

The Evangelical Heritage Version: What's in a Name?

The Bible translation produced by the Wartburg Project has been named *The Holy Bible: Evangelical Heritage Version (EHV)*. Why this name?

The name *The Holy Bible* stresses that our aim is not to produce anything new but to pass on the heritage which we have received from the church, which has been handing down the inspired Word from generation to generation for nearly 2000 years.

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.

Our translation is called *Heritage* because this word looks to the past, present, and 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.

To this end, the goal of our project is to produce a *balanced* translation, suitable for all-purpose use in the church.

- We seek a balance between *the old* and *the new*.
- We seek a balance between the poles of so-called *literal* and *dynamic equivalent* theories of translation.
- We seek a balance between *formality* and *informality*.
- *The Evangelical Heritage Version is not an interpretative translation.*

Each of these points is elaborated on in the following sections:

Old versus New

The Evangelical Heritage Version™ seeks a balance between *the old* and *the new*. We debated whether our translation should be called *new* or *revised*. Neither term tells the whole story. Our translation can be called *revised* or *traditional* in so far as it builds on the tradition of Bible translation that goes back to the King James Version, to Martin Luther, and beyond. It is *new* in that it does not follow any one template, and it introduces new terms in those places where the traditional terms are unclear.

- We seek to preserve heritage terms like “sanctify,” “justify,” “angels,” and “saints,” but not to the exclusion of more explanatory translations like “make holy” and “declare righteous.” We make an effort to retain familiar, treasured terms that are well established in the liturgy, hymns, creeds, and catechisms of the church.
- We prefer to preserve familiar expressions in well-known passages, but if the traditional reading or term is not very precise, a translation that reflects the original meaning more clearly takes priority over preserving traditional language.
- We try to preserve common biblical idioms like “the flesh,” “walk with God,” “in God’s eyes,” “set one’s face against,” etc. Our goal is not to preserve Hebrew or Greek grammatical idioms. It is to preserve important biblical expressions and imagery and, when possible, the word-play in the biblical text.
- We usually keep traditional names like the Ark, the Ark of the Covenant, the manger, etc. There may be exceptions when the traditional terms were not very clear, such as substituting *Bread of the Presence* for *Showbread*, or *the Dwelling* for *the Tabernacle*.
- When we are using a new term for an important biblical concept or object, we cite the traditional term in a footnote at the first occurrence of the new term in a given context, e.g.,

Bread of the Presence^a
or Dwelling^b

Note a Traditionally *showbread*
Note b Traditionally *Tabernacle*

Literal versus Dynamic

We seek a balance between the two poles called *literal* and *dynamic equivalent* translation. The translator should not be too locked in to any one theory of translation because:

- Literalistic, word-for-word translations sometimes convey the wrong meaning or they do not communicate clearly in the receiving language.
 - There is a lot of confusion about the concept of “a literal translation.” A literal translation attempts to follow the words of the original language very closely. It is impossible for a translation to follow another language exactly word-for-word unless it is an academic exercise, not intended for reading with understanding and enjoyment. A so-called “literal translation” does not follow the original text word-for-word, but thought-for-thought, because it does not look only at single words but also at the clusters in which they occur.

Nevertheless, a word-for-word translation is often possible and should be followed when there is no reason to depart from a word-for-word translation.

- We would be happy with a translation that was both dynamic and equivalent, but too often translations labeled “dynamic equivalent” are not really equivalent to the original. They import too much interpretation in the translation.
- The translator has to weigh whether a more literal approach or a freer approach best conveys the divinely intended meaning on a case-by-case basis.
- Translators will strive both to preserve the original meaning and to produce English which sounds natural, but the preservation of the original meaning takes priority over style. When a choice must be made, accuracy in conveying the divinely intended meaning of the text takes priority over literary beauty or rendering the text into common, contemporary English.
- Our Wartburg Project website has several articles and FAQs devoted to these points.

Formal versus Informal

We seek a balance between *formality* and *informality*. The Bible contains many types of literature and different levels of language, from the very simple to the very difficult.

- Our basic translation does not specify one level of language to be used uniformly throughout the Bible because the level of language in the Bible itself varies greatly from book to book and from passage to passage. The level of difficulty and the literary style of the translation aim to be similar to the level of difficulty and the style of the original. In many Bible passages the original language was neither “common” nor “contemporary.”
- The translator should not drain the color and liveliness from passages by removing the imagery. If Scripture uses five different words for a concept such as sin, the translation should reflect that diversity. If the text uses a figure of speech, the translator should use a figure of speech, the same one if possible.
- When a freer translation is necessary to communicate clearly, a more literal rendering may be preserved in the footnotes.
- The translator should remember he is a translator, not an editor of the biblical text. He has no call to “improve” the style chosen by the Holy Spirit.

Freedom versus Rules

We seek a balance between *following guidelines* and *exercising good judgment*. It is necessary for a translation project to provide translators and editors with a set of rules (general principles of translation) and rubrics (guidelines for translating specific words and expressions), but the relationship between two languages is so complex, that it is hard to imagine a rule or rubric that can be applied without exception. Translators and editors should consider exceptions from the rule or rubric on a case-by-case basis.

