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Luther's "September" New Testament of 1522
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Ever since 2017, Luther and the Reformation have been producing milestone anniversaries,[1] and 2022 is no exception, the five hundredth anniversary of Luther's German Bible that began with the publication of his New Testament in September 1522. People take it for granted today that anybody who wants a Bible can have one. While in some parts of the world that still is not the case, it is true in many other places including the United States. We have ready access to the word of God. But for that to happen, there had to be a printing press and a commitment to using it for Bibles. Gutenberg supplied the first, Martin Luther and his Wittenberg associates the second. Following Luther's example, reformers of all types soon were producing vernacular Bibles in England, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Denmark, and elsewhere.[2] God's word in the language of the people quickly became characteristic of "protestant" reform everywhere. The fact that we live in a world awash with printed Scriptures is the result of what Luther began in September 1522.

Luther initiated his project to produce a German Bible in December 1521 when he was still in safekeeping at the Wartburg. By late February, he had sent the first part of the New Testament (Matthew through John) to Philip Melanchthon via George Spalatin and had then brought the rest of it with him upon his return to Wittenberg in early March.[3] Remarkably, he had completed the task in less than three months.[4]

This was not the first time that he had tackled the task of translating Scripture into German. Previous efforts included *The Seven Penitential Psalms* (1517),[5] *A*

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[1] 2017—Posting the *Ninety-five Theses*; 2018—Heidelberg Disputation; 2019—Leipzig Debate; 2020—Luther burns the papal bull, *Exsurge domine*; and 2021—Diet of Worms.

[2] "Producing and Disseminating the Bible in Translation," in *The New Cambridge History of the Bible*, vol. 3, *From 1450 to 1750*, ed. Euan Cameron (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 159–383.

[3] Otto Albrecht, "Luthers Übersetzung des Neuen Testaments. Historisch-theologische Einleitung" in Martin Luther, *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Deutsche Bibel*, 12 vols. in 15 (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1906–), 6:xliii–xliv, hereafter abbreviated WA DB.

[4] Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther*, 3 vols. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1985–1993), 2:46–47.

[5] Martin Luther, *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe [Schriften]*, 73 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883–2009), 1:154–220 (hereafter WA); for a translation of the 1525 edition, see vol. 14, pp. 139–205, in *Luther's Works, American Edition*, vols. 1–30, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–76); vols. 31–55, ed. Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia/

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Short Form of the 10 Commandments, Creed, and Lord's Prayer (1520),[6] *The Magnificat* (1521),[7] and the epistle and gospel lessons for the church year from Advent to Epiphany. He did this last bit of translating for another major project, sermon notes and helps for the Sundays and festivals of the church year that we call his *Church Postil*.[8] Luther had undertaken this task at the Wartburg, where the agents of Frederick the Wise had taken him for safekeeping after his condemnation at the Diet of Worms. Although Luther hated it, there he remained from May 1521 until early March 1522 and worked on several projects, including the first phase of the postils that he was finishing up about the end of the year.

Not insignificantly, at the very end of this first set of postils, Luther had expressed a desire for all Christians to rely upon the Scriptures alone, "Would to God that my exposition and that of all doctors might perish and each Christian himself make the Scriptures and God's pure word his norm."[9] But without a Bible in the vernacular, how could this ever happen? So Luther would soon be at work in supplying his fellow Germans with a Bible of their own.

The German Bible was not an accident of timing, as if Luther, having run out of other things to do at the Wartburg, had decided to fill in the weeks before his return to Wittenberg by trying his hand at translating the New Testament. While Luther did have less to do at the Wartburg—no preaching, no lecturing—putting the Bible into German was not simply fortuitous, but a theological necessity.[10] One need only recall his words at Worms, "I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God."[11] By that time, Luther had clearly embraced the *sola scriptura* principle, that the Bible and only the Bible was the source and norm for Christian doctrine.

Nor was this a brand new idea at Worms. Even as an Augustinian friar, Luther had been encouraged to embrace the Scriptures as the center of Christian piety. After all, the Erfurt Augustinians gave him a Bible upon his entering their commu-

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Minneapolis: Muhlenberg/Fortress, 1957–86); vols. 56–82, ed. Christopher Boyd Brown and Benjamin T. G. Mayes (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009–), hereafter AE; WA 18:467–530.

　　[6] WA 7:194–229.

　　[7] WA 7:538–604 (AE 21:297–358).

　　[8] The Weimar edition has published Luther's work that he did on the postils at the Wartburg in two parts: Advent (WA 10/1.2:1–208) and Christmas, including Epiphany (WA 10/1.1:1–728), from which the gospel postils have been translated in AE 52. A complete set of postils in English is available in AE 75–79. They are based on the versions published by Luther and Caspar Cruciger in the 1540s. For the history of Luther's postils, see Benjamin T. G. Mayes, "Introduction to the Luther-Cruciger *Church Postil* (1540–1544)," AE 75:xiii–xxxi.

　　[9] AE 52:286 (WA 10/1.1:728). Brecht (2:46) says that Luther wrote this in November 1521.

　　[10] See Albrecht, "Historisch-theologische Einleitung," WA 6:xxix–xxxv.

　　[11] AE 32:112 (WA 7:838).

nity.[12] Subsequently, they made him a theologian and moved him to Wittenberg, where he began a career of lecturing on the Scriptures. Then, in the wake of the *Ninety-five Theses*, when his opponents were continually citing other authorities against him, Luther more and more resorted to the Scriptures alone until, as a result of the Leipzig Debate in the summer of 1519, he was defending the proposition, "A simple layman armed with Scripture is to be believed above a pope or a council without it."[13]

By 1520, Luther was using the scriptural principle to justify his reformation proposals. So, for example, in his overhaul of the sacramental system in his monumental *Babylonian Captivity of the Church* that year, he insisted "that every article of faith of which we boast is certain, pure, and based on clear passages of Scripture," and then he tested each of Rome's ostensible sacraments by the Scriptures, dismissing four entirely and radically reforming the remaining three.[14] Furthermore, in his *Address to the Christian Nobility* the same year, he had argued that laymen, too, have the right to interpret the Scriptures—in fact, not only the right but also the obligation: "It is the duty of every Christian to espouse the cause of the faith, to understand and defend it, and to denounce every error."[15]

Finally, upon his return to Wittenberg in March 1522, Luther began his well-known *Invocavit Sermons* with the stark reminder that each person dies by himself and therefore "must himself know and be armed with the chief things which concern a Christian." So he went on to advise that "we should all be well versed in the Bible and ready to confront the devil with many passages."[16]

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[12] According to Scott Hendrix, *Martin Luther: Visionary Reformer* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 35, the Augustinians gave him a Bible for daily reading as a novice, but he had to return it at the end of the year; nevertheless, Heinz Schilling, *Martin Luther: Rebel in an Age of Upheaval* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 64, maintains that Luther's familiarity with the Bible came from his years as an Augustinian monk. See also Brecht 1:85.

[13] WA 2:649.1–2. This particular proposition was not originally formulated by Luther. Mark D. Thompson, *A Sure Ground on Which to Stand: The Relation of Authority and Interpretive Method in Luther's Approach to Scripture* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 261, ascribes it to Nicolò de' Tudeschi (d. 1445), commonly known as Panormitanus. However, Luther defended the proposition against John Eck in the aftermath of the Leipzig Debate in Luther's *Defense against the Malicious Judgment of Eck* (1519) in WA 2:625–654. See Brecht 1:327–330. It also appears twice in a letter from Luther and Karlstadt to Frederick the Wise on August 18, 1519; Martin Luther, *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Briefwechsel*, 18 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1930–), 1:468, 472, hereafter abbreviated WA Br. For the significance of the Leipzig Debate in the development of Luther's doctrine of Scripture, see Thompson, 251, 254, and 261, and Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 118–126.

[14] AE 36:107 (WA 6:560).

[15] AE 44:136 (WA 6:412).

[16] AE 51:70–71 (WA 10/3:1–2). See Hans Volz, "Afterword," in Martin Luther and Lucas Cranach, *Das Newe Testament Deůtzsch*, facsimile ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 3–4.

But again, how could this be done without a Bible in the language of the people? And yet, such Bibles already existed. Contrary to what many people think, there were German Bibles before Martin Luther, at least eighteen printed editions, not to mention many other parts and selections from the Scriptures that had been translated into German.[17] The first printed Bible in German was that of Johann Mentelin, published in 1466, just a little more than a decade after Gutenberg had printed the first Latin Bible.[18] Around 1475, Günther Zainer offered a somewhat better German text; and a few years after that, publishers began printing editions with copious illustrations, especially in the Old Testament. In fact, as late as 1518, still another edition of the medieval German Bible was published in Augsburg.[19] So why was Luther not content with these?

