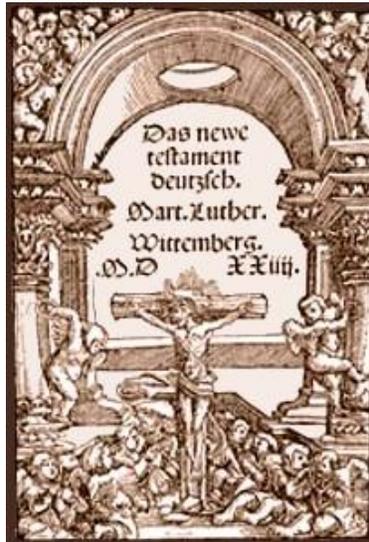


LUTHER'S BIBLE  
&  
THE EHV  
ON THE  
500<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY  
OF THE  
LUTHERAN REFORMATION

*Alle Schrift von Gott eingegeben*



October 31, 2017

## Introductory Thoughts on the 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation

We are celebrating 500 years of the Lutheran Reformation, and there is much to celebrate. We praise God that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. We learn this from Scripture alone. To God alone be all the glory and praise!

Most say that the Reformation started on October 31, 1517. On that day, Dr. Martin Luther sent a letter to the Archbishop of Mainz about indulgences. Here are a few excerpts from that letter:

Under your most distinguished name, papal indulgences are offered all across the land for the construction of St. Peter's.... I bewail the gross misunderstanding.... Evidently the poor souls believe that when they have bought indulgence letters they are then assured of their salvation. After all, the indulgences contribute absolutely nothing to the salvation and holiness of souls.<sup>1</sup>

After that, Luther also posted his *Ninety-five Theses* on the Castle Church door. These Latin statements were intended for public debate by university professors and theologians. Contrary to Luther's expectations, his *Ninety-five Theses* were translated, published, and read by many people throughout Germany and in many other places. This was the spark that started the Reformation.

Yet Luther was still learning from Scripture. In 1517, Luther still thought he was on the side of the Pope. By October of 1520, Luther had become clearer about many things. Luther admitted that he didn't have everything straight in 1517 when he wrote the *Ninety-five Theses* or in 1518 when he wrote their *Explanations*.

Whether I wish it or not, I am compelled to become more learned every day, with so many and such able masters eagerly driving me on and making me work. Some two years ago I wrote on indulgences, but in such a way that I now deeply regret having published that little book.<sup>2</sup> At that time I still clung with a mighty superstition to the tyranny of Rome, and so I held that indulgences should not be altogether rejected, seeing that they were approved by the common consent of so many.<sup>2</sup>

On April 18, 1521, at the Diet of Worms, Luther was famously forced to answer if he was willing to recant his writings. Here is the account of that dramatic scene:

When I had finished, the speaker for the emperor said, as if in reproach, that I had not answered the question, that I ought not call into question those things which had been condemned and defined in councils; therefore what was sought from me was not a horned<sup>3</sup> response, but a simple one, whether or not I wished to retract.

Here I answered:

“Since then your serene majesty and your lordships seek a simple answer, I will give it in this manner, neither horned nor toothed: Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience.

“I cannot do otherwise, here I stand, may God help me, Amen.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Luther's Works*, vol. 48:46-47. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, ©1963.

<sup>2</sup> *Explanations of the Ninety-five Theses* (1518. LW 31, 83-252) *Luther's Works*, vol. 36:11.

<sup>3</sup> *Cornutum*, “horned” syllogism—a sophistical, ambiguous reply.

<sup>4</sup> *Luther's Works*, vol. 32:112-113.

After that, Luther was in danger, and Elector Frederick wanted to protect him. It's a very good thing that Luther was at least somewhat aware of what was going to happen. On the morning of April 28, 1521, Luther wrote to Lucas Cranach, "I shall submit to being 'imprisoned' and hidden away, though as yet I do not know where. I would have preferred to suffer death at the hands of the tyrants... but I must not disregard the counsel of good men."<sup>1</sup>

Because Luther was aware of what was going to happen, he had his Hebrew Old Testament and Greek New Testament nearby. As he was being kidnapped (secretly taken for his own safety to the Wartburg Castle), Luther quickly grabbed his copy of the Greek New Testament and the copy of the Hebrew Bible. That would prove to be a great blessing and not just for Luther.

At the Wartburg Castle, Luther wrote, "I am reading the Bible in Greek and Hebrew."<sup>2</sup> Before this forced "sabbatical," he had been exceedingly busy and under plenty of stress. Now, at the Wartburg Castle, he had plenty of leisure time on his hands. God had provided an opportunity. Soon, Dr. Martin Luther would translate the New Testament into German.

What a blessing this would be for the German people! Many generations of German-speaking people have read and been blessed by Luther's clear and faithful Bible translation. It is fitting that we remember this as we celebrate the 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Reformation.

### **Part One: Luther's Translation Principles and Comments on Luther's Bible**

There were 18 German versions of the Bible before Dr. Martin Luther began his work of translating.<sup>3</sup> These translations were apparently translated from the Latin Vulgate and of very poor quality. Luther began translating the New Testament from the Wartburg Castle in the last few weeks of 1521. (This is the source of the name *Wartburg Project*.) He was finished by March of 1522. The speed and quality of the translation remain astonishing.

