

Bible Translations

Which one is correct?

Why do we need translations?

- “If the KJV was good enough for Jesus and Paul...it’s good enough for me!”
- Of course this is a joke. We know that the original language of the Old Testament was primarily Hebrew, though some was written in Aramaic. The New Testament was written in both Greek and Aramaic.

The Bible is an ancient set of copies of copies of holy writings. Any translation of the Bible that you see is the result of thousands of scholars’ hours deliberating, authenticating, and translating. Because the Bible was written in ancient languages within ancient cultures, some degree of interpretation is required to bring equivalence into English, no matter how literal the translation.

- **Example:** For example, a popular Gen Z phrase is to say you left someone “on read”. While you may not understand the lingo, their friends will. This is because cultures (and subcultures) use language differently. When you don’t understand the context, you’ll miss the entire meaning. Which, by the way, that phrase is referring to opening a message on your phone but not responding. The person who sent the message can see a receipt of when you read the message, knowing that you saw the message but chose to not reply. This can cause drama.

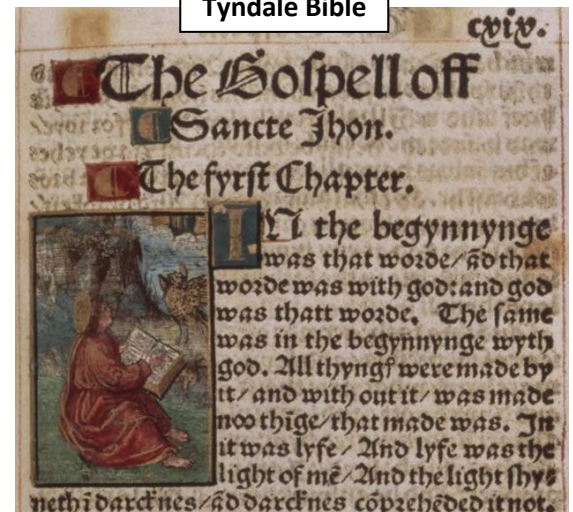
Now, imagine you exist 3,000 years in the future, where no one texts anymore... and you speak a different language. First, you’d need to learn 21st century English. Then, you’d need to learn about the technology of the 21st century. And lastly, you’d need to learn about teenagers from a specific generation and their popular phrases. Otherwise, “on read” may mean something very different to you. And when you translate this phrase back into your own language, you have the option to say “on read” (which may confuse those who don’t have your knowledge on the phrase) or you can use a different phrase that communicates the same concept (like “ignored”).

First translations of the Bible into English

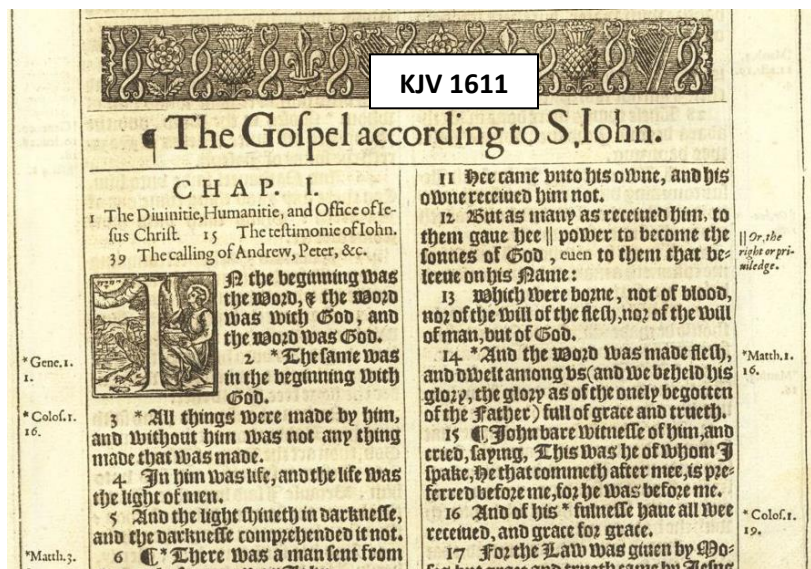
- Most people incorrectly assume that the King James Version of the Bible was the first English translation.
- **John Wycliffe** and his companions translated the Bible into *Middle English* in 1384. His hand-copied translation, however, was translated from the Latin Vulgate and not the original languages so it had problems.
- **William Tyndale** translated the Bible nearly 80 years before King James commissioned it. Tyndale’s bible was translated from 1522–1536. Tyndale was a gifted scholar and had a terrific understanding of both Hebrew and Greek. His Bible is credited with being the first Bible translation in the English language directly from Hebrew and Greek texts, although it relied somewhat upon the Latin Vulgate. (*For more information about Tyndale, see the movie “God’s Outlaw – The Story of William Tyndale” available for free online.*)
- Other English translations before the KJV version were the **Great Bible** (1535 – Coverdale’s translation that standardized the book order), the **Geneva Bible** (1560 – Calvin’s translation), and the **Bishop’s Bible** (1568) – *all of whom used Tyndale’s translation as a primary source.*
- The Catholic Church began the “Counter-Reformation” and produced their English translation (from the Latin Vulgate) filled with Catholic doctrine called the **Douay-Rheims Bible** (1582).

