

Reflections on the 10th Anniversary of the Wartburg Project

The first organizational meeting took place in a small living room on September 17, 2013. There had already been a lot of discussion about whether or not a new translation could (or should) be attempted. Those discussions and that organizational meeting followed the decision of the 2013 Synod convention not to investigate the feasibility of a translation. Sentiments expressed at that synod convention, however, encouraged those who wished to undertake a translation to give it a try. Some delegates had noted that those who were interested in pursuing such a project could undertake it as a parasynodical project—one not supported by the synod budget. That encouragement led to the founding meeting of the Wartburg Project which led to the Evangelical Heritage Version. Ten years have passed since then. The passing of a decade provides a good opportunity for some anniversary reflections.

Lessons Learned

There were so many lessons learned after that first meeting that only a few of them can be mentioned now. Certainly, we wanted the translation to be faithful to the original (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek) texts of Scripture. The two editors agreed right after the meeting on September 17, 2013 that the new translation should read more smoothly than the ESV yet be more literal than the NIV. That's what we would aim for. Independent evaluations such as that of Bible Gateway have ranked the EHV in that aimed-for spot.

Dr. John Brug, who had served for decades as a professor of Old Testament and Christian doctrine, was willing to serve as general editor and Old Testament editor of the project. He led the way by coming up with a beginning list of translation principles and rubrics. As we continued to work on the translation, that list grew and grew. There are so many decisions that need to be made in producing a translation. We learned many lessons along the way. Eventually, the "Principles and Rubrics" document grew to 47 pages. The 6th edition can be seen here: <https://wartburgproject.org/rubrics>

Again, led by our general editor, we developed our own process for producing the translation. That process is described in FAQ 24: <https://wartburgproject.org/faqs/2016/09/suggestions-for-improvement>

We learned that God has blessed many believers with gifts that helped to produce the EHV translation. It wasn't just professors and pastors who served. Once there was a translation, there were dedicated lay members to help with proofreading and providing feedback.

There were some fine points to learn along the way. Professor Brug provided guidance in the lessons of the Old Testament. He mentioned that, by doing this work, he was learning lessons along the way too. Professor David Kuske was a big help in producing the New Testament translation. He worked along New Testament editor, Pastor Brian Keller, and provided knowledge and the experience he had gained as a long-time professor (of the Greek New Testament) and translator. He reviewed all of the New Testament translations. He helped us with all of the textual decisions. This article provides just one example of lessons we learned from him: <https://wartburgproject.org/articles/2023/01/translating-connectives-in-the-new-testament>

We could go on and on with lessons learned, but let's move to some blessings.

Blessings

Even if no translation had ever been published, one clear blessing was the opportunity to work closely with God's Word. Working intensely with the Scriptural text led to the blessing of greater familiarity with God's Word. How exciting it was to finally move on from the stage of debating whether it could or should be done to just trying to do it! It felt like being a calf released from the stall! We were

actually going to attempt to translate the Bible! This is what Luther did in the Wartburg Castle, that is why *The Wartburg Project* was chosen as a name for this endeavor. What a privilege!

It was a special personal blessing to be able to work closely with professors and with graduates and supporters of our Ministry Education schools. Our pastors who participated have indeed learned not only how to translate God's Word to gain necessary insights for preaching and teaching, but also to translate so that a fresh, readable, faithful edition of the Holy Bible could be produced for the church at large.

In addition to the blessing of gifted men who were willing to serve as translators and reviewers, there were gifted lay readers too. Some very dedicated and gifted women spent many hours proofreading and critiquing our work. God blessed us with some generous donors who supported the work with financial offerings. We also received a considerable amount of helpful input from beyond our fellowship, indeed from beyond Lutheranism. These blessings all made it possible to continue the work on a translation.

There are more blessings than we can count, but surely one was that we would finally "own" a translation that wouldn't be taken away from us. If we could produce an acceptable translation, we would no longer be at the mercy of other publishers. If the 1984 edition of the NIV had continued to be available to us, we probably wouldn't have done all this work. But after ten years, there are so many blessings from the efforts of the Wartburg Project that it is difficult to imagine a world in which none of it might have happened. If God had not wanted it to happen, nothing would have been accomplished, but he blessed our efforts together.

Now that the EHV translation has been produced, it is a blessing that we can freely use it as we wish, even as we retain control over the translation of the Biblical text. We can freely give it away to others to do outreach. We can grant rights for the text to be used in other works, as a blessing for the church at large. We can use it in writing projects. We can enjoy reading it devotionally.

A number of times parish pastors have (as they prepared for preaching and Bible class) observed that they thought the EHV didn't "read right" in a certain passage – until they looked at the original text and discovered that the EHV was a better translation than the familiar words and phrases that they had been recalling. As parish pastors, they are blessed to be able to use the EHV many times every day as they read devotions, preach, teach, and deliver devotions to others, etc. What a blessing!

Over these years, God used his Word to cause our faith and knowledge to grow too!

This list could go on and on, but one more blessing has been the friendship, connections, and fellowship with others who served on this project. Not only that, but many people have encouraged us as they expressed appreciation for the EHV and all the work that went into it, including many from outside our circles. All of this results in thanksgiving and praise to God.

What has been accomplished after 10 years, by God's grace

The EHV New Testament and Psalms special edition was already published and available in 2017. The full EHV Bible was published and available from Northwestern Publishing House in 2019. The EHV print Study Bible was published in 2021. The EHV Bible and Study Bible are also available electronically. It remains astonishing how quickly and efficiently these were produced. It didn't cost us millions of dollars nor did it take decades of work, thanks to volunteers and to available resources and to the era of computer resources.

A number of other works have been published too. There are Gospel harmonies and catechisms and commentaries. There are devotional works. There are evangelism materials. There are worship resources. The EHV has been used in issues of *Meditations*. We now have an updated website that serves to display what's been accomplished: <https://wartburgproject.org/>

- Scroll down to see some works that use the EHV text here: <https://wartburgproject.org/purchase>

- Many articles have been written which can be seen here: <https://wartburgproject.org/articles>
- Many questions have been answered in the FAQs posted here: <https://wartburgproject.org/faqs>
- Multiple resources are available here: <https://wartburgproject.org/resources>
- Monthly reports tell the history of the project here:
<https://wartburgproject.org/articles/categories/monthly-reports>

Some of the historical background behind the formation of the Wartburg Project is recorded in FAQ 25: <https://wartburgproject.org/faqs/2016/10/previous-ideas-of-lutheran-translations>

After ten years, it seems fitting to offer a prayer of thanks to God.

Prayer: Lord God, heavenly Father, thank you for the gift of your holy Word and for graciously granting us the privilege to study it, translate it, proclaim it, and publish it. Without your help, we could accomplish nothing. Yet, with your gracious blessing, much has been accomplished to your glory. The Evangelical Heritage Version and a Study Bible have been produced and published. May we always give to you alone all glory and praise! Bless your saving Word, so that many people read it, hear it, and share it. Cause the EHV to be a blessing for many people. Help us to carefully and faithfully guard and keep your Word pure in the future, so that it is readily available for people to read, hear, learn, proclaim, teach, and use in worship. May your Holy Spirit work powerfully through your Word so that faith is increased and many more people believe in Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, and the only Savior from sin. In his name, we ask that your will would be done. Amen.

Pastor Brian Keller