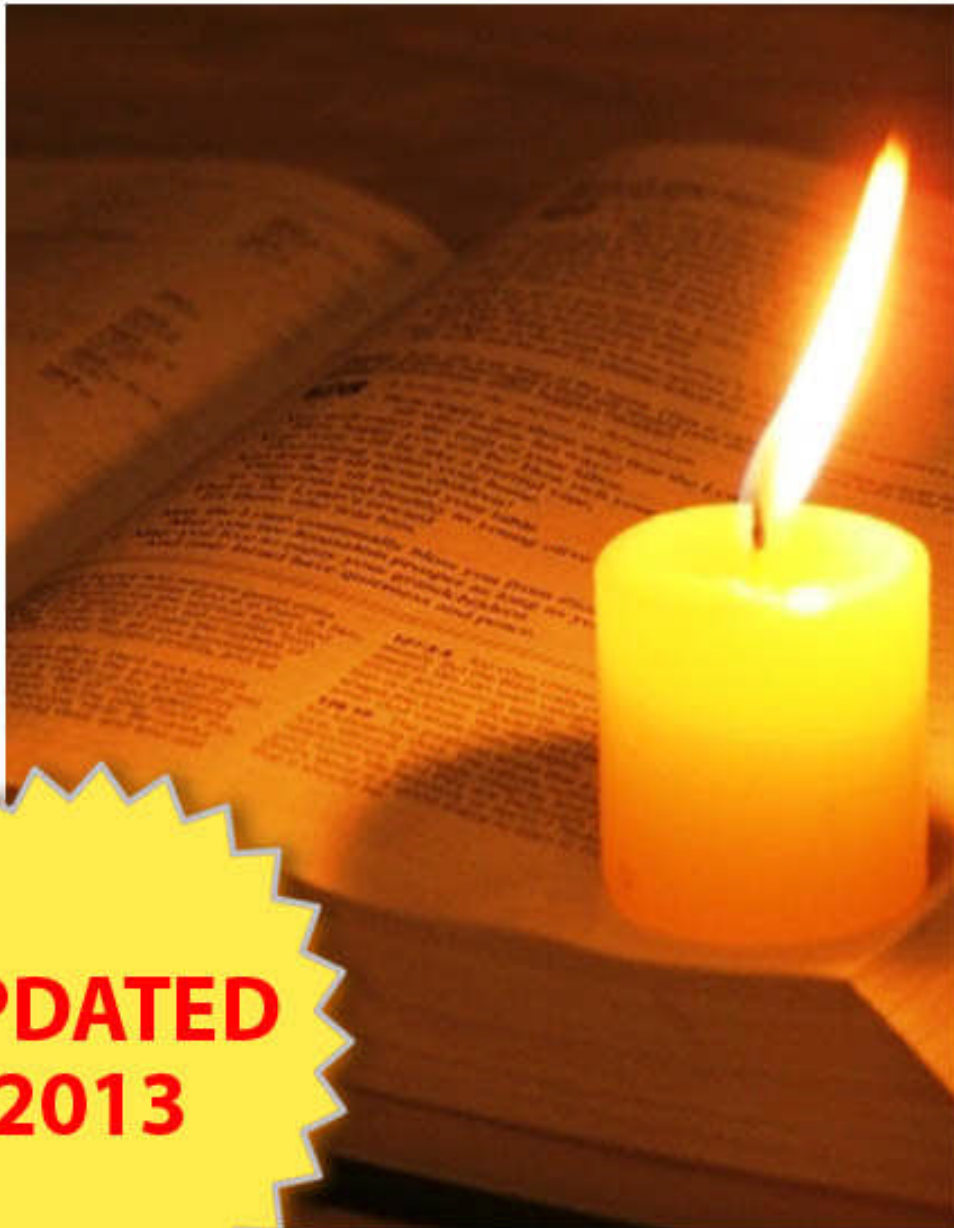


The Holy Bible



**UPDATED
2013**

A Buyer's Guide

by Leonard J. Greenspoon and Harvey Minkoff

The Holy Bible: A Buyer's Guide

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About the Biblical Archaeology Society

The excitement of archaeology and the latest in Bible scholarship since 1974

The Biblical Archaeology Society (**BAS**) was founded in 1974 as a nonprofit, nondenominational, educational organization dedicated to the dissemination of information about archaeology in the Bible lands.

BAS educates the public about archaeology and the Bible through its bi-monthly magazine, *Biblical Archaeology Review*, an award-winning web site www.biblicalarchaeology.org, [books and multimedia products](#) (DVDs, CD-ROMs and videos), [tours and seminars](#). Our readers rely on us to present the latest that scholarship has to offer in a fair and accessible manner. **BAS** serves as an important authority and as an invaluable source of reliable information.

Publishing Excellence

BAS's flagship publication is *Biblical Archaeology Review*. **BAR** is the only magazine that connects the academic study of archaeology to a broad general audience eager to understand the world of the Bible. Covering both the Old and New Testaments, **BAR** presents the latest discoveries and controversies in archaeology with breathtaking photography and informative maps and diagrams. **BAR**'s writers are the top scholars, the leading researchers, the world-renowned experts. **BAR** is the only nonsectarian forum for the discussion of Biblical archaeology.

BAS produced two other publications, *Bible Review* from 1985–2005, and *Archaeology Odyssey* from 1998–2006. The complete editorial contents of all three magazines are available on the **BAS Library**. The BAS Library also contains the text of five highly-acclaimed books, *Ancient Israel*, *Aspects of Monotheism*, *Feminist Approaches to the Bible*, *The Rise of Ancient Israel* and *The Search for Jesus*. Yearly memberships to the BAS Library are available to everyone at www.biblicalarchaeology.org/library. This comprehensive collection of materials is also available to colleges, universities, churches and other institutions at www.basarchive.org.

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The society, its magazine, and its founder and editor Hershel Shanks have been the subject of widespread acclaim and media attention in publications as diverse as *Time*, *People*, *Civilization*, *U.S. News and World Report*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and *The Jerusalem Post*. **BAS** has also been featured on television programs aired by *CNN*, *PBS* and the *Discovery Channel*. To learn more about the Biblical Archaeology Society and subscribe to **BAR**, go to www.biblicalarchaeology.org.

Further Reading in the BAS Library

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Over the years, the Biblical Archaeology Society has printed millions of words on topics from Jesus to Jerusalem, from the Dead Sea Scrolls to scientists' fear of the approaching death of the Dead Sea itself. Each of the over 6000 we have published in the past 35 years is fully available and fully searchable in the online BAS Library. Every photograph, more than 18,500 of them, is also fully viewable--along with the captions, of course.

Whether it's to research a paper, to prepare a sermon, to deepen your understanding of scripture or history, or simply to marvel at the complexity of the Bible, the most important book in history, the BAS Library is an invaluable tool that cannot be matched anywhere else. Find out more at www.biblicalarchaeology.org/library.

Bailey, Lloyd R. "[What a Concordance Can Do for You.](#)" **BAR** 10:06.

Beegle, Dewey M. "[What Does the Bible Say?](#)" **BAR** 08:06.

Cross, Frank M. "[New Directions in Dead Sea Scroll Research I: The Text Behind the Text of the Hebrew Bible.](#)" **BR** 01:02.

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Greenspoon, Leonard J. "[Mission to Alexandria: Truth and Legend About the Creation of the Septuagint, the First Bible Translation.](#)" **BR** 05:04.

Harrelson, Walter, "[What Is a Good Bible Dictionary?](#)" **BAR** 12:06.

LaSor, William Sanford. "[Learning Biblical Languages.](#)" **BAR** 13:06.

Minkoff, Harvey. "[Problems of Translations.](#)" **BR** 04:04.

Additional Further Reading

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Comfort, Philip W. *[The Complete Guide to Bible Versions.](#)* Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1991.

Kubo, Sakae and Walter F. Specht. *[So Many Versions?](#)* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983.

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Introduction

Are you looking to buy a Bible? If you're anything like me, the first place you would look is on Amazon.com. That's the easiest and fastest way for me to learn what's available, and about how much I can expect to spend.

But if you search for "Holy Bible" in Amazon's Books section, you are faced with 75,996 results—dozens of different translations and versions, hundreds of editions and countless varieties of packaging designed for every conceivable audience in a seemingly endless list of entries.

Unless you know in advance which exact translation and edition is the one for you, the amount of choice is dizzying. The Holy Bible: A Buyer's Guide is designed to help you sort through Bible translations and editions, and to help you make the important choice about which Bible to purchase. Written by prominent Biblical scholars Leonard J. Greenspoon and Harvey Minkoff, this free e-book will guide you through 27 different Bible versions and address their content, text, style and religious orientation.

New Bible editions and translations are published every year, and this newly updated edition features discussions by Leonard Greenspoon on six new Bible versions published through 2013, including excerpts from the Bibles' introductions, the opening verses in Genesis and Greenspoon's remarks on the translation, style and theology of each edition.

This newly updated free e-book will serve as a valuable guide to choosing the Bible that is right for you.

Sara Murphy
Webmaster, Biblical Archaeology Society
2010

Updated by Noah Wiener
Web Editor, Biblical Archaeology Society
2013

The Holy Bible: A Buyer's Guide

By Leonard J. Greenspoon



Walk through the religion section of any major bookstore, and you'll see an amazing array of Bibles. The broad selection of translations (also called versions)—and the seemingly endless ways in which they are packaged—is without historical precedent. But for many people, it is also bewildering, if not frustrating. Rather than the “blessing” it could and probably should be, it may be off-putting. When faced with a host of adjectives like “new” and “revised,” thoughtful buyers might well ask, What was wrong with the “old” or “traditional” or, dare I say it, the “original”?

And it doesn't stop there. How can a buyer tell when a Bible is a different translation (or version) or the same old text in a new coat? Some publishers put out several translations. Oxford, for example, prints copies of the New Revised Standard Version, the Jewish Publication Society Tanakh, the New American Bible, the New King James Version, the old King James Version and more. And several publishers put out the same translations: Eight different publishers have been given broad licenses to publish the New Revised Standard Version, for example. And sometimes publishers put out one translation under numerous different titles. Zondervan's *Devotional Bible for Dad*, *Revolution: The Bible for Teen Guys*, and *True Images: The Bible for Teen Girls* all

contain the same translation (the New International Version—the most popular translation today) with distinctive covers on the outside and different annotations, devotional aids and interpretive materials on the inside.

Some Bibles are aimed at specific religious groups, but this is not always clear from the title. How is a Bible buyer to know that the New American Bible is prepared by and for Roman Catholics, while the similarly named New American Standard Bible is aimed at conservative Protestants?

On the following pages, I try to answer such questions in as straightforward, objective and succinct a manner as I can. With this goal in mind, I have chosen 21 versions or families of versions. After providing some basic publication data for the edition I used, I offer a quotation from each version's own introduction that highlights its distinctive features or accomplishments. I then cite the same verses, Genesis 1:1–2, for each version and offer my own comments.

My Bible guide is far from the first such effort, nor will it be the last. I hope to distinguish my analysis from others by allowing each version to speak on its own behalf.

