

How to Choose a Reliable Bible Version (Part 2)

This is the second and final article on choosing a good version of the Bible for personal study. As mentioned in Part 1, the articles were prompted by the many questions I have been asked regarding choosing a good Bible and which versions are more reliable. This installment, although not exhaustive, will discuss a few things to look for in choosing a good Bible for personal study. Carefully read introductions, prefaces, and forwards. These will tell you about the translators' philosophy of translation, what is included in your Bible, what the study aids are, and how they are to be used. Remember that only the 66 books of the Bible are inspired by God. Everything else, including introductory notes, chapter notes, paragraph headings, reference links and commentary are editorial additions, are uninspired and subject to the particular bias of the editors.

1. In general, look for a version that was translated by multiple translators and reviewed by an editorial committee. In theory, this serves as a system of checks and balances against error and helps to develop (but does not guarantee) a version that is more faithful to the manuscripts from which it was translated.

2. Seek out a version which identifies its dominant philosophy of translation as "word for word." Although this philosophy may make for awkward reading in some places, it is still preferable over "thought for thought" (dynamic equivalent) and paraphrased translations. It is always better to be able to read what the writer said in words that translate his as closely as possible, rather than what a translator thinks the original writer may have thought. The difference in these two philosophies of translation lies in the translator's belief that the original writer's words were inspired, or that his thoughts were inspired and the words were entirely up to his own choosing. While it is evident that the personalities of various writers of the Bible show in their writings, scripture bears out that verbal inspiration is the correct view (1 Cor. 2:11-12; 2 Pet. 1:20-21). Consequently it is desirable that the words of the original writer be translated as accurately as the target language will allow.

3. Choose a version that is well known and respected for accuracy. Many people of our day seem to race to embrace that which is "new and different" in their pursuit of independence and establishing their own identity. This rash rejection of the cumulative wisdom of the past (learning from history so as not to repeat it) has resulted in the widespread acceptance of error, and in diversity of opinion being preferred over the veracity of fact. Respected translations such as the King James Version, American Standard Version of 1901, the New King James Version and the New American Standard Version are generally well regarded and espouse the word for word philosophy of translation. Dictionaries for each of these versions are readily available to aid in understanding difficult words. The King James and New King James translations have done an admirable job in preserving the poetry and majesty of the original languages as well.

4. Finally, choose a Bible that is comfortable to read and easy to handle. The style and size of the print should not cause eye strain and should be pleasant to read. The Bible of choice should not be so bulky, awkward and heavy that one may be inclined to leave it at home and unused. Choose a Bible with a durable cover and binding. It will be something that you will study and treasure for years, it will include your own notes, and

the more accustomed to handling it that you become the more likely you will be to carry it with you. Many people choose Bibles without thumb indexes or tabs for the various books, preferring to learn to locate books by practice and study. It has been said that the best preservative for the leather binding of a good Bible is the oil that is left on it by daily handling and reading.

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