



FOURTEENTH IN A SERIES

by Gary Matlack

Welcome to Decision Making 101. Here's your first assignment: choose a version of the Bible for your personal reading and study.

Oh, that's easy: the NIV. It's the most popular and the easiest to read, right? Well, except for *The Message*. Or is that a paraphrase? Although, I really appreciate the reverent language of the old NASB. King James? Well, it's a little rough to follow if you're not big on Shakespeare, but I hear it's more accurate. What's that? The *Jerusalem Bible*? Well, that sounds all right, but it seems like a long way to go just to buy a Bible. I mean, the plane ticket alone would . . . Oh, sorry. Let's see, now, where were we? Oh, yes, Bible versions . . .

Freedom of choice is a good thing. But it doesn't always make life simpler. Today's abundance of English translations and paraphrases requires us to educate ourselves in order to choose the version or versions that best fit our personal preferences and convictions.

Why are there so many English translations, anyway? Three main factors influence the number of translations available: the method of translation, the source of translation, and the historical development of the English language.

Difference 1: The Method of Translation

The two primary methods of translation are *formal equivalence* and *dynamic equivalence*. Formal equivalence can be described as a "word-for-word" translation. This method strives to render each word of the source material into one English word. Dynamic equivalence can be described as a "thought-for-thought"

What's the Difference in Bible Translations?

translation. This method aims to reproduce the meaning or idea behind a text. Therefore, it will often use several English words to represent one original word.

Difference 2: The Translation Sources

The manuscript source also helps explain the large number of translations. Since we don't have the original documents for the Old or New Testaments, translations are made from copies of the originals, or manuscripts. Without going into too much detail (you can find whole books written on this topic alone), there is an ongoing debate among scholars about which surviving manuscripts best reflect the original text. Some translators prefer *volume*, giving weight to groups of documents that contain the greatest number of copies of an original text. To others, date is the most important criteria; they prefer to translate from the oldest manuscripts, those closest to the original writings.

Difference 3: The Development of English

Finally, the development of the English language also helps us understand the proliferation of

translations. The English language has gone through some major changes over the last few hundred years, and you can buy Bibles that reflect all stages of development—from Old English to Modern, from formal to colloquial. People prefer different translations for different reasons. Some, for example, use the NASB for detailed study, the NKJV for memorization, and the NIV or a paraphrase for casual reading.

The truth is that no single translation has everything—the most accurate reflection of the original, the easiest to read, etc. Yet the abundance of choices need not undermine our trust in the Bible. These translations reflect the desire of translators to put God's Word into the hands and hearts of people everywhere. And the fact that so many manuscripts exist actually supports the argument for original documents recorded by "men moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21 NASB). ^(FL)

The table below should help you get an idea of how a few major versions compare.

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VERSION	TYPE OF TRANSLATION	PUBLISHER	READABILITY
New International Version (NIV)	Dynamic equivalence	Zondervan	Easy to read; somewhat interpretive
New American Standard Bible (NASB)	Formal equivalence	The Lockman Foundation	More of a word-for-word translation; less interpretive than NIV
New King James Version (NKJV)	Formal equivalence	Thomas Nelson	More contemporary than the old King James, but preserves its reverent feel
The Living Bible (LB)	Paraphrase	Tyndale House	Easy to read, but not recommended for serious study
The Message (the New Testament and selected Old Testament books)	Paraphrase	NavPress	Very colloquial; contains informative and insightful introductions to Bible books