

Making Sense of Bible Translations

Shop smart with our handy guide.

Making sense of the many Bible translations available can be challenging. But this handy guide can help you with the decision-making process. While comparing the different versions, concentrate on getting the one you'll be most likely to read and study.

Some of the more popular Bible translations for personal reading and study include the New International Version, the King James Version, the New King James Version, the New Living Translation and the New American Standard Bible.

For comparison's sake, there are two primary ways in which the Bible is translated: word-for-word and thought-for-thought. With the word-for-word method, biblical scholars take each word from the original Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek text and substitute an English word in its place, as in the King James Version.

With thought-for-thought, translators look at the meaning of the original thoughts of the Bible texts and seek to convey that meaning in contemporary English in a way that communicates the message to modern readers, as in the New International Version.

Readability

When considering which translation of the Bible to choose, you need to consider the readability of each, which typically is communicated in terms of the average grade level of readers. Among the most readable modern translations are the New Century Version (fourth grade), Contemporary English Version (fifth grade), New Living Translation (sixth grade) and Today's English Version (seventh grade).

Translations that are considerably higher on the readability scale include the New International Version (eighth grade), New King James Version (ninth grade), New Revised Standard Version (10th grade), New American Standard Bible (11th grade) and King James Version (12th grade).

Some of the more popular types of Bibles, regardless of readability, are “paraphrases”—as opposed to translations—of the Bible. Three popular paraphrases are The Amplified Bible, The Living Bible and The Message.

As its name suggests, The Amplified Bible “amplifies” the text by offering several additional meanings for key words and phrases. The Living Bible has been a perennial best-seller since it first appeared in 1971 as a personal devotional Bible. And The Message Bible features the rhythm and tone of contemporary English to communicate truth.

Classics

The New International Version, considered today’s best-selling translation of the Bible, is widely admired for its simple, straightforward style. The purpose of the translation was to “produce an accurate translation, suitable for public and private reading, teaching, preaching, memorizing and liturgical use.”

The King James Version, the most universally accepted translation for centuries, is the best-selling Bible translation of all time. It features a poetic and literary style of writing, in Elizabethan English, which makes it relatively difficult to read, but it remains a favorite for memorization.

The New King James Version is an updated version of the King James Version. The purpose of the translation was to modernize the original version yet maintain its unique style as much as possible. Though it features less dated verbiage, it retains the 17th century sentence structure of the 1611 King James

Version.

The New Living Translation is a meaning-for-meaning translation featuring commonly used vocabulary and language structures, which makes it very readable. The purpose of the translation was to “enhance the power and clarity of The Living Bible” and create a “translation as good for study as it is for devotional reading.”

The New American Standard Bible is a revision of the 1901 American Standard Version, which it updates into modern language. It is generally considered an accurate and highly respected, if somewhat formal, translation of the Bible.

The New Century Version is a highly readable translation that puts biblical concepts into natural terms, making it simple and easy to understand. Some paraphrasing is used to avoid words no longer in common use. It is available in several user-friendly formats, including the popular BibleZines—Bibles in a magazine format.

The New Revised Standard Version was published in 1990 as an update of the Revised Standard Version. It is a contemporary translation that uses generic language in reference to humans and is widely accepted, especially among scholars.

The Contemporary English Version features clear, simple language that children can comprehend but is written in a mature style that adults also can appreciate. And Today's English Version features simple, readable language using a relatively limited vocabulary.

Newcomers

One of the most recent translations is the Holman Christian Standard Bible, first published in 1999. It is an entirely new translation, crafted for today's reader from the original biblical languages and designed to appeal to a broad range of people.

This Bible retains meaningful theological terms while avoiding slang and politically correct language, and it equips serious Bible students with an accurate translation for personal study, private devotions and memorization. It is available in a variety of formats, including audio, pocket, bilingual and large print.

The English Standard Version is another relatively new translation of the Bible, first published in 2001. The essentially literal Bible translation combines word-for-word precision and accuracy with literary excellence, beauty and readability.

It is a popular choice for personal reading and study, preaching and teaching, family reading and devotions, and for memorizing and understanding the Word of God.

Due out in October, Thomas Nelson's newest translation of the New Testament, *The Voice*, is designed to bring the biblical narrative to life for modern readers, particularly young believers. Rather than being produced by scholars in academic settings, it represents a collaboration among scholars, pastors, writers, musicians, poets and other artists.

The goal of the project is to retell the story of the Bible in a fluid form, similar to that of a modern literary work, while remaining true to the original manuscripts. It features a screenplaylike format that is ideal for public readings and group studies as well as embedded commentary.

Selecting the translation of the Bible that best suits your needs is an important decision. But this brief overview of several of the more popular translations will simplify the selection process and help make study and reading of the Bible a regular practice.