WHEN WILL BIBLE TRANSLATION BE FINISHED?

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Category: Controversies

When I visit churches and talk to people about Bible translation, I'm often asked when the last translation will be completed. On the surface, this is a simple question; but like most simple questions, it has a complex answer!

The simple answer, is that Wycliffe has a vision that the last translation project will have *started* by the year 2025. So, we hope to start the last translation project within the next 15 years. It may take a little longer than that, but it is reasonable to expect that the last translation programme will start within this generation.

But the question is when will translation be finished, not when will the last translation project start; and that is far harder to predict. For a start, many of the translations which have been done up till now, only involved the New Testament or selections of the Scripture. If we believe that the whole of the Bible is God's word and should be translated (and I do) ,there is a lot of translation work that will need to be done even after the last translation project has started.

Then of course, there is the vexed question of revisions and new translations into languages which already have the Scriptures. Next year (2011) marks the four hundredth anniversary of the publication of the Authorised Version of the Bible in English. This means that the Bible has been widely available in English for four hundred years - and that is without counting earlier translations - but new English translations are still being produced. English has changed over four hundred years and other languages will change and evolve too and because of this there will be a need for Bible translation as long as human language continues.

So, when will Bible Translation finish?

It is conceivable, that every language in the world will have some part of Scripture available to them sometime after 2025. This will be an amazing day: but it won't mark the end of Bible translation. Though, it may, perhaps, signal the day in which Wycliffe Bible Translators' job will be finished.

If English is anything to go by; the Christian church will still be translating and publishing new editions of the Bible in many different languages in the year 2425, unless the world has come to an end by then. One day, there will be no more need of Bible translation because we will all see God clearly, face to face. But until that day, we will need to keep on searching for good, accurate and natural ways of expressing the Greek and Hebrew text in all sorts of languages. We can no more finish Bible translation than we can finish the Great Commission.