THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH PODCAST TRANSCRIPTS

EPISODE 125: THE FIRST ENGLISH BIBLE

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Welcome to the History of English Podcast – a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 125: The First English Bible. In this episode, we're going to explore the events leading to the first version of the Bible to be composed in the English language. This particular Bible is over two centuries older than the King James Bible. It was composed at the direction of the medieval cleric and scholar named John Wycliffe. The extent of Wycliffe's role in the translation remains a matter of some debate, but there is no debate over the popularity of the translation. The large number of surviving copies confirms its popularity, especially given that it was composed prior to the printing press, and also given the fact the Church later cracked down on it and declared it a heresy to possess it or even read from it. So this time, we'll explore the events leading to this important piece of medieval literature, and we'll also see how it impacted the English language

But before we begin, let me remind you that the website for the podcast is historyofenglishpodcast.com. And you can sign up to support the podcast and get bonus episodes and transcripts at Patreon.com/historyofenglish.

Also, in case you missed the announcement a couple of weeks ago, I will be attending a conference in NewYork City on June 29 called the Intelligent Speech Conference. It will feature a lot of history podcasters like Mike Duncan, and David Crowther, and lots of others. There will be talks and panels and just a general opportunity hang out with some of your favorite podcasters. I think there is also a dinner which you can attend if tickets are still available. At any rate, go to intelligentspeechconference.com for more information.

Also, I recently spoke with Jennifer Moss of the Baby Names Podcast about the history of English names. So if you get chance, check out that episode. It's available wherever you listen to podcasts.

So with that, let's turn to this episode about the first English Bible. And I want to begin this episode with a song. This piece of music is called Tempus Adest Floridum. It's a Latin song, and the title translates as 'It is Time for Flowering.' It was apparently composed sometime in the 1200s, and it would have been sung to herald in the springtime around the current point in our overall story of English in the late 1300s. Here's a performance of the song which has a melody that may seem a little familiar.

[SONG CLIP]

Now if that song seems vaguely familiar to you, it's probably because an English songwriter named John Mason Neale wrote new lyrics to the music in the mid-1800s. The resulting song was the well-known Christmas carol 'Good King Wenceslas.' It's a song about a Bohemian king who observes a poor peasant gathering winter fuel at Christmas time. So the good king and his page decide to brave a harsh winter storm to take the poor man some food and wine.

As it turns out, there really was a Good King Wenceslas of Bohemia, and he was considered such a pious and good leader, that he was recognized as a saint after he died. The name was so revered that a series of Bohemian kings in the 1300s also bore the name Wenceslas, including the man who served as king at the current point in our overall story of English in the year 1382.

Now, by this point, you're probably wondering why I'm telling you all of this stuff about this later Bohemia King named Wenceslas. Well, it's because he had a sister named Anne – actually a half-sister. And in the year 1382, she married the King of England – the young boy-king Richard II.

When we left Richard at the end of the last episode, he was busy negotiating the end of the peasant revolt in England. At 14 years of age, he was a very eligible bachelor, and the marriage to Anne of Bohemia had actually been delayed by the Peasant Revolt. But now, in the aftermath of the revolt, Anne finally arrived in England for the arranged marriage.

Like most visitors from the continent, she crossed the Channel by ship and arrived in Dover in the southeast. From there, she and her entourage mounted horses and headed to Canterbury – the next stop on the way to London. When Anne mounted her horse, she did something that the people of England had apparently never seen before. She had a specially designed saddle that extended from the side of the horse so she could sit with both legs on the same side of the saddle – what we could 'side-saddle' today. But the people of England had never really seen that before. Up until this point, women rode horses just like men – straddling the horse with one leg on each side of the saddle. But according to legend, it was Anne of Bohemia who made it popular for women to ride side-saddle in what was considered to be a more feminine manner.

Anne not only brought her unusual saddle from Bohemia, she also apparently brought something else with her that was unusual, and that was a copy of the Gospels – the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Actually, she apparently brought three different versions of the Gospels with her. So why was that so unusual? Well, we're told by later sources that she loved to read her Bibles, and when she arrived in England, she had a copy of the Gospels in three different languages. One was written in the traditional Latin used throughout Western Europe. Another was a German translation, and the third was a translation into her native Bohemian language, which was basically an early form of Czech.

At the time, it was somewhat unusual to have a Bible – or portions of the Bible – in multiples languages. Translations into the common languages of the people were frowned upon by the Church in the late Middle Ages. So these types of translations were rare, but that had not always been the case. Several centuries earlier, in the early Middle Ages, translations had been much more common, and it appears that Anne's German and Bohemian Bibles were descended from some of those earlier translations.

Of course, the Latin Bible itself was a translation. It had been translated from the original Hebrew and Greek texts in the late 300s and early 400s about a thousand years earlier in our story. The Latin Bible was also known as the Vulgate Bible, and it was largely the work of St. Jerome. At the time, Latin was the common language of the people of Rome. So the idea that the

average person could read the Bible was actually considered to be a good thing at the time. It was part of the way in which the Christian message was spread – by translating the Bible into the languages of the people who being converted.

Way back in Episode 14, we saw that a Gothic priest named Wulfilas translated the Bible from Greek into the early Germanic language of the Goths. That translation was made around the same time as the Latin translation – maybe a little before. And large portions of that Bible translation still exist.

Several centuries later in the 800s, Charlemagne directed the Bible to be translated into the early Germanic language spoken east of the Rhine to help convert the Germanic-speaking people in those regions. And that translation was probably the origin of Anne's German version of the Gospels. Around the same time, missionaries further east in the Slavic regions composed a Slavic translation of the Bible to help convert the Slavs. And that translation appears to be the origin of Anne's Bohemian version of the Gospels. Bohemia was basically the region we know today as the Czech Republic, and the old Bohemian language became modern Czech, but it was descended from that early Slavic language.

