

Which Bible Translation Should You Use?

Why so many?

Every few years it seems another Bible translation comes out, or an old one is revised. We now have so many to choose from it is hard to know what to do. Which one is best? Which one should you use?

The following discusses the various types of translation, reading level, and will briefly consider a few of the most popular versions.

Translation types

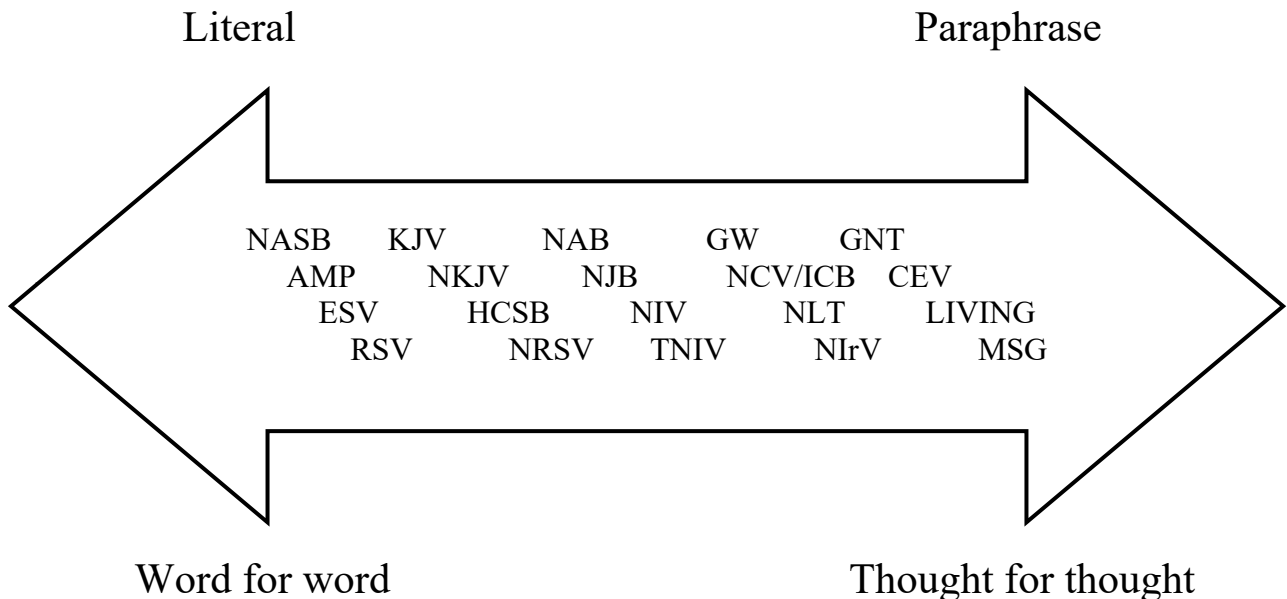
Translating from one language to another is not as simple as it might seem. You cannot just get out a dictionary and substitute one word for another in the language you are translating. There are differences in grammar, syntax, idioms, and word order, among other things. Do you try to stay as close as possible to word for word, or emphasize the thought meaning of the original? Is it intended for study, or reading, or both? Do you want a translation by committee or an individual? All of these are valid approaches, and each has its advantages and disadvantages.

The most literal or the closest to a word for word translation is known as formal equivalence. The KJV, NASB, and ESV, for example, fall into this category.

Functional equivalence tries to convey the thought and ideas of the original writing. At the far end of this spectrum are the outright paraphrases which are much more idiomatic and use everyday language. An early example of this is the Living Bible published in the 1970's. A more recent example is The Message.

