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Question 78 - What are the facts regarding the Wycliffe Bible?

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101 MOST ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE BIBLE

78. What are the facts regarding the Wycliffe Bible?

- A. **Date** – New Testament, 1380; Old Testament, 1382; revised by John Purvey, 1388.
- B. **The Translation** – Wycliffe’s version is the 1st complete translation of the Bible into the English language. It is a manuscript Bible, written before the invention of printing. It is a translation of a translation, made from the Latin Vulgate. While it is customary to date Modern Versions from the invention of printing (1450), yet in this case it has been permissible to go back of this date and call the Wycliffe Bible the 1st modern version.
- C. **The Language** – The three chief dialects at this time were Northern, Middle, and Southern, and even these were split up. But the Eastern Middle English, around London, was asserting itself above the confusion, and was gradually becoming the national language. The language of Wycliffe’s translation was a variety of this Midland form, and he thus contributed largely to the settling of the English language, doing for England what Luther did for Germany (555). He has been called “the father of English prose,” for before him there was little in England except poetry. His version has been called “the parent of the noble Bible English of our later versions.” “It is impossible to over-estimate the influence of this work, both on our English prose and on the lives of the English people.”
- D. **Influence** – The influence of Wycliffe was not confined to England. There were at that time some 30 or 40 universities in existence, and students were accustomed to go from one to the other, to hear the most noted professors. Thus his works and fame went all over Europe. His doctrines spread to Bohemia and stirred Hus and Jerome, whose martyrdom set all Bohemia afire. He did a remarkable and noble work, not only for England but for the world. His influence has come down to the present day. His was the only English Bible for 145 years, and some of our familiar Bible expressions, such as “the strait gate,” “the narrow way,” the “mote,” the “beam,” and so on, have come from his translation. As a sample of his English, note the following translation of the Lord’s prayer, “Our Fadir that art in heuenes, halewid be thi name; Thi kingdom comme to, Be thi wille done in heuen so in erthe; Gyve to us this dai oure breed ouer other substance, and forgive to us oure dettis as we forgyven to oure detouris; and leede us not in to temptacioun, but delyvere us fro yvel.”
- E. **Printed Copies** – Wycliffe’s version exists in about 170 manuscript copies, of which 30 contain the original translation of 1382, and the remaining 140 Purvey’s revision of 1388; all written before 1430. Previous to 1850 some printed editions of the New Testament appeared (1731, 1810, 1841, 1848), and one of the Song of Solomon, in a commentary (1823). In 1850 two English scholars, Forshall and Madden, after 22 years of labor on the 170 manuscripts, published the entire Bible, including the Apocrypha, in 4 large quarto volumes. An excellent reprint of the New Testament was made in 1879.

(*General Bible Introduction*. H. S. Miller. Word-Bearer Press. Houghton, N.Y. 1952. pp. 323, 330)