

Steve Burchett



WYCLIFFE:



**A Bible Man in England When
There Was No English Bible**

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*Wycliffe: A Bible Man in England
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CHAPTER 1

A Country Without a Readable Bible

“How many things do you have in your bedroom?”

That was the question I was once greeted with by the man I assist in a Christian ministry. He wanted me to try to count up pens and hangers and clothing and . . . everything! It was a good exercise because after I realized I would easily get up to hundreds of items (if not thousands), I was reminded that God has been very kind to me to give me so much.

Let me try something similar with you. How many Bibles do you own? Start by counting physical copies. What is your approximate number? Five? Twenty? Forty? More than that? And most (if not all) are in your own language, right? Next, think

about your phone. You probably have a Bible app, or at least access to the internet. Conclusion: a readable Bible in your language is *always* with you!

But imagine you were born early in the 14th century in England. There were no complete Bibles in English (some English portions had been translated in previous centuries), and even if there were, back in 1229 at the Council of Toulouse, a decree was made that prohibited anyone but clergy to have a Bible.¹ This remained in force into the 1300s. Yet even if England's citizens would have had copies of the Bible in their language, illiteracy was the norm.²

England's Darkness

Since the Bible was so rare in England, it is not surprising that spiritual darkness prevailed in that country in the 1300s. The only church was the Roman Catholic Church led by the pope. There was no thought of leaving it to join "First Baptist Church of Chester" or "Yorkshire Bible Church." People were stuck, even though their leaders were biblically illiterate. These men only read the Latin Bible, and just the sections that were

necessary for religious services.³ It also seemed as if all of the church leaders were ungodly. They typically took advantage of people for personal pleasure and financial gain by leading them to believe that money could be paid (indulgences) in order to purchase the forgiveness of sins.

There were also representatives of the Catholic Church, known as "friars," who took a vow of poverty and traveled throughout the country to perform religious rites, offer absolution, and preach. However, they extorted money out of people, begged for food (thus, they became known as "begging friars"), and taught mystical stories and entertaining fables from village to village.⁴ Bible stories and legends were not distinguished, and even blended together. One biographer notes, "[The friars'] great aim was to attract the attention and sustain the interest of their hearers by any means. The result was that their preaching often descended into vulgar jesting and buffoonery."⁵

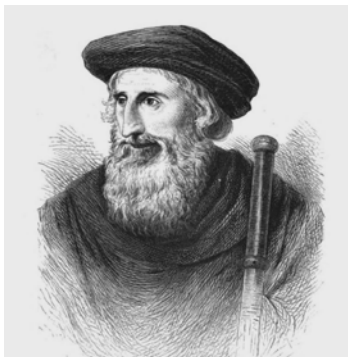
More darkness in 14th century England is uncovered when considering the entanglement of the church and state. It was a chaotic and hostile relationship. For example, sometimes prominent

positions in the government were given to clergy, leaving government officials angry because they believed they deserved those posts. Even through taxation, enormous amounts of money went to the headquarters of the Roman Catholic Church. For centuries, the papacy had control of both the church and the state, and might have owned as much as half of the estates in England.⁶ Throughout the 1300s, the power of Rome was weakening, but the King and pope (multiple popes starting in 1377) were in constant conflict, inflaming wickedness in each camp.

J.C. Ryle sums up the state of Christianity in England before the 16th century: "The three centuries immediately preceding the English Reformation . . . were probably the darkest period in the history of English Christianity. . . . Christianity in England seems to have been buried under a mass of ignorance, superstition, priestcraft, and immorality."⁷

Wycliffe's Birth

Into this Bible-less, spiritually corrupt, confused country was born John Wycliffe,⁸ possibly in Spreswell, a village in Yorkshire, England, and



maybe in 1324, though perhaps closer to 1330.⁹ Wycliffe's first approximately fifteen years of life are mostly a mystery, but he would have encountered the ungodliness of the clergy, the "buffoonery" of the friars, and the depravity of a sparring, never-separated church and state.

You might have heard of John Wycliffe via a Bible translation ministry called Wycliffe Bible Translators which "has helped people around the world translate the Bible into their own languages" since 1942.¹⁰ Why did they use Wycliffe's name? Because of the historic achievement accomplished later in his life when he was possibly at the age of fifty — the translation of the Bible from Latin into English, resulting in its distribution throughout

the country. This was the first complete Bible in English. Oh how England needed it!

Our Gratitude

It is not surprising that Wycliffe spent the final years of his life translating a Latin Bible into the language of the people if you know about his days apart from his translation work. We will begin to think about that lengthy portion of his life next, starting with his entrance into college. The goal of this book, however, will not be to walk through his life in detail, but to focus on his defining characteristic — devotion to Scripture. John Wycliffe was, above all else, a Bible man.

But before moving on, thank God for bringing you into a country and a technological era in which a complete Bible in your language is readily, and legally, available. Not everyone in history has had such riches. Not even everyone in the world today has this! Not even close! Of the over 7,000 functioning languages in the world, only 10% have a complete Bible in their language.¹¹ If you are among that small percentage, give thanks.

CHAPTER 2

Wycliffe Becomes a Bible Man

You have probably heard about young people who were professing followers of Jesus going off to college only to fall into great sin and reject the Lord. It also happens the other way around as some arrive at college lost, but then through a roommate or campus ministry or local church, or maybe a professor, they hear the gospel and look to Jesus and are saved.

Transformation at Oxford

John Wycliffe fits into the second category; upon arrival at Oxford University (specifically Balliol College), he was a lost young man in need of Jesus. He went to college not only for an education, but to study and train to become a priest in the

Roman Catholic Church. His intelligence was soon obvious to all, eventually earning him the title “The Flower of Oxford” because of his academic prowess.¹² Yet at this point, his theological studies were not based on the Bible but the works of men like Thomas Aquinas.¹³

However, there was an Oxford professor named Thomas Bradwardine who not only was a great mathematician and astronomer, but was committed to the authority of Scripture and salvation through Christ.¹⁴ Presumably, his perspective was influential in Wycliffe’s life. Additionally, the writings of other early “reformers” such as Robert Gorsetete and William of Occam are believed to have significantly influenced young Wycliffe, especially regarding the wickedness of the pope and the need to return to the truth as revealed in the Bible.¹⁵

Something else was instrumental in Wycliffe’s conversion — the Bubonic Plague. It appeared in England in 1348 and left at least one out of four people dead. This plague was also called “The Black Death” because of the dark blotches it created on the skin of those infected. The plague’s genesis was in Asia, but it came to England

probably via rats and fleas. Church historian Michael Haykin, speaking of the origin of the plague in Europe, says it probably arrived “on board the ships of knights returning from fighting Muslims in Palestine. The flea would bite the rat, infecting it, and when it died, jump off to another mammal, which might well be a human being.”¹⁶ Those infected died within a few days, but “some went to bed well and died before morning.”¹⁷ Wycliffe was only in his late teens or early twenties when it first struck. Two-thirds of the people in Wycliffe’s hometown died.¹⁸

People throughout England were terrified, and they mourned deeply. They needed spiritual guidance, but the church had little to say that was helpful. Many turned to witchcraft and spiritism along with ungodly and immoral behavior.¹⁹ Wycliffe responded differently. He saw the plague as God’s judgment upon the wicked world, and it drove him to seek the Lord for mercy and for answers, as well as for refuge from the future judgment. He sought the Lord by reading and studying the Latin Scriptures. Probably the faithful gospel teaching of Thomas Bradwardine colored his reflections. It is likely that during these sorrowful, agonizing days of Bible intake and prayer that John Wycliffe was converted to Christ.²⁰

It is difficult to know what Wycliffe believed about Jesus at this point, and if this truly was the precise moment of his conversion. However, the first publication of Wycliffe was titled, "The Last Age of the Church," written in 1356 (eight years after the Bubonic Plague first struck England). In it, writing to those who believed like him, he penned the following words clearly indicating his faith in Christ.

