

# Introduction

*...and I shall give to thee tables of stone, and the law, and commandments, which I have written, that thou teach them.*

From within a cloud or a burning bush, from the midst of the Holy of Holies in the Temple in Jerusalem or above the summit of Mount Sinai in the desert, to prophets, priests, and patriarchs alike, YAHWEH, the Great “I AM”, “the God of revelation and grace”, spoke to His people in words they could all understand.

Moses came down from Mt. Sinai with the ten commandments written in stone by the finger of God in a language the entire nation of Israel could read.

David composed his poems of praise and petition, promises and pleadings, to the Lord God of hosts, in the everyday language of his people.

Solomon penned his proverbs of wise fatherly counsel, and his songs of passionate love, in Hebrew, the language of many of his sons, and at least some of his lovers.

But 2300 years later, in England, the Word of God was written almost exclusively in Latin<sup>1</sup>, an unknown language to 99% of that society. Indeed, Latin was only understood by some of the clergy, some of the well-off, and the few who were university educated. This did not disquiet the Church princes, who long before had transformed the “Divine Commission” – to preach the Word and save souls – into the more temporal undertaking of an all-consuming drive to wield authority over every aspect of life, and in doing so, to accumulate ever-greater wealth.

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

“The Scriptures,” Wycliffe stated, “are the property 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

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<sup>1</sup> Following King Edward I's expulsion edict of 1290, decreeing the banishment of all Jews from England, the Jewish people were absent from its soil until the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century. However, Hebrew Old Testaments, commentaries, and other scholarly writings concerning the Hebrew Scriptures, were studied when the Old Testament of the “Wycliffe Bible” was written and revised (as were Greek sources when its New Testament was written and revised). For more on this, see ‘A Word Regarding the Primary Source’ below.

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bread? The faith of Christ ought therefore to be recounted to the people in both languages, Latin and English.”

Indeed, John Wycliffe earnestly believed that all of the Scriptures should be available to all of the people all of the time in their native tongue.

He believed that with the Word of God literally in hand, each individual could have a personal relationship with God, 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 (for a limited time, Nicholas Hereford<sup>2</sup> also helped). Their literal, 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 as sole arbitrator (indeed “soul” arbitrator!) between God and man, condemned this monumental achievement as heretical – and worse:

“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, [indeed all of the Scriptures,] 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, [indeed of the Scriptures *in toto*,] is scattered abroad and trodden underfoot by swine.”

(*Church Chronicle*, 1395)

The Church princes decreed that Wycliffe be removed from his professorship at Oxford, 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. Portions of that revision, in particular the Gospels and other books of the New Testament, were likely circulated as early as 1388. The complete text, including Purvey’s “Great Prologue”, appeared by 1395.

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<sup>2</sup> Nicholas (de) Hereford, an associate of Wycliffe’s and Purvey’s, helped write 2/3<sup>rd</sup>s of the highly literal “Early Version” of the Old Testament (up to “Baruch”, an apocryphal book then placed before “Ezekiel”), before he was summoned to Rome to explain his actions. Threatened with death by the Synod of Black Friars, he recanted. Pope Urbanus VI sentenced him to prison, where he possibly spent two years. When a civil insurrection broke out in Rome, the rioters set all the captives free. Hereford fled back to England and resumed his work to educate the ignorant and aid the poor. Arrested again, this time his recantation stuck. Thenceforth, he worked tirelessly against his former colleagues, testifying at their trials, vociferously and vituperatively condemning the writing of the English Bible. For his efforts, the Church princes rewarded him with the position of Chancellor and Treasurer of Hereford Cathedral, as well as a lifelong stipend. Finally, after a long life of shifting alliances, of activities of both grace and perfidy, Hereford retired to a Carthusian monastery, an austere, ascetic order that embraced solitude, silence, and midnight masses. Perhaps, at long last, he felt he had said enough.

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Historians refer to this as the “Later Version” of the “Wycliffe Bible”. This vernacular version retained most 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-printed (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 Old Testament (*with modern spelling*).

For his efforts, the Church princes ordered John Purvey arrested and delivered to the dungeon. He would not see freedom again 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, the co-author of the first English Bible eventually disappeared into the mists of history 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, all 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 but a few pages of the Gospel”, were imprisoned. And those faithful souls who refused to “repent” the “evil” that they had committed, were burned at the stake, the “noxious” books that they had penned, or even had merely owned, hung about their necks to be consumed by the very 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.

But the spark that John Wycliffe, John Purvey, and their followers had ignited could not, would not, be extinguished. The Word of God was copied, again, and again, and again. The Word of God was shared, from hand, to hand, to hand. The Word of God was spoken, and read, and heard by the common people in their own language for the first time in over 1000 years. At long last, the Word of God had been returned to simple folk who were willing to lose everything to gain all.

*And so the pearl of the Scriptures 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 (thereby sparking the Protestant Reformation), and Henry VIII proclaimed his divorce (thereby creating the Church of England), what would become the

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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 political-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 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 book, you may reach a different conclusion.