The Reformation (1517)

Tyndale Bible



- In January 1604, **King James** convened the Hampton Court Conference, where a new English version was conceived in response to the problems of the earlier translations perceived by the Puritans, Lollards, Waldenses, AnaBaptists, Paulicians, and others. James gave the translators instructions intended to ensure that the new version would conform to the ecclesiology, and reflect the episcopal structure, of the Church of England and its belief in an ordained clergy. The translation was done by 6 panels of translators (47 men in all, most of whom were leading biblical scholars in England) who had the work divided up between them: the Old Testament was entrusted to three panels, the New Testament to two, and the Apocrypha to one. **Note:** Tyndale's translation was used as a guide for all the KJV translators, and 80 to 90 percent of his NT is included in the KJV 1611.



- It may be surprising to learn that the KJV translators did not work from the original Greek and Hebrew texts. The KJV revised the many previous English versions and was *guided* by the Greek and Hebrew.¹
- The King James Version was “cleaned up,” reprinted and retranslated many times through the years (most notably in 1611, 1616, 1629, 1638, 1653, 1716, 1762, 1769, and 1873).

Manuscripts

- One of the reasons we see “different versions” of the Bible today is because of the number of manuscripts available. There are over 5,800 Greek New Testament manuscripts known to date, along with over 10,000 Hebrew Old Testament manuscripts and over 19,000 copies in Syriac, Coptic, Latin, and Aramaic languages. The oldest manuscripts (the Dead Sea Scrolls) were discovered in the 1940's and 1950's in the Qumran Caves the Dead Sea. These scrolls date between the 3rd century BC to the 1st century AD, and scrolls of **EVERY** book of the OT except Esther were found. These scrolls predated the oldest known scrolls by over 1000 years, and are a leading reason we have primarily 2 different *manuscript families* today.
- Manuscript Families**
- Scholars have divided these ancient manuscripts into two main families: **Alexandrian text-type** (also called Neutral or Egyptian) and **Byzantine text-type** (also called the Majority Text).
 - The **Byzantine text type** looks at **all the manuscripts** and determines the final reading by what the majority of the manuscripts say. (*i.e. Textus Receptus – KJV, NKJV*)
 - Rather than looking for a collective majority, the **Alexandrian text type** looks **mainly at the date** (favoring the oldest copies) of the manuscript **and the region** of the world where it originated. (*i.e. Critical Text – NASB, ESV and most modern translations*)
- What is the impact of the different manuscript texts?**
 - There is less than a 5% difference between the two families of texts, the main difference being the Alexandrian family is smaller (Mark 16:9-20 omitted, other verses and words omitted – *though they are footnoted or included in brackets in most of these modern translations*).

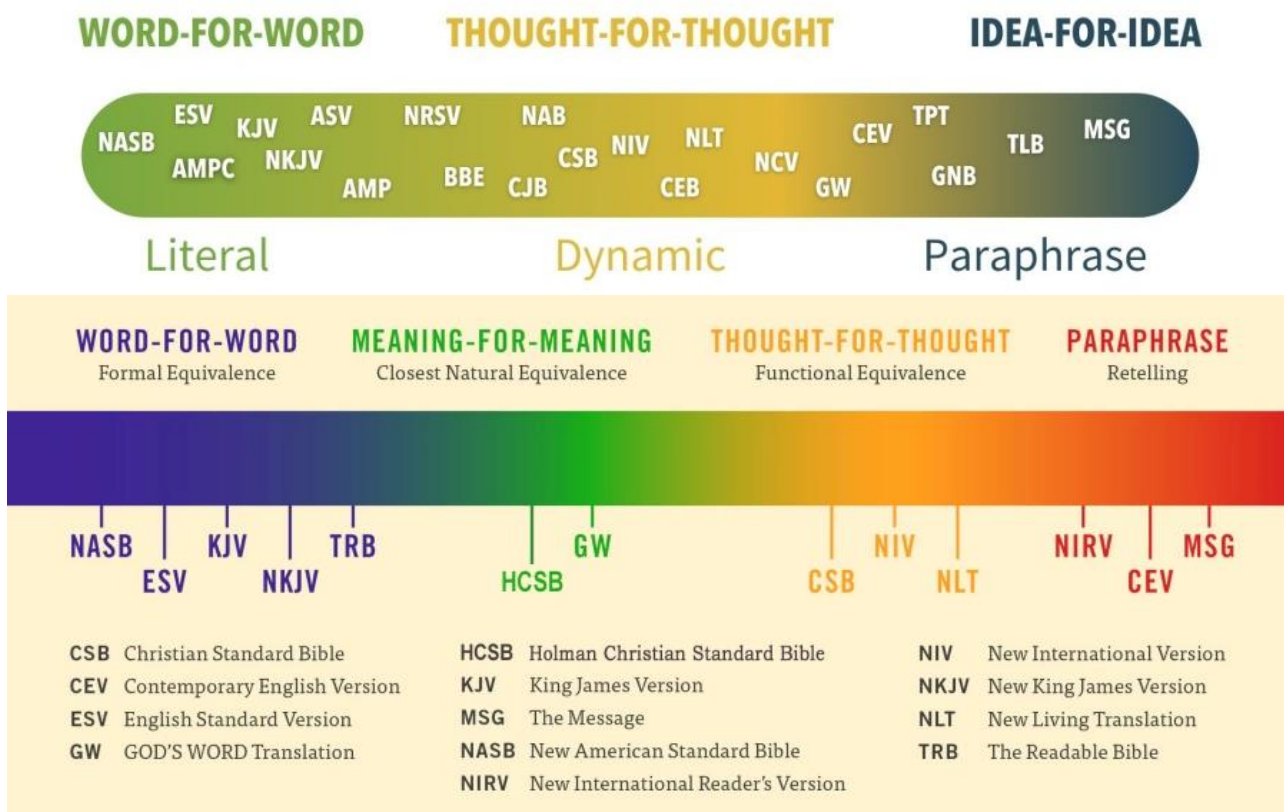
¹ Donald L. Brake, *A Visual History of the English Bible*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008), 190.