According to Hans Volz, Luther's predecessors were wanting in at least two respects. They had translated from the Vulgate (not the Hebrew and Greek), and they had failed to translate idiomatically. The result was German versions that preserved the inaccuracies of the late medieval Latin and employed a version of German that was often quite difficult to understand.[20]

By the time he embarked on translating the Bible, Luther was already committed to using the vernacular both to edify and to educate his fellow Germans. In a letter to a friend, written from the Wartburg just weeks before he began his New Testament translation, Luther listed many of his literary efforts before concluding, "All this is in German. I am born for my Germans, whom I want to serve."[21] So in works like his *Seven Penitential Psalms* and his *Magnificat*, Luther used the German language like a pastor who wanted to instruct and comfort his people; but in works like his *Address to the Christian Nobility* or his *Defense and Explanation of All the Articles* (1521), he wrote like a polemicist in order to expose the hypocrisy, deceits, and here-

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[17] There is a nice little introduction to the topic in John L. Flood, "Martin Luther's Bible Translation in Its German and European Context," in Richard Griffiths, ed., *The Bible in the Renaissance: Essays on Biblical Commentary and Translation in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (Aldershot, Hants, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 1988), 45–47. For a more detailed description, see Walter Eichenberger and Henning Wendland, *Deutsche Bibeln vor Luther: Die Buchkunst der achtzehn deutschen Bibeln zwischen 1466 und 1522* (Berlin: Evangelische Haupt-Bibelgesellschaft zu Berlin, 1980).

[18] "Printing Press," A&E Television Networks, October 10, 2019, https://www.history.com/topics/inventions/printing-press, accessed October 27, 2020. Online Britannica, s.v. "Gutenberg Bible," says "some 40" copies survive; https://academic-eb-com.coproxy.palni.edu/levels/collegiate/article/Gutenberg-Bible/38593, accessed October 27, 2020.

[19] Hans Volz, "German," in *The Cambridge History of the Bible: The West from the Reformation to the Present Day*, ed. S. L. Greenslade (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 94–109, here at 94, 104.

[20] Volz, "German," 94.

[21] Luther to Nicholas Gerbel, November 1, 1521; AE 48:320 (WA Br 2:396–398).

sies of his foes. But whatever the genre, Luther intended his readers to understand what he was saying, as he later put it when defending his biblical translations:

> We do not have to inquire of the literal Latin, how we are to speak German . . . . Rather we must inquire about this of the mother in the home, the children on the street, the common man in the market place. We must be guided by their language, the way they speak, and do our translating accordingly. That way they will understand it and recognize that we are speaking German to them.[22]

But that was much easier said than done since, when Luther began writing in German, there was no single German language that everyone in the German-speaking world employed. Today, languages like English or German are unifying forces that bring together millions of people living all over the world by using the same vocabulary and syntax to communicate. Although there are significant regional variations, especially in pronunciation but also in terminology, each of the principal European languages is still basically the same wherever people use it. People who speak English in India may sound different from those who use it in Texas, but it is the same language, and if they listen carefully, they can communicate quite well. And if they write it, there is hardly any difficulty at all.

But this has not always been the case. Only after a long period of time and facilitated by the use of the printing press did modern European languages come to exist in standard forms, common to all who use them. Through most of the Middle Ages, regional dialects were so strong that it is probably better to think of families of English or of German languages rather than of simply one common tongue. Luther once remarked, for example, that people who lived just thirty miles apart could not understand each other on account of using different dialects.[23] Significantly, however, the development from regional languages into standard forms coincided with the Protestant Reformation, and Luther's contribution to the creation of a standard German tongue was of critical importance.

By the time of the Reformation, some language consolidation had taken place. Regional German dialects were in the process of development over large tracts of territory. The requirements of government and trade, especially the book business, were leading German readers in the direction of a common tongue. But Luther was an important catalyst in this process on account of his adopting for his work one of

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[22] AE 35:189 (WA 30/2:637).

[23] "Germania tot habet dialectos, ut in triginta miliaribus homines se mutuo non intelligent." Martin Luther, *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Tischreden*, 6 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1912–21), 5:511.25–26, no. 6146, hereafter abbreviated WA TR. See Werner Besch, *Die Rolle Luthers in der deutschen Sprachgeschichte* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 1999), 7–8.

these regional common dialects with which to spread his message across the German-speaking world.[24]

The particular dialect that Luther chose is not so important as the fact that he chose one. Nevertheless, his choice was a good one—the official language of his own prince, Frederick the Wise, one of seven electors in the empire, and of the emperor himself, Maximilian I.[25] Luther's own geographical situation in the middle of German-speaking lands was providential as well, since the dialect employed there could more easily function as a bridge to other regions.[26] A Luther in the extreme north or south of the German-speaking lands would have had a much tougher time developing a dialect that could be understood everywhere in the German linguistic world; and, in fact, both the Dutch and the Swiss remained outside the area of consolidation anyway. Nonetheless, with those exceptions, Luther had at hand a German dialect well-suited for becoming a common German tongue. And that is what he used for his September Testament.

 As far as Luther's commitment to translating exclusively from the Greek and Hebrew is concerned, it may be a little difficult to assess at this point, since his earlier efforts were from the Latin. Nevertheless, by 1521, he had for some years been working with the Greek and Hebrew. In fact, in a letter to Spalatin, written shortly after arriving at the Wartburg, Luther reported that he was "reading the Bible in Greek and Hebrew,"[27] and just a few years later, he wrote, "God caused his scriptures to be set down in these two languages alone—the Old Testament in Hebrew, the New in Greek. Now if God did not despise them but chose them above all others for his word, then we too ought to honor them above all others."[28]

Providentially, Luther lived at a time when the biblical languages were coming back into vogue. Beginning with Petrarch in the fourteenth century, humanists had been working at recovering Greek,[29] and by Luther's day those efforts were paying

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[24] Frank L. Borchardt, "German Language," in Hans J. Hillerbrand, ed., *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, 4 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), s.v., hereafter *OER*.

[25] In a "table talk" from 1532, Luther commented, "The language which I use the Germans have in common . . . . My language is that of the Saxon chancellery, which all the princes and kings of Germany imitate . . . . Therefore this is the most commonly used language of Germany. In this way Emperor Maximilian and Elector Frederick have limited . . . the empire to a definite . . . tongue." WA TR 2:639.28–640.3, no. 2758b, translated in Ewald M. Plass, ed., *What Luther Says: A Practical In-Home Anthology for the Active Christian* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 727 (no. 2265). WA TR 1:524, no. 1040 includes a German version of the same statement. See Besch, *Die Rolle Luthers,* 12–14.

[26] Ingetraut Ludolphy, "Nachwort," in Martin Luther, *Das Newe Testament Deůtzsch*, facsimile ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 2, and Besch, *Die Rolle Luthers,* 11.

[27] Luther to Spalatin, May 14, 1521, AE 48:225 (WA Br 2:337–338).

[28] Luther, *To the Councilmen of Germany* (1524), AE 45:359 (WA 15:37).

[29] Petrarch obtained a copy of Homer's *Iliad* and found a tutor but was unable to take much advantage of either, ultimately prompting his famous remark, "Homerus tuus apud me mutus, imo

off handsomely. Luther himself had begun his study of Greek with his friend and fellow monk (also a humanist) Johannes Lang when still in Erfurt.[30] Shortly after he arrived in Wittenberg, Greek was being taught there,[31] and in his early lectures on the epistles of Paul (1515–1518), Luther referred frequently to the Greek.[32] But the arrival of Philip Melanchthon in 1518 to fill a new professorship in Greek brought into Luther's orbit someone who really knew the language and would be of invaluable assistance in preparing a German translation of the New Testament.[33]

In fact, some of the leading humanists of the day were themselves advocates of translating the Bible into the vernacular. In 1523, the French humanist Lefèvre d'Étaples published his own translation of the New Testament from the Latin into French. By 1530, he had completed the rest of the Bible.[34] Thomas More, though a fierce opponent of Luther, defended the "legitimacy and desirability" of an English Bible while at the same time dismissing the attempts of William Tyndale to do just that.[35] Erasmus, in his "Paraclesis" that accompanied his Greek-Latin New Testament in 1516, had expressed his commitment to the vernacular in this well-known passage:

> I would desire that all women should read the gospel and Paul's epistles, and I would to God they were translated into the tongues of all men, so that they might not only be read, and known, of the Scots and Irishmen, but also of the Turks and Saracens . . . . I would to God, the plowman would sing a text of the scripture at his plowbeam, and that the weaver at his loom, with this would drive away the tediousness of time. I would the wayfaring man with this pastime, would express the weariness of his journey. And to be short I would that all the communication of the Christian should be of the scripture, for in a manner such are we ourselves, as our daily tales are.[36]

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vero ego apud ilium surdus." See Paul Botley, *Learning Greek in Western Europe, 1396–1529: Grammars, Lexica, and Classroom Texts* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 2010), 81, 203 n. 150.

