

BIBLE TRANSLATION

An Open Book

The Berean Bibles and the Lutheran Reader

Essay · By **Larry Herzog Jr.** · *Ordinary Means*
Free for congregational use · larryherzogjr.com

Why the Question Matters

Many Lutheran laypeople who have looked up a verse on their phone have read the Berean Standard Bible, whether they knew it or not. It is the base text behind much of Bible Hub, it ships in YouVersion, Logos, Accordance, and STEP Bible, and it costs nothing to quote. Pastors drop it into bulletins. Sunday school teachers paste it into handouts. Builders of free Bible software reach for it first, because nobody can send them an invoice.

That reach makes it fair to ask the question a confessional Lutheran asks of any translation: does it let the text say what the text says, especially where Christ attaches His promises to water, to bread, and to the cup? This essay answers by looking at three things: who made the Berean Bibles, how they made them, and what they did with the passages where the Lutheran Confessions stand or fall.

The short answer is this. The Berean Standard Bible is a sound, honest, and unusually checkable translation that stumbles in one notable place, 1 Peter 3:21. Its companion editions, especially the Berean Literal Bible and the Berean Interlinear Bible, are among the best free tools a Lutheran layperson can own. The study notes that surround the text on Bible Hub are another matter, and a reader needs to know the difference. The essay closes with Ad Fontes, the free study application I built on these texts to make that difference easy to see.

What the Berean Bibles Are

The Berean Bible is not one translation but a family of them, built in tiers over the same tagged Hebrew and Greek data. The project names four tiers: an interlinear that follows the original word order, a literal translation, a modern English translation for public reading and study, and an emphasized translation. In practice the reader meets them as the Berean Interlinear Bible (BIB), the Berean Literal Bible (BLB), and the Berean Standard Bible (BSB), originally called the Berean Study Bible. Two relatives sit beside them: the Berean Annotated Bible, which inserts glosses into the BSB text, and the Majority Standard Bible, which carries the BSB's style over to the Byzantine majority text.

The New Testament appeared in 2016 and the whole Bible in 2020. The Old Testament follows the Leningrad Codex and the New Testament follows the Nestle-Aland critical text, the same base texts behind the ESV and NIV. Mark 16:9-20 is printed without brackets, with a footnote noting that some early manuscripts end at verse 8.

Bible Hub funded and coordinated the work. The core translation, styling, and proofing came from the Bible Hub and Discovery Bible teams, working under an advisory committee:

- **Grant Osborne** (New Testament lead), longtime professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and a senior translator for the NLT
- **Eugene Merrill** (Old Testament lead), professor emeritus at Dallas Theological Seminary
- **Gary Hill**, general editor of The Discovery Bible and the project's original languages coordinator
- **Maury Robertson**, longtime Greek professor at Gateway Seminary, a Southern Baptist school
- **Ulrik Sandborg-Petersen**, a Danish software engineer who builds annotated biblical text databases
- **Baruch Korman**, a Messianic Jewish Bible teacher in Israel with a doctorate on the translation technique of the Septuagint

That is a capable panel and a narrow one. It is evangelical and inerrantist, mostly Baptist or dispensational in its church life, with a New Testament lead known for Arminian sympathies. No member stands in a tradition that confesses baptismal regeneration or the true presence of Christ's body and blood in the Supper. That fact settles nothing by itself, but it tells a Lutheran exactly where to look.

Transparency: A Translation You Can Check

The Berean project's best feature is that it shows its work. Every English word in the BSB is linked to the Hebrew or Greek word behind it, and the full translation tables are published for anyone to download and dispute. On Bible Hub a reader can hover over a word and see its lexical form and parsing, then move from the BSB to the BLB to the interlinear for the same verse in two clicks.

This matters to Lutherans in a particular way. Our doctrine of the sacraments rests on the bare words of institution and promise, not on a translator's summary of them. At Marburg, Luther chalked *Hoc est corpus meum* on the table and refused to move off the word "is." A layperson who can see for himself that Peter wrote *sōzei*, "saves," in the present tense, or that Paul wrote *koinōnia*, "participation," can test any English rendering against the text.