## **Regarding *Wycliffe’s Old Testament***

*Wycliffe’s Old Testament* comprises the Old Testament found in extant copies of the “Later Version” of the “Wycliffe Bible”, with modern spelling. For 99.9% of *Wycliffe’s Old Testament*, the 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 John Wycliffe’s and John Purvey’s groundbreaking scholarship, as well as to aid comprehension and improve passage flow. (Literally thousands of “Early Version” verses were transcribed, but limited space meant most could not be printed in this book. See the *Wycliffe’s Bible* CD or the online efiles for these significant and interesting textual variations.)

Because their lives were ever at risk, 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 Old Testament* is unambiguously credited: “Translated by John Wycliffe and John Purvey”. While authorship of particular chapter or verse can be argued by those concerned with such matters, there is absolutely no doubt about the essential role that each of these men

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played in the momentous 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 a sixth dialect eventually developing in London). Examples of at least three dialects are found in the “Later Version” of the “Wycliffe Bible”.

What does one encounter reading the “Wycliffe Bible”? An alphabet with a widely used 27<sup>th</sup> letter, “ȝ”, and a 28<sup>th</sup> letter, “þ”, that already was frequently being replaced with “th” (even within the same sentence). A myriad of words which today are **obsolete** (“anentis”: “with”), **archaic** (“culver”: “dove”), or at best, strangely-spelled **precursors** to our modern words (“vpsedoun”: “upside-down”). Spelling and verb forms that are not standardized, in part because they were phonetic to different dialects. For example, the word “saw” is spelled a dozen different ways (even differently within the same sentence), 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: “at”, “for”, “in”, “of”, “on”, “there”, “to”, “what”, and “which” again and again seem wrongly situated; “themsell” and “themselves” are found in the same sentence, as are “yoursell” and “yourselves”; and so forth. Capitalization, punctuation, and other grammatical conventions that are rudimentary by today’s standards, and vary greatly from sentence to sentence. For example, the *past tense* of a verb was made by adding nothing to the present tense, or an “e”, “en”, “ed”, “ede”, “id”, “ide”, or still other suffixes. One encounters, in short, formidable obstacles to being able to understand (what will become) a single verse of Scripture.

And so the need for *Wycliffe’s Old Testament*. *Wycliffe’s Old Testament* is the “Later Version” of the Old Testament of the “Wycliffe Bible” (henceforth referred to as the WOT or Wycliffe Old Testament), with its irregular spelling deciphered, the verb forms made consistent, and numerous grammatical variations standardized. *Wycliffe’s Old Testament* is the key that unlocks the amazing secrets found within the WOT.

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

As stated above, with the spelling modernized, three types of words are found in the Wycliffe Old Testament: **obsolete** (“dead words”, unknown and unused for centuries); **archaic** (“old-fashioned words”, now chiefly used poetically); and, the vast majority,

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“precursors”, which are strangely-spelled forerunners of words that we use today. To understand the text, each group of words must be dealt with in a particular way.

## *Obsolete Words*

Perhaps 2% of the words in the “Later Version” of the WOT are “dead” words that are not presently used, or found in current dictionaries. This percentage is significantly lower than the estimated 5% of obsolete words found in the “Later Version” of the Wycliffe New Testament (WNT). It is amazing how in little more than a decade, the time taken to revise the “Early Version” of the “Wycliffe Bible”, the language so quickly evolved, and how much more modern the lexicon of the “Wycliffe Bible” became, particularly its Old Testament. But to understand the text, these obsolete words must be **replaced**.

Fortunately, the “Later Version” of the WOT was created at an exciting time of transition, just as the nascent language was beginning to blossom into the English that we know today. Many modern equivalents for words that we consider “dead” are found in the text itself, already in use alongside their soon-to-be-discarded doublets. Examples of “in-house” replacement words include: again, alley, ascend, ashamed, basket, besides, call, choir, desire, diminish, disturb, follow, hair shirt, harm, hinge, knew, know, mad, pasture, path, praise, reckon, repent, restore, rider, shame/d, snare, strong hold, strong vengeance, stumble, trap, trouble, uncle, weigh (both as a balance or scales and as the verb), weight, with, and still other words (including “that” and “those”, which are replacements for “thilke”). So most of the obsolete or “dead” words of the WOT were replaced with words already there in the text.

For the relatively few remaining obsolete words, reference works were consulted, and appropriate replacement words were chosen and utilized. Older words, in use as close as possible to the time of the “Wycliffe Bible”, were favored over more recent words. When selecting replacements not already found in the text, words were chosen, as often as possible, that were different from those used in the KJV, so as not to artificially produce similar phraseology. But sometimes the only appropriate replacement word was that which the KJV also used.

When an obsolete word was replaced, an effort was made to use the same replacement word as often as possible to reflect word usage found in the original text. However many words have more than one meaning, and differing contexts at times required multiple renderings for an individual “dead” word. So “departe”, usually rendered “part” (“to divide”), also became “separate”; “meyne” usually rendered “family”, also became “household”; “wilne” usually rendered “desire”, also became “to delight in” and “to take pleasure in”; “out-takun” usually rendered “except”, also became “besides”. Of these particular nine replacement words, only “separate”, “family”, and “except” are not found

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in the original text.