I have grouped the translations in three broad categories: literal; nonliteral with extended vocabulary; and nonliteral with limited vocabulary or colloquial language. The literal versions come closest to providing a word-for-word translation in terms of the grammar, vocabulary and style of the original; nonliteral versions with extended vocabulary attempt to provide a Bible that remains close to the original but makes use of more up-to-date vocabulary and style; the other nonliteral versions restrict the scope of their vocabulary and the complexity of their grammar. Each of these approaches has its own appeal and drawbacks; for example, a literal version brings modern readers closest to the ancient text, but often at the expense of intelligibility; the less literal a version is the easier it is for today's readers to comprehend, but readers can easily lose the feeling that they are dealing with an ancient text.

Not every reader will agree with my approach. Rest assured, I am under no illusions: My words, unlike Sacred Writ, are not inscribed in stone. In this admission I am in excellent company: The translators of the King James Version made much the same point in their introduction!

New Edition of *The Buyer's Guide*—Revised 2013

At the request of the editors of BAR, I have expanded my “Buyer’s Guide” through the addition of six new English-language versions of the Bible, most of which had not been published (or fully published) when the “Guide” first appeared in Fall 2005. I am grateful for this opportunity, especially since the production of new versions has continued unabated since that time.

At least one of these new versions falls into each of the categories I set up earlier: Literal Translations, Non-Literal Translations (with Extended Vocabulary) and Non-Literal Translations (with Limited Language). At the same time, these new editions do exhibit some features not seen in earlier translations, especially those that allow for enhanced internet availability in addition to traditional print copies.

I have tried to fashion the new entries so that they fit in seamlessly with the earlier format. After giving basic publication information about each version, I provide extended quotations from the introductions (or other prefatory materials) themselves. In this way I allow each translator or group of translators to express in their own words what they understand to be the distinctive or defining characteristics—stylistically, theologically and in terms of paratextual information (various types of footnotes, appendices, maps and other graphics, etc.)—of their version.

I then present the first two verses of the first chapter of the first book of the Hebrew Bible (that is, Genesis 1:1-2) in the words of each version. There follow my own observations about each translation. To a large extent, I am guided by the translators themselves; that is, my primary focus is on how well the translators carry out the goals they themselves have set. At the same time, I do have views of my own, which I readily offer without (I hope) clouding the reader’s vision of an assessment of each version on its own terms. This is not always an easy task, but it is one that I think is important.

I have reason to think that I have achieved a satisfactory balance. This feeling comes from the largely positive response that the “The Buyer’s Guide” has garnered among individuals from different faith communities as well as from those who do not identify with any community. I look forward to continued interaction with interested individuals. For me, such conversations are the best way to gain an understanding of how the Word can most effectively be delivered to the world we all inhabit.

Literal Translations

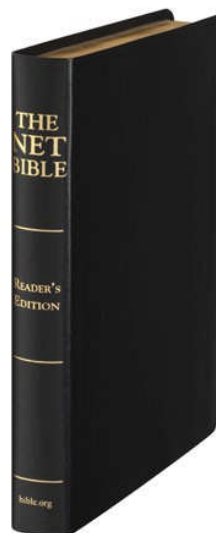


The NET Bible (NET Bible)

Edition: *The NET Bible. New English*

Translation Biblical Studies Press. 2005.

The cover spine includes this wording: "with 60,932 translators' notes."



[Click here to purchase](#)

Introduction: "There is an average of two translators' notes for each Biblical verse. The notes alone are the cumulative result of hundreds of thousands of hours of Biblical and linguistic research. The translator's notes, most of which were created at the same time as the initial drafts of the translation itself, enable the reader of the NET Bible to 'look over the shoulders' of the translators as they worked.

The NET Bible is a completely new translation. The project began on a rainy night in November 1995 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature. The name that was chosen reflects our goals to provide the Bible to the internet audience in electronic form in addition to the more traditional printed media.

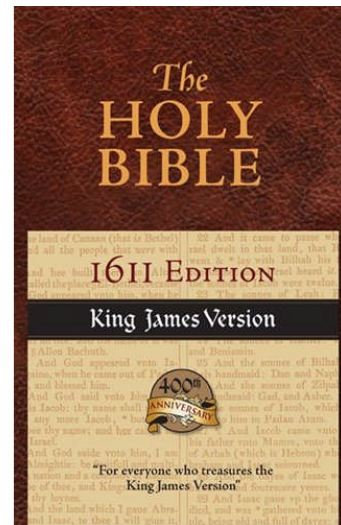
Faithfulness to the Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek in which the Biblical documents were originally written was the primary concern. The ultimate objective of the NETS Bible is to be accurate, readable, and elegant. A second major objective for the NETS Bible was the clarity of the translation for the modern reader. This concern for clarity extended to the literary quality and readability of the NET Bible. The NET Bible strives for accuracy by translating passages consistently and properly within their grammatical, historical, and theological context. Grammatical context is the most important."

Genesis 1:1–2: *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was without shape and empty, and darkness was over the surface of the watery deep, but the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the water.*

My remarks: The NET Bible is, in my view, one of the two versions (the NAB being the other) in this update that fall within the category of “literal.” Its rendering of Genesis 1:1-2 reflects the wording of the Hebrew, although it smooths over the structure of the original. It is the only translation that I can recall that uses the adversative conjunction “but” (rather than “and”) in v 2; although this is admittedly only a small point, I find this usage thought provoking. Nonetheless, what is most striking about the NET Bible is not its text, but its extensive footnotes. For Genesis 1:1-2, there are fifteen notes, ten of which are translators’ notes. Because of this extensive annotation—which may well appear as overkill to some (although not to the NET editors and, presumably, its target readers)—only v 1 and (most of) v 2 are found on the first page of the translation itself.

King James Version (KJV)

Edition: First published in 1611



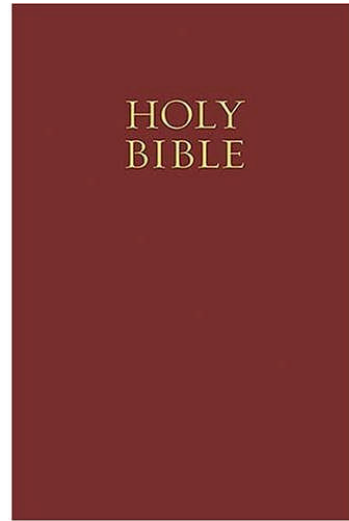
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Introduction: “Truly (good Christian Reader) we never thought from the beginning, that we should need to make a new Translation, nor yet to make of a bad one a good one ... but to make a good one better, or out of many good ones, one principal good one, not justly to be excepted against; that hath been our endeavor, that our mark.”

Genesis 1:1–2: *In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.*

New King James Version (NKJV)

Edition: *Holy Bible: The New King James Version, Containing the Old and New Testaments* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982)



[Click here to purchase](#)

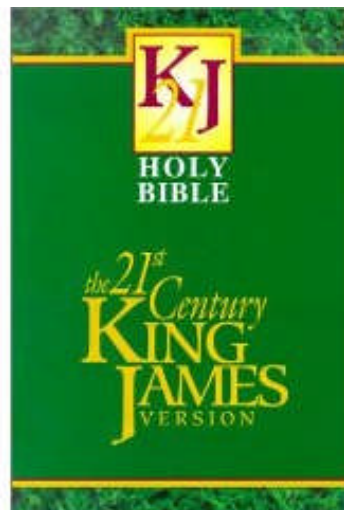
Introduction: "In harmony with the purpose of the King James scholars, the translators and editors of the present work have not pursued a goal of innovation ... [This translation] seeks to preserve *all* of the information in the text, while presenting it in good literary form.

"The translators have sought to maintain that lyrical quality which is so highly regarded in the Authorized Version ... Where obsolescence and other reading difficulties exist, present-day vocabulary, punctuation, and grammar have been carefully integrated."

Genesis 1: *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.*

**The 21st Century King James
Version (KJ21)**

Edition: *The Holy Bible: The 21st Century King James Version, Containing The Old Testament and The New Testament* (Gary, SD: 21st Century King James Bible Publishers/Deuel Enterprises, 1994)



[Click here to purchase](#)

Introduction: “The *KJ21* is unique among modern Bibles in that it is closer in language to the original King James Version than any other Bible copyrighted in the twentieth century ... Certain words which are not used in general conversation today, such as *thee, thy, thou, hath, art, cometh*, etc. have been retained in the *KJ21*, because they are readily understood and have remained an eloquent and beautiful part of our traditional language of worship and prayer ... We have steadfastly resisted any attempt to subject the Word of God to the vagaries of any current state of knowledge, culture, or political whim.”

Genesis 1: *In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.*

My remarks: In my opinion, a copy of the King James Version belongs in every household. And this holds true not only for Protestants, but also for Roman Catholics and Orthodox Christians, Jews, adherents of other religions, and believers in none. The KJV is not just an English classic; it is *the* English classic, and everyone should have easy access to its elegant diction and cadence. With its frequent “and ... and ... and” structure (as in “And God saw the light ... and God called the light Day”) and such expressions as “It came to pass,” the KJV replicates in English many of the characteristic features of biblical Hebrew, thereby qualifying it as a literal translation.

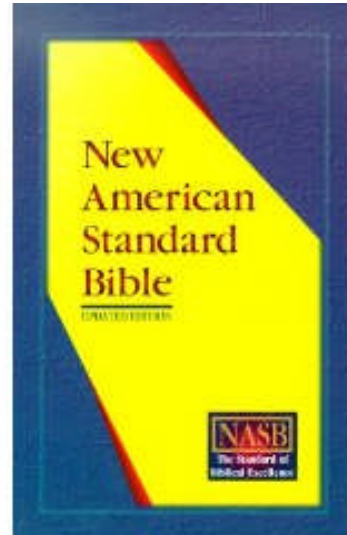
But the KJV translators entertained no illusions that their work was timeless or immutable. Both the NKJV and the KJ21 provide today's readers with a relatively light reworking of the 17th-century King James Version.

The KJ21, with its retention of pronouns like "thee" and verbal forms such as "cometh" and "art," retains a good deal of the KJV's flavor; at the same time, it modernizes much of the older vocabulary. Thus, to name only a few, "Holy Ghost" becomes "Holy Spirit," "carriage" is replaced by "baggage," and "gins" by "traps."

The NKJV is a lovingly realized updating of the KJV that will appeal to those who find many of the KJV's archaic features (such as the use of "thee" and "thy") off-putting, but nonetheless draw strength from its overall style and structure. It is surely easier for modern readers to comprehend than its almost 400-year-old predecessor.

