

Complete Guide to Bible Versions: Comparison, History, and Philosophy of Top Bible Translations [Updated 2025]

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February 21, 2025

If you're new to Bible reading — or even if you're not — you might feel completely bewildered by the array of Bible versions, translations, and editions available today.

Whether you're browsing the Bible section at your local bookstore or comparing [Bible Gateway's own library](#) (which features dozens of English translations, let alone the huge variety of other languages), you might feel overwhelmed by the alphabet soup of abbreviations in front of you.

You're not alone — Bible decision fatigue is real. In fact, it's not uncommon for shoppers to leave stores empty handed rather than risk buying the “wrong” Bible version.

Here's the good news: with very few exceptions, there is no “wrong” version of the Good News. But depending on what you're looking for, there are better or worse places for you to start.

This guide will help you sort through the major Bible versions available today and make a choice that suits your personal circumstances. You'll also learn a bit about the different translation types, or philosophies, and a crash course in their histories. When you're done, you'll have no trouble telling your NIV from your ESV, your NRSVUE from your NABRE, and your KJV from your NKJV.

Why Are There So Many Bible Versions?

Why are there so many Bible versions, anyway? How different can they really be?

If you've ever compared a few translations side by side, you know the answer: they can differ greatly. Sometimes it's hard to believe both passages come from the same source text!

The [books of the Bible](#) were written over hundreds of years in various locations around the Mediterranean Sea and the Middle East. Most of the Old Testament was written in Hebrew (with a few passages in Aramaic) centuries before the birth of Jesus, while the latest books in the New Testament were written in Greek decades after his death and resurrection.

Needless to say, a lot has changed in the world since then. Rendering words [written thousands of years ago](#) and thousands of miles away — in very different languages and contexts than our own — intelligible to a modern English reader is an enormous challenge.

There are a lot of good reasons for the variety of different ways an original passage from the Bible can be translated. Here are just a few of them:

No One-to-One Correlation

Words in one language seldom have exact matches in other languages. There are often [shades of meaning](#) lost in translation — all the more so when separated by thousands of years.

Common examples include the Hebrew word *ruach* — which can be translated either “breath” or “wind” — and of course the Greek *logos*, which can variously mean “word,” “reason,” “thought,” or “speech.”

No Punctuation

Unlike modern English, most ancient languages have little to no punctuation to clarify where one phrase or sentence ends and another begins. To make matters worse, early [Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek manuscripts](#) used all capital letters, and often didn’t include spaces between words. Hebrew didn’t even include vowels!

IMAGINETRYINGTOTRANSLATETHISSENTENCEWITHNOVOWELSIFITWAS NTYOURNATIVELANGUAGE. Now imagine trying to do that for hundreds of pages (not to mention backwards: Hebrew is written right-to-left)!

Idioms

One of the greatest challenges trying to translate texts across languages and cultures is figuring out what to do with *idioms*, or common cultural phrases that mean something very different from what they appear to in the literal sense.

Do you convert them to the target language as closely as possible, so readers know exactly what images the original writers used, even if they don’t understand what was originally meant by them? Or do you try to get the point across by adjusting the words to something more meaningful to us today?

Imagine someone in Thailand — or for that matter, on Mars — two or three thousand years from now trying to make sense of phrases like “break a leg” or “throw the baby out with the bathwater” and you can start to get a sense of the problem.

These sorts of phrases abound in both Hebrew and Greek. Many of them have now entered our own lexicon — so much so that we don't even realize they're from the Bible — but others, like the many uses of *covering* or *uncovering one's feet* — remain contested.

Times, Genres, and Styles

The books of the Bible were [written by many hands](#) over hundreds of years. Some books were carefully crafted by scholars, while others are the live-spoken testimony of holy men and women. Some of them are histories, some are poetry, some are letters, or collections of sayings, or prophecies. Often a single book will include several of these genres within it.

The fact that God chose so many hands to write his Word is part of what makes reading the Bible such a [vibrant, dynamic, and engaging experience](#). When translating such a wonderful variety of voices, it's possible to purposely or accidentally smooth them all out into a single, more consistent one.