- Although the rule “use one English word to translate one Hebrew or Greek word” is not a viable standard for a translator to apply consistently, translators should

strive to be consistent rather than casual in their renderings of specific words and word groups.

Balance Across the Board

We aim for *balance across the board*. For example:

- In texts that deal with sexual issues we try to be euphemistic where the original is euphemistic and more blunt where the language of the original text is blunt or even coarse.
- In using so called “gender-accurate language” our translation strives to be inclusive where the original is inclusive and exclusive where the original is exclusive.

The *Evangelical Heritage Version* is a translation designed for *learning and teaching*. Our translators assume that their 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 not be condescending or patronizing toward their readers, but should be dedicated to helping them grow. Translations should not be “dumbed down.” 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. It is in that sense a textbook for students who want to grow in their knowledge of biblical language.

The *Evangelical Heritage Version* is *not an interpretative translation*. On one level, every act of translation involves interpretation, but when we say that the *Evangelical Heritage Version* strives to avoid importing interpretation into the translation, we mean that our duty and goal is to understand and to reproduce as closely as possible what the text says and to say no more than what the text says.

- Translators should not introduce into the translation the kind of interpretation and explanation that is permissible and even expected in a study Bible or commentary.
- Translators should not introduce into the translation denominational interpretations that go beyond the simple, natural meaning of what the text says.
- Wherever possible, when the text, on the basis of Scripture, is open to two equally valid understandings, the translator should attempt to preserve both options. When this is not possible, one of the options can be preserved in a footnote. (For example, does a passage refer to the Spirit or to our spirit?)

The duty of a translator is to convey all the meaning (or the openness to more than one meaning), all the beauty (or the ugliness), all the style (high or low), and all the emotional impact of the original text into the translation. Anyone who has ever tried translating realizes that it is impossible to meet this goal fully, but translators must strive to come as close as they can to achieving these goals.

Though translation involves some academic skills, biblical translation is above all an exercise of faith and spiritual gifts. Although any skilled linguist who is fluent in the source language and the receiving language can do an acceptable job of rendering the literal sense of the words of Scripture, the most important qualities for a Bible translator to possess are a thorough knowledge of the whole message of Scripture, the aptitude to let Scripture interpret Scripture, and a humble

willingness to submit to everything which Scripture says. It was this aptitude, more than the depth of his knowledge of the original languages that made Martin Luther such a great translator.

A translator must adhere to the principle that Scripture interprets Scripture. This is especially true in communicating the doctrines of Scripture.

- Since Scripture was delivered to the human authors by one divine author, one passage of Scripture cannot be set against another. There are no conflicting theologies in the Bible.
- New Testament interpretations of the meaning of Old Testament prophecies is to be accepted. The translator will recognize and preserve direct prophecy where the immediate context or other testimony of Scripture indicates direct prophecy. To obtain a clear understanding of Scripture readers need to recognize the presence of Christ in both testaments.

What is the Wartburg Project?

The Wartburg Project is an association of Lutheran professors, pastors, and lay people who are working together to produce a new translation of the Bible, the *Evangelical Heritage Version*.

For each book of the Bible a lead translator produces a draft translation, using the best sources available to produce a translation that aims to preserve the heritage of English Bible translation and also to offer fresh insights.

Each book is then reviewed by several technical reviewers on the basis of the Greek or Hebrew text. These reviewers work independently of one another, and their reactions and preferences are collated by the testament editor. Based on discussions between the editor and the translator and technical reviewers, a second-stage draft of the translation is prepared.

This translation goes through popular review by pastors, teachers, and laypeople for clarity and readability. After this input is collated, a final draft is prepared for publication.

Our web site contains more detailed descriptions of our procedure.

The project is *collaborative*. No biblical book will be produced by or identified with the name of one individual.

The project is *grassroots*. The *Evangelical Heritage Version* is not the official product of any church body or publishing business (though it is being published and distributed by Northwestern Publishing House). The project is blessed with a heavy involvement of parish pastors, men who work with the Word in the daily life of the church. Laypeople and congregations are involved in testing and giving feedback to the translation. For example, many congregations have had the opportunity to test the translation of the gospels by their use of the Lenten Passion History which is available at our web site or from Northwestern Publishing House.

The *Evangelical Heritage Version* is a translation *addressed to the church*. Though the Bible is intended for the whole world, for the most part the original books of the Bible were addressed to the church, to the body of believers. Some of the books were first addressed to specific congregations or individuals. Although the *Evangelical Heritage Version* is designed to be useful for the evangelism efforts of the church, like the original books of the Bible it is addressed to the

preaching, teaching, worship life, and devotional use of the church. It aims to be an all-purpose Bible for the church. (God willing, a study Bible will follow, and perhaps such specialized products as a simplified Bible, a children's Bible, various levels of commentaries, etc.)

Working on this translation has been great blessing to the participants. We pray using it will be a blessing to you.