

CHOOSING A BIBLE

‘Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ,’ says St Jerome, but finding the right Bible can be tricky given how many editions there are on the market. So here are a few thoughts.

1. FIRST, WHAT’S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A CATHOLIC AND A PROTESTANT BIBLE?

The Septuagint (LXX)

The Septuagint is a translation of the Hebrew Bible (that is, the Christian Old Testament) into Greek. It was translated by seventy Jewish scholars¹ (hence the Latin word *septuaginta* which means seventy) for the Jewish community in Alexandria at the request of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285-247 BC). It is the oldest surviving translation of the Hebrew Bible. In fact, it is older than any Hebrew texts that now exist.

Canonical Books of the Bible

The final decision about which texts should be included in the Bible and which should not was made at the Council of Rome in AD 382 under Pope St Damasus I. All the Books that were included became known as canonical, from the Greek *kanōn* which means (unchanging) rule.

The Vulgate

At the same time that the canonical books were decided upon, Pope St Damasus I asked St Jerome to translate the whole Bible into Latin. St Jerome translated the Old Testament into Latin from the Greek Septuagint. The completed Bible became known as the *Biblia Vulgata*, or Vulgate Bible, meaning Bible in the common tongue. The Vulgate became the official Bible of the Catholic Church and remains so to the present day. (There are three official versions: The Sixtine Vulgate of 1590; the Clementine Vulgate of 1592; and the *Nova Vulgata* of 1979.)

The Douai-Rheims Bible

The Douai-Rheims Bible is a translation of the Latin Vulgate Bible into English by members of the English College in Douai, France. The New Testament was published in Reims, France, in 1582. The Old Testament was published in two volumes in 1609 and 1610 by the University of Douai. However, much of this

¹ It is now thought that there were 72 Jewish scholars.

version of the Bible was very dense and almost unreadable. As a result, Bishop Richard Challoner (1691-1781) provided a revised version which is still in use today (with further revisions to the New Testament texts by Fr Bernard MacMahon, c.1736-1816). The Douai-Rheims Bible we have today uses these Challoner-MacMahon texts.

The Protestant Reformation

In the sixteenth century, Protestant scholars made use of the Hebrew Masoretic text to translate the Bible into the vernacular (the common language of the people). Following the Hebrew texts as well as ideas born of Protestant theology, these scholars decided on an alternative set of canonical books, excluding others as Apocryphal (from the Greek *apokruphos* meaning hide away, and the Latin *apocrypha scripta* meaning hidden writings. Nowadays, some Protestant bibles include the Apocryphal books in the main body of the volume whilst others add them as an appendix. Some do not include them at all.)

King James Version (KJV)

The King James Bible or the Authorized Version was published in English in 1611 under King James. It is the main version of the Bible for the Church of England. Many people like to read the KJV because of the beauty of its language. For example, it is the only version that uses the phrase, 'I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys' in the Song of Songs 2:1.

Revised Standard Version (RSV)

The RSV is a revised version of the King James or Authorized Version. The RSV first appeared in 1881-1885 and 1901, and was revised in 1971. There are Catholic Editions of the RSV sometimes abbreviated to RSV(CE). This translation is probably the most widely used translation in the Catholic English-speaking world today.

Books of the Bible

For a comparison of the books in the different versions of the Bible, and for the difference in the numbering of the psalms, see the tables below.

2. SECOND, WHICH BIBLE SHOULD YOU CHOOSE?

There is no ‘should.’ Each person may choose whichever Bible suits him or her, and there are many, many to choose from. Here, we present just a few suggestions.

- i. **Douai-Rheims Bible** (see notes above). There are several editions currently in-print including from Baronius Press and from St Benedict Press/Tan Books. The language is old fashioned and therefore, to many people, unfamiliar. However, the great advantage is that the vocabulary and syntax lift the reader out of everyday language and makes the reader think about, and engage more deeply with, the text. The Latin Vulgate (of which the Douai-Rheims Bible is the English translation) is also the version used by all the saints and doctors of the Church down the ages, so familiarity with the Douai-Rheims Bible makes it easier to follow the Biblical references of, say, St Augustine, St Bernard of Clairvaux, or St John of the Cross.
- ii. **Knox Bible**. Translated from the Latin Vulgate by Monsignor Ronald Knox (1888-1957), the Knox Bible was officially authorized for use in Catholic churches and schools in 1944. Still in-print with Baronius Press. Again, old fashioned language, and not especially popular but beautiful nonetheless. Knox’s version of the Psalms is also interesting, for example Ps 118 (the longest psalm in the Bible) is, in Hebrew, constructed so that each section is named after the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, Aleph, Beth, Gimel, Daleth, (A,B,C,D) and so forth. In his version, Knox starts each verse of each section with the same letter. So, in the first section, each verse begins with the letter A. Each verse in the second section begins with the letter B. Whatever else you may think of this, it indicates an imaginative approach to the translation as a whole.

