

STUDY ON THE BIBLE

Session 5 - Which Bible is best for me?

Over the past four sessions, we have seen that the Bible is God's Word and how both the Old and New Testaments came into the form we have them now. In this session we are going to examine the multitude of different modern Bibles in the English language, the purpose they were commissioned, some of the history behind them, and which Bible may be best for you. I also have a few helpful tools listed on a separate sheet for your help in understanding various English Bibles.

Before we get started, we need to look at the various types of Bibles. Bibles are generally categorized by the guiding principles used to create the Bible. There are four general patterns of thought when it comes to putting forward a Bible (in any language).

1) There are the literal translations. These are attempts to bring the original words into the English language in as close to the original order as possible and still make sense in English. These are often called word-for-word translations. The main point of these Bible is that they are translations from the original Greek and Hebrew. They may also look at previous translations in English for various word choices and grammar styles but the main guiding principles of translation are to keep the word order as close to the original as possible. The main issue with a literal translation is that it is often hard to understand in English and stiff or wooden sounding to read.

2) There are dynamic equivalent translations. These again are translations of the original Greek and Hebrew texts but instead of word-for-word translation approach, these Bibles use a thought-for-thought method to bring the ancient texts into modern English. The problem these Bibles have is that there has to be some interpretive actions taken by the editors to determine what thought the original writer meant to convey. This can lead to nuance being missed and if the editors had a certain theological bent, they may choose one meaning over a more conventional meaning.

3) There are the newer form of translations called optimal equivalent. These Bibles retain the word-for-word translation of the Bible where it makes sense in the modern English but where it becomes convoluted, the translators switch to a thought-for-thought method. This makes for a nice blend between the first two systems of translations as it creates a readable yet accurate translation.

4) There are paraphrases which are not translations. A paraphrase is the work of a single author or small group of authors who seek to render the Bible in a fashion that reads like a modern book. It is highly interpretive and will be subject to the opinions and beliefs of the author who put it together. It is more a running commentary on the Bible than a Bible itself but it makes the Bible easy to understand and is often good for devotional use.

Now that we know the four major types of modern translations, we need to look at the most influential translation of the Bible in the English language and how it came into being.

I. The history of Bibles in the English Language

The King James Bible, also known as the Authorized Bible, is without question the most

influential translation of the Scriptures into the English language. However, like all translations, it just didn't pop up out of the ground but rather came into being at a certain time in history for certain purposes.

The 1500's was a time of renaissance and re-discovery in thought concerning translating the Bible from the original Greek and Hebrew into English instead of leaving the Scriptures in Latin. In 1526 William Tyndale published the first New Testament in the English language. In time, he was able to translate the Pentateuch into English from Hebrew. However, his translation work was illegal as people were not allowed to have the Bible for themselves. Also, his beliefs concerning salvation by grace were considered heretical. To make matters worse, he was an opponent of King Henry VIII due to his seeking an annulment from one of his wives. He fled to the Netherlands to continue his work as it was not illegal to own a Bible there. A friend turned him in to the authorities and in 1535 he was strangled while tied to a stake and then his body was burned. Yet, his death was not in vain as he was able to publish many copies of his New Testament from the original Greek before he was captured and executed. Just shortly after his execution, the King of England changed the law and it was legal to own a copy of the Bible in English and the King even authorized a new translation to be created, which was first published in 1538.

King Henry's Bible proved to be popular with the masses but with each successive edition, there also came more and more inconsistencies. This led to it falling out of favor with the clergy and thus coming to be less and less trusted with the general population. By 1568 a version of the Bible in English called the Bishop's Bible was published. It turned out to be popular with the clergy but not the average citizen. At almost the same time, a group of English Protestants fled England from the religious cleansing being carried out by Mary I who was attempting to reinstate England to Roman Catholicism (After Henry VIII split England from the Roman Catholic church and created the Church of England with himself as the head.) These English Protestants fled to Geneva, Switzerland where they translated the entire Bible into English from the original languages and developed the Geneva Bible (1576). This version of the Bible was never authorized by the royalty but it quickly became the most popular Bible among English-speaking Protestants on the Continent and in England. In 1558, Elizabeth I came to the throne in England and succeeded in imposing a high degree of uniformity upon the Church of England. Protestantism was restored as the official religion of the realm. The one thing the church did not have was a uniform Bible. Elizabeth died in 1603 and her son James I took the throne.

