

# Comparison of NRSVue and NRSV Bibles on the Book of Mark

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### 1. Introduction to the NRSV and NRSVue Translations

#### 1.1 Historical Background of the NRSV

The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) holds a significant place in the history of English Bible translations. It originated as a revision of the Revised Standard Version (RSV), which itself was a revision of the American Standard Version (ASV). Initiated to update language and textual accuracy, the NRSV was first published in 1989 by the National Council of Churches (NCC) in the United States, under the Division of Christian Education. The translation effort aimed to produce a text that served the devotional, liturgical, and scholarly needs of a broad range of Christian denominations, including Protestant, Catholic, Anglican, and Eastern Orthodox traditions. This ecumenical intent underscores the NRSV's wide acceptance and use in various religious contexts [1]. The translation team sought to maintain fidelity to the earliest available manuscripts while providing language that remained accessible and relevant to contemporary readers, juggling the dual demands of literal accuracy and readability. It has become a standard in theological education and academic biblical studies, prized particularly for its careful balance between precision and inclusivity [2].

#### 1.2 Development and Purpose of the NRSVue

The New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition (NRSVue) represents a major and comprehensive revision of the NRSV that was formally announced at the 2017 Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) and completed in 2021. This revision was overseen by the SBL under an agreement with the National Council of Churches, reflecting a coordinated scholarly effort to incorporate the latest advances in textual criticism, manuscript discoveries, and biblical scholarship [3]. The extensive revision process spanned approximately three years, demonstrating the commitment to thoroughness and fidelity to updated academic standards. The revision maintains the original translation philosophy laid out by the NRSV, namely, that the text should be “as literal as possible, as free as necessary,” which ensures a balance between formal equivalence and dynamic clarity for modern readers, and notably preserves the formal tone that marks the NRSV's style [4]. NRSVue further integrates advancements in manuscript research and textual analysis conducted since the original NRSV's publication, positioning itself as the most up-to-date English-language Bible translation in terms of scholarly textual accuracy [5]. Its publication signals both continuity and innovation in Bible translation, serving the same broad range of Christian faith communities but

with enhanced fidelity to contemporary biblical studies.

### **1.3 Translation Philosophy and Methodology**

Both the NRSV and its updated edition, the NRSVue, consciously eliminate archaic English pronouns such as “thee,” “thou,” and “thine,” aiming for readability and approachability without sacrificing textual accuracy. This modernization reflects a commitment to contemporary English usage that better facilitates comprehension among modern readers, without diminishing the sacred or formal nature of the text [6]. Additionally, a distinctive hallmark of the NRSV translation philosophy, which the NRSVue retains and extends, is the use of gender-inclusive language where the original biblical texts are judged to be inclusive. This reflects a scholarly sensitivity towards the social and theological implications of language, attempting to broaden inclusion without distorting the original meanings [7]. Methodologically, the NRSV and NRSVue strive for a balance between formal equivalence (word-for-word translation) and dynamic equivalence (thought-for-thought translation). This approach allows for textual fidelity while also ensuring clarity and nuance understandable for contemporary audiences [5]. While maintaining a formal tone consistent with the traditional style of biblical scholarship, the NRSVue subtly adjusts language and phrasing to improve readability and to incorporate fresh textual insights.

## **2. Textual Updates in the Book of Mark**

### **2.1 Language Modernization and Terminology Changes**

One of the notable textual updates in the Book of Mark within the NRSVue involves the modernization of medical and descriptive terminology to reflect contemporary vocabulary. For example, in Mark 1:40, where the NRSV traditionally renders the afflicted individual as “a leper,” the NRSVue opts instead for “a man with a skin disease.” This change reflects a desire to avoid the outdated term “leper,” which carries historical stigma and less precise contemporary medical meaning. Importantly, this adjustment does not attempt to impose novel terminology beyond current scholarly consensus but rather reframes ancient descriptions within a vocabulary accessible to modern readers, providing a different but more contextually sensitive view into the ancient world [8]. Similarly, Matthew 4:24 sees a shift from “demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics” in the NRSV to “people possessed by demons or having epilepsy or afflicted with paralysis” in the NRSVue, which attempts to clarify and elaborate on terms that may otherwise appear technical or obscure to modern readers [9]. Overall, these updates in Mark reflect a broader trend in the NRSVue toward linguistic clarity without sacrificing textual fidelity.

