



bible translations

The Bible is a collection of smaller books and letters written in Ancient Hebrew and Greek over the course of thousands of years. Any English translation is an intense undertaking where a translator or group of translators tries to make ancient documents written in languages that haven't been used for millennia try and make sense to an English speaking audience.

When choosing a Bible for yourself, there are three main issues you'll want to keep in mind.

The "original" texts of the Bible exist as thousands of copies, and fragments of copies. No two fragments are the same. Scholars spend entire careers trying to deduce the oldest and most reliable ancient manuscripts that are then, in turn, translated into modern languages.

dynamic verses literal

Some translations try and be as close as possible to the originals in a word-for-word manner. They translate the words into English, but maintain ancient idioms and phrasing, even if it makes it more

difficult to understand. These are called **literal translations**.

Other translations forgo the word-for-word approach for a more idea-by-idea, or phrase-by-phrase approach. These translations try and translate not just words but concepts in such a way that people today can easily grasp what is being said in modern English. These are called **dynamic**.

Usually translations that are available at your local bookstore exist not as one or another, but on a continuum between these two extremes. Mainstream translations undertaken by respectable boards of translators such as the NRSV, the NIV, and the ESV exist somewhere in the middle of the continuum. Something like The Message is something of a pure dynamic translation, even becoming something close to a paraphrase of what the original documents in the original languages were trying to say.

There is no "right" or "better" way to go here. It depends on what you're looking for. If you're looking for something that's very easy to read, and are less concerned with absolute fidelity to the

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word-by-word originals, then a more dynamic version would be what you're looking for. If you're willing to read something that's a little less graspable, but is more faithful to the originals, then a more literal translation is what will fit the bill.

theological bias

It's impossible to approach the Bible without bringing our own biases to it. We see the Bible through our own lenses of experience, perspective, and world-view. Translators and groups of translators are not immune to these biases. A Bible like The New Jerusalem Bible is produced by Roman Catholic theologians and translators, and it has a decidedly Catholic bent to it. The NIV and ESV were produced by evangelical translators, and their translations bear this out too.

Again, there is no right or wrong here, it's just important that you're aware of where your translation is coming from.

annotated versions and study bibles

There are a LOT of translations out there that come not only with the text of the Bible, but with notes, study questions,

maps, and other bits of commentary. Some of these can be very, very helpful in explaining the text, or in giving a real-world application of it.

It's just important to remember, again, that these notes and commentaries are not part of the original Bible, and their content varies in usefulness and accuracy.

commentaries

Just as there are many different translations out there, there are also many different commentaries on the scriptures. Some of these are geared for an academic audience, and would probably be practically indecipherable to most. Some are extremely approachable, and are written for a lay audience that is more interested in how to apply the scriptures to their lives, while giving a readable and interesting take on the history and setting of the text at hand.

versions

NRSV

The standard translation of mainline protestant churches and academics. Produced by a reputable board of scholars, it maintains fidelity to the original texts, while trying to also be readable. **This is the translation we read from week by week at St. Mark's.**

NIV

Another solid translation, produced by a board of evangelical academics, which places readability a little higher on the priority list.

ESV

A more recent evangelical translation which leans more to the literal side of the spectrum. **This is the translation that Fr. Rick uses for personal devotions.**

The New Jerusalem Bible

A great translation by a board of catholic scholars, and approved of by the Holy See.

The Message

The Message completed over a period of years from 1993 to 2002, is the work of one man, Eugene Peterson, a Presbyterian minister who created this translation to place the scriptures into the modern idiom, so that it is eminently readable. **We give this translation to our J2A classes at St. Mark's.**

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The New Testament by David Bentley Hart

A brand new translation of the Christian Testament by an Orthodox theologian, which seeks to be as close to the original texts as possible. Even going so far as where the New Testament authors use bad Greek grammar, he uses bad English grammar.

The Living Bible

The Living Bible completed in 1971 is a paraphrase based on the ASV and some other texts. Its intent was to say as clearly as possible what the writers of the Scriptures mean so that the modern reader could better understand. It was a “game changer” when it first came on the scene. The New Living Bible is a translation complete in 1996 and was originally intended as an update to the Living Bible although they quickly came to realize that a new translation was required. The goals are the same however.....making the Scriptures easier to understand.

The King James Bible

A monumental accomplishment in human history, the KJV is one of the most famous translations out there, and for centuries it was the gold-standard. It reads like poetry, but it can be hard to understand, AND because it is over 400 years old, it's translators did not have the benefit of all of the triumphs of modern biblical archaeology that has unearthed older manuscripts to work from.

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