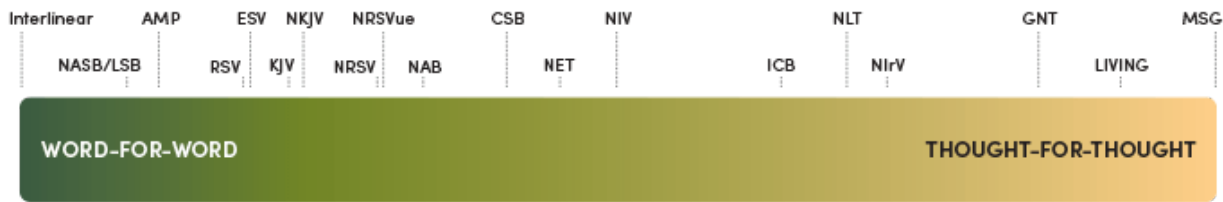
There are reasons to do so — such as helping to highlight the thematic and narrative throughlines of the entirety of Scripture. But you also run the risk of losing the freshness and particular feeling of the individuals God selected and inspired to deliver his message.

Types of Bible Translation

Different translators intentionally approach all these problems differently — but all with the same goal of trying to make God's Word clear and accessible in our own words.

To better understand what separates different Bible versions from one another, you first need to understand the fundamental translation philosophies behind them. Each translation style brings its unique lens to scripture, influencing how passages are interpreted and applied.

Bible Translation Guide



Formal Equivalence (Word-for-Word)

Formal equivalence prioritizes achieving word-for-word accuracy, focusing on a meticulous and precise translation of the original text's exact words as closely as possible into the target language. This approach preserves idioms, even if we lose their intended meaning.

Examples: The KJV and NKJV, ESV, NRSVUE, NASB, CSB, and NABRE versions are all different approaches to formal equivalence translation — some more stringently literal than others.

Functional Equivalence (Thought-for-Thought)

Functional equivalence — also called dynamic equivalence or thought-for-thought translation — focuses on conveying the meaning of thoughts or ideas rather than a direct word-for-word translation, aiming to preserve the original writers' intent and context. Here, idioms will be translated in a way that makes their intended meaning clear, even if it means losing the actual Hebrew or Greek phrase.

Examples: The NIV is among the most balanced translations available, but tends slightly more toward functional than formal equivalence. The NLT, CEB, and NIV are more strongly thought-for-thought approaches.

Paraphrase

As the name suggests, paraphrases rephrase and restructure sentences from the original text to enhance clarity and accessibility for a modern audience. In other words, paraphrases fall on the far end of the thought-for-thought spectrum. While some paraphrases are well-loved and respected, they can be controversial, because they stray distantly from the original language of the Bible.

Examples: The Message and the Living Bible are paraphrased versions of the Bible. The Amplified Bible is, too, although it is unique in being a word-for-word

paraphrase, where it provides multiple meanings of many words to help illustrate their various meanings.

Top Bible Versions Today

The most popular English versions of the Bible today include the New International Version (NIV), King James Version (KJV) and New King James Version (NKJV), the English Standard Version (ESV), the New Living Translation (NLT), the New Revised Standard Version (NRSVUE), and several others.



COMPARISON OF TOP BIBLE VERSIONS

VERSION	YEAR	TRANSLATION TYPE	RDG. LVL.*	EXAMPLE PASSAGE (1 CORINTHIANS 15:50)
NIV	1978 (REV. 2011)	Functional (slight)	Med-Easy	I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.
KJV	1611	Formal (medium)	Hard	Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.
NKJV	1982	Formal (medium)	Medium	Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption.
NRSVUE	1989 (REV. 2021)	Formal (medium)	Med-Hard	What I am saying, brothers and sisters, is this: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.
ESV	2001 (REV. 2016)	Formal (medium)	Med-Hard	I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.
NASB	1971 (REV. 2020)	Formal (heavy)	Hard	Now I say this, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.
NABRE	2011	Formal (slight)	Medium	This I declare, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does corruption inherit incorruption.
CSB	2004 (REV. 2017)	Formal (slight)	Med-Easy	What I am saying, brothers and sisters, is this: Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor can corruption inherit incorruption.
NLT	1996 (REV. 2015)	Functional (medium)	Easy	What I am saying, dear brothers and sisters, is that our physical bodies cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. These dying bodies cannot inherit what will last forever.
CEB	2011	Functional (medium)	Med-Easy	This is what I'm saying, brothers and sisters: Flesh and blood can't inherit God's kingdom. Something that rots can't inherit something that doesn't decay.
AMP	1965 (REV. 2015)	Paraphrase (Formal)	Hard	Now I say this, believers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit nor be part of the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable (mortal) inherit the imperishable (immortal).
MSG	1993-2002	Paraphrase (Functional)	Easy	I need to emphasize, friends, that our natural, earthy lives don't in themselves lead us by their very nature into the kingdom of God. Their very "nature" is to die, so how could they "naturally" end up in the Life kingdom?