While Luther completed the work of translating the New Testament from Greek into German very rapidly, his work on the Old Testament proceeded much more slowly. He began the Old Testament translation in 1522 and finished in 1534. He often commented that Hebrew did not want to become German. Luther made use of a committee of scholars who met in his home to discuss the translation. But Luther certainly remained firmly in charge of the translation project. There was no doubt it was Luther's translation.

Luther continued to revise his translation, seeking to improve it, until his death. But today it is important to clarify that these revisions were not aimed to make the translation more acceptable to various religious views. These revisions were not made for the sake of avoiding perceived offense by various advocacy groups. The revisions were simply aimed to make the translation more accurate and clear. Luther always carried with him the latest version of his translation. The last version of the German Bible that Luther himself worked on became the standard German translation for many years.<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, some printers took liberties with the text. There were several versions of the Luther Bible after his death.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Luther's Works, vol. 48:201.

<sup>2</sup> Luther's Works, vol. 48:225.

<sup>3</sup> There were 14 versions in High German and 4 versions in Low German. Heinz Bluhm, *Martin Luther: Creative Translator*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, ©1965. Pages 78, 97. E.G. Schwiebert, *Luther and his times*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, ©1950. Page 853, note 187. Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther 1521-1532: Shaping and Defining the Reformation* (Kindle Locations 834-835). Minneapolis: Fortress Press, © 1990.

<sup>4</sup> In fact, many scholars believe Luther's version was a major basis of the English versions of William Tyndale and Myles Coverdale, to which versions the King James Version owes a debt. See, for example: Heinz Bluhm, *Luther Translator of Paul: Studies in Romans and Galatians*, New York: Peter Lang, ©1984. Especially pages 559ff.

<sup>5</sup> For various editions of the Luther Bible, see: <http://www.bible-researcher.com/links10.html>

Luther's methods and views of translation are widely regarded as the model for proper Bible translating. There are many claims about Luther's translation views. Some have claimed that Luther's translation method was essentially dynamic equivalence, while others have claimed that Luther translated literally. Actually, Luther doesn't fit either category, or he fits both. He almost defies categorization. Luther was often criticized for not always translating hyper-literally. So, much of his writing responds to this charge. But in many places Luther did translate in an essentially literal way as he himself explained. He does not seem to have been faulted for this.

Luther tried to find just the right word in German to express the original meaning. Sometimes Luther went to the butcher to find just the right terms for body parts of sacrificial animals. In fact, "he had several rams slaughtered in his presence, so that a German butcher could tell him the proper name for each part of the sheep."<sup>1</sup> Luther knew the Bible, and he knew how the common people talked. But the German language was not quite settled. Each territory had its own version of the language. There was no standard spelling for words. Professor Daniel Deutschlander mentions this and much more:

One will find the simple word *und* spelled in four or five different ways—on the same page, with one and the same author! . . .

All of that makes Luther's accomplishment in translating and in his other writings the more remarkable. It is not too much to say that Luther, especially with his translation of the Bible, and then with the two catechisms and his hymns began the process of standardizing the German language. . .

While Luther used his own knowledge of Greek and Hebrew augmented considerably by the knowledge of some of his co-workers, it was perhaps in German usage that Luther made the greatest contribution. He came from common roots. And he didn't despise those roots, as someone who had outgrown the peasant's shoe or the cobbler's apron. When he wanted to know which word best fit a part of meat mentioned in connection with an Old Testament sacrifice, he went to the Jewish butcher to see what German word he used. He listened to the man in the market place or in the field, to the mother speaking to her child. It was in these most common of words that Luther found that commonality which could be understood throughout the German lands and that would make his translation so quickly beloved.

More than that even his translation and then his catechisms and hymns could be used to teach children how to read and write. The Small Catechism and the hymns were the early primers at the birth of the Lutheran school system. And the whole of instruction had the aim that from their earliest years children should know the truths taught in the Bible and then be able to find there those truths for themselves. Indeed it was with exactly that goal and aim in mind that Luther used vocabulary and grammar that would be easily accessible to the otherwise uneducated and to the young. He did it without "dumbing down" either content or style. He did it in a way that makes the core of his translation durable to this day, even with all the revisions in spelling and the like made necessary by the evolution of the language from his day to ours. His translation is at one and the same time simple and elegant. It lends itself to public reading and to private devotion. It is at once common and memorable.<sup>2</sup>

Luther's principles of Bible translation involved sound judgment and understanding of the Bible text. His choice varied according to particular cases. Luther explained his translation method with these words: "We extolled the principle of at times retaining the words quite literally, and at times rendering only the meaning."<sup>3</sup> In other words, Luther was not a strict literalist. He wrote:

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<sup>1</sup> From a sermon on Luther's life by Mathesius, quoted in Schwiebert, p. 649.

<sup>2</sup> *Luther and Translating*, pp. 2-4 (delivered to the WELS Michigan District Pastor-Teacher Conference, Jan., 2012).

