

**Mthr. Barbara's Guide to Bible Study Tools**  
St. Francis in the Fields Episcopal Church  
Tuesday Bible Study, Fall 2022

**A Note on Translation**

The two modern approaches to English Bible translations are called “formal equivalence” and “dynamic equivalence.” In a formal equivalence translation, the translators prioritize *accurately translating the words and phrases* of the original sources. These are more “literal” translations, and more closely follow the original Greek or Hebrew. Popular formal equivalence Bibles include the KJV, RSV, NRSV, NKJV, and ESV.

In a dynamic equivalence translation, the translators prioritize *conveying the meaning* of the original sources. This means that sentences are sometimes rephrased or translated as a whole, rather than being translated word-for-word, but may be easier to read. Popular dynamic equivalence translations include the NIV, NLT, and CSB.

There are strengths and weaknesses in both approaches. It can be helpful to read a dynamic equivalence translation alongside a formal equivalence translation to provide insight.

For a Bible study like Tuesday Bible Study, where we will spend time carefully expositing words and passages, please *bring a formal equivalence translation* (see suggestions below). If you do not have one of the recommended translations and would like help acquiring one, please speak to Mthr. Barbara.

Remember that all translation is interpretation! Even a “literal” translation is interpreted by the translator. This is why it can be helpful to read multiple translations.

**What about *The Message*?**

The Message, The Way (The Living Bible), and the Contemporary English Version are *paraphrases* and are not actually translations. This means that they do not follow the original sources closely and are intentionally trying to teach something, rather than show the meaning of the passages. These can be helpful tools, but they do not replace reading the Bible and should not be used as your everyday Bible. For purposes of TBS, please bring a Bible, not a paraphrase.

**Great Bible Translations (Recommended for TBS)**

- The Authorized Version (KJV): The Authorized Version (also called the King James Version) of the Bible is one of the treasures of the Anglican heritage and the English speaking world. It is, in many ways, the most literal translation available as it closely follows the structure and syntax of ancient Greek and Hebrew. Because of this, it can sometimes feel difficult to read, but if you persist you will find that it is not as difficult as some assume. The beauty of this translation is second to none! The KJV is always an excellent choice for TBS.
- Revised Standard Version/New Revised Standard Version: The RSV/NRSV are the son and grandson (respectively) of the KJV. Both are excellent, elegant, informed by recent scholarship, and are relatively free of theological bias. I slightly prefer the RSV, but it can be difficult to find in print, and either one is a good choice.
- The English Standard Version: The ESV is the most popular Bible in America. It is also in the lineage of the KJV, and is very similar to the NRSV. It leans Calvinist in its translation and especially in the study notes, and is slightly less elegant than the NRSV/RSV but is quite true to the original languages and is an excellent translation for TBS.

## **Great Bible Translations (Recommended for supplemental study or personal devotion)**

- The Revised English Bible: The REB is my favorite dynamic equivalence Bible, and I love to read it alongside the NRSV or Authorized Version. It is elegant, scholarly, beautiful, memorable and easy to read. This version is not popular in the US, but is widely used in England. Copies are available online.
- The New Jerusalem Bible: This is a scholarly Roman Catholic translation, well known for Anglicizing Hebrew names for God (el elyon, elohim, etc.) and for using the transliteration Yahweh rather than the honorific LORD.
- The New English Translation: This translation is available free online (also available in print) and is an ecumenical translation. It contains many interesting translation notes, and includes a number of articles which give a good sense of the many meanings that are possible even when one is reading “literally.”

## **Great Bible Formats**

- *Wide margin or journaling Bibles* have space around the edge for writing notes and reflections. Taking notes and marking up the Bible is a great way to help engage memory and to keep track of your Bible study learning. There is nothing irreverent about interacting with the scripture through highlighting and marginalia!
- *Single Column or Single Paragraph Bibles* have the text laid out like any other book, rather than in two columns. This can make it easier to read the Bible for devotion, and reminds us that it should be read as a whole, not as a collection of individual verses. Chapters and verse numbers are helpful, but they are scholarly innovations, not part of scripture!
- *Study Bibles* have notes and commentary from Bible scholars and translators in the margins and footnotes. Sometimes this can be helpful (the essays at the beginning of each chapter can be very good for understanding historical context) but they can sometimes lead to the assumption that there is one exhaustive meaning of the text which the translator has figured out. I recommend owning a study bible for reference, but learning not to rely on the notes or commentary for interpretation.

## **Other Bible Study Tools**

- Commentaries: You do not need a commentary to read the Bible! They are helpful, but they are not required for knowing “what the Bible means.” The most important thing is learning what it says and learning to interpret in the midst of a Christian community and in the context of the ancient teachings of the church (the Creeds).
  - For purposes of TBS, you do not need to consult any commentaries. However, if you would like to do additional study, I recommend having a good one-volume commentary like [The New Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible](#).
  - Remember that all commentaries are theological and are only one scholar or group of scholar's interpretation of the text.
  - Stay away from online commentaries. These are often not scholarly, not vetted, and are overly polemical. There are also so many options that things can become more confusing than clarifying!

- Dictionaries: A good Bible dictionary is often more helpful than a commentary! Keeping one of these at hand to look up words or to gain more clarity into the meaning of words in context can be very helpful. I recommend either:
  - Eerdmans Bible Dictionary
  - Oxford Dictionary of the Bible
- Writing tools: Pens, pencils, and highlighters can be a great way to take notes and engage the text. Here are my favorites (available at stationary stores or online):
  - Pigma Micron Pens: these fine point, archival ink pens don't smear, and can take notes in even the tiniest margins.
  - Gel-Dry lighters: Gel highlighters won't bleed through thin pages (they may "show through" on very thin paper) and come in a variety of vibrant colors.
  - Colored Pencils: If you want more variety, or are afraid of show through, you can't do better than regular old Crayola colored pencils!
  - Regular pencils: Taking notes with a regular pencil gives you the option to erase if you make a mistake, and won't bleed through or tear the pages in your Bible.