Around that same time, the Anglo-Saxons also translated parts of the Bible into Old English. Bede – the great Anglo-Saxon scholar and monk – apparently translated the Book of John into English. Contemporary accounts mention that translation, even though no copies have ever been found. Around the same time, the Book of Psalms and other devotional materials were translated into Old English by an Anglo-Saxon bishop named Eadhelm. Alfred the Great translated the Ten Commandments into English and attached a copy to his 'Book of Laws.' We're also told that he was translating the Psalms at the time of his death, though again, no copy survives. Other English versions of the Psalms also appeared throughout the late Anglo-Saxon period.

During this period, there were also several glosses of the Gospels into Old English. Glosses were literal word-for-word translations usually written in the margins. For example, the Lindisfarne Gospels are composed in Latin, but they also have an Old English gloss. So there is an English translation of each Latin word next to the original text. But these glosses aren't really a proper English translation. If you've ever tried to translate a passage in a foreign language one word at a time, you often end up with a bunch of random English words. The grammar and syntax may be so different that a word-for-word translation doesn't really make sense in English. And that's why the English glosses of the Latin Gospels aren't really considered to be proper English translations.

However, some Anglo-Saxon clerics did put together proper English translations of parts of the Bible. There is an Old English translation of the Gospels known as the Wessex Gospels or the West Saxon Gospels. It was composed in the late 900s. There were also a few other piecemeal translations of other books of the Bible, but there was never a complete English translation of the entire Bible.

All of these early English fragments point to the fact that there was a time when the Church allowed these types of translations without too much fuss. They were a way to spread the message to the people. But as the early Middle Ages gave way to the late Middle Ages, all of that changed. By the current point in our story, most of Europe was firmly converted to Christianity. And Latin had long since ceased to be a being a living language that people spoke from birth. It had become a learned language, and in the process, it also became a language of the elite. And that meant that direct access to the Bible became limited to the relatively small group of clerics and scholars who could speak Latin. The ability to read the Bible became a specialized skill. And in the process, the language became revered, only to be accessed by those who had extensive training. That gave the Church almost complete control over the Christian message. It was virtually impossible for lay persons to challenge the Church's interpretation of the scriptures. Most people didn't have access to a Bible, and even if they did, they probably couldn't read the Latin text. Again, that gave the Church tremendous power over the message. The Church eventually came to view the Latin Bible as the only acceptable version to be used in Western Europe, and any local translation had to be approved by the Church. There was an authorized translation of the Bible into French in the mid-1200s, but that was a rare exception, and it was only because French was such an important literary language at the time. There were no authorized translations into English.

But all of that changed around the time that Anne of Bohemia arrived in England to marry the young English king Richard. In the same year that that marriage occurred – 1382 – the first English Bible made its appearance in England. It wasn't authorized, and in fact, it was soon condemned by the Church, but it shows the increasing power and influence of the English language in the late 1300s.

This Middle English Bible was the work of an Oxford priest named John Wycliffe and a small group of followers who shared the same goal of making the Bible accessible to the common people of England. In its own way, it was an attack on the authority of the Church, and in fact, it was part of a larger anti-clerical movement that was taking place throughout England in the late 1300s. It was pro-Christian, but anti-Church. We saw some elements of that in Piers Plowman and the Peasants' Revolt in the last episode. In Piers Plowman, Church officials were routinely described as corrupt and lazy and indifferent to the concerns of the peasants. And when peasant mobs took over London in 1381, the Archbishop of Canterbury was one of their targets. He was captured and beheaded outside of the Tower of London.

So why was the Church held is such low regard at the time? Well, it was really the result of a series of events that had taken place throughout the 1300s. And these events provide an important backdrop for the composition of the Wycliffe Bible. So let's take a moment and examine why the Church as an institution had become so controversial.

The story really begins in the early 1300s. About 75 years earlier, in the year 1305, the entire papal court had moved from Rome to Avignon in southern France, and they remained there for much of the century. This may actually come as a surprise to you if you've always assumed that the popes have resided in Rome. But they haven't. For much of the 1300s, they lived in southern France while the Church buildings in Rome decayed and fell apart. During this time, all of the

popes were French by birth. By virtue of the fact that the popes were French, and the papacy itself was located in France, there was a very close link between the papal court and French royal court. They were basically tied together at the hip. And that was a source of great frustration for France's rivals, especially England which found itself mired in a long, extended war with France for much of the century. In England, there was a sense that the Church itself was on the side of France. And it was widely believed that the English money paid to the Church ended up in the French coffers, and was used to support the French war effort. So by supporting the Church financially, England was indirectly funding the war against itself.

Also during the 1300s, the sale of indulgences reached a peak, and that was considered by many to be an abuse by the Church. Indulgences were basically official pardons or remissions of sin that could be purchased from the Church. By this point, there were even specific Church officials called pardoners who traveled around selling them. If you had enough money, you could effectively buy your way out of punishment for any sin. These indulgences were designed to raise money for the Church, but they were the subject of severe criticism by many people who painted the Church as a corrupt institution that was more interested in money than salvation.

The Church also implemented other changes that were designed to enhance its revenues. That included a series of fees and taxes payable to the Church. As money poured in the Church's coffers, Avignon became an opulent papal court. An enormous papal palace was built there, and lots of courtiers and attendants flocked to the city. Prominent visitors to the city described it as extravagant and corrupt.

Then in the mid-1300s, the Black Death arrived in Europe. As we saw in an earlier episode, it wreaked devastation and death across the continent – and there was nothing the Church could do to stop it. No one had ever seen death on that scale. People prayed, but largely to no avail. The Church seemed to be impotent in face of the massive loss of life. And as I noted in that episode, priests and monks actually died at higher rates than the rest of society. They tended to the sick and dying, and the monks lived together in crowded monasteries. So they were especially vulnerable to the disease. For people who saw the plague as a type of divine punishment for society's sins, it seemed that God had saved his most severe wrath for the clerics.

In the midst of all of this, stories spread about priests who deserted their congregations when plague arrived. And there were also stories of priests who demanded money for their services during the outbreak. [*Source: "Life During the Black Death," John M. Dunn*] All of this contributed to the declining authority of the Church.