[30] Schilling, *Martin Luther,* 68.

[31] Brecht 1:120.

[32] There are fifty-eight references to the Greek text in the glosses of Luther's Romans lectures according to the index in the American Edition (AE 25:534).

[33] Heinz Scheible, "Melanchthon, Philipp," *OER*, s.v.

[34] Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *Lefèvre: Pioneer of Ecclesiastical Renewal in France* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 156–162.

[35] Eamon Duffy, "'The comen knowen multitude of crysten men': *A Dialogue concerning Heresies* and the defence of Christendom," in George M. Logan, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas More* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 207.

[36] Desiderius Erasmus, *An Exhortation to the Diligent Study of Scripture* (Antwerp: n.p., 1529), edited from the original text by Frank Luttmer, https://history.hanover.edu/courses/excerpts /346erasmus.html, accessed December 23, 2021. For the original Latin, see Hajo Holborn, ed., *Desiderius Erasmus Roterodamus: Ausgewählte Werke* (Munich: Beck, 1935), 142.

Luther's humanist friend Johannes Lang was already translating the Gospel of Matthew when Luther himself began the task,[37] and it was none other than Melanchthon who urged Luther to take up this project when Luther left the Wartburg for a brief visit to Wittenberg at the beginning of December 1521.[38] Still disguised as Junker Jörg, Luther's principal aim was to see for himself what was going on there since letters had reached him about disputes and controversies regarding reforms that were being planned and implemented. While there, he later wrote to Lang, his friends requested him to translate. In a "table talk," he mentioned Melanchthon specifically, because the latter was upset with the current German versions on account of different people rendering the Gospels and on account of the obscurity of the Pauline epistles.[39]

Within a week or so, Luther was back at the Wartburg and was soon at work translating.[40] In his letter to Lang, he expressed the hope that "this book alone, in all languages, would live in the hands, eyes, ears, and hearts of all people."[41] But he quickly learned how challenging it was to turn his hope into a reality for the German people. In his letter to Amsdorf on January 13, he admitted that he had "shouldered a burden beyond my power [*supra vires*]. Now I realize what it means to translate."[42] He also recognized that when it came to the Old Testament, he would have to work with his Wittenberg colleagues, so he even broached the idea of returning to Wittenberg secretly and lodging with someone there so as to keep the project moving forward. With their help, he believed, the result would be a German Bible worth reading, "for I hope we will give a better translation to our Germany than the Latins have [i.e., the Vulgate]."[43]

Undoubtedly, Luther had a copy of the Vulgate at hand (probably the 1509 edition printed by Froben at Basel)[44] and, even if he did not, he was so familiar with

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[37] Luther to John Lang, December 18, 1521; AE 48:356 (WA Br 2:413).

[38] Ludolphy, "Nachwort," 2, says Luther returned to Wittenberg December 4–9, 1521. See also Brecht 2:29–30.

[39] Luther to John Lang, December 18, 1521; AE 48:356 (WA Br 2:413). For Melanchthon, see Schilling, *Martin Luther,* 226, who cites WA TR 1:487, the supplementary material for no. 961; and Hans Volz, "Einleitung," in Martin Luther, *Die Gantze Heilige Schrifft Deudsch: Wittenberg 1545, Letzte zu Luthers Lebzeiten erschienene Ausgabe*, ed. Hans Volz (Munich: Rogner and Bernhard, 1972), 49* n. 52, who cites WA 48:448 for the Melanchthon reference.

[40] "I am working on a *Postil* and the translation of the Bible into German." Luther to Wenceslas Link, December 18, 1521; AE 48:359 (WA Br 2:415).

[41] Luther to John Lang, December 18, 1521; AE 48:356 (WA Br 2:413).

[42] Luther to Nicholas von Amsdorf, January 13, 1522; AE 48:363 (WA Br 2:423).

[43] Luther to Nicholas von Amsdorf, January 13, 1522; AE 48:363 (WA Br 2:423).

[44] *Biblia cum pleno apparatu summariorum concordantiarum et quadruplici repertorii sive indicii numerique foliorum distinctione Basilee nuper impressa* (Baseleae: Johannes Petri, 1509), online edition: https://www.ustc.ac.uk/editions/616604. See Otto Albrecht, "Anmerkungen und Erläuterungen zum Neuen Testament 1522–1546," WA DB 6:537.

it that it undoubtedly influenced his translation. Some have argued that Luther also employed one of the earlier German versions, but, according to Martin Brecht, there is "no proof" that he did, although he certainly was familiar with the language of German piety that is evident in his translation.[45] In addition, the editors of the Weimar edition of Luther's Bible suggest that Luther had access to Nicholas of Lyra's commentary on the whole Bible, also containing the *Glossa Ordinaria* that often accompanied the medieval Vulgate, and even Jerome Aleander's Greek-Latin lexicon.[46]

But what Luther actually translated was the Greek text of Erasmus. During the course of his lifetime, Erasmus produced five versions. The first edition was 1516; the second 1519, which was the one that Luther used.[47] What made Erasmus's work so accessible and influential was his inclusion of a Latin translation in columns parallel to the Greek original and the addition of thousands of notes in hundreds of pages that explained the Greek and justified Erasmus's Latin.[48] The extent to which Luther relied upon Erasmus's notes and translation, let alone the Vulgate and an older German version, is a matter of debate, but clearly Luther used what he had in order to get a translation that satisfied him.[49]

But "satisfied" is much too strong a term, since once the September Testament appeared, Luther and his Wittenberg colleagues not only set about translating the Old Testament but also returned periodically to the New in an effort to get it "just

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[45] Brecht 2:47. Brecht cites Heinrich Bornkamm, "Die Vorlagen zu Luthers Übersetzung des Neuen Testaments," *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 72 (1947): 26–27, who rejected the thesis that Luther used the so-called Zainer edition of the German Bible—a thesis advanced by Albert Freitag in WA DB 6:595–637.

[46] WA DB 6:xxxvii–xl and WA 10/1.2:lxii–lxvii. For Aleander's lexicon, see Botley, *Learning Greek in Western Europe,* 67–68, 157–158. For Nicholas of Lyra's commentary, see Frans van Liere, *An Introduction to the Medieval Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 49, 173–174.

[47] *Novum Testamentum omne, multo quàm antehac diligentius ab Erasmo Roterodamo recognitum, emendatum ac translatum . . . uná cum annotationibus recognitis, ac magna accessione locupletatis* (Basileae: in Aedibvs Ioannis Frobenii, 1519), online edition: https://archive.org/details /novumtestamentum00eras/. Bornkamm, "Die Vorlagen zu Luthers Übersetzung," 24, maintains that even though we do not know precisely *when* Luther obtained his copy of Erasmus's second edition, he undoubtedly had one. See also Albrecht, "Historisch-theologische Einleitung," WA 6:lxxii–lxxiii; and Volz, "Einleitung," 52*. It also seems clear that Luther had a Greek-only edition of Erasmus's second published text that Nicholas Gerbel had published in 1521, because Luther in a letter to Gerbel refers to a gift from Gerbel that the editors of *Luther's Works* identify as the Greek New Testament. See Luther to Nicholas Gerbel, November 1, 1521, AE 48:321 n. 34 (WA Br 2:397).

[48] Albert Rabil Jr., *Erasmus and the New Testament: The Mind of the Christian Humanist* (San Antonio, TX: Trinity University Press, 1972), 91–95, 115–155.

[49] Citing previous studies by Hermann Dibbelt and Heinz Bluhm as well as Bornkamm, Kenji Toki and Ikuko Yukawa, "On the Process of the Translation into the Septemberbibel: Galatians as a Test Case," *Hitotsubashi Journal of Arts and Sciences* 44 (2003): 11–22, argue that Erasmus's influence on Luther's rendering of the Greek was very significant.

right." Between 1522 and 1546, there were twenty-two editions of the New Testament published in Wittenberg as well as thirteen editions of the entire Bible.[50] Although Hans Volz has identified the revisions of 1530 and 1541 as the most significant, virtually every edition during Luther's life reveals the reformer's ongoing efforts to improve his version of the German New Testament.[51]

But the September Testament was the beginning, and Luther brought the second half of his manuscript back to Wittenberg when he returned on March 6. He then initiated what became his standard operating procedure, which was not to publish until he had consulted his colleagues in order to get the words just right.[52] In this case, that meant Melanchthon especially on account of his expertise in the Greek language, but also others like George Spalatin. Among the translation problems with which Luther was still dealing were the names and colors of the jewels in Revelation and the right word for "eunuch" in Acts 8:27.[53]

Luther also had to prepare all the accompanying matter—the prefaces, marginal notes, and parallel passages—and, by no means least of all, arrange for printing and publication. As far as the last was concerned, Luther relied on his friends and supporters, Wittenberg businessmen, Christian Döring (who had been publishing Luther's works since 1518),[54] and Lucas Cranach (artist and entrepreneur, and Döring's publishing partner from 1521 to 1528). It was also Cranach who took responsibility for the woodcuts that illustrated the September Testament, ten initial letters and twenty-one images for the book of Revelation.[55]

By this time, there were two printers in Wittenberg: Johann Rhau-Grunenberg and Melchior Lotter the Younger. The former was not up to the job, however much he had been and remained loyal to Luther and his cause,[56] so Luther and his publishers assigned it to Lotter.[57] Luther himself had worked out an arrangement with

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[50] Heimo Reinitzer, *Biblia Deutsch: Luthers Bibelübersetzung und ihre Tradition*, Ausstellungskataloge der Herzog August Bibliothek, Nr. 40 (Wolfenbüttel: Herzog August Bibliothek, 1983), 116–123; and Volz, "Einleitung," 138*–142*.