**New American Standard Bible
(NASB)**

Edition: *New American Standard Bible:
Updated Edition* (Anaheim, CA: Foundation
Publications, 1996)



[Click here to purchase](#)

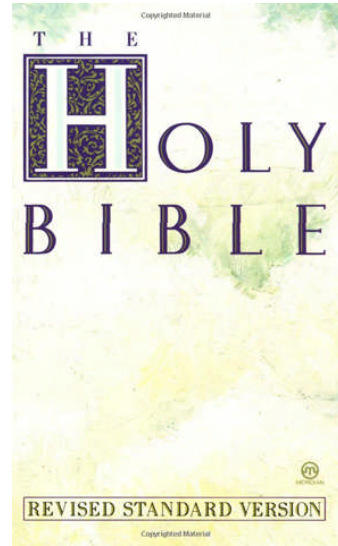
Introduction: “The attempt has been made to render the grammar and terminology in contemporary English. When it was felt that word-for-word literalness was unacceptable to the modern reader, a change was made in the direction of a more current English idiom.”

Genesis 1: *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters.*

My remarks: By the late 19th century, it had become apparent that the King James Version was in need of substantive and substantial revision. In 1870, the Church of England commissioned 50 British and American clerics and scholars to revise and correct the text. Their improved translation was published in the 1880s as the English Revised Version. An American edition, containing the preferences of the American scholars involved in the project, appeared in 1901. It was called the American Standard Version. The NASB is an update of this American Standard Version, and is thus firmly rooted in the KJV family. As such, it tends toward the literal representation of the Hebrew and Greek originals in vocabulary and grammar that conform to American usage. The most recent revision (in 1995) has added a bit more grace and fluidity to its style, while in no way detracting from its usefulness as a trustworthy guide to the ancient text.

Revised Standard Version (RSV)

Edition: *The Bible: Containing the Old and New Testaments, Revised Standard Version*
(National Council of the Churches of Christ
in the USA, 1952)



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Introduction: “A major reason for revision of the King James Version is the change since 1611 in English usage. Many forms of expression have become archaic, while still generally intelligible. Other words are obsolete and no longer understood by the common reader. The greatest problem, however, is presented by the English words which are still in constant use but now convey a different meaning from that which they had in 1611 and in the King James Version. [Eg., in the KJV “prevent” means “precede” and “convince” means “convict.”] ... The Revised Standard Version Bible seeks to preserve all that is best in the English Bible.”

Genesis 1: *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters.*

**New Revised Standard Version
(NRSV)**

Edition: *New Revised Standard Version Bible* (National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America, 1989)



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Introduction: “The Committee has followed the maxim, ‘As literal as possible, as free as necessary.’ As a result, the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) remains essentially a literal translation ... In references to men and women, masculine-oriented language should be eliminated as far as this can be done without altering passages that reflect the historical situation of ancient patriarchal culture ... We have resisted the temptation to introduce terms and phrases that merely reflect the current moods.”

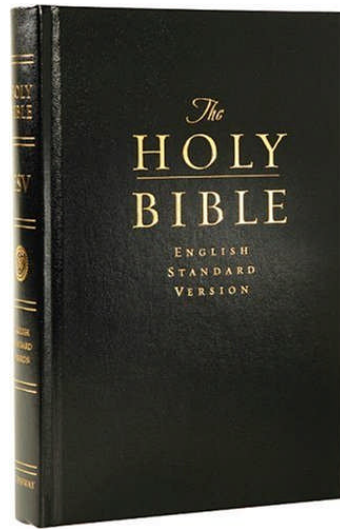
Genesis 1: *In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.*

My remarks: Almost every college student taking a Bible class has made use of the RSV or the NRSV, which are likely to remain the “gold standard” of the academic world for some time. This status is in large part derived from the fact that the RSV translation committee, and in its wake the NRSV translation committee, was the first (and still the only) major project to actively involve Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox Christian and Jewish scholars, thereby implementing a truly ecumenical, multireligious dialogue that, for example, produced the first Old Testament text with “young woman” rather than “virgin” at Isaiah 7:14.

The publication of the NRSV has not led to the “abandonment” of the RSV, as many had anticipated. Some prefer the “gender-specific” renderings of the earlier RSV translation, while other readers favor its overall tendency to provide more literal representations than does its “successor.”

English Standard Version (ESV)

Edition: *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version, Containing the Old and New Testaments* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles/Good News Publishers, 2001)



[Click here to purchase](#)

Introduction: “Each word and phrase in the ESV has been carefully weighed against the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek to ensure the fullest accuracy and clarity and to avoid under-translating or overlooking any nuance of the original text ...

“The ESV is an ‘essentially literal’ translation that seeks as far as possible to capture the precise wording of the original text and the personal style of each Bible writer ... In each case the objective has been transparency to the original text, allowing the reader to understand the original on its own terms rather than on the terms of our present-day culture.”

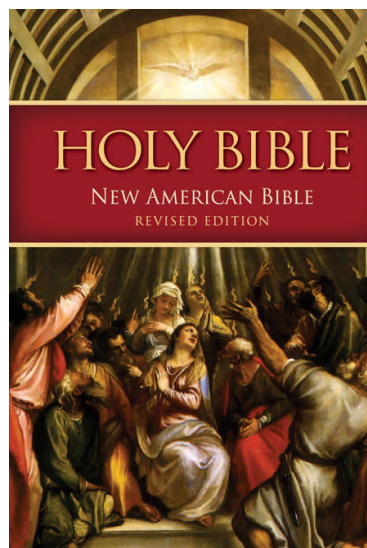
Genesis 1: *In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.*

My remarks: The translators of the ESV readily acknowledge their debt to the KJV and other earlier versions. It could be said that the ESV stands in the KJV tradition without being part of the family. Thus, for example, the KJV’s (and the Hebrew original’s) reliance on “and ... and ... and” is largely retained, while an effort is made to distinguish in English varying styles among Old and New Testament writers. In this way, its English style and vocabulary may be considered appropriately “biblical” and constitute a very sensible and sensitive balance between concern for the ancient originals and for modern readers.



The New American Bible Revised Edition (NABRE)

Edition: *The New American Bible Revised Edition* Catholic Book Publishing Corp. New Jersey, 2010.



[Click here to purchase](#)

Introduction: “This new edition is a thorough revision of the already excellent *New American Old Testament* of 1970. Work on most books of the Old Testament [was] begun in 1994 and completed in 2001. The revisers aimed at making use of the best manuscript traditions available, translating as accurately as possible, and rendering the result in good contemporary English. In many ways, it is a more literal translation than the original NAB and has attempted to be more consistent in rendering Hebrew (or Greek) words and idioms. In translating the Psalter, special effort was made to provide a smooth, rhythmic translation for easy singing or recitation, and to retain the concrete imagery of the Hebrew.

Where the Old Testament translation supposes the revised text, no additional remarks are necessary. Where the translators have departed from those received texts, such changes are recorded in the revised edition of *Textual Notes on the New American Bible*.”

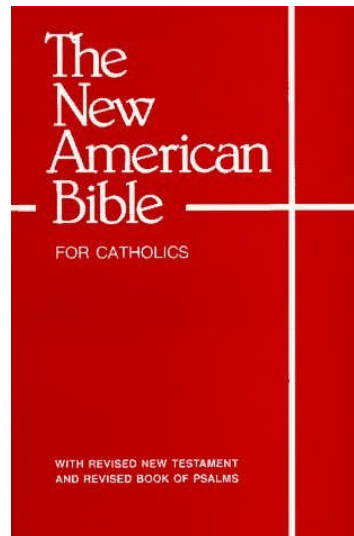
Genesis 1:1–2: *In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth—and the earth was without form or shape, with darkness over the abyss and a mighty wind sweeping over the waters—*

My remarks: As a revision of the NAB, the best way to evaluate NABRE is to compare it with the earlier English text: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters.” As noted above, the revisers themselves judged their

product “a more literal translation than the original NAB.” For Genesis 1:1-2, this phenomenon is most easily observed in the structure (rather than the vocabulary) of the English. The use of dashes in NABRE, along with the absence of a verb after “darkness” and the fashioning of “sweeping” as a participle, are more accurate— that is, more literal—reflections of the underlying Hebrew. On the other hand, the “composite” clause at the beginning of v 1, while it embodies both of the main translation (and interpretative) options, cannot be said to be more literal, and the rendering “mighty wind,” while less objectionable in terms of inter-religious usage, strikes me as theologically (if not climatologically) challenged. In spite of these reservations, I am confident that this revision will spark rich dialogue and reflection on the part of English-speaking Roman Catholics, who are the target audience for the new version.

The New American Bible (NAB)

Edition: *The New American Bible with Revised New Testament and Revised Psalms* (Nashville: Catholic Bible Press/Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1991)



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Introduction: “[The purpose of this work is] to translate the sacred scriptures from the original languages or from the oldest extant form of the text, and to present the sense of the biblical text in as correct a form as possible.

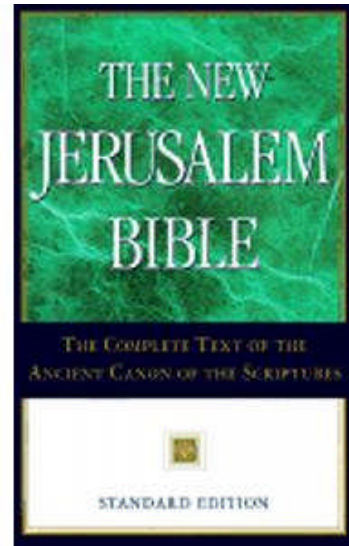
“The collaboration of scholars who are not Catholic fulfills the directive of the Second Vatican Council, not only that ‘correct translations be made into different languages especially from the original texts of the sacred books,’ but that, ‘with the approval of the church authority, these translations be produced in cooperation with separated brothers’ so that ‘all Christians may be able to use them.’”

Genesis 1: *In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless wasteland, and darkness covered the abyss, while a mighty wind swept over the waters.*

My remarks: The NAB, along with the Jerusalem Bible (see below), were among the first fruits of the Roman Catholic Church's encouragement of scholarship and teaching of the Bible from its original languages (rather than through the Latin Vulgate). It is thus of enormous interest to North American Catholics and to anyone interested in Catholic biblical teaching and understanding. The NAB New Testament has been thoroughly revised, and the Old Testament is undergoing revision. For the most part, this revision brings the translation closer to a literal representation of the biblical text.

The New Jerusalem Bible (NJB)

Edition: The New Jerusalem Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1985)



[Click here to purchase](#)

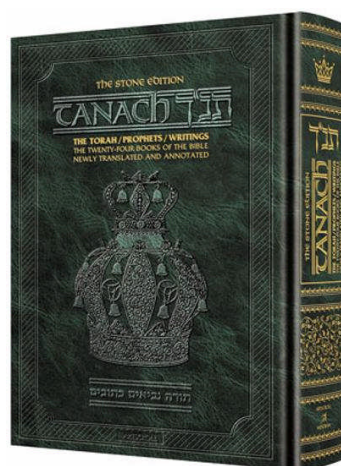
Introduction: “The biblical text of the first [English] edition [of *The Jerusalem Bible* of 1966] was occasionally criticized for following the French translation [*The Bible de Jérusalem*, which first appeared in 1956] more closely than the originals. In this edition the translation has been made directly from the Hebrew, Greek or Aramaic ... An attempt has been made to avoid translating a single term of expression of the original by a variety of renderings ... When it has been necessary to make a choice, fidelity to the text has been given preference over a literary quality which the original did not possess.”