### **2.2 Manuscript-Based Variations Impacting Mark**

The NRSVue’s revisions arise from engagement with newly discovered ancient manuscripts and refined textual research methodologies unavailable or undeveloped during the original NRSV translation. These manuscript discoveries have led to some changes in textual variants that impact certain verses in the Book of Mark, reflecting a deeper consultation of earliest manuscript traditions and variant readings. The three-year review process ensured that the

NRSVue incorporated such textual evidence, resulting in adjustments aimed at producing a text that aligns more closely with the most reliable and ancient textual witnesses [3]. Through this, the NRSVue demonstrates responsiveness to advances in biblical scholarship that prioritize historical accuracy and fidelity to original sources, often updating or modifying verses to include or exclude phrases found to be later additions or textual interpolations in manuscript traditions [2]. These updated readings improve the Bible’s scholarly reliability and its suitability for academic and liturgical use.

## **2.3 Specific Case: Mark 1:1 Textual Revision**

A particularly significant and controversial change in the NRSVue appears in Mark 1:1. Where the NRSV reads, “The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God,” the NRSVue omits the phrase “Son of God,” rendering it as simply “The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ.” This alteration derives from manuscript evidence indicating that some ancient authorities lack the designation “Son of God” in this verse, presenting a textual variant that raises questions about the originality of this Christological title in the earliest manuscripts [10]. This omission has provoked scholarly discussion and controversy, given the theological implications of removing an explicit Christological affirmation from the opening of Mark’s Gospel. Some scholars interpret this as a reflection of responsible textual criticism that prioritizes manuscript reliability, while others express concern about the impact of such changes on traditional Christology and faith interpretations [11]. The revision is a notable example of how the NRSVue incorporates the latest manuscript research, even when such changes touch sensitive theological territory [12].

## **3. Translation Style and Language Differences**

### **3.1 Use of Gender-Inclusive Language**

A salient difference in the translation style between the NRSV and NRSVue emerges in the handling of gender-inclusive language, particularly in references to groups traditionally rendered with masculine terms. The NRSVue more frequently employs “brothers and sisters” to convey the inclusivity intended in the original Greek “adelphoi,” where the NRSV was more likely to use alternatives like “believers,” “beloved,” or “friends” to avoid the masculine-only connotation of “brothers.” This enhancement of gender-inclusive language aligns with the NRSVue’s expanded commitment to reflecting the inclusive intent of the original texts, carefully balancing faithful translation with modern sensitivity [13]. This adjustment underscores a broader scholarly and ecclesiastical movement toward inclusivity without compromising textual integrity. The NRSVue follows the precedent set by the NRSV but provides more consistency in this inclusive terminology in communal and ecclesiastical contexts [7].

### **3.2 Formality and Readability Comparison**

The NRSVue retains the formal tone characteristic of the NRSV, maintaining its suitability for liturgical and academic use. However, it advances in terms of clarity and modern vocabulary, updating expressions that might otherwise appear archaic or obscure to contemporary

readers. For instance, as noted in the change in Mark 1:40’s terminology, the shift to “a man with a skin disease” offers a precise yet accessible rendering while preserving the formality of the original translation style. The NRSVue carefully calibrates such modernizations to ensure that they do not lessen the text’s reverence or scholarly legitimacy [4]. This balance results in a text that reads more smoothly for audiences today while holding fast to the original’s formal equivalence philosophy. Examples abound throughout Mark where vocabulary and phrasing have been adapted for contemporary understanding while retaining theological and historical depth [8].