[51] Volz, "Einleitung," 83*–113*, 138*–142*. See also WA DB 6:lxiii–lxx.

[52] Volz, "Einleitung," 54*. See also WA TR 1:486 and WA 48:449.

[53] Volz, "Einleitung," 54*–55*. Luther ended up using "verschnitener" (WA DB 6:527). See Luther to Spalatin, May 15, 1522 (WA Br 2:527) and Luther to Spalatin, March 30, 1522 (WA Br 2:490).

[54] *Deutsche Nationalbibliothek*, s.v. "Döring, Christian," https://d-nb.info/gnd/1037552709, accessed December 26, 2021. See also Andrew Pettegree, *Brand Luther: 1517, Printing, and the Making of the Reformation* (New York: Penguin Press, 2015), 157, who identifies Döring as the man who lent Luther and his companions horses and a carriage for their trip to Worms.

[55] Volz, "Einleitung," 54*, 57*. For Cranach's role in the Wittenberg book business, see Pettegree, *Brand*, 153–162.

[56] Pettegree, *Brand*, 42.

[57] For the printing connection between Döring, Cranach, and Lotter, see Steven Ozment, *The Serpent and the Lamb: Cranach, Luther, and the Making of the Reformation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 106–113.

Lotter Senior, a well-established printer in Leipzig with whom Luther had lodged during the Leipzig Debate, to establish another print shop in Wittenberg to be managed by his son. By December 1519, it was up and running, and in 1520 it printed such works as Luther's *Sermon on Good Works*,[58] his *Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*,[59] and his *Babylonian Captivity of the Church*.[60]

But the New Testament was a very different kind of undertaking. Andrew Pettegree identifies three features that made it especially challenging. First of all, its size: the final product was 222 leaves (444 pages). By way of comparison, the *Babylonian Captivity* was only forty-four leaves and the *Address* only forty-eight. Second, each of the latter two works was in the quarto format, but the New Testament was a folio. According to Ann Thompson, "Folios are books made out of large sheets of paper folded in half to create two leaves or four pages. Quartos are books made out of the same large sheets of paper as folios, but now folded in half twice to make four leaves or eight pages."[61] That means the pages of a folio are twice as big as those of quarto size, and Luther's September Testament was practically the first folio ever printed in Wittenberg. The height of each page was thirty-one centimeters (a little more than a foot). Finally, there were Cranach's full-page illustrations for the book of Revelation that had to be fitted into the text.[62]

So it was a big job for the printer, and the publishers wanted three thousand copies.[63] It was also labor-intensive. There were no power-driven machines. Everything had to be done by hand. The printing process that Gutenberg had developed about sixty-five years before began with the type, individual letters made out of a metal alloy, that a compositor had to arrange into words, sentences, and paragraphs for each page that he was going to print. These were placed upon a flat wooden plate. Ink was applied to the type. A sheet of paper was attached to a second wooden plate and plate and paper placed upon the type. Then by means of a long handle, a worker turned a heavy wooden screw that pushed the plate with paper down upon the plate with type and ink in order to facilitate the transfer of ink to paper. Thereupon, the handle was pulled back and the sheet removed. After the ink was dry, the paper could be turned over and the process applied again to the reverse side of the sheet.

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[58] WA 6:197.

[59] WA 6:397–398.

[60] WA 6:488.

[61] Ann Thompson, "Quarto and Folio," in *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare*, ed. Arthur F. Kinney (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 71–84.

[62] Pettegree, *Brand*, 187.

[63] We are not absolutely sure of this, but Ludolphy, "Nachwort," 4, says that that would have been typical.

Both sides being finished, a sheet was ready for collation with the rest (also done by hand) and completion of the book.[64]

Although Lotter had printed the first fascicle (out of five[65]) by May 10, the whole project needed to be finished by September so that they could ship the books to Frankfurt for the Michaelmas Fair (from September 29 to October 6), by that time the best place for publishers and printers from all over Europe to sell or trade their books.[66] If they missed that, they would have to wait until spring for the Lenten Fair. Perhaps Luther could have done so, but six months was a long time to wait for those who had invested so much of their time and capital. There were six printing presses in Wittenberg. At length, three of them were devoted to the project, and they met their deadline. Printing was complete by September 21.[67]

The book was not cheap. The sources indicate a price ranging from half a gulden to one and a half guldens, depending on whether the book was unbound, bound, or decorated. Half a gulden was the price of an unbound, undecorated copy. That same amount of money could buy about 330 pounds of wheat, 430 eggs, or two butchered sheep. It could also purchase fifty liters of Freistädter beer or twenty-nine liters of hard cider (*Most*). Half a gulden represented two weeks wages for a baker or four months' wages for a serving maid at the city hospital in Vienna.[68] So the September Testament was *not* cheap, and yet it sold so quickly that the publishers came out with a second edition just a few months later, the December Testament,[69] not to

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[64] *Britannica Academic*, s.v. "Printing," https://academic.eb.com/levels/collegiate/article/printing/109435, accessed December 28, 2021.

[65] WA DB 6:lxviii.

[66] Pettegree, *Brand*, 186. For the Frankfurt Fair, see Fleur Praal, "The Frankfurt Book Fair: 16th century to 2016," in *Leiden Arts in Society Blog*, Universiteit Leiden, https://www.leidenarts insocietyblog.nl/articles/the-frankfurt-book-fair-16th-century-to-2016, accessed December 28, 2021. Also Mathilde Rovelstad, "The Frankfurt Book Fair," *Journal of Library History, Philosophy, and Comparative Librarianship* 8, no. 3–4 (July–Oct., 1973): 113–123. Hans Volz and Henning Wendland, *Martin Luthers Deutsche Bibel: Entstehung und Geschichte der Lutherbibel* (Hamburg: Wittig, 1978), 111, say that Luther's publishers were aiming for the Leipzig Fair. Second to the Frankfurt Fair in the sixteenth century, it surpassed the latter in the seventeenth century. See Petra Schönhöfer, "The Book Fair—A Piece of German History," trans. Sarah Smithson-Compton, https://www.goethe.de/ins/gb/en/kul/mag/21514597.html, accessed March 17, 2022.

[67] WA DB 6:xlv–xlvii.

[68] Mark Edwards, *Printing, Propaganda, and Martin Luther* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 123, and Walter Krieg, *Materialien zu einer Entwicklungsgeschichte der Bücher-Preise und des Autoren-Honorars vom 15. zum 16. Jahrhundert* (Wien: Herbert Stubenrauch Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1953), 19–22. Volz, *Martin Luthers Deutsche Bibel*, 18, has different (and smaller) equivalences.

[69] It looks quite similar, but in about a hundred places Luther tried to repair or improve his text. The pope's tiara was also clipped in the three illustrations in Revelation where it had originally appeared. See Volz, "Einleitung," 61*–62*. The December Testament is available online at: http://resolver.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/SBB0001D8A600000000.

mention unauthorized competitors' editions, one already in December 1522 and fourteen more in 1523.[70]

The title page is striking—a simple title, "The New Testament," but elegantly framed; the place of publication, "Wittemberg"; and absolutely nothing else, not even Luther's name.[71] That would soon change, but this first edition reflects what Luther had written to Amsdorf just after he had begun translating, "I have here shouldered a burden beyond my power. Now I realize what it means to translate, and why no one has previously undertaken it who would disclose his name." Luther went on to say that he would have to work with others when he tackled the Old Testament, as in point of fact, he did.[72] He also consulted with others for the New Testament. But Luther's name sold books.[73] Although the December Testament was very similar in appearance to the first version and did not contain Luther's name, his name did appear on the first part of the Old Testament published in 1523,[74] and soon became a regular part of the "Luther" Bible, even to this very day.[75]

Well before Luther, Bibles in manuscript and print circulated with forewords, prefaces, and notes. Typically, the Vulgate versions included Jerome's prefaces to various books, and the pre-Luther German versions might include translations or paraphrases of Jerome.[76] But Erasmus composed his own,[77] and so did Luther—forewords, prefaces, and notes. As one might expect, Luther used this additional

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[70] This is my count from Reinitzer, *Biblia Deutsch,* 116–117.