<sup>3</sup> *Luther's Works*, vol. 35:222-223. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

What purpose does it serve unnecessarily to abide by the words so rigidly and strictly that people can get no sense out of them? Whoever would speak German must not use Hebrew idioms; but if he understands the Hebrew writer, he must see to it that he grasps his meaning and must think: Now let me see. How does a German speak in this case? When he has the German words that serve the purpose, then let him dismiss the Hebrew words and freely express the sense in the best German he is capable of using.<sup>1</sup>

Yet, Luther was not always so free in translating. He valued the very words of Holy Scripture.

On the other hand I have not just gone ahead anyway and disregarded altogether the exact wording of the original. Rather with my helpers I have been very careful to see that where everything turns on a single passage, I have kept to the original quite literally and have not lightly departed from it. For example, in John 6[:27] Christ says, “Him has God the Father sealed [*versiegelt*].” It would have been better German to say, “Him has God the Father signified [*gezeichnet*],” or, “He it is whom God the Father means [*meinet*].” But I preferred to do violence to the German language rather than to depart from the word. Ah, translating is not every man’s skill as the mad saints imagine. It requires a right, devout, honest, sincere, God-fearing, Christian, trained, informed, and experienced heart. Therefore I hold that no false Christian or factious spirit can be a decent translator.<sup>2</sup>

Sometimes Luther translated rather literally. Dr. Luther explained:

We have at times also translated quite literally—even though we could have rendered the meaning more clearly another way—because everything turns on these very words. For example, here in [Psalm 68] verse 18, “Thou hast ascended on high; thou hast led captivity captive,” it would have been good German to say, “Thou hast set the captives free.” But this is too weak, and does not convey the fine, rich meaning of the Hebrew, which says literally, “Thou hast led captivity captive.” This does not imply merely that Christ freed the captives, but also that he captured and led away the captivity itself, so that it never again could or would take us captive again; thus it is really an eternal redemption [Heb. 9:12]. St. Paul likes to speak in this way, as when he says, “I through the law died to the law” [Gal. 2:19]; again, “Through sin Christ condemned sin” [Rom. 8:3]; and again, “Death has been put to death by Christ.” These are the captivities that Christ has taken captive and done away: death can no longer hold us, sin can no longer incriminate us, the law can no longer accuse our conscience. On every hand St. Paul propagates such rich, glorious, and comforting doctrine. Therefore out of respect for such doctrine, and for the comforting of our conscience, we should keep such words, accustom ourselves to them, and so give place to the Hebrew language where it does a better job than our German.<sup>3</sup>

In summary, Luther’s own explanation bears repeating: “We extolled the principle of at times retaining the words quite literally, and at times rendering only the meaning.”<sup>4</sup> It requires excellent Christian judgment to make these tough calls of when to apply each principle. Prof. Deutschlander put it this way:

His overriding concern in following both of those principles was that Christ should be seen as the center of the whole Bible, Christ as Savior, as the God who comes to us in grace and through

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<sup>1</sup> *What Luther Says* #319. Compiled by Ewald M. Plass. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, ©1959. Pages 105-106.

<sup>2</sup> *Luther’s Works*, vol. 35:194.

<sup>3</sup> *Luther’s Works*, vol. 35:216.

<sup>4</sup> *Luther’s Works*, vol. 35:222-223.

faith, comes to us in the lowliness of the manger, the horror of the cross and in the glory of the resurrection and the final judgment, comes to us in plain words in simple water, in lowly bread and common wine. That overriding concern was the determining factor when deciding whether to be literal or idiomatic in the translation of specific passages.<sup>1</sup>

Conrad Cordatus was a close companion of Luther's. He compiled Luther's "Table Talks." Cordatus revealed Luther's translation principles:

"When we translated the Bible," said D.M. Luther, "I gave those who helped me these rules: First: the Holy Scripture speaks of divine works and matters. Secondly: when a verse or interpretation agrees with the New Testament, one should accept the same. Thirdly: one should pay attention to the grammar."

"In translation I always hold to this rule that one should not do violence to the grammar. And whoever understands this [i.e., the grammar] correctly, that one will recognize that the letter gives [the correct sense], not the spirit."<sup>2</sup>

From that quotation we may draw three principles for translating the Bible:

1. Always remember that this is Holy Scripture, God's inspired Word.
2. Let Scripture interpret Scripture. Let the New Testament interpret the Old Testament.
3. Pay attention to the grammar. It matters!