* Easy = U.S. Middle School Reading Level | Medium = Early High School | Hard = Late High School

NIV (New International Version)

Summary: The most popular modern version of the Bible, known for its excellent and broadly accessible balance of accuracy and readability.

- **Year released:** 1978 (Revised 2011)
- **Reading level:** 7 (Relatively easy)
- **Translation team/sponsor:** 100+ evangelical Bible scholars for Biblica (licensed to Zondervan in the U.S.)

The NIV's deft balance of accuracy and readability has established it as the most popular modern Bible version. More than 100 international scholars labored for over a decade to capture the original meaning of each passage without sacrificing accessibility, beginning in the 1960s and finally publishing the finished version in 1978.

One of the most balanced translations available, the NIV leans just slightly toward a functional equivalence compared to other top translations. It should appeal to a wide variety of readers across ages, reading levels, and denominations.

Readers looking for a closer word-for-word translation, however, might be happier with the ESV or NRSVUE, while those looking for a more traditional feel should stick with the KJV or NKJV.

Sample passage: I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. — [1 Corinthians 15:50](#) (NIV)

KJV (King James Version)

Summary: The enduring and influential classic that set the bar for English Bible translations. Best for traditional worship settings and historical or literary-minded readers.

- **Year released:** 1611
- **Reading level:** 12 (Very challenging)
- **Translation team/sponsor:** 47 Anglican scholars and clergy for King James I of England

One of the most popular books in the world for hundreds of years, the [King James Version](#) needs little introduction. Commissioned (or “authorized”) by King James I of England in 1604, undertaken by a team of 47 scholars, and released

in 1611, the KJV became the definitive Bible version in the English-speaking world until at least the mid-twentieth century. It is directly responsible for hundreds of English terms and phrases that we use every day — often without realizing their Biblical origin.

The KJV initially took a formal equivalence approach, though (because it was intended to be read aloud in services) it paid special attention to the beauty and elegance of the language. That effort still bears fruit today.

On the other hand, our language has changed a lot since 1611, and some of the phrasing and sentence structure can be confusing to modern readers. We no longer use “thee” and “thou” as informal pronouns, for example, which makes them paradoxically sound *more* formal.

In addition, 400 years of Bible scholarship has enabled us to see areas where the KJV translators had less access to the resources we have today, and had to make some occasionally puzzling guesses. (My personal favorite is from [Numbers 23:22](#), God “hath as it were the strength of an unicorn.” Today most translations use “wild ox.”)

Sample passage: Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. — [1 Corinthians 15:50](#) (KJV)

NKJV (New King James Version)

Summary: An update to the KJV that preserves its literary majesty while modernizing archaic words and phrases.

- **Year released:** 1982
- **Reading level:** 9 (Medium)
- **Translation team/sponsor:** 130 scholars, clergy, and lay Christians for Thomas Nelson Publishers

The NKJV is an update and modernization of the KJV by 130 Bible scholars. It was commissioned in 1975 and released in 1982, with the goal of retaining the same formal equivalence and literary majesty of the original KJV while eliminating archaic, obsolete, or inaccurate terms and phrases (so, no more unicorns).

The NKJV serves as the perfect bridge between the traditional feel of the KJV and the accessibility of modern translations like the NIV.

Sample passage: Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. — [1 Corinthians 15:50](#) (NKJV)

NRSVue (New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition)

Summary: A forward-thinking but academically rigorous translation that emphasizes gender inclusiveness. A favorite of scholars and academics, Catholics (NRSV-CE), and inclusive faith communities.

