



Bible Translations

What Bible is Best for Me?

The Bible isn't a top-secret nuclear document – it's much more powerful. But its power to change lives is only unleashed when you open God's Word and begin to read it. So picking the right version isn't near as important as picking up the Bible in the first place.

But finding a Bible that fits your spiritual needs and personality can be an important part of your Christian journey. If you know a few key principles, you can make the search for a new Bible a much more pleasant experience.

Whether you are searching for your own study Bible or looking to pick up one for a friend, you should find these principles helpful:

Some Tips to Keep in Mind Before Starting Your Bible Hunt

1. Any English version of the Bible is a translation from the original documents written in Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic. Certain Bibles might be more literal translations than others, but practically all of them are translations from the originals. In other words, don't fall into the trap of picking a more traditional biblical translation because you believe it to be more "authentic."
2. No one Bible has it all. Some study Bibles come with concordances, biblical dictionaries, colorful maps or important scripture application tools. Few come with all of them. Similarly, not all Bible translations fit every use. This doesn't mean you have to buy hundreds of Bibles, but it does mean that you should be a careful consumer. Buy a Bible that is appropriate for the way you use it.
3. Any translation too cumbersome to read on a daily basis isn't the right Bible for you. Find a version you feel comfortable using. The most important thing about picking a Bible is finding one you will read!

TYPES OF BIBLES:

Word-for-Word Translations: These versions strive to translate the Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic word for word into modern languages (English for our purposes, although the same is true of other languages.) They often sacrifice readability for accuracy.

Thought-For-Thought Translations: These translations try to take entire thoughts and put them into English instead of being concerned with taking it word for word. These are usually "middle ground" translations because while they are not literal in the word order, they strive to translate the thoughts of the original texts. Both word for word and thought for thought translations are put together by a large team (up to 100) of scholars in the Bible's original languages.

Paraphrase: These are the most interpretive versions of the Bible. None of them claim to be close translation of the original text nor should they be taken as such. In fact most do not even call themselves translations. Instead these take the ancient manuscripts and put both the words and the thoughts behind them into a language we can understand. Not only do they strive for readability but also usability. Paraphrases are more concerned with the "meaning" of the authors, than their actual words. The fact that they appear to have some wide variances with the more traditional texts shouldn't be seen negatively. No translation can help believers take a fresh look at their faith better than a good paraphrase. Just try to compare the texts with more literal versions to make sure you agree with the passages' retelling. A single author usually puts together paraphrases.

NEW AMERICAN STANDARD (NAS)

Type: Word for Word

Strengths: The NAS is one of the most accurate of all contemporary Bible translations. The version's translators made a strong commitment to take the ancient languages and transfer them word for word into the English language. It also takes into consideration the most reliable ancient texts available.

Weakness: This version is still difficult to read in places (11th grade reading level.). While eliminating the cumbersome "Thee's" and "Thou's," it is still very close to the original, which doesn't always take into account the best way to communicate the biblical texts into modern English.

Best uses: The NAS makes a good study Bible, particularly if you consider yourself a good reader. Its accuracy almost guarantees that the words you are reading would be close to what the writers wrote. But you might want to combine your reading of the NAS with a good thought-for-thought or paraphrase translation. This will ensure that you understand what you are reading from the context it was written.

Sample Verse: *"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."* **John 3:16**

NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION (NIV)

Type: Thought for Thought

Strengths: The NIV has quickly passed the KJV as the most read English Bible in the United States. It combines readability and accuracy as well or better than any Bible on the market.

Weakness: The NIV's versatility makes it difficult to discuss its weaknesses. Just be aware that as a thought for thought translation, the emphasis is on BOTH understandability and accuracy. This is not a word for word translation; instead translators tried to take phrases in the Bible and put them into current language. Even this isn't much of a weakness because at times that actually makes it more accurate since it properly conveys both meaning and the words of the original text.

Best Uses: Combined with good study helps, it makes a good study Bible that is also very easy to read. It's also readable enough for enjoyable and frequent reading. Additionally, its balance lends itself to being a good Bible for a small group study.

Sample Verse: *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."* **John 3:16**

THE NEW LIVING TRANSLATION (NLT)

Type: Thought for Thought Translation

Strengths: The NLT is one of the more popular thought for thought translations out there. Just like the NIV, this translation strives to balance both accuracy and readability. It's even a smoother read than the NIV.

Weaknesses: The translators were not trying to produce a word for word translation. Instead they were trying to communicate the thoughts of the biblical authors. Even though the translators created a translation well balanced between readability and accuracy, it leans more toward readability, thereby sacrificing a little accuracy.

Best Uses: The NLT is one of the best translations for reading through the entire Bible. It can be used for more intense Bible study if you have access to other study tools or a more literal Bible to read with it.

Sample Verse: *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life."* **John 3:16**

THE MESSAGE (MSG)

Type: Paraphrase

Strengths: This is one of the most exciting and vibrant versions of the biblical story on the market. When you read it, the ancient Middle East comes alive. Letters become letters again, and poetry becomes poetry. Through the lens of Eugene Peterson (the paraphrase's author), you'll take a brand new look at scripture that you've read thousands of times. The entire Bible is now available.

Weakness: This is still a paraphrase. As you are reading it, realize that you are reading someone else's interpretation of scripture. No paraphrase should be used for serious study.

Best Uses: Use The Message to liven up your own personal time with God. It's not a study Bible. Don't let it be the only Bible you use. If you get a copy of The Message, pick up a more traditional Bible to read with it. In fact one of the best ways to read The Message is to read a more literal translation like the NASB or NIV and then turn to it and read the exact same passage. You'll quickly discover this invigorates your time with God. This is also a wonderful version of the Bible for new believers, so that they can begin to pick up the life-changing habit of daily Bible reading.

Sample Verse: *"This is how much God loved the world: He gave his Son, his one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be destroyed; by believing in him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life."* **John 3:16**

WHICH VERSION OF THE BIBLE SHOULD I USE FOR STUDY? Even though you've decided on a translation, you still have a plethora of different versions available to you. Although you'll never find a study Bible that has everything, look for a Bible – or maybe a couple – that has tools to allow you to dig deep into scripture.

The Recommended Personal Study Bible:

"The Life Application Bible" (Tyndale)

In this version application notes throughout the Bible help you take age-old biblical principles and apply them to your life. Also included are: a 365-day reading plan, a Bible concordance, character sketches, in-text maps and many other helpful Bible tools. Available in NLT, NIV and NASB.

The Recommended Topical Study Bible:

"Thompson Chain Reference Bible - NIV (Kirkbride)

This classic version of the Bible allows readers to follow more than 8,000 topics throughout scripture, from Genesis to Revelation. Available in KJV, NKJV, NIV, NASB.

The Recommended Background Study Bible:

"The NIV Study Bible" (Zondervan)

The NIV Study Bible has more than 20,000 in-text study notes, along with in-text maps, charts, diagrams and illustrations. Available only in NIV.

The Recommended Doctrine Study Bible:

"The Disciples Study Bible" (Broadman and Holman)

The Disciples Study Bible includes an in-depth look at 27 of the major Bible doctrines, 24 full-color illustrations on doctrine and chronology and a theological intro to each book of the Bible.

MY PERSONAL FAVORITE? I happen to favor the NLT for many of the reasons mentioned above!