Genesis 1: *In the beginning God created heaven and earth. Now the earth was a formless void, there was darkness over the deep, with a divine wind sweeping over the waters.*

My remarks: In its earlier English formulation, the Jerusalem Bible relied heavily, perhaps too heavily, on the first authorized French translation of the original text of the Old and New Testaments. The NJB has remedied any unfortunate consequences of such over-reliance. Its decision to use a single English rendering for each Hebrew or Greek term is unusual for modern versions, which tend to favor lexical variety over consistency. The result here is a dignified presentation of Sacred Writ that is clearly at home in both church and study group.

ArtScroll Tanach

Edition: *The Stone Edition, Tanach—The Torah, Prophets, Writings: The Twenty-Four Books of the Bible Newly Translated and Annotated*, The ArtScroll Series (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 1996)



[Click here to purchase](#)

Introduction: “This volume is in response to countless requests from many sectors of the Jewish community for a one-volume Tanach [Hebrew Bible] that is accurate, graceful, clear, and, most of all, faithful to traditional Torah commentary.

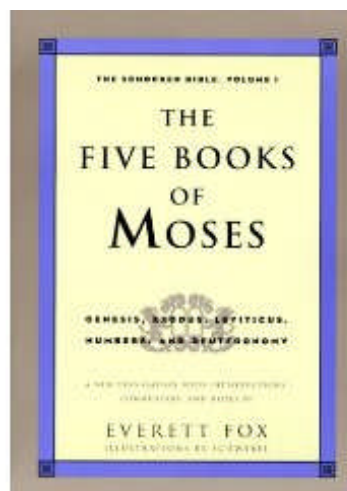
“The first goal of translation must be accuracy; no effort was spared in the successful quest of that goal ... The translation balances the lofty beauty of the Hebrew with the need to provide a literate and comprehensible English rendering. Where a choice had to be made, we preferred fidelity to the text over inaccurate simplicity.”

Genesis 1: *In the beginning of God's creating the heavens and the earth—when the earth was astonishingly empty, with darkness upon the surface of the deep, and the Divine Presence hovered upon the surface of the water—*

My remarks: The production values of this edition are extraordinarily high. The translators are steeped in Jewish exegetical traditions and make frequent use of them in both text and notes. The Hebrew and English texts are found on facing pages, thus facilitating comparison and thoughtful reading. Where the Hebrew text is difficult or ambiguous, the text reflects this. Thus, this is a version worthy of serious study not only by Jews, but by anyone interested in the Bible within the Jewish tradition.

The Schocken Bible

Edition: *The Schocken Bible, vol. 1, The Five Books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995)



[Click here to purchase](#)

Introduction: “The purpose of this work is to draw the reader into the world of the Hebrew Bible through the power of its language ... I [translator Everett Fox] have sought primarily to echo the style of the original, believing that the Bible is best approached, at least at the beginning, on its own terms. I have presented the text in English dress but with a Hebraic voice.

“The reader will encounter a text which challenges him or her to rethink what these ancient books are and what they mean, and will hopefully be encouraged to become an active listener rather than a passive receiver.”

Genesis 1: *At the beginning of God's creating of the heavens and the earth, when the earth was wild and waste, darkness over the face of the Ocean, rushing-spirit of God hovering over the face of the waters—*

My remarks: There is nothing else like the Schocken Bible in English. Its translator, Everett Fox, deliberately set out to push the English language, and his readers, to its (and their) farthest boundaries—and perhaps even beyond. Thus, readers of this Bible are confronted with an English that is not quite English, with a vocabulary and style that compel one to stop and think and envision (or re-envision) the Bible on its own terms and, so far as it is possible in English, in its own language. Readers willing to be transported back in time and space through this version will be richly and uniquely rewarded; it is worth the effort.

Non-Literal Translations (with Extended Vocabulary)



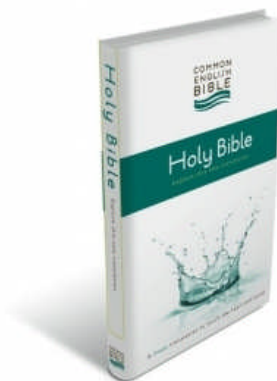
Common English Bible (CEB)

Edition: *Common English Bible: Holy Bible:*

a fresh translation to touch the heart and

mind Common English Bible. Nashville.

2011.



[Click here to purchase](#)

Introduction: “One hundred twenty Biblical scholars from twenty-two faith traditions worked as translators for the CEB. The CEB is truly a Bible created by churches and for the Church.

The CEB translators balance rigorous accuracy in the rendition of ancient texts with an equally passionate commitment to clarity of expression in the target language. Translators create sentences and choose vocabulary that would be readily understood when the Biblical text is read aloud.

English speakers, especially when telling a story, writing a letter, or engaging in conversation, make frequent use of contractions. As a result, translators have often used contractions, particularly in direct speech. However, formal genres of literature typically do not include contracts.”

Footnotes: “Translators decided, in certain instances, that they should explain their translation or textual decisions. However, notes are kept to a minimum and rendered with utmost concision.”

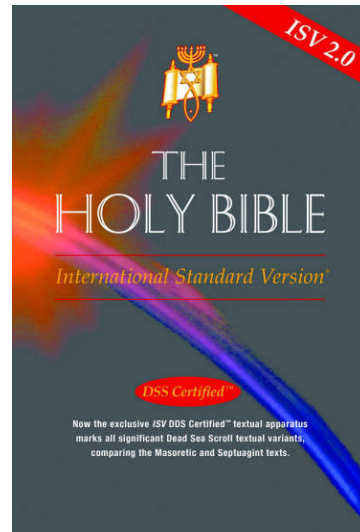
Genesis 1:1–2: *When God began to create the heavens and the earth—the earth was without shape or form, it was dark over the deep sea, and God’s wind swept over the waters—*

My remarks: As many commentators have observed, the Hebrew of Genesis 1:1-2 is not straightforward in terms of its structure. The dashes here are helpful in alerting CEB readers to this fact. From an inter-religious perspective, the use of the expression "God's wind" is much to be preferred over the traditional "Spirit of God" or "God's Spirit." In a footnote, CEB editors note the traditional "In the beginning, God created" as a possible rendering for this difficult clause. This is the only footnote to these verses, in keeping with the CEB policy cited above. Overall, this strikes me as a solid, middle-of-the-road text.



International Standard Version (ISV)

Edition: *The Holy Bible: International Standard Version*. ISV Foundation.
Davidson Press. Toluca Lake, CA. 2013.



[Click here to purchase](#)

Introduction: “The ISV is the only translation in any language that includes book of Isaiah from the Dead Sea Scrolls. Other Dead Sea Scrolls translations are coming soon. The ISV is first modern version in *any* language to provide an exclusive textual apparatus comparing the text of the famed Dead Sea Scrolls with the traditional text of the Hebrew *Tanakh* (i.e., the ‘Old Testament’). ”

The target reading level in English was 8th-9th grade. [The translation] is fair, accurate, non-interpretive. The Committee on Translation opted not to insert theological biases or preferences into the translation of the text of the ISV.

The ISV is sensitive to conservative, modern scholarship. The ISV is a literal-idiomatic translation. [It] steers a careful course between word-for-word translation and interpretation under the guise of translating. [The ISV translation] is both accurate and idiomatic at the same time. The ISV can be read with understanding even by those for whom English is a second language.

The ISV is intergenerational. The ISV is the first Bible translation specifically crafted for our computer-literate generations.”

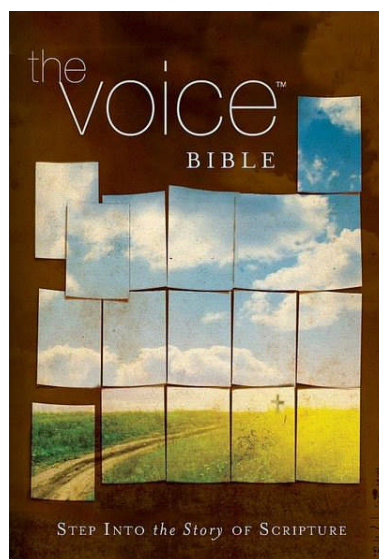
Genesis 1:1–2: *In the beginning, God created the universe. When the earth was as yet unformed and desolate, with the surface of the ocean depths shrouded in darkness, and while the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters*

My remarks: What the VOICE editors call “contextual equivalence,” those responsible for the ISV term “literal-idiomatic.” Interestingly, although these two versions are said to occupy the same spot on the literal-free continuum, they are quite different. ISV is rather straightforward and does reflect, with its extended subordinate clauses (“When...darkness” and “while...waters”), the difficulty or complexity of the Hebrew original. In its notes, it allows that “the heavens and the earth” is the literal rendering of “the universe” and that “When God began to create...” is an alternative rendering for the first clause in Genesis 1:1. In both cases, I would prefer that the wording in the footnote replace what is in the text itself. And I am not happy (as I note in the sidebar “In the Beginning or When He Began? How to Translate Genesis 1:1–2”) with the capital “Spirit of God.” Nonetheless, the ISV translators obviously know their target audience, for whom this version will certainly be attractive.



The Voice Bible (The VOICE)

Edition: *The Voice Bible: Step into the Story of Scripture* Ecclesia Bible Society. Thomas Nelson. Nashville. 2012.



[Click here to purchase](#)

Introduction: “The VOICE uniquely represents collaboration among scholars, pastors, writers, musicians, poets, and other artists. The VOICE distinguishes the unique perspective of each author. The heart of project is retelling the story of the Bible in a form as fluid as modern literary works while remaining painstakingly true to the original Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic texts.

[In the text,] standard type denotes the [version's] dynamic translation. Italic type indicates words not directly tied to the dynamic translation of the original language. Delineated material expands on the themes found in the text. Screenplay format is used to identify dialogue and to avoid the repetition of conjunctions, articles, and certain verbs. The speaker is indicated, the dialogue is indented, and quotation marks avoided.

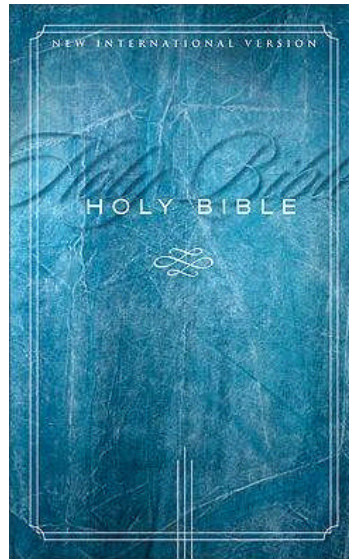
We describe our approach as ‘contextual equivalence,’ recognizing that context is the most important factor. The VOICE represents a hybrid of the word-for-word and thought-for-thought approaches, not an either/or pursuit.”

