

## NASB and ESV DIFFERENCES

### Bible translations in general

- **Literal or Word for Word Translation.** The goal of a Bible translation is obviously to help the reader understand the text. Until the twentieth century the philosophy of Bible translation was to translate the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek words of the Bible into the closest possible equivalent in English. In other words the translator's aim was to be as literal as possible and still be readable. This method is often referred to as a literal or word for word translation. However, the title is a little misleading because we cannot effectively translate exactly word for word from the Biblical languages into English without the end result being unreadable.
- **Thought for Thought Translation.** In the mid-twentieth century the idea of a dynamic equivalent was introduced. This is commonly referred to as a thought for thought translation or a paraphrase. The goal is to translate the idea or thought in the original language to a corresponding thought in English. *"Briefly stated, the theory of dynamic equivalence in Bible translation emphasizes the reaction of the reader to the translated text, rather than the translation of the words and phrases themselves."* (Leland Ryken, *The Word of God In English*. (2002) Wheaton, IL: Crossway)
- **Which is Which?** Translations like the King James Version, American Standard, New American Standard, and English Standard are on the more literal side of the spectrum. Bibles like *The Message* and *The Living Bible* are much more on the dynamic equivalent side of the scale. And scholars often place the New International Version in the middle of the scale.

### What made the New American Standard so popular?

From the Preface of the NAS: *"Modern English Usage: The attempt has been made to render the grammar and terminology in contemporary English. When it was felt that the word-for-word literalness was unacceptable to the modern reader, a change was made in the direction of a more current English idiom. In the instances where this has been done, the more literal rendering has been indicated in the notes."* (New American Standard Bible: 1995 update. (1995). LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation)

The NASB has always been popular with serious Bible students because the translators tried to 'render the grammar and terminology' of the original languages into English. And they worked at being as literal as possible. Serious Bible students have always wanted to know exactly what the text said so they could be the ones to determine for themselves the meaning. The NASB meets that need.

### What about the English Standard Version?

From the preface of the ESV: *"The ESV is an 'essentially literal' translation that seeks as far as possible to capture the precise wording of the original text and the personal style of each Bible writer. As such, its emphasis is on 'word-for-word' correspondence, at the same time taking into account differences of grammar, syntax, and idiom between current literary English and the original languages. Thus it seeks to be transparent to the original text, letting the reader see as directly as possible the structure and meaning of the original."* (The Holy Bible: English Standard Version. (2001). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society)

The ESV is popular, among other reasons, because it is translated in a 'current literary English'. Or, to put it another way, the ESV is understandable and sounds like current English literature to many English-speakers. It sounds modern.

### What are the differences between ESV and NAS?

Most scholars rank the NAS as a bit more literal word for word translation. Some, but not all, think that some of the Old Testament passages are a little 'wooden', so literally 'word for word' that they are hard to read.

Many scholars and students, but certainly not all, think the ESV is smoother and easier to read. If this is true, it is because the translators opted for readability over literalness in some passages, whereas the NAS usually chose literalness over readability.

There is no one translation that will ever be universally accepted as the perfect translation. However, for the English speaking world, both the ESV and NASB are excellent translations directly from the original languages.

### Should you buy an ESV?

Maybe. In the end the version you choose to study from is a personal choice. Both the ESV and the NAS will serve you well. The real issue is: will you study the one you have? No Bible is of any value if you do not open it and read it. There is nothing especially powerful about a Bible lying on a table. But once you open it and begin to study it there is nothing more powerful in the whole world. The Bible is literally the word of God. His words are

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powerful, sharp, penetrating, and very dangerous. The word of God changes cultures, tribes, cities, countries, and even individual lives. **Whichever version you choose, read it!**