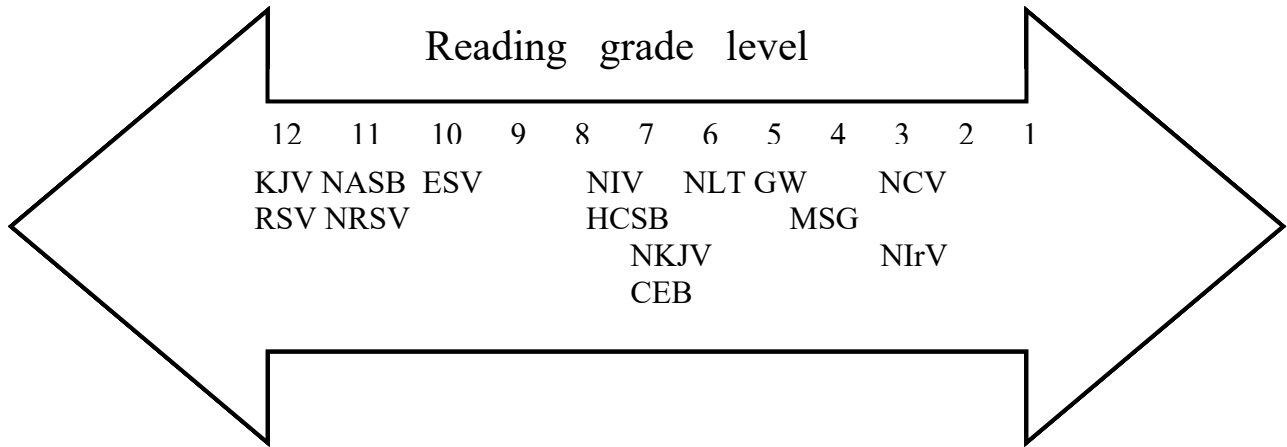
Some translators attempt to strike a balance between these two methods. This is sometimes called dynamic equivalence. The NIV and NAB are examples of this method.

The following chart is a relative representation of translations on a scale of translation methodology.



Reading level

Various translations are written at different reading levels. The literal translations are typically at a higher grade level and the paraphrases at the lower grade levels. This chart gives you some approximations.



If English is not your primary language consider these;

(CEV) Contemporary English Version

(ERV) Everyday Reading Bible

(GNT) Good News Translation

(NiRV) New International Readers Version

Which is best?

All of the translations mentioned herein are done by competent people trying to accurately convey God's words to us. They have different translation philosophies and even different doctrinal views, but none can be considered "bad" or inaccurate within their methodology. The version you prefer depends on your purpose, reading level, and personal preference as to style.

For serious study it is recommended you stay with a more literal translation. A good choice is the NASB because it is available with Strong's word references, which can be helpful for some in their personal studies. For reading, the functional or dynamic equivalents are easier reading. If your English is not too good, use one of the easier translations mentioned above.

The real answer, and strongly recommended, is to use more than one translation. Most Bible questions in regard to language and meaning can be resolved by reading the relevant passages in several translations. A parallel Bible in KJV, NASB, NIV, and NLT will give you a good variety of methodology and style. Other combinations can do the same thing, but try to get versions from several different points of view.

Conclusion

Which translation should you use? All of them.

Common abbreviations for Bible versions. Dates are the copyright, revision, or publication dates.

KJ21	21 st Century King James Version	1994
AMP	Amplified Bible	1965, 1987
ASV	American Standard Version	1881
AV	Authorized Version aka KJV	1611, 1613, 1629, 1638, 1762, 1769
BBE	Bible in Basic English	1949, 1964
CEB	Common English Bible	2011
CEV	Contemporary English Version	1995
DBY	Literal translation by Nelson Darby	1890
DRB	Douay OT Rheims NT	1609/1582 Catholic
EMTV	English Majority Text Version	2003
ESV	English Standard Version	2007
GNB	Good News Bible/Todays English Version	1992
GNT	Good News Translation aka GNB	1976
GW	God's Word	1995
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible	2003
ISV	International Standard Version	2011
JB	Jerusalem Bible	1966 Catholic
JPS	Jewish Publication Society Bible (OT)	1995
KJ2000	KJ for 21 st Century	1994
KJV	King James Version aka AV	1769
LB	The Living Bible	1971
LITV	Literal Translation of the Bible aka KJII	1976, 2000
MKJV	Modern King James Version	1998
MSG	Message	1993, 2002
Mur	James Murdock NT	1851
NAB	New American Bible for Catholics	1970 Catholic
NAS77	New American Standard Bible	1997
NAS95	New American Standard Bible 1995	1995
NASB	New American Standard Bible aka NASV	1995
NCV	New Century Version/The Everyday Bible	1988, 2005
NEB	New English Bible	1972
NET	New English Translation	1999
NIrV	New International readers Version	1998
NIV	New International Version	1984, 2011
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible	1985 Catholic
NKJV	New King James Version	1982
NLT	New Living Translation	1996, 2004
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version	1989
Phi	The New Testament in Modern English	1960 (Phillips)