In 1604, realizing a need for a uniform Bible for the church of England, which was still less than 100 years old at that time, he authorized a new translation of the Bible in English. King James considered the existing translations "corrupt and not answerable to the truth of the original". James was not a religious scholar, however he wanted a Bible that would be the gold-standard of all Bibles for his day and beyond. So James invited 54 scholars to a conference at Hampton Court. Of those invited 47 showed up and James made sure these men were not only well versed in the ancient languages and religion but that they were rivals in thought and belief. He felt that this would prevent any one theological thought from tilting the translation to any extreme. He placed Richard Bancroft, the Archbishop of Canterbury, as the general editor and overseer of the other scholars to keep it non-partisan. These men used the best copies of the Greek and Hebrew manuscripts that were available at that time. Those scholars also used the previous English versions of the Bible to compare word choice and grammar so that the new translation would read in a familiar way with what people already knew. The King James Bible

was completed in 1611. Not since the translation of the Septuagint some 1800 years earlier had a translation been produced under royal sponsorship on such a grand scale and attention to scholarship. It quickly spread throughout Europe and became not only the most popular translation of the Bible in English in that day and time but also for the next 300 years. It was by far the most scholarly and faithful to the original texts until the early 1900's.

There were three changes that led to an explosion of new translations of the Bible in English starting in the early 1900's and going forward until today. The first was the boom in archeology that began in the mid 1800's. There were new manuscripts in various languages, including the original Greek and Hebrew, that led to more accurate versions of the Bible. By comparing the word choice in certain texts of various languages, a more precise meaning could be determined from the original. The next change that happened necessitated the need for new English translations was that the English language had evolved. The language of the King James Bible, while elegant and flowing, wasn't how people spoke in 1900 or today. So to remain relevant to the masses, modern translations were born. On the negative side of things, scholars of various faiths realized that the wording of the Bible could be altered in order to further their theological views. They wouldn't (at least until the year 2000) change the definitions of the original words but they would use variant definitions to slant a passage to fit their belief. Most of these are very minor and most people would not even recognize any difference unless they are pointed out. But it was these three things that led to the variety of Bibles we enjoy in the English language today.

II. Modern English Translations of the Bible

Each modern version of the Bible was made to fit a specific purpose. To help you in deciding which Bible is best for you, it's important to know who the author's sought to be the audience for the new version. I want to give you an overview of some of the more popular Bibles.

A. English Standard Version (ESV) This one came out in 2001. It is "essentially literal" and is intended for a public audience. Some modifications were made to make it more readable in modern English but kept the ancient word order when possible. It has become a very popular Bible due to its readability.

B. New American Standard Bible (NASB) This one first came out in 1971 but was revised in 1977, 1995 and then lastly in 2020. This is considered to be the most literal translation of the ancient Scriptures in the English language. It attempts to keep the ancient word order when possible, even at the expense of readability.

C. New International Version (NIV) This one came out in 1978 and was revised in 1986 and has been revised a few times since then. It was the first of the thought-for-thought translations. It maintained specific wording and grammar when necessary but also worked to bring the ancient cultural and linguistic nuances out in the translation. In my opinion this version shines when reading the parables of Jesus. However, it also uses some editorial errors (in my opinion) one of the most serious is translating the Greek word for "flesh" as "sinful nature". Also in 2011, the NIV came out with a "gender inclusive" language version.

D. Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB/CSB) This one came out in 1999 but was last updated in 2017. It is what is called an "optimal equivalent". The translators tried to convey both language and grammar present in the original texts as well as the original message that

would have been understood by the ancient hearers. They believed that even if a translation is literal, it isn't accurate if it is difficult or misleading for modern readers.

E. New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) This one came out originally in 1989 as a replacement for the Revised Standard Version of 1952 which was a replacement for the American Standard Version of 1901 which was a revision of the KJV. It was updated in 2022. This Bible sought to be ecumenical and interfaith, even friendly to faiths outside of Christianity. It was sought to be kept as literal as possible and as free as possible. The NRSV was a word-for-word translation but often editorialized the content. It is mainly used by progressive Christians and other mainstream Protestant denominations.