That is not a complete list, however. Luther indicated that a translator's faith and "theological competence" matter too, as we will see. It is commonly said today that any good translation must be the combined effort of translators from all sorts of different faiths. Occasionally, proponents of this opinion might draw a line at a "high view of Scripture" (whatever that means). Luther did not approach his own translation that way. Yes, he did occasionally consult Jews for Hebrew language questions, but they were certainly not members of his translation committee. He did not need to consult Roman Catholic scholars, though he was familiar with and used their writings. He did not include anyone of a different faith on his committee. I've never come across sharp criticism of this fact: all of the translators and committee members of the Luther German Bible were of the same faith and fellowship. Today, we would call every single one of them "confessional Lutherans," though they were not called by that term back then. And yet, their translation was not some sectarian version that was hidden in a corner. It became the standard German Bible for centuries, even though there were 18 other German Bibles around before it. Luther valued "theological competence" in translation work. He wrote:

Very simply, the task of the translator is not that of reproducing in one language words exactly equivalent to the words of another language, but of reproducing in vigorous vernacular idiom the meaning originally expressed in the foreign tongue. To do this properly, philological skill is indispensable—only, however, as the handmaiden of an even greater theological competence. Ultimately the sense itself in the original must determine whether the rendering in translation will be literal or relatively free. Hence the Jews themselves are our best instructors in the Hebrew language but Christians alone can truly translate the Bible.<sup>3</sup>

It certainly does matter what a translator's theological position might be. Luther's comment bears repeating:

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<sup>1</sup> Luther and Translating, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> *Dr. Martin Luthers Sämtliche Schriften*, herausgegeben von Joh. Georg Walch, CPH, St. Louis, 1887, Bd. 22, S. 1545, 1902 respectively. The translation is by Daniel Deutschlander.

<sup>3</sup> *Luther's Works*, vol. 35:207. (Emphasis mine.)

Ah, translating is not every man's skill as the mad saints imagine. It requires a right, devout, honest, sincere, God-fearing, Christian, trained, informed, and experienced heart. Therefore I hold that no false Christian or factious spirit can be a decent translator.<sup>1</sup>

Over the years, many German-speaking people, especially confessional Lutherans, have agreed that Luther showed excellent Christian judgment in his Bible translation. Luther's translation set the standard of a sound Bible translation for many years. One of the reasons that Luther's translation excelled was his God-given faith. A person's beliefs influence and affect the character of a Bible translation. Some claim that "all translation involves interpretation."<sup>2</sup> This is one reason why Luther excelled as a translator. He excelled as an interpreter of God's holy Word. Many otherwise gifted linguists falter in this aspect.

If there were translators on a committee who did not see any direct prophecies of the Messiah in the Psalms, might that impact how they translate certain Psalms that used to be seen as clearly foretelling the coming of the Savior?

If there were translators on a committee who did not believe that the Holy Spirit is mentioned in the Old Testament, might that impact how they translate Genesis 1:2? "The Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters." Could it play a role in how they render Psalm 51:11? "Do not cast me from your presence. Do not take your Holy Spirit from me."

If all translators on a committee were confessional Lutherans, is it possible that they could translate in a way that is fair and legitimate? Is it possible that confessional Lutherans could offer a gift to the church that would be intended for all people, including members of other denominations, and not just for confessional Lutherans? That's what Luther's translation accomplished. Yet, every single member of his translation committee was of the same faith and fellowship. The translation became a blessing for many people. It still is! We referred to it regularly in our EHV translation work. German-speaking people still treasure it.

Perhaps the quality of Luther's translation may be seen in the fact that Jerome Emser, one of Luther's sharpest critics, actually plagiarized much of Luther's version. In the days before copyright laws, it was possible to get away with this sort of fraud. Luther responded with some choice words.

Now they sit in judgment on my whole work! Fine fellows! That is the way it was with St. Jerome too when he translated the Bible. Everybody was his master. He was the only one who was totally incompetent. And people who were not worthy to clean his shoes criticized the good man's work.<sup>3</sup> It takes a great deal of patience to do a good thing publicly, for the world always wants to be Master Know-it-all.<sup>4</sup> It must always be putting the bit under the horse's tail,<sup>5</sup> criticizing everything but doing nothing itself. That is its nature; it cannot get away from it.

I should like to see a papist who would come forward and translate even a single epistle of St. Paul or one of the prophets without making use of Luther's German translation. Then we should

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<sup>1</sup> *Luther's Works*, vol. 35:194.

<sup>2</sup> E.g., Fee, Gordon D.; Strauss, Mark L. (2009-05-19). *How to Choose a Translation for All Its Worth: A Guide to Understanding and Using Bible Versions* (chapter four; Kindle Location 1090). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

<sup>3</sup> In about the year 382 Jerome was commissioned by Damasus, the bishop of Rome (d. 384), to prepare an authoritative revision of the Latin Bible. In accepting the task Jerome spoke of the harsh criticism he anticipated both of himself and of his work. His expectations were fulfilled. Jerome's Vulgate version drew criticism even from Augustine, Rufinus, and others, criticism which had ceased, however, by the time of his death in 420. Jackson (ed.), *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, II, 123–124; Hauck (ed.), *Realencyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, III, 36–40.

