



Versions and Translations

The following outlines some of the key characteristics of several Bibles currently in use. A number of the Bible translations most popular in the Western world today can be found in searchable form online (see: <http://www.ntgateway.com/bible-translations/>).

The King James Version (KJV)

The translation was planned from 1604 and published in 1611 under the auspices of King James VI of England. This Bible has become one of the most influential English books in modern Western civilization. It served as a unifier of English politics and religious disagreements. The King James Bible uses an economy of words and voices beautiful cadences that have led many to call it elegant. It remains a favorite in many Protestant circles.

The Douay-Rheims Bible

The first English translation for Roman Catholics was produced in Douay and Rheims in France from 1582-1610. It is based not upon the Hebrew and Greek text but rather the Vulgate, the Latin translation that was the authoritative Bible for the Catholic Church for much of its history. Its close adherence to the Latin makes many passages difficult for contemporary readers to understand, and it has largely fallen into disuse in many Catholic quarters. It is sometimes called the Rheims-Douay Bible.

The American Standard Version (ASV)

The growing sense that the KJV was based on less-than-ideal manuscripts and philological knowledge led to the British Revised Version in 1885. An American edition, the ASV, came out in 1901 and represented several hundred further emendations to suit its American audience. The ASV is sometimes thought of as by students of biblical languages as a particularly "wooden" translation, and it does in some respects seek to replicate the feel of the original, for example in using "Jehovah" rather than "Lord," or "Sheol" rather than "grave/Hell." However, the ASV is also quite euphemistic in places.

The Revised Standard Version (RSV)

This mid-twentieth-century American revision of the ASV took further steps to modernize the language of the translation and to embrace textual criticism. In an interesting compromise, it maintains the use of archaic pronouns such as "thou/thy/thee," but only for God. This allows the Psalter, for example, to maintain its "traditional" (i.e. KJV) flavor. The RSV also included the deuterocanonical Old Testament books accepted by the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches (albeit set apart in their own section), making it a more ecumenical Bible. Some of the changes to the text led to controversy, as the translators, mostly Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) members, and their translation were deemed communist by Sen. Joseph McCarthy and others!

The New International Version (NIV)

The NIV, which appeared in 1978, was largely the result of dissatisfaction with the RSV in conservative Protestant circles. It continues to be the pew Bible of choice in many churches today. Its translation reflects a more thorough commitment than the RSV's to

modernizing the idiom of the text; for example, archaic pronouns are banished entirely. Although its preface emphasizes its translators' commitment to biblical authority, it is somewhat less rigorously technical than the RSV. The word "international" in its title reflects the involvement of scholars from Canada, Great Britain, Australia, and New Zealand, although Americans, some SBL members, formed the great majority of its committees.

The JPS Tanakh

Published by the Jewish Publication Society in 1985, this translation was produced by rabbis and scholars from the three main branches of American Judaism: Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform. It is based on the oldest-known complete Hebrew version of the Holy Scriptures, the Masoretic Text, which can be traced back to Aaron Ben Moses ben-Asher, c.930 C.E. Ben-Asher researched all available texts to compile an authoritative Bible manuscript. In 1010 C.E. his work was revised by Samuel ben Jacob, a scribe in Egypt. Lost for centuries, the manuscript was eventually discovered in the mid-nineteenth century and became known as the Leningrad Codex. The **JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh** features the Hebrew text side by side with the English translation and adapts the latest Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia edition of the Leningrad text by correcting errors and providing modern paragraphing. The translation is available in a study Bible format in **The Jewish Study Bible**.

The New Jerusalem Bible

This 1985 Roman Catholic translation is based on the Hebrew and Greek but also reflects the influence of a French translation carried out by scholars at the École Biblique, a Dominican school and research center in Jerusalem. The New Jerusalem Bible and its predecessor, the Jerusalem Bible, are especially well known in English-speaking contexts outside the United States. Both the New Jerusalem Bible and the Jerusalem Bible (1966) are famous for eschewing the traditional rendering of the name of God as "LORD," opting instead for "Yahweh," which closely corresponds to the underlying Hebrew. The École Biblique is now engaged in a long-term project to produce a successor edition called *The Bible in its Traditions*.

The New American Bible (NAB)

The United States Catholic Conference of Bishops commissioned this translation, which is the primary source for the lectionary passages read at Mass in American Catholic churches. The NAB is based on the Hebrew and Greek texts rather than on the Latin Vulgate. Most of the editorial committee consisted of Roman Catholic scholars, though some members represented other traditions. The books of the original edition appeared in stages, with the publication of the New Testament marking completion of the project in 1970. The translators strove to combine fidelity to the original languages, gender inclusiveness, and sensitivity to usefulness in liturgical contexts. The Bible often meets these goals quite successfully, though efforts to improve it have led to multiple revisions. For example, the original rendering of Psalm 24:1 was considered confusing when heard read aloud: "The Lord's are the earth and its fullness." The revised verse reads, "The earth is the Lord's and all it holds." A fourth edition, the New American Bible Revised Edition (NABRE), was released in 2011.

The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

Nominally a response to still newer textual data from the Dead Sea Scrolls and elsewhere that had come to light since the translation of the RSV, the 1990 NRSV in fact represented another striking revision. As the most critical and up-to-date popular

translation, it is a favorite of biblical scholars, and is used in many mainline churches. It is also thoroughly ecumenical, including the deuterocanonical and apocryphal books used in the many churches of the world. Apart from the adoption of fully modern idiom without archaic pronouns, the most striking innovation of the NRSV was its effort to avoid masculine pronouns where possible. Although this de-genderizing effort did not extend to God, it does remove gender in certain cases where it is present in Greek and Hebrew, and is thus interpretive. Sometimes this has significant theological import. For example, Psalm 8's question, "What is ... the son of man that you care for him?" (RSV) became "What are ... mortals that you care for them?" (NRSV). The translators here favored their sense of the original intent of the Hebrew, although the phrase "son of man" had taken on great significance for early Christian interpreters, who understood it as a reference to Jesus Christ.

The EOB

The EOB or Eastern/Greek Orthodox Bible is the first major English translation produced specifically for Eastern Orthodox Christians. The Greek text underlying the New Testament is the Patriarchal Text, a text authorized in 1904 by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. The Old Testament is based upon the Septuagint, an ancient Greek translation of the Jewish scriptures, rather than on Hebrew manuscripts. The EOB New Testament is already available, and the EOB Old Testament is expected to appear soon. The underlying textual differences guarantee that the EOB will be unique among English Bibles.

For further reading, see Bruce M. Metzger, *The Bible in Translation: Ancient and English Versions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001).

See also "Transmission and Translation of the Bible," by Brennan Breed at in the August 2009 issue of *Teaching the Bible* at: http://www.sbl-site.org/assets/media/TBv1_i1.htm