In all, approximately 100 individual replacement words (and their various forms and tenses) were utilized. Some replacement words (“benumbed”, “creaketh”, “creditor”, “mocked”, “satisfy”, etc.) were used infrequently; other replacement words (“ascend”, “call”, “except”, “pour”, etc.) were used repeatedly.

## *Archaic Words*

About 4% of the words used in the “Later Version” of the WOT are today considered “archaic”, that is, not widely used, but still found in good, current dictionaries. Words in this category include: “comeling” (stranger or newcomer), “culver” (dove), “forsooth” (“for truth” and “but”), “knitches” (bundles), “livelode”/“lifelode” (livelihood), “quern” (hand-mill), “soothly” (truly), “strand” (stream), “sweven” (dream), “trow” (to trust or to believe), “ween” (to suppose), and “youngling” (young person). Once understood, these words are valid and vital, and evoke the atmosphere and colour of the original text. Most archaic words have been retained. Sometimes the KJV follows the “Later Version” in the use of an archaic word – such as “anon” (at once), “baken” (baked), “holden” (held), “holpen” (helped), “leasing” (lying), “letting” (hindering!), “washen” (washed), “wist” (knew), and “wot” (know) – and *Wycliffe’s Old Testament* also follows the WOT.

Significantly, and of great benefit for our purposes, many archaic words in the WOT have their own modern equivalents right there in the original text. So in *Wycliffe’s Old Testament*, following the original text, you will find both “alarge” and “enlarge”; “alure” and “lattice” (and “alley”); “anon” and “at once”; “araneid” and “spider”; “barnacle” and “bit” (part of a “bridle”, which is also found); “cheer” and “face”; “close” and “enclose”; “darked” and “darkened”; “dure” and “endure”; “err” and “wander”; “flower” and “flourish”; “forgot” and “forgot”; “gat” and “begat”; “gender” and “engender”; “get” and “beget”; “gobbets” and “pieces”; “gotten” and “begotten”; “grave” and “engrave”; “gree” and “degree”; “grene” and “snare” (and “trap”); “half” and “hand” (and “side”); “harded” and “hardened”; “leasing” and “lying”; “lessed” and “lessened”; “liquor” and “liquid”; “manyfold” and “manifold”; “marishes” and “marshes”; “maumet” and “idol”; “nurse” and “nourish”; “owe” and “ought”; “paddocks” and “frogs”; “painture” and “painting”; “plage” and “region”; “says” (and “serges”) and “curtains”; “simulacra” and “idols”; “sop up” and “swallow”; “spelunk” and “cave” (and “den”); “strain” and “constrain”; “sweven” and “dream”; “thank” (past tense of “think”) and “thought”; “tree” and “beam” (and also “stick”, and “timber”, and “wood”); “venge” and “avenge”; “vinery” and “vineyard”; “virtue” and “strength” (and “host”); “volatiles” and “birds”; “waiter” (and “waker”) and “watcher” (and “watchman”); “waking” and “watching”; “wem” and “spot”; and still more doublets of archaic and modern words. For definitions, see the Glossary, beginning on page 1264.

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## *Precursors*

But the vast majority of words in the “Later Version” of the WOT, about 94%, are the direct precursors of words that we use today. Although these words are spelled quite differently from words that we know, once their spelling has been modernized, they can be understood – with the following caveats.

In *Wycliffe’s Old Testament*, you will encounter familiar words in unfamiliar settings: “deem” in place of “judge”; “defoul” in place of “defile”; “doom” in place of “judgement”; “dread” in place of “fear”; “either” in place of “or”; “enhance” in place of “exalt”; “health” in place of “salvation” or “deliverance” (and also “victory”); “wed” in place of “pledge”; and so on. Consult a good dictionary. Even as currently defined, these words remain relevant in their particular context. Their retention here breathes new life into familiar passages and brings fresh insight and illumination.

However, some words that we recognize have significantly changed definition in the intervening six centuries (in most cases, their meanings have become more specialized, less inclusive, than they were before). Reading the original text, these words sound jarring to our ears and appear out of place. Confusion would result if they were retained in *Wycliffe’s Old Testament*. So different words were **substituted**, words whose definitions have remained constant over the centuries, are conducive to the context, and aid, rather than hinder, passage flow. Of vital importance, almost all of the substitution words used in *Wycliffe’s Old Testament* were already present in the original text (some were previously noted above in the list of doublets of archaic and modern words); many are given as alternate renderings by the translators themselves (either in italics or in another verse dealing with the same subject matter).

