

Helpful Hints for Selecting a Study Bible

What Bible should I use? Choosing a good study Bible for devotional and personal use can be quite an adventure. It is easy to be overwhelmed when shopping for a good study Bible because there are so many different translations, paraphrases, and versions in the modern publishing market. There are the “old” King James (KJV) and the “new” King James (NKJV) versions, plus the RSV, NRSV, NIV, NAB, NASB, NEB, and numerous other additions.

“What Bible, then, should I use?” you ask. Well, a lot depends on what you consider your reason or need in purchasing a Bible. Is it mainly for serious Bible study, or for use in a small group, perhaps a Worship Experience, or for personal meditation and private devotionals? For the sake of convenience, we divide the many versions of Bible translations into three categories:

Verbal Editions

Some translators try most often to reproduce the word order that we find the original languages (Hebrew/Greek/Latin). The translators will update the English words used in a modern idiom (*compare the King James with the NRSV*), but they will be very cautious about making changes for the sake of relevance in the language, to avoid giving the Bible text a meaning that was not conceivable to the original author. Here are examples of Verbal Editions:”

King James Version (KJV)

English Standard Version (ESV)

New King James Version (NKJV)

Common English Bible (CEB)

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

Dynamic Editions

Some translators pay more attention to the English reader by changing the word order and frequently choosing more contemporary English words to convey the meaning of the original text. For example, if the targeted readers of the Bible were on an island and had never seen snow and had no word for snow, the translator might look for an equivalent word and translate, “your sins will be washed as white as sand.” Examples of “Dynamic Editions” are:

New International Version (NIV)

Today’s International Version (TNIV)

Contemporary English Version (CEV)

New Living Translation (NLT)

Good News Bible (GNB)

Today’s English Version (TEV)

Paraphrase Editions

Paraphrasing accepts advice from the original languages, but it is a personal interpretation rather than a direct translation reviewed and confirmed by a team of

experts in the Hebrew, Greek, and Latin languages. Original word order is not followed, and a single communicator who is very talented at explaining the Bible writes paraphrased versions. Examples of a “Paraphrase Edition” are:

The Message by Eugene Peterson

The New Testament in Modern English by J.B. Philips

The Living Bible by Kenneth Taylor

Here are some helpful suggestions for purchasing a Bible.

- 🌐 Do your homework. Seek to determine which Bible translation or version best suits your personal needs. Compare different versions of some of your favorite Biblical passages and see which ones “speak” to you.
- 🌐 Ask your pastor, small group members, and trusted friends which translations or versions they use and find most helpful to them. Websites such as Amazon, Cokesbury, LifeWay, and www.christianbook.com (Christian Book Distributors) may also prove helpful. Discount stores such as Sam’s, Wal-Mart, & Target have a very limited selection.
- 🌐 Check the Internet for information on Bible translations in which you are interested. Some websites also provide the reading level (ranging from grades 4 to 12) of each translation and version.
- 🌐 You may wish to buy more than one version. Most pastors and teachers recommend at least three different translations or versions. This will allow you to compare and contrast the strengths and weaknesses of the different translations.

Which translations are highly recommended?

The following versions are especially worthy of your consideration:

The New American Standard Bible (NASB) - The NASB follows the original text word for word in English.

The Common English Bible (CEB) – The CEB is also an example of a Verbal Edition.

The New King James Version (NKJV) – Eliminates the “thee’s” and “thou’s” of the 1611 King James Version, yet maintains enough of the original King James to spark verses you may remember if you grew up reading and memorizing verses from the King James.

The Message by Eugene Peterson – This makes an easy read in modern language and is as close to a true scholarly work without sounding too academic. Make sure that you purchase the “numbered edition” unless you want it to read like a novel instead of a Bible with numbered verses.

***Note:**

Various “Parallel Bibles” are also available. These are Bible editions that print as few as two and as many as eight different translations or versions of Scripture side by side on facing pages for convenient comparison. It is a great study guide, especially if one is able to find his or her favorite translations or paraphrase side by side (*like the NASB/The Message Parallel Bible*).

Another wise investment for your personal Bible study would be a good concordance and a good Bible atlas. There are also “Note Taker’s” editions of most Biblical translations which offer an extra wide white margin for penning your own thoughts and ideas. Most of these are published in hardback form for durability and sturdiness.

An excellent FREE mobile and online Bible may be found at YouVersion (www.youversion.com) and offers you the option of many different translations and languages – all for FREE!