### **3.3 Handling of Potentially Controversial or Sensitive Terms**

The NRSVue reflects careful attention to terms that may carry controversial, sensitive, or culturally loaded meanings, aiming to navigate modern sensibilities thoughtfully without compromising textual fidelity. An example includes the modification from “servant girl” to “female servant” in Mark 14:69, which alleviates a potentially belittling or diminutive connotation, offering a more respectful and accurate portrayal of the original text’s social dynamics [14]. Additionally, terms linked to social or cultural perceptions—such as those related to disease, stigma, or identity—are carefully reconsidered to prevent misunderstanding or offense while preserving the original meaning. However, such decisions also attract criticism, with some viewing them as liberal adaptations that might dilute doctrinal clarity or introduce interpretive bias [15]. Others argue that the translation choices reflect responsible scholarship and pastoral sensitivity to modern readers’ contexts [16].

## **4. Significant Verse-by-Verse Comparison in Mark**

### **4.1 Mark 1:1 – Introduction to Jesus’ Identity**

Mark 1:1 serves as the opening proclamation of the Gospel and its Christological emphasis. The NRSV translates this verse as “The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God,” establishing immediately Jesus’ divine identity. This rendering reflects both traditional Christian doctrine and the textual evidence available at the time of translation. In contrast, the NRSVue omits “Son of God,” rendering it simply as “The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ.” This change arises from recognition of variant manuscript traditions—some of the earliest Greek manuscripts do not include this phrase. Accordingly, the NRSVue prioritizes textual authenticity over theological tradition in this instance [10]. This modification has significant implications for Christological interpretation, representing a shift that challenges readers and communities to grapple with questions of textual evidence versus doctrinal affirmations. The omission is controversial, inviting debate among biblical scholars, theologians, and church communities about the balance between critical scholarship and faith commitments [12]. It is noteworthy that other contemporary annotated translations, such as the Jewish Annotated New Testament, retain the phrase but note its absence in some authorities, indicating the complex manuscript history of this verse [17].

## 4.2 Mark 1:40 – Description of the Leper/Man with Skin Disease

In Mark 1:40, the NRSV refers to the afflicted person as “a leper,” utilizing the traditional biblical terminology that has long appeared in English translations. The NRSVue, however, updates this to “a man with a skin disease,” a phrase that aligns better with modern medical terminology and avoids the pejorative associations born from historical leprosy stigmatization [8]. This linguistic shift reflects an academic and pastoral sensitivity that seeks to preserve the meaning and narrative intent while ensuring clarity and relevance for present-day readers. By choosing this more descriptive and neutral terminology, the NRSVue facilitates a better understanding of the historical context—where “leprosy” might cover a range of skin ailments—and thereby enriches contemporary comprehension of the healing narrative [9]. This change exemplifies how biblical translation must negotiate ancient concepts with modern conceptual frameworks and levels of medical knowledge.

## 4.3 Mark 14:69 – Terminology for Servant Girl / Female Servant

The translation of Mark 14:69 provides a clear example of the NRSVue’s commitment to respectful gender language. The NRSV uses the phrase “servant girl,” which some readers and scholars have found to carry a belittling or diminutive implication. The NRSVue revises this to “female servant,” which offers a more neutral and respectful term, avoiding gendered diminishment while remaining faithful to the original Greek term [14]. Such adjustments resonate with contemporary concerns about language that reflects respect and dignity, especially for roles traditionally assigned to women in biblical narratives. This translation choice also illustrates the broader trend within NRSVue to balance linguistic precision with evolving cultural sensitivities concerning gender and social roles.

# 5. Theological and Interpretive Implications

## 5.1 Changes Affecting Christological Titles in Mark

The removal of the phrase “Son of God” from Mark 1:1 in the NRSVue notably impacts traditional Christological understanding. This phrase has historically underscored Jesus’ divine status and Messiahship in Christian theology. Its omission based on manuscript evidence introduces complexities into the interpretive framework, prompting scholars and readers to reconsider the foundation of Christology as presented in the earliest Gospel texts [10]. This change highlights the tension between textual criticism—which privileges the earliest available evidence—and doctrinal traditions that have long affirmed particular Christological titles. The NRSVue’s choice illustrates a commitment to textual accuracy that may challenge readers’ theological expectations and necessitate enriched interpretive discourse on the origins and development of Christological titles [17].

