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## Introduction

*Then Jesus spake to the people...*

By the sea or on a hilltop, in the temple or at the well, to individuals and to multitudes alike, when Jesus walked the earth, he spoke to people in words they could understand.

Paul's actual letters were written in Greek, the everyday language of those to whom they were sent. Thirty years later, the same would be true of the original Gospels.

1300 years later, in England, the Word of Truth was written only in Latin, a foreign language to 99% of that society. Indeed, Latin was only understood by some of the clergy and the well-off, and the relatively few who were university-educated. As well, the Church's "Divine Commission" – to preach the Word and save souls – had been transformed into a more temporal undertaking: the all-consuming drive to wield authority over every aspect of life and, in the process, to accumulate ever-greater wealth.

John Wycliffe, an Oxford professor and theologian, was one of those few who had read the Latin Bible. Though a scholar living a life of privilege, he nevertheless felt a special empathy for the poor and the uneducated, those multitudes in feudal servitude whose lives were "short, nasty, and brutish". He challenged the princes of the Church to face their hypocrisy and widespread corruption – and to repent. He railed that the Church was no longer worthy to be The Keeper of the Word of Truth. And he proposed a truly revolutionary idea:

"The Scriptures," Wycliffe stated, "are the properly of the people and one which no party should be allowed to wrest from them...Christ and his apostles converted much people by uncovering of scripture, and this in the tongue which was most known to them. Why then may not the modern disciples of Christ gather up the fragments of the same bread? The faith of Christ ought therefore to be recounted to the people in both languages, Latin and English."

Wycliffe believed that with the Word of Truth literally in hand, each individual could work out his or her own salvation, with no need for any human or institutional intermediary.

And so John Wycliffe and his followers, most notably John Purvey, his secretary and close friend, translated Jerome's Vulgate, the "Latin Bible", into the first English Bible. Their literal and respectful translation was hand-printed around 1382. Historians refer to this as the "Early Version" of the "Wycliffe Bible".

The Church princes, long before having anointed themselves sole (soul?) arbitrator between God and man, condemned this monumental achievement as heretical – and worse:

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“This pestilent and wretched John Wycliffe, that son of the old serpent...endeavour[ing] by every means to attack the very faith and sacred doctrine of Holy Church, translated from Latin into English the Gospel that Christ gave to the clergy and doctors of the Church. So that by his means it has become vulgar and more open to laymen and women who can read than it usually is to quite learned clergy of good intelligence. And so the pearl of the Gospel is scattered abroad and trodden underfoot by swine.”

*(Church Chronicle, 1395)*

The Church princes decreed that Wycliffe be removed from his professorship at Oxford University, and it was done. Two years later, his health broken, he died.

In the decade following John Wycliffe’s death, his friend John Purvey revised their Bible. The complete text, including Purvey’s “Great Prologue”, appeared by 1395. But portions of that revision, in particular the Gospels and other books of the New Testament, were likely circulated as early as 1388.

Historians refer to this as the “Later Version” of the “Wycliffe Bible”. This vernacular version retained most, though not all, of the theological insight and poetry of language found in the earlier, more literal effort. But it was easier to read and understand, and quickly gained a grateful and loyal following. Each copy had to be hand-written (Gutenberg’s printing press would not be invented for more than half a century), but this did not deter widespread distribution. The book you now hold in your hands is that Bible’s New Testament (*with modern spelling*).

For his efforts, the Church princes ordered John Purvey arrested and delivered to the dungeon. He would not see freedom until he recanted of his “sin” – writing the English Bible. His spirit ultimately broken, he eventually did recant. Upon release, he was watched, hounded at every step, the Church princes determined that he would tow the party line. His life made a living hell, eventually the co-author of the first English Bible disappeared into obscurity and died unknown.

But the fury of the Church princes was unrelenting. Edicts flew. John Wycliffe’s bones were dug up – and burned. Wycliffe’s writings were gathered up – and burned. All unauthorized Bibles – that is, those in the English language – were banned. All confiscated copies were burned. Those who copied out these Bibles were imprisoned. Those who distributed these Bibles were imprisoned. Those who owned an English Bible, or, as has been documented, “traded a cart-load of hay” for part of one, were imprisoned. And those faithful souls, who refused to “repent” the “evil” that they had committed, were burned at the stake, the “noxious” books they had penned hung about their necks to be consumed by the same flames. In all, thousands were imprisoned and many hundreds executed. Merry olde England was engulfed in a reign of terror. All because of an English Bible. This Bible.