Adding to all of these problems was the fact that the Church was one of the largest landholders in England, especially in the south of England. The older monasteries had become very rich and were largely self-sufficient. The monks spent most of their time living in relative comfort while the peasants often struggled to get by. This led to the common stereotype of the fat, lazy monk which we saw in Piers Plowman. In that popular poem, the sin of sloth is depicted as a lazy monk who can barely be bothered to stay awake.

You might recall that Piers Plowman depicted the lazy monk as semi-literate. He didn't know the Lord's Prayer or other important religious passages, but he knew the songs of Robin Hood by heart. That was another common complaint at the time. Even though the Bible was only available in Latin, many of the monks and clerics couldn't actually read Latin and didn't know what the Bible said. The Bishop of Gloucester surveyed over 300 deacons, archdeacons, and priests in his diocese. He found that about half of them couldn't repeat the Ten Commandments, and one in ten didn't know where to find the ten Commandments in the Bible. Forty of them couldn't even repeat the Lord's Prayer. [*Source: "The Adventure of English," Melvyn Bragg, p. 80*]

The common people relied upon the priests to interpret the Bible for them, but many priests couldn't read Latin and therefore didn't actually know very much about the Bible.

All of this generated a lot of criticism – both from lay people and from clerics and religious scholars. We saw evidence of that in Piers Plowman with its pointed attack on the clergy. And we saw how radical hedge preachers like John Ball fired up the peasants by attacking the Church authorities.

There were also other respected voices offering criticism. One of those voices was John Wycliffe, an Oxford scholar and teacher who wrote and lectured about Theology. He was also a priest, and throughout the 1360s and 1370s, he garnered a lot of attention for his works on philosophy and religion. And a fair reading of his career also suggests that he was a bit of a nationalist. He championed the rights of the English government in its conflicts with the King of France and the papacy in Avignon. He also championed the English language and the right of the English people to read the Bible in their own language.

Wycliffe believed that religious authority came from the Bible itself – not the priesthood. In his mind, the feudal hierarchy of the Church couldn't be justified with the Bible. The Scriptures said nothing about a pope, and Christ and his apostles never took any official titles. Furthermore, the Bible spoke of people being charitable, but in his opinion, the Church had no right to force or compel people to make contributions to the Church. All donations should be voluntary. He felt that the Church itself should not be one of the wealthiest institutions in Europe. It should possess the basic property it needed to carry out its religious mission and no more. It should take care of poor people – not take from them. He agreed with other critics that the selling of indulgences was a fundamentally corrupt practice because only God could remit sin. And he felt that priests should focus on delivering God's message. That meant that they should stay out of government affairs and they shouldn't hold secular offices.

Now if you're familiar with Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation, a lot of this will sound familiar, but John Wycliffe lived almost a century and half before the Reformation got underway on the Continent. For this reason, Wycliffe has been called the 'Morning Star of the Reformation' by many scholars. In a sense, he was leading the way for later reformers who had many of the same criticisms and concerns that he had.

In England, Wycliffe found a receptive audience in the 1300s. By the 1370s, there were a lot of people listening to what he had to say, and he found supporters throughout many elements of

English society. His views reflected ideas that were widely held in England at the time, and he gathered many supporters who became known as Lollards. The name was apparently derived from a Middle English word meaning 'mumblers' – as in 'mumblers of prayers.' It probably started as a derogatory term, but it was adopted by Wycliffe's followers over time. Many of those early followers were graduate students at Oxford who took his message out to the countryside. Many Lollard manuscripts were composed to outline and explain their views, and many of those manuscripts were written in English.

Wycliffe not only found support among the common people, he also found a sympathetic ear at the highest level of the English government. As we know from prior episodes, John of Gaunt was the most powerful noble in England and he took a liking to Wycliffe and his views. The competition between church and state shaped this period. And as we've seen, many important government positions were held by Church officials. So the idea that clerics should tend to the Church and stay out of government business appealed to people like Gaunt. And it was really Guant's protection that allowed Wycliffe to flourish in the 1370s, even as the Church was becoming more irritated with his views.

In 1377, Wycliffe had advised the royal court that it didn't need to pay money that was being demanded by the papacy. He wrote that England should keep its treasure for its own defense. [*Source: "Chaucer's People," Liza Picard, p. 228-9*]

That same year, Wycliffe was hauled before a convocation of bishops at St. Paul's Cathedral in London. He was called to answer for his teachings. The exact charges aren't actually known for certain, but clearly the patience of the bishops had worn out. The council was attended by a large group of people including John of Gaunt. The whole proceeding got off to a rough start when there was dispute as to whether Wycliffe should stand before the council as an accused criminal or sit before the council to defend his arguments as a scholar would do before an academic council. When the presiding bishop insisted that Wycliffe stand before the council as a criminal, Gaunt stood up and threatened the bishop. The two exchanged words, and Gaunt threatened to drag the bishop out of the church by his hair. The whole thing devolved into a melee as fighting broke out in the church. The assembly scattered, and nothing ultimately came of the meeting. [*Source: "Wide as the Waters," Benson Bobrick, p. 40-1*]

Three months later, the pope issued five bulls or formal edicts condemning Wycliffe and his teachings. The Pope ordered the Church officials to investigate Wycliffe further, and if found guilty, he was to be arrested and forced to confess. But those orders were issued at the same time that the old king Edward III died. And with Edward's death, and young Richard's succession, the papal orders were largely lost in the mix and fell by the wayside.

