

A Brief Survey of Thai Bible Translations

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From time to time, I have been asked by new missionaries which Thai Bible translation they should buy? There are not that many available but for the newcomer to Thailand, and to the Thai language, it can be confusing to know which Bible is best to get. Therefore, for the sake of those who are new to Thailand, or are interested in Bible translations in general, I wanted to give a brief survey of what's available.

1971 Thai Standard Version (ฉบับมาตรฐาน)

This is a [literal translation](#) of the Bible, perhaps most similar to the Revised Standard Version (RSV) in English. This is far and away the most commonly used Bible translation used in Thai churches although some of the language is a bit difficult to understand because the high royal Thai language is often used. Some feel that to not use this royal language would show disrespect for God and/or the Bible. This translation is over 30 years old and the Thailand Bible Society is in the process of doing a revision of the Thai Standard Version to make it somewhat more readable, especially in terms of the royal language. The updated version of the [Pentateuch](#), Psalms & Proverbs, and the [New Testament](#) have already been released and the remainder of the Old Testament is in process. Both the Standard Version and the Standard Version update are available from the [Thailand Bible Society](#).

Update (February 2011) - The Thailand Bible Society has completed its revision of the standard Thai Bible. The Bible is being printed and will become available in April 2011. This is not a complete new translation but an extensive revision based on the Hebrew and Greek. They would very much like it to become the new standard in Thai churches but it will take time for this transition.

Thai New Contemporary Version (ฉบับอมตธรรมร่วมสมัย)

After the standard version, this [dynamic equivalence](#) translation of the Thai Bible is most common. However, it is still a distant second to the 1971 Standard Version. The Thai New Contemporary Version (TNCV) is most similar to the NIV in English, and is produced by the International Bible Society, the same folks who produced the NIV. This version is easier to read than the Standard Version and flows a bit better. Where the royal language is not necessary, it uses common language which is easier to understand. The New Testament came out in 2000 and the Old Testament came out in 2007. The TNCV is available from the [International Bible Society in Thailand](#).

New Thai Translation Version (ฉบับแปลใหม่)

Unlike the Standard Version and the TNCV, which were the works of Bible translation committees from a variety of Protestant church backgrounds, the New Thai Translation Version (NTTV) is primarily the work of just two people, Jerry and Chareeraat Crow of [YWAM](#). I've heard this version also called "the Jerry Crow Bible". This is a very easy to read version, designed to be accessible for the common person. To that end, it avoids the royal language as much as possible. The translators based their translation on the

Greek while cross-referencing several English translations and various advisors gave input. Only the New Testament is available and may be purchased from [Kanok Bannasan \(OMF Publishers Thailand\)](#).

Easy-to-Read Thai New Testament (ฉบับอ่านเข้าใจง่าย)

Produced by the [World Bible Translation Center](#), this is an extremely easy to read version and probably the most accessible of any of the Thai translations for someone with a low degree of literacy and/or education. Royal language is largely avoided and simple vocabulary is chosen. You can download directly from the [World Bible Translation Center](#) or purchase it from [The Bible League Thailand](#).

Thai King James Version

This is exactly what it sounds like: a Thai translation of the authorized King James Version. The Thai KJV New Testament was translated from the English KJV to Thai, however when the translators checked the meanings of words, they referred to the Greek Textus Receptus. The Westcott and Hort text was not used in the translation process. The Thai KJV is not commonly used in Thai churches although it is used exclusively among some fundamental Baptist missionaries who are committed to KJV only. The Thai KJV is available [online for download from Philip Pope's website](#).

Which Thai Bible Translation Should I Use?