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But the spark that John Wycliffe, John Purvey, and their followers had ignited would not, could not, be extinguished. The Word of Truth was copied, again, and again, and again. The Word of Truth was shared, from hand, to hand, to hand. The Word of Truth was spoken, and read, and heard by the common people in their own language for the first time in over 1300 years. At long last, the Word of Truth had been returned to simple folk who were willing to lose everything to gain all.

*And so the pearl of the Gospel was spread abroad and planted in their hearts by the servants of God...*

216 years after Purvey's revision appeared, somewhat less than a century after Martin Luther proclaimed his theses (sparking the Protestant Reformation) and Henry VIII proclaimed his divorce (thereby creating the Church of England), what would become the most famous, enduring, beloved and revered translation of the Bible, the "Authorized" or "King James Version" (KJV), was published in 1611.

In their preface, "The Translators to the Reader", in the 1<sup>st</sup> edition of the KJV, the 54 translators detail many sources utilized and arduous efforts undertaken to achieve their supreme accomplishment. Interestingly enough, they make scant mention of even the existence of earlier, unnamed English versions. And they make no specific reference to the work of John Wycliffe and John Purvey. It is not my desire or intention here to speculate on the politico-ecclesiastical reasons for this omission, simply to state its fact.

From 1611 until today, historians of the English Bible have uniformly followed the lead of the KJV translators, and have either ignored, dismissed or denigrated John Wycliffe's and John Purvey's contributions to, and influences upon, that ultimate translation, the KJV. To wit:

"The Bible which permeated the minds of later generations shows no direct descent from the Wycliffite versions; at most a few phrases from the later version seem to have found their way into the Tudor translations...Tyndale's return to the original languages meant that translations based on the intermediate Latin of the Vulgate would soon be out of date."

*(Cambridge History of the Bible, Vol. 2, p. 414.)*

When you finish reading this present volume, you may reach a different conclusion.

### **Regarding *Wycliffe's New Testament***

*Wycliffe's New Testament* comprises the New Testament found in extant copies

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of the “Later Version” of the “Wycliffe Bible”, with modernized spelling. For more than 99% of *Wycliffe’s New Testament*, word order, verb forms, words in *italics*, and punctuation are as they appear in the “Later Version”. In addition, words and phrases found only in the “Early Version” are presented within square brackets, “[ ]”, to provide more examples of Wycliffe’s and Purvey’s groundbreaking scholarship, as well as to often aid reader comprehension and improve passage flow (more on this below).

Because mortal danger was a very real possibility and personal glory was of no consequence to either man, neither Wycliffe nor Purvey signed any extant copy of either version, attesting to authorship. This omission has allowed some historians to debate the matter. *Wycliffe’s New Testament* is unambiguously credited: “Translated by John Wycliffe and John Purvey”. The evidence supports this stand and there is absolutely no doubt about the essential role that each man played in the effort to bring the English Bible to the English people.

### *Middle English*

The “Wycliffe Bible” was written in Middle English in the last three decades of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. “Middle English” is the designation of language spoken and written in England between 1150 and 1450. The year 1300 is used to divide the period into “Early Middle English” and “Late Middle English”. During the time of Late Middle English, there were 5 regional dialects in England (with London itself eventually developing a sixth distinct dialect). Elements of at least three dialects can be found in the “Later Version” of the “Wycliffe Bible”.