So when we were sinful, and the children of wrath, God's Son came out of heaven, and praying his Father for his enemies, he died for us. Then much rather shall we be saved, now we are made righteous through his blood.²¹

The Good a Bible May Do

The Bible and its message of salvation through faith in Christ played a vital role in Wycliffe's conversion. This is a reminder of what God might do with a Bible or New Testament or Gospel of John given to an unbeliever. The Scriptures are able to make people "wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15).

God could use Scripture to transform a whole family, or to birth a church in an unexpected fashion. He has done it before. A man who owned a market in El Salvador used the pages of a Bible to wrap some of the produce his customers bought. Sometimes they would make it home with a single page, but other times multiple pages. Instead of throwing those sheets away, the villagers read them. They slowly pieced the pages together, and the stories began to make sense. These curious customers eagerly awaited the next pages, and then the next. Going to the market had never been so exciting! Soon, some became believers and a church was born.²²

Never underestimate the power of God to save someone who reads Scripture.

If you are not a believer, here is a suggestion that I am sure Wycliffe would endorse: choose one of the first four books of the New Testament (Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John), read a chapter or two a day, and ask throughout, "What does this tell me about Jesus?" Pray to God to show you who Jesus is, and why you need him.

CHAPTER 3

Wycliffe, a Bible Man - Teaching it Everywhere and Every Way

John Wycliffe was submitted to the authority of the Bible and determined to bring its light into England's darkness. He cherished the Scriptures, saying with the psalmist, "I will . . . speak of your testimonies before kings and shall not be put to shame, for I find my delight in your commandments which I love" (Psalm 119:46-47). He believed the Bible was the inspired word of God, without error. He posited, "It is impossible for any part of the Holy Scriptures to be wrong. In Holy Scripture is all truth; one part of Scripture explains another."²³

Wycliffe was not always correct in his views. For example, he had wrong ideas about the power of secular authorities over the church — even believing that they had the power to remove

unrepentant church officials from office. Still, Wycliffe always sought to understand and apply Scripture.

As I mentioned in chapter 1, devotion to the Bible was the defining characteristic of John Wycliffe's life. For the next several chapters, we will consider proofs that he truly was a Bible man. Each demonstration of his love for Scripture will have something to say to believers today.

A Frequent Teacher of the Bible

Here is proof #1 of Wycliffe's devotion to Scripture:

He consistently taught the Bible in multiple settings through verbal and written forms.

Wycliffe eventually became a professor at Oxford. Academically, he received his Master of Arts by 1361, and then in 1372 he received his doctorate of theology which brought freedom to lecture in theology.²⁴ Unlike so many who had gone before him who focused on Aquinas and Duns Scotus and the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard, Wycliffe taught the Bible. In the following words, pastor and author Steven J. Lawson summarizes Wycliffe's commitment to Scripture as a professor.



He refused to cite the teaching of the church fathers, the findings of councils, and the decisions of popes as carrying greater authority than the Bible. His appeal was to the Scriptures alone. Further, he denounced ecclesiastical corruption in high places among the church leaders, stressing the singular importance of the written Word and grieving over the lack of biblical teaching in pulpits. For this strict adherence to

Scripture, he became known as “The Evangelical Doctor.”²⁵

Wycliffe also sought to interpret and help others to submit to the Bible by serving as a “rector” — the spiritual leader responsible for a congregation — in Fillingham, then Ludgershall, and then the last decade of his life (assisted eventually by John Horn once his health declined²⁶) at Lutterworth about eighty miles from London. He taught the Bible with such care and power that many people were compelled to come and hear.²⁷

It is worth noting that something else drew people to Wycliffe: as the saying goes, he “practiced what he preached.” A young man who knew Wycliffe said the following about him.

Master John Wyclif . . . was considered by many to be the most holy of all men in his age. . . . He was absolutely blameless in his conduct. Wherefore very many of the chief men of this kingdom, who frequently held counsel with him, were devotedly attached to him, kept a record of what he said, and guided themselves after his manner of life.²⁸

Truth pouring out of a godly man — a powerful combination for any generation!

In addition to his public speaking ministry, Wycliffe was a potent communicator in writing. Close to 300 of Wycliffe's sermons have been preserved to the present day,²⁹ and he completed over 160 theological works in his lifetime.³⁰ Some of these writings were even used by Martin Luther in his confrontations with the pope two centuries beyond Wycliffe.³¹

An Undeserved Blessing

The people of Wycliffe's churches and classrooms were blessed to have him in their midst, filling their minds with biblical ideas and satisfying their souls with words of eternal life. They had never heard anything like this! But even though they were victims of a corrupt church and destructive teaching, no one deserved such blessing as God gave through Wycliffe. God would have been perfectly just to let the people perish. But he was gracious to them.

Alistair Begg was the first Bible teacher I remember listening to on the radio. He was from Scotland,

but pastoring in the Cleveland, Ohio, area (my home state as a boy). I was instantly attracted to his teaching, and not because of his Scottish accent! I heard in his communication a man given to carefully expounding the text of Scripture, and my redeemed heart delighted in it. There were other men on the radio who could have won my affections. Some might have led me astray. But the Lord brought Alastair into my life and used him to disciple me. Why did God do this? Not because I deserved it, but because he is gracious.

Perhaps your story is similar. I hope you would add that you are in a church that is characterized by faithful Bible teaching. Remember: we could have been born into a country without a Bible in our language, and without faithful Bible teachers. Like the people in England in Wycliffe's day, we were born in sin, enemies of God, deserving of nothing but judgment. But also like the people in Wycliffe's day within the sound of his Bible-filled voice, God has been gracious to us by giving us modern day Wycliffes, both online and, more importantly, in our local churches.

Do not take for granted what others throughout history have rarely, if ever, possessed. Do not take

for granted what none throughout history have ever deserved.

CHAPTER 4

Wycliffe, a Bible Man - Opposing the Corrupt Church

John Wycliffe was not a cold or unkind man.

In his own village . . . he was much loved. He was often seen with a portion of his handwritten Bible under his arm, his staff in hand, visiting the people in order to share the Word of God with them. Rich and poor were glad when he came to visit. He was the friend of all; he was ready to teach, comfort, and pray with anyone in his community. Continually he sought the good of his flock and for this the people loved him.³²

However, like Jesus opposing the Pharisees, Wycliffe was stern and unflinching when confronting corrupt leaders in the church.

One king, Edward III, was drawn to Wycliffe's teaching, but not because of his faithful Bible exposition. His appreciation for Wycliffe was connected to a practice that had been going on for centuries: kings were expected to send to the pope money they had gathered from the church in England. Wycliffe spoke against this, which pleased the King very much.³³

Wycliffe's favorable position in the eyes of the English throne led him to argue on behalf of the King before Parliament, and then to serve as one of several commissioners representing the King before the pope in Bruges, France, in 1374. The conflict between the English Crown and Rome was ever-present, and Wycliffe's intellectual abilities, coupled with his "siding" with the King on certain issues, led to these unique opportunities.

