
HOW TO SELECT A BIBLE

by

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The most important tool you need to get into God's Word for yourself is a Bible. Unfortunately, many people do not know what to look for in a Bible. One trip to a Christian bookstore will demonstrate the incredible number of different types and versions of the Bible. As a result, it can often be quite confusing when purchasing a Bible or determining if your current Bible should be replaced. Ultimately, your choice will depend on personal preferences. However, there are a few things you should consider in selecting a Bible.

Why are there so many versions?

There are literally dozens of different versions available in the English language. They all have different strengths and weaknesses and serve different purposes. All are an attempt to translate the original languages of the Bible (Hebrew and Greek) into English. There are three main approaches to translating the Bible:

- (1) **Word-by-Word** - The first method employed is that which seeks to follow the original text as closely as possible in a word-by-word pattern. Here strict adherence to the ancient language is stressed in a verbal way. The strength of such a method is obviously found in its verbal accuracy. The weakness is its inevitable awkward style at times. To translate any document from one language to another in this manner makes for difficult reading. These types of translations are very useful for study purposes, especially if you know the original languages. However, they can be somewhat awkward for normal reading.
- (2) **Concept Accuracy** - This method, which is the predominant method of modern translations, seeks a maximum of fluid reading style with a minimum of verbal distortion. Since words put together produce thoughts or concepts, the goal is to produce an accurate rendition of the thoughts or concepts of Scripture.
- (3) **The Paraphrase** - This method is an expansion of the concept method. Here the concept is extended and elaborated to insure that it is well communicated. There are various kinds of paraphrases. Most paraphrases are done by an individual rather than a committee. The danger of a paraphrase is that the translator can update the original author too much. As a result, the paraphrase becomes more like a commentary.

The following scale will help demonstrate where popular versions fit with respect to the three approaches:

Word-by-Word		Concept Accuracy		Paraphrase
NASB	NKJV	NIV	GNB	LB
	NRSV	NAB	NLT	The Message
			NEB	

KEY:

NASB - New America n Standard Bible	NRSV - New Revised Standard Version
NKJV - New King James Version	NIV - New International Version NAB - New American Bible NEB - New English Bible GNB - Good News Bible NLT - New Living Translation

Which translation is best?

While there are no "perfect" translations, there are versions that are more useful than others. We recommend that you begin by purchasing one of the versions that seeks "concept accuracy." This type of Bible can be especially helpful for Bible study because it combines accuracy with readability. In addition, you may want to consider using a modern paraphrase on occasion for variety. Just remember that the farther a version moves away from the original language, the greater chance there is for distortion. If you are more comfortable with the KJV or NASB, use that version. The most important thing is not which version you read, but *that* you read.

What should I look for in a Bible?

The following are several important characteristics to look for in a Bible:

- (1) **No notes** - When you are studying the Word, you want to come to the text unbiased, without any extraneous comments competing for your attention. Ideally you want the biblical text and only the biblical text. This characteristic would eliminate most "Study Bibles" which have become quite popular today. We have personally found Study Bibles to be useful for detailed study. However, when we read the Bible devotionally, we have found ourselves spending more time reading the notes instead of the biblical text.
 - (2) **Cross-references** - A cross-reference includes related verses in the margins of the Bible. These can be helpful for comparing Scripture with Scripture.
 - (3) **A concordance in back** - A concordance is a list of the words in the text, with references for where to find them..
 - (4) **Wide margins** - That way you'll have plenty of room to record your observations and insights.
 - (5) **Maps** - A few maps in the back of your Bible can be helpful for quick reference. It's always crucial to consider the sites where the events of Scripture took place.
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