What does one encounter reading the “Later Version”? An alphabet with a widely used 27<sup>th</sup> letter, “ȝ”. A myriad of words which today are obsolete (“disparple”: “to scatter”), archaic (“culver”: “dove”), or at best, strangely spelled (“vpsedoun”: “upside-down”). Spelling and verb forms that are not standardized because they are phonetic to different dialects: the word “saw” is spelled a dozen ways, and differently for singular and plural nouns, similarly the word “say”; “have take” and “have taken” are found in the same sentence, as are “had know” and “had known”; and so forth. Prepositions and pronouns that often seem misplaced and incorrectly used: “in”, “of”, “to”, “what”, “which”, and “who” again and again seem wrongly situated; “themself” and “themselves”, and “youself” and “yourselves”, regularly appear in the same sentence; etc. Capitalization, punctuation, and other grammatical conventions that are rudimentary by today’s standards and vary greatly from sentence to sentence: for example, *past tenses* are made by adding nothing to the present tense, or an “e”, “en”, “id”, “ede”, and still other suffixes. One encounters, in short, a seemingly incomprehensible challenge within (what will become) a single verse of scripture.

And so the reason for *Wycliffe’s New Testament*. *Wycliffe’s New Testament* is the “Later Version” of the “Wycliffe Bible” with irregular spelling deciphered, verb

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forms comprehended and made consistent, and numerous grammatical variations standardized. *Wycliffe's New Testament* is the key that unlocks the amazing secrets found within the "Wycliffe Bible".

### *Three types of words: obsolete, archaic and precursors*

As indicated above, when the spelling is modernized, three types of words are discovered in the "Later Version": **obsolete** ("dead", unknown and unused for centuries), **archaic** (old-fashioned, now chiefly used poetically), and, the vast majority, "**precursors**", that is, strangely spelled forerunners of words that we use today. To comprehend the text, each group of words must be dealt with in a particular way.

### *Obsolete Words*

Approximately 5% of the words in the "Later Version" are "dead" words that are neither presently used, nor found in current dictionaries. To fully understand the text, these obsolete words must be replaced. (In a handful of instances, the KJV follows the "Later Version" in the use of an obsolete or archaic word – words such as "holden": "held"; "washen": "washed"; "wot": "know"; "wist": "knew"; "anon": "at once"; and "let": "to hinder" – and *Wycliffe's New Testament* follows suit. In most other instances, the obsolete words have been replaced.)

Fortunately for our purposes, the "Wycliffe Bible" was created at an exciting time of transition, just as the nascent language was beginning to blossom into the English that we know today. So, frequently, a modern equivalent of an obsolete word is present in the "Later Version", already in use alongside its soon to be discarded doublet. These "in-house" replacement words include "know", "follow", "praise", "with", "scatter", "lying", "harm", "commandment", "reckon", "ignorance", "ignorant", "offence", "ascend", "again", and many others (including even "that" and "those", derived from either "the" + "ilk" or "thilke"). More than half of the obsolete words in the "Later Version" were replaced with these "in-house" substitutions. Somewhat surprisingly, a number of the equivalent modern words were found only in the "Early Version" of the "Wycliffe Bible". In these instances, which are not infrequent, it is the "Later Version" that utilizes only the older, soon-to-be defunct, term.

For the remaining obsolete words, reference works were consulted and the appropriate word chosen and utilized. Older words, in use as close in time to the "Later Version" as possible, were favored over more recent words. And, as often as possible, when selecting a replacement word not already found in the text, one different from that used in the KJV was chosen, so as not to artificially produce similar phraseology. Sometimes, however, the only appropriate replacement word was that which the KJV also used.

When an obsolete word was replaced, the effort was made to use the same

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replacement word as often as possible to reflect word usage in the “Later Version”. However, words often have more than one meaning and readability itself sometimes required multiple renderings. So, a word usually rendered “suitable”, also became “opportune”; one rendered “grumble”, also became “grudge”; one rendered “of kind” or “by kind”, occasionally became “naturally”; one rendered “part” (i.e., “to divide”), also became “separate”; one rendered “cause to stumble”, also became “offend”; one rendered “rush”, also became “force”; one rendered “household”, also became “family” and “members”; and so on.

In all, approximately 240 replacement words (and their various forms) were utilized. Some replacement words (“parched”, “wrenched”, “physician”, etc.) were used infrequently; other replacement words (“call”, “ascend”, “promise”, etc.) were used repeatedly.