Now there is something very interesting about the place where the pope issued those five papal bulls against Wycliffe. They weren't issued in Avignon in southern France. They were actually issued in Rome. A few months earlier, Pope Gregory had returned to Rome. For 70 years, the popes had lived at the opulent court in southern France, but Gregory decided to head back to Rome where the Church buildings had fallen into ruin and disrepair. He remained in Rome until he died about a year later. With the death of the pope, the assembled cardinals had to select a

new pope. At the time, there were 16 cardinals in Rome, and 11 of them were French. It is very likely that the French cardinals would have headed back to Avignon to select the new pope, and they probably would have selected another Frenchman, but the people of Rome converged on the conclave and demanded that the new pope be chosen there. They chanted "A Roman Pope! A Roman Pope!" With no way to escape the mob, the cardinals decided to select the pope there in Rome. They eventually settled on an Italian cleric who took the name Urban VI. But shortly after the selection, the French cardinals quickly left Rome and declared that the election was invalid because it was made under duress. They then elected their own pope who became known as Clement VII. And he returned to Avignon. That left the Church with two competing popes – one in Rome and one in Avignon. That division split the Church, and it also split the countries of Western Europe.

Naturally, France and its allies supported the pope in Avignon who became known as the anti-pope. And most of France's enemies supported the rival pope in Rome. That included England and the Holy Roman Empire. That also helps to explain why the young English king Richard II married Anne of Bohemia. At the time of this division, her father was the Holy Roman Emperor. So the marriage helped to forge that alliance between England and the Holy Roman Empire. It was an alliance against France and the anti-pope in Avignon.

Therefore, this religious dispute very quickly became a political dispute. The competing popes excommunicated each other and then went to war. They each hired mercenaries who fought each other across Italy and southern Europe. All of this further eroded the reputation of the Church.

This division is sometimes called the Western Schism. Now I said /skiz-em/, but you may pronounce that word differently. The Oxford English Dictionary says that /skiz-em/, /siz-em/ and /shiz-em/ are all acceptable pronunciations. It's one of those words where the spelling has contributed to the confusion over the years. And the reason I'm mentioning this word is because it was first used in English in the Wycliffe Bible. The word referred to the divisions within the Church. It began as the Greek word ***skhisma***, then passed through Latin and French where it apparently lost the 'k' sound. It first appeared in English in the Wycliffe Bible as S-C-I-S-M-E – probably pronounced /siz-em/. But in the 1500s, scholars started to add the 'h' back into the word to reflect the original Greek and Latin spellings. The new spelling was S-C-H-I-S-M.

In the 1700s, scholars started to argue that the word should be pronounced /skiz-em/ instead of /siz-em/ based on the original Greek and Latin pronunciations. In other words, it should mirror the pronunciation of words like ***school*** and ***scheme***. Today both pronunciations exist – /skiz-em/ and /siz-em/ – alongside /shiz-em/ which is derived in part from the modern French pronunciation of the word.

Note that the history of this word is very similar to the history of the word ***schedule*** (/sked-ule/) – or /shed-ule/. It also begins with S-C-H and has Greek roots, and it also has differing pronunciations in Modern English. It was originally /sed-ule/ when it first entered English, but /shedule/ and /skedule/ have evolved over time – in part based on the differing pronunciations of the S-C-H letter combination.

At any rate, regardless of how you pronounce it, there was a great schism (skiz-em) – or /siz-em/ – in the Western Church in 1378. The two popes spent most of their energies trying to destroy the other. And the entire legitimacy of the Church was threatened by that division. It was a spectacle that appalled many Christians.

Like many observers, John Wycliffe openly criticized the split in the Church. And his views became even more extreme in the late 1370s. During this period, he criticized the Eucharist. The Eucharist is the ceremony where bread and wine are consecrated and consumed. The Church taught that the bread and wine were literally turned into the body and blood of Christ during this ceremony – a process called transubstantiation. Wycliffe denied this belief, and suggested that there was no literal transformation. This may seem like a technical point, but it went right to heart of Church doctrine.

In his writings during this period, Wyciffe wrote sermons and theological discussions in both Latin and English, and those works contain the first known use of several English phrases.

In a collection of his writings called "Select English Works" (1380), he gave us the first recorded us of the phrase 'Rob Peter to Pay Paul.' The idea behind the phrase is that you are taking something intended for one purpose and using it for another. Latin had an early version of the phrase in the 1100s. The Latin phrase was, "As it were that one would crucify Paul in order to redeem Peter." Wycliffe renders his version of the phrase as "Lord, hou schulde God approve þat þou robbe Petur and gif þis robbere to Poule in þe name of Crist?" In Modern English, it reads "Lord, how should God approve that you rob Peter and give this robbery to Paul in the name of Christ?" Other variations of this phrase also appeared over the next few centuries with different verbs like 'Unclothe Peter to clothe Paul,' but the version with ***rob*** is the one that has endured.

The same collection also uses the term 'high horse' for the first time in an English document. If you refer to someone as being on their 'high horse,' it usually means that the person is arrogant and looks down on the people around him or her. So to be on a 'high horse' means that you are up high looking down on others. Well, in its original sense, it had a much more literal meaning. It literally meant a person who was riding a high horse – specifically a royal procession where people of high rank were mounted on very large or 'high' horses.

Those large horses were the ones usually used for heavy charges in a battle or a tournament. The knights or nobles who rode them were often considered to be arrogant, and they felt that they were superior to others. And that led to the more modern sense of someone being on their 'high horse.' Wycliffe used the term in its original sense as a royal procession when he wrote, "Þe emperour..made hym & his cardenals ride in reed on hye ors" – literally 'The emperor made him and his cardinals ride in red on high horses.'

His writings during this period also contain the first recorded use of the phrase 'by hook or by crook.' He used the phrase several times in regard to people being compelled to buy sacraments 'with hook or crook' meaning 'by all possible means.' In one selection he writes, "Þei sillen sacramentis..and compellen men to bie alle þis wiþ hok or crok" – literally 'They sell sacraments

and compel men to buy all of this with hook or crook.' I noted in an earlier episode that hooks and crooks were both hook-shaped tools used by peasants and farm workers. Peasants were generally restricted from cutting wood in the commonly-held lands or the lands of their lords, but they were allowed to use hooks and crooks to collect limbs and branches as long as they could reach up and pull them down. So that appears to be the ultimate origin of the phrase 'by hook or by crook.' It meant obtaining something by any means necessary. And even though the phrase was probably common in English before this point, Wycliffe is the first known writer to use it in his writings.

