæɪ wɛndə
The hooly blisful martir for to seke	ðə hɔlɪ blɪsful mɑrtɪr fɔr tō sɛkə
That hem hath holpen whan _at they were seeke.	ðat hɛm hɑθ hɔlpən hwan ðat ðæɪ wɛr sɛkə
Bifil that in that seson on a day,	bɪfɪl ðat ɪn ðat sɛzʊn ɔn ə dæɪ
In southerk at the Tabard as I lay	
Redy to wenden on my pilgrymage	
To Canterbury with ful deuout corage,	
At nyght were come in to that hostelrye	
Wel nyne and twenty in a compaignye	
Of sondry folk by auenture yfalle	
In felaweshipe, and pilgrimes were they alle	
That toward caunterbury wolden ryde.	