

Reading God's Word

1) What is the Bible?

- A) The Bible is a collection of 66 separate writings which are called books.
- (1) The Bible was written by more than forty authors from every walk of life, including kings, military leaders, peasants, philosophers, fisherman, tax collectors, poets, musicians, statesmen, scholars and shepherds.
 - (2) The Bible was written to kings, nations, slave-owners, churches, Jews, Gentiles, and individuals of all backgrounds.
 - (3) The Bible contains poetry, songs, personal letters, historical narratives, biographies, romance, rhetoric, satire, law, prophecy, and parables.
 - (4) The Bible was written over a period of 1,500 years. It was written in times of war and peace. It was written on three continents—Asia, Africa and Europe—and in places as varied as a desert, a dungeon, an island and a palace.
- B) The Bible is divided into two sections: the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament records the history of Israel prior to the coming of Christ. The New Testament records the life of Jesus and the history of the early church.

2) What makes the Bible different from other books?

- A) The Bible makes a radical claim—it claims to be the “Word of God.”
- (1) The claim. Paul said, “All Scripture is God-breathed (inspired) and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16 NIV). This passage is the key text for the doctrine of inspiration. The Bible has literally been breathed out from God.
 - (2) The method. Peter said, “Above all, you do well if you recognize this: no prophecy of scripture ever comes about by the prophet's own imagination, for no prophecy was ever borne of human impulse; rather, men carried along by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Peter 1:20–21 NET). God, acting through the Holy Spirit, caused various men to record the exact words He desired. This means the Bible is not the product of men's minds, but rather of God Himself.
- B) In summary, inspiration is the process by which Spirit-moved writers produced God-breathed words. This makes the Bible unique from other books, for it is the authoritative Word of God.

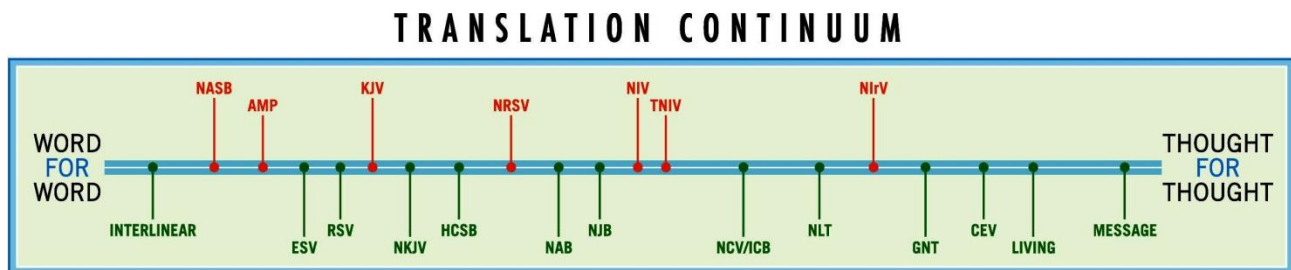
3) There are so many different translations. Which one should I read?

- A) The Bible was originally written in three languages: Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. The Bibles we have today are translations into English from the original languages.¹

¹ See this link for a list of Bible versions: <http://www.biblestudytools.com/bible-versions/>.

B) There are two general methods of Bible translation:

- (1) Word-for-Word (Formal Equivalence) – this method attempts to translate each word of the original language into English and tries to preserve the original word order and sentence structure as much as possible. Word-for-word translations are excellent for study.
- (2) Thought-for-Thought (Dynamic Equivalence) – this method seeks to understand what the original text is saying and then translate that thought into English at the expense of literalness and original word order. Thought-for-thought translations are helpful for ease of reading.

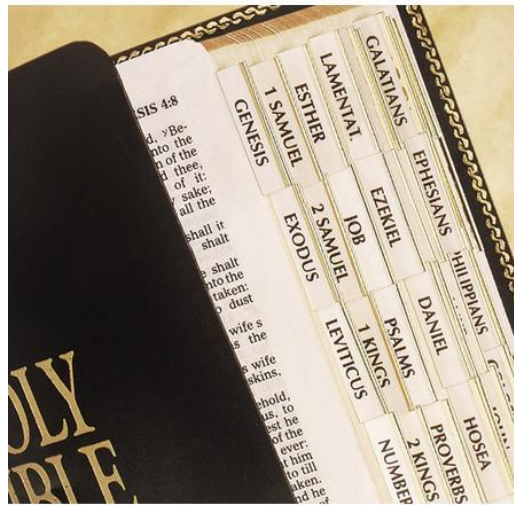


This continuum shows how different Bible translations fit into the word-for-word and thought-for-thought translation philosophies.