REB	Revised English Bible	1989
RSV	Revised Standard Version	1971
RV	Revised Version	1885
RWB	Revised Webster's Bible	1995
TMB	Third Millennium Bible	2008
TNIV	Today's New International Version	2005
WB	Webster's Bible	1833
WEB	World English Bible	1998
WNT	Weymouth New Testament	1903
WYC	Wycliffe NT	1382
YLT	Young's Literal Translation	1898

Many of these versions can be found on BibleGateway.com and in e-Sword. E-Sword is a free Bible study program with many older dictionaries, commentaries, and translations. Other aids are included or available for free. Some later translations and reference works you will have to pay to download.

AMP The Amplified Bible.

Based on the ASV with added English words to convey the full meaning of the original. The added words are indicated by brackets or parentheses. By Dr Frances Siewert complete bible first published in 1965. Occasionally useful, but the same effect can be achieved by comparing multiple translations. This is easy to do with today's computer bible study programs that didn't exist then.

AV Authorized Version, commonly called the KJV King James Version.

The standard English bible for millions of people over several hundred years. It has a style and elegance unmatched by other translations, but it does contain some errors and the language can be hard to understand. Largely based on an earlier translation by Tyndale, it was first published in 1611 and revised five times, the last in 1769. Many public domain commentaries and bible study aids are based on this translation including Strong's Concordance. Not recommended as a primary bible unless you are willing to put up with the language difficulties, but good to use in comparisons.

NIV New International Version.

First conceived in 1965 with the full Bible published in 1978, revised in 1983 and 2011. A very popular translation especially among evangelicals it spawned the gender neutral TNIV and simplified NiRV. This translation lies at the midpoint on the functional – dynamic equivalence scale.

NASB New American Standard Bible.

A revision of the 1901 American Standard Version first published in 1971, modified in 1972, 1973, 1975, and 1977 then updated in 1995. These two versions are known as NASB77 and NASB95. Probably the most literal 20th century translation, this is a good study Bible and standard for scriptural comparisons.

ESV English Standard Version.

Another update of the RSV, which like the NASB, was an update of the ASV. The RSV was considered to have a more liberal theology and was originally published in 1952 and revised in 1977. The ESV addressed these objections and was published in 2001 with a minor revision in 2007. A fairly literal translation popular with mainline denominations.

NLT New Living Translation.

The Living Bible, a paraphrase of the ASV by Kenneth N. Taylor, was published in 1971 and proved to be very popular. The NLT began as a revision of the LB but evolved into a new, full translation. First published in 1996, with a second edition in 2004 and revised in 2007. This translation leans toward the dynamic equivalence method and has become very popular, displacing the NIV as best selling translation in 2008.

MSG The Message.

A highly idiomatic translation by Eugene H. Peterson published as a complete Bible in 2002. Even more idiomatic than the LB the message has been called an intelligent paraphrase. Technically, a paraphrase is within the same language whereas this was done from the original languages. It is a good comparative version representing the extreme of the dynamic equivalence view. Not to be used for serious study.

The best selling Versions for the past several years have been the NIV, NKJV, KJV, NLT, and ESV.

