

Which Bible Translations Should I Read?

Introduction by Dwight Gingrich, chart by Brent MacDonald

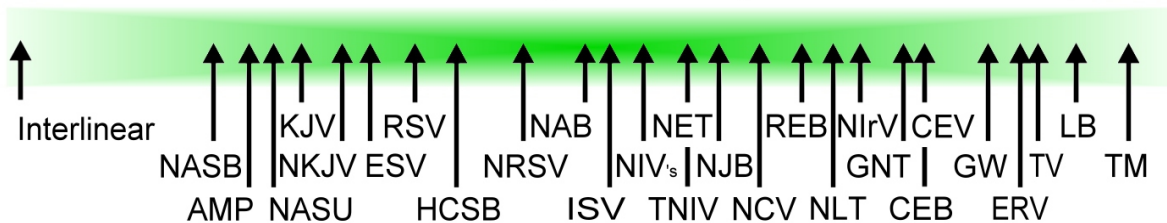
My personal recommendations:

- **Use a word-for-word translation for careful Bible study and teaching.** These will follow the vocabulary, sentence structure, and idioms of the Bible writers most closely. My favorites are the NASB and ESV. If you use the KJV, consider comparing it with one of these.
- **Compare the better thought-for-thought translations** with your word-for-word translation; they will help explain what difficult passages might mean. My favorites include the NIV (see note below), HCSB (Southern Baptist publisher), NET (available online, copyright-free, with extensive footnotes), and NLT (very interpretive, but often making good interpretive choices). *Be aware that the new NIV (2011, replacing both NIV 1984 and TNIV) is very different from the old NIV. It now uses gender neutral language regarding humans (e.g. where KJV has “brothers,” it may have “brothers and sisters”). This has benefits and drawbacks, but increases its usefulness when comparing translations. In many ways this update is more accurate and even more word-for-word than the familiar 1984 version.*
- **Do not quote a paraphrase as if it is the Bible!** It is more like a commentary on the Bible.
- **If I could pick just one Bible** for church and family use, it would probably be the ESV. Why? 1) It is a word-for-word translation, 2) it is highly-accurate, 3) it is probably the word-for-word that is most readable for all ages—the NKJV is similar, but does not make use of the best Greek manuscripts, and 4) it has an active conservative publisher behind it (Crossway) that is producing a good selection of ESV-related study helps. That's my informed opinion, *but please read something!*

The rest of this handout is copied directly from <http://www.notjustanotherbook.com/biblecomparison.htm> [except where I've added my own thoughts inside brackets like this]. Brent MacDonald's chart is the best resource I (Dwight) have found for starting to compare Bible translations—it's up-to-date and includes all the major English translations currently in use.

English Bible Translation Comparison

Word for Word ←————→ Thought for Thought ←————→ Paraphrase



NASB / NASU - New American Standard (11)
 AMP - Amplified Bible (12)
 ESV* - English Standard Version (9.5)
 ERV^ - Easy to Read Version (3.5)
 KJV* - King James Version (13)
 NKJV - New King James Version (9)
 RSV* - Revised Standard Version (11)
 HCSB - Holman Christian Standard (8)
 NRSV^^ - New Revised Standard (10.5)
 NAB* - New American Bible (7)
 NIV - New International Version (8)
 NIVI^ - NIV [UK only, 1996 edition] (8)
 NIV2011^^ - NIV Revision (8)
 CEB*^ - Common English Bible (7)

TNIV^ - Today's NIV (7.5)
 NJB* - New Jerusalem Bible (7.5)
 NCV^ - New Century Version (5)
 REB (NEB)*^ - Revised English Bible (7)
 NLT^ - New Living Translation (6.5)
 NIV - New International Reader's (3.5)
 GNT (GNB/TEV)* - Good News Translation (6)
 CEV*^ - Contemporary English (5)
 ISV^^ - International Standard Version (8.5)
 GW - God's Word (4.5)
 LB - Living Bible (8.5)
 TM - The Message (4.5)
 NET*^^ - NET Bible (7)
 TV - The Voice (7)



^^ No gender neutral language for God, careful/moderate inclusive language regarding mankind.
 ^ Gender neutral language * Apocrypha available or included (#) Approximate overall reading grade level

Purpose of the *English Bible Translation Comparison* chart:


- This chart visually shows the style of each English Bible translation, in a spectrum ranging from word-for-word, to thought-for-thought (dynamic equivalence) and paraphrase. [Word-for-word is

also called “formal equivalence” and thought-for-thought is also called “functional equivalence.”]

- Displays common abbreviations for many popular English Bible translations.
- The numeric value in parenthesis following each translation name is the grade level of readability.
- Notes whether the apocrypha is included or available for each translation. Be aware that some translations include the apocrypha as part of God's Word (e.g. NAB), while others included it for historical significance (e.g. KJV) or make it available for research purposes (e.g. ESV).
- Makes note of translations that are employing gender neutral language. (Consider this article: [What's Wrong with Gender-Neutral Bible Translations?](#) by Wayne Grudem.)

What the *English Bible Translation Comparison* chart doesn't do:

- This chart makes no assessment as to the quality of each translation and, in fact, includes some translations with strong Roman Catholic bias (e.g. NAB).
- It does not cover every English translation, choosing to focus on a majority of modern best sellers.
- We are not the final word on readability level or style. While tests exist to help determine these, conflicting results often arise requiring a subjective determination and subsequent designation. Publishers often make claims regarding readability of their translations, some which we have agreed with, others have required revision. Ongoing reevaluation has prompted us to make changes in our assessments, resulting in small changes from earlier versions of this chart.



Bible Translation Dates (completed) and Number of Translators		
Amplified	1965	1 (Frances Siewert)
ASV	1901	30
CEV	1995	100
ESV	2001	100
Geneva	1560	7+
God's Word	1995	26
HCSB	2000	90
KJV	1611	50
LB	1971	1 (Kenneth Taylor)
Message	2002	1 (Eugene Peterson)
NAB	1970	6+
NASB	1971	58
NEB	1970	26
NCV	1991	52+
NIV	1978	110
NKJV	1982	130
NLT	1996	90+
NRSV	1989	30
REB	1989	26
RSV	1952	32
TEV(GNB/GNT)	1976	7 (Robert Bratcher +6)
TNIV	2002	14+

The Geneva Bible was the first English Bible translated by a committee.

Most Bible Translations have undergone multiple revisions.

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Some additions to the chart above:

Common English Bible ~ 2011 ~ 120 translators; The Voice ~ 2009 ~ 27 scholars, 52 Emergent Movement "retellers";
ERV (Easy to Read Version) ~ 1987 ~ 5 translators + "contract with trained translators" to review texts;
ISV (International Standard Version) ~ 2011 ~ 7 "Contributing Scholars"

[Some sources list slightly different numbers of translators. Also note these revisions: KJV has been updated many times; NASB was updated in 1995; ESV was updated in 2007 and 2011; NIV was updated in 1984 and (more substantially) in 2011.]

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