### *Archaic Words*

More than 10% of the words used in the “Later Version” are today considered “archaic”, that is, not presently or widely used, but still found in good, current dictionaries. Words in this category include “youngling” (young person), “ween” (suppose), “trow” (trust/believe), “swevens” (dreams), “strand” (stream), “querne” (hand-mill), “repromission” (promise), “principat” (principality), “comeling” (stranger/new-comer), “livelode”/“lifelode” (livelihood), “knitches” (bundles), “anon” (at once), “culver” (dove), “soothly” (truly), and “forsooth” (for truth). Once understood, these words are valid, vital, and provide a sense of the times and atmosphere in which the “Later Version” was written. Most archaic words have been retained. For definitions, refer to the Glossary at the back of the book, or to the KJV, or to your own dictionary.

In numerous instances within the “Later Version”, archaic words also have their own more modern equivalents. So within *Wycliffe’s New Testament*, following the “Later Version”, you will find both “again-rising” and “resurrection”; “again-buying” and “redemption”; “gobbets” and “pieces”; “meed” and “reward”; “volatiles” and “birds”; “wem” and “spot”; “virtue” and “power”; “leaveful” and “lawful”; “maumet” and “idol”; “simulacra” and “idols”; “comprehend” and “apprehend” (i.e., to physically catch, lay hold of, or to grasp); and numerous other doublets of archaic and “modern” words.

### *Precursors*

But the vast majority of words in the “Later Version”, 85% or more, though often spelled quite differently, are nevertheless the direct precursors of words that we use today. Their spelling modernized, they are comprehensible – with a few caveats.

Within *Wycliffe’s New Testament*, you will encounter familiar words in unfamiliar settings: “health” in place of “salvation”; “enhance” in place of

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“exalt”; “clarity” and “clearness” in place of “glory”; “deem” in place of “judge”; “doom” in place of “judgment”; “defoul” in place of “defile”; “virtue” in place of “power”; “dread” in place of “fear”; “either” in place of “or”; “charity” in place of “love”; “take” in place of “receive”; “and” in place of “also”; and so forth. Consult a dictionary. Even as defined in the year 2001, these words remain relevant in their particular context. Their use in favorite and well-known passages breathes new life into these verses and can bring fresh insight and illumination.

In some instances, however, words that we recognize have significantly changed definition in the intervening six centuries. Confusion would result if these words were retained in *Wycliffe’s New Testament*. So they were replaced. Words in this category include “wood” (meaning “mad”); “behest” (meaning “promise”); “let” (meaning “hinder”); “cheer” (meaning “face”); “anon” (meaning “at once” or “immediately”, not the more modern “by and by”); “sick” (meaning “weak” or “frail”); “sad” (meaning “firm”); “cloth” (meaning “cloak”; it is also the singular of “clothes”, and as such, “a garment”); “lose” (meaning “to destroy”, active sense); “lost” (meaning “destroyed”, active sense); “leech” (meaning “physician”); “leave” (meaning “dismiss” or “send away”); “left” (meaning “dismissed” or “sent away”); and so forth. About twenty words comprise this group and about half of their replacements were found already in the “Later Version”. For more information regarding these words, consult the Glossary.

To aid comprehension and readability, two separate words in the “Later Version” are often joined together in *Wycliffe’s New Testament*. Examples include “in+to”, “-+self”, “-+selves”, “no+thing”, and a few others. Conversely, many unfamiliar compound nouns found in the “Later Version” are hyphenated in *Wycliffe’s New Testament*. So, for example, “a<sub>3</sub>enrisynge” became “again-rising” (“resurrection”). For added comprehension, it is sometimes beneficial to reverse the order of hyphenated words, so “against-stand” can be read “stand against”, “against-said” can be read “said against”, and so on.

Occasionally an appropriate prefix or suffix was added to a familiar root word to aid understanding. These include “en” to make “engender”, “sur” to make “surpassingly”, “ac” to make “acknowledge”, “re” to make “restrained” and “requite”, “de” to make “deprived”, “ap” to make “approved”, and “ly” to make “mostly”. All of the prefixes and suffixes used were already found in abundance in the “Later Version”. Rarely, a comma was inserted to aid readability (its placement not indicated). Words not found in the original text that were added to aid reader comprehension and passage flow are placed in round brackets “( )”. Most are inconsequential prepositions (“the”, “which”, “that” or “for”) or nouns such as “self” and “selves”. None are integral or determinate.

