

Questions People Ask
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I was in a bookstore the other day, and I was surprised to see so many different translations of the Bible. There must have been a dozen different kinds of Bibles to purchase. Why so many? Do they all say the same thing?

It is true that a lot of different Bibles are available today, but there are actually only a few different translations. Bible publishers like to “repackage a Bible by adding some additional introductory material aimed at a particular audience. They title their product as a women’s Bible or a youth Bible, but these “specialty” Bibles may use the same translation. It is important to pay attention to the name of the translation, not the title on the cover...

When buying a Bible you should ask yourself why you want to read the Bible. Your answer will help guide you in choosing a suitable translation. If you want to do serious study of the Bible, you want a fairly literal translation of the original Greek and Hebrew texts. The way individual words are translated and the kind of footnotes to the text will be very important in such a study, and you might choose the *Revised New American Bible*. If you are looking for a translation that might act as springboard to help you pray and meditate on God’s word, you might want a more poetic translation. I would recommend the *New Jerusalem Bible*. The footnotes in that edition are good for study too, but the translation is more poetic and meditative. If you are looking for a translation that is easy to read and uses language and idioms anyone with a high school education can understand, select the *Good News Bible* or *Today’s English Version*; both are produced by the American Bible Society.

As you can see, there are not only a lot of choices but a lot of things you should consider before making your choice. But whatever choice you make, the most important thing is to pick up the Bible every day and spend time reading it.

Follow up reading:

Choosing A Bible Translation, by John J. Pilch, Liturgical Press, \$1.95. “Which Bible translation is the best to buy or use?” The answer depends upon the reader’s purpose: to study seriously or to read for enjoyment. From this perspective, the author reviews representative contemporary English-language translations, Bibles on computer software and the Internet, and special challenges such as inclusive language and cultural differences. John J. Pilch teaches Scripture at Georgetown University.