

Guide to Choosing a Bible

by Theresa Crabtree

For information on my favorite Bible study aids, visit:

<https://www.theresacrabtree.com/choosing-a-bible/>

Check out my Bible study videos.

<https://www.theresacrabtree.com/bible-studies/>

<https://www.youtube.com/c/TheresaCrabtree88>

Choosing a Bible can feel like a daunting task, especially for beginners. To get started, a comparison of the wording of the scriptures is important to choose your preferred VERSION / TRANSLATION. Once you find the version you prefer, take a deep breath; the hardest part is over! Next, you will need to know what TYPE of Bible will fit your needs. Then comes the details, choosing your preferred FEATURES.

If you belong to a church, ask your pastor for recommendations. You can also visit a local bookstore that sells Bibles to compare the various options.

When you are ready to purchase your Bible or related study guides, I have found the following to have good prices for customers in the USA. You'll have to check with them about availability and mailing costs to other countries. <https://biblestore.com/>

Ready? Take a deep breath and let's dive in!

POPULAR BIBLE VERSIONS / TRANSLATIONS IN ENGLISH

In this article, since we are focusing just on English translations, the words "version" and "translation" can be used interchangeably. The following Bible versions are currently the top selling English translations. Review each of the summaries below. Compare the two "sample passages" to get a feel of the language structure and wording. For example, the James 4:11 sample demonstrates how each version translates gender pronouns. (Example: brothers and sisters vs brethren vs brothers)

If you would like to compare more verses, go to <https://www.biblegateway.com/> I loooove this resource and use it nearly every day! Type in any Bible passage, keyword or topic. Then select one of the versions you are considering buying. Then repeat to compare to other versions you are considering. There are over 60 versions to choose from! All of the ones listed below are included.

King James Version (KJV)

AUDIENCE: Good for those who like the traditional and formal elegance of Old English.

PROS: Accuracy makes this classic still popular in its original 1611 translation.

CONS: Due to archaic language (thee, thou, art), some verses may affect readability.

PUBLISHED: 1611

SAMPLE PASSAGES: *"The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace."* ~ Numbers 6:24-26

"Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge." ~ James 4:11

New King James Version (NKJV)

AUDIENCE: Good for those who like the poetic prose of the KJV without the Old English pronouns and other archaic words.

PROS: More modern language, removing the "thee, thou, art" and other Old English words. Yet, still holds to the more formal poetic wording. Also includes some modifications stemming from the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

CONS: If more modern word usage is preferred, this is not a choice. Also, not the best choice for a young reader.

PUBLISHED: 1982 update from the 1611 King James Version

SAMPLE PASSAGES: *"The Lord bless you and keep you; The Lord make His face shine upon you, And be gracious to you; The Lord lift up His countenance upon you, And give you peace."* ~ Numbers 6:24-26

"Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge."
~ James 4:11

New Living Translation (NLT)

AUDIENCE: Good for new and young readers for study and daily devotional reading.

PROS: Easier to read with more modern language.

CONS: Thought-for-thought translation may not be suitable for those preferring word accuracy over the translator's meaning.

PUBLISHED: 1996

SAMPLE PASSAGES: *"May the Lord bless you and protect you. May the Lord smile on you and be gracious to you. May the Lord show you his favor and give you his peace."* ~ Numbers 6:24-26

"Don't speak evil against each other, dear brothers and sisters. If you criticize and judge each other, then you are criticizing and judging God's law. But your job is to obey the law, not to judge whether it applies to you."
~ James 4:11

New International Version (NIV)

AUDIENCE: Readers of all ages, reading levels and denominations. Good for daily study and devotional reading.

PROS: Due to its accuracy and readability, most Bible commentaries and English-speaking churches in the USA use the NIV as their base.

CONS: Thought-for-thought translation may be less suitable for scholarly or academic readers looking for their own interpretations and those preferring more traditional styled text.

PUBLISHED: 1978, Revised in 2011

SAMPLE PASSAGES: "The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace." ~ *Numbers 6:24-26*

Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against a brother or sister or judges them speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. ~ *James 4:11*

English Standard Version (ESV)

AUDIENCE: Good for scholarly study.