It was during this same period – around the year 1380 – that Wycliffe decided to begin an English translation of the entire Latin Bible. As I've noted, Wycliffe and his followers felt that the Bible was the ultimate source of Christian authority – not Church councils and papal decrees. So he wanted to bring the Bible to the common people of England. To make his case, he noted that there had been a long history of translating the Bible into other languages. So why shouldn't English have is own version? Around the year 1380, Wycliffe composed a document called De Officio Pastorali which means 'The Pastoral Office.' He wrote one version in Latin and another in English. Here's an excerpt from the English version where he made his case for an English Bible – first in Modern English then in his original Middle English:

> Saint Jerome travailed and translated the Bible from diverse tongues into Latin so that it might be afterwards translated to other tongues, and thus Christ and his apostles taught the people in that tongue that was most known to the people. Why shouldn't men do the same now? Also the worthy realm of France, notwithstanding all hindrances, has translated the Bible and the Gospels with other true sentences of doctors out of Latin into French, why shouldn't Englishmen do the same? As the lords of England have the Bible in French, so it isn't against reason that they should have the same sentence in English, for thus God's law would be better known and more believed for common understanding, and for more accord between realms.

Now the same passage in the original Middle English:

> seynt ierom trauelide & translatide þe bible fro dyuerse tungis into lateyn þat it myȝte be aftir translatid to oþere tungis. & þus crist & his apostlis tauȝten þe puple in þat tunge þat was moost knowun to þe puple; why shulden not men do nou so? Also þe worþy reume of fraunse, not-wiþ-stondinge alle lettingis, haþ translatid þe bible & þe gospels wiþ oþere trewe sentensis of doctours out of lateyn in-to freynsch, why shulden not engliȝsche men do so? as lordis of englond han þe bible in freynsch, so it were not aȝenus resoun þat þey hadden þe same sentense in engliȝsch; for þus goddis lawe wolde be betere knowun & more trowid for onehed of wit, & more acord be bi-twixe reumes.

Now we should also keep in mind that this was a time when English was on the rise. English was once again the language of Parliament, and the courts, and the schools. And this was the time of Chaucer and William Langland and other writers who were composing their poetry in English –

not French or Latin. So the overall rise of English was another factor that fed this desire for an English Bible.

Around the time that Wycliffe composed the provisions I just read, so around 1380, he and a small group of followers began the process of translating the Bible. Of course, they didn't have permission from the Church to do that, so the translation was completely unauthorized. But they were willing to take the risk. Within a couple of years, the translation was complete. And it appeared in the middle of 1382.

Modern scholars are not entirely sure how much Wycliffe himself actually contributed to the translation. At one time, it was thought that he was the primary translator. But the modern view is that much of the work was done by a small group of his followers. The group may have been as small as five or six people. It appears that his primary assistant was Nicholas de Hereford. Hereford and Wycliffe knew each other from their time at Oxford, and according to notes in some of the surviving copies, Hereford translated a large portion of the Old Testament.

Now the original translation was basically an extended gloss of the Latin Bible. In other words, the translators took the traditional Latin Vulgate Bible, and they pretty much translated it word for word – even maintaining much of the original Latin word order and syntax. They did that in order to stay as close as possible to the original Latin version.

So let me give you an example of the language in this first English Bible. And let's begin at the beginning with the very first words of the Old Testament. These are the first five verses of the Book of Genesis. Just so you can hear a comparison, I'm going to read the version from the King James Bible first. That's a Modern English version from the early 1600s. Then I'll read the same passages from Wycliffe's original Bible. So here's the King James version:

1 In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.
2 And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.
3 And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.
4 And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness.
5 And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.

Now here's the same passage from the Wycliffe Bible which follows very closely with the Latin original:

1 In þe firste made God of nouȝt heuene and erþe.
2 þe erþe forsoþe was veyn wiþ ynne and void, and derknessis weren upon þe face of þe see; and þe spiryt of God was born upon þe watrys.
3 And God seide, Be maad liȝt; and maad is liȝt.
4 And God sawȝ liȝt þat it was good, and deuydid liȝt fro derknessis;
5 and clepide liȝt, day, and derknesses, nyȝt. And maad is euen and moru, o day.

Now you'll notice that the Wycliffe Bible begins with the phrase "In the first," but the King James Bible begins with the phrase "In the beginning." Also, the Wycliffe version refers to "the face of the sea" whereas the King James version refers to "the face of the deep." And Wycliff uses the Old and Middle English verb ***clepe*** where the King James Bible uses the more modern word ***call***. ***Call*** is actually an Old Norse word, but it had replaced ***clepe*** by the Modern English period.

Now that passage I just read doesn't use very many Latin words, but as the translation continued, the translators encountered a lot of Latin words that didn't have a good alternative in English. These were usually words that expressed very specific concepts and ideas. So when there wasn't a good English alternative, they tended to just keep the Latin word. They would often drop the Latin inflectional ending to Anglicize it a bit. But it meant that this first English Bible had a lot of Latin words, many of which were used for the first time in English. It has been estimated that over a thousand Latin words were used for the first time in the Wycliffe Bible. Again, that was probably intentional. As long as the translation stuck with the Latin word, the Church authorities were less likely to object.

So for example, the Wycliffe Bible gives us the first use of the word ***agony*** from the Latin ***agonia*** – ultimately from a Greek root word. We also find the first use of the word ***interpretation*** from the Latin word ***interpretatione***. We find the first use of ***irrevocable*** from Latin ***irrevocabilis***. The word ***novelty*** appears for the first time in the phrase 'novelty of voices' – a direct translation of the Latin 'vocum novitates.' Other words taken directly from the Latin Bible, and used for the first time in English, include ***humanity***, ***injury***, ***transfer***, ***excellent***, ***ambitious***, and ***communication***.

