

Which Bible?



There is a bewildering choice of translations of the Bible that many people find confusing. Which Bible is best and why?

The first question you need to take into account is, “Why was this translation made? It helps to realise that each translation of the Bible has been made for a reason. Knowing the reason why a translation was made helps you estimate its usefulness and be aware of possible bias.

Another guide is, how many people were involved in producing a translation and how well qualified were they? A translation made by a large body of well-qualified academics is likely to be more accurate than one that one person has made on their own.

A further test is, how many people use it and where? If your church always uses the same translation, you’ll need to get that one, even if you prefer to use another for your private reading.

It helps to understand what it is that the translators are translating. There is no “original Bible” for them to work on. What they have is a collection of more than a thousand ancient, hand-made copies of books or parts of the Bible, housed in museums, monasteries, libraries and universities around the world. Very occasionally, archaeologists unearth others. These copies are all substantially the same but each has slight differences. Most differences are minor – for example one word omitted, repeated or replaced with another. Others are more significant, like the three alternative endings of Mark’s gospel.

These copies are in various languages, mainly Greek, but also the original Hebrew of the Old Testament and a few other ancient languages such as Latin and Coptic. There are also places in other ancient books where Bible passages are quoted. By comparing all these, experts can make an intelligent guess at what the original text said and how it then developed over the years from copy to copy.

The committee of experts who produced the translation that King James authorised in 1611 worked on a version of the original text known as the *Textus Receptus* (received text). Since then many more documents have been discovered and, in the light of these, researchers have changed their understanding of what the Bible writers originally said. An international committee of experts produces and, where necessary, updates this text. Most modern translations use this version of the text.

The table below applies these tests to some of the more popular translations of the Bible.

A comparison of modern Bible translations

Translation	Date	base text	Produced by	purpose	comment	Romans 8 v 28
Authorised Version (AV) (King James)	1611	<i>Textus receptus</i>	Committee commissioned by King James 1 st of England 6 th of Scotland	To unify the Churches of England and Scotland and to combat Baptist, Congregational and Catholic influences.	Partially political motivation. Was basically a revision of William Tyndale's Bible.	And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to his purpose.
New King James Version	1991	<i>Textus receptus</i>	Committee set up by Thomas Nelson, Publishing company	To produce a modernised version of the AV.		And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to his purpose.
Revised Standard Version (RSV) American Standard Version and the New RSV	1951 (RSV) 1989 (New RSV)	Bible Society text	A national inter-church committee in the USA	To produce a modern translation that is close to the AV but takes account of more recently discovered evidence.	Widely used in the 1960s and 1970s but not so much now.	We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose.
New English Bible	1960s (NT), 1970s (OT)	Bible Society text	A national ecumenical committee set up by the British Council of churches	To produce a standard English Bible that would provide for future generations what the AV had provided before.	Was sidelined by the popularity of the GNB and NIV	And in everything, as we know, he co-operates for good with those who love God and are called according to his purpose.

Jerusalem Bible	1966	Bible society text	The Holy See	To produce a modern Bible for Catholics that is supportive of Catholic teaching.		We are well aware that God works with those who love him, those who have been called in accordance with his purpose, and turns everything to their good.
Good News Bible (Today's English Version) GB TEV	1966 (NT) and 1971 (OT)	Bible Society text	The Bible Society	To make the Bible accessible to ordinary people while using the latest scholarship and a new translation approach (dynamic equivalence.)	Started as a paperback version of the gospels, <i>Good News for Modern Man</i>	We know that in all things God works for good with those who love him, those whom he has called according to his purpose.
New International Version (NIV)	1979 and many subsequent revisions	Bible Society text	Initiated by an international committee of Evangelical and Reformed scholars and later sponsored by the International Bible Society	To produce an accurate and readable version of the Bible which is based on the latest scholarship and is supportive of evangelical teaching.	Currently the most popular version	And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.
New Century Bible	1986	Bible Society text	Translation committee of 50 international scholars commissioned by Thomas Nelson, Ltd.	Aims to be conservative and evangelical in tone, gender-neutral, and suitable for all readers.	Originally made for the International Children's Bible and the Youth Bible	We know that in everything God works for the good of those who love him. They are the people God called, because that was his plan.
The Message	1993	Bible Society text	Eugene Peterson		Popular translation by an individual writer and theologian	That's why we can be sure that every detail in our lives of love for God is worked into something good.