Genesis 1:1–2: In the beginning, God created *everything*: the heavens *above* and the earth *below*. *Here's what happened:* *At first* the earth lacked shape and was totally empty, and a dark *fog* draped over the deep while God's spirit-wind hovered over the surface of the *empty* waters. *Then there was the voice of God.*

My remarks: What is perhaps most noticeable about this version's rendering of Genesis 1:1-2 is the inclusion within the text of nine words in italics (or sixteen if the last sentence is considered part of v 2), which (as observed above) are "not directly tied to the dynamic translation [itself]." This is an ubiquitous feature of The VOICE, which its target audience should find helpful. Its self-styled "contextual equivalence," located as it is between literal and free, is fast becoming something of a "sweet spot" for contemporary, non-literal versions, even as its name varies from translation to translation. As for the wording of the text, I am especially taken by the expanded designation "spirit-wind," which successfully acquaints the reader with the richness of the Hebrew word.

New International Version (NIV)

Edition: *The Holy Bible: New International Version, Containing The Old Testament and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984)



[Click here to purchase](#)

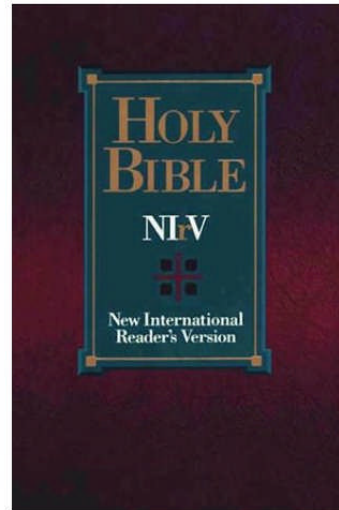
Introduction: "The New International Version is a completely new translation of the Holy Bible made by over a hundred scholars working directly from the best available Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek texts.

"Certain goals for the NIV: that it would be an accurate translation and one that would have clarity and literary quality and so prove suitable for public and private reading, teaching, preaching, memorization, and liturgical use ... [The translators] have striven for more than a word-for-word translation ... Concern for clear and natural English—that the New International Version should be idiomatic but not idiosyncratic, contemporary but not dated—motivated the translators and consultants."

Genesis 1: *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.*

**New International Reader's
Version (NirV)**

Edition: *The Holy Bible: New International
Reader's Version* (Colorado Springs:
International Bible Society, 1998)



[Click here to purchase](#)

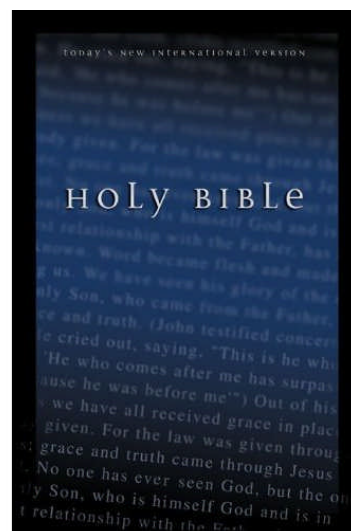
Introduction: “God has always spoken so people would know what he meant. When God first gave the Bible to his people, he used their languages. They could understand what they read. God wants us to understand the Bible today too.

“The *New International Reader's Version (NirV)* is a new Bible based on the *New International Version (NIV)*. We made the *NirV* even easier to read and understand. We used words of the *NIV* when we could. Sometimes we used shorter words. We explained words that might be hard to understand. We made the sentences shorter.”

Genesis 1: *In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth didn't have any shape. And it was empty. Darkness was over the surface of the ocean. At that time, the ocean covered the earth. The Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.*

Today's New International Version (TNIV)

Edition: *The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005)



[Click here to purchase](#)

Introduction: “Among the more programmatic changes [from the NIV] are the removal of nearly all vocative ‘O’s [as in ‘O Sovereign Lord,’ in Genesis 15:2] and the elimination of most instances of the generic use of masculine nouns and pronouns ... The Committee has again been reminded that every human effort is flawed—including this revision of the NIV.”

Genesis 1: *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.*

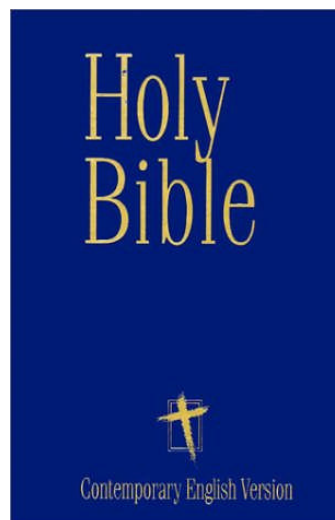
My remarks: At least one out of every three Bibles sold today is an NIV, and major bookstores feature many more editions of the NIV than of any other modern translation of the Bible. And, I am sure, most customers who buy them are well satisfied. Produced by a solid translation committee with conservative theological beliefs and wide experience in academia and preaching, the NIV has been attractively packaged and marketed to a number of niche groups (moms, teens, sportsmen and soldiers [their cover is camouflage]) without in any way detracting from the readable and reliable text that is at its core.

The NIV was produced with the recognition that the NIV is not easily understood by all. Of all the Bible's surveyed here, the NIV uses the most words (45) to translate Genesis 1:1–2. It also uses the most sentences, six (seven versions make do with one). It follows that the NIV also has the shortest sentences (an average of 7.5 words per sentence).

The most recent NIV, appearing just a few months ago, is the TNIV, marked by increased sensitivity to changes in the English language and in the way we view each other. So, for example, Psalm 1:1 now reads “blessed are those who do not walk in step with the wicked” rather than “blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked.”

Contemporary English Version (CEV)

Edition: *Holy Bible: Contemporary English Version* (New York: American Bible Society, 1995)



[Click here to purchase](#)

Introduction: “The Contemporary English Version differs from all other English Bibles in that it takes into consideration the needs of the hearer, as well as those of the reader, who may not be familiar with traditional biblical language.

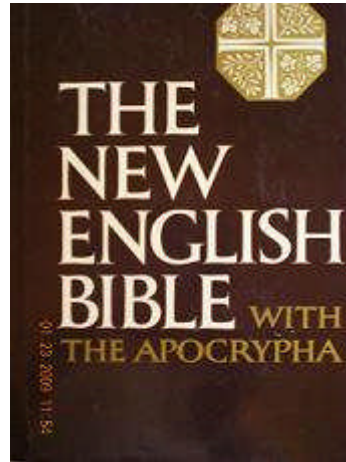
“The *CEV* has been described as a ‘user-friendly’ and a ‘mission-driven’ translation that can be *read aloud* without stumbling, *heard* without misunderstanding, and *listened* to with enjoyment and appreciation, because the language is contemporary and the style is lucid and lyrical ... The translators of the *Contemporary English Version* have diligently sought to *capture the spirit of the King James Version*.”

Genesis 1: *In the beginning God / created the heavens / and the earth. / The earth was barren / with no form of life; / it was under a roaring ocean / covered with darkness. / But the Spirit of God / was moving over the water.*

My remarks: For the sake of full disclosure, I should point out that I served as a consultant for a number of the CEV's Old Testament books. For that reason, I am very familiar with its text. I find its well-conceived directness and forceful diction to be among its most appealing traits. Those lacking background in “biblical English” will find the CEV a far less daunting approach to the Bible than more literal renderings. It also functions well in oral contexts. Its text of the New Testament has been singled out for its efforts to eradicate any possible anti-Jewish sentiments.

New English Bible (NEB)

Edition: C.H. Dodd, ed., *The New English Bible: With the Apocrypha* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press and Cambridge Univ. Press, 1971)



[Click here to purchase](#)

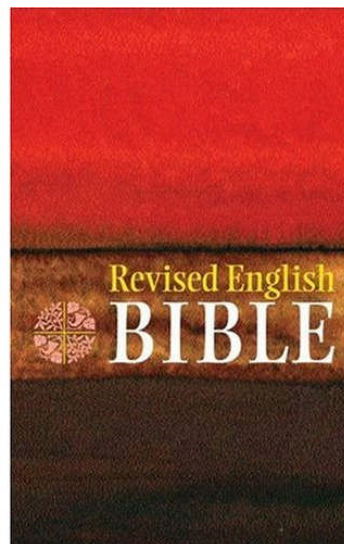
Introduction: "The Joint Committee provided for the actual work of translation from the original tongues by appointing three panels. Their members were scholars drawn from various British universities. The Committee also appointed a fourth panel, of trusted literary advisers, to whom all the work of the translating panels was to be submitted for scrutiny.

"There are passages where, in the present state of our knowledge, no one could say with certainty which of two (or even more) possible meanings is intended. In such cases, after careful discussion, alternative meanings have been recorded in footnotes."

Genesis 1: *In the beginning of creation, when God made heaven and earth, the earth was without form and void, with darkness over the face of the abyss, and a mighty wind that swept over the surface of the waters.*

The Revised English Bible (REB)

Edition: *The Revised English Bible with the Apocrypha* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press. and Cambridge Univ. Press, 1989)



[Click here to purchase](#)

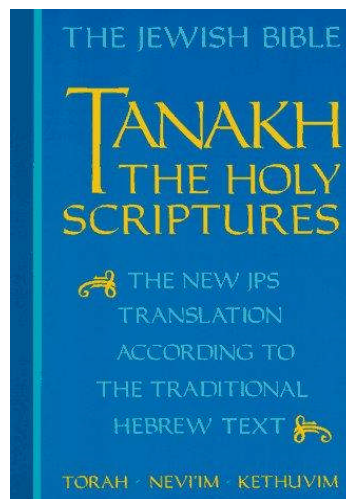
Introduction: "The Revised English Bible [is] a translation standing firmly in the tradition established by the NEB. This substantial revision expressed the mind and conviction of biblical scholars and translators of the 1980s ... Care has been taken to ensure that the style of English used is fluent and of appropriate dignity for liturgical use, while maintaining intelligibility for worshippers of a wide range of ages and backgrounds. The revisers have sought to avoid complex or technical terms where possible, and provide sentence structure and word order which will facilitate congregational reading but will not misrepresent the meaning of the original texts."

Genesis 1: *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was a vast waste, darkness covered the deep, and the spirit of God hovered over the surface of the water.*

My remarks: The NEB was the first large-scale British translation since the KJV. It sought to combine a majestic, elevated English style with the results of contemporary scholarship. Its success was limited, partly because of the perception (not totally undeserved) that it was primarily a product for scholars. Subsequently, the REB brought in a new generation of translators and a more expansive view of its intended audience and their needs. The translators have admirably succeeded by producing a version that has wide appeal in the pulpit and study group as well as in the classroom. Its style is noticeably, and unapologetically, British, but this should not occasion any concern for English-speakers outside the British Isles. For some, in fact, the resulting text has an added dignity and weight.

**The Jewish Publication Society
(JPS)**

Edition: *Tanakh: A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures According to the Traditional Hebrew Text* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1999)



[Click here to purchase](#)

Introduction: “The translation of *Tanakh*, produced by the Jewish Publication Society, was made directly from the traditional Hebrew text into the idiom of modern English.

“It represents the collaboration of academic scholars with rabbis from the three largest branches of organized Jewish religious life in America.

“The translators avoided obsolete words and phrases and, whenever possible, rendered Hebrew idioms by means of their normal English equivalents.”

