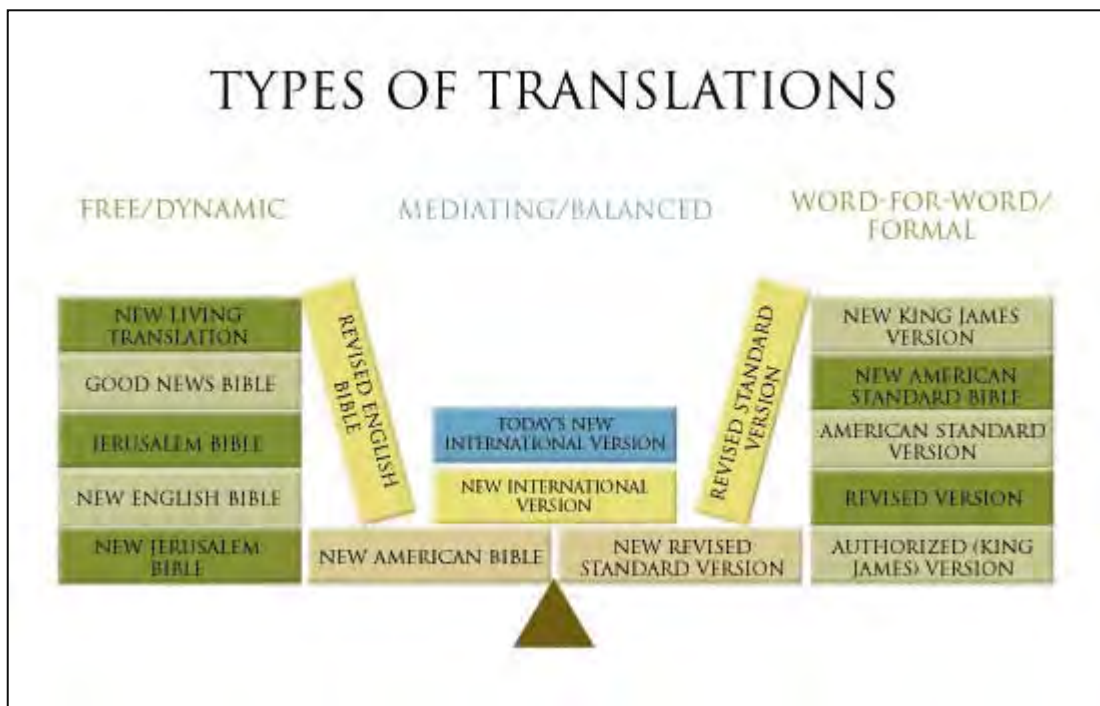


English Bible Translations



Contemporary English Version (CEV)

Reading Level: Grade 5.6

The Contemporary English Version (New Testament, 1991, full Bible, 1995) "was begun in 1984 by the American Bible Society. The mandate for the ABS translation team was to craft a translation that was biblically accurate, reader friendly, and understandable—even for first-time Bible readers. Among special concerns were ease of reading without sounding 'childish,' comprehensibility when read aloud, modern formatting, quality of style, and literary value. An international, interdenominational group of over 100, including translators, English language experts, and biblical authorities [comprised] the CEV translation team" (Thomas Nelson brochure). In general, it employs natural and uncomplicated English.

God's Word

In 1936, Dr. William F. Beck "started the task of diligently searching and studying the best available manuscripts of the Old and New Testaments in the original languages. ... Once he accurately comprehended the text, he made every effort to express its meaning in a way that communicated God's thoughts in an unambiguous and easy-to-understand form.

"Beck's aim was accuracy of meaning and the absolutely clear expression of that meaning for all the English readers of his day. ... But language tends to change even within the lifetime of translators. ... It has now been over 50 years since Beck began his ... work. ... But already in 1978 the question had arisen: should Beck's translation just remain a pioneer effort or is it worthy of an updated revision? A team of Bible scholars and pastors felt that the above-mentioned translation was worth the hours of time needed to revise it in order to produce a superior product. Thorough revision/translation work began in 1982" (from the Preface to God's Word to the Nations: New Testament). The first edition appeared in 1988, with minor revisions in 1989 and 1990. "God's Word" has yet to receive broad recognition or be widely distributed.

