

# Bite Size Bible Study

Bible Translations #237

By Lee Logue

I have composed a lot of Bite Size Bible Studies, but until now I have refrained from talking about what Bible Translation one should use.

I have two reasons for believing that the answer is a personal one for many people. First there are estimated 80,000 different translations (including about 3700 in foreign languages). Around 900 different English versions exist currently. Thus, leaving one to ask which one is best. My answer is – none of them – they all have good points and points where they seem to miss the mark.

Secondly it depends a lot on the level the reader:

- New to the Bible
- Have some knowledge of the contents
- Reading for emotional and spiritual support
- Scholarly – digging for deeper truths

No one translation fits all of these categories and that's why some of us have so many different translations.

This brings us to the considerations one needs to think about when choosing their Bible. Which one(s) is best for you?

Here are a couple of things to consider:

- **Purpose:** What will you be using the translation for? If you are doing academic study, a more literal translation may be preferred. If you are reading for personal devotion, a more readable translation may be better.
- **Translation Philosophy:** Some translations prioritize word-for-word accuracy, while others focus on conveying the meaning of the original text in a more natural way.

Now I will attempt to give a brief description of several of the more common translations (in no particular order). In this internet age we have a great advantage, as we can go to [biblegateway.com](http://biblegateway.com) and look at each of the translations on the site and find one that seems best for you at any particular time. (@ indicates that this version is available on [biblegateway.com](http://biblegateway.com))

**King James Version (KJV) @** – Also called the Authorized Version. It's old, and it uses lot of old English words which no longer mean the same as they do today. However, it is still beautiful and nostalgic (to some) and possibly an important piece of literature in the English language.

**New King James Version (NKJV) @** – This translation chooses to base its text on a less-than-stellar textual tradition despite being an update with availability to better texts. Easier to read than KJV but still holds to some of the old literary traditions.

**New International Version (NIV) @** – This is probably one of the most popular of modern translations. It's probably the translation seen most often in churches or other settings. It, more than any other, comes the closest to striking the balance between formality, functionality, and adherence to the holy text and readability for us today. It does this by working from some of the best Greek and Hebrew texts, utilizing the skill of excellent scholars from various denominations, and employing a real strategy for bringing the word to modern eyes.

**New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) @** – The NRSV is the Bible of choice for most scholars, particularly those with above-average interest in the Old Testament. It was translated by a truly cross-denominational committee (including Jews and Catholics and Orthodox Christians alike) and designed to be used for both study and liturgy. It doesn't always sound like the more traditional text, but it is trying to demonstrate the idiom and intent of the original authors. This translation also utilizes gender-neutral language where possible, which is important for some.

**Common English Bible (CEB) @** – The CEB was designed to be easy to read and used by a variety of denominations. The translation committee worked around the Dale-Chall Readability Formula to produce a rendering of the Bible at the same reading level as a USA Today newspaper. Like the NRSV, this version tries to use gender-neutral language where applicable.

**English Standard Version (ESV) @** – The ESV is considered one of the more literal translations, but it manages that achievement without losing readability or beauty. Through elegant translation and skillful word choice, the ESV manages to convey the original intent of the authors while still producing a powerful and lovely translation of Scripture. This version has been criticized for not being consistent in the use of gender-neutral language.

**New Living Translation (NLT) @** – The NLT is a popular translation, and it is fairly solid. It works on a 6th grade reading level, making it useful for those who are still learning English. It's designed to resemble modern language more than the Greek text. The NLT has an easy-to-read style without significant sacrifice of the original language.

**New American Standard Bible (NASB) @** – The NASB is considered one of the more literal translations but is difficult to read (operating at an 11th grade level). The version's strict adherence to "grammatical correctness" makes the text seem wooden, and its ties to Southern Baptist theology are noticeable in scattered verses. Still, the NASB provides a close examination of the text for those preferring to avoid ancient languages and offers an excellent study option.

**New Jewish Publication Society (NJPS)** – This translation is done completely by Jewish scholars, trying to best bring out the Jewish theology in the text without Christian overtones. They are particularly strict in their translations of the Torah. This version doesn't have the New Testament.

**Amplified Bible (AMP) @** – The idea of including every nuance of the language in the translation is neat, but the insertion of so many word meanings causes it to be a less than easy read. There are several editions of this version. I find it good for study but not for other purposes.

**The Message (MSG) @** – Originally called the Message Bible, they have since dropped Bible because this is a paraphrase, not a Bible. Good for easy reading and emotional support.

**New Jerusalem Bible (NJB)** – If you want Catholic theology, this is one of many. Relatively easy to read and has the Apocryphal books as well.

**New English Translation (NET) @** – This online Bible is designed to be free and accessible to all; it is also one of the more recently updated versions with a revision in 2019. The NET Bible is most notable for its tackling of the formal/functional balance by rendering a readable text along with copious footnotes for in-depth and literal translations. Every working draft was made publicly available on the internet. Bible scholars, ministers, and laypersons from around the world logged millions of review sessions, making it an open source for everyone.

**Young's Literal Translation (YLT) @** – This is a super-literal translation, which may be valuable for some, who like to dig deep into the language side of study.

**Complete Jewish Bible (CJB) @** – This Translation attempts to return the Jewishness of the scriptures. The names are the Jewish name (not an Anglicized version) which sometimes makes it difficult to know to whom the verse is referring. Unlike many Jewish publications this does contain the New Testament books. The order of the books follows the Tanakh order, not what you are used to.

**Benner's Translation of the Torah (MT)** I have included this for those who like digging deep into the scriptures. It is relatively new. In this translation each Hebrew word is translated faithfully according to its original linguistic and cultural perspective. It tries to eliminate personal and religious bias by translating each Hebrew word, prefix and suffix, the same way, every time it occurs in the text. Only the first 5 books are included in this translation.

As you can see even from this short list, there are many choices. No one translation will fulfill all the needs one would require. Even as we mature spiritually, we find that our "favorite" translation may need to be supplemented by another translation.

When you are reading your "favorite" Bible, keep these things in mind:

- These are old texts, and the originals are not available, so being 100% true to the original is not possible.
- These books are to teach theology (how to live properly according to our Creators Teaching), not to be historically, scientifically, or literately correct.
- The stories we read may or may not be historically accurate but like a parable are told to teach us how and/or how not to live.
- The Books may not be written by the person cited or even during his lifetime but may be written as remembered by someone else or even several others later in history.
- Each story is written in a particular genre and determining which of these (poetic, non-fiction, fiction, humor, satire, etc.) will "color" our understanding of the text.

**May your choice of Bibles  
draw you closer in your relationship  
with our Creator God**

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