

Reformation Reflections



What is a man to do when he has just been declared an outlaw of the Holy Roman Empire, whisked away to an out-of-the-way castle, disguised, and hidden from those who might want to kill

him? Why not translate the New Testament from Greek into German, and, in so doing, not only provide a foundation for Christian faith, but also contribute to the unification of the German people?

So it was that Luther, outlawed at the Diet of Worms in 1521 and disguised as the bearded “Knight George” (see above), found himself safely, though not happily,



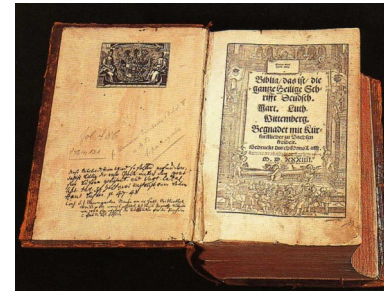
ensconced in the **castle Wartburg**. With nothing but time on his hands, he began the herculean task of translating the New Testament, so that the German people could read the Gospel in their own tongue.

Contextualization of the language was a deep love of Luther's. He wanted this translation to be something other than a dry reading of a technically correct rendering. He wanted it to sound like the same language people spoke in the local German shops. As he once wrote:

The proper method of translation is to select the most fitting terms according to the usage of the language adopted. ... To translate properly is to render the spirit of a foreign language into our own idiom. ... I try to speak as men do in the market place.

Luther's love of language was intense, but his love of the Gospel was the essence of his life and work. His production of the New Testament in German was undertaken for the sake of the proclamation of the Gospel. This he reiterated in the preface of the translation published in September 1522:

So the New Testament is a book in which are written the Gospel and the promises of God, together with the history of those who believe and of those who do not believe them. For “gospel” is a Greek word, and means in Greek a good message, good tidings, good news, a good report, which one sings and tells with gladness. ... A poor man, dead in sin and consigned to hell, can hear nothing more comforting than this precious and tender message about Christ; from the bottom of his heart he must laugh and be glad over it, if he believes it true.



Luther went through very trying times while he cowered in the castle. He was afraid of satan (*would he destroy Luther's work?*), of men (*would someone come to kill him?*), of himself (*had he been deceived?*), and even of God (*perhaps Luther's teaching was wrong*). Through it all, it was the

Word of God, and the very Gospel he was translating, that sustained him. That Word, given to the people in their own language, sustained and nourished the German people, as well.

God uses His people, in spite of the difficult circumstances of their lives, to speak and live the Gospel. Like Luther laboring away in the Wartburg, God is using you today, in your vocation, to proclaim the Good News of Jesus.

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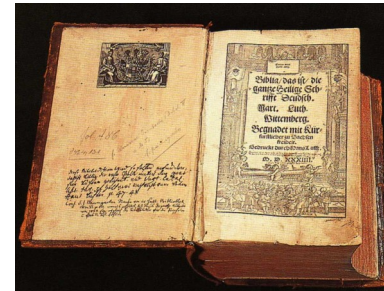
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