[71] The *Universal Short Title Catalogue: An Open Access Bibliography of Early Modern Print Culture* lists five online editions of the September Testament (https://ustc.ac.uk/editions/627911). The book is available at http://dx.doi.org/10.25673/opendata2-8770.

[72] Luther to Nicholas von Amsdorf, January 13, 1522, AE 48:363 (WA Br 2:423).

[73] In the years 1518–1525, Luther published 219 different works in the German language. Admittedly most of these were pamphlets; but the next most published Protestant author was Luther's onetime Wittenberg colleague, Andreas Karlstadt, with only forty-seven titles. In fact, Luther's titles are more than the next seven authors combined. Moreover, Luther's 219 titles went through a total of 1,465 printings in this same period, which was almost twice as many as the next seventeen Protestant authors put together during this period. See Edwards, *Printing*, 26.

[74] Online reproduction of title page available at: https://pitts.emory.edu/dia/image_details.cfm?ID=3506.

[75] For example, *Die Bibel nach Martin Luthers Übersetzung: Lutherbibel revidiert 2017 mit Apokryphen* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2017).

[76] Stefan Strohm, "Voraussetzungen," *Ursprung der Biblia Deutsch von Martin Luther: Ausstellung in der Württembergischen Landesbibliothek Stuttgart 21. September bis 19. November 1983* (Stuttgart: Württembergische Landesbibliothek, 1983), 19, describes the material in the fourteen High-German editions as partly from Jerome and partly under Jerome's name but originating elsewhere. See also Maurice E. Schild, *Abendländische Bibelvorreden bis zur Lutherbibel* ([Gütersloh]: Mohn, 1970).

[77] Erasmus included a dedication to the pope and three forewords: *Paraclesis* (an encouragement to read the Bible), *Methodus* (how to read the Bible), and *Apologia* (a defense of his undertaking). He also replaced Jerome's prefaces by his own, "prostheses" for the Greek and "argumenta" for the Latin. See Erasmus von Rotterdam, *Novum Instrumentum*, facsimile ed. (Stuttgart-Bad Canstatt: Fromman-Holzboog, 1986). See also Schild, *Bibelvorreden*, 138–165.

material to highlight his evangelical reading of the Scriptures over against the false views of his opponents, principally the papacy and its defenders. The September Testament also included illustrations—initial letters[78] for each of the books and twenty-one woodcuts for the book of Revelation.[79] German Bibles before Luther had also restricted their New Testament illustrations to the last book.[80]

The illustrations were the responsibility of Cranach, of course, and it is possible that Luther did not have much input, seeing especially that he was at this point in his life not very enthusiastic about the last book of the Bible. "I can in no way detect that the Holy Spirit produced it,"[81] he wrote in its preface. The illustrations, however, represent very powerfully some of the great visions of the book and do so, according to Philipp Schmidt, from a distinct point of view that is not only theological but also sociological.[82]

On the one hand, some of the pictures are clearly antipapal. In three of them, for example, an apocalyptic villain is wearing the three-tiered papal tiara;[83] and in a fourth, for those in the know, the fall of Babylon (Rev 14:8) is really the fall of Rome. After the Gutenberg Bible, perhaps the best known of the incunabula is the *Nuremberg Chronicle* (1493), a world history filled with illustrations of all of Europe's great cities, including and especially Rome.[84] If one compares it to Cranach's illustration, it is obvious that the *Chronicle*'s Rome was the model for his Babylon.[85]

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[78] There were ten of them. Volz, "Einleitung," 57* n. 88, describes them briefly. Copies of them are available in Albert Schramm, *Die Illustrationen der Lutherbibel* (Leipzig: Karl W. Hiersemann, 1923), table 2.

[79] The next several paragraphs of this article discuss the illustrations in the September Testament. Therefore, I have included online references in the footnotes for readers who want to see the pictures mentioned in the text as well as read about them. Reproductions of the twenty-one illustrations from Revelation can be found in WA DB 7:483–523. They are also available online at the *Pitts Theological Library Digital Image Archive* [PTLDIA] (https://pitts.emory.edu/dia/book_lists.cfm?ID=415).

[80] Eichenberger and Wendland, *Deutsche Bibeln vor Luther*, 9–10, mention also some initial and introductory images.

[81] AE 35:398 (WA DB 7:404).

[82] Philipp Schmidt, *Die Illustrationen der Lutherbibel 1522–1700* (Basel: Reinhardt, 1962). But see also Peter Martin, *Martin Luther und die Bilder zur Apokalypse: Die Ikonographie der Illustrationen zur Offenbarung des Johannes in der Lutherbibel 1522 bis 1546* (Hamburg: Friedrich Wittig Verlag, 1983), 95–98, for a brief discussion of Schmidt's thesis and reactions to it. Martin, 197, also develops his own thesis that the 1522 illustrations do indeed represent Luther's understanding of Revelation at this time.

[83] WA DB 7:503, 513, 515. Online at the PTLDIA: https://pitts.emory.edu/dia/image_details.cfm?ID=383; https://pitts.emory.edu/dia/image_details.cfm?ID=505; and https://pitts.emory.edu/dia/image_details.cfm?ID=2431.

[84] For a description and digital copy of Rome in the *Nuremberg Chronicle*, see https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/PR-INC-00000-A-00007-00002-00888/1.

[85] Schmidt, *Die Illustrationen,* 93–94, 95, 96, and 97. For Cranach's "Fall of Rome," see WA DB 7:509 and https://pitts.emory.edu/dia/image_details.cfm?ID=3165. Cranach also used the

On the other hand, the illustrations also present an anti-elitist political thrust. This becomes evident by comparing Cranach's work to Albrecht Dürer's set of fifteen illustrations for the Apocalypse,[86] first published almost twenty-five years before the September Testament, that certainly were the inspiration for many of Cranach's renderings. Just compare Cranach's representation of "someone like a son of man" (Rev 1:12–16) to Dürer's[87] or each artist's image of the "four horsemen of the Apocalypse" (Rev 6:1–8).[88] Obviously, Cranach was using Dürer's work as a model.

But just as obviously, Cranach has deviated from his source in many respects and not the least of them, as Schmidt has argued, is his depiction of either the victims or the agents of satanic forces. For example, notice how Dürer represents those whom the horsemen are trampling. One of them is a bishop, but that is not the case with Cranach. His victims are just ordinary people while the three horsemen besides death are a king, a noble, and a knight.[89] Similarly, the lion riders of Revelation 9:17 are all nobles and the victims all commoners. In fact, Schmidt maintains that the man in front was modeled after Duke George the Bearded.[90] Meanwhile, those who worship the beast from the sea (Rev 13:4, 8) are dressed like the elite and one wears a crown (identified by Schmidt as Emperor Maximilian). Likewise, the worshipers of the papal whore of Babylon. To Cranach, at least, the last book of the Bible was being fulfilled in his own times.[91]

Whether Luther agreed with the artist is certainly debatable given his disdain for Revelation at this time, as indicated not only in his preface but already in the

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Chronicle's Rome to depict a second reference to the fall of Babylon in Revelation 18:2. See WA DB 7:517 and https://pitts.emory.edu/dia/image_details.cfm?ID=7707.

[86] According to the Morgan Library and Museum, Dürer first published these illustrations in 1498. A second edition came out in 1511, *Apocalipsis cum figuris* (Nuremberg: Dürer, 1511). https://www.themorgan.org/exhibitions/online/imperial-splendor/apocalypse-pictures, accessed March 19, 2022. An online edition of the second edition is available at https://mdz-nbn-resolving .de/urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb00074181-1, page 1.

[87] Cranach: WA DB 7:483 and https://pitts.emory.edu/dia/image_details.cfm?ID=1981. For Dürer: https://mdz-nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb00074181-1, page 5.

[88] Cranach: WA DB 7:487 and https://pitts.emory.edu/dia/image_details.cfm?ID=5818. For Dürer: https://mdz-nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb00074181-1, page 9; or from The Met's collection: https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/336215.

[89] Schmidt, *Die Illustrationen,* 94–95.

[90] Schmidt, *Die Illustrationen,* 14, 95. For the "lion riders," see WA DB 7:499 and https://pitts.emory.edu/dia/image_details.cfm?ID=2402. For Cranach's Duke George, see https:// lucascranach.org/DE_BStGS_WAF168. Duke George was one of Luther's most prominent opponents among the temporal authorities of the Holy Roman Empire. See Karlheinz Blaschke, "George, Duke of Saxony," OER, s.v.