Wycliffe's service on behalf of the King, especially in Bruges, proved significant for his role as a Bible man in England for at least three reasons. First, he became acquainted with the son of the King, John of Gaunt, whom the Lord would use to protect Wycliffe. Second, upon Wycliffe's return to England from France, the King appointed him to the rectorship at Lutterworth, his final

congregation which was closer to Oxford than his previous church. And third, and probably most crucially, Wycliffe's two years of service in Bruges on behalf of the King revealed to him more than ever the abuses of the Roman Catholic Church. He was further motivated to speak the truth and expose such depravity.³⁴

Denunciation

This points to a second proof that John Wycliffe was a Bible man:

He persistently denounced the faulty doctrine and worldly practices of the Roman Catholic Church.

In Writing

Wycliffe did not shy away from addressing any corruption he saw in the church. For example, he was incensed by the begging friars. They taught unbiblical messages wherever they went and told people that their sins could be forgiven, but only if they compensated the friars financially. The friars took a vow of poverty, but lived like princes! In response, Wycliffe wrote a tract titled *Objections to the Friars* in which he "assails them as the pests of society, the enemies of religion, the patrons and promoters of every crime."³⁵

Church historian Stephen Nichols highlights three critical works of Wycliffe, written in the 1370s, that paved the way for the English reformation in the 16th century.³⁶ The first work was titled *On Divine Dominion*. In this, Wycliffe spoke against the very existence of the papacy. He would eventually call the pope the “Antichrist, the worldly priest of Rome, and the most cursed of all pickpockets and purse-keepers.”³⁷

A second vital work of Wycliffe was titled *On Civil Dominion* in which he “makes a case for the civil authorities not to be at the mercy of the church,”³⁸ an idea that angered the pope greatly.

Most significantly, Wycliffe wrote *On the Truth of Sacred Scripture*. At a time when Roman Catholic law said that producing Bible translations in the common language of the people was illegal and punishable by death, Wycliffe made the case that the people deserved the Bible in English.

In Public

Wycliffe not only wrote against the church, but his lectures at Oxford targeted Rome, and he

even spoke the truth in the open air when visiting London, further frustrating the Catholic clergy. The church consistently charged Wycliffe with heresy and sought to silence and imprison him, and even wanted to put him to death. Multiple times he was called to trials and councils, all presupposing his guilt.



The first trial in which Wycliffe was able to speak (see chapter 5 for an earlier trial that ended in a riot) happened in London at Lambeth Palace before the Archbishop of Canterbury (and other bishops) in April of 1378. The pope had officially issued decrees (papal bulls) against Wycliffe, specifically nineteen theological errors, leading to this trial.³⁹

A large crowd came to the trial, many in favor of Wycliffe. Just as the trial was getting underway, a message from the queen-mother, Joan of Kent, was presented to the clerical judges. She was the mother of King Richard II (who was only eleven). She demanded that they not pass a sentence on Wycliffe, whom she did not believe was a heretic. The queen-mother's request struck fear in the bishops. They did not rule officially, even though they dialogued with Wycliffe which gave him an opportunity to make his case for truth. He then presented to the judges a written defense which included the following.⁴⁰

1. The pope of Rome has no political authority.
2. All popes are sinners just as other men and need to be reprovved.
3. The pope has no right to the national resources of England.
4. Priests have no power to forgive sins.
5. Neither the pope nor his priests have the power of excommunication.
6. The Church is a plunderer of the world's goods.
7. No tithes should be paid to Rome.
8. The mass is blasphemous.

In December of 1382, only two years before his death, Wycliffe was called before a council of bishops and other clergy in Oxford to be tried, condemned, and delivered to civil authorities for punishment as a heretic. Though frail due to poor health, he once again proclaimed the truth and exposed the errors of Rome, concluding with the simple statement, "The truth shall prevail."⁴¹

Imitation

Wycliffe's opposition to the false gospel of the Roman Catholic Church is worth imitating today. Pastor and author R.C. Sproul died on December 14, 2017. In his tribute to Sproul, pastor John MacArthur shared about the time in the late 1990s when he and Sproul participated in a private summit meeting regarding the "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" (ECT) document that had been recently issued. MacArthur, Sproul, John Ankerberg, and D. James Kennedy together expressed their concerns to three ECT advocates: Chuck Colson, J.I. Packer, and Bill Bright. Here's the part MacArthur highlighted about Sproul.

R.C. pointed out that the document's discussion of justification by faith omitted the all-important word *alone* (the *sola* in *sola fide*). This was and always has been the central point of disagreement between Roman Catholics and Protestants, he said. By deliberately omitting that word and acting as if it were a non-issue, Protestants who helped draft the ECT document were deliberately capitulating to the main Roman Catholic error and undermining the gospel itself. At one point he became so passionate in making his argument that he literally climbed on the table, making the plea on his hands and knees from the tabletop until each person on the other side of the table had made direct eye contact with him. There wasn't a hint of malice in the gesture, and everyone in the room understood that.⁴²

Sproul had some Wycliffe blood in him! (It should be noted that Sproul was not calling these advocates of the ECT document unbelievers.)

We may never have the same prominent platforms as these men, but the stakes are just as high when we are talking to our lost Catholic neighbors who think they are Christians, or any who believe they are right with God, but are not. Give them the true gospel. Plead with them to believe. Climbing on tables is optional.

CHAPTER 5

Wycliffe, a Bible Man - Enduring Persecution and Suffering

John Wycliffe knew how to make his views known through unconventional and even humorous ways. For example, he said the letters in the title for the office of *CARDINAL* stood for this: "Captain of the Apostates of the Realm of the Devil, Impudent and Nefarious Ally of Lucifer."⁴³

Wycliffe also knew how to turn a phrase. As an illustration, the Roman Catholic Church taught that the bread and wine of the Lord's supper changed into the actual body and blood of Jesus. When addressing this error called "transubstantiation," Wycliffe spoke with these clever words.

How can you, O priest, who are only a man, make your Maker? What? The thing

that grows in the fields today — the ear of wheat which you pluck today, shall that be God tomorrow?⁴⁴ As you cannot make the works which He made, how can you make Him who made the works? Woe to the adulterous generation that believes the words of the pope rather than the gospel!⁴⁵

One of the consequences of speaking like this, especially about the Lord's supper, was expulsion from Oxford.⁴⁶ Even John of Gaunt, whom we are about to see was a staunch supporter of Wycliffe, abandoned him because of his view of the Lord's supper. But Wycliffe always stood firm.

This brings us to a third proof that John Wycliffe was devoted to the Bible:

He endured persecution and suffering that came because of his commitment to the authority and sufficiency of Scripture.

Abysmal Persecution

The first trial Wycliffe experienced happened in 1377 in London.⁴⁷ William Courtenay, Bishop of

London, summoned Wycliffe to come before him and other judges at St. Paul's Cathedral. A massive, mostly pro-Wycliffe, crowd came to take in the trial on February 19, 1377. Even the aisles were full of people. Two prominent political figures, John of Gaunt, the Duke of Lancaster (and the King's son), and Lord Percy, the Earl Marshall of England, came with Wycliffe to support him.

As the proceedings began, an angry exchange took place especially between Bishop Courtenay and John of Gaunt. Supposedly it started with Lord Percy encouraging Wycliffe to sit down, explaining, "You have many things to answer to, and you need to repose on a soft seat."

Bishop Courtenay, already irritated because of the crowd's backing of Wycliffe and the support of these two powerful officials, replied, "It is unmeet that one cited before his ordinary should sit down during his answer; he must and shall stand."

John of Gaunt chimed in, "The Lord Percy's motion for Wycliffe is but reasonable; and as for you, my lord bishop, who are grown so proud and arrogant, I will bring down the pride not of you alone, but of all the prelacy in England."