That is what the name promises. The Bereans of Acts 17:11 "examined the Scriptures every day to see if these teachings were true" (BSB), and the Formula of Concord confesses that the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures are the only rule and norm by which all teachers and teachings are judged (FC Ep, Rule and Norm 1, Kolb-Wengert). A confessional Lutheran is a Berean by conviction.

Transparency is not neutrality. Linking a word to its Greek original shows what the word is, not whether the translator handled it well. But the tiers do something no single translation can: when the BSB smooths a phrase toward one reading, the BLB and the interlinear usually leave the original exposed right beside it. The sections below lean on exactly that.

Free to Use: The Church Owns This Bible

On April 30, 2023, the translation team dedicated the Berean Bible and Majority Bible texts to the public domain under a Creative Commons CC0 dedication. Their terms page says all uses are freely permitted. Attribution is appreciated but not required, and the only request is that anyone who alters the text not publish the altered version under the Berean name.

For a congregation, that removes every practical barrier. A church can print all of Romans for a Bible class, record its own audio Bible, load the full text into an app, or translate a study into another language without a permission form. A layman can write a Bible study, include every verse in full, and sell it at cost or give it away. The ESV, NIV, and CSB all set ceilings on how many verses may be quoted and require permission beyond them. Even the NET, which is free to read online, carries conditions.

There is something fitting in this for Lutherans. Luther translated so that the mother in the house and the children in the street could hear God speak German, and his Bible spread because printers were free to print it. A Bible held in common by the church, rather than licensed to it, honors that instinct. The usual objection, that copyright protects a text from corruption, does not hold up: the KJV has been in the public domain in most of the world for generations without a flood of bad editions, because reliable sources remain easy to find. For the BSB, that source is berean.bible.

The Baptism Test

On baptism, the BSB lets nearly every promise stand as written. The committee's own churches treat baptism as an ordinance of obedience, yet in eight of the nine key passages the English says what the Greek says: baptism saves, washes away sins, gives new birth, and joins the baptized to Christ's death and resurrection.

Passage	Berean Standard Bible	Verdict
Mark 16:16	"Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."	Sound. Printed without brackets; the footnote on verse 8 is fair.
John 3:5	"no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit."	Sound. Water stays water.
Acts 2:38		

Passage	Berean Standard Bible	Verdict
	“be baptized, every one of Sound. No “because of,” you, in the name of Jesus which some versions supply Christ for the forgiveness of to cut the tie between baptism and forgiveness.	
Acts 22:16	“Get up, be baptized, and wash your sins away, calling Sound. on His name.”	
Romans 6:3-4	“all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death ... buried Sound. with Him through baptism into death”	
Galatians 3:27	“all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.”	Acceptable. The middle voice allows “clothed yourselves” (NASB and NET agree), but the BLB’s “have put on Christ” keeps the baptized from sounding like the actor.
Colossians 2:12	“having been buried with Him in baptism, you were raised with Him through Sound. your faith in the power of God”	
Titus 3:5	“He saved us ... through the washing of new birth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.”	Sound. The Small Catechism’s own proof text, intact.
1 Peter 3:21	“And this water symbolizes the baptism that now saves you also” ... “the pledge of a Weak. See below. clear conscience toward God”	

The one real stumble is 1 Peter 3:21, and it comes in two words.

The first is “symbolizes.” Peter calls baptism the *antitypon*, the counterpart or fulfillment of the flood. The BSB’s sentence technically keeps the right direction, with the flood water standing for the baptism that “now saves you.” But putting the word “symbol” into the one verse in Scripture that says baptism saves hands the memorialist reader exactly the category he brings with him. The ESV’s “Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you” and the BLB’s “which also corresponds to the baptism now saving you” both avoid the problem.

