

# Guide to Choosing a Bible

## ***Bible Translations***

The first decision that needs to be made when considering a Bible purchase is what translation of the Bible do I want? Whichever translation you select is strictly a personal preference. Often people own more than one translation to give them a couple of different understandings of specific verses.

The bad news is there are many, many choices. The good news is that the vast majority of the Bible translations available today are of high quality and accuracy so you can't make a wrong decision. The best Bible for you to purchase is the one that you will actually read!

## **Types of Translations**

The original Bible text was written in Hebrew, Greek and some Aramaic – all of course, languages that most of us do not understand. Therefore, it is necessary for scholars to write the Bible in languages that we can understand. But how come there are so many different translations in English alone? That is because various translations have different goals. And as the English language changes, translations must change to provide us with an accurate understanding.

There are three different ways to translate a document:

- The first is to present a word-for-word transfer of the original words into English (formal equivalence). An example of this would be the King James Version or the New American Standard version. The one problem with this type of translation is that it sometimes results in hard to understand sentences.
- Secondly, some translations are labeled as dynamic equivalency or 'thought-for-thought' translations. These seek to transfer the thought and emotion of the original text by using as many words as are necessary to reach the intended meaning of the text in current English phraseology. The NIV is an example of a Bible that uses both thought-for-thought and word-for-word methods.
- The third, and newer method, is a paraphrase. A paraphrase is a restatement of speech or writing that retains the basic meaning while changing the words. A paraphrase often clarifies the original statement by putting it into words that are more easily understood. Examples of this are the Message Bible and the Living Bible. It is interpretative.

Which selection you make will depend on the purpose you have for your Bible:

- Are you looking for something that is easy to sit down and read?
- Are you looking for something that will help you dig deeper and understand accurately?
- Would you like a devotional reading?
- Or some combination of the above?
- Will you be doing a Bible study with other adults or with your children that would be helpful to have the same translation?

At church, the most often used translation is the NIV. This is the version used in the Bible in the pew rack, as well as the translation that is used in the third grade Bibles we give out. Other translations used during the worship service are the Message and the New Living Translation

### **Bible Translation Comparison Chart**

The table below gives you the translation, abbreviation, reading level and helpful comments of some commonly used translations.

Translation	RL	Notes
King James Version (KJV)	12	Formal, doctrinally true, more difficult to read. 1 <sup>st</sup> published in 1611
New American Standard (NASB)	11	Word for word, Evangelical. 1 <sup>st</sup> published in 1961 – many updates since.
New King James Version (NKJV)	8.5	Follows KJV closely, updating language only. 1 <sup>st</sup> published in 1982
The Message	8.5	An excellent paraphrase, both readable and accurate, not meant to be a ‘study’ Bible. 1 <sup>st</sup> published in 1993
Today’s New International Version (TNIV)	8.0	Revised NIV, adds gender neutral language but God is still referred to as He. Also adds other clarifications and updates. 1 <sup>st</sup> published in 2001
New International Version (NIV)	7.8	Evangelical, easy to read, goal of the team of scholars was to be accurate, beautiful, clear and dignified, useful for all purposes. 1 <sup>st</sup> published in 1993
New Living Translations (NLT)	6.3	Evangelical, intended to replace the Living Bible, translates entire thoughts into natural, everyday English
Contemporary English Version (CEV)	5.6	Individual translation in simple language, not a paraphrase. 1 <sup>st</sup> published in 1995

RL = Reading Level

## Comparison of Bible Translations

But one of the best ways to determine which Bible is right for you is to just compare some verses to see which one you like best.

### 2 Corinthians 1:12

KJV: For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward.

NASB: For our proud confidence is this: the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you.

NKJV: For our boasting is this: the testimony of our conscience that we conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God, and more abundantly toward you.

MES: Now that the worst is over, we're pleased we can report that we've come out of this with conscience and faith intact, and can face the world—and even more importantly, face you with our heads held high. But it wasn't by any fancy footwork on our part. It was God who kept us focused on him, uncompromised

TNIV: Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, with integrity <sup>[a]</sup> and godly sincerity. We have done so, relying not on worldly wisdom but on God's grace.

NIV: Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world and especially in our relations with you, in the holiness and sincerity that are from God. We have done so not according to worldly wisdom but according to God's grace.

NLT: We can say with confidence and a clear conscience that we have lived with a God-given holiness and sincerity in all our dealings. We have depended on God's grace, not on our own human wisdom. That is how we have conducted ourselves before the world, and especially toward you.

CEV: We can be proud of our clear conscience. We have always lived honestly and sincerely, especially when we were with you. And we were guided by God's wonderful kindness instead of by the wisdom of the world

## ***Bible Styles:***

Many of the Bible styles cross boundaries. You will find that some Study Bibles contain elements of Devotional Bibles; most Personality Bibles are either Study or Devotional Bibles. Parallel Bibles often include elements of Study Bibles, as do the Guided Reading Bibles. So don't think you are limited by one category or the other, they often overlap in the same Bible.

