

RUSSELL SANDERS

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HISTORICAL PERSECUTION OF BELIEVERS – LESSON 13

JOHN WYCLIFFE AND THE LOLLARDS

John Wycliffe (Wickliffe), 1330-1384 was from England where the social, political, and religious environment had already brought some relaxation of the absolute control of the king and the church (RCC) due to the principles set forth in 1215 by the Magna Carta which gave the people certain rights and freedoms not previously known. This worked in favor of religious dissenters such as John Wycliffe.

Wycliffe was a scholar, philosopher, theologian, bible translator, reformer, Catholic Priest, and seminary professor at Oxford University. He is best remembered today as the first to translate the Bible into English. This infuriated the RCC because the Bible was only supposed to be in Latin, the official language of the RCC (Roman Catholic Church). Common people were prohibited from reading it or owning any part of it. It further incensed the church that one of their own highly respected priests and seminary professors would be the one to violate this.

Once the bible was in people's hands, there was no stopping of the power of God's written word. Today the Wycliffe Bible Translators have translated the Bible into hundreds of languages worldwide including far remote indigenous tribes.

The irritation of the RCC went far beyond that because Wycliffe was highly critical of the abusive practices of the church and the clergy. He disputed doctrines such as transubstantiation which claims that communion bread and wine become the literal flesh and blood of Jesus in the recipients' mouth. He criticized the communion practice of giving only the bread to the parishioner and reserving the wine for only the priest.

He criticized the extravagant pomp, the luxury, and the trappings (garments) of the bishops. He criticized their superstitions and deceptions. Twice he was tried by the Inquisition, but he had enough support that they dared not severely punish him. They admonished him to cease preaching and publishing his books or articles. He responded by taking to the streets to preach even more vigorously.

Twice he fell extremely ill and was not expected to live yet he recovered to continue his work. Wycliff's followers became known as Lollards. They were critical of the Pope and the entire hierarchy of the RCC who considered them as heretics. As Wycliffe's printed translations of the bible circulated, anyone who was found with any part of it was burned at the stake.

Ironically, this came at a time period when there were two competing Popes, Urban VI and Clement VII, both claiming for a number of years to be the Pope of the Roman Catholic Church. This is one more additional proof of the claim of the RCC of having an unbroken line of Popes from Peter to this present time to be inaccurate.

Wycliffe's impact for us has been that of making the Holy Bible in the common people's language. Miraculously, he had escaped death from the RCC's Inquisition. He died a natural death at age 54.

His legacy lives on today.