

TLCBiblical.com Video Series

102 What Version Of The Bible Should I Use

1. What version of the Bible should I use? That's an excellent question. Some folks will insist that we use a specific version of the Bible such as the Authorized or King James Version. Others will argue that we should only use the latest modern language rendering of the scriptures to really understand the text. Discussions like this result in confusion for beginning readers and may also cause problems for folks who have been reading the Bible for a long time.

2. So how do we decide? What criteria can we use that will insure we are reading from a reliable translation of God's word? Can we make that decision at all? I think we can but it means that we have to understand the process and methods of translating and rendering the scriptures into modern languages. In this video we're going to review that process and then offer recommendations for a version that we can have confidence in.

3. In order to decide what version would be best for our personal study we need to take a look at some important considerations.

- a. First we'll talk about the source material from which the Bible is translated
- b. Secondly we will examine the methods or perspectives used in translating the Bible
- c. finally we need to apply what we've learned about the process of translation to selecting a reliable version of the Bible.

4. Before we discuss these points I want to address some of the skepticism that you will undoubtedly hear concerning the credibility of the Bible. While it is true that we don't have the original documents, or autographs, written by the authors themselves, I believe we can have confidence that we have the word of God. Whenever the authenticity of the scriptures is questioned I like to ask a few questions. The first is, "do you believe in God?" If the answer is yes then I ask, "Do you believe God created the physical universe we live in?". If the answer to that is also yes then I ask one more question. If God created the physical universe by speaking it into existence then couldn't He inspire human agents to record the story, write it down and preserve it through the ages. Obviously that wouldn't be too hard for a being who could create worlds by speaking them into existence. So, keep this point in mind as we turn our attention to a discussion of the source documents from which the translations are made.

5. The number of manuscripts from which the Bible is translated number in the thousands. While some point out that there are discrepancies between these manuscripts those differences fade in importance as we find that they represent misspelled words, missing words, changes in word order, missing letters and other minor defects such as this. Although these exist none of them affect doctrinal points made in the writings contributing to the consistency among all of the available manuscripts. This level of agreement between the manuscripts is unprecedented in human history and represents a level of consistency that does not exist in any other human undertaking. The manuscripts represent a time span of over one thousand years and were

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102 What Version Of The Bible Should I Use

produced by as many as 40 different writers and yet show remarkable agreement. Another significant point is that the number of manuscripts from which the Bible is translated vastly outnumber those for any other ancient work setting the Bible apart as unique. The survival and presence of these manuscripts is unparalleled in the history of the world. For those who believe in God these facts provide evidence of divine preservation and therefore divine power. When we consider this point we can have confidence that a reliable translation is credible.

6. And that brings us to our next point which is a review of how the source texts are translated. The manuscripts are written primarily in three ancient languages. Hebrew, which makes up most of the Old Testament, Aramaic, a language used for some copies of Daniel and portions of the book of Ezekiel, and koiné Greek, used in the writing of the New Testament which was a common language throughout the Roman Empire of the first century. These languages are dead, that is no longer used, and so the manuscripts from which the Bible is translated are frozen in time and not subject to cultural or linguistic changes due to the evolution of the cultures who spoke them. This is an advantage for scholars who study these languages to translate them and for those of us who benefit from their expertise. However, since we don't speak or study these languages we're dependent on the translators who render the text for us. When we look at how this is done we find that there are several perspectives on how a translation should be rendered. We can group these as

- a. literal word translations
- b. formal or functional equivalence method translations (word for word)
- c. dynamic equivalence translations (thought for thought)
- d. and paraphrasing

We'll discuss each of these but let's take a look at how the process begins.

7. To see what it takes to translate a sentence or phrase into another language such as English, we need to review the process. First the words in a sentence or phrase have to be translated literally in the order they appear in the original. Once that is done a decision has to be made about how to rearrange the words or change them to reflect terms that can be understood. This also includes rendering words or short phrases representing idioms in the original language into an equivalent expression in the target language. The degree to which the actual definition and meaning found in the original language is preserved or altered will be affected by the method or philosophy of the translators. Now let's take a look at the methods of translation and see how they compare.

8. The first of these is the Literal or word for word method of translation. This is a straightforward rendering of words from the original language into the target language. Literal translations are difficult to read as there is no attempt to change the word order or render idioms in a manner that would be understandable to a modern reader. These have value for very detailed study when we want to look deeper into specific words or phrases and are many times available

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102 What Version Of The Bible Should I Use

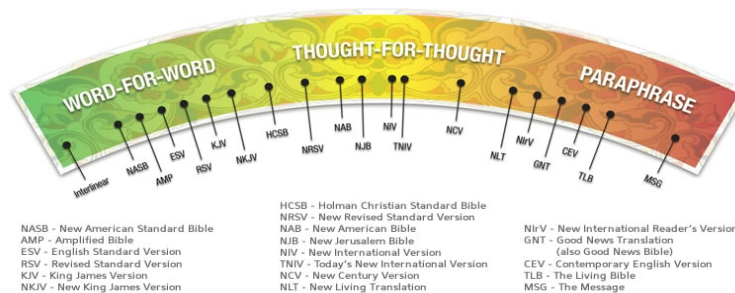
as interlinear Bibles showing both the original language and the rendered version. Although good for precise examination of the scriptures a literal translation would not be recommended for someone just starting out with the scriptures.

9. A second method translating is referred to as the formal equivalent method. This is a word for word translation but the word order has been modified so that it can be understood by readers in the target language. Every effort is used to preserve the exact wording and meaning of the original text. Idiomatic phrases are rendered to convey the same meaning as in the original language, or as closely as possible. These translations are the closest to a literal translation while being more readable and understandable.

10. A third category of translation is referred to as the dynamic or functional equivalence method. These are also known as thought for thought translations. In this method the translator rewords a passage in an attempt to better define what they believe was the intended meaning of the writer. This method of translation covers a wide spectrum and can represent a more subjective attitude on the part of the translator. In this method of translation ideas are being rendered more than the actual words. For that reason some thought for thought translations can differ significantly from a formal or word for word rendering. While being more readable these translations are not recommended for in depth study or review of doctrinal issues.

11. Finally the last category is actually not a translation method at all. Paraphrase Bibles are a restatement of an existing translation of the Bible in a manner consistent with the ideas of the author. While generally being very readable, these versions of the Bible serve more as a vehicle to promote certain ideas rather than to convey the actual meaning of the text. For this reason a paraphrase, while being easy to read, is not a reliable source for studying doctrine.

Types of Bible Translations



12. So where do modern translations fall in relation to these methods rendering the text. This is a chart, and others like it, can be found online and provide a visual classification of the various

TLCBiblical.com Video Series
102 What Version Of The Bible Should I Use

versions in relation to the method of translation. The arrangement of the translations in the graphic is interesting as it represents the fact that the farther away from the literal word translations, represented on the left, the more subjective the interpretation of the text becomes. Although the intent may be to create a version that is more readable, or that captures the spirit of what the translator believes was intended by the author, the more subjective of these versions begin to obscure doctrinal points or introduce ideas that are not consistent with the actual content of the source documents. For that reason the formal equivalence translations will be closer to what the original states.

13. My recommendation is to select a version from the formal equivalent, or word for word, method of translation . These will provide a closer rendering of what was stated in the source texts and also limit subjective alteration of the meaning. These versions include

- a. The New King James Version
- b. The New American Standard Bible and others

6. In the next video we'll talk about the King James Version of the Bible