Wycliffe also used the word ***problem*** for the first time in English. It was a direct translation of the Latin word ***problema***. Interestingly, the word was originally used to refer to a riddle. In the Book of Judges, the strongman Samson marries a Philistine girl. At the wedding feast, he makes a bet with a group of men by posing a riddle and challenging them to solve it. Again, the original Latin Bible calls the riddle a ***problema*** which the Wycliffe Bible translates as ***problem*** – the first recorded use of that word in English. The later King James version replaced the word ***problem*** with the Old English word ***riddle***.

The Wycliffe Bible also contains the first use of the word ***puberty*** which was a direct borrowing the Latin word ***pubertas***. It meant the time when a young person reached sexual maturity. The translators were apparently concerned that English readers wouldn't know what the word ***puberty*** meant, so they followed the word with a short explanation defining it as 'the time of marriage.' The passage reads, "`puberte, that is, tyme of mariage." So the translators sometimes felt the need to explain what some of those Latin loanwords meant.

Now apparently, some of Wycliffe's followers were unhappy with this original translation. They felt that it was too Latin in vocabulary and structure. So shortly after the first version was released, they began work on a revised and updated version. It appears that this revised version was mostly the work of a close associate of Wycliffe named John Purvey. This second version appeared in the late 1380s – about six years after the original version and a short time after

Wycliffe himself had passed away. This second version was intended to be more user-friendly for English readers. It focused more on English word order and phrasing.

This revised version also contained an extended prologue which explained the process that was used to make the translation. The Prologue even gives an example to illustrate this process. It provides the Latin phrase "Dominum fonnidabunt aduersarii eius.' The passage explains how that phrase should be 'englisshid' – or turned into English. The passage actually uses ***English*** as a verb – 'to English the Latin sentence.' It says that a literal word-for-word translation would be "þe Lord hise aduersaries shulen drede" – literally 'The Lord his adversaries should dread.' But since that sentence is awkward, the passage says that the better translation would be "þe aduersaries of þe Lord shulen drede him" – literally 'The adversaries of the Lord should dread him.' So as this example illustrates, the word order was modified to match English syntax.

But it wasn't just word order. The revised version also chose to drop some of the Latin words that had been retained in the original version. In their place, the revision often selected a native English word or a French word that had become common in English by that point.

So, for example, the first version of the Wycliffe Bible gives us the first use of the word ***pollute*** from Latin ***polluta***. But the second version changed that word from ***pollute*** to ***defoulyd*** which was a common word in the language at the time.

The original version also contains the first use of the word ***plague*** from Latin ***plaga***. You might remember that the Black Death was generally called the 'Great Mortality' in English documents from the mid-1300s, but Wycliffe gives us the first use of the word ***plague***. A few years later, when the Bible was revised, the wording was changed from ***plague*** to the native English word ***wound***. So again, we see this shift from a Latin word to an English word that was better understood at the time. By the way, speaking of ***plague***, I should note that the Wycliffe Bible also gives us the first use of the word ***pestilence*** from Latin ***pestilentiae***.

The first draft of the Bible also gives us the first use of the word ***contradiciton*** from Latin ***contradictionem***. Now if we think about that word ***contradiction***, it actually combines two Latin elements. We have the Latin prefix ***contra-*** meaning 'against.' We have that root in the word ***contrary***. And the second part is ***diction*** from a Latin word meaning 'speech.' We actually have the word ***diction*** in English with that same meaning. So if we combine those two Latin elements, we can discern that ***contradiction*** is literally 'against speech' or 'to speak against something.' Again, the first version of the Wycliffe Bible used that direct Latin loanword ***contradiction***.

But the later translators apparently didn't like that Latin term, so they opted for a literal English translation. The term appeared in the Book of Psalms in the sentence "I saw wickedness and contradiction in the city." But the revised version used the phrase 'wickidnesse and ayenseiyng' – literally 'wickedness and against-saying.' So the later version changed ***contradiction*** to 'against-saying.' This is another example of how the later version tried to re-word the Bible to reduce some of the heavy Latin influence and produce something that was more user-friendly for English readers. Obviously, ***contradiction*** has won out over time.

The original version of the Bible also used the words ***liberty*** and ***civility*** for the first time in English. ***Liberty*** was rendered from Latin ***libertas***, and ***civility*** was rendered from Latin ***civilitatem***. In both of those cases, the later revised version substituted the native English word ***freedom***.

In the Book of Galatians, the apostle Paul provides a warning to those who fall from grace through the persuasion of others. Wycliffe translates this passage by using the word ***persuasion*** for the first time in English. He derives it from the Latin word ***persuasio***. But the later version of the Wycliffe Bible dropped the new word ***persuasion*** and replaced it with the more familiar word ***counsel***. So it refers to those who lose faith through the 'counsel' of others. Interestingly, the King James Version preferred the original translation, and it uses the word ***persuasion***.

By the way, we might think of ***persuasion*** as the use of sweet talk to convince someone of something. Well, believe it or not, the words ***sweet*** and ***persuasion*** are cognate. The '-suasion' part of ***persuasion*** comes from the same root as the Old English word ***sweet***. The original Indo-European root mean sweet or pleasant. English took the word as ***sweet***, and Latin took the word as pleasant with ***persuasion*** meaning pleasant or convincing words.

Another example is the word ***se***x. Now you may be surprised to learn that the word ***sex*** appeared for the first time in English in the Bible, but it did. It appeared in Wycliffe's translation of the story of Noah's Ark from the Book of Genesis. The word was used in the sense of gender. God instructs Noah to bring two of every animal onto the ark. Here's the passage from the modern King James Bible: "And of every living thing of all flesh, two of every sort shalt thou bring into the ark, to keep them alive with thee; they shall be male and female." In Wycliffe's original translation, that passage is rendered as "Of all þingez hauyng soule of eny flesch: two þou schalt brynge in to þe ark, þat male sex and female: lyuen with þe." So whereas the King James version refers to 'two of every sort,' Wycliffe refers one of each 'sex.' This was the first recorded use of the word ***sex*** in the English language, and it was a direct translation of the Latin word ***sextus***. Now when the Wycliffe version was revised a few years later, the later version replaced the word ***sex*** with the Old English word ***kind***. It reads "thou schalt brynge in to the schip tweyne and tweyne, of male kynde and female" – or in Modern English 'thou shalt bring into the ship two and two, of male kind and female.' So in those passages, we can see how that key word has evolved from the Latin ***sextus***, to early Wycliffe ***sex***, to later Wycliffe ***kind***, to the King James word ***sort***.