The “in-house” substitution words used include: arms (for “armours”); at once (for “anon”); basin (for “cup”, and for “vial”, as corrected in glosses citing the Hebrew text); beam (for “tree”); box tree (for “beech tree”, as corrected in glosses citing the Hebrew text); cause to stumble (for “sclaundre”); cave (for “swallow” as a noun); chamber (for “treasury”); chiefs (for “corners”); curtains (for “tents”); denounce (for “defame”); depraved (for “shrewide”); feeble (for “sick”); foreyard (for “hall”); half (for “middle”); hooks (for “heads” of pillars); host (for “strength”); hosts (for “virtues”); joined (for “applied”); knowing (for “cunning”); let go (for “leave” and for “left”); lookers (for “tooters”); loves (for “teats”); lie and lying (for “leasing”); mad (for “wood”); meek (for “debonair”); meekness (for “debonairness”); one (for “to” and for “toon”); only (for “properly”); own (for “proper”); pieces (for “plates”); pit (for “lake” and for “swallow” as a noun); posts (for “fronts” and for “trees”); remember (for “record”); remnant (for “relief”); servant (for “child”); servants (for “children”); species (for “spices”); spoon (for “mortar”, as corrected in glosses citing the Hebrew text); stick (for “tree”); stranger or visitor (for “pilgrim”); strength or power (for



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“virtue”); strengthened (for “comforted”); strong hold (for “strength” and for “strengthening”); stumble (for “offend”); swallow (for “to sop up”); table (for “board”); tent (for “roof”); tents (for “castles”); timber (for “tree”); turn/ed again (for “convert” and “converted”/“return” and “returned”); vessel (for “gallon”); watch (for “wake”); watcher (for “waiter” and for “waker”); a weigh, that is, a balance or scales (for “a peis”); to weigh and weight (for “peise”); well (for “lake” and for “pit”); wild (for “wood”); wood (for “tree”); young (for “birds”); young man (for “child”); and young men (for “children”). **All of these substitution words are frequently found in the original text.** Nine other substitutions were used which are not found in the original text: boy (for “child”); cloak (for “cloth”, the singular of “clothes”); consecrate/d (for “make sacred” and “made sacred”, though “consecration” is found); drowned (for “drenched”); firm (for “sad”); physician (for “leech”); pledge (for “wed”); and promise (for “behest”).

This seems a lengthy list. About 70 individual words. Yet the total number of substitution words in *Wycliffe’s Old Testament* is approximately 500, out of more than 550,000 words in all (or about 1/10<sup>TH</sup> of 1%). Many of these words were used as substitutions five times or less. So when you read any of these words (with the exception of the final nine), almost all of the time they are there in the original text. Substitution words were only used to aid comprehension and were kept to an absolute minimum.

### *Other Minor Modifications*

To aid comprehension and readability, two separate words in the WOT are often joined together in *Wycliffe’s Old Testament*. Examples include: “in + to”, “to + day”, “- + self”, “- + selves”, “no + thing”, and a few others. Conversely, and for the same reasons of comprehension and readability, many unfamiliar compound nouns found in the WOT are hyphenated in *Wycliffe’s Old Testament*. For example, “aȝenstondynge” became “against-standing” (“opposing”), “aȝeinseyng” became “against-saying” (“contradicting”), etc. It can also be helpful to reverse the order of hyphenated words when reading them, so “against-stand” can be read “stand against”, “against-said” can be read “said against”, and so on.

Occasionally a prefix or suffix was added to a root word to aid comprehension: “ac” to “knowledge”; “al” to “together”; “be” to “gat”, “get”, and “loved”; “con” to “strained”; “di” to “minished”; “en” to “close”, “compass”, “dure”, “during”, “gender”, and “grave”; “re” to “quite”; and “ly” to “most”. These prefixes and the suffix are found in the original text, as are the words “altogether”, “begat”, “beget”, “constrained”, “diminished”, “enclose”, “endure”, “enduring”, “engender”, and “engrave”.

Inconsequential prepositions, conjunctions, and pronouns (“a”, “the”, “and”, “selves”, etc.) not found in particular “Later Version” phrases, but present in the same “Early Version” phrases, were occasionally added to the text of *Wycliffe’s Old Testament* to aid

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comprehension and improve passage flow. They appear in square brackets, “[ ]”, and are regular type size. Such words were also added even when not found in the comparable “Early Version” verses; these inserts appear in parentheses, “( )”, and are regular type size.

Parentheses were also used to contain phrases and even entire verses which were re-ordered, re-punctuated, and, sometimes, re-worded, to aid comprehension and readability. Working with Hebrew and Latin sources, the translators produced a highly literal text that is often convoluted and confusing in English. So an effort was made to make better sense out of these passages by putting the available words (or, at times, different, but more accurate words,) into a more fluent order, with more appropriate punctuation. But this was only done with words that are found within parentheses. Such re-working always appears after the original unaltered text, and can easily be ignored, if so desired.

Punctuation overall follows the original text. Occasionally a comma was inserted to aid readability. For chapters of repetitive lists of names, numbers, places, or temple accoutrements (such as those found in Numbers, Ezra, Nehemiah, and 1<sup>st</sup> Chronicles), verses were made consistent with one another. To accomplish this, commas and semi-colons were sometimes interchanged. As well, in various Psalms, it seems that semi-colons were employed to aid in oral presentation (perhaps to indicate a significant pause for breath), for their usage does not follow grammar found elsewhere in the text. So sometimes commas were substituted. The occasional interchange of commas and semi-colons in these books aids comprehension and improves passage flow, but does not alter the meaning of any verse.