## 5.2 Influence of Terminology Changes on Narrative Understanding

Terminological changes, such as substituting “leper” with “man with a skin disease,” influence how readers perceive the social and religious world of Jesus’ ministry. Such updates affect the reader’s understanding of purity laws, social stigma, and the radical nature of Jesus’ healings.

By clarifying disease terms, the NRSVue better communicates the historical realities and social ramifications of afflictions described in the biblical text. This has the potential to deepen readers' empathy and insight into the Gospel narratives by emphasizing accurate, culturally informed descriptions over outdated labels, thus affecting theological reflection on Jesus' ministry and social engagement [8]. It also reframes the healing narrative, providing modern readers a more accessible lens into the significance of Jesus' acts of compassion [9].

### 5.3 Gender-Inclusive Translation and Its Impact on Ecclesiology

The expanded use of gender-inclusive language in the NRSVue, particularly substituting “brothers and sisters” for masculine-only terms, impacts ecclesiological reading and theological reflection. This choice promotes a more inclusive understanding of the early Christian community portrayed in Mark and other texts, reflecting the communal identity beyond male-exclusive imagery [13]. By honoring the inclusivity arguably inherent in the original texts, this translation fosters an ecclesiology that welcomes the full breadth of Christian participants. However, this approach also requires careful balancing to ensure faithfulness to original intent while adapting to contemporary church contexts and sensibilities [7]. Such gender-inclusive translation choices contribute to ongoing conversations about inclusivity, representation, and the evolving role of language within Christian liturgy and theology.

## 6. Scholarly Reception and Criticism

### 6.1 Positive Evaluation of NRSVue Updates

The NRSVue has garnered praise for its extensive incorporation of the latest manuscript discoveries and advances in biblical scholarship, positioning it as one of the most extensively updated English-language Bible translations currently available [18]. Scholars have noted its improvements in linguistic clarity, modern vocabulary, and sensitivity to gender-inclusive language as strengths that enhance both readability and scholarly integrity [4]. The NRSVue is recognized as a valuable tool not only for devotional reading but also for academic study, with its updated text providing a fresh and reliable rendition of Scripture that meets contemporary scholarly standards [19]. This broad approval positions the NRSVue as a worthy successor to the NRSV in diverse Christian settings.

### 6.2 Critiques and Controversies Surrounding Key Changes

Despite such positive reception, the NRSVue has attracted significant critique, especially concerning the removal of explicit Christological phrases such as “Son of God” in Mark 1:1. Critics argue that these changes dilute central doctrinal affirmations and reflect a liberal translation agenda that could lead to theological confusion or diminished clarity concerning key Christian beliefs [16]. There are also concerns about the generalization or omission of explicit condemnations or theological terms in passages such as 1 Corinthians 6:9, raising questions about fidelity to doctrinal teachings [15]. Some scholars and readers express distrust or dissatisfaction, fearing that certain updates may stem from ideological rather than purely scholarly motivations [20]. These controversies underscore the challenges involved in balancing textual precision, theological tradition, and evolving cultural contexts.

## 6.3 Comparisons with Other Bible Translations in Mark

In comparing the NRSVue to other major Bible translations such as the RSV, ESV, and NIV, the NRSVue often demonstrates a nuanced approach that captures textual and linguistic subtleties better than some more literal or thought-for-thought versions. For instance, the RSV-CE and ESV-CE, while often more literal, may lack the nuanced gender inclusivity or updated manuscript evidence incorporated into the NRSVue [21]. The NRSVue benefits from ongoing ecumenical acceptance, used in Protestant, Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox communions alike, distinguishing it among translations for its academic rigor and broad liturgical utility [22]. These comparisons highlight the NRSVue's role as a bridge between scholarship and worship, offering translation choices that resonate across denominational lines while embracing modern critical research.