- **Year released:** 1989 (Rev. 2021)
- **Reading level:** 10 (Somewhat challenging)
- **Translation team/sponsor:** 50+ scholars from Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, and Jewish backgrounds for the National Council of Churches USA

First published in 1989 and then updated in 2021, the NRSV (now NRSVue) was developed by a team of about 30 translators from Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, and (for the Old Testament) Jewish backgrounds. It was based on the RSV translation of 1952, itself an update of the ASV from 1901, using a predominantly formal equivalence and taking into account the latest scholarship of Biblical times and manuscripts.

Among its distinguishing developments, the NRSVue is known for using gender-inclusive translations such as “person” instead of “man” and “brothers and sisters” instead of “brothers” where the context supports or allows it. The translators argue that it better reflects the original meaning in languages where plural masculine pronouns (e.g., ἀδελφοί/*adelphoi*) were used for groups that included both men and women — especially where the text makes clear that women were, in fact, present, such as [Acts 18:26-27](#) or [1 Corinthians 1:11](#).

While it remains a controversial choice among those who feel it is an insufficiently literal translation, other versions such as the NIV, CSB, and NASB have since adopted the same practice as better reflecting both modern usage and the original authors’ intentions.

The NRSV is also, in the edited and expanded Catholic Edition (NRSV-CE), one of the few [complete Bible translations approved](#) by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops for private use and study.

Sample passage: What I am saying, brothers and sisters, is this: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. — [1 Corinthians 15:50](#) (NRSVue)

ESV (English Standard Version)

Summary: A straightforward translation that adheres to an “essentially literal” word-for-word approach. A favorite of scholarly evangelicals preferring traditional gendered terminology.

- **Year released:** 2001 (Revised 2016)
- **Reading level:** 10 (Somewhat challenging)
- **Translation team/sponsor:** 100+ evangelical scholars and pastors for Crossway

The ESV translation was conducted in the late 1990s by about 100 evangelical scholars and published in 2001, partly in response to the NRSV. Like the NRSV, the ESV is an update of the RSV and aims as closely as possible for word-for-word accuracy while remaining readable.

The translators sought to go beyond the NRSV and what they perceived as some liberties it took with interpretation, particularly its gender neutrality. Instead the ESV endeavored to hold to an “essentially literal” approach that emphasizes word-for-word accuracy and fidelity as well as building on the RSV’s literary excellence and depth.

Sample passage: I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. — [1 Corinthians 15:50](#) (ESV)

NASB (New American Standard Bible)

Summary: A rigorously word-for-word translation that seeks to reproduce the original structure of the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. Generally considered one of the most literal Bible translations available in English.

- **Year released:** 1995 (Revised 2020)
- **Reading level:** 11 (Challenging)
- **Translation team/sponsor:** Lockman Foundation

First published in 1971 and updated in 1995 and again in 2020, the NASB strives to be as literal and precise as possible without sacrificing readability and modern English usage.

The 1995 version was a significant update to the original release. It echoed the NKJV by removing archaic pronouns (thee, thy, thou) and restructuring awkward phrases. In 2020 the NASB was updated again to account for the latest scholarship (including gender neutrality where appropriate to the context) and modern language usage (such as “let’s go up” instead of “let us go up”).

Throughout these improvements, though, the NASB has held closely to a strict word-for-word equivalence. This makes it a good choice for scholars and anyone looking for a very close adherence to the original structure and wording of the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts.

Sample passage: Now I say this, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. — [1 Corinthians 15:50](#) (NASB)

NLT (New Living Translation)

Summary: A looser translation that emphasizes readability, simplifying complex terms and phrases while preserving their original meaning. A good choice for new and young readers, and daily devotional readers seeking a new perspective.

- **Year released:** 1996 (Revised 2015)
- **Reading level:** 6 (Easy)
- **Translation team/sponsor:** Tyndale House Foundation

Developed by some 90 scholars from various denominational backgrounds in the 1980s and released in 1996, the NLT is notable for being the most popular of the firmly functional-equivalence translations.