The dialogue became even more unpleasant. Soon the Bishop's thugs attacked John of Gaunt and Lord Percy. Chaos ensued, and the trial could not continue. Wycliffe never even got to hear the charges against him, but this trial serves as an illustration of the kind of disrespect and furor he experienced.



Following the trial at Lambeth Palace (see chapter 4), Wycliffe became extremely ill at the end of 1378. Everyone thought he was going to die. The Roman Catholic clergy rejoiced. Some friars went to see him, hoping he would recant his views. By this time, Wycliffe's beliefs were so prominent among the people of England that these friars hoped

that if he renounced his doctrine, they could get back to their carnal ways without having to deal any longer with the resistance of Wycliffites. They stated, "You have death on your lips. Be touched by your faults, and retract in our presence all that you have said to our injury."⁴⁸

Wycliffe asked his servant to raise him up in his bed, looked directly at the friars, and said loudly, "I shall not die but live, and declare the evil deeds of the friars!"⁴⁹

A couple of years later, Wycliffe was accused of something that he obviously did not do. The common people of England rebelled in 1381. They were tired of the tactics employed by their superiors such as rigorous, oppressive tax collections. This "Peasant's Revolt" was ultimately blamed on Wycliffe. This was absurd, especially when recognizing that the rebels thought favorably of the begging friars.

Nevertheless, in 1382, Willam Courtenay (who was now serving as a church leader over an area well beyond London, giving him more power than ever) arranged a synod in order to condemn Wycliffe's views. It is unclear whether or not Wycliffe was in attendance. What is noteworthy

is that during the meeting, a violent earthquake shook all of London, including the building where the synod was happening. The pro-Wycliffe people believed this was God's judgment upon Wycliffe's enemies. Courtenay took a different view, saying, "This earthquake foretells the purging of this kingdom from heresies."⁵⁰

One biographer explains what resulted from this synod: "A fierce and fiery persecution was now commenced against the Reformer and his followers."⁵¹

Expulsion from Oxford. Rejection by friends. Unjust trials. Harassment when deathly ill. False accusations. These are just a few ways Wycliffe was persecuted. Other sufferings could be added to the list, such as house arrest,⁵² and he was even rejected by his parents.⁵³ Yet through it all, Wycliffe endured. To do otherwise would have been to reject the Bible and, ultimately, the Lord himself.

Abiding Inspiration

Biographies help us to keep following Jesus. In 1988, John Piper began a tradition of giving a

biographical sketch at an annual conference for pastors, hosted by his church and the ministry he started. Here is what Piper says about the significance of biographies in his life.

Biographies have served as much as any other human force in my life to resist the inertia of mediocrity. . . . When you are surrounded by a society of emotionally fragile quitters, and when you see a good bit of this ethos in yourself, you need to spend time with people — whether dead or alive — whose lives prove there is another way to live. . . . Few things inspire me to live radically for Christ more than the story of those who did.⁵⁴

My hope is that this portrait of John Wycliffe, and in particular the persecution and suffering he endured because he was a Bible man, will inspire *you* to keep treasuring Scripture even though it will be costly. You will not regret it. Jesus put it like this: “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it” (Luke 9:23-24).

CHAPTER 6

Wycliffe, a Bible Man - Translating the Bible into English

It is estimated that there have been over 350 translations of the complete Bible in English since the 14th century.⁵⁵ In John Wycliffe's day, there were none.⁵⁶ In the three-hundred years leading up to Wycliffe's life, English was used very rarely in writings. "Noblemen wrote in French — the language of the elite — and official church documents were in Latin. English was for peasants."⁵⁷

Wycliffe was determined to get the Scriptures into the language of the people of England so that they could know and follow Jesus. His resolve is evident in the following words.

Those Heretics who pretend that the laity need not know God's law but that the knowledge which priests have had imparted to them by word of mouth is sufficient, do not deserve to be listened to. For Holy Scripture is the faith of the Church, and the more widely its true meaning becomes known the better it will be. Therefore since the laity should know the faith, it should be taught in whatever language is most easily comprehended. . . . [After all,] Christ and His apostles taught the people in the language best known to them.⁵⁸

The fourth proof of Wycliffe's devotion to Scripture is this:

He oversaw the first translation of the entire Bible into English.

A Monumental Feat

It was in the final years of his life, starting in 1380, that John Wycliffe focused on translating the Bible from the Latin Vulgate⁵⁹ into English. There is disagreement as to the amount of actual translation



work Wycliffe did. Some believe he translated the New Testament, and perhaps portions of the Old Testament.⁶⁰ Others suggest he did hardly any of the actual translation.⁶¹ All, however, agree that he was the chief instigator and overseer of this critical translation work — his greatest achievement.

Wycliffe utilized a team of men in his translation efforts, including Nicholas of Hereford, a friend from Oxford, and presumably John Purvey, Wycliffe's assistant. None of the translators knew the original biblical languages of Hebrew and Greek.⁶²

There are two views regarding the Bible's completion. Some argue that the whole Bible was completed within Wycliffe's lifetime,⁶³ whereas others say the entire Bible was not completed until several years after he died in 1384.⁶⁴ Either way, the task was accomplished.

Regarding the first edition of the "Wycliffe Bible," Bible scholar Daniel Wallace says, "(It) was slavishly literal — even to the point of retaining the Latin word order when it made no sense in English!"⁶⁵ Therefore, Wycliffe's assistant, John Purvey, revised it twice (first in 1388, then 1395) into more readable English.⁶⁶

If you were transported back to the 1380s, you would barely understand the (Middle) English of the day. Here is Hebrews 1:1-4 from the Wycliffe Bible.

Manyfold and many maners sum tyme
God spekinge to fadris in prophetis, at the
laste in thes daies spak to us in the sone:
whom he ordeynede eyr of alle thingis,
by whom he made and the worldis. The
which whanne he is the schynynge of
glorie and figure of his substaunce, and
berynge alle thingis bi word of his vertu,

makyng purgacioun of synnes, sittith on the righthalf of mageste in high thingis; so moche maad betere than aungelis, by how moche he hath inherited a more different name bifore hem.

It would be about half a century before the printing press was available (1440), so every Wycliffe Bible had to be handwritten! Working full time, an entire Bible could take close to a year to finish.⁶⁷ Sometimes only sections of Scripture were copied so that the circulation would multiply. Amazingly, thousands of whole or partial copies were distributed. Historian J.A. Wylie explains what transpired.

The interest taken in [Wycliffe] and in his work enlisted a hundred expert hands, who, though they toiled to multiply copies, could scarcely supply the many who were eager to buy. Some ordered complete copies to be made for them; others were content with portions; the same copies served several families in many instances; and in a very short time Wycliffe's English Bible had obtained a wide circulation, and brought a new life into many an English home.⁶⁸

It seems as if the availability of this wonderful book would have driven an increase in literacy among the English people who, providentially, had recently been focusing on their language. Today, over 600 years later, there are at least 20 handwritten copies of the entire Wycliffe Bible still available, and about 90 copies of the handwritten New Testament are extant.⁶⁹

Wycliffe's enemies were incensed. They knew, as Wallace writes, that a Bible in the vernacular "indirectly began to break down the power structures of the political-religious machinery of the Roman Catholic Church. Lay folks did not need to rely on the priests to access God. And they could know his will and even challenge their spiritual leaders."⁷⁰

Even twenty years after his death, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Arundel, said this about Wycliffe: "This pestilential and most wretched John Wycliffe of damnable memory, a child of the old devil, and himself a child or pupil of Antichrist . . . crowned his wickedness by translating the Scriptures into the mother tongue."⁷¹

