



Which Bible translation is for me?

“Which Bible should I use?” Every Bible reader asks this question at one time or another as he or she sorts through the myriad translations on the market. The reason so many translations exist is because biblical scholars respond not only to complex translation decisions but also to people’s different attitudes toward language, culture, and tradition, not to mention varied emotional orientations and aesthetic tastes.

The Old Testament was written in Hebrew. The New Testament was written in Greek. Obviously today we do not have the original manuscripts, but rather copies of copies of copies. Thousands of variations exist in the surviving biblical manuscripts. Translators are constantly sorting through these ancient copy fragments trying to select the most authentic ones, while creating a style of language translation that is helpful and enjoyable to a modern reader. To a very real degree, every “translation” is an “interpretation.”

There is no such thing as an exact translation of the original Hebrew or Greek. Meanings of words and grammatical structures in any two languages do not generally correspond. Translating idiomatic expressions into another language in literal form is impossible. For example, how would you translate “drive someone up a wall” in Spanish, or “jump the gun” in Swahili? Furthermore, much of the original New Testament lacked all punctuation, thus leaving large grammatical decisions to translators’ hands. Did Jesus say to the thief on the cross beside him, “Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise”? Or: “Truly I say to you today, you will be with me in paradise”? A comma can make a huge difference.

Summary: The best translation is one that is well used and helps shape a strong spiritual life in you. Many people own two different Bibles, one being more literal and scholarly for accurate Bible study and learning, and the other being more expressive of everyday language and speech patterns.

PASTOR MARTY

Peter W. Marty
Senior pastor

Glossary of terms

Study Bible – A study Bible has background notes at the bottom or side of each page and special introductions to each book. Some study Bibles are equipped with pictures, diagrams, and maps to assist in understanding life and culture in biblical times.

Titles or Sub-headings — Sometimes sub-headings or titles within a chapter of a book in the bible help make for easier reading by identifying key stories and people. You might wish to see if the bible that interests you has these or not.

Wide-Margin Edition – This is a reference to Bibles that leave more marginal space on the side for taking personal notes.

Application Study Bible – Sometimes called a “Life Application Bible,” this Bible edition intends to offer practical ideas for everyday life and living faithfully connected to the Word of God. Some of the application suggestions are admittedly very editorial in nature.

Large Print – Also labeled “Giant Print” on some bindings, this Bible is exactly what it says: a larger-print edition for those with less strong eyesight.

Parallel Bible – A “parallel” Bible of any kind, New Testament or otherwise, is a Bible that prints multiple translations on the same page in a reduced paragraph size format. This can be helpful for those interested in not purchasing multiple Bibles, yet wanting several translations at their disposal. The more fragmented layout of a parallel Bible can make the flow of easy reading more difficult.

Concordance – This book is not a Bible but it contains an alphabetical listing of all the key words in the Bible. So, for example, if you want to find in the Bible the verse about the widow’s mite, but have no idea where it is, you could look up the word “widow” in a concordance and skim right to the passage in your Bible. Be aware that some concordances cover only the scope of the New Testament and not the entire Bible.

Dictionary of the Bible – Exactly what it says, this volume is extremely helpful for looking up background descriptions of virtually everything in the Bible. Whether you want to learn more about olive trees, King Nebuchadnezzar, or the proportions of Noah’s ark, nice concise paragraphs and photos are provided in alphabetical order. A dictionary of the Bible can grow fast learning in a dramatic way.

Red Letter Edition – Some Bibles print in red ink what are believed to be the words of Jesus. While there is much scholarly disagreement over exactly which words belong authentically to Jesus, a red letter edition can serve as a very eye-catching orientation to the basic material of what Jesus actually said.



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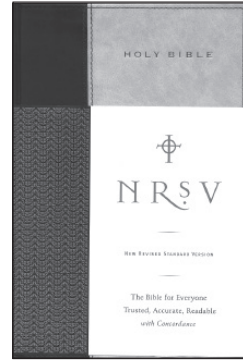


Bible translations

stocked in the St. Paul Book Corner

NRSV — New Revised Standard Version

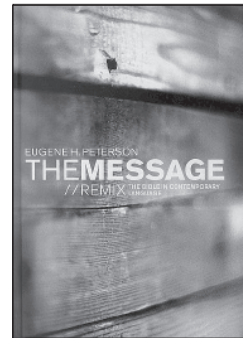
This is the 1990 update from the popular RSV translation that emerged from Protestant scholarship in the 1950's. St. Paul uses the NRSV in its preaching and teaching. It is the version contained in the red Bibles in the pew. It is generally considered to be the most faithful word for word translation of the original Hebrew and Greek. Also available in Study Bible format, as the *Lutheran Study Bible* or *HarperCollins Study Bible*.



The Message

Also: **The Message Remix**

Translated by Eugene Peterson, this highly vernacular (everyday speech) edition has been wildly popular since its completion in 2002. It has a gripping and attractive style, even if its non-literal approach makes it less useful for careful Bible study work. You'll need the "Remix" edition of *The Message* if you want actual Bible verse references, though even here they are approximate because of the free style of writing.



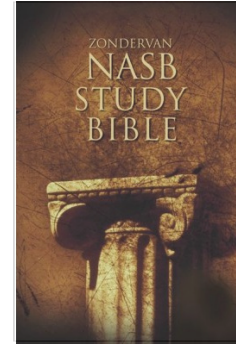
GNB — Good News Bible

Highly readable for adults and children. It's more "meaning-based" in translation than literal, making it less helpful for serious Bible study. Uses vernacular or everyday language. Its English sounds the way ordinary fluent speakers of English might speak and write.



NASB — New American Standard Bible

Most recently updated in 1995, the NASB has many similarities to the NRSV Bible. It is considered to be one of the most accurate word for word translations, aiming to utilize contemporary English vernacular while staying true to the original Hebrew and Greek. See the NASB Study Bible for helpful notes to better understand important words or concepts.



Bibles for all ages

Along with a variety of translations, the Book Corner also carries a number of Bibles appropriate for different ages. From an infant board book Bible to colorful story Bibles and others for early readers or adolescents, these offer an approachable way for children to learn Biblical stories.



What about the KJV? — The King James Version

This translation is not stocked in the St. Paul Book Corner because of its very dated English (1611). Some people turn to it for its poetic cadences and "thee's" and "thou's." But because its writing predates so much modern scholarship and our discovery of ancient manuscripts, and because some archaic 17th-century English words within it mean the very opposite of what they mean today, the KJV is not recommended for serious study or easy reading.



Sample verse comparisons

Psalm 23:1-3 NRSV: The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul.

The Message: God, my shepherd! I don't need a thing. You have bedded me down in lush meadows, you find me quiet pools to drink from.

GNB: The Lord is my shepherd; I have everything I need. He lets me rest in fields of green grass and leads me to quiet pools of fresh water. He gives me new strength.

NASB: The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters. He restores my soul.

John 1:14 NRSV: And the Word became flesh and lived among us... full of grace and truth.

The Message: The Word became flesh and moved into the neighborhood... Generous inside and out, true from start to finish.

GNB: The Word became a human being and, full of grace and truth, lived among us.

NASB: And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us... full of grace and truth.