King James Version (KJV)

Reading Level: Grade 12

This, the most famous of English versions, is named after King James I of England who initiated the work. It is basically a revision of previous translations: Tyndale's, Coverdale's, the Great Bible and the Geneva Bible. Over fifty scholars worked on the project, which started in 1607. It was finished in 1611.

"The King James Version, known in England as the Authorized Version because it was authorized by the king, has become an enduring monument of English prose because of its gracious style, majestic language, and poetic rhythms. No other book has had such a tremendous influence on English literature." (Comfort, pp. 48-49)

However, the KJV translators had access to only a few ancient manuscripts. Since their day many older manuscripts have been discovered, resulting in a more reliable Greek and Hebrew text. In addition, many words in the KJV are now obscure; others cannot be traced back to the most reliable manuscripts. While IBS is glad to provide the historic KJV, we feel the NIV is both more accurate and more readable for today's audience.

The Living Bible

Reading Level: Grade 8.3

"In 1962 Kenneth Taylor published a paraphrase of the New Testament Epistles. ... The entire Living Bible was published in 1971. .. Using the American Standard Version as his working text, Taylor rephrased the Bible into modern speech—such that anyone, even a child, could understand the message of the original writers. In the preface to The Living Bible Taylor explains his view of paraphrasing:

'... to say as exactly as possible what the writers of the Scriptures meant, and to say it simply, expanding where necessary for a clear understanding by the modern reader.'

"Even though many modern readers have greatly appreciated the fact that The Living Bible made God's Word clear to them, Taylor's paraphrase has been criticized for being too interpretive. But that is the nature of paraphrases—and the danger as well.

"The Living Bible has been very popular among English readers worldwide" (Comfort, pp. 75-76).

The Message

Reading Level: Grade 8.5

The Message, published in 1993 by NavPress, is a free, highly colloquial and interpretive translation/paraphrase of the New Testament by Eugene H. Peterson. An earlier form of the book of Galatians appeared in 1988 under the title *Traveling Light*.

"This version of the New Testament in a contemporary idiom keeps the language of the Message current and fresh and understandable in the same language in which we do our shopping, talk with our friends, worry about world affairs, and teach our children their table manners. The goal is not to render a word-for-word conversion of Greek into English, but rather to convert the tone, the rhythm, the events, the ideas, into the way we actually think and speak" (from the Introduction).

New American Bible

Reading Level: Grade 6.6

"The first American Catholic Bible to be translated from the original languages is The New American Bible (not to be confused with the New American Standard Bible). Although this translation was first published in 1970, it was updated in 1991. The New American Bible has short introductions to each book of the Bible and very few marginal notes. Kubo and Specht provide this description of the translation:

'The translation ... is simple, clear, and straightforward and reads very smoothly. It is good American English, not as pungent and colorful as the N.E.B. [New English Bible]. Its translations are not striking but neither are they clumsy. They seem to be more conservative in the sense that they tend not to stray from the original' [p. 165, Kubo and Specht, *So Many Versions?*]. "

(Comfort, p. 82-82)

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

Reading Level: Grade 11

"The Lockman Foundation, a nonprofit Christian corporation committed to evangelism ... organized a team of thirty-two scholars to prepare a new revision [of the American Standard Version of 1901]. These scholars ... strove to produce a literal translation ... in the belief that such a translation 'brings the contemporary reader as close as possible to the actual wording and grammatical structure of the original writers' " [from the preface].

"After the New American Standard Bible was published (in 1963 for the New Testament and 1971 for the entire Bible), it received a mixed response. Some critics applauded its literal accuracy, while other sharply criticized its language for hardly being contemporary or modern.

"On the whole, the New American Standard Bible became respected as a good study Bible that accurately reflects the wording of the original languages yet is not a good translation for Bible reading" (Comfort, pp. 77-78).

New International Reader's Version (NirV)

Reading Level: Grade 3.5

The New International Reader's Version (NirV, 1996) "is a new Bible version developed to enable early readers to understand God's message. Begun in 1992 and co-sponsored by Biblica and Zondervan Publishing House, the New International Reader's Version is a simplification of the New International Version (NIV), today's most popular translation of the Bible. " (from the NirV "Sample Booklet").