[91] Schmidt, *Die Illustrationen,* 94–98. For worshipers of the beast, see WA DB 7:507 and https://pitts.emory.edu/dia/image_details.cfm?ID=6137. For worshipers of the whore of Babylon, see WA DB 7:515 and https://pitts.emory.edu/dia/image_details.cfm?ID=383. For Emperor Maximilian, see Dürer's woodcut at https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.58111.html. For Maximilian himself, see Paula Sutter Fichtner, "Maximilian I," OER, s.v.

Testament's table of contents.[92] Basically, Luther followed Erasmus's ordering of the books rather than his Latin Vulgate by placing Acts after John instead of after the Pauline epistles.[93] There was, of course, one major deviation from Erasmus's ordering, viz., his placing Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation into a numberless—and "saintless"[94]—group of their own at the end of the Testament. Regarding the canonicity of each of these, Luther had severe doubts—doubts that he explained in his prefaces to these books.[95]

To begin with, Luther knew that the canonicity of each had been questioned in antiquity. This he could have learned from Erasmus,[96] indeed, from Jerome himself.[97] But it was their contents that for Luther confirmed the doubts of some from centuries earlier.

For Revelation, it was chiefly a matter of clarity. Although by 1530, Luther had changed his mind about Revelation, in 1522 he insisted that "the apostolic office [is] to speak clearly of Christ and his deeds, without images and visions" and that "Christ is neither taught nor known in it."[98] For Hebrews, it was a question of authorship and the "hard knot" that in three passages the epistle "denies and forbids to sinners any repentance after baptism."[99] Jude, Luther maintained, was mostly an extract or copy of 2 Peter, and it cited "sayings and events . . . found nowhere else in the Scriptures."[100]

Most famously, of course, Luther also questioned the epistle of James primarily on account of its disagreement with "St. Paul and all the rest of Scripture in ascribing justification to works." While admitting that James could be glossed in such a way

[92] For the table of contents, see https://pitts.emory.edu/dia/image_details.cfm?ID=6587.

[93] See Erasmus, *Novum Testamentum* 1519, p. 109. For Vulgate, see *Biblia* 1509, New Testament, fol. 329 v.

[94] Unlike all the authors of the first twenty-three books who are designated, "Sanct," James, Jude, and John—authors of the last three books—do not have the epithet, and Hebrews has no author at all.

[95] For a fine discussion of Luther's views expressed in his prefaces, see Jason D. Lane, "Luther as Bible Teacher: The Biblical Prefaces and His View of the Canon," in *Defending Luther's Reformation: Its Ongoing Significance in the Face of Contemporary Challenges*, ed. John A. Maxfield (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017), 155–181. Edwards, *Printing*, 111–117, also presents a nice summary of the theological themes in the prefaces.

[96] See F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 242. For Erasmus himself, see his "Annotationes," *Novum Testamentum 1516*, 600–601 (Hebrews), 601 (James), and 625 (Revelation).

[97] See Bruce, *Canon*, 225–229, and Thomas O'Loughlin, "Jerome's De uiris illustribus and Latin Perceptions of the New Testament's Canon" in *The Mystery of Christ in the Fathers of the Church: Essays in Honour of D. Vincent Twomey SVD*, ed. J. E. Rutherford and D. Woods, (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2012), 55–65.

[98] AE 35:398–399 (WA DB 7:404).

[99] Luther cites Hebrews 6:4–6 and 10:26–27 as well as the example of Esau in 12:17. AE 35:394–395 (WA DB 7:344).

[100] AE 35:397–398 (WA DB 7:386).

as to bring him into harmony with the rest and while acknowledging that the author had a point about the necessity of good works, Luther still argued that the book of James (like Revelation) failed the test of apostolicity. "The office of a true apostle," Luther insisted, "[is] to preach of the Passion and resurrection and office of Christ and to lay the foundation of faith in him." If a book does not do that, it is not apostolic even if an apostle wrote it.[101]

With respect to all four of these books at the end of the Testament, Luther was opinionated but not dogmatic. He says explicitly regarding Revelation, "I leave everyone free to hold his own opinions. I would not have anyone bound to my opinion or judgment." He also would not "prevent anyone from including or extolling James"; he "valued" Jude; and he called Hebrews "a marvelously fine" epistle.[102] Nonetheless, with the exception of Revelation, his prefaces for the others remained basically the same as did the table of contents and were still there in the final Wittenberg edition of the Bible printed during his lifetime.[103]

While Luther did not hesitate to rate some books of the New Testament as inferior to the rest, he was also not shy about singling out others as superior. In fact, he did this right at the beginning of his translation in a one-page explanation of "which are the true and noblest books of the New Testament," viz., John's Gospel; the Pauline epistles, especially Romans; and 1 Peter, because in them "you do find depicted in masterly fashion how faith in Christ overcomes sin, death, and hell, and gives life, righteousness, and salvation." For Luther, that message was the gospel that all needed to hear and believe.[104]

Not surprisingly, then, Luther highlighted that same message in the prefaces that he composed for other parts of the New Testament in addition to the four books at the end of his translation. In fact, the first thing to confront the reader following the title page is a "Foreword" to the New Testament. Although Luther began by saying that he would like to have published the biblical text without any extras, that was not possible since there were so many bad interpretations out there that nobody knew what was "gospel or law, New Testament or Old." So Luther prepared a few pages to guide the ordinary reader not to look for "laws and commandments where he ought to be seeking the gospel and promises of God." The saving work of our

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[101] AE 35:395–397 (WA DB 7:384–386). But see Jason D. Lane, *Luther's Epistle of Straw: The Voice of St. James in Reformation Preaching* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2018) for a much broader consideration of how early Lutherans treated James, including Luther in sermons on texts from James.

[102] AE 35:398, 397, 395 (WA DB 7:404, 386, 344).

[103] *Die Gantze Heilige Schrifft Deudsch: Wittenberg 1545, Letzte zu Luthers Lebzeiten erschienene Ausgabe* (Munich: Rogner and Bernhard, 1972), 1966. The order of the books in the New Testament table of contents remains the same in the 2017 edition of *Die Bibel nach Martin Luthers Übersetzung: Lutherbibel revidiert 2017 mit Apokryphen* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2017).

[104] AE 35:361–362 (WA DB 6:10).

Lord Christ is, of course, what Luther meant by "gospel." It is not a book but a message, just one message, expressed either at length or quite briefly, that "by his death and resurrection he [Christ] has overcome sin, death, and hell for those who believe in him." For Luther, then, this gospel is the "new testament," i.e., last will and testament, by which Christ bequeathed salvation to believers. As a result, the New Testament gets its name from its contents, "the gospel and the promises of God, together with the history of those who believe and of those who do not believe them." In contrast to this, Luther wrote, the "Old Testament is a book in which are written God's laws and commandments" along with the story of those who either kept them or did not. Luther insisted, however, that God had promised the gospel through the prophets of old and then went on to quote specific passages from the Old Testament, beginning with Genesis 3:15.[105]

So the gospel is the main message of the Bible, and Christ is the center of the gospel. Luther warned the reader, therefore, not to turn Christ into another Moses, a lawgiver who "drives, compels, threatens, strikes, and rebukes terribly." A believer does not become righteous by observing any law. "He is alive and righteous and saved by faith." Even so, Luther admonished, a true believer demonstrates his faith by good works, "Truly, if faith is there, he cannot hold back; he proves himself, breaks out into good works . . . . Everything that he lives and does is directed to his neighbor's profit, in order to help him . . . . That is what Christ meant when at last he gave no other commandment than love." So faith and love, Christ and salvation, law and especially gospel—these define Luther's approach to reading the New Testament in a God-pleasing and edifying way.[106]

In his September Testament, Luther did not provide a specific preface for any of the four gospels or for the book of Acts. Presumably, he thought his "Foreword" would suffice for the first five books, but when he got to the Pauline epistles, he provided a preface for each, including a lengthy one for Romans (eleven pages in the September Testament as compared to just four for the foreword)—the book that Luther described as "really the chief part of the New Testament and . . . truly the purest gospel." Once again, however, he bemoaned the fact that "it has been badly obscured by glosses and all kinds of idle talk." So Luther offered a preface to help the reader to a better understanding of this key scriptural text.[107]

He began by offering explanations of significant Pauline terminology: law, sin, grace, faith, righteousness, flesh, and spirit. Luther's comments are insightful, at times, even provocative. An example of the first is his distinction between doing the works of the law and fulfilling the law. When someone does the right thing, either

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[105] Also Genesis 22:18; 2 Samuel 7:12–14; Micah 5:2; and Hosea 13:14.
[106] AE 35:357–361 (WA DB 6:2–10).
[107] AE 35:365–366 (WA DB 7:2).