- No major Christian doctrine is impacted or changed (the most significant doctrinal issue is that the importance of fasting is weakened in the Alexandrian texts).²

Types of Translations

- **Formal Equivalence (Word-for-Word)** - Literal translations are often the closest English form of the Hebrew or Greek word. In this process, translators painstakingly review every single word to ensure they are as accurate as possible, called formal equivalence. This form of translation is extremely helpful for academic study and works well with interlinear Bibles. However, the biggest drawback to word-for-word translations is that modern readers might misunderstand figures of speech, literary devices, and cultural references.
- **Functional Equivalence (Thought-for-Thought)** - Dynamic translations place a higher emphasis on summing up the biblical authors' thoughts while still respecting the text. These thought-for-thought translations balance accuracy with approachability, perfect for light reading or a devotion. After all, the Bible is for the common person. The drawback though is that every tweak in the name of understandability is a step toward someone else's textual interpretation, so if you want to draw your own conclusions about every matter, stick with the 'literal' category.
- **Paraphrase (Idea-for-Idea)** - In your mind, paraphrased translations might already have a bad reputation; we would argue that there is a time and place for every type of Bible out there. Paraphrased Bibles focus on getting the general idea across with clear language, and are useful for those new to the Faith or new to reading. Sometimes, a paraphrase is nice because it is an interpretation; you can use it to gain a fresh perspective on a passage you are reading. Typically, Bible paraphrases are not necessarily meant to stand alone, so keep that in mind.

Types of Bible Translations



² For more information concerning textual variants, see Episode 5 of the video series *How We Got the Bible* by Timothy Paul Jones available on YouTube.

John 14:21

HCSB	NIV	ESV	NLT	KJV
The one who has My commands and keeps them is the one who loves Me. And the one who loves Me will be loved by My Father. I also will love him and will reveal Myself to him.	Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.	Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.	Those who accept my commandments and obey them are the ones who love me. And because they love me, my Father will love them. And I will love them and reveal myself to each of them.	He that hath my commandments , and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.

Things to Consider

- EVERY English Bible is a translation. It is also important to understand that when we say the Bible is inerrant, that we are primarily referring to the original manuscripts.
- Different people and different scenarios benefit from different translations.
 - If you are studying to teach adults, you likely want a Word-for-Word translation.
 - If you are studying the bible with children, a Thought-for-Thought translation would likely be better.
 - If you are a new Christian not really familiar with the Bible at all, a Paraphrase might keep you interested.
 - If you are studying a difficult book, like Job and are struggling with it, reading a different translation, (especially a paraphrase) can help.
- As yourself these questions when deciding which translation to get/read:
 - Will I enjoy the translation?
 - Will it be easy to read?
 - Will I understand it?
 - Will I be motivated to read it?
- For many people, just one translation will never do, and the one you use will change depending on the type of study you are doing.
- When studying to teach, I personally think it is important to read multiple translations simultaneously using the parallel option on most bible study websites.

So, what is **THE BEST** translation of the Bible?

- **ANSWER: the one you will read!**
 - *“Whatever translation you decide to use, be sure it is one you can read with understanding, memorize with ease, and obey with faith.” – Brake, 298*

HELPFUL RESOURCES:

- Brake, Donald L. *A Visual History of the English Bible*; Baker Books, 2008.
- Bruce, F.F. *The Origin of the Bible*, Tyndale House Publishers, 1992.
- Jones, Timothy Paul. *How We Got the Bible*, 6-Session DVD-Based Study, Hendrickson Publishers, 2015.