### **Study Bible**

Study Bibles come in several different types. Some Study Bibles try to help you understand the translation and the language. Some Study Bibles try to help you cross-reference Scripture with other areas of the Bible. Some Study Bibles try to help you understand the culture and context of the setting in which it took place. Other Study Bibles try to help you understand why something happened, or what motivated someone or why God wants us to know that particular thing right then. Many Study Bibles combine several of these approaches. There are a multitude of examples of this style of Bible, in every translation. Some popular ones include:

- The Quest Study Bible
- NIV Life Application Study Bible
- NIV Study Bible
- A recent one that looks interesting is the Archeological Study Bible
- Around for a while and supposed to be one of the most complete is the Thompson Chain Reference Bible

### **Devotional Bible**

A Devotional Bible will help you put passages of the Bible to practice in your daily life. There will be real-life vignettes of how people have experienced something related to a passage and how you can apply it to your life. There may be a brief prayer for you to read along with it. Some Devotional Bibles invite you to apply the passage to your life by asking probing questions. Sometimes both methods are employed. There are many different types of Devotional Bibles, generally aimed at different audiences, such as: Women, Men, Teens, Youth, Kids/Children, Prayer, Sports, Marriage, Recovery

### **Parallel Bible**

Parallel Bibles have two or four translations side by side so that you can compare the different translations as you read. There are usually two translations per page. In a four translation edition, there will be only one passage per page turn.

### **Personality Bible**

These Bibles will have some author's name associated with them. The author will have written notes and annotations along with certain passages. Depending on the author, the annotations will have a leaning towards topics of the author's interest. If you have a favorite author, this may be a good way to join him/her in studying the Bible. Examples include:

- Maxwell Leadership Bible with John Maxwell
- Devotional Bible with Max Lucado
- Positive Thinking Bible with Norman Vincent Peale
- The Everyday Life Bible: The Power of God's Word for Everyday Living with Joyce Meyer

## **Guided Reading Bible**

These Bibles will help guide you through your reading experience. They will show you which verses/chapters to read together to help guide you in your journey through the Bible, whether to you want to read the whole Bible over a certain period of time, or to gain insight into certain topics. Some examples include:

- The Bible in a Year
- Chronological Bibles
- Weekly Reading Bibles
- Guided by Topics (The Serendipity Bible is an example of this with all of these options and more in one Bible) – topics can include
  - Prophets of the Bible
  - Kings of the Bible
  - Great Bible Stories
  - Women of the Bible
  - Jesus
  - Prayer
  - The Holy Spirit
  - Being Single
  - Marriage
  - Parenting
  - Grief
  - Finances

## **Other Features to Consider**

- Binding
- Size (do you want to put it in a Bible cover or backpack or briefcase or purse?)
- Weight (are you going to carry it around a lot?)
- Text Size
- Text Color
- References –
  - Maps
  - Concordance
  - Dictionary
  - Location of references (end of page, center column, end column, etc)
- Book Outlines/Introductions
- Ribbon Marker(s)
- Presentation Page (is it a gift?)
- Family Record Page (is it to be a family Bible?)
- Closure – Zipper, Magnetic/Snap flap
- Price

## **Questions to Answer Before You Choose**

1. Who is the Bible for?
2. What should the reading level be?
3. What translation are you looking for?
4. What will the Bible be used for?
5. Is the user a seeker/beginner or a more advanced user of the Bible?
6. Is the user going to be searching for facts or will the user want to gain insight and feelings from the Bible?
7. Are there other special features the user would like?

# Quick Guide to Choosing a Bible

## ***Preliminary Questions to Consider***

- Who is the Bible for?
- What should the reading level be?
- What will the Bible be used for?
- Is the user a seeker/beginner or a more advanced user of the Bible?
- Is the user going to be searching for facts or will the user want to gain insight and feelings from the Bible?

## ***Select Your Translation***

- Word-for-Word: Accurate, sometimes hard to read
  - King James
  - New American Standard
- Thought-for-Thought: Accurate, same thoughts, may be more wordy
  - NIV
- Paraphrase: Same ideas, using today's language and phraseology
  - Message
  - Living Bible

## ***Select Your Style***

- Study Bible: for a better understanding of the time and place or what was happening and how it relates to other areas of the Bible.
- Devotional Bible: to help you bring the Bible into your daily life and make it more part of your regular prayer time.
- Parallel Bible: to see more than one translation at a time.
- Personality Bible: to see the Bible through a favorite author's eyes.
- Guided Reading: to add structure to your Bible study time.

## ***Select Your Features***

- Binding
- Size, Weight
- Text Size, Color
- References & Location of References
- Book Outlines/Introductions
- Ribbon Marker(s)
- Presentation Page
- Family Record Page
- Closure – Zipper, Magnetic/Snap flap
- Price