To sum up: More than 98% of the words found in *Wycliffe's Old Testament* are modern spellings of the original words found in the 14<sup>th</sup> century manuscript. Less than 2% are “replacement words”, that is, appropriate words chosen to replace obsolete or “dead” words. Almost all of these replacements – about 100 individual words along with their various forms and tenses – are found in the original text. As well, about 500 times throughout all of *Wycliffe's Old Testament* (about 1 word for every two and a half pages of this book), a word more conducive to the context was substituted for another whose meaning had radically changed over the intervening 600 years. Almost all of the substitution words (about 70 in all) were taken from elsewhere in the original text.

Ultimately, each word in *Wycliffe's Old Testament* was selected for its fidelity to the original text, as well as its ability to aid comprehension and passage flow.

### *Use of the KJV*

When transforming the “Later Version” of the WOT into *Wycliffe's Old Testament*, reference was made to the KJV in regard to verse number, book order, book names, and (most) proper names.

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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 Old Testament*, the “Later Version” of the WOT was defined, word by word. Then the KJV was placed alongside and used to divide each chapter into the traditional verses. (The English Bible was first divided into numbered verses 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, it became readily apparent that Wycliffe and Purvey had often written first what would appear two centuries later in the KJV. (This debt is particularly obvious in the New Testament. See *Wycliffe’s New Testament*.)

The sequence of the books of the Old Testament to which we are accustomed long pre-dates the KJV. It appeared in some Latin Bibles at least as early as the 5<sup>TH</sup> century A.D. (Those Bibles in turn were influenced by the order of the books in the Septuagint, the Old Greek version of the Hebrew Scriptures, from the 3<sup>RD</sup> century B.C., which is our earliest complete translation of them.) The sequence was formally established in the accepted order at the time that the verse divisions were made (again, about 60 years before the KJV was printed). This is the same order found in the WOT, which was written 150 years earlier. *Wycliffe’s Old Testament* simply follows the WOT (but excludes the apocryphal books found intermittently within it).

The names of the books of the Old Testament have minor variations among the copies of the “Wycliffe Bible”, but they are basically what is found in the KJV. Most are prefaced by the phrase, “The Book of...”. The exceptions: 1<sup>ST</sup> and 2<sup>ND</sup> Samuel are called 1<sup>ST</sup> and 2<sup>ND</sup> Kings in the WOT (the same alternate names also found in early editions of the KJV); “our” 1<sup>ST</sup> and 2<sup>ND</sup> Kings are called 3<sup>RD</sup> and 4<sup>TH</sup> Kings in the WOT (again, the same alternate names also found in early editions of the KJV); 1<sup>ST</sup> and 2<sup>ND</sup> Chronicles (named by Jerome) are called 1<sup>ST</sup> and 2<sup>ND</sup> Paralipomena in the WOT (the name is taken from the Septuagint and means “things left over”, referring to Samuel and Kings; however, it is a misnomer, for the Chronicles are distinct from the other historical books, focusing on God’s intervention in history, and omitting Northern Kingdom annals); Nehemiah is called 2<sup>ND</sup> Ezra; the Song of Solomon is usually called the Song of Songs (as it is often named in Jewish and modern English Bibles); and Jeremiah is referred to as “Jeremy” in the titles of the book of his prophecies and the book of his lamentations. On the whole, book names in *Wycliffe’s Old Testament* follow those found in the KJV.

To aid comprehension and also comparison with other translations, proper names in *Wycliffe’s Old Testament* were generally made to conform to those in the KJV. However, surprisingly, the modern names of such countries as Africa, Greece, Libya, and Ethiopia are found in the WOT, where the KJV often uses their archaic and/or Hebrew names (respectively Put, Javan or Grecia, Lubim, and Cush), and they were not changed. As well,

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the WOT often shows its debt to the Septuagint by using the Greek names for such cities as Heliopolis, Memphis, Pelusium, Sidon, Tanis, and Thebes, instead of the Hebrew names which the KJV uses (respectively On, Noph, Sin, Zidon, Zoan, and No); these names were also not changed. A list of “Alternate Names of People and Places” appears on pages 1262-63, before the Glossary.

Infrequently, apparently confusing an object name with a proper name, a **Hebrew** word was not translated in the WOT, but simply transliterated (the KJV and other translations do translate these words). These transliterations were left as found in the original text of the WOT, with a translation following in parentheses. They are also defined in the Glossary.

Finally, the few times where a proper name in the WOT is distinctly different from its counterpart in the KJV, it was not changed in *Wycliffe’s Old Testament*; however the more familiar name is given immediately following in parentheses.

