

Bible Translation Comparison

What's the best Bible translation?

Honestly, the best bible version is the one that you will read or listen to. English speakers are blessed with many different translations, while speakers of some languages may only have one option to choose from.

Different translations exist because they are seeking to do different things. Some translations are more of a word-for-word or formal equivalence of the original languages such as the KJV, ESV, NKJV, LSB, NASB, NRSV, NRSVue, RSV, and YLT. Some translations are more thought for thought rather than word for word such as NLT, NIV, GNT, CEV, NCV, and NIrV. Some are a combination of formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence such as NET.

Depending on what you are reading the Bible for such as for bible study, theological precision, devotional reading or academic level bible study will make a difference in which translation to use. Also, the reading level of the reader will make a difference. Below are a list of Bible translations and information to help you as you review them.

You can download a free Bible app such as YouVersion which has many of these translations and compare them for yourself, or you can access them online at biblegateway.com for free. Some of the translations have an audio version available also.

Bible Translation	Type of Translation	Best Used For	Reading Level
ESV	Essentially literal / formal equivalence	Study, preaching, memorization	10th–11th grade
KJV	Formal equivalence / Early Modern English	Traditional reading, memorization, literary study	12th+
NKJV	Formal equivalence / updated KJV style	Traditional Bible study and church reading	9th–10th grade

Bible Translation	Type of Translation	Best Used For	Reading Level
NASB	Essentially literal / formal equivalence	Detailed Bible study and word comparison	11th–12th grade
LSB	Essentially literal / formal equivalence	In-depth study and theological precision	11th–12th grade
NRSV	Formal equivalence / moderate readability	Academic and comparative study	10th–11th grade
NRSVue	Updated NRSV / formal equivalence	Academic and scholarly study	10th–11th grade
CSB	Optimal equivalence	General study, teaching, preaching	7th–8th grade
NIV	Dynamic/functional equivalence with literal elements	General reading, study, church use	7th–8th grade
NET	Balanced / translator-focused	Bible study and examining translation decisions	8th–9th grade
HCSB	Optimal equivalence	General reading, study, church use	7th–8th grade
NLT	Dynamic/functional equivalence	Devotional reading and difficult passages	6th–7th grade
GNT	Dynamic/functional / thought-for-thought	Easy reading, devotionals, new readers	6th grade
CEV	Dynamic/functional equivalence	Children, new readers, public reading	5th grade
NCV	Dynamic/functional equivalence	Easy reading and devotionals	5th–6th grade

Bible Translation	Type of Translation	Best Used For	Reading Level
NIRV	Simplified dynamic equivalence	Children, beginning readers, ESL	3rd grade
MSG	Paraphrase	Devotional reading and fresh perspective	7th–8th grade
TLB	Paraphrase	Devotional and casual reading	7th grade
AMP	Essentially literal + explanatory expansions	Personal study and word exploration	10th–11th grade
VOICE	Literary / mediating translation	Devotional and narrative reading	8th–9th grade
NABRE	Formal/functional balance	Catholic study and liturgical reading	9th–10th grade
Douay-Rheims	Formal / traditional	Traditional Catholic study	12th+
RSV	Formal / essentially literal	Historical and theological study	10th–11th grade
ASV	Formal equivalence	Historical study and translation comparison	12th+
YLT	Extremely literal	Hebrew/Greek structure comparison	12th+
Darby	Very literal / formal equivalence	Detailed study and comparison	11th–12th grade
NETS	Septuagint-oriented translation	Studying the Greek Old Testament	College+

Quick guide:

-  **Deep study:** NASB, LSB, ESV, NET
-  **Academic:** NRSVue, NRSV, NETS, RSV
-  **Preaching/teaching:** ESV, CSB, NIV, NASB
-  **General reading:** NIV, CSB, NLT
-  **Children/new readers:** NIRV, CEV, GNT
-  **Comparing wording:** NASB, ESV, LSB, YLT, NET
-  **Devotional reading:** NLT, GNT, MSG
-  **Traditional:** KJV, NKJV, ASV, Douay-Rheims