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## COMPARING BIBLE TRANSLATIONS

Comparing Bible translations is like buying a house. You love the kitchen design in one, but the family room doesn't have a fireplace. Another one has a fireplace, but the bedrooms are smaller.

The same principle holds true for Bible translations. Each one has its attractions and its distractions. You have to weigh what's most important for you. If the Bible is like your only home, you'll need a good, solid one that's reliable and straightforward. But if it's more like a vacation cabin, you might choose something with

a few unusual features that would give you a change of pace.

These evaluations are guided by the insights and critiques of various Bible scholars.

The following list of translations is by no means complete. Many other available versions are used. But this list includes those most widely available.

### **Amplified Bible (AB)**

Translated by Frances E. Siewert and a team of about

12 other conservative evangelicals, this formal-equivalence version is unique in that it supplies alternate translations for key words in brackets in the text itself. Released in 1965, it remains a top-10, best-selling Bible in the United States and is particularly popular among evangelicals.

Including the other possible English words and phrases in brackets sometimes helps illuminate difficult passages. But too often the technique confuses more than it clarifies. As one reviewer, Edward P. Blair, notes: "This translation . . . is not representative of the best biblical scholarship of our time."

### **Good News Bible: Today's English Version (TEV)**

The TEV, released in 1976, was translated by the American Bible Society (ABS) under the leadership of Robert Bratcher. The entire work was reviewed by the ABS's Translations Committee as well as eight specialists representing seven religious groups. It's designed to express the meaning of the original text in modern words and forms.

Written at a seventh-grade level, it uses a limited vocabulary to make it accessible to those who use English as a second language. The careful translation makes it more accurate than most conversational versions. Yet some readers object to its translation of passages' meanings rather than each word's literal English equivalent.

### **Jerusalem Bible (JB) and New Jerusalem Bible (NJB)**

The first complete Roman Catholic Bible translated into English from Greek and Hebrew, the Jerusalem Bible is the work of 28 British scholars. It was inspired by a French translation, and it follows mainstream Bible scholarship.

The new Jerusalem Bible, released in 1985 updates the original based on recent scholarship. It's also the first major English translation to "soften or avoid the inbuilt preference in the English language . . . for the masculine," as the forward says.

The extensive scholarly notes and introductions are unsurpassed in any other one-volume translation. Indeed, the JB and NJB are sometimes actually classified as study Bibles.

Written at a 10th-grade reading level, the translation is solid, rarely reflecting a Catholic bias. But the notes will offend readers who don't accept the use of literary and historical analysis in Bible study. And some readers dislike the use of translation techniques that focus on meaning rather than each word's literal equivalent.

### **King James Version (KJV)**

About 46 scholars, appointed by King James I of England, prepared the King James Version. Scholars relied heavily on the Latin Vulgate as well as earlier English translations. Released in 1611, it became the standard Bible of the English-speaking world and remains a best-selling version.

The King James Version is the most familiar and

revered of the translations. But it uses archaic, Elizabethan language with words that are either unclear or misunderstood by modern readers. It's written at a grade-14 reading level, far above most teenagers. Moreover, the translators didn't have the benefit of modern Bible scholarship or recent archaeological discoveries. As a result, it contains passages that scholars agree aren't authentic.

### **Living Bible (LB)**

Written by Kenneth Taylor to help his children understand the Bible, this version became an immediate success when it was published. In fact, it was the best-selling book in the United States in 1972. In preparing the version, Taylor worked from the American standard Version of 1901, not the Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic texts.

Taylor's colloquial American English reads easily. It makes the general and abstract specific and concrete. It's written at an eighth-grade-reading level.

The Living Bible should be used only in comparison with other versions—*never* as a study Bible or as the text in public worship. Scholars criticize Taylor for overstepping the boundary between paraphrase and commentary. "Not even a paraphraser has the right to import into the text what is not clearly there," writes Robert Bratcher of the American Bible Society, "and he has even less right to import what's clearly not there."

### **New American Bible (NAB)**

Under official Roman Catholic Church sponsorship, this is the first version translated from the original languages by American Catholics. Released in 1970, it's the product of more than 25 years of work by 50 scholars.

The translation is more literal than many others. But it's perhaps the most readable of the literal translations. Little material (even in footnotes) is distinctly Catholic. The version is criticized for rearranging the text in light of literary analysis.

### **New American Standard Bible (NASB)**

Product of 58 anonymous scholars under the sponsorship of the Lockman Foundation, this version updates the earlier American Standard Version text of 1901, which was popular in conservative church circles.

Released in 1971, the NASB is generally accurate. It's a useful tool for Bible study, particularly for people with a background in biblical studies. It's written at an 11th-grade reading level.

But the literalness of the translation makes it difficult to read. It also maintains much of the traditional and outdated practices of the KJV, such as separating individual verses.

### **New English Bible (NEB)**

The NEB was translated by leading British Protestant scholars. Individual translators prepared drafts, which were then reviewed by other translators as well as literary stylists.

Released in 1970, no other modern English translation matches the NEB's literary quality. Written at an

eighth-grade reading level, the text is fresh, forceful and readable. But some critics dislike the use of the meaning-for-meaning translation approach. Others say the translations of some disputed passages aren't widely accepted.

A revision is scheduled for release in the near future.

### **New International Version (NIV)**

This translation arose out of conservative versions, particularly the RSV. For a decade, more than 110 evangelical scholars worked on the translation, guiding it through an elaborate committee structure of checks and balances. The version sold 1.2 million copies in the first four weeks; it remains a best-selling Bible.

Released in 1978, the NIV is an accurate, easy-to-read translation. Written at a seventh-grade level, many readers use it in study, worship and personal reading. Its occasional use of traditional language appeals to KJV loyalists, and disputed passages are translated in ways that won't offend evangelical readers.

At the same time, the conservative theological bias occasionally leads to word choices that don't accurately reflect the original language. And the scarcity of critical footnotes sometimes fails to alert readers about disputed passages and meanings.

### **New King James Version (NKJV)**

In order to appeal to Christians who trust the KJV but have difficulty with its outdated language, Thomas Nelson Publishers asked 130 conservative evangelicals to work on this revision of the King James Version. The goal was to modernize language, grammar, punctuation and format while maintaining the authority, rhythm and beauty of the KJV text. The revision was released in 1982.

What's resulted is a revision that's definitely easier to read. (It has a ninth-grade reading level.) But in seeking to be both contemporary and traditional, this version fails to do either. The literal translation sometimes makes sentence structure cumbersome and unclear. And mixing some 17th-century English with 20th-century English makes the reading disjointed.

### **Revised Standard Version (RSV)**

A diverse committee of 32 scholars translated the RSV under the sponsorship of the National Council of Churches. It uses modern language, recent biblical scholarship and incorporates recent archaeological and linguistic discoveries.

Released in 1952, the RSV is accurate, making it the standard version for many denominations. It's written at a 10th-grade reading level. But because it's a revision of the KJV, it retains some outdated language.

In 1973, the translators released an ecumenical edition. It's the first English Bible published that is acceptable to Protestants, Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodoxes. Another revision, with inclusive language, is expected this year.

*Note: The DRE recommends in descending order.*

1. RSV
2. Jerusalem
3. Good News (for children)