*Both the **Douai-Rheims** and the **Knox** Bibles use the Vulgate names for the books of the Bible and the Vulgate numbering of the psalms². All of the following versions, although Catholic, use the Hebrew/Masoretic/Protestant names and numbering.*

- iii. **Catholic Bible** is the Catholic Edition of the English Standard Version (ESV-CE). Created by a team of more than 100 scholars, and now published by the SPCK, it is the version chosen by the Bishops of England & Wales for the new lectionary (the book which contains all the readings at Mass) which will be introduced soon, probably Advent 2023.
- iv. The **Ignatius Bible** uses the RSV(CE) translation. Ignatius Press have produced several different versions – with different levels of commentary –

² See the comparison tables below.

including a series of booklets called the ‘Catholic Study Bible’ which each contain just one book from the Bible with accompanying notes.

- v. **The Great Adventure Bible** is published by Ascension Press, Pennsylvania, USA. It uses the RSV(CE) translation. It has all sorts of useful and informative features such as maps, graphs, diagrams, ‘key events,’ introductory articles, and commentaries.
- vi. **The Catholic Study Bible** uses the New American Bible Revised Edition. Gives extensive reading guides at the start of each book of the Bible as well as informative footnotes throughout.
- vii. **The Navarre Bible** has been produced by the University of Navarre in Spain and is published by Scepter Publishers. It comes as a multi-volume set, and each volume has a thorough commentary. There are seven volumes covering the Old Testament and twelve covering the New Testament. The single-volume ‘Navarre Bible – NT Expanded Edition’ includes a new commentary compared to the previous NT commentaries.
- viii. **Bible in a Year: Your Daily Encounter with God** Published by the Augustine Institute in the USA, it is the only Catholic version – RSV(CE) – which divides the Bible up into 366 sections, one for every day of the year. Each date usually has:
 - 3 chapters from the Old Testament
 - a psalm (or a chapter from the Wisdom literature, that is, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Wisdom, or Sirach)
 - a chapter from the New Testament
 - a brief reflection

Advantage: everything is all laid out for the reader to get through the whole Bible in a year without having to flick back and forth. *Disadvantage:* the choice of chapters does not correspond to the feast days or seasons of the Church’s year, so for example on 25th December the readings are not specifically related to the Nativity. Even so, an excellent ‘Bible in a Year.’
- ix. **The Jerusalem Bible** was translated by a team of French and English scholars in the 1960s, and is the text used in the lectionary at Mass (but see note on the Catholic Bible ESV-CE above) and, therefore, many of its phrases will be very familiar.
- x. **The Bible: A Study Bible freshly translated by Nicholas King SJ** Published by Kevin Mayhew in 2013, it offers a refreshing new wording for many phrases that have, perhaps, become so familiar that we overlook them.