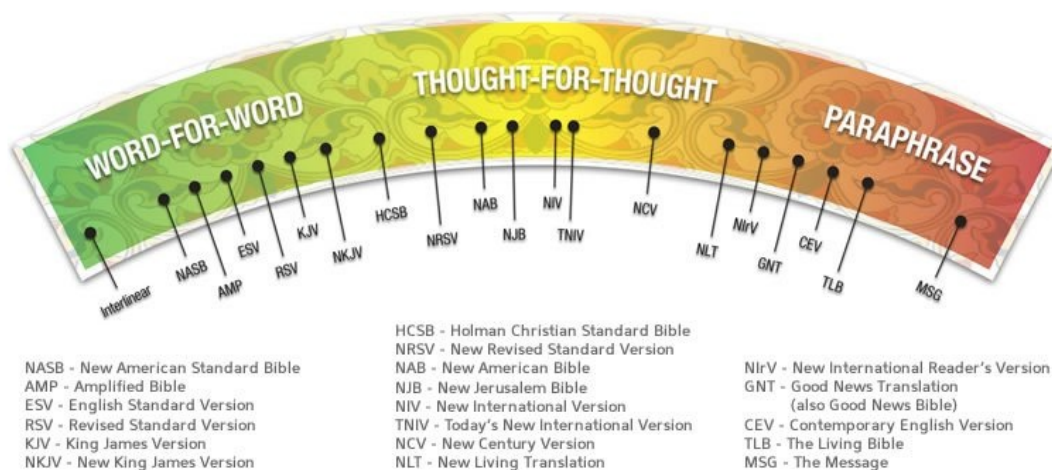
F. New Living Translation (NLT) This one came out in 1996 and it was meant to carry the Scriptures into contemporary English. It was written for the general church-going population and aimed to be accessible for readers of all ages. They used a word-for-word basis but clarified the meanings of many portions of Scriptures where the cultural aspect of the translation would be lost in modern English. They called it "literal yet meaning based". This Bible is not to be confused with The Living Bible which was a paraphrase from the 1970's.

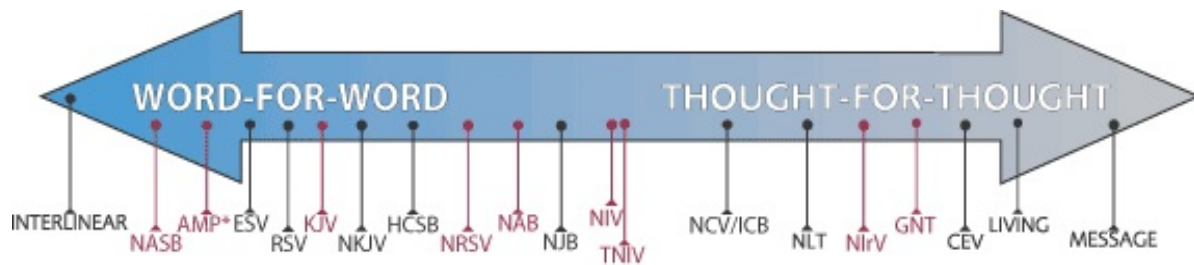
G. The Message (2002) is a paraphrase written by the late Eugene Peterson. He converts a passage into a readable paragraph format to make it similar to a modern book in the aspect of flow. It's highly interpretive and subject to the beliefs of Eugene Peterson.

H. The International Children's Bible (1983) This is not a storybook or paraphrase. It is a literal translation written on a third grade reading level. (The NASB and KJV are both written on a 12th grade reading level.) It removes most "big" theological words and replaces them with definitions.

III. The following is a collection of various charts that show where each version fits along the continuum of how literal they may be. Just realize that a literal translation may not be the best translation for a particular person depending upon his or her reading proficiency and knowledge of the Bible and it's terminology.