The second is “pledge.” The Greek *eperōtēma* is rare and debated. It can mean a request, an appeal, or a formal answer, and some lexicons allow “pledge.” But “the pledge of a clear conscience” makes baptism the believer’s promise to God, which is precisely Baptist covenant theology, while “an appeal to God for a good conscience” (ESV) leaves baptism as God’s gift received. In fairness, the BSB’s own footnote offers “Or appeal for,” and the NET, CSB, and NIV also say “pledge” in the main text, so this is not a Berean peculiarity. A Lutheran teacher using any of them should point the class to the alternative.

Notice what the BSB did not do. It did not drop “saves,” soften “now,” or wrap the verse in a paraphrase. Peter’s claim that baptism “now saves you” survives in the English, and the Small Catechism’s question, how can water do such great things, can still be asked of this text.

The Supper Test

On the Lord’s Supper the BSB is stronger still. The words of institution read as the church has always heard them, and the one passage where translators most often tip their hand, 1 Corinthians 10:16, comes through better in the BSB than in its own literal companion.

Passage	Berean Standard Bible	Verdict
Matthew 26:26-28	“Take and eat; this is My body.” ... “This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”	Sound. “Is,” not “represents.”
Luke 22:19-20	“This is My body, given for you” ... “This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is poured out for you.”	Sound.
1 Corinthians 10:16	“Is not the cup of blessing that we bless a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?”	Strong. “Participation” for <i>koinōnia</i> is better than the BLB’s weaker “fellowship.”
1 Corinthians 11:24	“This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me.”	Sound.
1 Corinthians 11:27	“will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord.”	Acceptable, with a supplied phrase. See below.
1 Corinthians 11:29	“anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the	Sound. Unlike the NIV, it does not add “of Christ”; un-

Passage	Berean Standard Bible	Verdict
	body eats and drinks judgment on himself.”	like the CEV, it does not turn the body into the congregation.

1 Corinthians 10:16 deserves a word. Paul asks whether the blessed cup is not a *koinōnia* in the blood of Christ and the broken bread a *koinōnia* in His body. “Participation” says that those who receive the bread and the cup receive something, namely the body and blood themselves. “Fellowship” can drift toward the believers’ fellowship with each other. Here the BSB holds the line better than the BLB, and as well as the ESV.

The soft spot is 1 Corinthians 11:27. Paul says the unworthy communicant is *enochos*, liable or answerable, for the body and blood of the Lord. The BSB, following the NIV and CSB, supplies “of sinning against.” The NET and the BLB both keep the plainer “guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.” The BSB’s own footnote, “Or will be responsible for the,” points the same way, but the main text is what most people read. The supplied phrase does not deny the presence, but it lets a reader hear a general sin of disrespect toward Christ’s sacrifice rather than an offense against the body and blood actually received. That distinction is the hinge of the Formula of Concord’s teaching that the unworthy also receive Christ’s body and blood, to their judgment (FC SD VII, Kolb-Wengert). A Lutheran teaching this verse from the BSB should show the class the BLB beside it.

It is worth saying plainly: a committee whose churches largely hold a memorial view of the Supper produced a text in which Jesus says “this is My body” and Paul calls the bread a participation in it. That is what an essentially literal method looks like when it is followed honestly, and it deserves credit.

Where to Watch

The committee’s theology shows up less in the translation than in what surrounds it. A Lutheran reader needs to keep the text and its neighbors apart.

The study notes on Bible Hub. Bible Hub prints its own commentary beside the BSB, and those notes are not part of the translation. They teach an evangelical ordinance theology openly. On Acts 2:38 they call baptism the believer’s public, obedient response and add that the water itself does not save. On Mark 16 they describe baptism as the public confession of an inward faith. On 1 Corinthians 10:16 they call the cup a memorial of Christ’s sacrifice. A layperson who reads the BSB on Bible Hub gets a sound text with a Baptist commentary wrapped around it, and may not notice the seam.