And þat was þat marie maȝde leyn woldene
 & marie of iames & salome b. on yte brete
 wellinge on neme this. to come & to anoynte ihu &
 ful erli ioo of þe wouke daies: þe came to þe lepulac.
 where þe time was rilu & þe leide to gide re/ wolden
 moue arwey þe stou to us: fro þe done of þe lepulac/
 & þe in leide & laien y stou waleward arwey for it was
 ful gret: & þe iede to þe lepulac & laien aȝonglig
 hylid w. aȝhit smole. littege at y rufhale. & þe were
 aferd/ w. h. seip to h. r. le. je dieð/ þe leke ihu of
 nazareth a. u. o. h. e. d. i. s. w. r. i. l. u. þe is not here lo þe pla
 cene here þe leide h. i. but go þe here je to h. i. e. d. i. s. p. l. a. s.
 & to þe t. r. y. þe al go bi h. i. i. to galilee/ þe i. e. s. s. u. l. e.
 le h. i. a. s. þe leide to þou/ & þe i. e. d. e. out: & fledde fro þe
 pulac/ w. d. i. e. d. e. & i. u. a. k. i. n. g. l. a. d. d. e. a. s. a. i. l. i. d. h. e. & t. o. t. h. i. a.
 þe leide on y p. i. g. t. o. r. þe d. r. e. d. d. e. & i. l. l. c. v. o. o. s. e. r. l. i. f. f. u. r. s. t. e.
 d. a. i. o. n. þe w. o. k. e. & a. p. p. e. r. i. d. e. f. i. r. s. t. to marie maȝde leyn.
 h. r. o. w. o. l. d. e. l. a. d. d. e. c. a. s. t. o. u. t. l. e. u. e. n. e. d. r. u. e. h. s. & i. d. e. j. e. d. e.
 t. e. l. d. e. to h. e. y. l. a. d. d. e. l. e. w. i. t. h. i. w. i. n. d. e. w. e. r. e. w. e. l. i. g. e. &
 w. e. p. i. g. e. & þe i. e. r. i. g. e. y. t. i. p. l. e. u. y. d. e. & w. a. s. l. e. y. n. o. f. b. u. r.
 b. i. l. e. u. y. d. e. n. o. t. b. u. t. a. l. l. þe p. i. g. i. s. w. i. t. h. i. n. t. w. e. y. n. o. f. h. e.
 w. a. n. d. e. d. e. l. e. w. a. s. l. e. y. n. i. d. i. a. n. o. f. l. i. c. e. n. s. e. to h. e. g. o. i. g. e.
 i. t. o. a. t. o. u. & þe i. e. d. e. t. e. l. l. e. to þe o. p. e. & n. e. s. þe b. i. l. e. u. y. d. e.
 to h. e. b. u. t. a. t. þe l. a. s. t. e. w. i. t. h. i. n. þe o. p. & d. i. l. a. p. h. i. s. l. a. t. e. a. t.
 þe m. e. t. e. i. l. l. c. a. p. p. e. r. i. d. e. h. e. to & r. e. p. u. y. d. e. y. b. u. b. i. l. e. n. e.
 o. f. h. e. & þe h. i. n. d. u. e. l. l. e. o. f. h. e. r. t. e. f. o. r. þe b. i. l. e. u. y. d. e. n. o. t. to.
 h. e. y. l. a. d. d. e. l. e. y. n. y. t. w. a. s. r. i. l. u. f. r. o. d. e. y. l. e. l. e. i. d. e. to.
 h. e. g. o. j. e. i. t. o. a. l. þe w. o. l. d. & þe d. e. y. g. o. t. p. e. l. to e. v. e. c. r. a. t. u. r. e.
 w. o. l. d. e. y. b. i. l. e. u. e. y. & i. s. t. a. p. t. i. d. & h. a. l. l. e. l. a. a. f. b. u. t. l. e. y. b. i.
 l. e. n. e. y. n. o. t. h. y. a. l. l. d. i. g. n. e. d. & j. e. l. e. t. o. k. e. n. e. s. h. y. l. e. f. u. e. h. e.

FACSIMILE OF ST. MARK 16TH, FROM A WYCLIFFE BIBLE IN THE
 LIBRARY OF LAMBETH PALACE. (Slightly reduced).

The next time an English translation was produced was William Tyndale's New Testament (translated from the Greek text), but that was 130 years later. A major reason there was such a gap in new translation work was that in 1408, at the Convocation of Oxford, English translations were declared to be illegal. Translating the Bible into English was effectively halted because it required a Bishop's permission.⁷² That alone reveals the value of the Wycliffe Bible not only in his day, but in the decades that followed.

A Must Read

Biographer J.C. Carrick explains just how much John Wycliffe had to overcome in order to translate the Bible into English.

At this time of day we can hardly estimate the difficulties of such an undertaking as this: there was the heavy opposition of the Church to the popularising and vulgarising of the priests' sacred book: there was the entire absence of printer's press and printer's ink, and the like, — only the human hand and the slowly moving pen: these and a hundred other

difficulties the brave spirit of John Wycliffe faced and overcame; and thus he was the forerunner of all the later translators.⁷³

Yet Wycliffe would not tell us that the Bible is a “must read” because of the sacrifices he made and the danger he put himself and others in to produce this translation. He would tell us to cherish the Bible for the same reason that he was determined to get it into the language of the people of England: because of its ultimate author — the living God — and because its contents, if taken to heart, will save your soul. Wycliffe once wrote, “Spiritual profit is infinitely better than temporal, and spiritual profit cannot be acquired apart from the teaching of Holy Scripture.”⁷⁴

In an age when the tug toward social media or streaming services or emails is relentless, spiritually prosperous believers (Psalm 1:3) choose *more* Scripture, and *less* entertainment; *more* of God’s voice, and *less* of man’s.

One modern inspiring example of this is author and theologian Vern Poythress. His son, pastor Justin Poythress, wrote this about growing up with his father.

We did morning and evening devotions as a family, and I knew my father read his Bible in the morning. But I also remember other occasions, such as Saturday afternoons, or evenings, or during vacation times, hearing — of all things — a sanctified hissing noise.

The noise would come from his bedroom, the door slightly ajar, and I discerned the cause of the hissing to be my father's voice as he read the Bible to himself at a volume just above a whisper. The result, audible to someone outside the room, was a series of 's' sounds echoing faintly in the hallway. When I peeked in, he would sometimes raise his eyes and offer the faintest smile before returning to the Scripture. He was always willing to be disturbed, but if left alone, he would proceed for long durations, reading large chunks in a sitting.⁷⁵

What was his father doing? Memorizing Scripture. Justin Poythress would learn that his father had memorized "the entire New Testament, the Psalter, the second half of Isaiah, Ecclesiastes and the Song

of Solomon, all the Minor Prophets, Ruth, and other select portions of Old Testament narrative” — about half of the Bible! And he notes that his father tries to keep these verses memorized by reviewing six chapters a day.⁷⁶ A wonderful part of this story is that Justin Poythress sees his father as such a godly man, and he is sure his dad’s constant intake of Scripture is the key.