Names of God are a special circumstance. God has many names and titles in the WOT, including “God”, “Lord”, “God Almighty”, “Almighty God”, “the Almighty”, “the Lord of hosts” (sometimes written “the Lord of virtues”), “the Lord God of hosts” (sometimes written “the Lord God of virtues”), “the High”, “the most High”, “the Highest”, “the alder-Highest”, “the Holy”, “my Maker”, “the old of days”, “creator”, “the overcomer”, and still others as well (including “king”, which is also given as a title for the coming Messiah). In the WOT, the first seven titles in this list are always capitalized, the next six are infrequently capitalized, and the others are never capitalized. In *Wycliffe’s Old Testament*, the capitalized titles were left as such, those in the second grouping (“the High”, “the most High”, “the Highest”, “the alder-Highest”, “the Holy”, and “Maker”) were consistently capitalized to aid comprehension, and the other remaining titles were also capitalized for the same reason. The KJV, and other translations, including Jewish Bibles, capitalize some, or even all, of these titles, but not in uniformity with one another.

Surprisingly, the words “christ”, “christs”, and “Christ” appear in the WOT. The English word “christ” is from the Greek word “christos” (“christus” in Latin), and means “the anointed (one)”; the transliterated Hebrew for the same word is the familiar “messiah”. The word “christos” appears in the Septuagint (e.g., in Psalms 2:2 and Daniel 9:25). It was borrowed from there by the writers of the Greek New Testament in the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. to refer specifically and only to Jesus Christ (and so it is capitalized). But in the WOT, “christ” uncapitalized can refer to King Saul, the Persian king Cyrus, David in particular, the patriarchs in general (here the word “christs” is used), and others who were “anointed by God” (but with no messianic overtones). The WOT self-defines the term with the words “the anointed”, “the king”, or “the anointed king” (sometimes in an alternate rendering, sometimes in italics).

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However, reference is made to “Christ” in a prophetic manner, that is, in regard to the coming Messiah, in 1<sup>ST</sup> Samuel 2:10 and 2:35, 2<sup>ND</sup> Samuel 23:1, Psalms 2:2 and 45:2, and Lamentations 4:20, all verses where the KJV and other translations say “anointed king” or “anointed prince”; throughout the Song of Songs, where the “Early Version”, and one copy of the “Later Version”, present the entire book as an allegorical dialogue between Christ and his bride, the Church; in Daniel 9:25 and 9:26, where the KJV says “Messiah”, but modern translations simply say “prince”; and in Zechariah 3:8, where the KJV and other translations say “the Branch”/“The Branch”, and Jewish Bibles suggest a formal name, rather than a messianic term. (In Isaiah, where one might expect to find the word, if anywhere, it does occur, once, at 45:1, but only as “my christ”, and refers to King Cyrus of Persia; in the KJV and other translations, the term used here is “his anointed”.)

Other titles in the WOT which also refer to the coming Messiah include “king”, “duke”, “prince”, “saviour”, “a just burgeoning”, “a burgeoning of rightwiseness”, “a seed of rightfulness”, and “the sun of rightwiseness”. None of these titles is ever capitalized in the WOT. However, in one verse, Zechariah 6:12, the coming Messiah is referred to as “a man, Coming forth, *either Born, is his name,*” in the “Later Version”, and as “a man, East, or *Springing, (is) his name,*” in the “Early Version” (both examples capitalized in the original text). The equivalent title used here in the KJV, and in several modern translations as well, is “The Branch”. Overall, the KJV and other translations, including Jewish Bibles, capitalize words such as “King”, “Prince”, “Branch”, and “Sun”, as titles for the coming Messiah, but not always consistently internally, or in uniformity with one another. To aid comprehension, all are consistently capitalized in *Wycliffe’s Old Testament*.

In Habakkuk 3:18, where the KJV has “God my saviour”, and other translations have “God my deliverer”/“God my deliverance”, *Wycliffe’s Old Testament*, following the WOT (both versions), has “God my Jesus”. The name “Jesus” is not here in the original Hebrew or Greek texts. Its insertion here in this verse by Christian preachers Wycliffe and Purvey illustrates their belief in the essential unity of the two testaments.

“Spirit” in the WOT can refer to God, His breath, or simply “the wind”. So “the Spirit” and “the Spirit of God” are sometimes capitalized, sometimes not. Occasionally, the WOT has “the Spirit of the Lord”, where the KJV and other translations have “the spirit of the Lord”. But overall, “the Spirit of the Lord” is capitalized more often in the KJV Old Testament and other translations than in the WOT. This term is problematic. *Wycliffe’s Old Testament* simply follows the WOT. As always, the goal was to provide an accurate representation of the original text, while remaining true to the context, and enhancing reader comprehension.

Words in *italics* are words added by the translators to aid comprehension. The KJV contains more *italicized* words than the “Later Version” of the WOT, but less than the

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“Early Version” of the WOT. *Wycliffe’s Old Testament* simply follows the WOT.

Comparing *Wycliffe’s Old Testament* and the KJV, sometimes the KJV follows the WOT, other times the KJV helps decipher a passage in the WOT; sometimes the two texts are identical, other times they are as different as two versions of the same verse could be.

## *A Word Regarding the Primary Source*

The primary source for this book was Forshall & Madden’s 4-volume magnum opus, *The Holy Bible, Containing the Old and New Testaments, With the Apocryphal Books, In the Earliest English Versions, Made from the Latin Vulgate by John Wycliffe and His Followers*. Today, it is most likely found in a university library or on the Internet.