<sup>4</sup> *Meister Klüglin* is a favorite expression of Luther for someone who always knows everything better than the next fellow.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Wander (ed.), *Sprichwörter-Lexikon*, III, 579, "Meister," No. 8; "The real Master Know-it-all is the one who can bridle the horse at the rear and ride it backward."

see a fine, beautiful, praiseworthy German translation! We have seen the Dresden scribbler<sup>1</sup> who played the master to my New Testament. I shall not mention his name<sup>2</sup> again in my books as he has his Judge now,<sup>3</sup> and is already well known anyway. He admits that my German is sweet and good.<sup>4</sup> He saw that he could not improve on it. But eager to discredit it, he went to work and took my New Testament almost word for word as I had written it. He removed my introductions and explanations, inserted his own, and thus sold my New Testament under his name. Oh my, dear children, how it hurt me when his prince,<sup>5</sup> in a nasty preface, condemned Luther's New Testament and forbade the reading of it; yet commanded at the same time that the scribbler's New Testament be read, even though it was the very same one that Luther had produced!

That no one may think I am lying, just take the two Testaments, Luther's and the scribbler's, and compare them; you will see who is the translator in both of them. He has patched and altered it in a few places. And though not all of it pleases me, still I can let it go; it does me no particular harm, so far as the text is concerned. For this reason I never intended to write against it either. But I did have to laugh at the great wisdom that so terribly slandered, condemned, and forbade my New Testament, when it was published under my name, but made it required reading when it was published under the name of another. What kind of virtue that is, to heap slander and shame on somebody else's book, then to steal it and publish it under one's own name—thus seeking personal praise and reputation through the slandered work of somebody else—I leave that for his Judge to discover. Meanwhile I am satisfied and glad that my work (as St. Paul also boasts [Phil. 1:18]) must be furthered even by enemies; and that Luther's book, without Luther's name but under that of his enemies, must be read. How could I avenge myself better?<sup>6</sup>

Luther found translating work to be quite humbling. That was good for him, as he mentioned.

I have also undertaken to translate the Bible into German. That was necessary for me; otherwise I might have died someday imagining that I was a learned man. Those who think themselves scholars should try to do this work.<sup>7</sup>

Have you ever wondered how much money Luther made for all of this work?

Just as for all his other writings, Luther asked for no honorarium for the translation, and he received none. The printers and publishers did a good business with the Bible translation. Luther, to his irritation, did not even receive enough free copies.<sup>8</sup>

Luther did receive considerable criticism. He addressed his critics at some length. Here are some of Luther's comments.

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<sup>1</sup> *Sudler* was a choice bit of invective. Derived from the term to "dirty" or "deal in dirt" and "handle dirty things," it had come to be used of any craftsman—even an author—whose work was poor, clumsy, unreliable, and superficial. Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, X, 972.

<sup>2</sup> Jerome Emser....

<sup>3</sup> Jerome Emser had died November 8, 1527, after nearly a decade of literary hostility against Luther which called forth little response from Luther subsequent to his bitter polemical treatises of 1521.

<sup>4</sup> Emser had admitted that Luther's translation "was nicer and sounded better" than the old version, but added, "This is why the common folk prefer to read it, and amid the sweet words they swallow the hook before they know it." Arnold E. Berger, *Luthers Werke* (Leipzig: Bibliographisches Institut [no date]), III, 172, n. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Duke George, "The Bearded," of Saxony (1471–1539), had affixed his name to the 1527 Preface to Emser's New Testament (see the text in *St. L.* 19, 494–501). However, Luther suspected that Emser was its real author; cf. his letter to Justus Jonas of December 10, 1527, in Smith and Jacobs, *Luther's Correspondence*, II, 426–427.

<sup>6</sup> *Luther's Works*, vol. 35:183-185.

<sup>7</sup> *Luther's Works*, vol. 43:70.

<sup>8</sup> Martin Brecht. *Martin Luther 1521-1532: Shaping and Defining the Reformation* (Kindle Locations 857-859).

Now because we extolled the principle of at times retaining the words quite literally, and at times rendering only the meaning, these critics will undoubtedly try out their skill also at this point. First and foremost they will criticize and contend that we have not applied this principle rightly, or at the right time—although they never knew anything about such a principle before. Yet they are the type who, the moment they hear about something, immediately know it better than anyone else. If they are so tremendously learned and want to display their skill, I wish they would take that single and very common word, *chen* [יָחַן],<sup>1</sup> and give me a good translation of it. I will give fifty gulden to him who translates this word appropriately and accurately throughout the entire Scriptures. Let all the experts and know-it-alls pool their skill, in order at least to see that actually doing the translation is a wholly different art and task from that of simply criticizing and finding fault with someone else's translation. Whoever does not like our translation can just leave it alone. By it we are serving our own, and those who do like it.<sup>2</sup>

I figured from the very beginning that I would find ten thousand to criticize my work before I found one who would accomplish one-twentieth of what I have done. I, too, would like to be very learned and give brilliant proof of what I know by criticizing St. Jerome's Latin Bible; but he in turn could also defy me to do what he has done. Now if anyone is so much more learned than I, let him undertake to translate the whole Bible into German, and then tell me what he can do.<sup>3</sup>