Rather than striving for word-for-word accuracy, the NLT translators sought to convey the original meaning of the text as clearly as possible for modern readers. This includes updating measurements and dating to modern standards (e.g., feet instead of cubits), as well as making sense of archaic idioms (“get yourself ready” instead of “gird up thy loins”).

These modernizations make the NLT a nice, accessible option both for new Bible readers in search of clarity and for long-time Bible users seeking a new approach and perspective.

Sample passage: What I am saying, dear brothers and sisters, is that our physical bodies cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. These dying bodies cannot inherit what will last forever. — [1 Corinthians 15:50](#) (NLT)

Other Notable Bible Versions

Here are some other notable Bible versions from recent decades. See the graphic above for sample text of these translations.

CSB (Christian Standard Bible)

Summary: A balanced translation that goes for word-for-word accuracy while simplifying the language for modern readers. Though a similarly balanced translation to the NIV, the CSB has struggled to step outside of the former's shadow, especially for those outside of the Southern Baptist Convention.

- **Year released:** 2004 (Rev. 2017)
- **Reading level:** 7 (Relatively easy)
- **Translation team/sponsor:** 100 evangelical scholars for Holman Bible Publishers

Sample passage: What I am saying, brothers and sisters, is this: Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor can corruption inherit incorruption. — [1 Corinthians 15:50](#) (CSB)

CEB (Common English Bible)

Summary: A dynamic yet balanced translation that strives for natural language and broad accessibility to speakers of modern English without sacrificing rigorous accuracy. Known for its informal, conversational style falling somewhere between the NIV and NLT.

- **Year released:** 2011
- **Reading level:** 7 (Relatively easy)
- **Translation team/sponsor:** 120 mostly mainline Protestant and progressive evangelical scholars for Christian Resources Development Corporation (licensed to Abingdon)

Sample passage: This is what I'm saying, brothers and sisters: Flesh and blood can't inherit God's kingdom. Something that rots can't inherit something that doesn't decay. — [1 Corinthians 15:50](#) (CEB)

NABRE (New American Bible Revised Edition)

Summary: The official Catholic translation of the Bible and the only one approved for use in Mass, the NABRE takes a balanced, word-for-word translation approach, similar to but less stringent than the NRSVue or ESV. It's also known for its extensive footnotes and cross-references.

- **Year released:** 2011 (Based on the 1970 NAB)
- **Reading level:** 9 (Medium)
- **Translation team/sponsor:** Catholic Bible Association of America for the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine

Sample passage: This I declare, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does corruption inherit incorruption. — [1 Corinthians 15:50](#) (NABRE)

AMP (Amplified Bible)

Summary: A unique translation balancing word-for-word equivalence and paraphrase by offering multiple translations and exposition (“amplifications”) on many words and phrases. It’s a useful tool for private study but has received criticism for interpolating phrases like “personal Savior” that did not exist in the original time and language of the Bible.

- **Year released:** 1965 (Rev. 2015)
- **Reading level:** 11 (Challenging)
- **Translation team/sponsor:** Frances Siewert (Presbyterian) and other scholars for Lockman and Zondervan

Sample passage: Now I say this, believers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit nor be part of the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable (mortal) inherit the imperishable (immortal). — [1 Corinthians 15:50](#) (AMP)

MSG (The Message)

Summary: A popular paraphrase by pastor and theologian Eugene Peterson, begun in 1993 and finally completed in 2002. Peterson sought to capture the tone and informal style of contemporary speech to deliver a version of the Bible that reads like a story, vibrant and accessible. It’s a compelling way to hear familiar passages with fresh ears, and works well as an audio Bible — though some of the American slang is already beginning to feel outdated. A fun read but not recommended as (nor intended to be) anyone’s first or only Bible.

- **Year released:** 1993-2002 (Piece by piece)
- **Reading level:** 6 (Easy)
- **Translation team/sponsor:** Eugene Peterson (Presbyterian) and consulting scholars for NavPress

Sample passage: I need to emphasize, friends, that our natural, earthy lives don’t in themselves lead us by their very nature into the kingdom of God. Their very “nature” is to die, so how could they “naturally” end up in the Life kingdom? — [1 Corinthians 15:50](#) (MSG)

A Brief History of Bible Translation

Although the number of Bible versions has exploded in recent decades, there is a long and active history of translating the Bible to make it more accessible to regional audiences. In fact, the first major translation of the Bible into a regional language was completed more than 200 years before the birth of Jesus.

