

Resources for Bible Reading by Greg Smith-Young

I've put this together to help people who want to read the Bible. Here are some resources you might find helpful.

Part 1: Bibles

To read the Bible, the first thing you need is . . . a Bible. Since most of us don't read Greek or Hebrew, we need a good translation to use. Fortunately, there are a huge number of English translations out there. Unfortunately, choosing one can be bewildering. Here is a quick guide.¹

There are 3 basic approaches to Bible translation. Each is useful, depending on your purpose. For each, I've included some examples I'd recommend, though there are many other good translations.

Good for Study (Word for Word). The translator tries to put each word of the original language (Hebrew, Greek) into English, preserving the original word order and sentence structure as much as possible. These Bibles are the best choice for study purposes.

ENGLISH STANDARD VERSION (ESV). This is a great Bible for in-depth study. Its translation team was committed to a high view of Scripture. It seeks to convey the exact wording and individual style of each of the biblical writers.

TODAY'S NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION (TNIV). An update of the very popular New International Version (NIV). It is very readable. This new version corrects some errors in the NIV and uses gender-inclusive language when referring to people.

NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION (NRSV). Very popular in mainline Protestant circles, in part because it uses gender-inclusive language.

KING JAMES VERSION (KJV) Can't forget the classic, which is more accurately called The Authorized Version. Though surpassed in accuracy over the past 400 years, its beauty of language is a treasure. It has been updated (New King James Version; 21st Century KJV), but none of these is reliable for study purposes.

Good for Reading (Thought for Thought) The translator tries to say in English what the message was in the original language, both in meaning and style. These Bibles are easier to read and understand, and are good for reading large portions of the Bible at once.

¹ For this I've used an online article by Richard Ascough. He is professor of New Testament at Queen's Theological College in Kingston. http://post.queensu.ca/~rsa/English_Versions.htm. I've made changes to what he wrote though, so don't blame him for any of my mistakes. Also, at points I disagree with his assessment of various translations.

CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH VERSION (CEV) I use this one a lot, especially with youth groups and for public reading of narrative texts. It is very readable. It uses gender-inclusive language and is sensitive to concerns about anti-Judaism in the biblical text.

TODAY'S ENGLISH VERSION (TEV) Also known as The Good News Bible, many of us are familiar with the stick drawing throughout. It is still good to use, though I prefer the CEV.

NEW LIVING TRANSLATION (NLT) Though this is presented as an update of the Living Bible (see below), really it is an entirely new translation. It is fresh and easy to read.

Paraphrases. These put the Bible into words that try to express the original meaning but in fresh and new ways. They are usually done by one person (most other translations are done by committees of scholars). These are helpful for seeing a Bible passage in a new way, but can be misleading.

THE MESSAGE. Eugene Peterson is a noted writer on Christian spirituality and pastoral work, but his scholarly background is in the Hebrew language. This is a striking rendering of the original text into contemporary language. He often replaces biblical metaphors with ones that make sense to our context. I love it! Yet it is not, strictly speaking, the Bible, but Peterson's take on the Bible. So while I use it to find a fresh perspective on familiar texts, it is not reliable for study.

THE LIVING BIBLE (TLB) Done by Kenneth Taylor in this 1960s, this paraphrase was based on other English translations, rather than the original languages. It takes many liberties with the original text that distort the meaning. I don't recommend it, but only include it here because it was once very popular.

Part 2: Help for Greater Understanding

The best way to understand the Bible is to read it!

Also, talk about it with others (**Bible study groups** are great).

There are libraries full of resources out there that can help too. Some are for the beginner, others for the highly-trained scholar. Make use of these. However, I'll repeat that the best way to understand the Bible is to read it yourself. Allow God to use it to shape you as a follower of Jesus.

Here are some supplementary resources you might want to look into:

Study Bibles bundle the Bible text (using whatever translation you want) with a lot of

background information. Often they contain notes on the text, tables of information, maps, and many other aids. I have recently discovered the Zondervan TNIV Study Bible (ISBN 0310934818) which is basically a mini-library of Bible study resources.

Who was Zedekiah? A good **dictionary of the Bible** is helpful. Here are some I'd look at. They are all reasonably priced, and most come with other resources such as maps included.

- Oxford's A Dictionary of the Bible (ISBN 019860890X)
- The Penguin Dictionary of the Bible (0141015330)
- Nelson Pocket Bible Dictionary (141850016X)
- Zondervan's Compact Bible Dictionary (0310489814)

Where was Moab? A **Bible atlas** is great, especially when trying to make sense of the historical writings. Two worth considering are:

- HarperCollins Atlas of Bible History (ISBN 0061451959)
- Bible Atlas & Companion (1597897795)

Bible Handbooks: Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart have written a very helpful book, How to Read the Bible Book by Book. For each book, it has basic data, an overview of the contents, advice for reading it, and then a walk through the various sections of the book. I highly recommend it.

Short Commentaries: I also recommend Tom Wright's "For Everyone" series. These are short commentaries on the New Testament books. Wright is one of the most influential readers and scholars of the New Testament these days. In these books, he explains the background and meaning of the passages in easy-to-understand ways. For those who remember William Barclay's Daily Study Bible, this is similar. Currently commentaries are available for:

Matthew (2 vols)	Romans (2 vols)
Mark	1 st Corinthians (2 vols)
Luke	Galatians & Thessalonians
John (2 vols),	Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians & Philemon
Acts (2 vols)	1 st Timothy, 2 nd Timothy & Titus
	Hebrews

One last thing, before I forget. **The best way to understand the Bible is to read it!** I hope that your time reading the New Testament this year will be a blessing to you, and that God's Holy Spirit will use it to help you follow Jesus.

Greg Smith-Young
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