You may say that I translated the New Testament conscientiously and to the best of my ability. I have compelled no one to read it, but have left that open, doing the work only as a service to those who could not do it better. No one is forbidden to do a better piece of work. If anyone does not want to read it, he can let it alone. I neither ask anybody to read it nor praise anyone who does so. It is my Testament and my translation, and it shall continue to be mine. If I have made some mistakes in it—though I am not conscious of any and would certainly be most unwilling to give a single letter a wrong translation intentionally—I will not allow the papists [to act] as judges. For their ears are still too long, and their hee-haws too weak, for them to criticize my translating. I know very well—and they know it even less than the miller's beast—how much skill, energy, sense, and brains are required in a good translator. For they have never tried it. There is a saying, "He who builds along the road has many masters." That is the way it is with me too.<sup>4</sup>

This I can testify with a good conscience—I gave it my utmost in care and effort, and I never had any ulterior motives. I have neither taken nor sought a single penny for it, nor made one by it. Neither have I sought my own honor by it; God, my Lord, knows this. Rather I have done it as a service to the dear Christians and to the honor of One who sitteth above, who blesses me so much every hour of my life that if I had translated a thousand times as much or as diligently, I should not for a single hour have deserved to live or to have a sound eye. All that I am and have is of his grace and mercy, indeed, of his precious blood and bitter sweat. Therefore, God willing, all of it shall also serve to his honor, joyfully and sincerely.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> It is sometimes translated "Favor, grace," etc.

<sup>2</sup> *Luther's Works*, vol. 35:222-223.

<sup>3</sup> *Luther's Works*, vol. 35:249-250.

<sup>4</sup> *Luther's Works*, vol. 35:183.

<sup>5</sup> *Luther's Works*, vol. 35:193.

## Part Two: The Evangelical Heritage Version® (EHV®)

The Evangelical Heritage Version (EHV) is a translation that hopes to preserve the best from the long heritage that has gone before us. EHV translators and editors consulted Luther's German translation. Early English Bible translators (like William Tyndale) sought to preserve some of Luther's translation work. Preservation of heritage terms from the King James tradition is balanced with readability in contemporary English. The EHV also provides some fresh insights.

- Like Luther's translation, the EHV is a translation of the original languages (Hebrew and Greek).
- Like Luther, we let Scripture interpret Scripture and humbly submit to everything that God's inspired, inerrant Word says.
- Just as Luther consulted a German butcher about terms, we consulted today's American farmers about the term "manger" (see FAQ #14 about this).
- We expect that a translation will understand itself as a "direct quotation" of an ancient document, rather than merely supplying the "gist" of the original's meaning in a contemporizing paraphrase. Yet, we expect, with Luther, that when theologically necessary a translation will adhere closely to the wording of the original.

We hope the Evangelical Heritage Version will prove to be very readable to a wide range of users, but the EHV is designed with learning and teaching in mind. We assume that our readers have the ability and the desire to learn new biblical words and to deepen their understanding of important biblical terms and concepts. Translators should be dedicated to helping their readers grow. The Bible was written for ordinary people, but it is a literary work with many figures of speech and many rare words. The Bible is a book to be read, but it is also a book to be studied. Our footnotes are designed to assist in the process of learning and teaching. Our translation is in that sense a textbook. This concept will, Lord willing, be much more fully implemented in our planned study Bible, which is now in progress.

The EHV is a grass-roots translation, which makes extensive use of parish pastors and lay people in the editing and evaluation of the translation. We want to keep the Bible close to the church and involve the church in the evaluation and refining of our translation. Congregations can make free use of the weekly readings for the church year, which can be downloaded from our Wartburg Project website. We try to answer questions about the EHV in the FAQ section of our website and provide more in-depth studies in the library section of our website.

The EHV is a gift to the church. It was translated at very low cost because of the abundance of volunteer labor. We have also promised that people who have obtained rights to use the EHV in derivative works, such as commentaries or study Bibles, will not be denied the right to continue to use the version of the EHV which they have adopted, even if new versions of the EHV appear someday.

The Evangelical Heritage Version is a Bible for the people, which will be made available at very reasonable terms for secondary works like commentaries, catechisms, and musical compositions.

Our translation is called *Evangelical* because its highest goal is to proclaim the good news of the gospel of salvation through faith in the atoning work of Jesus Christ, God's eternal Son. Though there are many topics in the Bible, all of them are there to serve the gospel of Christ. All of our work in producing and distributing this translation is directed to the glory of God and to the eternal salvation of people's souls. Almost all our congregations have the word *evangelical* in the name that identifies them. The word *evangelical* expresses the nature and purpose of the congregations of our church bodies.

Our translation is called *Heritage* because this word looks to the past, the present, and the future. *Heritage* expresses our respect for the generations of Christians and for the faithful translators who have passed the Bible down to us. We are very conscious that we in the present are building on the foundation which they have laid. As the old saying goes: We can see so far because we are standing on the

shoulders of giants. The term *Heritage* also looks to the future. The gospel is a precious inheritance that is to be passed from generation to generation until Christ returns. It is our prayer that this translation will have a part in that great mission which the Lord has left for his church. Our goal and motto is expressed in the hymn verse:

*God's Word is our great heritage  
and shall be ours forever.  
To spread its light from age to age  
shall be our chief endeavor.  
Through life it guides our way.  
In death it is our stay.  
Lord, grant while worlds endure  
we keep its teaching pure  
throughout all generations.*

## **EHV Style**

### ***Balanced Approach***

Like Luther's translation, the EHV does not fit neatly into a simple category of "purely literal" or "purely dynamic equivalent" translation. The EHV strives for a balanced approach that accurately communicates the meaning of the original text. The EHV strives to avoid both ditches:

- the ditch of hyper-literal translation that results in stiff and wooden language that can be difficult to read and understand, as well as
- the ditch of loose paraphrase that may read very easily, but is less accurate and misses key points of meaning in the original text.