PROS: Word-for-word is not as accurate as NASB, although more readable. However, it still has some outdated language.

CONS: If you are "gender pronoun sensitive," this translation, like KJV tends to use the masculine rather than neutral pronouns.

PUBLISHED: 2011

SAMPLE PASSAGES: "*The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.*" ~ *Numbers 6:24-26*

"Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge." ~ *James 4:11*

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

AUDIENCE: Most literal word-for-word Bible translation in modern English language. Good choice for scholars or those wanting a version that remains close to the original structure and wording from the Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek formats.

Pros: With the wording close to the original languages, the reader can more readily interpret their own meaning. The 2020 version uses more modern language structure.

Cons: Since it is word-for-word translation, the sentence structure doesn't flow as fluently. However, it is still quite readable.

PUBLISHED: 1971, updated in 1995, 2020

SAMPLE PASSAGES: *"The Lord bless you, and keep you; The Lord cause His face to shine on you, And be gracious to you; The Lord lift up His face to you, And give you peace."* ~ Numbers 6:24-26

"Do not speak against one another, brothers and sisters. The one who speaks against a brother or sister, or judges his brother or sister, speaks against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge of it." ~ James 4:11

Christian Standard Bible (CSB)

AUDIENCE: Great for Southern Baptists with modern language, yet conservative translation.

PROS: Mixture of word-for-word and thought-for-thought translation. Uses gender neutrality.

CONS: The translation may be too conservatively leaned for some, especially scholars who may prefer their own interpretation.

PUBLISHED by the Southern Baptist Convention in 2004, updated 2017

SAMPLE PASSAGES: *"May the Lord bless you and protect you; may the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; may the Lord look with favor on you and give you peace."* ~ Numbers 6:24-26

"Don't criticize one another, brothers and sisters. Anyone who defames or judges a fellow believer defames and judges the law. If you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge." ~ James 4:11

TYPES OF BIBLES

DEVOTIONAL BIBLE: Devotional Bibles include additional insights encouraged to deepen reflection on the specific scripture. They are often organized as a daily read that includes relevant prayers, meditation ideas, personal stories and insightful commentary. Some devotional Bibles are written for a specific audience such as: personal, family, group study or for men, women, teens or children. Some are written for specific denominations such as Catholic or Baptist. Devotional Bibles are designed for deeper reflection and should be used in addition to studying a standard Bible.

JOURNALING BIBLE: Journaling Bibles often have wide margins for writing notes, insightful reflections and allowing space for artistic expression. You might want to consider one that has spiral or lay-flat binding.

SLIMLINE, THINLINE, COMPACT BIBLE: By using thinner paper, these Bibles are thinner and lighter than standard Bibles. This makes them easier to carry and fit easily into a purse and carrying bag. Some are small enough to fit in a pocket. They are offered in a variety of translations and feature options. If you plan to make notes or use a highlighter in your Bible, keep in mind that they will likely bleed-through. The pages may tear more easily, too.

STUDY BIBLE: As the name suggests, study Bibles are loaded with useful materials to enhance your understanding of the scriptures. Most include commentary and insights which may or may not be in alignment with your personal belief. Some of the added features to look for are: maps, concordance, topical index, explanatory introductions to each book, devotional insights, historical or character background and word studies.

FEATURES TO CONSIDER

BOOKS INCLUDED: Most contain the Old and New Testament. Some contain just the New Testament. Others have the New Testament and some of the OT books such as Psalms and Proverbs.

COVER: Hard cover, paperback, real or faux leather, cloth, zippered closure, decorative, color

EASE OF USE: Ribbons as placeholders, thumb index to locate books more readily

BINDING: sewn, glued, spiral-bound, lay flat binding

SIZE: Large, Standard, pocket-size or somewhere in between

FONT: Font size and style, red letters to highlight Jesus' words

PAPER: Standard or thin for lighter weight

PAGE LAYOUT: Wide margins for notes, topic subheadings, references to related scriptures

REFERENCES: Concordance, maps, one year Bible reading plan, dictionary, commentary notes, introduction to each book, illustrations

AUDIENCE: Personal, Family, Group, Scholar, Adult Reading Level, Children (Illustrated or Text Only)