

THE TOWER OF BABEL

Genesis Chap. 11

From the Old English translation of *The Hexateuch*, ed. J. Crawford, EETS (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1922).

Truly all people spoke a single language
1 Soðlice ealle menn spræcon ða ane spræce.

When they travelled from the eastern regions, they found a particular field in Senaar-land,
2 Ða ða hi ferdon fram eastdæle, hi fundon ænne feld on Senaarlande,

and dwelled there.
ond wunodon ðæron.

Then they said among themselves: "Let us make tiles and bake them in fire."
3 Ða cwædon hi him betwynan: Vton [= Uton] wyrcean us tigelan ond ælan hi on fyre.

Truly they had tile instead of stone and tar instead of mortar.
Witodlice hi hæfdon tigelan for stan ond tyrwan for weall-lim.

and they said: "Let us build a city and a tower up to high heaven,
4 ond cwædon: Vton timbrian us ceastre ond stypel oð heofon heahne,

and let us honor our name before we are scattered across all the earth.
ond uton wyrðian urne naman, ær ðam ðe we synd todælede geond ealle eorðan.

Truly the Lord stepped down to where he saw the city
5 Witodlice Drihten astah nyðer to ðam ðæt he gesawe ða burh

and the tower which Adam's children constructed.
ond ðone stypel ðe Adames bearn getimbrodon.

and he said: "This is one people, and they all speak one language
6 ond he cwæð: Ðis is an folc, ond ealle hi sprecað an leden

and they have begun to make this; nor will they abandon it before hit is finished.
ond hi begunnon ðis to wyrccenne; ne geswycað hi ær ðan ðe hit geara sy.

Truly let us come and scatter in that place their speech."
7 Soðlice uton cuman ond todælan ðær heora spæce.

Thus the Lord scattered them from that place across all the earth.
8 Swa Drihten hi todælde of ðære stowe geond ealle eorðan.

and thus one called the place Babel, because all languages were scattered there.
9 ond for ðam man nemde ða stowe Babel, for ðam ðar wæron todælede ealle spæce.

Pronunciation of Consonants

Most Old English consonants are pronounced the same as their Modern English counterparts: most, but not all. This exercise treats two groups:

1. the variant pronunciations of <g> and <c>; and
2. the voiced/unvoiced options for <s>, <f>, and <þ/ð>.

When a <c> or <g> is followed by an <i> or <e>, the consonant is palatalized; that is, the <c> is pronounced as [tʃ] as in *chin* and the <g> is pronounced as [j] as in *yard*. There are exceptions, but it's a reliable rule of thumb. It is conventional for editions to use the letters <ċ> and <ġ> for the variant forms. Study the following charts, then transcribe the words in the last part.

For <g>

In most cases, the <g> is pronounced as it is in Modern English, [g]	gōd god glæd grim gōs	good god glad grim goose
When <g> is followed by an <i> or <e> it is pronounced as a [y]	ġiet ġeard nægēl ġeoc	yet yard nail yoke
also, the same holds true when a <g> ends a word.	dæg cæg īsig hālig	day key icy holy

For <c>

In most cases, the <c> is pronounced as [k]	cū cniht cuman cōc cræft	cow boy come cook craft
When <c> is followed by an <i> or <e> it is pronounced as a [č]	ċēosan ċiriċe ċild ċeorl	choose church child churl

Also, the same holds true when a <c> ends a word.	laðlic brēc ic	loathly breeches I
---	----------------------	--------------------------

For <f>

In most cases it is pronounced as [f]	feower findan fisc ceaƿ	four find fish chaff
When it comes between voiced sounds (esp. vowels) it is pronounced as [v]	nafela ofer fife hræfn	navel over five raven

For <s>

In most cases it is pronounced as [s]	sweostor stān glæs mūs	sister stone glass mouse
When it comes between voiced sounds (esp. vowels) it is pronounced as [z]	risen hæsel cēosan nosu	risen hazel choose nose

For <þ> or <ð>

In most cases both thorn <þ> and eth <ð> are pronounced as [θ]	þurh þōht smið bæð	through thought smith bath
When either comes between voiced sounds (esp. vowels) it is pronounced as [ð]	baðian ōðer sweðrian leðer	bathe other to vanish, dwindle leather

Give a **phonemic transcription** of the following words from the “Tower of Babel”

OE Word	Transcription	MnE Translation
tigel	t ɪ j ɛ l	tile
sōðlice		soothly, truly
ceaster		city
wyrðian	ü	to make worthy, honor
geond		beyond
eorðan		earth
nyðer	ü	nether, down
folc		folk
stȳpel	ū	tower, steeple
heofon		heaven
hæfdon		had
of		from, off

More Transcription

OE Word	Transcription	MnE Translation
scranc	ʃ r ɑ n k	shrank
hors		horse
geolu		yellow
wē		we
lȳtel	ū	little
drincan		to drink
nāht		naught, not
hring		ring
hwæt		what
hnutu		nut
hlūd		loud
cwēn		queen
hrycg	ü	ridge
līf		life
līfes		life's
hwæthwugu		something
slægen		slain
scūfan		shove