### ***Formal and Informal***

The Bible contains many types of literature and different levels of language, from the very simple to the very difficult. The Bible in the original languages is not a "simplified Bible." Even native speakers of Hebrew and Greek who read the Hebrew and Greek text of Holy Scripture did not always find it to be easy reading with simple language. So, the EHV was not committed to producing one level of language. Instead, EHV strives to reproduce the tone or "flavor" of the original.

### ***Old and New***

The EHV has a goal of preserving familiar expressions in well-known passages, but if the traditional reading or term is not very precise or clear, we give priority to expressing the meaning of the original text more clearly than preserving the traditional rendering. We respect and try to preserve traditional terms that are well established in the worship life of the church, but the EHV does introduce some new terms in those places in which a traditional translation no longer communicates clearly.

The EHV makes an effort to retain key terms that appear in the creeds, catechisms, liturgy, and hymnals. We preserve heritage terms like *sanctify, justify, covenant, communion, angels, and saints* (but not to the exclusion of modern explanatory terms like *make holy, declare righteous, holy people, etc.*). The EHV also keeps traditional names like *the Ark, the Ark of the Covenant, the manger, etc.* The EHV did not invent any of these translations, but we carry them forward to the next generation as part of our inheritance from the great tradition of English Bible translation, because a translation that moves too far away from the worship life of the church does not serve well as an all-purpose translation.

We also try to reflect common biblical expressions like "the flesh," "walk with God," "in God's eyes," "set one's face against," "burn with anger," and "listen to the voice." Our goal is not to preserve Hebrew or Greek grammatical idioms for their own sake, but to preserve important biblical expressions

and imagery and, when possible, biblical word-play. We do not, however, slavishly preserve these expressions in contexts in which they sound strange in English.

See how we took into account Luther's input regarding the "Atonement Seat" in FAQ #30.

### **Big Things or Little Things?**

It is said that congregations often experience greater difficulty because of small things that do not really matter than they do over important doctrinal issues. When I was a vicar, someone quit the church over the color of the new carpeting. (The member really, really wanted orange. For some reason the majority disagreed.) People let themselves become divided over little things, rather than focusing on the things that are of greater importance.

A similar danger faces Bible translations. For that reason, I let Luther speak a little more (above) about all the complaining and criticizing that he received. Sharp criticism can get wearisome. People can become completely caught up in their personal likes and dislikes of individual passages and lose sight of the big issues of translation: preservation of biblical imagery, clear reflections of prophecy, and clear communication of the theological, literary, and emotional intent of the text.

At the Wartburg Project our motto is "purely positive." We welcome differences of opinion and discussion concerning any point of translation, but only with a spirit that is based on careful study of the evidence, a spirit of cooperation and compromise on issues that are merely a matter of English style and individual preferences, and that makes upholding the integrity of the text the highest priority. Let's never forget Luther's first principle: *Always remember that this is Holy Scripture, God's inspired Word.*

### **Different Tools and Technology**

Luther's work of translating was much more difficult than our work of translating the EHV. Today, we have many blessings that Martin Luther did not have. We have translation tools on our computers that make our work much easier. We have more and better dictionaries to consider the meanings of words. We have tools that can immediately tell us how many times a word is used in the Bible. We can instantly compare many other translations on one verse. On our website, we have a picture of Luther's study in the Wartburg Castle. I imagine him with an open Greek New Testament, a piece of paper, an inkwell, and a quill pen. We have so many available resources and helps that we have it much easier. Luther would have been glad to receive these tools, but he had to do it the hard way.

In addition, Luther had to communicate by writing letters and meeting his committee members in person. We have been able to use the internet, email, telephones, and other technology. We can communicate constantly without ever leaving our primary calling. We can share thoughts, texts, and translations without moving from our offices. Email and the abundance of printed and online resources permit us to receive input from all parts of the Christian church and all parts of the world. Some of these we find ourselves; some are offered to us by their creators.

Maybe Luther had it better in this respect: For translation work, it would be nice to have the situation of sitting in a secluded castle without interruption. Almost every single one of our participants continued to serve as full-time pastors or professors. In the summer of 2015, General Editor John F. Brug retired from being a full-time seminary professor and is now able to dedicate most of his time to translation work. Thanks to some generous donations, I was able to take a little "sabbatical time" here and there to do some more focused work as New Testament Editor. Of course, for most of Luther's life, he did not have that "secluded castle" situation either. After he left the Wartburg Castle, Luther would spend maybe two hours a day working on the Bible translation. For most of us, that's how our work on the EHV has taken place.

