

English Translations of the Bible

A Review of Major Translations of the Bible into English

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The history of the English Bible spans over thirteen centuries, from the earliest Old English paraphrases of the seventh century to the digitally distributed translations of the twenty-first. It is a story marked by the conviction that ordinary people should be able to read the Word of God in their own language.

This is a review of the major English translations of the Bible. For each translation, it identifies when it was produced, who produced it, and what distinguishes it from its predecessors and successors.

Wycliffe's Bible (c. 1382–1384)

Translator(s): *John Wycliffe and associates (esp. Nicholas of Hereford)*

The first complete English Bible. Translated from the Latin Vulgate (not from Greek or Hebrew). Hand-copied, as it predated the printing press. Wycliffe's followers, the Lollards, distributed it widely. Church authorities condemned it; in 1415 the Council of Constance ordered Wycliffe's bones exhumed and burned. Despite suppression, about 250 manuscript copies survive—a testament to its popularity.

Tyndale's New Testament (1525–1526)

Translator(s): *William Tyndale*

The first printed English New Testament and the first translated directly from Greek. Tyndale was a brilliant linguist who studied under Erasmus. His prose rhythms profoundly shaped the English language. An estimated 84% of the King James New Testament retains Tyndale's wording. Tyndale was executed for heresy in 1536, reportedly crying out, "Lord, open the King of England's eyes!"

King James Version (Authorized Version) (1611)

Translator(s): *47 scholars organized into six committees*

Commissioned by King James I at the Hampton Court Conference in 1604. The translators drew upon Tyndale, Coverdale, the Geneva Bible, the Bishops' Bible, and even the Douay–Rheims. It was designed to be read aloud in churches, giving it an unmatched literary cadence. The KJV shaped the English language more than any other book besides Shakespeare. It remained the dominant English Bible for over 250 years and continues in wide use today. The 1611 edition included the Apocrypha.

Wesley's New Testament (1755)

Translator(s): *John Wesley*

The founder of Methodism revised the KJV New Testament with over 12,000 changes intended to make the text clearer for ordinary readers. Wesley's notes and commentary accompanied the translation and reflected his theological emphasis on personal holiness.

English Revised Version (RV) (1885)

Translator(s): *Committee of 50+ British scholars*

The first major scholarly revision of the KJV. It drew on far superior Greek manuscripts (especially Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus, discovered since 1611). While more accurate, its prose was often considered less elegant than the KJV. It was the beginning of the modern era of committee-based critical translations.

American Standard Version (ASV) (1901)

Translator(s): *American committee of scholars*

The American counterpart to the English Revised Version, incorporating preferences the American scholars had been unable to include in the British edition. Known for its extreme literalness and consistent use of "Jehovah" for the divine name. Highly regarded for study but considered stilted for public reading.

Revised Standard Version (RSV) (1952)

Translator(s): *Committee authorized by the National Council of Churches*

A revision of the ASV using the best available Greek and Hebrew manuscripts. It was the first modern translation to gain wide acceptance across denominational lines. Controversially, it translated Isaiah 7:14 as "young woman" rather than "virgin," sparking heated debate. Some conservative pastors publicly burned copies in protest.

New American Standard Bible (NASB) (1970–1971)

Translator(s): *Lockman Foundation (committee of 58 scholars)*

An update of the 1901 ASV, prized for its extreme word-for-word accuracy. Long considered the most literal major English translation. Favored for detailed exegetical study. Updated editions appeared in 1995 and 2020.

The Living Bible (TLB) (1971)

Translator(s): *Kenneth N. Taylor*

A one-man paraphrase (not a translation) of the entire Bible in simple, everyday English. Taylor began the project to help his ten children understand Scripture during family devotions. It

became a bestseller, selling over 40 million copies, and introduced many people to Bible reading for the first time.

New International Version (NIV) (1978)

Translator(s): *Committee on Bible Translation (over 100 scholars)*

A fresh translation (not a revision) from the best available Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic texts. It employed a “dynamic equivalence” philosophy, aiming for thought-for-thought accuracy in modern English. It became the best-selling modern English Bible and remains so today. Major updates appeared in 1984 and 2011.

New King James Version (NKJV) (1982)

Translator(s): *130 scholars coordinated by Arthur Farstad*

A modernization of the KJV that updates archaic vocabulary and grammar while preserving the textual basis and literary style of the 1611 translation. It replaced “thee” and “thou” with “you” and updated verb forms. Popular among those who love the KJV tradition but desire readability.

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) (1989)

Translator(s): *Committee under Bruce Metzger*

A revision of the RSV that became the standard academic Bible translation. It was the first major translation to use gender-inclusive language for human beings (e.g., “brothers and sisters” for Greek adelphoi). Widely adopted by mainline Protestant denominations and used extensively in seminaries.

New Living Translation (NLT) (1996)

Translator(s): *90 scholars coordinated by Tyndale House Publishers*

A thought-for-thought translation (not a paraphrase like its predecessor, The Living Bible). Produced by a committee of evangelical scholars, it aimed for clarity and naturalness in contemporary English while maintaining accuracy. Known for its exceptional readability.

English Standard Version (ESV) (2001)

Translator(s): *Translation Oversight Committee under J.I. Packer*

A revision of the 1971 RSV in the tradition of Tyndale and the KJV. It follows an “essentially literal” translation philosophy, seeking to be as word-for-word as possible while remaining readable. It rapidly gained popularity in Reformed and evangelical churches and is now one of the most widely used study Bibles.