Written over a period of twenty years in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, this monumental work of scholarship was the crowning achievement of The Rev. Josiah Forshall and Sir Frederic Madden. From about 160 extant hand-printed copies of the two versions of the “Wycliffe Bible” (about 40 copies of the “Early Version”, and about 120 copies of the “Later Version”), they selected one copy from each version to serve as “master” texts, and then, by utilizing over 90,000 footnotes, correlated the other copies with the two “master” texts.

Both versions of the “Wycliffe Bible” contain prologues (introductions to each book, or group of related books, mostly taken from Jerome), and marginal glosses (explanations of the text by the translators, and some alternate renderings of words and phrases). The prologues are not utilized in *Wycliffe’s Old Testament*. The glosses are a different story.

Some revisions of the “Later Version” of the WOT, particularly the copies Forshall & Madden labelled “C”, “G”, “K”, “Q”, and “X”, and to a lesser extent, “B”, “I”, and “N”, contain glosses which prove that Hebrew Bibles, commentaries, and scholars were consulted during the copying/revising process. Over 300 times throughout the WOT, gloss after gloss states: “in Hebrew, it is”, “is not in Hebrew”, “as Hebrews say”, “as Hebrews understand”, “this verse is not in Hebrew”, “this title is not in Hebrew”. As well, at least 7 times, a “Rabbi Solomon” is quoted as commenting on a particular verse: “as Rabbi Solomon saith”. This “Rabbi Solomon” was most likely the scholar “Rashi”, the leading commentator on the Jewish Bible and the Talmud in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, or possibly another commentator from history, or perhaps even a contemporary of the translators (although this is the least likely possibility). Another 5 times, reference is made to (Jerome’s) “Book of Hebrew Questions”, a book of the master translator’s own corrections of the Greek and Latin texts, which he made by referencing the Hebrew Scriptures. Jerome believed that the Hebrew provided a truer text to translate from than either the earlier Latin versions or the Septuagint (a fact agreed to by all modern translators). So, where appropriate, the words and phrases from these glosses have been either incorporated into the main text of *Wycliffe’s Old Testament* or are presented as alternate

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renderings. A few of the alternate renderings from the glosses are printed in this book, but all of them can be found in files on the *Wycliffe's Bible* CD and the online efiles. As well, gleanings from other glosses are placed in footnotes here.

The footnotes in Forshall & Madden's four volumes are another source of invaluable information. As noted, there are over 90,000 footnotes, with about 65,000 pertaining to the Old Testament alone (both versions). These footnotes delineate textual divergence – changes, omissions, insertions, copyist errors – between the “master” texts and the other hand-printed copies of both versions of the “Wycliffe Bible”. (A footnote can refer to a single copy or to multiple copies.) Close reading of the footnotes indicates that many times when a copy of either version was written (though less frequently with the “Early Version”), original language texts were also consulted. For time and again, words were added, or changed, to produce a more accurate rendering of the original Hebrew of the Old Testament, and the original Greek of the New Testament. In creating *Wycliffe's Old Testament*, many of these footnotes were utilized to provide the most precise translation, as well as the best phrasing – the most satisfying, balanced, rhythmic read – that is found within all extant copies of the WOT.

In *Wycliffe's Old Testament*, a forward slash, “/”, separates different renderings of the same phrase from two different hand-written copies, usually the “master” text and an alternate rendering found in a footnote. Most of these renderings from the footnotes came from the copies labelled “I”, “N”, and “S”. It is interesting to note that numerous textual variations indicated in footnotes for only the “Early Version” also appear in the KJV. This suggests that several copies of the “Wycliffe Bible” were studied during the writing of the KJV. See the files on the *Wycliffe's Bible* CD or the online efiles for most of these alternate renderings taken from the footnotes.

In creating *Wycliffe's Old Testament*, textual errors that were found in the WOT were not changed (they are also part of the original text); none are of major doctrinal significance. Corrections of names, numbers, and places, most often needed in chapters of repetitive lists, were placed in parentheses, immediately following the error, to enable better comparison with other translations.

A handful of printing errors – reversed letters or misread vowels of pronouns, prepositions, and adverbs – were discovered in the “Later Version” of the WOT. These were confirmed by referring to the “Early Version”, which in each case agreed with the Hebrew, and not with the “Later Version”. These were corrected.

## *Use of the “Early Version”*

The “Later Version” of the WOT is the foundation upon which *Wycliffe's Old Testament* was built. Strictly speaking, *Wycliffe's Old Testament* is not a composite of the

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“Later” and “Early” versions. However, the “Early Version” of the WOT was utilized in a number of significant ways in the writing of *Wycliffe’s Old Testament*.

First, the “Early Version” was used to define unknown words found in the “Later Version”. Irregular spelling can make even the simplest words difficult to decipher. The “Early Version” served as a second source for such words. Often it had a more recognizable spelling, and so helped to identify them. As well, modern equivalents of “dead” words (to be used as replacement or substitution words) were often found only in the “Early Version”. Modern verb forms were also often found only in the “Early Version”. Their existence helped achieve verb form consistency in *Wycliffe’s Old Testament*.

