

# EVERLASTING LIFE BAPTIST CHURCH

## HOW TO CHOOSE A BIBLE TRANSLATION

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Christians are well aware of the plethora of Bible translations that are available to them. Our day, it seems or in fact, excels previous generations for access to various renditions of Scripture to English.

The largesse of the Bible translations presents believers with the practical problem of which one to choose. The choice may or, in my view, should include the following criteria: Is my choice made because of the translation's literalness, or is it its readability or for study?

To begin to answer the queries put forward, it is helpful to know that as a general fact, all Bible translations are not equal in the sense of being faithful to the original languages of Scripture. By being faithful to the original language, I mean that the translation is as close as a rendering can be in the receptor language.

It is understood that all translations lose something of meaning in translation from one language to another. However, one translation method provides a greater closeness to the original wording than does another one.

There are two major Bible translation theories or philosophies that are employed in translating from the source language to the receptor language.

### **Formal Equivalence**

This methodology for rendering the original languages of Scripture (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek) into English is also known as a formal-correspondence translation. "A formal-equivalence translation concerns itself primarily with accuracy or faithfulness to the original text. In both form and content, it focuses attention on the original text being translated. It seeks as close a match as possible between the elements of the receptor language and those of the source language. Its reader can thus identify himself as fully as possible with someone in the source-language context and more fully comprehend the customs, manner of thought, and means of expression connected with the original setting. To accomplish this goal, the literal translation preserves as much of the source-language grammatical structures and word usage as the boundaries of proper English will allow."<sup>i</sup>

### **Dynamic Equivalence**

This translation philosophy "results in what is termed more popularly a 'free translation or paraphrase.' The chief concern with this approach is readability. It

seeks to convey the thought of the original languages with little or no attention of obtaining a word-for-word correspondence between the original and the translation.”<sup>ii</sup>

In my view, the dynamic equivalence theory fails to account for the fact of verbal inspiration of Scripture, that is, that every word of Scripture is God-breathed, not merely thoughts (**2 Timothy 3:16**). Verbal inspiration is important. We see this in the tenses of verbs, for example.

In **Matthew 22:32**, Jesus makes a decisive point about the long dead, yet living, Abraham, Issac, and Jacob using the present tense. Likewise, Jesus uses the present tense “I Am” in **John 8:58**, but in regard to Himself. Our Lord had the imperfect tense “I was” available, but that would have left open the question of whether the person of Jesus also had a beginning like Abraham. However, the present tense predicates absolute existence for the person of Jesus.

Much more could be stated about the differences of the two translation theories. The scholar I quote in this article spent a lifetime teaching the Word of God in the original languages at the seminary level but also developed expertise in the field of original language manuscripts.