afraid of punishment or desiring a reward, because the law says that he must, he shows that deep down in his heart, he dislikes, resents, and even hates the law for without it, he would much prefer to be doing the opposite. This shows the futility of trying to be saved by works of the law.[108]

Perhaps provocative is Luther's statement that "unbelief alone commits sin." But again, what Luther was emphasizing is that it is the heart that matters. If faith makes the heart right, then good works follow. But when there is no faith, the heart remains wrong, and evil works follow. So "before good or bad works take place," wrote Luther, " . . . there must first be in the heart faith or unbelief. Unbelief is the root, the sap, and the chief power of all sin."[109]

So what then is faith? Luther answered, it "is a living, daring confidence in God's grace, so sure and certain that the believer would stake his life on it a thousand times." And where does it come from? "Faith . . . is a divine work in us which changes us and makes us to be born anew of God." And what is the result? "It is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, this faith. It is impossible for it not to be doing good works incessantly. It does not ask whether good works are to be done, but before the question is asked it has already done them, and is constantly doing them." Faith then "is called 'the righteousness of God' because God gives it, and counts it as righteousness for the sake of Christ our Mediator, and makes a man to fulfil his obligation to everybody . . . . [T]hrough faith a man becomes free from sin and comes to take pleasure in God's commandments."[110]

In the second part of his preface to Romans,[111] Luther summarized each chapter and showed how the epistle moved logically from one topic to the next—from sin to justification to good works to the ongoing struggle with sin to the comfort of predestination to Christian living, obedience to temporal authorities, and consideration for the weak. Clearly, Paul covers a lot of ground, and so, so did Luther in summarizing what he called "the daily bread of the soul."[112]

The prefaces for the other Pauline epistles, as well as those for each of Peter's epistles and one for all three of John's, are much shorter than the one for Romans. Nonetheless, there are Lutheran themes like "law and gospel" in several of them.[113] In each of these prefaces, Luther identified a theme and then described briefly how the apostle developed it through the chapters of the book. Sometimes, he offered a

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[108] AE 35:366–368 (WA DB 7:2–6).
[109] AE 35:369 (WA DB 7:6–8).
[110] AE 35:370–371 (WA DB 7:8–10).
[111] AE 35:372–380 (WA DB 7:12–26).
[112] AE 35:365 (WA DB 7:2).
[113] Edwards, *Printing*, 116, found law and gospel in the prefaces for 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Timothy, Titus, 2 Peter, the three epistles of John, and even Revelation.

word or two regarding the circumstances that prompted the writing (e.g., 1 Cor-inthians[114] and Galatians[115]), but more often he just summarized the contents. So, for example, Luther did not refer to Paul's imprisonment in connection with Philippians or with 2 Timothy[116] or to his direction to Titus to appoint clergy for Crete.[117] He did not even say that Onesimus was a runaway slave in the preface to Philemon, although he does mention his master.[118]

The prefaces are not especially polemical in terms of naming names and factions. Luther did not directly mention the papacy or the monks, and he failed to identify "the man of sin [*der mensch der sunden*]" or "the child of perdition [*das kind der verderbung*]" in 2 Thessalonians 2 with the pope.[119] But Luther did apply the New Testament to his own times in these prefaces. So in that same preface to 2 Thessalonians, he referred Paul's rebuke of idleness to the clergy of Luther's day.[120] Likewise, in the preface to 2 Timothy, he maintained that Paul's prophecies regard-ing the end-time teachers were "all too amply fulfilled in our clergy."[121] In his preface to Romans, Luther referred to "wranglers and sophists" who taught that one should prepare himself for grace by works.[122] In introducing 1 Corinthians, he said, "For it was as in our day. . . . There are many mad saints (we call them factious spirits, fanat-ics and heretics) who have become wise and learned all too quickly and, because of their great knowledge and wisdom, cannot live in harmony with anybody."[123]

Perhaps the most striking reference to the situation of the church in Luther's own times comes in his preface to the Johannine epistles when he wrote:

> The spirit of Antichrist . . . is today for the first time really in full sway. For although people do not now publicly deny with their lips that Christ has come in the flesh, they do deny it with their hearts, by their teaching and life. For he who would be righteous and saved by his own works and deeds is as much as

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[114] "St. Paul . . . had taught his Corinthians Christian faith and freedom from the law. But then the mad saints came along, and the immature know-it-alls. They broke up the unity of doctrine and caused division among the believers." AE 35:380–381 (WA DB 7:82).

[115] "The Galatians had been brought up by St. Paul to the true Christian faith, from the law to the gospel. After his departure, however, false apostles came along." AE 35:384 (WA DB 7:172).

[116] AE 35:385, 389 (WA DB 7:210, 272).

[117] AE 35:389 (WA DB 7:284).

[118] AE 35:390 (WA DB 7:292).

[119] For the preface, see AE 35:387–388 (WA DB 7:250). Luther's marginal note at 2 Thessalonians 2:4, WA DB 7:254, does explain that "sitting in the temple" refers to the "government of Antichrist [*widderchrists*]" in Christendom who substitutes his commands for God's, but Luther does not mention the papacy.

[120] AE 35:388 (WA DB 7:250).

[121] AE 35:389 (WA DB 7:272).

[122] AE 35:367–368 (WA DB 7:6).

[123] AE 35:380–381 (WA DB 7:82).

denying Christ, since Christ has come in the flesh for the very purpose of making us righteous and saving us without our works, by his blood alone.[124]

Clearly, this statement equates opposition to Luther's fundamental teaching with the "spirit" of antichrist, but it still falls short of calling pope or anyone else *the* Antichrist.

Besides the foreword and the prefaces, Luther also employed marginal notes in order to help his readers get the most out of their time with the text. According to Mark Edwards, the September Testament contains 298 such notes. That does not seem like a lot, given that there were 401 pages of biblical text, but they were unequally distributed with some books like Matthew, Romans, and 1 Corinthians receiving many (88, 50, and 45 respectively) and most other books, either few or none at all (two books with two, five books with one, and seven with none).[125] Perhaps the easiest explanation for this is that Luther just ran out of time.

Luther used the notes to identify people, places, and terms *and* to direct readers to an evangelical understanding of the text. According to Edwards, more than 80 percent of the notes were theological and of these half dealt with themes prominent in Luther's theology at this time—Christian liberty, law and gospel, faith and works, and promise.[126] For a sampling of Luther's notes, consider those on Matthew 5–7, the Sermon on the Mount.[127]

There are nineteen notes in this section altogether.[128] A couple of them simply explain unfamiliar terms. For example, Luther described "Racha" as a scraping of the throat that showed anger[129] and identified the "tax collectors [die zollner]" as godless agents of the Romans.[130] But Luther used many more notes to express strictly theological concerns, in particular, to bring out the spiritual side of Jesus' words. For instance, "peace makers" follow the example of Christ, who has made peace for us with God;[131] the righteousness of the Pharisees consists of outer works and appearances, but Christ demands a righteousness of the heart;[132] and "plucking out the

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[124] AE 35:393 (WA DB 7:326).

[125] Edwards, *Printing*, 117.

[126] Edwards, *Printing*, 117–118.

[127] WA DB 6:26–38.

[128] Luther identified each note by putting a word or phrase from the text in parentheses. Thus, the first note comments on *besitzen* (Matt 5:4) and the last on *thut* (Matt 7:24). Just one, on *richten* (Matt 7:1), lacks the parentheses. Perhaps it is a printer's error.

[129] WA DB 6:28, "Racha ist das rauch scharren ym halss, und begreyffet alle zornige zeychen."

[130] WA DB 6:30, "(zollner) heyssen latinisch Publicani und sind gewesen die der Romer rendte unnd zol bestanden haten, unnd waren gemeyniglich got loße heyden, da hyn von den Romern gesatzt."

[131] WA DB 6:26, "Die fridfertigen sind mehr den fridsamen, nemlich, die den frid machen furdern und erhalten unter andern, wie Christus uns bey got hatt frid gemacht."

[132] WA DB 6:28, "Der phariseer fromkeyt steht alleyn in ausserlichen wercken und scheyn Christus aber foddert des herzen fromkeyt."

lustful eye" takes place when the lust of the eyes is killed and done away with in the heart.[133] Luther identified the "holy thing" that one should not give to dogs as "God's Word,"[134] the dogs as those who persecute the word,[135] and the swine as those who drown themselves in fleshly desire and do not follow the word.[136]

In a couple of places, Luther restricted the application of a passage. The prohibition of swearing, Luther wrote, did not apply when love for one's neighbor or the honor of God required it (Matt 5:34).[137] Similarly, the prohibition against resisting evil (Matt 5:39), Luther noted, was meant to forbid personal vengeance but not action by the government when appealed to by oneself or through one's neighbor out of love.[138]

A question that always arises in connection with the Sermon the Mount is: how do people ever do all that Christ commands? Luther answered this in a final note on our Lord's final admonition both to hear and do what Christ has said. Luther noted that such doing requires faith. All works that look good but are done without faith are sin. But where faith is present, works that are truly good must follow. When Christ says, "Do," he means, "Do it from a pure heart." But faith alone purifies the heart; and that kind of righteousness stands firm against all the power of hell, for it is built through faith upon the rock that is Christ.[139] And with that note, Luther has brought our Lord's sermon into the framework of what Luther always taught about the Christian life: faith and good works in that order.