That passage is also interesting for another reason. The Wycliffe translations contain one of the first – and perhaps THE first – rendering of the word ***female*** with its current spelling F-E-M-A-L-E. And that is an interesting development because the spelling was altered to mirror the spelling of the word ***male*** – M-A-L-E. Now you may be saying, so what? Well, the reason why that is notable is because the words ***male*** and ***female*** are not actually related. They are not cognate. They're derived from two completely different root words. We tend to assume that they are related today because they are spelled similarly and they have related meanings. But the word ***male*** is derived from the Latin word ***masculus*** which gave us the word ***masculine***. As the word passed through French, the pronunciation was shortened and slurred into ***male***. Meanwhile, the word ***female*** is derived from the Latin word ***femina*** which gave us the word ***feminine***. In late

Latin, it acquired the suffix ***-ella*** which was used to indicate something small. And that produced the word ***femella*** meaning a girl. Again, within French it was slurred into female spelled F-E-M-E-L-L-E. Both words – ***male*** and ***female*** – entered English in the 1300s. ***Female*** appeared for the first time in the 1350s, and ***male*** appeared for the first time here in Wycliffe's Bible in the 1380s. But apparently, people were already assuming that the two words were variations of the same root word. And in Wycliffe's Bible, we find the two words spelled similarly in the modern fashion as M-A-L-E and F-E-M-A-L-E.

So, despite the later revisions, we've seen that the original Bible translators tried to stay as close as they could to the Latin Vulgate Bible. They routinely kept an existing Latin word and simply Anglicized it. And I wanted to make that point because this really marks the beginning of a trend which continued over the next few centuries. And that trend was the increased borrowing of words directly from Latin rather than French. As the importance of French declined in England, Latin remained the language of the Church and language of scholarship. And increasingly, English speakers borrowed words directly from Latin.

There are tons of words in the Oxford English Dictionary, many of which are variations and derivatives of a smaller number of basic root words. The British linguist David Crystal has estimated that there are about 30,000 basic word forms in the OED that come from French. By contrast, there are about 50,000 basic word forms that come directly from Latin. [*Source: "Stories of English," David Crystal, p. 154, 163*] So there are considerably more words that come directly from Latin than come from French. And that is due to the heavy Latin borrowing that took place beginning around this point into the 1400s.

That has given Modern English several layers of words with the same or similar meanings. Very often, we have a basic common word from Old English, a slightly more elevated word from French, and an even more formal word from Latin. So we might have an English ***foe***, or a French ***enemy***, or a Latin ***opponent***. We might 'ask' that person something with the English word ***ask***, or we might 'question' that person with the French word ***question***, or we might 'interrogate' that person with the Latin word ***interrogate***. Through that process, we might 'learn' or 'understand' something with the English words ***learn*** and ***understand***, or we might 'ascertain' something with the French word ***ascertain***, or we might 'comprehend' something with the Latin word ***comprehend***. When we're done, we might 'end' the inquiry with the English word ***end***, or 'finish' it with the French word ***finish***, or 'conclude' it with the Latin word ***conclude***. You get the idea.

These layers of words allow us to express very subtle distinctions in Modern English, and they are the product of lots of borrowing over the centuries – borrowing that shifted from French to Latin over time. And we can see the beginning of that process here in the Wycliffe Bible.

I should also note that the Bible not only gave us a lot of new Latin words, it also gave us the first version of several common English phrases. These were usually Latin phrases that were translated into English for the first time.

So for example, we get the first rendering of the term 'brother's keeper.' In the story of Cain and Abel from the Book of Genesis, Cain kills Abel, and when God asks where Abel is, Cain says, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Wycliffe renders it as "am I þe keper of my broþer?" – 'am I the keeper of my brother?' In later versions of the Bible, including the King James version, 'the keeper of my brother' is altered to "brother's keeper." This was ultimately a direct translation of the Latin term "custos fratis."

The Bible also gives us the first use of the term 'graven image.' In the Book of Exodus, the original translation refers to a 'graven thing,' but the revised version changes the term to 'graven image.'

The translation of Exodus also gives us the first English rendering of the phrase 'an eye for an eye.' The passage reads, "he schal yelde lijf for lijf, iye for iye, tooth for tooth, hond for hond, foot for foot" – literally 'he shall yield life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, and foot for foot.'

In the Song of Solomon, the Latin term "turris eburnean" is literally translated as 'ivory tower' and is therefore the first recorded us of the term 'ivory tower' in English.

In the Book of John, the translators provide the first use of the phrase "born again." It's rendered as a direct translation of the Latin phrase "natus fuerit denno" with the same general meaning.

From the Book of Matthew, Wycliffe gives us the first English use of the phrase "salt of the earth." Matthew also gives us the first English version of the phrase "Ye of little faith."

In the Book of Hebrews, the translation states that the word of God is sharper than any "tweyne eggid swerd" – literally 'two-edged sword.' This may have been the origin of the more common phrase 'double-edged sword.'

In the translation of Ecclesiastes, we're told, "No thing vndir the sunne is newe" – literally 'there is no new thing under the sun.'

So as you can see, the Wycliffe Bible was not only an important religious document – it was also an important English document. And it also proved to be very popular. Over a 150 copies of the Bible still survive which attests to its popularity at the time. That means that there were probably thousands of copies at one time. [*Source: "The Last Plantagenets," Thomas B. Costain, p. 36-40*]

And we have to keep in mind that this was before the advent of the printing press. So each copy had to be made by hand. This is really where Wycliffe was at a disadvantage in comparison to Martin Luther over a century later. Luther expressed many similar ideas and concerns about the Church, but he lived after the printing press had been invented. So his Protestant literature could be mass produced. By contrast, Wycliffe's Bible and other related writings had to be spread by hand-written manuscripts. And that was probably a major factor in why Wycliffe's movement lost steam over time, but Luther's movement spread like wildfire.

