



Choosing a Bible Translation

There are many bible translations to choose from when you are considering a new bible. This can sometimes be confusing and make the choice of which bible to choose very difficult. By understanding the differences between the bible translations and asking yourself a few questions, your decision of which translation to use will be easier to make.

One of first questions to ask yourself is what are you going to use the bible for? Are you going to use it for study, teaching, devotions or do you simply want easy reading in contemporary language? Depending on what you desire, you may decide on more than one translation.

Disclaimer: There are many, many translations available which are not listed here. Their exclusion is not meant to indicate any preference or bias. This page is meant as an introduction to the process of choosing a bible translation and further research into a translation is recommended. Ultimately it is the reader's choice.

Which Bible Translation Should I Choose?

There are three basic types of bible translations. By understanding the differences between these three types, your decision is narrowed down considerably to just the versions that are within the type of translation that meets your needs.

Formal Equivalence (Word for Word)

Generally used for Study and Teaching

A formal equivalence translation is a "word for word" literal translation of the original language (Hebrew & Greek). The original languages have idioms and concepts that are not easily translated and can sometimes appear awkward when reading. The word for word translations, however, are usually the most accurate.

Most Popular Word for Word Translations: KJV, NKJV, NASB, ESV

Dynamic Equivalence or Functional Equivalence (Phrase for Phrase) For Devotional Reading to Read the Bible as an Unfolding Story

A dynamic equivalence translation is more of a "thought for thought" translation of the original meaning and reworded in contemporary language. This translation is easier to read than a "word for word" translation; however, they are not as accurate. Dynamic Equivalence translations are completed by individuals or committees. The interpretation of the individual is subject to the individual's theological views, linguistic or cultural understanding. The individual may be wrong and not even know it. Some people prefer to read thought for thought translations that are completed by a committee. With a group of people to keep each other accountable, accuracy of the original text is improved. It is to be noted that denominational committees can have the same result as an individual translator as they are acting from a single ideology.

Most Popular Phrase for Phrase Translations: NIV, TNIV, NAB, NRSV

Paraphrase (Functional Equivalence at the easiest reading level)

For Very Easy Reading

A paraphrase translation is said by some to not even be a translation but strictly an interpretation. A paraphrase focuses on the thoughts of the authors and not the text. These are the easiest to read but are also the least accurate. They are good for readers new to the bible, for younger readers and public reading.

Most Popular Word for Word Translations: The Message, NLT, GNT (formerly called Good News Bible)

Accuracy vs. Clarity

As a general rule: accuracy is best in word for word translations and worst in paraphrase translations while clarity is just the opposite. The chart below helps to explain this better.

