JOHN WYCLIFFE 1330 - 1384

There were many reformers throughout the history of the Christian church and one of them was John Wycliffe, a Roman Catholic priest, who lived in the 1300's. He was not seeking to break from the Church, but rather to reform it from within and correct abuses that had crept in over many centuries.

Conditions in the land were difficult: the "Black Plague" swept across England and Europe and in some places wiped out one-third of the population; what was known as the "100 Years War" between England and France sapped energy and resources; and wage controls locked the poor into a marginal existence that led to the violent Peasant's Revolt in England in 1381.

Wycliffe cared deeply for the poor and common folk and railed against the abuses of the church. The church owned over one-third of the land in England and high offices of the clergy were often bought or given out as political plums. A student of the Bible, Wycliffe saw that some of the doctrines of the church had departed from biblical moorings. He wrote and preached against purgatory, the sale of indulgences, and the doctrine of transubstantiation. This got him banished from his university teaching post at Oxford.

But he and some of his students undertook the monumental task of translating all the Scriptures into English, working from a hand-written Latin translation that was over 1,000 years old. Think for a moment what it would mean if you could not own a Bible or if the Bible wasn't even available in your own language. What if you were taught that the Bible was only for church officials to study and interpret? That was exactly the case in Wycliffe's England.

Nothing was more important to him than getting the Bible and its message into the language and hearts of the people. He knew the Scriptures would change lives. Wycliffe was condemned by the church and died of a stroke in 1384. But his memory and influence was so strong that he was formally condemned again thirty years later at the Council of Constance. Orders were given for all his writings to be destroyed, his bones exhumed and burned and the ashes to be thrown into a nearby river that they might erase his memory.

But even such bizarre and extreme actions could not stop the hunger for God's Word and the truth that Wycliffe had advocated. How appropriate that a great missionary organization founded in 1942 took its name and inspiration from this reformer. In cooperation with other like-minded ministries, Wycliffe Bible Translators aims to translate the Bible into every one of the over 2,500 remaining languages on earth that don't have the Scriptures.