

Bible Translation Guide For 2020 (how to choose the right translation)

Taken from: <https://www.rethinknow.org/2018/01/29/how-to-choose-the-right-bible-translation-for-you/>
Jeffery Curtis Poor | January 29, 2018

It wasn't so long ago that you only had one option for an English Bible, the King James Version. Fast-forward 150 years or so and now there are as many Bible translations as there are options in the toothpaste aisle. With so many options now choosing the right Bible translation big task.

To complicate matters further, not all translations are equal or even done in the same manner. Some focus on a literal, word for word, translation. While others focus on translating the original meaning, thought for thought, of each passage.

I'm not going to go into all the technical details; there are people much smarter that have much better resources than I do. Rather I want to give a brief overview for the average person to make a better choice in choosing a translation.

What Kind of Translation Do You Need?



This chart puts some of the popular translations on a continuum so that you can see how they each uniquely approach interpretation of the original text. This is not an exact chart, rather an overview to see which translations are more literal and which ones focus on the main ideas.

If you are like me you might assume that the more literal, word for word, translations are better. But it comes down to what you are reading it for. A more literal translation can be useful when doing an in-depth study of a passage. Whereas most prefer an easier to read, thought for thought, translation when just reading more devotionally.

How you are going to read the Bible will dictate what translation will best suite you. Most people aren't going to be doing any in-depth studies so an easy to read or translation more in the middle will be best suited.

Easy Reading Bible – **New Living Translation (NLT)**

The NLT boasts a readable translation that uses verbiage and language that is commonly used in modern day. Many have found this to be one of the easiest to read translations. While it is far from a literal, word for word, translation it does a great job communicating the main thought of the original author. This is a great option for someone that wants the Bible in a readable format, but still maintaining the integrity of the authors original meaning.

Middle of Road – [New International Version \(NIV\)](#)

The NIV uses modern day language, but sticks closer to the original text than the NLT. It attempts to find the optimal balance between readability and exactness. This is one of the more popular Bibles, and many churches that you will attend on a Sunday will read from this translation. This is a great version for someone looking for a balanced Bible.

Literal Translation – [New American Standard Bible \(NASB\)](#)

The NASB is arguably the best literal translation you can use. It is the best translation if you are looking at doing an inductive study on a passage or prefer to read as close to the original language as possible. However it can be difficult to read as this translation leans towards a literal translation. This is a good option for someone that wants to do an in-depth study or is looking for a modern literal translation.

Different Perspective on a Passage – [The Message](#)

The Message is a great option to read WITH another translation. The Message doesn't convey the words from the author but rather the main idea. Thus when you read this you will see drastically different words and phrases. It's not a true translation, as the goal is to convey the tone and feel of the text rather than the text itself. This can be very useful when used with a more literal translation to help you see Scripture in a different light. However this is not the best version to read by itself.

One to Avoid – [King James Version \(KJV\)](#)

There's two reasons I think you should avoid the KJV. I'm not going to go in-depth on this. I'm going to state my concerns, and you can look further into them if you would like. If you want a more detailed look on the KJV read this: [Why I Do Not Think the King James Bible Is the Best Translation Available Today](#)

My first concern is the reliability of the translation. They simply did not have the training nor the best manuscripts when this translation was made. Particularly in their words in the New Testament, the manuscripts they were working with were relatively new (in translating the older equals more reliable). The KJV was also heavily influenced by political forces that affect the quality of the translation. While there have been several revisions, this translation is still lacking when compared to others.

My second concern is the style of the translation; it's in Old English. The majority of the New Testament was written in Koine Greek. It was a common everyday language of the day. Simple and easy to understand. That's how I believe we should translate the Bible today. But the KJV is a dated language. Many of the phrases and words are no longer in use today thus making it very hard for most to understand.

My Personal Favorite – [English Standard Version \(ESV\)](#)

I read the ESV primarily, although I also enjoy reading the NLT. It can be a little bit more of a "formal" version. It leans more towards a literal translation, however not to the point of sacrificing readability. I find it reads relatively easy. This is a good translation for someone that wants an easier to read literal translation.

So which one is best? The bottom line is you should choose the Bible translation that you most like to read. Read a few and figure out which one you enjoy reading. The best translation is the one you actually read.