



Luther Bible

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This artifact comes to us from over the centuries and across the oceans. It is a priceless heirloom of the Reformation, brought to Australia as a treasured family possession by German immigrants in the nineteenth century. The Bible was presented to the Immanuel Seminary, a forerunner of the Australian Lutheran College, by J.E. Kotzur of Henty in 1954.


The *Luther Bible* is an early printed work, published in Wittenberg in Germany in 1551. It was done in the workshop of Hans Lufft, the town printer, who printed most of Luther's works. The first edition of the Bible, as translated by Luther, was published in 1534, and illustrated by artists from the workshop of Lucas Cranach Sr. It was republished in facsimile form in 2003. Löhe Memorial Library owns a copy of this two volume facsimile.

The book itself is a large and heavy object, measuring 25cm. in width, 37 cm. in length and 13 cm. in height. It has covers of tooled pigskin and metal corners and clasps. The title is within an illustrated border: *Biblia Das ist: die gantze heilige Schrift: Deusch. Auff's neu zugericht. Doct. Mart. Luth. Gedruckt zu Wittemberg, durch Hans Lufft, 1551.*

There follow 344 pages of text from Genesis to the Song of Songs. There is a separate title page for the prophets: *Die Propheten alle Deutsch. Doct. Mart. Luth ... 1550* and a separate pagination sequence, 382 pages of Prophetic books, Apocrypha and the New Testament. There is no separate title page for the New Testament.

The particular beauty of this edition lies in its illustrations. They are all done as woodcuts and hand coloured. The *Luther Bible* has a total of 172 in-text illustrations, two illustrated title pages and one full-page frontispiece to Genesis 1. The latter is signed with his initials by the artist, Hans Brosamer (c.1500–1554) and dated 1550. This artist also produced many of the other illustrations in the book, including the title page for the prophets, and the illustrations of the gospels and the epistles.

The initial letter of each chapter is illustrated and coloured throughout the book. In the second book of the Bible, a second artist's initials appear in illustrations: Georg



Lemberger (c.1490–1540). This artist illustrated some of the earlier editions of the Bible as they appeared in sections from the printer in the years before the whole translation was complete. Most of the illustrations are, however, unsigned. The first dozen books of the Bible are profusely illustrated and their rich colours have survived because they have been kept out of the light in a closed book for the last 450 years.


For the Prophetical books, the Apocrypha and the New Testament, the illustrations are mainly restricted to the beginning of each book, which serve the purpose of delineating one book from the next. The four gospels are each only illustrated with a depiction of the gospel writer and his attendant symbol, a winged beast. However, the most richly illustrated book in the Bible is the last one, Revelation, with 26 illustrations.

Hans Brosamer (c.1500-1554)

We know little of the life of this artist. What we know of his creative life and the places he lived, comes from the book illustrations, paintings, woodcut portraits and copperplate engravings which bear his monogram, HB. No portrait or self-portrait of the artist has survived. He was probably born in Fulda and died in Erfurt. A tailor's knife has been found also bearing his monogram, so he also must have worked as a tailor (Gotzkowsky 2002, 11).

Brosamer did many illustrations for works of Luther apart from this Bible. He illustrated the *Church Postils*, sermons on the set texts of the lectionary, and numerous editions of the *Epistle and Gospel Readings*. He also illustrated the *Small Catechism* and the *Large Catechism*. His illustrations are characterized by their great detail and the expressive faces of the subjects. He was as much at home with landscapes as with urban scenes and interiors. The illustrations of the book of Revelation in this Bible have all been attributed to Brosamer (Gotzkowsky 2009, 296-308).

It is interesting to note that probably the first portrait of Martin Luther done by Brosamer was the famous “*Seven-headed Luther*”. This was on the title page of the anti-Lutheran book written by John Cochlaeus and printed by Valentin Schumann in Leipzig in 1529. In this image, Luther is depicted as a doctor of theology, a monk, a heretic (in Turkish head-dress), a pastor, an enthusiast (with flies buzzing around his head), a parish inspector, and a Barabbas, or an armed rebel (Gotzkowsky 2009, 191).



After Brosamer's chief client, Hermann Gülfferich, died in Frankfurt in 1554, his production of artworks ceases and nothing is known of his subsequent fate.

George Lemberger (c.1490–1540)

We know even less of the life of this artist. No self-portrait has survived.

A German painter and draughtsman, Lemberger was probably the son of a painter and woodcarver, Simon Lainberger, and was born in Landshut. This would make him the brother of the woodcarver, Hans Leinberger. He was trained by his father and by the leading artist of the Danube School, Albrecht Altdorfer (1480–s1538).

The influence of the Danube School can be seen in Lemberger's elaborate landscapes, a hallmark of his illustrations here. A characteristic of his style is the long drooping foliage of the pine trees, looking like horses' tails.

He was a creator of woodcut designs and also the actual woodcuts. He left Regensburg in 1523 and moved to Leipzig, but nine years later he was deported as a "convinced Lutheran" and went to Magdeburg. Lemberger became known as a book illuminator; one of the most prominent of the period. He illuminated the *Niederdeutsche Bibel* for Johannes Bugenhagen with 117 illustrations (Reinitzer 1983, 184).


He died in Magdeburg or Leipzig sometime after 1540.

Notes on Illustrations

Title Page & Prophets title page (P2-1)

The border illustration is the same for both pages: the barren tree of the law and the leafy tree of the gospel. This famous image was first developed by Lucas Cranach in oil paintings, and recast as a title page in the 1541 edition of the Luther Bible (Pettegree 2000, 475).

The left hand side shows Adam and Eve sinning, and in the background, the snake on the wooden cross in the wilderness. In the foreground, Moses holds the tablets of the law, while an unfortunate sinner is being driven into the fires of hell by death and a beast wearing a cardinal's hat. In the fire can be seen a monk and a figure wearing a bishop's mitre.



On the right hand side, a muscular Christ is driving a spear through both a dragon, representing the devil, and a skeleton, representing death. In the background, Mary is shown receiving the message of her forthcoming conception. In fact, the baby is coming to her on a beam of light from heaven. In the foreground, Christ is depicted on the cross, with a stream of blood flowing onto a half-naked sinner. John the Baptizer is pointing the sinner to the source of his forgiveness.

Note the different dates on the two title pages: 1550 for the Prophets, while the main title page has been changed by hand to 1551.

Genesis 1

The Creation story: OT01

The frontispiece of the Bible is the only full page illustration, showing the creation of Eve from the side of the sleeping Adam. God is the largest figure in the illustration, shown wearing a rich, maroon robe and with flames emanating from his head. The maroon colour has leaked slightly onto the adjacent paper. In the background, Adam and Eve are shown eating the forbidden fruit, recommended to them by the snake. The tree is very definitely an apple tree. Also in the background, an angel is expelling the pair from the garden. They are still naked, showing no sign of the clothes God had given them. A rich assortment of animals is shown, from a snail to a lion, and even including a unicorn. The antlered deer in the foreground is depicted in careful detail. However, there is an elephant lurking in the background forest, which shows that the illustrator had never seen a live specimen. You can also see a unicorn there. The illustration is signed by Hans Brosamer with his initials, and dated 1550.



Biblia

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heilige Schrift:
Deutsch.

Luffs new zugericht.

Doct. Mart. Luth.

Gedruckt zu Witten-
berg / Durch Hans Lufft.

M. D. LI.