For the foreigner starting out, you might want to get the New Thai Contemporary Version, paired with the NIV in a bi-lingual Thai-English edition (either [New Testament](#) or the [whole Bible](#)). The Thai TNCV and English NIV will match up well enough so that you can use the English to figure out the Thai. The Thailand Bible Society also puts out a bi-lingual Thai-English Bible, although they pair the Thai Standard Version with the Good News Bible, an easy to read dynamic English translation. Pairing a literal Thai translation with a dynamic English translation proves rather unhelpful if you want to use the two in conjunction for purposes of language study. Either way though, having a bi-lingual Bible will make it easier to find verses and to skim the text looking for a particular passage. When looking at the Bible with Thai people, this will make life a whole lot easier. A [Thai-Chinese](#) bi-lingual New Testament is also available from the Thailand Bible Society. There is a Thai-German New Testament out there somewhere but I am not sure where you can get it.

Although the TNCV or another easy-to-read Thai Bible might be helpful for the beginning Thai speaker, having anything other than the Thai Standard version usually won't be much help in following along with the Scripture readings at church, or in listening to a sermon where the preacher is referencing the Standard Version. From what I have observed, there is a significant minority of Thai Christians who have something other than the Standard Version for personal use but it is almost universally the 1971 Standard Version which is used in churches, particularly for preaching, public worship services, Bible studies, and prayer meetings. As a foreigner, I've had to learn Thai from the ground up anyhow, so it does not seem to me to be an extra hassle to learn the language of the Standard Version as opposed to an easier to read version. And using the Standard Version allows me to participate more easily in the life of the

Thai church. The Thai pastor whom we work with says, “I am a Thai and Thai is my native language so I don’t find the Standard Version to be problematic. Besides, there are some passages in the Standard Bible that express things in a more round about way (such as Rachel being in the way of a woman while sitting on top of the chest with the stolen idols in it) whereas the easier to read versions just say ‘she had her period’. Where the Bible says something in a more discreet way, we should keep it that way.”

On the other hand, I have some friends in student ministry (both Thai and foreign) who commonly use the Thai New Contemporary Version. They say that for the students they work with, the Standard Version is difficult to understand and using this NIV-like version makes evangelism and discipleship a whole lot easier. One example is [2 Kings 23:7](#), where the word used for “male shrine prostitutes” in the Standard Version is an obscure term (เทวทาส) meaning some sort of religious slave. But in the TNCV, it plainly says male prostitutes (โสเภณีชาย). Also, I was recently told that the faculty and students at [Bangkok Bible Seminary](#) all use the Thai New Contemporary Version in their classes because it is much more readable for native Thai speakers (as compared to the Standard Version).

For personal Bible reading, I use the Standard Version. By principle, I prefer a more literal translation of the Bible even if it is not quite as fluid and natural as a more dynamic translation. In English, I use the [ESV](#) and find it quite easy to compare the Thai Standard Version and the [ESV](#) to figure out difficult words and phrases since they are both literal translations.

For sermon preparation, I generally use the Thai Standard Version and consult the other translations to see how else a passage might be expressed in Thai. The sentence patterns, structure, and vocabulary in the Thai Standard Bible is not necessarily the language that a Thai person would use to explain Scripture in a natural colloquial way so the various translations (and some Thai Bible commentaries) are helpful in figuring out how to express the truths of Scripture in a way that is understandable. The language of Scripture should be sufficiently plain so that the common man can understand it but at the same time the language of Scripture should as closely as possible reflect what the original text actually says. It is a tough balance to strike.

I can’t really say that any of the available Thai Bible translations is “the best” Although I prefer the Standard Version because it is a literal translation, in some places it is difficult to understand and I’m not sure that all of the word choices are the best (see my [previous post](#) on the translation of the word “godliness” in Thai Bibles). I find the Standard Version to be generally good although sometimes I think that another translation has captured the sense of the original a bit better. The updated Standard version clears up some of the more difficult words and includes helpful footnotes explaining the meaning of the less common royal words that are used. Once the Thailand Bible Society finishes updating the rest of the Old Testament, the updated Thai Standard Version will probably become the one used by most churches and it is the one

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that I will probably use as well. However, it is still possible that the New Thai Contemporary Version will overtake the Standard Version in popularity. Time will tell.