

How To Select A Bible

Having the right tools is essential to any project. Ask anyone who has tried to do a job without them. A carpenter needs a hammer, saw, and nails. An artist needs a canvas, palette, paints, and brushes. Likewise, as a student of God's word we need the right tools.

Let's start with the basics. To study the Bible, what you need is... a Bible. That sounds simple, but there are many who spend more time studying books about the Bible than on the Bible itself. Hundreds or even thousands of dollars are spent amassing huge libraries, thinking that all of those books are essential to understanding the Bible. While those books may be helpful, the most important book in Bible study is the Bible. All the other books are secondary.

When I talk about a study Bible, I'm thinking of a Bible that has these ideal characteristics:

LARGE PRINT

Small print Bibles are easier to carry. But small print can be near impossible to study. It not only strains the eye, but it makes it difficult to write in and around the text.

WIDE MARGINS

That way you'll have plenty of room to record your observations and thoughts

NO NOTES

When you are studying the Word, you want to come to the text unbiased, without any extraneous comments competing for your attention.

NO SUBHEADINGS

An ideal Bible would have chapter and verse indications but no editorialized headings for paragraphs and sections. They tend to bias the reader.

MARGIN NOTES & CROSS-REFERENCES

These notes offer a more literal translation of a word or phrase. Some notes include alternative renderings from comparative Hebrew and Greek texts. They can also translate the meaning of proper names from the Hebrew and Greek—insight you wouldn't otherwise have. Sometimes ancient weights, distances, monetary values and other measures are converted into modern equivalents.

Another common use of margin notes is to provide cross-references to passages of Scripture that will shed light on the verses you are reading. With these references the Bible can be used as its own commentary.

PAGE QUALITY AND BINDING

If you study your Bible the way we are going to suggest in class, you're going to give your Bible a real workout. So you need an edition that will stand up to serious use. That means high-quality paper and a binding that won't let go of the cover.

TRUTH THAT TRANSFORMS

A CONCORDANCE IN THE BACK

A concordance is a list of words in the text, with references for where to find them.

MAPS

For serious study, you need an atlas. But a few maps in the back of your study Bible can be quite handy.

TRANSLATIONS

The Bible was not written in English, but in Hebrew and Greek. These ancient languages have been translated into English. If you do any research on the translation of the Bible you'll discover that no translation is perfect. These are ancient languages that use peculiar words that sometimes have no good English equivalents. Transferring the words, phrases, and ideas from one language to another is sometimes a challenge.

There are two fundamental methods of translation. Translators either attempt to make a literal "*word for word*" rendering of the original text or they paraphrase the text in a "*thought for thought*" translation.

Examples of the *word for word*, literal translations would be **the King James, the New King James, the American Standard, and the New American Standard.**

Examples of the *thought for thought*, paraphrased versions would be **the Living Bible, the New English Bible, and J. B. Philips *New Testament in Modern English*.**

The popular **New International Version** is a middle of the road approach combining the two methods.

It is my opinion that you should use a word for word translation for the bulk of your reading and study. Paraphrased Bibles sometimes mistranslate because of the doctrinal biases of the translators. They also tend to sacrifice accuracy for readability. It's easy for the interpretations of a translator to slip into a paraphrased version.

I'm not saying that paraphrased versions should never be used. They are easier to read and that can be very helpful, especially to a new student of the Bible. However, they should always be read alongside a word for word translation.

SECOND MOST IMPORTANT TOOL

Next to your Bible, the most important study tool in Bible study is a notebook. A notebook can be used to record sermon notes, daily devotional reflections, and observations gleaned from personal studies. Writing down your thoughts helps to sharpen your mind in study. It helps to focus your study giving it more purpose and direction. It can also remind you later of conclusions you've made and then reinforce those truths in your mind.