
Endnote: Regarding the “Early Version”

The “Early Version” of the “Wycliffe Bible”, hand-printed about 1382, has long been criticized by Bible historians as too literal, often unintelligible, cumbersome, at best a deeply flawed 1st attempt. In fact, much of the Gospels and the Apocalypse were transferred without significant change from the “Early Version” to the “Later Version”, and closely resemble the “Wycliffe-Purvey” text.

However, it is also true that when the “Early Version” is directly compared to the “Later Version”, the “Early Version” is, overall, a less satisfying read. It is not so finely tuned and contains many more italicized glosses which interrupt the flow. That is why hand-written variations of the “Later Version” became the foundation upon which the King James Version (KJV) was built. But, as was stated earlier, comparing all three versions side-by-side, it becomes clear that the KJV translators rejected numerous revisions made in the “Later Version”, and chose instead individual words and phraseology found in one variant or another of the “Early Version”. Why did they do this? Simply put, in countless passages of the “Early Version”, both the poetry of the language and fidelity to the original Greek text are superior to that found in the “Later Version”.

As the words contained within the square brackets in “Wycliffe-Purvey” readily demonstrate, the KJV translators repeatedly followed the “Early Version”, rather than the “Later Version”, in regard to prepositions (“the” in “EV” replaced by “a” in “LV”), verb forms (e.g., “saying” and “sitting” in “EV” replaced by “said” and “sat” in “LV”), and phrase order within a verse (“a/b/c” in “EV” rearranged into “b/a/c” in “LV”).

But of greatest consequence are almost one hundred significant words that appear in the “Early Version”, which were later copied in the KJV, but which are not found in the equivalent “Later Version” verses. Translation is an inexact science. A single word can often be rendered several ways (as the “Wycliffe” versions themselves amply demonstrate). Therefore these linguistic agreements between the “Early Version” and the KJV are meaningful. Examples include: “unction” (“anointing” in “LV”), “allegory” (“understanding” in “LV”), “mystery” (“private” in “LV”), “liberty” (“freedom” in “LV”), “captive” (“prisoner” in “LV”), “Caesar” (“emperor” in “LV”), “prize” (“reward” in “LV”), “wise men” (“astrologers” in “LV”), “veil” (“covering” in “LV”), “faith” (“unbelief” in “LV”), “concision” (“division” in “LV”), and “sand” (“gravel” in “LV”). These words, and many others, were first introduced into the English New Testament lexicon in the 1382 “Early Version” of the “Wycliffe Bible”. More than two hundred years later, they were utilized again by the KJV translators.

Presented on the following page are a sampling of “Early Version” verses (limited only by space, for there are literally 1000s to chose from) which read like a 1st draft of the KJV. Sometimes fine-tuning would be required, but often the KJV translators’ ‘red pencil’ would scarcely be needed. Compare these verses with their “Wycliffe-Purvey” counterparts.

Regarding the “Early Version”

Wycliffe, 1382

Matthew

2:1,2 ...lo! kings, *or wise men*, came from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he, that is born the king of Jews?

11:29 Take ye my yoke upon you, and learn ye of me, for I am mild and meek of heart; and ye shall find rest to your souls.

18:20 For where two or three shall be gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them.

22:21 ...Therefore yield ye to Caesar those things that be Caesar's, and to God those things that be of God.

Mark

1:3 The voice of *one* crying in desert, Make ye ready the ways of the Lord, make ye his paths rightful.

1:6,7 ⁺...and he ate locusts, and wild honey, and preached, saying,...

Luke

4:8 ...Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and to him alone thou shalt serve.

4:12 It is said, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.

John

3:16 Forsooth God so loved the world, that he gave his one begotten son, that each man that believeth into him, perish not, but have everlasting life.

Acts

20:36 ...for he said, It is more blessed to give, more than to receive.

KJV, 1611

Matthew

2:1,2 ...behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews?

11:29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

18:20 For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

22:21 ...Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's.

Mark

1:3 The voice of *one* crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

1:6,7 ...and he did eat locusts and wild honey; and preached, saying,...

Luke

4:8 ...Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.

4:12 It is said, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.

John

3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Acts

20:36 ...how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.