Genesis 1: *When God began to create heaven and earth—the earth being unformed and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep and a wind from God sweeping over the water—*

My remarks: The Jewish Publication Society (JPS) produced its first English version in 1917. This translation followed closely the Revised Version of 1885, itself a revision of the KJV; its most distinctive departures from the earlier version lay in its substitution of traditional Jewish renderings for Christological language such as “Spirit” (with a capital “s”) and “virgin” at Isaiah 7:14. In the mid-1950s, JPS initiated a new translation project that, while retaining distinctively Jewish exegesis and understandings, decisively departed from KJV style in the direction of more up-to-date English. The first publication of this new project, also known as the New Jewish Version or new JPS Version, was in the mid-1960s.

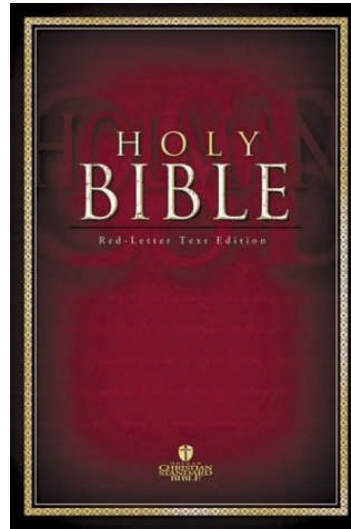
The 1999 edition of the JPS Tanakh is the first to have English and Hebrew texts on facing pages. This is especially desirable for a Jewish translation, which is intended to take its place

alongside the Hebrew original rather than serving in its stead. The Tanakh reflects the richness of the Jewish exegetical traditions and the fact that there are a number of biblical passages whose meaning is ambiguous or uncertain. All of this is expressed in a decidedly modern-sounding and looking translation that is easily accessible to Jewish and non-Jewish readers alike.

Again, for the sake of full disclosure, I should mention that I have often spoken to and with the Jewish Publication Society about the possibility of a new version under their auspices.

Holman Christian Standard Bible

Edition: *Holy Bible: Holman Christian Standard Bible* (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003)



[Click here to purchase](#)

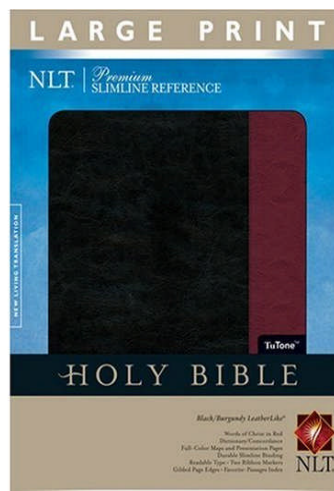
Introduction: “The goals of this translation are: to equip serious Bible students with an accurate translation; to affirm the authority of Scripture as God’s Word and to champion its absolute truth; to serve many people who speak or read English as a primary or secondary language with a translation they can easily use and understand; to reflect recent changes in English by using modern punctuation, formatting, and vocabulary, while avoiding slang, regionalisms, or changes made specifically for the sake of political or social agendas.”

Genesis 1: *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness covered the surface of the watery depths, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters.*

My remarks: The recently completed HCSB is among the newest English-language versions available. It is being heavily promoted by its publisher and has been garnering an ever-increasing number of readers. Those looking for an accessible, reliable and dignified text that reflects both conservative theology and concern for the reader will not be disappointed. It is an excellent example of what its translator’s term “optimal equivalence,” whereby the form of the ancient languages is retained in modern garb unless considerations of intelligibility necessitate reformulation.

New Living Translation (NLT)

Edition: *Holy Bible: New Living Translation*
(Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers,
1996)



[Click here to purchase](#)

Introduction: “As a thought-for-thought translation, the New Living Translation seeks to be both exegetically accurate and idiomatically powerful.

“The translators have made a conscious effort to provide a text that can be easily understood by the average reader of modern English ... We have also sought to translate terms shrouded in history or culture in ways that can be immediately understood by the contemporary reader ... Metaphorical language is often difficult for contemporary readers to understand, so at times we have chosen to translate or illuminate the metaphor.”

Genesis 1: *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was empty, a formless mass cloaked in darkness. And the Spirit of God was hovering over its surface.*

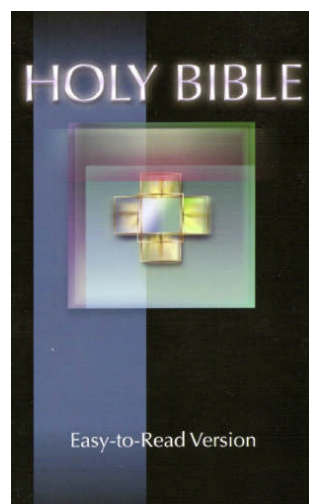
My remarks: The New Living Translation and the Living Bible (see below) are both produced by Tyndale House Publishers, founded by Kenneth N. Taylor in 1962, and thus these two versions do share a generally conservative theological outlook. In most other respects, however, they are substantially different. The NLT is the product of a large committee of scholars, rather than one individual, and it is decidedly not a paraphrase (as is the case with the Living Bible). Unlike some of the other versions in this category of my listing, the NLT updates much of the ancient terminology and seeks to explain metaphors that might puzzle contemporary readers. This provides the NLT with an immediacy that many today will appreciate.

Non-Literal Translations (with Limited Language)



Easy-to-Read Version (ERV)

Edition: *Holy Bible: Easy-to-Read Version*
World Bible Translation Center. Fort Worth.
2006.



[Click here to purchase](#)

Introduction: “This version of the Bible has been prepared especially for people who want an English translation that accurately expresses the full meaning of original text in a style that is clear and easy to understand. It is especially helpful for those who have limited experience with English, including children and people who are just learning English. It is designed to help such people overcome or avoid the most common difficulties to reading Bible with understanding. The translators worked to express the meaning of the Biblical text in a form that would be simple and natural. They used language that, instead of working as a barrier to understanding, would provide a key to unlock the truths of the Scriptures.

Words that are implied by the context are often supplied in the text to make the meaning clear. If such explanatory words or phrases are extensive or unusual, they may be marked by half brackets.”

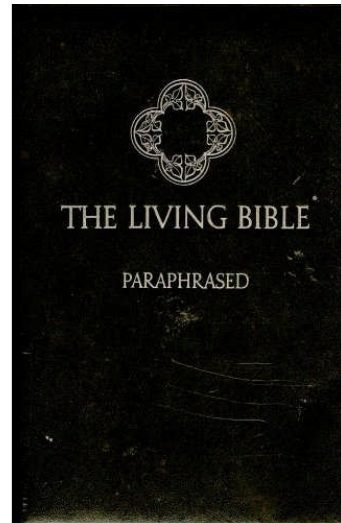
Genesis 1:1–2: *God created the sky and the earth. At first, the earth was completely empty. There was nothing on the earth. Darkness covered the ocean, and God’s Spirit moved over the water.”*

My remarks: In this rendering, which is characteristic of ERV, the two verses (Genesis 1:1-2) are broken down into four sentences, which comprise five easy-to-follow clauses. Ease of comprehension is further facilitated by the fact that none of the material is subordinated and that the vocabulary chosen contains no complex or unusual terminology. The flip (or “dark”) side of

this practice is that the text read by ERV's target audience is far removed stylistically from the Hebrew original. Moreover, as I note in the "Buyer's Guide" sidebar "In the Beginning or When He Began? How to Translate Genesis 1:1–2," God's Spirit (with the capital "s") introduces a Christian theological concept that is not helpful if this translation is intended to attract the widest possible audience.

The Living Bible (LB)

Edition: *The Living Bible, Paraphrased: A Thought-for-Thought Translation* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publisher, 1971)



[Click here to purchase](#)

Introduction: "A word should be said here about paraphrases. To paraphrase is to say something in different words than the author used. This book is a paraphrase of the Old and New Testaments. Its purpose is 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.

"If this paraphrase makes the Bible easier to understand and follow, deepening the Christian lives of its readers and making it easier for them to follow their Lord, then the book has achieved its goals."

Genesis 1: *When God began creating the heavens and the earth, the earth was at first a shapeless, chaotic mass, with the Spirit of God brooding over the dark vapors.*

My remarks: Although it no longer sells as well as it once did, the Living Bible was an extremely popular text for a considerable period of time.

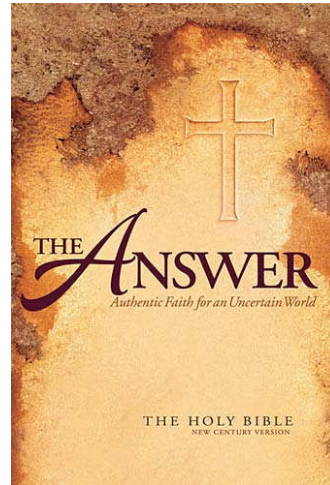
Like several of the Bibles in this category ("nonliteral with limited or colloquial language"), the LB is a paraphrase. Of all the translations surveyed, the LB provides the shortest (28-word) version of Genesis 1:1–2.

While some consider paraphrasing a negative (because paraphrases tend to reflect too sharply the interpretive stance of those who produce them), the LB's translator Kenneth Taylor and his

associates proudly proclaimed the LB to be an exemplar of this genre (or subgenre). The LB's pages are filled with Taylor's evangelical theology, which he clearly believes is an authentic part of the biblical message for today's Christians. Whether or not all readers agree, there is no doubt that Taylor fashioned many memorable and even startling phrases that are bound to excite his audience—and perhaps exasperate others. Thus, for example, the “sons of God,” found in Genesis, become the “evil beings from the spirit world,” and the expression “from the Old Testament as well as from the New” anachronistically appears in Matthew 13:52.

New Century Version (NCV)

Edition: *The Holy Bible: New Century Version* (Fort Worth: Thomas Nelson Bibles, 1991)



[Click here to purchase](#)

Introduction: “The *New Century Version* translates the Scriptures in familiar, everyday words of our times.

“The *New Century Version* aids understanding by putting concepts into natural terms ... Modern measurements and geographical locations have been used as much as possible.

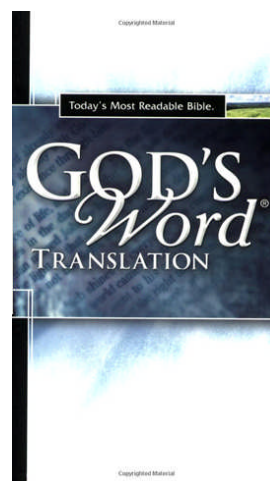
“*Rhetorical questions* have been stated according to their implied answers ... *Figures of speech* have been translated according to their meanings ... *Idiomatic expressions* of the biblical languages are translated to communicate the same meaning to today's reader that would have been understood by the original audience.”

Genesis 1: *In the beginning God created the sky and the earth. The earth was empty and had no form. Darkness covered the ocean, and God's Spirit was moving over the water.*

My remarks: The New Century Version has taken its place as an easy-to-understand text that consistently puts things in natural terms that are immediately and easily understood by the vast majority of English speakers and readers. Relatively short sentences are the rule, and nontechnical vocabulary and phrasing predominate. NCV readers benefit from having the ancient word and its world brought into their own, so they can easily identify with the biblical characters and their circumstances.