- C) For your main Bible, I recommend the English Standard Version (ESV) or New American Standard Bible (NASB). The ones from [Cambridge University Press](#) are beautiful. The craftsmanship is excellent and the text is clear and easy to read with plenty of space for note taking. If you can afford it (they are expensive), get real leather—it will last a lifetime.
- D) For your reference Bible, I recommend “[Today’s Parallel Bible](#)” from Zondervan. It has the KJV, NASB, NIV and NLT versions side-by-side for you to compare and contrast. This is very useful and will get you in the habit of checking other translations.
- E) If you would like to purchase a Bible for your children, I recommend the “[Picture Bible](#)” by Iva Hoth and the “[Illustrated Bible: Complete New Testament](#)” by Keith Neely.
- F) If you enjoy reading the Bible online, I recommend [BibleGateway.com](#) and [Bible.is](#). You can also use an app like [YouVersion](#).

4) How do I find things in the Bible?

- A) If you’re new to the Bible, I recommend using book tabs (see picture below). You can buy the tabs at any Christian bookstore. Some will even put them on for you.



- B) Books of the Bible are often referred to by their abbreviations (e.g., Gen for Genesis). This can be tough for new converts who are not familiar with all the books. Be sure to look at the “Bible Book Abbreviations” handout on the website which gives the common abbreviations for each book.
- C) As you work your way through the lessons on the website, be sure to look up each Scripture reference. This will give you practice with locating verses in the Bible.

5) Where should I start reading?

- A) The “30 Days With Jesus” handout on the website is an excellent way to begin reading the Bible. You can do this in conjunction with the “30 Day Bible Reading and Prayer Record Sheet” handout.
- B) Once you finish the “30 Days With Jesus” handout, you will be ready to read larger sections of Scripture. However, because many books in the Bible are difficult to read and understand, I recommend that you start with the easier books. The “Bible Books in Reading Order” handout on the website will help you with this (the easiest books are listed first with the difficulty level increasing as you go).
- C) For those who are ready to read the entire Bible, I created a plan that will help you read through the Bible in a year:
- (1) The [Chronological Synopsis of the Bible](#). This plan has you reading through the Bible chronologically—that is, in the order in which the events occurred. Events that are recorded more than once (e.g., the history of Israel's kings, the Gospels, etc.) are harmonized and presented in synopsis form (parallel columns of text). I created this plan myself, and I use it for my own daily Bible reading.
- D) Topical Reading. Sometimes you will want to read what the Bible has to say about a certain topic (e.g. divorce, homosexuality, baptism, angels). The best resources for this type of reading are the “[Baker Topical Guide to the Bible](#)” by Walter A. Elwell and the “[New Nave's Topical Bible](#)”.

6) How much should I read each day?

- A) If you're not working through a particular reading plan, I recommend that you read at least one chapter each day. Sometimes you may read more and occasionally less, but a chapter a day is a good rule of thumb.

7) I'm not a good reader. How do I get something out of what I read?

- A) Ask questions. Questions are the key to understanding. You should always have a pen and paper when you read the Bible. As you read, write down any questions you have about the meaning of the text. If you can, answer the questions yourself by thinking about the verses and studying the context. Save questions you can't answer for church or Bible study (2 Timothy 2:7). Consider the following example:

- (1) "This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:5-7 NET).
- (2) Here are some questions you could ask:
 - What does it mean that "God is Light"?
 - What does it mean to "walk in darkness"?
 - What does it mean to "walk in the light"?
- (3) You could answer these questions as follows:
 - (a) "God is light" means that God is truth. If I "walk in darkness" then I'm living in lies and wickedness, but if I "walk in the light" then I'm living in truth and obedience to God.
- (4) An important takeaway from this passage is that you cannot be a Christian and continue to practice willful sin. If you claim otherwise, you are a liar (see 1 John 2:4).
- (5) Consider this quote: "People only truly think when they are confronted with a problem. Without some kind of dilemma to stimulate thought, behavior becomes habitual rather than thoughtful" (John Dewey). I encourage you to form the habit of asking questions of the text.

- B) Apply what you read by asking yourself these two questions:

- (1) Does this passage challenge any of my values, beliefs, or attitudes? The focus here is on your internal thinking. For practice, try applying Philippians 3:8.
- (2) Does this passage challenge the way I act or speak? The focus here is on your outward behavior. For practice, try applying Philippians 2:14-15.