To summarize: More than 95% of the words you will read in *Wycliffe’s New Testament* are modernized spellings of the original words (or their contemporary equivalents) found in the 14<sup>th</sup> century manuscript. Less than 5% of the words

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are “replacement” words, that is, appropriate words chosen to replace obsolete or “dead” words. Of this small group – less than 240 individual words and their various forms – about half are already found in the original text and half are my selections as replacements.

Ultimately, the presence of each word in *Wycliffe’s New Testament* was decided by its fidelity to the source texts, as well as its aid to reader comprehension and passage flow.

### *Use of the KJV*

In transforming the “Later Version” into *Wycliffe’s New Testament*, the KJV was followed in three aspects: Verse number, book order, and proper names.

Verses are not found in either version of the “Wycliffe Bible”. Each chapter consists of one unbroken block of text. There are not even paragraphs. In creating *Wycliffe’s New Testament*, the “Later Version” was defined, word by word. Then, the KJV was placed alongside and used to divide each chapter into the traditional verses. (Verse divisions were established and numbered in the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, 60 years before the KJV was printed. The King James translators copied what was already established.) As the blocks were broken up, there were many moments of astonishment, for time after time, John Wycliffe and John Purvey had written it first, written it right, more than two centuries before the King James translators.

New Testament book order to which we are accustomed long pre-dates the KJV: it appeared at least as early as the 5<sup>th</sup> century in some Latin Bibles, and was established as the accepted order at the same time the verse divisions were made, as stated, 60 years before the KJV was printed. The “Wycliffe Bible” follows that order with one exception: “Deeds of Apostles” (in some copies of both versions of the “Wycliffe Bible” titled “Actus Apostolorum”, Latin for “Acts of the Apostles”) is placed after Hebrews and before James. In *Wycliffe’s New Testament*, “Deeds”/“Actus” is returned to its more familiar position between The Gospel of John and The Epistle of Paul to the Romans.

(As indicated, New Testament book names vary among copies of the “Wycliffe Bible”. But overall, they are more basic, and less formal, than those found in the KJV. To wit: “The Gospel of Luke” rather than “The Gospel according to Saint Luke”; “The Epistle of Paul to the Colossians” rather than “The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Colossians”; and so forth. *Wycliffe’s New Testament* follows the simplicity of the “Wycliffe Bible”, rather than the more ecclesiastical KJV, in this regard.)

Proper names have been modernized in *Wycliffe’s New Testament* to conform to those in the KJV and so aid in comparison purposes. However, where a name in the “Later Version” is significantly different from its counterpart in the KJV, it was not changed in *Wycliffe’s New Testament*.

Names of God are a special circumstance. In the “Wycliffe Bible” (both



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versions), “God”, “Jesus”, “Christ”, and the “Holy Ghost” are always capitalized, while the “Father”, the “Son” (of God or of man), the “Spirit”, “Lord”, and “Saviour” are only sometimes capitalized. For consistency’s sake, all have been capitalized in *Wycliffe’s New Testament*. Other appellations and adjectives for God and Jesus, such as “the word”, “the lamb”, “shepherd”, “master”, “prince”, “king”, “holy” and “just” are not capitalized in the “Wycliffe Bible”, and remain not capitalized in *Wycliffe’s New Testament*. “christian” is not capitalized in the “Wycliffe Bible” nor in *Wycliffe’s New Testament*. As always, the goal was to achieve a workable balance between comprehension on the one hand and an honest representation of the original texts on the other.

With *Wycliffe’s New Testament* and the KJV side-by-side, you can readily compare one text to the other. Sometimes first reading *Wycliffe’s New Testament*, then the KJV, you will see how the KJV grew out of the “Wycliffe Bible”. Sometimes the KJV will help you to understand *Wycliffe’s New Testament*. Sometimes the two are different, but related; sometimes just different. But often, you will find these two texts very similar or even identical.

Words in *italics* are as found in both the “Wycliffe Bible” and the KJV, and in each case signify words added by their respective translators to aid the reader’s understanding. The KJV contains many more words in *italics* than does the “Later Version”, but less words in *italics* than the “Early Version”.

