Thy Word, O Lord, Is Gentle Dew

Carl Bernhard Garve (1763–1841); tr. Catherine Winkworth (1827–1878)

Thy Word, O Lord, is gentle dew
To suff'ring hearts that want it;
O shed Thy heav'nly balm anew,
To all Thy garden grant it.
Refreshed by Thee,
May ev'ry tree
Bud forth and blossom to Thy praise,
And bear much fruit in after days.

Thy Word is like a flaming sword,
A sharp and mighty arrow,
A wedge that cleaves the rock; that Word
Can pierce through heart and marrow;
O send it forth
O'er all the earth,
The darkened heart to cleanse and win,
And shatter all the might of sin.

Thy Word, a wondrous star, supplies
True guidance when we need it;
It points to Christ, it maketh wise
All simple hearts that heed it;
Let not its light
E'er sink in night,
But still in every spirit shine,
That none may miss that light divine.

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ΤΩ ΧΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

Actions, Intentions, Motivations

Jon Pratt

Previously, I challenged the reader to read the Bible daily and to use different translations. As I listed all twenty translations (or editions of translations) I had read, several questions came to mind, and my goal in this essay is to answer two of them. First, what criteria should be used when judging the value of a translation? Second, which translations would work best for devotional reading? To answer this second question, I will provide a short description of the translations and their editions which I have read through.

Translation Criteria. The kind of translation you choose to use will likely vary depending on the situation, but we are specifically addressing personal Bible study. And I suggest three principles that should be applied to your translation choices.

First, is the translation *understandable*? We should ask whether the vocabulary makes sense to the modern reader; what the reading level of the person is; how theological terms are translated (e.g. "propitiation" versus "sacrifice of atonement"); and how gender language is treated.

Second, what is the *translational philosophy*? There is a debate among scholars regarding functional and formal equivalence in translation. Functional equivalence seeks to translate the meaning of the original into the modern context, while formal equivalence strives to retain the grammatical structure and language of the original as closely as possible. There is a spectrum here, with the Message on the functional end and the ASV and NASB on the formal end of the scale.

Third, what is the *textual basis*? Translations should be founded upon the best readings of the existing Hebrew and Greek manuscripts. The *textus receptus*, which was based on Erasmus's Greek text of 1516, included only a few manuscripts. It serves as the source of the KJV and the NKJV. But many discoveries and improvements in text-critical studies have occurred since the TR was created, and a good translation should take these into consideration. This topic was well-explained by Dan Wallace, our fall conference speaker this past month (2026 Fall Conference).

Translation Descriptions. The list which follows includes only the translations that I have read through. I understand that my recommendations may

not be appreciated by everyone, but at least they come from one who has taken the time to read them. The list of versions is treated in order of the year of their initial publication.

- King James Version (KJV): This venerable translation has endured for over 400 years and was still third on the list of best-selling translations in 2025. Personally, I have read through this translation more than any other on this list. But today most people do not understand its many archaisms, and since it is based on the TR, modern translations are preferred.
- American Standard Version (ASV): Published in 1901, this was our founder R. V. Clearwaters' favorite translation. It is hard to understand 125 years later due to its overly literal nature and its dated English usage.
- Revised Standard Version (RSV): A revision of the ASV, the RSV was published in 1952 by the National Council of Churches. It became the standard translation used by mainline denominations.
- Jerusalem Bible (JB): This is the only Catholic Bible on my list, published in 1966. Here is my post-reading assessment: "Though often cited as a standard translation of the twentieth century, the JB is not one I would ever recommend to a fellow Christian of any level of maturity. There are so many strange and poor translations that it is confusing at best and irritating at worst."
- New English Bible (NEB): Produced in Great Britain in 1970, the NEB is a faithful translation using the functional equivalent approach. It used contemporary idioms of its day and used archaic pronouns for God (e.g. thee, thou, etc.).
- New American Standard Bible (NASB): First published in 1971 and undergoing significant revisions in 1995 and in 2020, the NASB can rightly claim to be the most formally equivalent translation today. Having read all three editions, I believe each new edition greatly improved upon the weaknesses of its predecessor.
- Today's English Version (Good News Bible): This functionally equivalent translation (some may call it a paraphrase) came out in 1976, but its colloquialisms confine its usefulness to the 70's and 80's.
- New International Version (NIV): First published in 1978, the NIV has been the best-selling English translation for the past 40 years. Its functional equivalent approach is more moderate than others already mentioned. Prior to its major revision in 2011, the Committee on Bible Translation (which produced the NIV) had published the TNIV (Today's New International Version), a gender-neutral translation. This caused quite a stir. The TNIV was discontinued in 2009 and the 2011 revision of the NIV was published. It retained many of the less controversial gender-neutral changes introduced by the TNIV.
- New King James Version (NKJV): 368 years following the publication of the KJV, the NKJV came on the scene in 1979. It updates the antiquated English of the KJV while retaining much of the majesty and order of the KJV. A major weakness of the NKJV is that its textual basis is the TR.
- New Revised Standard Version (NRSV): In 1989 the NRSV became the first major translation to use a gender-neutral approach to Bible translation. It is an improvement over the English of the RSV.
- The Message: Eugene Peterson took ten years to produce this translation which was first published in 1993. While many would call this a paraphrase, it is certainly the most functionally equivalent translation available. I'm reading this now, and I will likely not read through it again.
- New Living Translation (NLT): This translation, produced in 1996, is my favorite on the functional equivalent side of the spectrum (considering the NIV as mediating between the two approaches).
- New English Translation (NET Bible): The 2001 edition contained 58,506 notes concerning translation decisions, text-critical decisions, and study aids. It is an original translation and uses "gender-accurate" translation striving for smooth and accurate style. The 2019 edition which includes nearly 60,000 notes will be my next Bible to read through.
- English Standard Version (ESV): First published in 2001, the ESV has now risen to be the second most popular Bible (in sales) since 2022. It is an essentially literal translation and it stands in the line of classic English translations from the KJV, RV, ASV, and RSV.
- Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB): The HCSB first came out in 2004 and continued until 2017 when it was replaced by the Christian Standard Bible.
- Christian Standard Bible (CSB): Replacing the HCSB in 2017, it retains "the freshness of the HCSB, while also enhancing its faithfulness to the original languages and its readability for a modern audience" (from its website).
- Legacy Standard Bible (LSB): In 2021 the faculty of The Master's Seminary were responsible for this update to the 1995 NASB. It is a formally equivalent English Bible translation. Its main positive is that it uses the transliterated name for God, Yahweh, in the Old Testament.

After reading these translations, my favorites in order are the CSB, ESV, NIV, LSB, NASB, and NET. Yours may be different, but, again, my main encouragement is that you become a reader of God's Word and that you read it in different translations.

This essay is by Jon Pratt, Vice President of Academics and Professor of New Testament at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