The Berean Annotated Bible. The annotated edition inserts parenthetical glosses into the BSB itself. In Acts 2:38 it renders “be baptized (submerged),” and in 1 Peter 3:21 “the baptism (submersion).” That is an immersionist gloss placed inside the line of Scripture. The New Testament itself uses the word for the washing of cups, pots, and dining couches (Mark 7:4) and for washing before a meal (Luke 11:38), so mode is not in the word. Lutherans should not use the annotated edition for teaching.

The lexical helps. The hover glosses and the HELPS Word-studies that ride along with the text on Bible Hub are useful, but they are interpretive, and HELPS in particular is devotional. The gloss for *baptizō*, for instance, leads with “dip, submerge.” Treat them as one teacher’s notes, not as the Greek.

The small supplied phrases. The places where the BSB supplies words, as in 1 Corinthians 11:27, are not marked in the text the way older translations used italics. Its footnotes often give the more literal alternative, but on most verse pages and phone screens they are easy to miss. The BLB and the interlinear are the check.

None of this is unique to the Berean Bibles. Every translation is made by people with convictions, and every study Bible teaches the theology of its editors. Zwingli read the same Greek as Luther and still said “is” means “signifies.” A faithful translation cannot stop a false reading. It can only refuse to do the false reading’s work for it, and on the sacramental texts the BSB mostly refuses.

A Lutheran Workbench: Ad Fontes

I should say plainly that I have a stake here. Ad Fontes, the Bible study environment I publish under the Ordinary Means imprint, is built on the Berean texts. It exists because of the argument this essay has been making: a transparent translation the church may freely reuse can be read in a setting built for Lutheran readers, instead of inside someone else’s commentary.

Ad Fontes runs in the browser at ad-fontes.app and as desktop apps for macOS and Windows. Reading is free and needs no account; only private notes require a sign-in. The Berean Standard Bible is its foundational English reader, set beside six other named editions.

Edition	Language	What it adds
Berean Standard Bible (BSB)	English	The readable base text, with its publisher footnotes
Berean Literal Bible (BLB)	English	The literal tier, the check on the BSB’s smoothing (labeled a publisher draft)
Majority Standard Bible (MSB)	English	The BSB’s style carried over to the Byzantine majority text
Young’s Literal Translation (1898)	English	An older literal translation from the Textus Receptus tradition
Nestle 1904	Greek	A critical text close to the one behind the BSB

Edition	Language	What it adds
Robinson-Pierpont 2018	Greek	The Byzantine majority text
Boyd Textus Receptus (2022)	Greek	The text family behind the KJV

Three features answer the problems raised above.

Compare editions. Select a verse and choose Compare editions, and all seven readings line up with the publishers' footnotes in view. This is where the BSB earns back some ground. At [1 Peter 3:21](#), the BSB's own footnote on "pledge" reads "Or appeal for." At [1 Corinthians 11:27](#), its footnote gives the plain sense the main text paraphrases: "Or will be responsible for the" body and blood of the Lord. At 1 Corinthians 11:29, it notes that the Byzantine and Textus Receptus texts read "the body of the Lord," and the MSB, Robinson-Pierpont, and Boyd rows show exactly that. The BSB is more candid than its main text suggests, but only a reader who sees the notes knows it, and verse pages on a phone rarely show them.

Explore Greek. The Greek panel gives an interlinear of Nestle 1904 with the Berean contextual glosses, plus lemma, parsing, Strong's numbers, a lexicon definition on hover, and every other occurrence of the same word. A Bible class can open [1 Peter 3:21](#) and look at *eperōtēma*, or open 1 Corinthians 11:27 and look at *enochos*, and see what the English is working with. The panel is honest about its limits: it shows the Greek and its glosses, not a word-for-word alignment to the BSB.

Commentary kept in its place. Every note I add is labeled "Ordinary Means commentary" and kept visibly apart from Scripture and from the publishers' notes. That is the seam Bible Hub blurs. The app's 104 Textual Comparisons cover all 27 books, many with a Codex Sinaiticus plate, and they describe what differs between the editions and what it changes in the reading without dressing commentary up as text.