### *A Word Regarding the Primary Source*

Both versions of the “Wycliffe Bible” contain prologues (introductions to each book, mostly taken from Jerome) and marginal glosses (explanations of the text by the translators). These have not been reproduced in *Wycliffe’s New Testament*. If of interest, the reader is encouraged to locate a copy of the present volume’s primary source, Forshall & Madden’s *The Holy Bible, Made from the Latin Vulgate By John Wycliffe and His Followers* (most likely found in a university library).

Twenty years in the making, this magnificent 4-volume opus is a monumental work of scholarship from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. In it, The Rev. Josiah Forshall and Sir Frederic Madden correlate 160 extant hand-written copies of the two versions of the “Wycliffe Bible” into two master texts. There are over 90,000 footnotes, more than 25,000 of them pertaining to the New Testament alone (both versions). These footnotes delineate textual divergence – copy errors, omissions, and insertions – between the master text and each hand-written copy of the “Wycliffe Bible”. (A footnote can refer to a single copy or to multiple copies.) Close reading of these footnotes indicates that many times when a copy of either the “Early” or “Later” version was made, the source texts were also consulted. For time and again, words added to, or changed, in one phrase or another, produce a more accurate rendering of the original Greek. In creating *Wycliffe’s New Testament*, many of these footnotes were utilized to provide the most precise translation of the New Testament found within all extant copies of

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the “Wycliffe Bible”. Footnotes were also used when a change created a more satisfying (i.e., balanced, rhythmic) read. However, with regard to the “Later Version”, no footnote was simply used to produce greater consistency with the KJV, nor were two footnotes combined within the same phrase (“between the commas”) for that purpose. With regard to the “Early Version”, noteworthy phrasing from two (or more) footnotes were often combined due to space limitations and to avoid needless repetition. These excerpts are marked with a plus sign in superscript, “<sup>+</sup>”; all other “Early Version” passages are from a single source. A forward slash, “/”, separates different renderings of the same phrase from two sources. It is significant to note that many textual variances indicated by footnotes for the “Early Version” appear within the KJV. This strongly suggests that the KJV translators consulted a variety of copies of the “Wycliffe Bible” as they accomplished their work (more on this below).

In creating *Wycliffe’s New Testament*, textual errors that were found in the “Later Version” were not corrected (they are also part of the reality of this book); none are major, see which ones you can find. A handful of printing errors – reversed letters or misread vowels of prepositions, pronouns and adverbs – appear to have been discovered. They were confirmed by referring to the “Early Version”, which in each case agreed with the Greek and not the “Later Version”. In these instances, the “Early Version” phrases have been provided for comparison purposes.

### *Use of the “Early Version”*

The “Later Version” is the foundation upon which *Wycliffe’s New Testament*, like the KJV itself, was built. Strictly speaking, *Wycliffe’s New Testament* is not a composite of the “Early” and “Later” versions. However, as has already been touched upon, and now will be further detailed, the “Early Version” was utilized in a number of ways.

First, the “Early Version” was used to help define unknown words found in the “Later Version”. For, as was stated above, often a modern equivalent of a “dead” word was found only in the “Early Version”. Similarly, and again surprisingly, modern verb forms were quite often found only in passages of the “Early Version”. Their presence there aided immeasurably in attaining a consistency of verb forms throughout *Wycliffe’s New Testament*. Finally, irregular spelling sometimes made even the simplest words difficult to decipher. Many times the “Early Version” served as a reference source of another, more recognizable spelling of the same word, and so helped make those words comprehensible.

Second, the “Early Version” served as a source of “missing” or “dropped” words and phrases. A limited number of times, a textually significant word or partial phrase not found in the “Later Version”, but present in the “Early Version” (following the Greek and found also in the KJV), was inserted into

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*Wycliffe's New Testament* to enhance its accuracy, reader comprehension, and/or the flow of the passage. Seven significant examples include Deeds 6:3, 13:20, 17:10, 18:21, Ephesians 6:21, and Apocalypse 16:4-5 and 17:16. Countless more times, less consequential “missing” words – in many cases prepositions perhaps inadvertently “dropped” by weary or distracted copyists – were extracted from the same passage in the “Early Version” and added to *Wycliffe's New Testament*. All of these “missing” words, significant or otherwise, are contained in square brackets, “[ ]”, and are **regular** type size.

