

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-10002-1 - Early Bible Illustrations: A Short Study Based on Some
Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Century Printed Texts

James Strachan

Frontmatter

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EARLY BIBLE
ILLUSTRATIONS

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A SHORT STUDY
BASED ON SOME FIFTEENTH AND
EARLY SIXTEENTH CENTURY
PRINTED TEXTS

BY
JAMES STRACHAN



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PREFACE

My reason for writing this book is that it deals with a subject of some historical interest about which little seems to have been written already. I stumbled upon it almost by accident, and it is only fair to the reader that he should be made aware of the author's limitations. I am neither a biblical scholar nor a historian, and certainly no connoisseur of art. I am a retired Inspector of Schools and what little claim I may have to expert knowledge lies in the domain of Mathematics and Geography.

In 1950 I was working at Friends House, London, the headquarters of the Society of Friends, as educational adviser to the Friends' Education Council, when John Nickalls, the Librarian, asked me more or less casually whether I could put a meaning to some pictorial woodcuts in a copy of the Great Bible of Henry VIII which had at one time belonged to George Fox, the founder of the Quakers. He thought that as I had been educated in Scotland in the nineteenth century I might be well enough acquainted with the Old Testament stories to place some of the pictures whose meaning had so far eluded him.

Some of the answers were obvious enough—David and Goliath, for instance, or Daniel in the Lions' Den—but in order to complete the task I found it necessary to look at contemporary bibles published in other countries and presently it became evident that the pictures I was dealing with constituted a series with a long and rather complicated history. At first I found hardly any literature on the subject, and was all the more tempted to pry on my own account into the origin of these pictures and see if I could discover their source.

About this time the British and Foreign Bible Society was planning an exhibition of Bible Illustration through the ages as part of the celebration of their 150th anniversary in 1954. I was invited to assist in the arrangement of the section of the exhibition relating to early printed bibles, including the preparation of a guide-book and a film-strip. It was in the course of these activities that the idea of writing a book on the subject began to take shape,

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and I am much indebted to Rev. John Stirling, then Librarian of the Society, for his encouragement and co-operation.

What has already been published on this subject is mostly in French and German, and I have found nothing in English for the general reader. I am fully conscious of the amateurishness of my effort, and I plead for indulgence from bibliographers, historians and art critics for the omission of much that they might consider relevant and for errors of commission they are bound to detect. My excuse must be that as no one better qualified had written this book for me, I had to write it myself.

At an early stage I had the good fortune to meet Mr Ralph E. Ford of Bedford, an enthusiastic bibliographer and the owner of an exhibited collection of early bibles from which I got some very useful information to work on as a start. I am grateful for the large amount of help received thereafter from university and college librarians in Oxford, Cambridge and Dublin, also from the staff of the British Museum and above all from the British and Foreign Bible Society, whose magnificent collection of bibles was freely placed at my disposal. Most valuable too has been the expert constructive criticism of Mr M. H. Black of the Cambridge University Press, who has had about as much to do with the shaping of the book as I have myself.

Most of the photographs were taken by R. B. Fleming and Co. Ltd., some from the Great Bible in Friends House on which I started, but by far the greater number from the British and Foreign Bible Society's collection. Fig. 1 was got from the British Museum for the 1954 exhibition. Figs. 82, 19, 56, 64, 65, and 66 are also by courtesy of the British Museum; the last three of these are not from originals (which are not readily accessible in England) but from a copy of Schramm's *Die Illustration der Lutherbibel*, by kind permission of Messrs Karl W. Hiersemann of Stuttgart. Figs. 22 and 104 were supplied by Cambridge University Library and Fig. 91 was also obtained in Cambridge, from a rare copy in Trinity Library.

JAMES STRACHAN

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[More information](#)

CONTENTS

I	INTRODUCTION: THE QUEST	<i>page</i> 1
2	THE EARLIEST PRINTED PICTURES	7
3	NICOLAS DE LYRA	16
4	THE ITALIAN BIBLE OF 1490 AND ITS SUCCESSORS	25
5	THE LÜBECK BIBLE; THE CZECH BIBLE OF 1506	36
6	LUTHER'S BIBLES	42
7	THE GERMAN SWISS BIBLES	51
8	FRENCH AND DUTCH BIBLES	59
9	THE ENGLISH BIBLES: HISTORY	69
10	THE ENGLISH BIBLES: ILLUSTRATIONS	76
	<i>The Illustrations</i>	<i>following page</i> 86
	<i>Appendix. The woodcuts in the Great Bible</i>	<i>page</i> 150
	<i>Select Bibliography</i>	160
	<i>Catalogue references of bibles mentioned</i>	162
	<i>Index</i>	165

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NOTE

References to manuscripts, early printed bibles and similar works are dealt with by small superiors in the text, running from 1 to 151. After the Select Bibliography a list is given of the corresponding catalogue numbers.

References to passages of scripture are given in terms of the Authorized Version except where otherwise indicated. There is some difference in nomenclature between the Authorised Version on the one hand and the Vulgate and its derivatives on the other. The following table of correspondences may help to avoid confusion.

Vulgate	1 Kings	2 Kings	3 Kings	4 Kings
A.V.	1 Sam.	2 Sam.	1 Kings	2 Kings
Vulgate	1 Esdras	2 Esdras	3 Esdras	4 Esdras
A.V.	Ezra	Nehemiah	1 Esdras	2 Esdras

There is also a slight difference in the numbering of the Psalms. The Vulgate, following the Septuagint, treated Ps. ix and x (A.V.) as a single psalm and Ps. cxlvii (A.V.) as two psalms. Luther in 1524 adopted the Hebrew numbering and, with the exception of Coverdale (who in 1535 adhered to the Vulgate), other protestant bibles followed suit. The result is that from Ps. x to Ps. cxlvii (A.V.) the corresponding numbers in the Vulgate are less by one.

Illustrations are sometimes taken from reproductions in bibles of later date than those in which the pictures first appeared.