We might never be able to memorize so much, but we can all do more. And when we consider the spiritual profit that comes with the intake of Scripture, why would we not give *more* hours to it? There has never been a better time to start “hissing” with Vern Poythress. Blessed will be that man or woman (Psalm 1:1-2)!⁷⁷

A Major Need

I also wonder if someone reading this might be moved to follow in Wycliffe’s steps and become a Bible translator and bring this masterpiece to others. After all, “1.51 billion people, speaking 6661 languages, do not have a full Bible in their first language. 145 million people, speaking 1892 languages, still need translation work to begin.”⁷⁸

Maybe you are supposed to join a team of translators somewhere in the world and do this grueling, kingdom-advancing work. It is not flashy, but Bible translation is as needed today in various places around the world as it was in 14th century England.⁷⁹

CHAPTER 7

Wycliffe, a Bible Man - Deploying Preachers and Bible Disseminators

By the end of the 14th century, it is estimated that about a quarter of the population of England was favorable toward the theological convictions of John Wycliffe.⁸⁰ That was 500,000 citizens in a country of approximately two million people!⁸¹

How did this happen? John Wycliffe had disciples.

These were chiefly Oxford graduates trained by Wycliffe himself, and sent by him all over the land to preach a plain and simple Christian faith. Their commission was to preach the gospel; not to dispense pardons or celebrate Masses for the living or the dead, but simply clothed with russet cloak, barefooted, and staff in

hand, to tell the message of the Cross in the towns and villages of Britain.⁸²

This gives us a fifth proof that John Wycliffe was a Bible man:

He deployed itinerant preachers and Bible disseminators throughout England.

Deploying Bible Men

As time passed, even uneducated men were trained and became part of this traveling team of gospel preachers.⁸³ These evangelists traveled in pairs and were called “poor priests,” functioning intentionally opposite of the begging friars in both lifestyle and message.⁸⁴ They agreed with Wycliffe’s views of the authority of Scripture and salvation by grace through faith in Jesus.⁸⁵ Their aim was to communicate the truth plainly wherever they could — marketplaces, fairs, houses, under trees, even in churches if they were not prohibited — with the goal that people would be converted to Christ.

Wycliffe said to these men, “Go and preach. It is the sublimest work. After your sermon is ended . . .



visit the sick, the aged, the poor, the blind, and the lame, and succour them according to your ability.”⁸⁶ He even supplied them with outlines of messages to utilize in various settings.⁸⁷ They also disseminated gospel tracts from Wycliffe or Nicholas of Hereford,⁸⁸ as well as Wycliffe Bibles in part or whole.⁸⁹

After Wycliffe died in 1384, his itinerant preachers began to be called “Lollards.” This term, used by Wycliffe’s enemies, might have been a way of calling these men “mumblers” (derived from a Dutch word) who were leading people astray from the doctrine of Rome with their supposedly muddled teaching.⁹⁰ Or, “Lollards” might have meant “tares” (from the Latin word *lolium*). If so,

Wycliffe's enemies were calling his disciples tares among the Catholic wheat of God's kingdom (and, therefore, enemies of God).⁹¹ These men eventually welcomed the designation because it clearly distinguished them from the corrupt church.

As the years passed, a large number of Lollards were executed because of the gospel they proclaimed. Some men had their Bibles hung around their necks to be burned at the stake with them.⁹² The first Lollard martyr, of many more in the decades ahead, was William Sawtre, burned at the stake in London in 1401.⁹³

These brave Bible men, initially deployed by Wycliffe, show us that their leader himself was a Bible man.

Training and Deploying Bible Men Today

Pastors should learn from Wycliffe's strategy. If a pastor wants to leave a legacy of biblical fidelity — if he hopes the Bible is cherished in his church decades after he is gone from this earth — he must train men in his church. Pastor and author Jim Elliff writes, "If the truth were known, a man's ministry

is more likely measured by the mature disciples he leaves behind than the manicured sermons he gave.”⁹⁴

Is it really possible that training men today will benefit the church in ten years? In fifty years? In one-hundred years? Yes.

Wycliffe’s training and deployment of young men caused a wave of gospel knowledge to wash over the entire country so powerfully that the effects were still felt centuries later. J.C. Ryle remarks about Wycliffe’s traveling preachers: “They sowed the seed of thoughts among the people which were never entirely forgotten, and, I believe, paved the way for the Reformation. If Wycliffe had never done anything but this for England, I believe that this alone would entitle him to our deep thankfulness.”⁹⁵

Bible men make more Bible men, potentially influencing generations. But this does not just happen via forty-five minutes of teaching on Sunday. More time in Scripture with the men of the church actively participating in Bible study is required. Even just one hour a week with some of the teachable, eager men could have colossal ramifications.

If you are a pastor, here is my suggestion: pick a book of the Bible and start reading and studying it with the men in your church who want to participate. Work hard observing and interpreting the text before moving to present-day implications. Make it a dialogue, and give them the joy of discovery. Do not talk too much, or feel like you have to always “give the correct answer.” Part of training men to study the Bible and to know how to “talk Bible” requires being quiet as the leader perhaps way more than you might prefer so that others can share what *they* see and what *they* are comprehending.⁹⁶

What will come of this type of training of men? They probably will not go barefoot (like the Lollards) throughout the country preaching Christ, though they may go barefoot in their *homes* proclaiming the truth. They will have something of eternal value to share *wherever* they go.

Even if you can only get two men to commit to meeting once a week, start there and see what God develops. You will not regret it in the present, and future generations will benefit perhaps more than we could ever know as they come into contact with such Bible men. It might even lead to another reformation!

Disseminating the Bible Today

We all can join the Lollards in the distribution of the Scriptures. The Lord can even use a “diminishing” New Testament for his saving purposes. Let me explain with a story.

Gaylord Kambarami served as the General Secretary of the Bible Society of Zimbabwe. He once offered someone a New Testament, but the man responded that he would just roll the pages and use them as cigarettes. Kambarami replied, “I will make a deal with you. I will give you this book if you promise to read every page before you smoke it.” The man agreed to the arrangement, so he gave him the New Testament and they went separate ways.

Approximately fifteen years later, Kambarami was attending a convention. The speaker on the platform unexpectedly recognized him, pointed him out to the crowd, and said, “This man doesn’t remember me, but I remember him. About 15 years ago he tried to sell me a New Testament. When I refused to buy it he gave it to me, even though I told him I would use the pages to roll cigarettes. He made me promise to read the pages before I

smoked them. Well, I smoked Matthew. I smoked Mark. Then I smoked Luke. But when I got to John 3:16, I couldn't smoke any more. My life was changed from that moment!" He soon became an evangelist, devoting his days to telling others the gospel of Jesus Christ.⁹⁷

Consider to whom you might give Scripture. Have a few New Testaments (or even single Gospels) with you at all times. Ask God for opportunities to give them away to people who are genuinely interested. You may want to paste a personal testimony in the front cover about how the Bible has changed you, along with your contact information. If only ten people reading this gave away ten portions of Scripture to different people over the next year, that would be one-hundred people receiving Scripture! Imagine what God might do through such a simple effort.

CHAPTER 8

The Death, “Martyrdom,” and Influence of England’s Bible Man

John Wycliffe did not die as a martyr. Instead, while he was engaged in ministry in his church in Lutterworth, he had a stroke (his second). He could no longer speak, and three days later, on December 31, 1384, he died.⁹⁸

Wycliffe’s enemies continued to rail against him after he was buried in the graveyard of his church. One enemy said this.

On the feast of the passion of St. Thomas of Canterbury, John Wycliffe, that organ of the devil, that enemy of the Church, that author of confusion to the common people, that idol of heretics, that image of hypocrites, that restorer of schism, that

storehouse of lies, that sink of flattery, — being smitten by the horrible judgment of God, was struck with palsy, and continued to live in that condition until St. Sylvester's Day, on which he breathed out his malicious spirit into the abodes of darkness.⁹⁹

The Wycliffe Bible continued to frustrate Wycliffe's opponents. In 1390, a motion was presented to the House of Lords to burn all Wycliffe Bibles. When this happened, John of Gaunt, Wycliffe's famous defender from previous years, became furious and asked, "What! Are we the very dregs of humanity that we cannot possess the laws of our religion in our own tongue?"¹⁰⁰

Martyrdom After Death?