3. BOOKS OF THE BIBLE: A COMPARISON

CLEMENTINE
VULGATE

DOUAI-RHEIMS

KING JAMES VERSION
*Books in italics are
considered Apocryphal*

OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis	Genesis	Genesis
Exodus	Exodus	Exodus
Leviticus	Leviticus	Leviticus
Numeri	Numbers	Numbers
Deuteronomium	Deuteronomy	Deuteronomy
Josue	Josue	Joshua
Judices	Judges	Judges
Ruth	Ruth	Ruth
1 Samuelis also known as 1 Regum	1 Kings	1 Samuel
2 Samuelis also known as 2 Regum	2 Kings	2 Samuel
3 Regum	3 Kings	1 Kings
4 Regum	4 Kings	2 Kings
1 Paralipomenon	1 Paralipomenon ³	1 Chronicles
2 Paralipomenon	2 Paralipomenon	2 Chronicles
1 Esdræ	1 Esdras	Ezra
Nehemiæ also known as 2 Esdræ	2 Esdras	Nehemiah
Tobiaë	Tobias	<i>Tobit</i>
Judith	Judith	<i>Judith</i>
Esther	Esther	Esther and the <i>Rest of Esther</i>
Job	Job	Job
Psalmi	Psalms	Psalms
Proverbia	Proverbs	Proverbs
Ecclesiastes	Ecclesiastes	Ecclesiastes
Canticum Canticorum	Canticle of Canticles	Song of Solomon
Sapientiaë	Wisdom	<i>Wisdom</i>
Ecclesiasticus	Ecclesiasticus	<i>Ecclesiasticus</i>

³ The word *paralipomenon* comes from the Greek *para-* meaning to one side, and *leipein* meaning to leave. In other words *paralipomenon* means things left out or left to one side.

Isaiæ	Isaias	Isaiah
Jeremiæ	Jeremias	Jeremiah
Lamentationes	Lamentations	Lamentations
Baruch	Baruch	<i>Baruch and the Epistle of Jeremy</i>
Ezechielis	Ezechiel	Ezekiel
Danielis	Daniel	<i>Daniel, Song of the Three Children, Story of Susanna, and The Idol Bel and the Dragon</i>
Osee	Osee	Hosea
Joel	Joel	Joel
Amos	Amos	Amos
Abdiæ	Abdias	Obadiah
Jonæ	Jonas	Jonah
Michææ	Micheas	Micah
Nahum	Nahum	Nahum
Habacuc	Habacuc	Habakkuk
Sophonie	Sophonias	Zephaniah
Aggæi	Aggæus	Haggai
Zachariæ	Zacharias	Zechariah
Malachiæ	Malachias	Malachi
1 Machabæorum	1 Machabees	<i>1 Maccabees</i>
2 Machabæorum	2 Machabees	<i>2 Maccabees</i>

NEW TESTAMENT

secundum Matthæum	Matthew	Matthew
secundum Marcum	Mark	Mark
secundum Lucam	Luke	Luke
secundum Ioannem	John	John
Actus	Acts	Acts
ad Romanos	Romans	Romans
1 ad Corinthios	1 Corinthians	1 Corinthians
2 ad Corinthios	2 Corinthians	2 Corinthians
ad Galatas	Galatians	Galatians
ad Ephesios	Ephesians	Ephesians
ad Philippenses	Philippians	Philippians
ad Colossenses	Colossians	Colossians
1 ad Thessalonicenses	1 Thessalonians	1 Thessalonians
2 ad Thessalonicenses	2 Thessalonians	2 Thessalonians

1 ad Timotheum	1 Timothy	1 Timothy
2 ad Timotheum	2 Timothy	2 Timothy
ad Titum	Titus	Titus
ad Philemonem	Philemon	Philemon
ad Hebræos	Hebrews	Hebrews
Iacobi	James	James
1 Petri	1 Peter	1 Peter
2 Petri	2 Peter	2 Peter
1 Ioannis	1 John	1 John
2 Ioannis	2 John	2 John
3 Ioannis	3 John	3 John
Iudæ	Jude	Jude
Apocalypsis	Apocalypse	Revelation

APOCRYPHA

<i>Oratio Manassæ regis</i>	<i>Prayer of Manasses</i>	<i>Prayer of Manasses</i>
<i>3 Esdræ</i>	<i>3 Esdras</i>	<i>1 Esdras</i>
<i>4 Esdræ</i>	<i>4 Esdras</i>	<i>2 Esdras</i>

NUMBERING OF THE PSALMS

The Vulgate and the Douai-Rheims Bibles use the Septuagint numbering whilst Protestant and most modern Catholic editions use the Hebrew Masoretic numbering. So, in most modern Bibles, for the Psalm, ‘The Lord is my shepherd,’ you will see the number 23[22]. The first number refers to the Hebrew Masoretic text; the number in brackets refers to the Septuagint text.

Hebrew numbering (Masoretic)	Greek numbering (Septuagint)
1–8	1–8
9–10	9
11–113	10–112
114–115	113
116	114–115
117–146	116–145
147	146–147
148–150	148–150