Here's a very brief, condensed timeline of the major developments in Bible translation, at least for the English-speaking world.

The Earliest Bible Translations

The oldest complete translation of the Old Testament from its original Hebrew was the Greek Septuagint, created around the 3rd century BC. The earliest complete translation of both testaments was the Latin Vulgate by Jerome in the 400s AD.

- **Septuagint (Greek):** This is the [Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible](#), created during the mid-3rd century BC to accommodate the increased use of Greek among diasporic Jews following the conquest of the eastern Mediterranean by Alexander the Great. It became the standard Old Testament for Christians throughout the Greek-speaking world, and, remarkably, is still in liturgical use today by the Eastern Orthodox Church.
- **Vulgate (Latin):** Saint Jerome meticulously undertook his translation of the Bible in the late 4th to early 5th century AD to accommodate the increasing use of Latin instead of Greek in the western Roman Empire. He established a new precedent by translating the Old Testament from its original Hebrew rather than the more commonly used Septuagint version.

Jerome's work paid off: even before the Catholic Church officially sanctioned it at the Council of Trent in the 16th century, the Vulgate was by far the most widely used version of the Bible in Europe — and remained the definitive Catholic version all the way until Vatican II permitted the use of vernacular Bibles in 1963.

First English Translations

It took nearly 1,000 years after the adoption of the Vulgate for Bibles to start appearing in English. By that time, most common people didn't speak or understand Latin, making God's Word inaccessible to them except indirectly, as explained by priests or passed down verbally in Bible-based stories.

- **Wycliffe's Bible:** The [first complete translation of the entire Bible into English](#) was by John Wycliffe and his followers in the late 1300s. It was based on the Vulgate (since the original Hebrew and Greek texts remained unavailable in the West). Because it had to be hand-copied and distributed, it didn't reach a wide audience, but it was still enough to earn Wycliffe a condemnation for heresy 30 years after his death.
- **Tyndale's New Testament:** William Tyndale's translation of the New Testament, published in 1526, was the first English version to be distributed using the new printing press. Tyndale's work was groundbreaking for its use of the original Greek texts and for his commitment to making the Bible understandable for commoners, or those who spoke "the ploughman's terms." Unfortunately, it also led to his martyrdom in 1536.
- **The Geneva Bible:** Published in 1560 by English refugees in Geneva, Switzerland, this was the first English Bible to include both [verse numbers](#) and [extensive commentary](#). Its readability and comprehensive annotations made it the Bible of choice for [English-speaking Protestants](#) in the 16th and 17th centuries — including the Mayflower pilgrims in America.
- **The KJV:** Commissioned by King James I of England in 1604, [this translation](#) aimed to create a version that could be accessible and acceptable to the broadest English-speaking audience — which included both Anglicans and Puritans, who were then mortal enemies. Its enduring use and admiration are a testament to its success.

Bible Translation in the 20th-21st Centuries

The 20th and 21st centuries have seen a proliferation of English Bible translations, reflecting diverse theological perspectives, advances in historical linguistics, and the ongoing quest for clarity and accessibility. The two most important developments during this era that aren't listed above were the ASV and RSV.

- **ASV (American Standard Version):** Released in 1901, the ASV took a strict word-for-word approach that sought to capture the original sense of the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts, while retaining the KJV's use of Elizabethan English (such as "thee" and "thou"). Though not much used today, it served as the basis for most formal-equivalence translations since, including the RSV, NRSV, ESV, NASB, and the Amplified Bible.
- **RSV (Revised Standard Version):** A major, comprehensive update of the ASV, the RSV was published in 1952 after 15 years of work by a massive ecumenical body of 38 Christian faith groups in the United States. It was the first translation to do away with archaic pronouns and verb forms (e.g., adopting "you have" instead of "thou hadst"), simplifying the text and opening God's Word to millions of readers while adhering to rigorous accuracy by leveraging the latest Biblical scholarship and manuscripts.