God's Word (GW)

Edition: *God's Word* (Holiday, FL: Green Key Books, 1995)



[Click here to purchase](#)

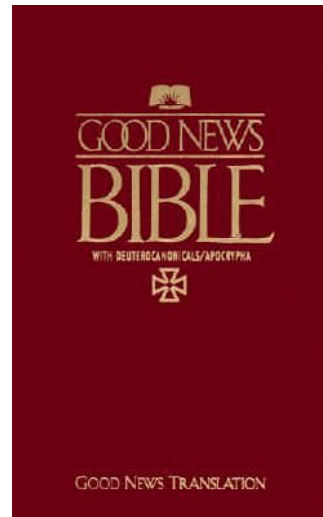
Introduction: “*God’s Word* fills a need that has remained unmet by English Bibles: to communicate clearly to contemporary Americans without compromising the Bible’s messages ... *God’s Word* looks and reads like contemporary American literature. It uses natural grammar, follows standard punctuation and capitalization rules, and is printed in a single column ... *God’s Word* favors concise, clear sentences ... *God’s Word* achieves a warmer style by using contractions where appropriate. Many Bible translations contain theological terms that have little, if any, meaning for most non-theologically trained readers. *God’s Word* avoids using these terms and substitutes words that carry the same meaning in common English.”

Genesis 1: *In the beginning God created heaven and earth. The earth was formless and empty, and darkness covered the deep water. The Spirit of God was hovering over the water.*

My remarks: With a single column of text on each page, simplified language, and the sincerely expressed desire to be understood and understandable, *God’s Word* admirably succeeds in its desire to look and read like a good deal of other contemporary American writing. Its short sentences and nontechnical terms give it an immediate impact that many of today’s readers will value. Its deliberate efforts to be warm will not detract from, but actually enhance, many readers’ experience of Sacred Writ in this accessible and attractive format. Examples of these attempts can be found at Psalm 1:1, where “blessed is the person” appears (traditionally, “blessed is the man”), and Luke 9:3, where Jesus’ instructions to the apostles—“Don’t take anything along on the trip. Don’t take a walking stick, traveling bag, any food, money, or a change of clothes”—does indeed sound more up-to-date than the language found in more formal versions.

Good News Bible (GNB)

Edition: *Good News Bible: Good News Translation* (New York: American Bible Society, 1976)



[Click here to purchase](#)

Introduction: “The *Good News Translation* seeks to state clearly and accurately the meaning of the original texts in words and forms that are widely accepted by people who use English as a means of communication. This translation does not follow the traditional vocabulary and style found in the historic English Bible versions.

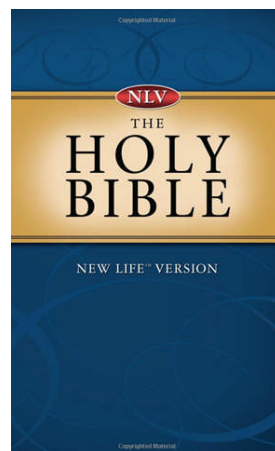
“Every effort has been made to use language that is natural, clear, simple and unambiguous. Consequently there has been no attempt to reproduce in English the parts of speech, sentence structure, word order, and grammatical devices of the original languages.”

Genesis 1: *In the beginning, when God created the universe, the earth was formless and desolate. The raging ocean that covered everything was engulfed in total darkness, and the Spirit of God was moving over the water.*

My remarks: The Good News Bible (also called Today's English Version) is among the most widely circulated English-language editions. It has been extensively promoted by the American Bible Society as especially appropriate for people without a great deal of formal education or previous experience with the Bible. Its success among these audiences should not obscure the fact that even well-educated and biblically literate individuals can profit from their experience of reading the GNB.

New Life Version (NLV)

Edition: *Holy Bible: New Life Version with Topical Study Outlines, Christian Literature*
(Canby, OR: Christian Literature International, 1969)



[Click here to purchase](#)

Introduction: “The idea of a very readable and yet accurate version of the Scriptures came to us in an igloo in the frozen Canadian Arctic many years ago [where the translators were working with ‘primitive Eskimos’]. The secret of its readability is in the limited vocabulary. In most cases, each word uses only one meaning. Difficult Biblical words found in other versions were broken down into simple, meaningful phrases.

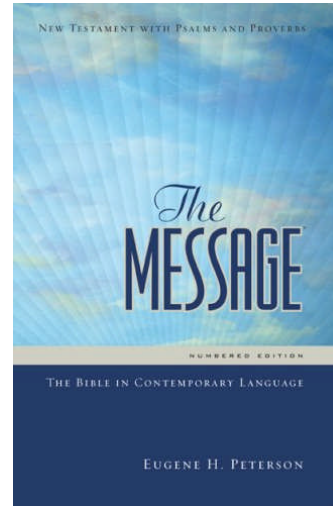
“Those of us who worked on this limited vocabulary New Life Version were constantly watching to keep it understandable without sacrificing accuracy. There was no thought to change God’s Holy Word to today’s street language.”

Genesis 1: *In the beginning God made from nothing the heavens and the earth. The earth was an empty waste and darkness was over the deep waters. And the Spirit of God was moving over the top of the waters.*

My remarks: The New Life Version has the same general goal as several other translations in this category. The real-life experiences of those responsible for it are undoubtedly part of its success in achieving those goals. It is important to keep in mind, as these translators have, that many first-time Bible readers are put off by technical language, long sentences and complex patterns of thought, even when these may accurately reflect the ancient original. Such individuals will find great comfort in the NLV. For these readers, the translators make use of “boat” rather than “ark” in the Noah story (although they retain the expression “gopher wood”); and the “ark of the covenant” becomes “the special box of the agreement.”

The Message

Edition: *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002)



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Introduction: “*The Message* is a contemporary rendering of the Bible from the original languages, crafted to present its tone, rhythm, events, and ideas in everyday language. *The Message* grew from the soil of forty years of pastoral work.

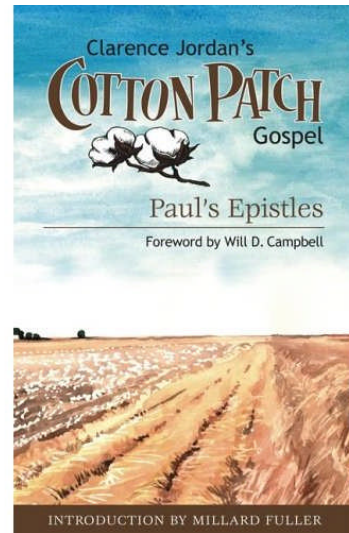
“*The Message* is a reading Bible. It is not intended to replace the excellent study Bibles that are available. My [translator Eugene Peterson’s] intent is simply to get people reading it who don’t know that the Bible is readable at all, at least by them, and to get people who long lost interest in the Bible to read it again.”

Genesis 1: *First this: God created the Heavens and the Earth—all you see, all you don’t see. Earth was a soup of nothingness, a bottomless emptiness, an inky blackness. God’s Spirit brooded like a bird above the watery abyss.*

My remarks: The message of the Message as expressed by Eugene Peterson, the man responsible for it, could not be clearer: Everyday language, the language of the street and of the community, is the most effective way to get the Bible to large numbers of otherwise estranged individuals. It is worthwhile, as Peterson sees it, to use paraphrase or just about whatever else it takes to accomplish this laudable goal. He certainly succeeds in attracting attention; no one can read this text and remain unmoved. As a first step, but hopefully not the last one, on the road toward familiarizing the public with the Bible, the Message deserves a wide audience.

Cotton Patch Gospel

Edition: *Clarence Jordan's Cotton Patch Gospel* (1968–1973; repr. Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2004)



[Click here to purchase](#)

Introduction: “Translations have left us stranded in some faraway land in the long-distant past. We need to have it come in our tongue and our time. We need to be participants in the faith not merely spectators.”

My remarks: In the mid-20th century, Clarence Jordan began translating—or perhaps adapting is the better word—individual New Testament books into the language of the American South. Jordan’s desire was to take Scriptures out of “the classroom and stained glass sanctuary and put them out under God’s skies where people are toiling and crying.” There is apparently a market, presumably of some size, for Jordan’s work, since the entire Cotton Patch Gospel (containing much of the New Testament) has now been attractively reprinted. But those familiar with more traditional renderings of Scripture may be puzzled, even disturbed, by the substantial and substantive “liberties” Jordan has taken. For biblical names, he typically substituted names from the American South, and he changed all sorts of biblical references. See, for example, 2 Timothy 4:19: “Say hello to Prissy and Adrian and to the Butterfinger family. Hank stayed on in Atlanta. I left Troy sick in Meridian,” where the NIV has: “Greet Priscilla and Aquila and the household of Onesiphorus. Erastus stayed in Corinth, and I left Trophimus sick in Miletus.”

In the Beginning or When He Began? How to Translate Genesis 1:1–2

Sidebar to: The Holy Bible: A Buyer's Guide

In comparing Bibles, I chose to quote each version's rendition of Genesis 1:1–2 not only because it is well known and it appears in all Bibles, Jewish and Christian, but also because it contains an authentic and insoluble *crux interpretation*, or interpretive knot. Both popular translations, "In the beginning" and "When God began," have support within Jewish exegetical traditions; for Christians, "In the beginning ..." is compatible with the belief in *creatio ex nihilo*, or creation out of nothing. As much as possible, I would wish to capture both nuances in my "ideal" translation.

Further, since the Hebrew words for "heaven(s)" and "earth" are both preceded by the definite article and since the first term is plural (or, more properly, dual), I prefer the rendering "the heavens and the earth." I would deliberately use a form of "create," which accurately reflects the Hebrew verb that uniquely takes the Divine as its subject.

I am happy with any number of permutations that express the concept of "void" and "lacking form." (On some days, I'm willing to make the argument that transliteration—*tohu ve-vohu*—should appear in my "ideal" text to give a sense of what the Hebrew looks and sounds like here.) I would retain the more literal "deep" over against any changes.

For the traditional "Spirit of God," I would go with "spirit of God." As many people are aware, there are no capital (or small) letters in Hebrew, so that "Spirit" (as opposed to "spirit") seeks to impose a particular Christian perspective on this phrase. Although "mighty wind" is a perfectly acceptable rendering of the Hebrew, as are the "wind" or "breath" "of God," I think they all fall short in reflecting the majesty of the Hebrew at this point. As for the following verb, I prefer something more expressive of expansive movement or action than the traditional "hover."

Putting all this together, I come up with the following translation, found nowhere else in its entirety, with which I am not entirely unhappy:

"In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was formless and void, and darkness over the surface of the deep; and the spirit of God sweeping over the surface of the waters."

How to Buy a Bible

By Harvey Minkoff

To the uninitiated, the Bible is the Bible. To get one, you go to a bookstore and ask for a Bible. Devoted Bible students know better. The English-speaking student of the Bible is blessed with dozens of translations in hundreds of editions. What distinguishes them one from another?