And then in 1415, over thirty years beyond Wycliffe's death, a church assembly called the "Council of Constance" reviewed portions of Wycliffe's writings and found him guilty of perhaps 300 counts of what they called heresy.¹⁰¹ It was then ordered that "his body and bones, if they might be discovered and known from the bodies of other faithful people, should be taken from the



ground, and thrown away from the burial of any church[yard], according to the canon laws and decrees!"¹⁰²

Why did they command this? It signaled to those following Wycliffe's path that the same would happen to them *while they were alive* if they did not recant. Thirteen years later, Wycliffe's enemies

dug up his bones, burned them to ashes, and cast them into the nearby brook. Wycliffe became a “martyr” forty-four years after he died!

Influence After Death

The brook into which John Wycliffe’s ashes were thrown was called “the Swift.” A man named Thomas Fuller once commented on his ashes, saying, “This brook conveyed them into Avon, the Avon into the Severn, the Severn into the narrow seas, they into the main ocean; and thus the ashes of Wycliffe were the emblem of his doctrine, which is now dispersed all the world over.”¹⁰³ Indeed, long after Wycliffe was gone his influence remained. This is why Wycliffe is often called “The Morning Star of the Reformation,” because, like the bright star (actually Venus) that sometimes shines in the dominating darkness in the eastern sky telling us the sun will soon rise, Wycliffe shined light into the darkness of his day as a forerunner of the sun — the Protestant Reformation.

Consider just one “line” from Wycliffe to the Reformation. His works and doctrine spread to a man named Jan Hus in Bohemia (present-day

Czech Republic). At the Council of Constance, Hus was called in to defend his pro-Wycliffe views. He was found guilty and soon burned at the stake. But before his death, Hus, whose name in Czech means "goose," guaranteed, "You may roast the goose, but a hundred years from now a swan will arise whose singing you will not be able to silence."¹⁰⁴

Just over one-hundred years after Hus' death in 1415, that "swan" arose. His name was Martin Luther. He followed in the steps of Wycliffe and Hus, striving to bring the church back to the authority and sufficiency of Scripture. During one famous debate, the Leipzig Disputation, Luther was called a "Hussite." It was meant as an insult, but during an intermission Luther read Hus' works and then, when the debate reconvened, Luther affirmed Hus' teaching.¹⁰⁵ Luther also said during this debate, "It is of little consequence to me whether these things were said by Wycliffe or by Hus. . . they are truth."¹⁰⁶

From Wycliffe to Hus to Luther . . . to you? Will you carry on this legacy and be a Bible man? A Bible woman? A Bible boy or girl?

ENDNOTES:

¹ W.H. Behrens, "John Wyclif," in *Great Leaders and Great Events: Historical Essays on the Field of Church History*, ed. L. Bucheimer (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1922), 124.

² Margaret Shand, "John Wycliffe," <https://www.epc.org.au/historical/john-wycliffe.html>, accessed January 25, 2022.

³ Daniel B. Wallace, "1. From Wycliffe to King James (The Period of Challenge)," <https://bible.org/seriespage/1-wycliffe-king-james-period-challenge>, accessed January 25, 2022.

⁴ Ambassador Group, *John Wycliffe: Man of Courage* (Greenville, SC: Ambassador Emerald International, 2004), 21-23, Kindle.

⁵ J.C. Carrick, *Wycliffe and the Lollards* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908), 166.

⁶ Gary J. Hall, *John Wycliffe: A Light Shining in a Dark Place*, chapter 1, <https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/John%20Wycliffe.pdf>, accessed January 25, 2022.

⁷ J.C. Ryle, *Light from Old Times* (Moscow, ID: Charles Nolan Publishers, 2000), 22.

⁸ There are multiple ways Wycliffe's last name is spelled. The other most common way is "Wyclif."

⁹ Wallace, "From Wycliffe to King James."

¹⁰ <https://www.wycliffe.org/about>, accessed January 25, 2022.

¹¹ https://www.wycliffe.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Tall-Infographic_2021_EN.pdf, accessed January 25, 2022.

¹² Shand, "John Wycliffe."

¹³ Religious Tract Society, *Life and Times of John Wycliffe: The Morning Star of the Reformation* (56, Paternoster Row, 65, St. Paul's Churchyard: The Religious Tract Society, 1884), 26.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 16-18.

¹⁶ Michael Haykin, "'The Best Friend in the Worst Time': Pandemics in Church History," <https://www.evangelical-times.org/articles/historical/the-best-friend-in-the-worst-time-pandemics-in-church-history/>, accessed March 14, 2022.

¹⁷ Mark Galli, "When a Third of the World Died," <https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-49/black-death-christian-response-third-world-died.html>, accessed July 20, 2022.

¹⁸ Hall, *John Wycliffe: A Light Shining*, chapter 2.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* and Carrick, *Wycliffe and the Lollards*, 64.

²⁰ Steven J. Lawson, *The Bible Convictions of John Wycliffe* (Sanford, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 2021), 14-15, Kindle.

Lawson is convinced that this is the time Wycliffe was converted. He is probably right.

²¹ Cited in Robert Vaughn, *The Life and Opinions of John de Wycliffe*, Vol. I, 2nd ed. (London: Holdsworth and Ball, 1831), 259.

²² Harold Sala, *Why You Can Have Confidence in the Bible: Bridging the Distance Between Your Heart and God's Word* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 2008), 204.

²³ Cited in Hall, *John Wycliffe: A Light Shining*, chapter 5.

²⁴ Ibid., chapter 5.

²⁵ Lawson, *The Bible Convictions of John Wycliffe*, 16.

²⁶ Religious Tract Society, *Life and Times of John Wycliffe*, 89.

²⁷ Diana Kleyn, with Joel R. Beeke, *Reformation Heroes* (Grand Raids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2007), 8, and Lawson, *The Bible Convictions of John Wycliffe*, 17.

²⁸ Cited in Ra McLaughlin, "John Wycliffe: Morning Star of the Reformation," <https://media.thegospelcoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/30165727/CH.McLaughlin.Wyclif.pdf>, accessed January 25, 2022.

²⁹ Carrick, *Wycliffe and the Lollards*, 126.

³⁰ For a simple summary of Wycliffe's fundamental beliefs, see Shand, "John Wycliffe," and McLaughlin, "John Wycliffe: Morning Star of the Reformation." For an extensive look, see Lawson, *The Bible Convictions of John Wycliffe*, chapters 2-4.

³¹ Shand, "John Wycliffe." She also makes this comparison between Wycliffe and Luther: "While Luther made plainer the truth of justification by faith, Wycliffe certainly held to this important doctrine."

³² Kleyn, *Reformation Heroes*, 11.

³³ Lawson, *The Bible Convictions of John Wycliffe*, 18, and Kleyn, *Reformation Heroes*, 8.

³⁴ Carrick, *Wycliffe and the Lollards*, 98.

³⁵ Religious Tract Society, *Life and Times of John Wycliffe*, 78.

³⁶ Stephen Nichols, "The Morning Star of the Reformation," <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/morning-star-reformation>, accessed February 11, 2022

³⁷ Cited in Hall, *John Wycliffe: A Light Shining*, chapter 5

³⁸ Nichols, "The Morning Star of the Reformation."

³⁹ Lawson, *The Bible Convictions of John Wycliffe*, 20.

⁴⁰ This list is found in Hall, *John Wycliffe: A Light Shining*, chapter 8.

