

Bible Translations – A Quick Guide

based on
How to Choose a Translation for All Its Worth
by Gordon D. Fee and Mark L. Strauss

King James Version (KJV) aka The Authorized Version - 1611

Until the mid-20th century, the KJV was the dominant English language version. Some Christians still insist that it is the only acceptable English translation. Because the science of textual criticism has advanced greatly since the time of its translation, Scholars generally do not consider it a reliable translation. In addition, much of the language is archaic and requires a special education for anyone in the contemporary English speaking world to understand it. Some words that are still in use in English, no longer have the same meaning that they did in 1611, for ex. “meat” and “conversation.”

Three categories of translation from the original languages (Hebrew and Aramaic in OT and Greek in NT) to English.

1. Formal Equivalence – More literal rendering of the original language. Helps to capture images and wordplay from the original. Produces less natural English.
2. Functional Equivalence – More natural rendering into English. Makes meaning clearer, but may obscure meanings that are specific to the original language.
3. Mediating – Attempts to balance the other two.

Contemporary Bible Translations and Versions

Formal Equivalent Versions

Revised Standard Version (RSV) 1952. A revision of the KJV. Retains “thee” and “thou” language.

New American Standard Bible (NASB) 1971. Revised (NASU) 1995. Considered the most “literal” in following the original languages.

New King James Version (NKJV) 1982. Retains the *Textus Receptus* text. Basically updating the archaic language of the KJV.

New Revised Standard (NRSV) 1990. Revision of the RSV. First to intentionally try to do gender-neutral language.

English Standard Version (ESV) 2001. Updated revision of the KJV/RSV tradition but avoiding what some thought was politically-correct gender language of the NRSV.

Amplified Bible (AMP) 1965. Expansion version, largely the work of one person who used ASV as its basis.

Mediating Versions

New International Version (NIV) revised 1984 and 2011. A new translation from the original languages using over 100 scholars.

Today's New International Version (TNIV) 2005. Update of the NIV focusing on gender-neutral language.

Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB) 2004. Lifeway translation. A new trend in publishing houses having their own translation so that they can control the copyright and not have to pay another publisher.

British Versions

New English Bible (NEB) 1970.

Revised English Bible (REB) 1989.

Roman Catholic Versions

Jerusalem Bible (JB) 1966.

New Jerusalem Bible (NJB) 1985.

New American Bible (NAB) 1970, revised 1991.

Functional Equivalent Versions

The Living Bible (LB) 1971. A true paraphrase. Kenneth Taylor simplified the KJV for his children.

The New Living Translation (NLT) 1996, revised 2004.

Good News Translation/Today's English Version/Good News Bible (GNT/TEB/GNB) 1976, revised 1992. First English version to adopt the translation strategy of missionary/linguist Eugene Nida that he called dynamic equivalence (=functional equivalence). Produced by the American Bible Society.

Contemporary English Version (CEV) 1995. Another American Bible Society produced translation that used linguistic research to understand how to translate. Identifies itself as a "companion" translation to more literal ones.

The Message 2002. Translation by Eugene Peterson based on his long career as pastor and preacher in communicating the word to his congregation with contemporary relevance.

New translations are being produced all the time. Abingdon Press (Methodists) is the distribution source for a new translation, The Common English Bible (CEB).