Third, the “Early Version” served as a source of “alternate” words and phrases. When the “Early Version”, the “Later Version” and the KJV are compared side-by-side, one quickly discovers innumerable instances where the KJV follows not the “Later Version”, but, instead, the “Early Version”. Sometimes it is a single word, sometimes it is a phrase, and sometimes it is the order of several phrases within a verse. In many of the examples presented in *Wycliffe's New Testament*, the “Early Version” more closely follows the Greek than does the “Later Version”, and the KJV deviates from following the “Later Version” and, to a greater or lesser degree, mirrors the “Early Version”. All of these “alternate” words are also contained in square brackets, “[ ]”, but the type size has been **reduced** to distinguish them from “missing” words.

Fourth, a subset of category three, the “Early Version” served as a source of “interesting” words, perhaps no more accurate than what is found in the “Later Version”, and many not utilized by the KJV, but nonetheless fascinating, and so presented in *Wycliffe's New Testament*. Words such as “experiment”, “prescience”, “copious”, and “litigious”, to name but a few. These excerpts, limited in number, are also in square brackets, “[ ]”, and with **reduced** type size.

To sum up: All words in *Wycliffe's New Testament* contained in square brackets, “[ ]”, are from the “Early Version” of the “Wycliffe Bible”. Regular size words are missing from the same passage in the “Later Version” and have been added to aid textual accuracy, reader comprehension, and/or passage flow. Reduced size words are presented as “alternate” words and phrases from the “Early Version”, and they are either closer to both the original Greek and to what is found in the KJV, or, in a limited number of cases, simply interesting to note.

All of the foregoing understood, it needs to be stated that *Wycliffe's New Testament* can be read and readily comprehended without reference to any of the words and phrases found within the square brackets. The “Later Version” – as represented by *Wycliffe's New Testament* – can and does stand on its own. The inclusion of the words in square brackets simply provides an added dimension of this seminal work in the English translation of the New Testament. (For more discussion of “Early Version” highlights and insights, read the *Endnote: Regarding the “Early Version”* at the back of this book.)

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### *A Final Note*

With the spelling up-dated and many obsolete words replaced, the document you now hold in your hands is a fair and accurate representation of John Wycliffe's and John Purvey's 14<sup>th</sup> century translation of the very first English vernacular New Testament. This *is* their New Testament *with modern spelling* – not some 21<sup>st</sup> century variation on a medieval theme. The melodies and harmonies are distinctly Wycliffe's and Purvey's. Only now, they are sung with words that we can all understand. Six centuries later, you can now read what those common folk were themselves at long last able to read (or, more likely, have read to them). Simple, direct words, with their own charm and rhythm, their own humble, cogent beauty. Sophisticated and graceful words, their originality and newness making the well-known and fondly remembered fresh, alive, and interesting once again. All because Wycliffe, Purvey, and their compeers cared so deeply and sacrificed so dearly.

Today there are over 100 modern translations of the New Testament in English, available at bookstores, the library, and even on the Internet. But once, there was just one. This one. Try to imagine the impact upon hearing and reading these words for the very first time:

Oure fadir that art in heuenes,  
halewid be thi name;  
thi kingdoom come to;  
be thi will don in erthe  
as it is in heuene;  
3yue to vs this dai oure ech  
dayes breed;  
and for3yue to vs oure dettis,  
as we for3yuen to oure dettouris;  
and lede vs not in to temptacioun,  
but delyuere vs fro yuel. Amen.

“Later Version”, *Matthew, Chapter 6*,  
*The Holy Bible*, 1395, unaltered.

Our Father that art in heavens,  
hallowed be thy name;  
thy kingdom come to;  
be thy will done in earth  
as it is in heaven;  
give to us this day our each  
day's bread;  
and forgive to us our debts,  
as we forgive to our debtors;  
and lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil. Amen.

*Matthew. 6:9-13*,  
*Wycliffe's New Testament*, 2001.