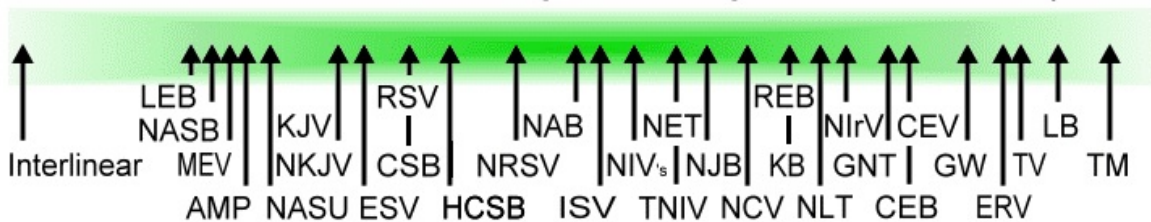
Types of Bible Translations





English Bible Translation Comparison

Word for Word ← Thought for Thought → Paraphrase



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|--|---|
| <p>NASB / NASU - New American Standard (11)
 AMP - Amplified Bible (12)
 ESV* - English Standard Version (9.5)
 ERV^ - Easy to Read Version (3.5)
 KJV* - King James Version (13)
 NKJV - New King James Version (9)
 RSV* - Revised Standard Version (11)
 HCSB - Holman Christian Standard (8)
 NRSV^^ - New Revised Standard (10.5)
 NAB* - New American Bible (7)
 NIV - New International Version (8)
 NIV1^ - NIV [UK only, 1996 edition] (8)
 NIV2011^^ - NIV Revision (8)
 CEB^^ - Common English Bible (7)
 MEV - Modern English Version (13)
 CSB^^ - Christian Standard Bible (7)</p> | <p>TNIV^ - Today's NIV (7.5)
 NJB* - New Jerusalem Bible (7.5)
 NCV^ - New Century Version (5)
 REB (NEB)** - Revised English Bible (7)
 NLT^ - New Living Translation (6.5)
 NirV - New International Reader's (3.5)
 GNT (GNB/TEV)* - Good News Translation (6)
 CEV^^ - Contemporary English (5)
 ISV^^ - International Standard Version (8.5)
 LEB - Lexham English Bible (11)
 GW^^^ - God's Word (4.5)
 LB - Living Bible (8.5)
 TM - The Message (4.5)
 NET^^^ - NET Bible (7)
 TV - The Voice (7)
 KB*~ - Knox Bible (12.5)</p> |
|--|---|

^^ No gender neutral language for God, careful/moderate inclusive language regarding mankind.

^ Gender neutral language * Apocrypha available or included (#) Approximate overall reading grade level

' Text based entirely or primarily on the Textus Receptus and the Jacob ben Hayyim edition of the Masoretic Text.

~ Text based entirely or primarily on the 1592 Sixto-Clementina Latin Vulgate prepared by Pope Clement VIII.



Here's the website I found very helpful in figuring out which translation is best for a person to read. <https://www.biblestudytools.com>

IV. Looking at the differences

A. **[Mark 1:17-21]** - NASB, NIV (*NIV is missing the word immediately in all these verses*)

B. **[Romans 7:18]** - KJV, HCSB, NIV (*NIV has translated the word “flesh” to “sinful nature” in these verses*)

C. **[Romans 16:1]** - HCSB, NRSV, NIV, NASB (*The NRSV and NIV both translate the word “servant” as deacon or deaconess. The RSV first did this intentionally to further a progressive agenda in the churches. This word means servant as used of Christ. While in certain contexts it is translated “deacon” it is not correct in this place as it’s a general reference to a person and not the office.*)

D. **[Matthew 22:1-14]** - NASB, NIV, NLT, GNB (*Notice the wording and flow of the story is much more relaxed and natural sounding in the NIV & GNB*)

E. **[Psalm 23:1-6]** - KJV, HCSB, NIV, GNB, ESV (*Notice the change of words and flow of the psalm*)

F. **[I Corinthians 7:32-40]** - NASB, NIV, HCSB, GNB (*notice the impact of editors for this passage in each translation as many are different meanings for the same text*)

Are there any other passages you’d like to compare in various translations?

Keep in mind that literal isn’t always better for a Bible. Literal translations are generally harder to read and often require more “commentary” or helps for a younger believer who isn’t familiar with the terminology of Christianity. The important aspect of any Bible you want for yourself is that you understand the words when you read it. You will always have questions about the meaning of certain passages but it is essential that you at least understand the words on the page.

*** Word of warning about a new “translation” called The Passion Translation (TPT). It is not a translation or even a paraphrase. It is one man’s re-imagining of the Bible as the author (Brian Simmons) thought it should be written. It adds new words and ideas to the original meaning thus changing the basic meanings of the inspired texts. It should be read with caution and along side another reliable translation.

Q: Are there any questions, comments, rebukes or rebuttals?