With all of the tools at our disposal, I don't think it has ever been any easier to produce a new translation of the Bible. I don't wish to downplay the difficulty of Bible translation, but God has made it much easier for us than it was for Luther. We are grateful.

From 1521 until he died, Luther spent himself on his Bible translation. It was never far from his mind. He carried the latest edition with him. He regarded it as that important. We regularly receive questions about the EHV and suggestions for improvement. We see this as important work too. Like Martha, sometimes we can be focused on many things and even distracted by some, but we do well to recognize, as Mary did, that God's Word is the one thing that we truly need.

### **Bible Translation as Continuing Education**

The work of the Wartburg Project has quietly served as an enormous exercise in continuing education. As we worked on translating the text or reviewing the text, we learned many lessons from God's Word. We often discovered details, nuances, or connections that we'd not noticed before. It was a genuine learning experience. Sometimes it seemed like we were writing or reading at least dozen "exegetical briefs" each week. That alone made this effort worthy of our time and energy. General Editor John Brug commented on this:

If one adds up all the growth in biblical knowledge and understanding that has been gained by the translators, the editors, and the reactors, and then adds in all the additional work of popular reviewers and readers, the amount of Bible study and knowledge that accrues to the long-term benefit of the church is enormous. The project is already paying big dividends for the church in all the in-depth Bible study it is producing. In thirty-plus years of seminary teaching I have never had a class that was more beneficial to the teacher and the students than the "classes" that make up the work of the project. The benefits to the participants will trickle down to their congregations and conferences. This benefit alone is worth all the time and effort that participants are sinking into the project.

Now that the result of all this work is a Bible translation for many other people to use and enjoy, the blessings just continue. Now I can read the EHV for my devotions, sometimes recalling why we translated it this way instead of another way. I can use the EHV for Scripture lessons in worship and the Scripture text for my sermons. When I teach a Bible Class, I can use the EHV. When I visit shut-in members, I use the EHV. What a privilege it is to use the translation we worked on! It's maybe a little like eating food grown in your own garden. What a blessing to enjoy the fruits God has provided! Yet, I remember that this is God's inspired and inerrant Word, provided as a heritage for the future. I gave my children copies of the EHV. What a pleasure it is to share God's Word!

### **Part Three: Information and Updates**

The best place to obtain information and updates about the EHV and the Wartburg Project is to visit: [wartburgproject.org](http://wartburgproject.org). The Wartburg Project is a group of pastors and professors who have been working together since the fall of 2013 to produce a new translation of the Bible.

As of October 31, 2017, all of the books of the Bible have been translated, edited, and turned in to Northwestern Publishing House (NPH). That phase of the work took four years. NPH still has plenty of work to do in setting up the text and proofreading. When all of the text is set up, then we have plenty of proofreading to do also. We want to be very careful.

The EHV New Testament and Psalms special edition has been available since May 2017. We eagerly look forward to the full published EHV Bible.

#### **Privilege**

What a privilege it has been to work with God's Word in the original languages and grapple with the best ways to translate that into language our own members will read and hear! How many people have had this great privilege?

It's a privilege to be able to give a gift to others. As we prepare to give this gift of a new Bible translation, we are thankful for all that God has provided. There were quite a few generous donors who asked for the privilege of giving to support our work. They volunteered and viewed it as a privilege to donate. Their donations have helped significantly. Every aspect of the work with the EHV has been a privilege. It's a privilege to study God's Word, translate it, edit the English text, proofread manuscripts, and give offerings to support the work. It's been a privilege to work together. We praise God for giving us the opportunity and privilege.

#### **Purely Positive**

The Wartburg Project is now four years old. Our motto has been "Purely Positive." After all of the difficult discussions and debates about Bible translations, we purposefully set a course to avoid debates and controversies. We set out to translate the Bible without being sidetracked into all sorts of other issues. We set out to work quietly and respectfully. It's been refreshing to be a part of this.

Technology has even helped us minimize arguments. You might wonder how we can possibly entertain differences of opinion without arguing and having hard feelings. Technology has enabled us to have debates in ways that the names of those who disagree on certain issues do not become involved. We focus on the questions, the issues, and the input, but not on the personalities of the participants. We have many participants, but no part of the translation is ever identified with the name of a single person, and we do not use participants' names without their permission.

If there are attacks on the translation or parts of it, we do not respond directly or engage in argument. Instead, we present our rationale for our translation in a positive way.

#### **Plans**

We plan to market the EHV widely in a wide variety of formats: hardcover Bibles, as text on BibleGateway, Logos, Kindle, etc. The more interest there is, the more we will seek to make the EHV available for many others. We encourage our publisher to try to get the EHV into as many bookstores as possible.

Already we are aware of interest from all over the world. People in Australia, South Africa, England, Estonia, Russia, and Sweden are among those who are aware of our project and have written to us. Work on the study Bible edition is already underway.

### **Check the FAQ Articles**

Check the website for the growing list of Frequently Asked Questions and the responses. There are many articles available at [wartburgproject.org](http://wartburgproject.org). See our expanded online library for more information.