



REEDSPORT CHURCH OF GOD

What Bible translation should I use?

Help! What Bible translation should I use?

The Bible and translation are very closely intertwined. Consider these fascinating facts:

- The original Old Testament was written in two languages, Hebrew and Aramaic. One of the first Greek *translations* of the Old Testament, called the *Septuagint*, was carried out in the second century BC. Interestingly, this translation became so popular that Paul quotes the *Septuagint* in his New Testament writings rather than the original Hebrew and Aramaic scripture.
- The New Testament was written in Greek, though this wasn't the language Jesus spoke. He probably understood Greek, but his everyday language (and the language those around him commonly spoke) was Aramaic. This means that even if you were to read the original Greek text of the New Testament, you would be reading Jesus' words in translation. (The two exceptions to this are [Matthew 27:46](#) and [Mark 5:41](#).)

These are indications that even the Biblical writers did not think of translation as less important than the original texts. And if you think about it, this makes a lot of sense. Before Jesus left his disciples, his instructions in the Great Commission told them to "go and make disciples of all the nations" ([Matthew 28:19](#)). Again in [Acts 1:8](#), he says, "And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." While there was no New Testament at that point, the implication is clear: If you go to the ends of the earth, you will have to speak like they do at the ends of the earth; therefore, translate whatever scripture you have that you need to share.

It took a while for the Christian church to pick up on that idea. For many centuries, the Latin translation of the Bible, in particular the *Vulgate* translation, was the only Bible available. This essentially meant that commoners who were not able to read Latin had no access to the Bible. They had to rely on the clergy to explain and retell the Bible to them.

This changed radically in the 16th and 17th centuries when the Reformation movement led to the formation of the Protestant church (and many different Protestant denominations). Martin Luther, one of the Reformation leaders, translated the Bible into German, forging the way for the great Bible translation movement that the Christian church has been pursuing ever since.

Today the Bible has been translated into more languages than any other piece of writing. As of this moment, the complete Bible has been translated into 531 languages, and there are 2,883 languages with at least a translated portion of the Bible.

Some of these languages have only one translation, but typically once a church is established in a language, Christians who speak that language translate the Bible again and again. Why? One of the reasons is that language changes all the time, and Christians want to match the colloquial nature of the Greek in the New Testament to a colloquial form of their local language. A text that was translated 50 or 100 years ago simply will not have the impact on readers as a text that reads naturally and fluently.

English is a language with a very large number Bible translations. In fact, there are more than 450 partial or whole translations of the Bible into English alone! Today you can actually choose from around 50 different translations at Amazon or a Bible distributor—and these are not just different editions, like a "study Bible" or leather-bound Bible, but completely different translations!

Is this a good thing? Isn't this very confusing to the average Christian?

We think it's a great thing, especially for the average Christian who can't refer directly to the Greek New Testament or the Hebrew and Aramaic Old Testament. Every time a scholar translates a Bible passage, he or she has to make a decision about precisely how to say it in the new language. There is never one right answer for any particular word or sentence; instead, there are always several possibilities that are correct translations. And we are in the privileged position of being able to read those many different right answers to receive a much fuller understanding of what the original text means.

So what translation should you read? If you don't already have a Bible translation that really speaks to you, or you want to add a couple of translations to your repertoire, you're in for a treat. One of the best resources for getting acquainted with the different versions is a free Internet site called biblegateway.com, which allows you to navigate easily through about 40 different English translations.

After browsing through several different translations, you will quickly see that the translation teams behind the various versions use very different styles and translation principles. Some versions, like *The Message*, use extremely colloquial language and take a lot of liberty in their translation. Others, like the *Holman Christian Standard* or the *English Standard Version*, try to stick to the source text even to the point of sacrificing some stylistic considerations. And others, like the *New International Version*, the *Common English Bible*, or the *New Living Translation*, strive for a happy medium between these extremes. Some Bibles are interesting for specific purposes, such as *The Voice* for public reading or the *Easy-to-Read Version*, which uses a very limited vocabulary and is great if you want to read through a whole book of the Bible in one sitting.

What about the *King James Version*? Wasn't it sufficient for Christians throughout the last four centuries? Without a doubt, the *King James Version* was a momentous translation with beautiful poetic language that has had a tremendous impact on the English language. In fact, more than 250 modern English idioms come from the language used in the *King James Version*. But does this automatically make it better than other translations? Well, if only the kind of language used in the *King James Version* speaks to you, then it is indeed better for you. But you have to remember that the *King James Version* was translated 400 years ago, and the language is naturally 400 years old. Most people find it easier to grasp something that is communicated in today's language. In addition, scholars have unearthed new evidence concerning the original texts since it was translated. Today, most scholars believe that the traditional closing of Mark ([Mark 16:9-20](#)) found in the *King James Version* is a later addition that was not in the original text. The vast majority of more modern Bible translations either leave out that passage or note that this was possibly not in the original text. This is only one example among many.

Does this mean that we all need to buy new bookshelves to make room for the dozens of Bibles that we need in our resource libraries? Well, it might be helpful to own two or three different translations, including the Bible we often use in our services, the *New Living Translation*. But biblegateway.com puts the whole range of translations at your fingertips when you're at the computer, and the free [YouVersion app](#) allows you to choose from a number of translations for your mobile device.

Have fun choosing the right Bible for you. You really can't go wrong—unless, of course, you don't read it at all!