Second, the “Early Version” served as a source of “missing” words and phrases. About two dozen times, a textually significant word or partial phrase was not found in the “Later Version”, but was present in the “Early Version” (following the Hebrew and also found in the KJV). Examples include: Genesis 35:5 and 50:22; Leviticus 4:21; Numbers 32:29 and 35:27; Deuteronomy 3:22; Joshua 16:8; 1<sup>ST</sup> Samuel 1:9; 2<sup>ND</sup> Samuel 17:28; 1<sup>ST</sup> Kings 8:2, 8:34, 21:7, and 21:19; 2<sup>ND</sup> Kings 1:4; Ezra 4:8; Proverbs 5:4 and 21:21; Isaiah 64:2; Jeremiah 52:22; Ezekiel 15:4; Hosea 2:12; and Zechariah 7:4. (An even greater number of significant phrase fragments are “missing” from the “Early Version”.) As well, less consequential “missing” words, mostly “and” and “the”, were often found only in “Early Version” verses. These “missing” words, significant and insignificant alike, were inserted into *Wycliffe’s Old Testament* to improve its accuracy, reader comprehension, and passage flow. All “missing” words are contained within square brackets, and are regular type size.

Third, like the glosses and footnotes, the “Early Version” itself 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 discovers numerous instances where the KJV follows the “Early Version” and not the “Later Version”. Sometimes it is a single word, sometimes it is a phrase, and sometimes it is the order of several phrases within a verse. This usually occurs where the “Early Version” more closely follows the Hebrew than does the “Later Version”. These textually significant “alternate” renderings from the “Early Version” are also contained within square brackets, but have reduced type size, to distinguish them from “missing” words.

Fourth, the “Early Version” served as a source of “interesting” words and phrases, no more accurate than what is found in the “Later Version”, and many not utilized by the KJV, but fascinating nevertheless. These renderings are also contained within square brackets, and also have reduced type size.

Fifth, in 1<sup>ST</sup> Chronicles 8:16-26 (one of the “list” chapters), the text of the “Early Version” was used, rather than that of the “Later Version”, because of more accurate punctuation. There are no major differences in wording between the two versions; consistency in



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punctuation and aid to comprehension were the only reasons for using these “EV” verses. Each verse is marked with a superscript <sup>E</sup> to denote its origin.

To sum up: All of the words in square brackets, “[ ]”, in *Wycliffe’s Old Testament* are from the “Early Version” of the WOT. Regular-size words were added to aid textual accuracy, reader comprehension, and passage flow; reduced-size words are either “alternate” words that are textually closer to the original Hebrew and/or what is found in the KJV, or simply “interesting” variations too fascinating to ignore. A limited number of these “EV” words are printed in *Wycliffe’s Old Testament*, but all of them can be found in files on the *Wycliffe’s Bible* CD and the online efiles.

All of the foregoing understood, it needs to be stated that *Wycliffe’s Old Testament* can be read, and comprehended, without reference to any of the words or phrases found in the square brackets. The “Later Version” of the WOT – as represented by *Wycliffe’s Old Testament* – can stand on its own. These additional words simply provide an another dimension of this seminal work in the English translation of the Old Testament. (For more on the “Early Version”, see *Endnote II: Regarding the “Early Version”*, on page 1283.)

## *A Final Note*

With the spelling up-dated and the 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 Old Testament. This is *their* Old Testament *with modern spelling* – not some 21<sup>st</sup> century variation on a medieval theme. The melodies and harmonies are 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 rhythm and charm, 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 many modern translations of the Old Testament in English, available at the library, in bookstores, and on the Internet. But once, there was just one. This one. Try to imagine the impact on hearing or reading these words for the very first time:

In the bigynniyng God made  
of nouȝt heuene and erthe.  
Forsothe the erthe was idel and voide,  
and derknessis weren on the face of

In the beginning God made  
of nought heaven and earth.  
Forsooth the earth was idle and void,  
and darknesses were on the face of

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depthe; and the Spiryte of the Lord  
was borun on the watris<sup>3</sup>.

And God seide, Liȝt be maad, and  
the liȝt was maad.

And God seiȝ the liȝt,  
that it was good, and he  
departide the liȝt fro derknessis;  
and he clepide the liȝt, dai,  
and the derknessis, nyȝt. And  
the euentid and the morwetid  
was maad, o daie.

*“Later Version”, Genesis, Chapter 1,  
The Holy Bible, 1395, unaltered.*

(the) depth; and the Spirit of the Lord  
was borne on the waters.

And God said, Light be made, and  
the light was made.

And God saw the light,  
that it was good, and he  
parted the light from (the) darknesses;  
and he called the light, day,  
and the darknesses, night. And  
the eventide and the morrowtide  
was made, one day (the first day).

*Genesis 1:1-5,  
Wycliffe’s Old Testament, 2010.*

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<sup>3</sup> The “Early Version” phrase here is: “and the Spiryte of God was born vpon the watrys” (“and the Spirit of God was borne upon the waters”).