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DEU, Mütercim
Tercümanlık

Martin Luther as a Translator

Born: November 10, 1483

Died: February 18, 1546

Education: Philosophy at the
University of Erfurt,
Bachelor's degree, Master's
degree

Languages: Hebrew, Greek,
Latin, German

for further reading:



WHO IS MARTIN LUTHER?

German theologian and religious reformer Martin Luther served as the motivation for the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century. Luther's words and deeds set off a chain of events that recast some fundamental Christian doctrines and split Western Christendom between Roman Catholicism and the emerging Protestant groups, which included Lutheranism, Calvinism, Anglicanism, the Anabaptists, and the anti-Trinitarians. He is among the most important individuals in Christian history.

Scholars concur that Luther's translation was liberated for its day. Luther wanted to create a version that could be read. The translations of Luther's favorite Old Testament book, the Psalms, show the liberties he took to make the text understandable to German readers. He claimed that the Scriptures are the words of God and not human authors, and he wanted David to "sound purely German." He states, "I chose to do violence to the German language rather than to depart from the word," adding, "I have been very careful to see that where everything turns on a single passage, I have kept to the original quite literally and have not lightly departed from it."

LUTHER'S NEW TESTAMENT TRANSLATION

For the three months he spent imprisoned in the Wartburg Castle (Dec. 8, 1521–early March 1522), Luther started translating the New Testament into German from Latin and Greek so that everyone in the "Holy Roman Empire of the German nation" could have easier access to it.

Luther made use of Erasmus' Latin New Testament, Second Edition (1519), with Greek annotations. After leaving the castle, he worked with Greek expert Phillip Melancthon to revise passages that remained unclear to him. Luther had studied Greek at the Brethren of the Common Life-run Latin schools in Deventer, the Netherlands, and Magdeburg, Germany, just like Erasmus had.

In the latter half of the fifteenth century, these lay brothers introduced Greek as a new subject to their curriculum. Greek was hardly taught at universities at the time.

Printed in September of 1522, this translation—also referred to as the "September Bible"—contained only the New Testament. The Bible was also released by Luther in small octavo format.

Luther ventured into neighboring towns and marketplaces to listen to people speak in order to assist him with translating into modern German. By translating as closely to their current language usage as possible, he hoped to ensure their comprehension. Six months after his return to Wittenberg, this translation—dubbed the "September Bible"—was released.