Content

While we regularly speak of *the* Bible, in reality there are several different, but related, Bibles. The Jewish Bible consists of the 24 books of the Hebrew Scriptures, called the Tanakh, an acronym for its three divisions—Torah (the Law, also called the five books of Moses or the Pentateuch), Nevi'im (the Prophets) and Ketuvim (Writings). These books and several others—among them Judith, 1-4 Maccabees and Wisdom of Ben Sirach (or Ecclesiasticus)—were collected in a third century B.C. Greek translation known as the Septuagint (Seventy), after its legendary 72 translators.^a The text, names and order of the books in the Septuagint differ from the Hebrew version. For example, the Hebrew books of Samuel and of Kings correspond to 1–4 Kings in the Septuagint.

Christian Bibles contain all or most of the books of the Jewish Greek Bible—called the Old Testament (OT) by Christians—plus the New Testament (NT). The Catholic OT, as in the revered Douay Bible or the modern Jerusalem Bible, includes all the books of the Septuagint. The OT of the Eastern Orthodox churches contains the Hebrew Scriptures and some of the additional books of the Septuagint. The Protestant OT is limited to the 24 books of the Hebrew Scriptures, arranged, however, in the same order as in the Septuagint.

Protestant attitudes vary toward the remainder of the Septuagint's books. The King James Version (KJV), produced in 1611 during an anti-Catholic period in England, omits them. The more ecumenical modern Protestant versions—for example, the Revised English Bible

(REB) and the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)—include them in a section labeled Apocrypha, originally meaning “hidden” but now implying “of questionable authority.”

Text

Bible translations are based on different versions of the text. Until recently, the Vulgate—a Latin rendering made in the fourth century by the church father Jerome—was the primary biblical text of Catholicism. The pioneering translation into modern English by Ronald Knox, published in 1949 and given the official approval of the Roman Catholic Church, is based on the Vulgate and is thus a translation of a translation.

Even when the translators work from the Hebrew and Greek, the texts can differ.

The Bible was not composed as a single, bound book. It was written by many authors in a period spanning over one thousand years. Individual books circulated in handwritten copies; often they incorporated the copyists' explanations, additions and errors. As these copies were in turn copied, text “families” evolved. The Septuagint's Greek version of the Book of Jeremiah, for example, is about 10 percent shorter than the printed Hebrew text.

The standard text of the Hebrew Bible is called the Masoretic text (MT), from the verb meaning “hand over,” reflecting the belief that it was handed from generation to generation in uncorrupted form. Among the Dead Sea scrolls are Masoretic texts as well as representatives of other text families, including a Book of Jeremiah corresponding to the Septuagint version.^b The New Jewish Publication Society translation (NJPS) claims simply to follow the traditional Masoretic text. The New English Bible (NEB) translates the Masoretic text of Rudolph Kittel's *Biblia Hebraica*, third edition, but with so many emendations that a separate booklet was issued, *The Hebrew Text of the Old Testament: The Readings Adopted by the Translators of the New English Bible*. Most modern translations also draw on the Septuagint, Dead Sea Scrolls and other early “witnesses” for clarification or alternate readings.

The New Testament was originally written in Greek; papyrus manuscripts survive from the fourth century; some papyrus fragments dating as early as the second century have been found. While variations exist in the more than 6,000 extant NT manuscripts, few make an “appreciable difference to the meaning so far as it could be represented in translation,” in the words of the NEB introduction.^c

Style

Translations vary from literal to paraphrase.^d Literal translation goes beyond the word-for-word technique that gives us Hebraic expressions like “Song of Songs” and “living soul.” It extends also to syntax. Defending the Vulgate against his critics, Jerome declared that in Holy Scripture “*et verborum ordo mysterium est*” (even the order of words is sacred). This belief dominated biblical translation for 1,500 years. Much of the strange syntax of the KJV mirrors the Hebrew, for example, “And God saw the light, that it was good” (Genesis 1:4)



To the extent that English has a “biblical” style, it is the sound and rhythm of the King James. To countless generations the Bible has meant “thee” and “thou,” “lo” and “doth.” Even when a need was felt to update the KJV in the late 19th century, the watchword was moderation. Words that had fallen out of the language—but not “thee” and “thou,” “lo” and “doth”—were replaced, as were words whose changed usage caused confusion. For example, to maintain the intent of the original, “bosom” was changed to “heart” and “covetous” to “greedy.” But the KJV could still be seen in the Revised Version (1885), American Standard Version (ASV) (1901), Revised Standard Version (RSV) (1952), and New American Standard Bible (NASB) (1971). The preface to the RSV proclaims that it “is not a new translation in the language of today.... 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.” Somewhat more freedom is reflected in the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) (1990), a reworking of the 1952 edition; its charge was to be “as literal as possible, as free as necessary.”

In contrast to the literal approach, thought-for-thought translation requires the translator to extract the meaning from the words and syntax of the original and present it in whatever words

and syntax seem best. Phrases can replace single words; sentences can be combined and rearranged; transitional words can illuminate logical connections. Thus, John 1:1 in the literal NASB is one sentence, without subordination: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

On the other hand, here is John 1:1 in the NEB: "When all things began, the Word already was. The Word dwelt with God, and what God was, the Word was."

In the past few decades some translators have tried to achieve what Eugene Nida calls "dynamic equivalence"—having the translation produce the same effect on its audience as the original text did on its audience. On the assumption that John was written in the normal, everyday language of its time—rather than in a literary style—The Good News Bible: Today's English Version renders the previous verse: "Before the world was created, the Word already existed; he was with God, and he was the same as God."

Even freer than thought-for-thought translation is paraphrase, which frequently incorporates interpretation. Thus, in The Living Bible (also marketed as The Book), John 1:1 reads: "Before anything else existed, there was Christ, with God. He has always been alive and is himself God."^e

Religious Orientation

Translators have been burned at the stake. People have killed and died over the difference between "congregation" and "church," "elder" and "priest." It should be no surprise, therefore, that translations embody religious interpretations.

Psalm 2:12 provides one example:

KJV: Kiss the Son, lest he be angry

NRSV: Kiss his feet, or he will be angry

NEB: Kiss the king lest the Lord be angry

NJPS: Pay homage in good faith, lest He be angered

Among Protestant Bibles, the King James Version has long been the Authorized Version, and, along with its many revisions, still appeals to traditionalists and lovers of literature. Other translations, somewhat more conservative are the J. B. Phillips Version (1947–1963), Good News Bible: Today's English Version (1966–1978), New American Standard Bible (1971), and New International Version (NIV) (1978). On the liberal side is the New English Bible (1961–1970),

though its revision, the Revised English Bible (1989), is closer to the mainstream. The Living Bible is evangelical.

The Catholic counterpart to the KJV in age and status is the Rheims-Douay Version (1582, 1609–1610), revised by Bishop Challoner (1750). A revision based on the Vulgate as well as on Hebrew and Greek texts appeared as the Confraternity Version (1963). The New American Bible (1970) translates the Hebrew and Greek versions rather than the Vulgate. The widely praised Jerusalem Bible (1966) incorporates French research in Hebrew and Greek contained in *La Bible de Jerusalem*. The revised New Jerusalem Bible appeared in 1986.

The Jewish Publication Society, a cultural and educational organization with no denominational affiliation, has published two translations: *The Holy Scriptures* (1917), a revision of the Revised Version of 1885; and *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures* (1963–1982), also called the New JPS (NJPS) version, a scholarly translation into contemporary English. A traditional rabbinic translation is published by Mesorah Publications as the Artscroll Tanach.

Personal Preference

Bibles come in many sizes, bindings and prices, from paperback pocketbooks to leather-bound pulpit editions. Paper quality, typeface, workmanship and beauty vary.

Individuals must decide whether they need familiar language to absorb in silence or lofty rhetoric to intone in public, whether they want a book to write notes or a masterpiece to display reverently. Most students of the Bible own several.

Study Aids Inside and Outside Bibles

Sidebar to: How to Buy a Bible

When ancient prophets stood in a royal hall or public square and proclaimed their message, the audience understood. Translators who believe they can convey that same immediacy avoid notes, commentaries and cross-references. They try to create a text as accessible as a newspaper. One mandate of the KJV was that it contains no notes. The Bible in Basic English (1950) is limited to a 1,000-word vocabulary.

The NJPS has brief footnotes giving alternative readings and some cross-references. The Jerusalem Bible notes are longer and often include interpretation or doctrine. The Good News Bible avoids footnotes, but introduces headings and cross-references; an appendix identifies names and technical terms. The NRSV makes its explanatory titles less intrusive by putting them at the bottom of the page. Special study editions are also available, for example, the Oxford Annotated Bible for the RSV and the NRSV, and the Cambridge Bible Commentary and Oxford Study Bible for the NEB. Study aids may include maps, charts and illustrations as well as background essays and commentary.

Several multivolume sets offer line-by-line commentaries, for example the nondenominational Anchor Bible series and Hermeneia, and the Jewish Soncino Books of the Bible, Artscroll Tanach and JPS Torah Commentary. Several of these present facing bilingual texts and grammatical notes.

Word-by-word study is possible with *NIV Interlinear Hebrew-English Old Testament* by John Kohlenberger and *The New Greek-English Interlinear New Testament* by Robert Brown and Philip Comfort.

Valuable adjuncts to Bible study include Bible atlases, with maps related to specific events, times and places in the Bible; Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias, each with definitions and explanations of specific words or subjects from the Bible; and concordances listing almost all the words contained in the Bible with their occurrences by chapter and verse, usually with context.

Notes

How to Buy a Bible

- a. Leonard J. Greenspoon, "Mission to Alexandria: Truth and Legend About the Creation of the Septuagint, the First Bible Translation," **BR** 05:04.
- b. Frank Moore Cross, "New Directions in Dead Sea Scroll Research I: The Text Behind the Text of the Hebrew Bible," **BR** 01:02.
- c. The NEB started with Eberhard Nestle's late 19th-century *Novum Testamentum Graece* as a basis; choosing among variant manuscript readings, the editors created the text, later published as *The Greek New Testament* (1964), edited by R.V.G. Tasker. The REB, a 1989 revision of the NEB, draws heavily on the later work of Kurt Aland in *Novum Testamentum Graece* (1979). Another respected basic text is *The Greek New Testament* (1983), published by the United Bible Societies.
- d. Harvey Minkoff, "Problems of Translations: Concern for the Text Versus Concern for the Reader," **BR** 04:04.
- e. Eldon Epp, "Should 'The Book' Be Panned?" **BR** 02:02.

Author Biographies

Leonard J. Greenspoon, author of **BAR**'s popular Bible in the News column, holds the Philip M. and Ethel Klutznick Chair in Jewish Civilization at Creighton University, in Omaha. He is editor, with Ronald A. Simkins, of the 18-volume *Studies in Jewish Civilization* series.

A late professor of linguistics at Hunter College in New York City, Harvey Minkoff was the author and editor of several books, including *Visions and Revisions* (Prentice-Hall, 1990) and *Approaches to the Bible: The Best of Bible Review*, vols. 1 and 2 (Biblical Archaeology Society, 1995).