

A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF POPULAR BIBLE TRANSLATIONS

There are too many Bible translations available in English today (more than 100!) to describe them all here, but below are descriptions to help orient you to some of the more popular or influential. These translations range between two primary approaches to translation: word-for-word—“formal equivalent,” and thought-for-thought—“functional equivalent.” The modern translations here benefit from a high level of scholarship and accuracy. Some prize literary appeal and others emphasize clarity of expression.

CHRISTIAN STANDARD BIBLE (CSB, HCSB)

This is a 2017 update of the Holman Christian Standard Bible (2004), an original translation from Greek and Hebrew manuscripts. Its scholars, most of whom are from conservative and evangelical church traditions, have aimed at a balance between word-for-word and thought-for-thought translation—as close to the original wording as possible while emphasizing clarity for modern English readers. It uses a seventh-grade reading level.

COMMON ENGLISH BIBLE (CEB)

The CEB is a new translation (2011) optimized for smooth reading for a broad range of people. After the scholarly translation (a balance of dynamic equivalence and formal equivalence), the draft texts were reviewed for grammar, style, and consistency. It uses common equivalents for many traditional church terms. CEB translators come from a variety of denominations, mostly mainline or progressive Protestant. The translation has been released by a consortium of five church publishing houses. It reads at a seventh-grade level.

CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH VERSION (CEV)

The CEV is a meaning-based (or functional equivalent) translation done in a contemporary style using common language. It is designed to be understood when read and heard out loud, not just when it is read silently. It is one of the better Bibles for children and youth, as well as for new Bible readers who are not familiar with traditional Bible and church words. First published in 1995 and revised in 2006.

ENGLISH STANDARD VERSION (ESV)

The ESV was published in 2001 (updated most recently in 2016) and is a revision of the Revised Standard Version (1971 edition), drawing on recent scholarship and following a formal equivalence approach. It is growing in popularity, particularly among some Protestant churches.

GOOD NEWS TRANSLATION (GNT)

The GNT (also known as *Today's English Version* or the *Good News Bible*) was one of the first meaning-based (or functional equivalent) translations of the Bible into English. It was originally published in 1976 and revised in 1992. The GNT presents the message of the Bible in a level of English that is common to most of the English-speaking world. The GNT is still used widely in youth Bible study groups and in less formal worship services. Editions are also available for Roman Catholic readers.

KING JAMES VERSION (KJV)

The KJV (also known as the Authorized Version) is a word-for-word (or formal equivalent) translation originally published in 1611 at the request of King James I of England. It has been frequently reprinted and its spelling updated. Most copies today are slightly adapted from a 1769 edition. So many people have used the KJV over the centuries that it has become the single most important book in shaping the modern English language. Many of the best and most ancient Hebrew and Greek manuscripts of Bible books have been discovered since 1850, so the KJV could not make use of them. In many cases, it is helpful to read and study the KJV alongside another more recent translation. The KJV is still the most widely owned and used English translation in the United States.

THE MESSAGE

The Message is a popular paraphrase of the Bible by Eugene Peterson, who used the original Greek and Hebrew texts and tried to bring their “feel”—their tone, rhythm, and idiom—directly into contemporary English. It is presented as a Bible more for personal reading than for study or public reading. The Message is often useful to read side by side with other, more word-for-word translations. Peterson’s choice of words can help new readers unlock the sense of the text and can help seasoned Bible readers find fresh energy in passages that have become too familiar.

NEW AMERICAN BIBLE (NAB, NABRE)

The NAB was originally published in 1970 as a meaning-based translation intended primarily for Roman Catholic readers. The New Testament was revised in 1986, shifting more toward a word-for-word or formal translation. The full Bible with a newly revised translation of the Old Testament and extensive notes was released in 2011 as the New American Bible, Revised Edition. The NABRE is useful for individual study. The older NAB is approved for public worship for American Catholics.

NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE (NASB)

The NASB, first published in the 1960s, is an excellent example of a formal translation of the Bible in English. It is probably the most “word-for-word” type translation available today. Because of this, the NASB is a good version to use in Bible study where one is concerned with the form of the original Hebrew and Greek. The most recent edition of the NASB was published in 1995.

NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION (NIV)

The NIV was a completely new translation, but it was strongly influenced by the tradition of the King James Version. The full Bible was published in 1978 and revised in 1984 and 2011. A blend of form-based and meaning-based translation types, the NIV is one of the most popular English Bibles in use today. It is equally useful for individual study and public worship, especially among more traditional and conservative denominations.

NEW JERUSALEM BIBLE (NJB)

The NJB is a 1985 revision of the older Jerusalem Bible (JB). The JB was translated from the original languages, but it developed out of a popular French translation done in Jerusalem, which is where it got its name. The NJB, like the JB before it, is known for its literary qualities. While the JB tended to more meaning-based (or functional equivalent), the NJB moved toward more of a word-based (or formal equivalent) translation.

NEW LIVING TRANSLATION (NLT)

The NLT is a meaning-based translation in the tradition of the Living Bible (LB), a popular 1971 Bible paraphrased from English. The New Living Translation involved comparing the LB to the original-language texts, and then making changes so that the NLT is now a true translation. The NLT is a good translation to use with youth and adults who have difficulty with the traditional language of a formal equivalent translation.

NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION (NRSV)

The NRSV is a 1989 revision of the Revised Standard Version. The NRSV is now the latest translation in the King James tradition. It aims at being readable, but it also tries to keep familiar words and phrases from the KJV. It is a blend of meaning-based and form-based translation types. The NRSV has become a standard translation for serious Bible study, especially in seminaries and colleges.

REVISED ENGLISH BIBLE (REB)

The REB is a 1989 revision of the earlier New English Bible (NEB, 1946), which was a bold and innovative translation from original texts with a considerable British flavor. The REB smoothed some of the NEB's more unusual terms and aimed to be more accessible to an international audience. The REB is a meaning-based translation but has retained much of the traditional language and style. It is a popular English translation for public reading of Scripture.

REVISED STANDARD VERSION (RSV)

The Revised Standard version (1952, revised most recently in 1977) is an update of the American Standard Version (1901), which was a revision of the King James Version. It is a mix of formal equivalence and functional equivalence in its approach. This translation has been widely used in mainline Protestant churches. A Roman Catholic edition was released in 1966 (and updated in 2006). Since its 1977 revision (which also removed the "thee" and "thou" language), this translation has also been widely used in Eastern Orthodox churches.

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