

Which is the Best Translation of the Bible?

The simple answer to the question of which version of scripture should I use is' "Choose the one that you can and will read and understand." However, with so many bibles around, it might be useful to know something about the various editions available. Here are a few *guidelines* and comments from users.

First, there are *translations* and *paraphrases*. A translation is "a written communication in a second language having the same meaning as the written communication in a first language." While every version of the Bible has been written with some degree of interpretation, translations are more useful for scholastic study purposes. They tend to be closest to the original, word-for-word meaning of the author, drawing on the resources of generations of scriptural and linguistic scholars to maintain that integrity. A paraphrase is "a restatement of a text or passage." Often used as studying or teaching devices, it is generally accepted that a paraphrase is only as good as the understanding of its author. A third category, *thought-for thought interpretations*, tries to bridge the gap between the thought of ancient times and modern language structures. Another factor to think about when considering a paraphrase or thought-for-thought interpretation is its date. Some "modern" language bibles were compiled before 1950 and many words and phrases now have significantly different meanings.

Many bibles contain *study aids*. These should be interpreted in light of their source. Several bibles use the same translations or paraphrases with study aids aimed at different target audiences and interest groups; everyone from teenagers to senior citizens, from new parents to dieters (no kidding!). In one sense, there is something for everyone out there! Other versions rely on thought-provoking questions and group discussion topics.

Denominations endorsements recommend particular translations for use in their member churches. The lessons read in the Anglican church use the versification of the Revised Standard Bible and are usually based on that translation (or the New Revised Standard Version which reflects even more modern scholarship.)

The following lists are an incomplete comparison of several popular versions based on the research of Preceptaustin, (preceptaustin.org), a conservative website. The chart does not consider the value of the introductions to the books and the footnotes and other study aids found in some editions of these versions. These are also very interpretative and reflect the scholarship of the time when they were written.

More Word -For-Word (less interpretive)

New American Standard

Amplified Version (hard to just read but useful study aid, see below)

Authorized Standard Version 1901

English Standard Version

Revised Standard Version (source of most Anglican readings)

New Revised Standard Version (excellent study aids which are revised regularly, get a recent edition)

King James Version

New King James Version

Somewhat To Significantly Interpretative **More Thought For Thought**

New International Version, including its various study editions

New American Bible

New Jerusalem Bible

New Century Version

International Children's Bible

More **Paraphrase**, More Interpretative; More Concept For Concept

The Living Bible

The Message

New Living Translation

J B Phillips Paraphrase

Contemporary English Version

Good News Translation

The same website also recommends using **translations** "for the most objective, non-biased and "pure" inductive study. Do not use paraphrased versions as your *primary* resource for they provide no way to determine if the translator's interpretation of the original Greek and Hebrew is accurate. The more word-for-word versions more accurately render the words of the original biblical authors and are therefore recommended for Bible study. The Amplified Bible sometimes gives several possible translations for a word. It is not recommended as your primary text for simple bible study but can be helpful for deeper understanding. Consultation with some paraphrases (e.g., NLT and Phillips or the Message) may also yield insights into the meaning of the passage (after doing your own initial study).

Note that the popular *NIV* is a thought-for-thought or "dynamic equivalence" translation which can be helpful for new believers, but it is *not recommended* for in depth bible study because of the inconsistent way in which it renders the Hebrew and Greek texts. In some cases, the NIV includes significant interpretation which leaves the reader without any indication of other possible ways to understand that particular verse than that of the interpreter.

The New Oxford Annotated Bible is the NRSV translation with excellent introductions, footnotes, translation notes, and a collection of study aids that includes essays, maps, timelines, etc. While all bibles are considered "the good book", this is the version recommended for study by Education for Ministry, a study program from the University of the South and endorsed by the Diocese of Ottawa.

*From a document prepared for the St. Thomas
Education for Ministry class, 2005*