Several of those comparisons sit right on the sacramental passages:

- [Mark 16:9-20](#). All seven editions print the longer ending, including "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved." Nestle sets it in brackets, and the BSB and MSB footnote the manuscripts that end at verse 8.
- [Acts 8:37](#). The eunuch's confession before his baptism appears only in Boyd's Textus Receptus and, in brackets, in Young's. The BSB prints the Textus Receptus reading in a footnote at verse 36.
- [Luke 22:19-20](#). Publisher notes report a shorter form that stops partway through verse 19 and omits the cup saying. All seven editions print the longer text, "given for you" and "the new covenant in My blood" included.
- [1 Corinthians 11:24](#). The Byzantine and Textus Receptus texts add "Take, eat" and read "broken for you"; the BSB, BLB, and Nestle read "which is for you."

That last comparison makes a point worth carrying out of this essay. The editions disagree over “broken.” They do not disagree over “is.” Critical, Byzantine, and Textus Receptus alike, all seven have the Lord saying “This is My body.” A layperson who has watched those seven rows line up has been given more than a translator’s assurance. He has checked it for himself, which is exactly what the Bereans did.

Verdict: Use It, and Use It Berean-Style

The Berean Standard Bible is a sound choice for Lutherans, and on the sacramental texts it is better than its makers’ theology would lead anyone to expect. Its one clear weakness, “symbolizes” and “pledge” in 1 Peter 3:21, is shared in part by the NIV, CSB, and NET, and its own footnote and literal tier correct it. Add the fact that the church may print, record, adapt, and distribute it without asking anyone, and it earns a place on a Lutheran’s shelf.

A few practical guidelines follow.

1. **For free congregational material**, the BSB is a reasonable text to quote in full. Where 1 Peter 3:21 or 1 Corinthians 11:27 comes up, add a sentence that shows the reader the Greek.
2. **For study**, read the BSB with the BLB beside it. The BLB is clunkier, but it is the check on every smoothing the BSB does. Ad Fontes sets them side by side, with the Greek and the BSB’s footnotes a click away.
3. **For teaching the languages**, the Berean Interlinear Bible is one of the best free tools available to a lay class. It lets people see *sōzei* and *koinōnia* for themselves.
4. **Avoid the Berean Annotated Bible** for teaching, and warn people that the study notes on Bible Hub are not the translation and do not teach what Lutherans confess.
5. **Do not trust any one translation with the sacraments**. Teach people to ask of every Bible what the Bereans asked of Paul: is it so?

The Bereans did not receive Paul’s message because they trusted the messenger. They received it because they opened the Scriptures and found that it was so. The Berean Bibles, for all the limits of the men who made them, make that kind of checking easier and cheaper than it has ever been. Lutherans, who confess that Christ comes to us in water, bread, and the cup because He said so, have every reason to take them up and check.

Sources

- [Berean Bible: Terms and Conditions](#) (public domain dedication, April 30, 2023)
- [Translation Tiers](#) and [Translation Process](#), Berean Bibles
- [Berean Standard Bible appraisal and translator biographies](#), Gracious Tech
- Bible Hub verse and parallel pages: [Acts 2:38](#), [1 Peter 3:21](#), [1 Corinthians 10:16](#), [1 Corinthians 11:27](#), [1 Corinthians 11:29](#), [John 3:5](#), [Galatians 3:27](#), [Mark 16 \(BSB\)](#)

- [Ad Fontes](#), Ordinary Means: BSB publisher footnotes at 1 Peter 3:21 and 1 Corinthians 11:27, 29, and Textual Comparisons for Mark 16:9-20, Acts 8:37, Luke 22:19-20, and 1 Corinthians 11:24
- *The Book of Concord*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Fortress, 2000): Small Catechism, Baptism; Formula of Concord, Epitome, Rule and Norm; Solid Declaration VII

Scripture quotations marked BSB are from the Berean Standard Bible, which has been dedicated to the public domain.