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Bible Translations: From Word-for-Word to Paraphrase

Where 38 English Bibles sit on the spectrum, based on what the published guides say

Every English Bible is a translation from Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek, and every translator has to choose between keeping the original wording and saying the meaning in natural English. Neither choice is wrong. This page shows where the guides place each translation so you can pick one with your eyes open.

MORE LITERAL <----------> MORE INTERPRETIVE

1 Interlinear or very literal	2 Formal (word-for-word)	3 Balanced (mediating)	4 Functional (thought-for-thought)	5 Paraphrase
No guide places a translation here. Interlinears (Green's, Berean Interlinear) belong here by format but are not placed.	**NASB 1995** * **NASB 2020** * **ESV** * **KJV** * **NKJV** * **NRSV** * **NRSVue** * LSB RSV ASV YLT MEV LEB Douay-Rheims	**CSB** * **NIV** * **NIrV** * BSB NET CEB NABRE NJB TLV ICB ERV	**NLT** * GNT CEV NCV GW CJB REB ISV	MSG TLB Voice

Between bands (guides split): AMP sits between 2 and 3. TPT sits between 4 and 5. * **= ECPA top 10, September 2026 (bold).**

The Bible I use

The Bible I read and quote is the SLB (Steadfast Literal Bible), my own translation, free at trinfinityenterprises.com/slb.

Why the SLB: I chose it because it is a word-for-word translation in today's language, built on the ancient Scripture sources.

The BSB (Berean Standard Bible): a modern translation dedicated to the public domain, free to quote and share. Only one guide places it so far (balanced), so I treat that placement as tentative.

Where the guides disagree

NIV: three guides call it balanced; Tyndale calls it thought-for-thought.

AMP: Logos says word-for-word; Bible Gateway says it balances word-for-word and paraphrase.

TPT: Logos says paraphrase; Christianbook says dynamic equivalence.

The Voice and GW: their publishers call them mediating, but Logos puts them further right.

Many less common Bibles are placed by only one guide. Treat those as rough.

How to choose

Start with your purpose. For close study, use a formal Bible (band 2). For daily reading, a balanced or functional Bible (band 3 or 4) reads easier.

Read two side by side. A formal Bible next to a functional one shows you where the translators had to choose.

More literal does not mean more accurate. Every translation interprets. Formal and functional Bibles aim at different goals, and both can be faithful.

Avoid building doctrine on a paraphrase alone.

Acronym key: AMP Amplified Bible; ASV American Standard Version; BSB Berean Standard Bible; CEB Common English Bible; CEV Contemporary English Version; CJB Complete Jewish Bible; CSB Christian Standard Bible; ECPA Evangelical Christian Publishers Association; ERV Easy-to-Read Version; ESV English Standard Version; GNT Good News Translation; GW GOD'S WORD Translation; ICB International Children's Bible; ISV International Standard Version; KJV King James Version; LEB Lexham English Bible; LSB Legacy Standard Bible; MEV Modern English Version; MSG The Message; NABRE New American Bible Revised Edition; NASB New American Standard Bible; NCV New Century Version; NET New English Translation; NIrV New International Reader's Version; NIV New International Version; NJB New Jerusalem Bible; NKJV New King James Version; NLT New Living Translation; NRSV New Revised Standard Version; NRSVue NRSV Updated Edition; REB Revised English Bible; RSV Revised Standard Version; SLB Steadfast Literal Bible; TLB The Living Bible; TLV Tree of Life Version; TPT The Passion Translation; Voice The Voice; YLT Young's Literal Translation.

Sources: Band = median of the guides that place each translation (Logos/Faithlife spectrum, Christianbook, Bible Gateway 2025, Tyndale, Olive Tree), with publisher statements kept separate; popularity from the ECPA Bible Translations Bestsellers list, September 2026. Full citations: "Bible Translations - Literal to Interpretive Comparison" workbook.