Bible Version FAQs

How many versions of the Bible are there?

A lot! Bible Gateway has [more than 200 versions](#) — including more than 60 in English — and there are many more out there, especially when you include partial translations such as OT-only or NT-only translations and individual books from independent scholars.

Is there a most accurate Bible translation?

The short answer is "no." The longer answer is that it depends how you — and any given translator — define "accuracy."

Because ancient Hebrew and Greek texts don't map perfectly onto modern English language and culture, any translation has to strike a careful balance between rigorous adherence to the [original languages](#), or taking some liberties in order to clarify their meaning. (See the discussion on idioms above for some examples.)

Either way, there are countless choices to make about the best way to present confusing passages and guesswork about the original authors' intent. And many of these choices are influenced by the translator's own cultural, doctrinal, and theological assumptions.

That said, a more word-for-word approach such as the **NASB** or **ESV/NRSVue** (both inheritors of the RSV tradition) is likely to adhere closer to the original text. Scholars and academics tend to appreciate the NRSVue for looking more holistically at the underlying cultures and contexts of the Bible's writers. But others say it is insufficiently literal in its interpretation of Greek and Hebrew words.

Which Bible version is best for beginners?

If you're just [setting out on your Bible reading journey](#) — no matter your age or stage of faith — the best place to start is probably a translation that balances accuracy with readability, so you get a feel for the text without getting bogged down in the details.

The **NIV**'s deft balance and broad popularity make it a great first Bible version. But depending on your taste and reading level, you might be more interested in something more formal, like the **NKJV**, **NRSVue**, or **ESV**. Or, if you want something a little smoother and more accessible, try the **NLT** or **CEB**.

It's also a good idea, if you're just starting out, to begin with a [Study Bible](#) that can guide your reading and help you contextualize and make sense of complex passages. Most of the above versions have Study editions, so just find the one that feels right to you!

What version of the Bible do Catholics use?

The only English version of the Bible approved for Catholic mass is the **NABRE**. Additionally, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has [approved](#) the **NRSV-CE** and the Good News Translation (**GNT**) for private use, along with some other partial translations.

Of course, there's nothing stopping Catholic readers from using any of the other Bible versions available — though you'll want to ensure it includes the [Deuterocanonical books](#) that Protestant Bibles typically leave out. (Hint: Look for a "Catholic Edition" or "CE" after the abbreviation.)

The ESV, NLT, and CEB all have Catholic editions with Apocrypha. Be aware, though, that these translations were done by predominantly Protestant scholars, and may exhibit a slight bias toward Reformed theology in their word choices (and especially in their Study editions). When in doubt, stick with the Church-approved translations.

How should I choose which Bible version is right for me?

The best way to choose which Bible version is right for you is by comparing some favorite passages in a few translations [side by side](#) (or in parallel). If you are new to Bible reading and don't have a favorite passage, you can always start with [Genesis 1](#), [John 1](#), or [Matthew 5-7](#) (the Sermon on the Mount). Which one speaks to you the most? Remember: there's no wrong answer!

It's also always a good idea to consult your pastor. What does your church use liturgically? Is there a Bible Study group reading a particular version? While reading the Bible privately can be a powerful way to build a relationship with the Lord, studying his Word in community can expand your horizons with unexpected insights, challenge you with different perspectives, and hold you accountable for regular engagement with Scripture. After all, we are called to be one body in Christ ([Romans 12:5](#)).

Conclusion: The Best Bible Version?

That's easy: the best Bible version is the one you'll keep reading!

If there's one thing you should take away from this article, it's that translating a text as big and complex and multifaceted and meaningful as the Bible is incredibly difficult. For better or worse, there's no perfect "right way" to do it.

Ultimately, whether you're drawn to the poetic cadence of the King James (or New King James) Version, the straightforward clarity of the New International Version, or the historical depth of the New Revised Standard Version (or better yet, all three of them!), what matters most is that you're [engaging with Scripture](#) in a meaningful way.

So take your time, explore different translations, and find the one that brings you closer to understanding God's message for you.

This post was updated in February 2025 with several additional Bible versions and more information about each of them. The language was also corrected and clarified throughout.

[Jacob Edson](#)

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