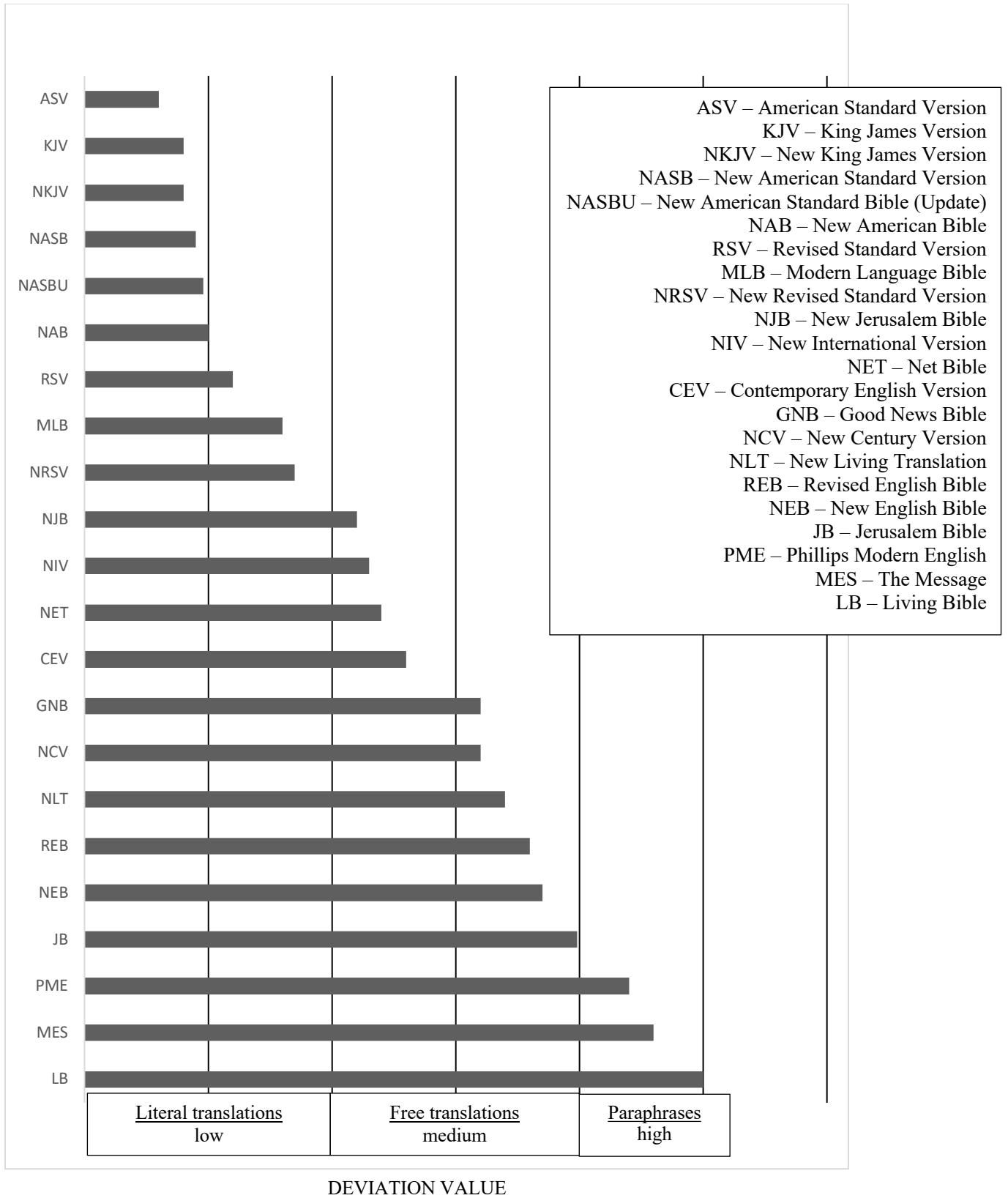
Dr. Robert L. Thomas’ book, *How to Choose a Bible Translation*, is essential reading for anyone seeking to gain greater understanding about Bible translations. In the aforementioned book, the late professor provides examples of the deficiencies of the dynamic equivalence translation theory. Also, he provides a figure depicting the deviation values of translations ranging from the literal to paraphrase for a number of translations. This is helpful. The figure is provided on the last page of this article.

To return to the matter of criteria for choosing a translation, this writer’s preference is for the formal equivalence rendering. A literal translation is best suited for study because it gets the reader closer to the original biblical languages as stated above.

Personal experiences with translations that were produced by the dynamic equivalence method showed me the lack of accuracy when compared to a literal translation production. There were instances where the text led to confusing interpretations because of the different translations provided.

Thomas’ book, for which this article’s title was borrowed, was penned before the introduction of the Legacy Standard Bible (LSB). No doubt he would affirm the LSB because of the translation theory it uses: Formal Equivalence.

In its foreword, these words appear concerning the translation: “The Legacy Standard Bible aspires to be a legacy passed on to equip generations to study Scripture and continue the philosophy of being a window into the original text for the glory of God.”



<sup>i</sup> Robert L. Thomas, *How to Choose a Bible Version, Making Sense of the Proliferation of Bible Translation*.

<sup>ii</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.