⁴¹ Cited in Ambassador Group, *John Wycliffe*, 49.

⁴² John MacArthur, "A Tribute to My Friend: John MacArthur Remembers R.C. Sproul," <https://tms.edu/news/a-tribute-to-my-friend-john-macarthur-remembers-r-c-sproul/>, accessed February 10, 2022.

⁴³ Nichols, "The Morning Star of the Reformation."

- ⁴⁴ The wafer of the Lord's Supper was made from wheat.
- ⁴⁵ Cited in Kleyn, *Reformation Heroes*, 13.
- ⁴⁶ Shand, "John Wycliffe."
- ⁴⁷ The following dialogue and story is located in Carrick, *Wycliffe and the Lollards*, 102-4.
- ⁴⁸ Ambassador Group, *John Wycliffe*, 40.
- ⁴⁹ Cited in Carrick, *Wycliffe and the Lollards*, 131.
- ⁵⁰ Hall, *John Wycliffe: A Light Shining*, chapter 11.
- ⁵¹ Religious Tract Society, *Life and Times of John Wycliffe*, 83.
- ⁵² Donald L. Roberts, "John Wycliffe and the Dawn of the Reformation," <https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/john-wycliffe-and-the-dawn-of-the-reformation>, accessed February 11, 2022.
- ⁵³ Hall, *John Wycliffe: A Light Shining*, chapter 3.
- ⁵⁴ Cited by Justin Taylor, "Why and How John Piper Does Biography," <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/evangelical-history/why-and-how-john-piper-does-biography/>, accessed February 11, 2022.
- ⁵⁵ Brian H. Edwards, "From Vulgate to Vulgar: The Story of Our English Bible," <https://answersingenesis.org/the-word-of-god/from-vulgate-to-vulgar/>, accessed January 25, 2022.

⁵⁶ According to Carrick, *Wycliffe and the Lollards*, 142, there were “small portions of the New Testament in English,” but not anything close to a complete Bible.

⁵⁷ Wallace, “From Wycliffe to King James.”

⁵⁸ Cited by Wallace, “From Wycliffe to King James.”

⁵⁹ Through the encouragement of Damascus, the Bishop of Rome, Jerome completed a translation of the entire Bible from Hebrew and Greek into Latin in 402 A.D. “Vulgate” is from the Latin and means “common” or “popular,” so this translation was called the “Vulgate” because it was the Latin that most people spoke.

⁶⁰ See Religious Tract Society, *Life and Times of John Wycliffe*, 118.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² According to Wallace, “From Wycliffe to King James,” “By the middle ages, Greek was completely unknown in western Europe. (It would not be studied in any university until 1458, at the University of Paris.) All the clergy in the west for a thousand years had to learn Latin, but not Greek or Hebrew.”

⁶³ So Religious Tract Society, *Life and Times of John Wycliffe*, 121, and Wallace, “From Wycliffe to King James.” Those in this camp argue for completion around 1382, followed by a revised edition as early as 1388.

⁶⁴ So Hall, *John Wycliffe: A Light Shining*, chapter 13, and Kleyn, *Reformation Heroes*, 13. Those in this camp say the New Testament was completed as early as 1380, and the whole Bible in about 1388.

⁶⁵ Wallace, "From Wycliffe to King James."

⁶⁶ Lawson, *The Bible Convictions of John Wycliffe*, 155.

⁶⁷ Wallace, "From Wycliffe to King James."

⁶⁸ Cited in Religious Tract Society, *Life and Times of John Wycliffe*, 122. Payment was required because of labor costs. Perhaps it also kept some from having a handwritten portion of Scripture simply as a relic.

⁶⁹ Brian H. Edwards, "From Vulgate to Vulgar: The Story of Our English Bible," <https://answersingenesis.org/the-word-of-god/from-vulgate-to-vulgar/>, accessed February 14, 2022. Even these numbers are disputed. Shand, "John Wycliffe," for example, writes, "(T)here are about one hundred and seventy handwritten copies still available."

⁷⁰ Wallace, "From Wycliffe to King James."

⁷¹ Cited in Hall, *John Wycliffe: A Light Shining*, chapter 13.

⁷² Herb Samworth, "How Did We Get the Bible in English," <https://answersingenesis.org/bible-questions/how-did-we-get-the-bible-in-english/>, accessed February 14, 2022.

⁷³ Carrick, *Wycliffe and the Lollards*, 143.

⁷⁴ Cited in Lawson, *The Bible Convictions of John Wycliffe*, 143.

⁷⁵ Justin Poythress, "Remarkable Bible Memorization," <https://www.crossway.org/articles/remarkable-bible-memorization/>, accessed February 14, 2022.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ For help on how to get the most out of Bible reading, see Jim Elliff, *My Preferred Way to Read the Bible*, located at <https://www.ccwtoday.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/MyPreferredText.pdf>, accessed February 16, 2022.

⁷⁸ <https://www.wycliffe.net/resources/statistics>, accessed February 14, 2022.

⁷⁹ See Dave and Stacey Hare's website, <https://www.hare-translation.com/>, for stories and views of Bible translation from two seasoned Bible translators.

⁸⁰ Carrick, *Wycliffe and the Lollards*, 199.

⁸¹ <https://populationdata.org.uk/population-of-england>, accessed February 15, 2022.

⁸² Carrick, *Wycliffe and the Lollards*, 132.

⁸³ Hall, *John Wycliffe: A Light Shining*, chapter 13.

⁸⁴ Carrick, *Wycliffe and the Lollards*, 199-200.

⁸⁵ Lawson, *The Bible Convictions of John Wycliffe*, 163.

⁸⁶ Cited in Carrick, *Wycliffe and the Lollards*, 133.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 202.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 205.

⁸⁹ Nichols, "The Morning Star of the Reformation." Hall, *John Wycliffe: A Light Shining*, chapter 13.

⁹⁰ Lawson, *The Bible Convictions of John Wycliffe*, 163.

⁹¹ Hall, *John Wycliffe: A Light Shining*, chapter 13.

⁹² Wallace, "From Wycliffe to King James."

⁹³ Carrick, *Wycliffe and the Lollards*, 208.

⁹⁴ Jim Elliff, "Looking for a Church? Here's What to Look For," <https://www.ccwtoday.org/2014/07/looking-for-a-church-heres-what-to-look-for/>, accessed February 15, 2022.

⁹⁵ Ryle, *Light from Old Times*, 25.

⁹⁶ For practical help on this, see my article, "Stop Talking So Much . . . and Other Tips for Leading a Small Group Bible Study," <https://www.ccwtoday.org/2018/09/stop-talking-so-much-and-other-tips-for-leading-a-small-group-bible-study/>, accessed February 16, 2022.

⁹⁷ Sala, *Why You Can Have Confidence in the Bible*, 203-4.

⁹⁸ Lawson, *The Bible Convictions of John Wycliffe*, 25.

⁹⁹ Cited in Religious Tract Society, *Life and Times of John Wycliffe*, 94-5.

¹⁰⁰ Edwards, "From Vulgate to Vulgar."

¹⁰¹ McLaughlin, "John Wycliffe: Morning Star of the Reformation."

¹⁰² Cited in Religious Tract Society, *Life and Times of John Wycliffe*, 95.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ Cited in Greg Morse, "Jan Hus, c. 1369-1415: The Goosefather," <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-goosefather>, accessed February 16, 2022.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Cited by Lawson, *The Bible Convictions of John Wycliffe*, 185.



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Steve Burchett is an assistant to the president of Christian Communicators Worldwide. He also serves as an elder in Christ Fellowship of Kansas City.



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