Nevertheless, a lot of Wycliffe Bibles were produced, and they were read by people throughout England by all classes of people. And its amazing that we have as many copies as we do today, because the story of the Wycliffe Bible was about to take a major turn. Shortly after the Bible was produced, the Church decided that it was time to crack down on this new innovation before it got out of hand. As the English Bible and the Lollard message spread around the country, the Church soon started to take the matter more seriously. The Peasant Revolt may have also played a role in this crackdown. Many in power blamed Wycliffe and radical priests like John Ball for seeding the discontent that led to the revolt.

In fact, in 1382, the year after the Peasant Revolt and the year that the first draft of the Bible was released, many of Wycliffe's views were condemned by a Church council. Wycliffe himself avoided any major punishment, and he died of natural causes a couple of years later. But many of his colleagues who assisted with the translation experienced a different fate. Nicholas de Hereford was excommunicated for heresy. He was the man who apparently translated a large portion of the Old Testament. He was later imprisoned and tortured. He recanted his Lollard views and died a few years later.

John Purvey was also targeted. He was the man who was apparently responsible for much of the revised version of the Bible in the late 1380s. He was also hauled before the bishops, tortured and forced to recant. However, he soon returned to the Lollard movement and eventually disappeared from history.

In 1394, a bill was introduced in Parliament which outlawed any version of the Bible composed in English. However, John of Gaunt was still around, and he blocked the proposed bill. Supposedly, he rejected the proposed law with the following words: "By God, we will not be the refuse of all other nations; for since they have God's law, which is the law of our belief, in their own language, we will have ours in English whoever it may begrudge." [*Source: "Wide as the Waters," Benson Bobrick, p. 66*]

A few years later, in 1401, England adopted a law called 'Concerning the Burning of Heretics' which, as you can guess from the title, authorized the burning of heretics at the stake. This law was destined to be used a lot over the next few centuries. But initially, it posed the greatest threat to the Lollards. They now had to fear for their lives and the entire movement was pushed underground.

After John of Gaunt died and was out of the picture, the bishops finally got their wish. In 1408, a Convocation sitting at Oxford banned all translations of the Bible into English by any unauthorized person. It also prohibited the reading of any such translations. Anyone caught with an English Bible could be tried for heresy. Wycliffe's Bibles were ordered to be burnt. Nevertheless, many people ignored the order.

Finally, in 1415, the Great Western Schism came to an end as the two competing popes were deposed, and the Church was once again unified under a single pontiff. The council that resolved that split in the Church also took one additional action before it disbanded. It condemned the

long deceased Wycliffe as a heretic, and it ordered his bones to be exhumed and removed from the grounds where he was buried. Several years later, the order was carried out. Wycliffe's remains were dug up and burned. The ashes were thrown into the nearby River Swift, which flows in the Avon, and then into the Severn, and then into the sea. An anonymous poet soon turned this into a prophesy. It read:

The Avon to the Severn runs,
The Severn to the sea,
And Wycliff's dust shall spread abroad,
Wide as the waters be.

The idea was that Wycliffe's bones may have been disinterred and burned and thrown into the river and the sea, but in the same way that his remains were scattered, his message would also spread far and wide over time.

And this takes us back to where we began – with Anne of Bohemia who married young King Richard in the same year that the Wycliife Bible appeared.

Anne came from Bohemia which is the modern Czech Republic. And as we've seen, she was an avid reader of the Bible. She was also apparently enamored with Wycliffe's teachings. Thanks to Anne, new links were established between England and Bohemia. Scholarships were soon established for Bohemian students who wanted to study at Oxford. One of the Bohemian students who took advantage of that opportunity was Jerome of Prague. While in England, he also became fascinated with Wycliffe's teachings, and he returned to Bohemia and took those teachings with him. A short time later, the great Bohemian reformer named Jan Hus picked up the mantle and spread the message throughout Bohemia. He translated some of Wycliffe's writings into the early Czech language, and his mission ultimately helped to establish the first Protestant state in Europe in the 1400s.

Now it's tempting to trace this movement from Bohemia northward to Germany and the Protestant Reformation in the 1500s. Despite that temptation, there's little evidence that Martin Luther was directly influenced by John Wycliffe or Jan Hus, but Luther did acknowledge their contributions to the overall Reformation movement. In 1529, Martin Luther wrote, "I have hitherto taught and held all the opinions of Hus without knowing it.... We are all Hussites."

Of course, Hus's views were largely Wycliffe's views, and they can be traced back to England in the 1380s. And that is also why Martin Luther's Reformation ideas found such fertile ground when they reached England in the 1500s The groundwork for the Reformation had already been laid by Wycliffe and the Lollards in the 1300s.

This connection is even more apparent in a Bohemian Psalter prepared in the year 1572. The manuscript contains a page, with a hymn dedicated to the Bohemian reformer Jan Hus. It's adorned with three drawings arranged in a vertical row. The first picture depicts John Wycliffe striking a spark; below him, Jan Hus is shown using the spark to light a candle; and at the bottom, Martin Luther, is shown holding a blazing torch. The idea is that the beliefs associated

with the Reformation could be traced back to John Wycliffe and the Wycliffe Bible in the 1300s in England.
Now at the same time that Wycliffe and his translators were working on the first Wycliffe Bible and the later revision, a London poet named Geoffrey Chaucer was working on a manuscript of his own. That manuscript was a collection of stories told by pilgrims on the their way to Canterbury Cathedral. Of course, that work of literature was the Canterbury Tales. It was the last great work of Chaucer's career, so next time, we'll fill in the middle part of Chaucer's career and take the story up to the Canterbury Tales. Along the way, we'll see how the literature of this period reflects the overall development of English into an early form of the language we speak today.

So next time, we'll take the road to the Canterbury Tales. Until then, thanks for listening to the History of English Podcast.