The reformer did not very often explicitly criticize the papacy or the monks in his notes. But there was one such note in the Sermon on the Mount. On Matthew 5:19, Luther wrote, "The papistic crowd does this [that is, "loosen" one of the least of these commandments] by saying that these commands of Christ are not

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[133] WA DB 6:30, "Geystlich auß reyssen, ist hie gepotten, das ist, wenn der augen lust getodtet wirt ym herzen unnd abethun."

[134] WA DB 6:36, "das heyligthum ist gottes wortt da durch alle ding geheyligett werden."

[135] WA DB 6:36, "hund sind die das wort verfolgenn."

[136] WA DB 6:36, "sew seind, die ersoffen ynn fleyschlichem lust, das wort nicht achten."

[137] WA DB 6:30, "Alles schweren und eyden ist hie verpotten, das der mensch von yhm selber thutt, wens aber die lieb, nodt, nutz des nehisten, odder gottis ehre foddert, ist wolthun, gleych wie auch der zorn verpotten ist. Unnd doch loblich wenn er aus liebe und zu gottes ehren, erfoddert wirt."

[138] WA DB 6:30, "niemant soll sich selb rechen noch rach suchen auch fur gericht, auch nitt rach begeren. Aber die ubirkeytt des schwerds, sol solchs thun, vonn yhr selbs odder durch den nehisten aus lieb ermanet unnd ersucht."

[139] WA DB 6:38, "(thut) Hie foddert Christus auch den glawben, denn wo nit glaub ist, thut man die gepot nitt, Ro. 3. Unnd alle gutte werck nach dem scheyn, on glawbenn geschehenn seyn sund Dagegen auch wo glawb ist, mussen recht gutte werck folgen, das heysset Christus (thun) von reynnem herzen thun. Der glawb aber reynigt das herz. Act. 15. Und solche fromkeytt, steht vest wider alle wind, das ist alle macht der hellen, denn sie ist auff den felß Christum, durch den glawbenn gebawet. Gutte werck on glawben, seyn der torichtenn iunckfrawen lampen on ole."

commands of Christ but counsels."[140] But there are not too many other notes like that. Edwards asserts that only five marginal notes attack popes, monks, or nuns directly: three in 1 Corinthians, one in 2 Corinthians, and one in Matthew.[141]

My examination of these books revealed only four. I found two in Matthew and two in 1 Corinthians but none in 2 Corinthians. Besides Matthew 5:19, Luther leveled another criticism against the papacy in a note on "the abomination of desolation" in Matthew 24:15. Luther explained the phrase as a reference to something that "has a beautiful outward appearance of holiness before the world by which true holiness is ruined, as is the pope's regime and was the idolatry of the Jews and heathen in earlier times."[142] In a note on 1 Corinthians 3:4, Luther wrote, "Here Paul condemns the papacy and all sects."[143] In a note on 1 Corinthians 7:35, he observed that "Paul does not want to forbid marriage to anyone as now happens through law and vows with priests, monks, and nuns."[144] Perhaps Edwards also had in mind a note from 2 Corinthians 5:11, in which Luther referred to tyrannical treatment of the people with "banning" and "other outrageous commands,"[145] but I found no clear mention of either popes or regular clergy in Luther's notes on 2 Corinthians.

But the paucity of such comments did not keep Luther's opponents from criticizing his September Testament. Duke George forbade its sale in his part of Saxony[146] and his court theologian, Jerome Emser, Luther's "Leipzig goat,"[147] came out with a lengthy criticism already in 1523 and another one in 1524,[148] and then a few years

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[140] WA DB 6:28, "Also thut der Papisten hauff, sagen, dise gepott Christi seyen nicht gepott sondern redte."

[141] Edwards, *Printing*, 203 n. 26.

[142] WA DB 6:106, "Diser grewel fur got mus eyn schon auserlich ansehen der heylickeyt fur der wellt haben damitt die recht heylickeyt verwustet wirt, wie des Bapsts regiment unnd vor zeytten der iuden und heyden abgotterey waren."

[143] WA DB 7:94, "Hie hat Paulus das Bapstum und alle secten verdampt."

[144] WA DB 7:106, "Paulus wil niemant die ehe verpieten, wie yzt durch gesetz unnd gelubd geschicht, bey pfaffen, monchen, und nonnen."

[145] WA DB 7:150, "(faren schon) Das ist, wyr tyrannisiern noch treyben die leutt nicht, mit bannen und ander freuelen regimenten, denn wyr furchten Got."

[146] Volz, "Einleitung," 59*, and Brecht 2:53. For the text, see Hermann Gelhaus, *Der Streit um Luthers Bibelverdeutschung im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert*, 2 vols. (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1989–1990), 2:9–10.

[147] For Emser's biography, see Agostino Borromeo, "Emser, Hieronymus," *OER*, s.v.

[148] *Auss was gründ und ursach Luthers dolmatschung uber das nawe testament dem gemeinen man billich vorbotten worden sey* (Leipzig: Wolffgang Stöckel, [1523]), http://gateway-bayern.de /VD16+E+1089. Extensive excerpts are available in Gelhaus, *Streit,* 2:17–51. Emser wrote another critique of Luther's Bible, his *Annotationes Hieronymi Emser uber Luthers naw Testament gebessert und emendirt* (Dresden: [Emserpresse], 1524), http://gateway-bayern.de/VD16+E+1090. According to Gelhaus, *Streit*, 1:27–56, 144–158, Emser objected to Luther's translation on three grounds: (1) it was not authorized by the church; (2) Luther had abandoned the Vulgate; and (3) he had translated inaccurately for the sake of his false doctrine.

after that, produced his own rendition of the New Testament, ironically, based almost entirely on Luther's translation![149] They recognized then what is obvious today, that by means of notes, prefaces, and illustrations, the September Testament was advancing Luther's cause among the German-speaking population of Europe, especially among those who could read;[150] but, of course, from Luther's perspective, the "extra" material was all secondary to the biblical text itself that Luther—and Lutherans—believed was the real source of what he was preaching and teaching.

By the time that Luther's September Testament came off the press, he and his colleagues were already hard at work on the Old Testament, and, as we have already noted, getting the best possible Bible in the German language remained Luther's objective for the rest of his life. But the September Testament of 1522 was the first step—and a giant step it was.

The German Bible was the most important of Luther's publications, but there were many more; together, they demonstrate Luther's readiness to employ the new technology of his day. The printing press was revolutionizing society, but Luther recognized it chiefly as a vehicle for making the word of God available to all. We, too, are living at a time when new technologies are transforming the world, but they cannot change human beings. We are still sinners in need of a Savior. Perhaps Luther's example can inspire us to use the resources of our times to do what he did in his: get the gospel out to all.[151]

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[149] *Das naw testament nach lawt der Christlichen kirchen bewerten text, corrigirt und widerumb zu recht gebracht* (Dreszden: Wolffgang Stöckel, 1527). Gelhaus, *Streit,* 2:52–54, includes Emser's conclusion. Emser's New Testament appeared in the same year as his death. Based largely on Luther's first German New Testament, Emser's version has been examined by Kenneth A. Strand, *Reformation Bibles in the Crossfire: The Story of Jerome Emser, His Anti-Lutheran Critique and His Catholic Bible Version* (Ann Arbor, MI: Ann Arbor Publishers, 1961), 61–73, and Heinz Bluhm, *Luther Translator of Paul: Studies in Romans and Galatians* (New York: Lang, 1984), 133–153, 507–536.

[150] But nonetheless, non-readers were also influenced since "reading" in early modern Europe often meant "reading aloud" and in a social context. See Jean-François Gilmont, "Printing," *OER*, s.v.

[151] Editor's note: To date, there has been no English translation of Luther's German Bible. While such a translation would not be as authoritative as a Bible translated directly from the Hebrew and Greek (such as the Douay-Rheims translation of the Latin Vulgate), an English translation of Luther's translation would help English readers see how Luther understood the text, would put in our language the most significant resource for Lutheran exegesis in the first several centuries after the Reformation, and would make available the marginal notes, cross-references, and illustrations that Reformation-era readers enjoyed and used.