The NirV was designed to make the Bible clear and understandable to early readers, and can be read by a typical fourth grader. For this reason, it is also of value to the millions for whom English is a second language. It intends to be distinguished by five fundamental characteristics—readability, understandability, compatibility with the NIV, reliability and trustworthiness. It serves as a natural stepping-stone to the NIV when the time is right.

New International Version (NIV)

Reading Level: Grade 7.8

"The New International Version is a completely new rendering of the original languages done by an international group of more than a hundred scholars. These scholars worked many years and in several committees to produce an excellent thought-for-thought translation in contemporary English for private and public use. ...

"The translators of the New International Version sought to make a version that was midway between a literal rendering (as in the *New American Standard Bible*) and a free paraphrase (as in *The Living Bible*). Their goal was to convey in English the thought of the original writers. ... The New Testament of the New International Version was published in 1973, and the entire Bible, in 1978. This version has been phenomenally successful. Millions and millions of readers have adopted the New International Version as their 'Bible.' Since 1987 it has outsold the King James Version, the best-seller for centuries—a remarkable indication of its popularity and acceptance in the Christian community. The New International Version, sponsored by the [International] Bible Society, ... has become a standard version used for private reading and pulpit reading in many English-speaking countries" (Comfort, pp. 79-81).

Jerusalem Bible

"The first complete Catholic Bible to be translated from the original languages is *The Jerusalem Bible*, published in England in 1966. ... This Bible, which includes the Apocrypha and Deuterocanonical books, contains many study helps—such as introductions to each book of the Bible, extensive notes on various passages, and maps. The study helps are an intricate part of the whole translation because it is the belief of Roman Catholic leadership that lay people should be given interpretive helps in their reading of the sacred text. The study helps in *The Jerusalem Bible* were translated from the French, whereas the Bible text itself was translated from the original languages. ... The translation of the text ... is considerably freer than other translations, such as the Revised Standard Version, because the translators sought to capture the meaning of the original writings in a 'vigorous, contemporary literary style'" [from the preface] (Comfort, pp. 81-82).

New King James Version (NKJV)

Reading Level: Grade 8.5

The New King James Version (1982) is a revision of the King James Version, called for primarily due to the same reasons given for the New Revised Standard Version. It retains the elegant literary style of the KJV, but is easier to read.

New Living Translation (NLT)

Reading Level: Grade 6.3

The New Living Translation (Tyndale, 1996) is a "thorough revision" of The Living Bible. "More than ninety scholars from various theological backgrounds and denominations [were involved] ... with the goal that it be exegetically accurate and idiomatically powerful.

"Most significantly, the New Living Translation is not a paraphrase but a translation. Every verse has been carefully compared to the most reliable editions of the Hebrew and Greek texts in an effort to make a translation that accurately conveys the meaning of the original texts" (from the Preface to the review copy of Romans).

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

Reading Level: Grade 8.1 (but Zondervan says it's actually 10.)

"The New Revised Standard Version [was] published in 1990. ... In the preface to this revision, Bruce Metzger, chairperson of the revision committee, wrote:

'The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible is an authorized revision of the Revised Standard Version, published in 1952, which is a revision of the American Standard Version, published in 1901. ... The need for issuing a revision of the Revised Standard Version of the Bible arises from three circumstances: (a) the acquisition of still older biblical manuscripts, (b) further investigation of linguistic features of the text, and (c) changes in preferred English usage' (Comfort, p. 85).

Revised English Bible

" (1989) ... is a radical revision of the New English Bible" (Comfort, p. 85).

Revised Standard Version (RSV)

"The organization that held the copyright to the American Standard Version ... authorized a new revision in 1937.

"The New Testament was published in 1946; and the entire Bible with the the Old Testament, in 1952.

"The principles of the revision were specified in the preface to the Revised Standard Version:

"The Revised Standard Version is not a new translation in the language of today. It is not a paraphrase which aims at striking idioms. It is a revision which seeks to preserve all that is best in the English Bible as it has been known and used throughout the years.

"This revision was well received by many Protestant Churches and soon became their 'standard' text. ... Evangelical and fundamental Christians, however, did not receive the Revised Standard Version very well—primarily because of one verse, Isaiah 7:14...." (Comfort, pp. 66-67). The RSV has now been replaced by the NRSV.