

HOW TO CHOOSE A STUDY BIBLE

1. Is it a translation or a paraphrase?

All Bibles in the English language are considered translations. The original text was written in Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic. When choosing a Study Bible, you want to consider if the translation you are choosing is a literal translation, thought for thought translation, or paraphrase.

The following are how various translations break down. There are more translations available, but this will give you an idea of some of the most popular translations available.

Literal Translations:

- King James Version (KJV)
- New King James Version (NKJV)
- English Standard Version (ESV)
- New American Standard Bible (NASB)
- New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)
- Revised Standard Version (RSV)

Thought for Thought Translations:

- New International Version (NIV)
- New Living Translation (NLT)

Paraphrases:

- The Message (MSG)

When choosing a Study Bible, I recommend going with a literal translation. Thought for thought translations are good for *general reading*, but when it comes to *serious study*, a literal translation will make for better study.

Paraphrases of the scriptures shouldn't be considered the Word of God. I look at them as more of a "commentary" of the Bible, and not to be mistaken for a literal interpretation of the scripture. Paraphrases should be used with *extreme caution*.

2. What study tools does it have available?

When choosing a good study bible, you want the bible to have some key features that will make your study time more fruitful.

Features of a good study bible include:

- Concordance
- References
- Introductions
- Maps
- Timelines/Charts
- Commentary

Of course, there could be other tools available to you within the Study Bible, but this will get you looking at the Study Bible a little more critically.

3. Does it seek to help me understand the original meaning of the text?

When choosing a Study Bible, it's important to understand if the commentary within the study notes will help you interpret the original meaning of the text or if it is a regurgitation of another person's study or interpretation.

The truth is that a good Study Bible doesn't need to have additional commentary of the text. It is helpful when you get snagged up, or you're just getting started reading and studying the Bible for yourself. But sometimes having the commentary of the text available so easily tempts you to jump right to someone else's interpretation of the scripture instead of allowing the Holy Spirit to help you divide the scriptures for yourself.

A good Study Bible will give you the tools you need to come to your own conclusions. It won't tell you how the text should be applied in your life. Application is for the Holy Spirit to work in you. A good Study Bible will help you understand the original meaning of the text so that you can rightly interpret for your own life.

These three simple questions will help you determine if the Study Bible you're considering will enhance your understanding of God's Word. Choosing the right Study Bible can be a little overwhelming at first, but I hope that these simple questions and recommendations will help get you started.