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Question 77 - What are the facts regarding the Latin Vulgate?

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101 MOST ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE BIBLE

77. What are the facts regarding the Latin Vulgate?

- A. During the fourth century A.D. it was felt a new translation of the Bible was needed in Latin, which was then the common language in the Western world. Thus, in A.D. 382 the great scholar Jerome was appointed by Damasus, the Bishop of Rome, to begin doing this. For the next 25 years Jerome worked on this translation, going right to the Hebrew and Greek. The term *vulgate* comes from the Latin word that means "common." Thus, until the King James Version in 1611, the Latin Vulgate became the recognized Bible for nearly 1,200 years. In 1228 the Vulgate was divided into chapters by Stephen Langton, archbishop of Canterbury. It was divided into verses by Robert Stephens in 1551, and these verses were numbered by Montanus around A.D. 1571. The Vulgate was also the first Bible to be printed by John Gutenberg in 1455. One of these printed copies now resides in the U. S. Library of Congress and is valued at \$350,000.
- B. As one might expect, Jerome's version of the Bible was not immediately accepted everywhere. People had become used to the Old Latin versions and weren't about to give them up without a struggle. Jerome thought it was like refusing to drink from a pure fountain and keep on drinking at muddy streams. Some Bible readers recognized the merits of Jerome's version and so his version circulated side by side with Old Latin versions for some time. He got a measure of satisfaction from observing that many of those who criticized his version in public read it in private. Eventually Jerome's version won out over all others and got the name "Vulgate" (in the sense of common or popular).

The Latin Vulgate was to become the Bible of Western Europe for a thousand years. With the dawn of the Reformation it was realized once again that people needed the Bible in their mother tongue, and a number of translations of the Latin Vulgate into other languages were produced. In the history of Bible translation no version, other than the Septuagint, has had such a profound influence on Christianity.

So completely did Jerome's Vulgate eventually conquer all rival versions that later, when church councils were held, the Vulgate was carried in triumph in a golden reliquary (a repository for relics).

(*A General Introduction to the Bible*. David Ewert. Academic Books. Zondervan Pub. House. Grand Rapids, Michigan. 1983. pp. 178, 179)

- C. Thus the Latin Bible of Jerome, which came to be known as the Vulgate, was a composite work of four parts: (1) The Old Testament, except the Psalter, a

translation from the original Hebrew; (2) The Psalter, the Old Latin revised from the Septuagint; (3) The Gospels, the Old Latin revised from the original Greek; (4) The remainder of the New Testament, the Old Latin more hastily and superficially revised.

(*General Biblical Introduction*. H. S. Miller. The Word-Bearer Press. Houghton, N.Y. 1952. p. 242)