## 7. Linguistic and Semantic Nuances in Key Passages

### 7.1 Translation of Ambiguous Greek Terms

The NRSVue pays particular attention to terms in the original Greek that carry semantic ambiguity or multiple possible meanings. Compared to the NRSV, the updated edition sometimes chooses more precise or contextually sensitive renderings to capture these nuances better. This approach is well exemplified in Mark's text, where certain Greek words have layered meanings that require careful interpretive decisions. The NRSVue balances formal equivalence with a dynamic awareness of semantic range, which enables it to represent subtle distinctions more clearly to modern readers while remaining faithful to the source language [23]. As a result, key passages may feature phrasing that better conveys ancient intent and connotation without oversimplifying complex lexical semantics [5].

### 7.2 Semantic Shifts Affecting Narrative Tone

Certain word choices or phrasings in the NRSVue shift the narrative tone or social connotations within Mark's Gospel. For example, the transition from "servant girl" to "female servant" in Mark 14:69 not only modernizes terminology but also adjusts the tone to be more respectful and less diminutive, altering the portrayal of social roles and agency within the narrative [14]. Similarly, substituting "brothers and sisters" for male-only terms softens gender exclusivity and broadens the communal tone, which impacts how readers perceive the inclusiveness and dynamics of early Christian communities [13]. These semantic shifts enhance narrative coherence and reader engagement, albeit while requiring theological and ecclesiastical sensitivity in communication.

### 7.3 Consistency in Translation Strategy across Mark

The NRSVue demonstrates a commendable consistency in applying its translation philosophy across the Book of Mark, consistently following its guiding principle of "as literal as possible, as free as necessary." This results in a coherent and unified text that respects both the source language and the expectations of contemporary readership. The NRSVue preserves the formal feel of the original NRSV while introducing necessary updates and clarifications

without generating jarring tonal shifts or inconsistencies between verses [5]. This consistency supports a fluid reading experience and facilitates both personal devotion and academic inquiry, ensuring that theological themes and narrative flow remain clear throughout Mark's Gospel [4].

## **8. Impact on Biblical Scholarship and Study**

### **8.1 Use of NRSVue in Academic and Theological Settings**

The NRSVue is increasingly being adopted among biblical scholars, seminaries, and theological institutions, in part due to its integration of recently discovered manuscripts and updated textual analysis. It is considered highly suitable for academic research and exegesis, providing an authoritative basis for study that incorporates the latest textual data [5]. Its ecumenical nature further supports interdenominational dialogue and collaborative biblical scholarship, making it a favored choice in contexts that require a balanced approach to text, theology, and modern scholarship [2]. Academics appreciate the NRSVue's capacity to serve devotional, liturgical, and scholarly purposes cohesively [24].

### **8.2 Influence on Exegetical Commentary and Resources**

The publication of the NRSVue has influenced the development of updated commentaries, study Bibles, and biblical software applications that aim to incorporate cutting-edge scholarship and textual fidelity. Modern exegetical resources increasingly use the NRSVue text as a baseline, especially for passages with significant manuscript variants or linguistic ambiguities. This allows scholars and students to engage with the newest critical apparatus and interpretive frameworks when analyzing the Book of Mark and other biblical texts [19]. Consequently, the NRSVue contributes to the shaping of contemporary interpretive paradigms and enriches the academic discourse surrounding New Testament studies [21].

### **8.3 Reflections on Translation Updates Affecting Faith Communities**

The NRSVue's updates resonate differently across diverse Christian traditions and faith communities. While Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox liturgical contexts broadly recognize the NRSVue and value its ecumenical approach, reactions vary regarding specific translation choices, especially those with theological or doctrinal weight. Clergy and laypeople expressed both endorsements and concerns about the text's modern language and theological nuances, reflecting ongoing debates about the role of translation philosophy in shaping biblical literacy and faith formation [22]. Nonetheless, the NRSVue plays a pivotal role in advancing biblical engagement through scholarship-sensitive translation that addresses contemporary readers' needs [25].

## **9. Comparative Table of Key Verse Translations in Mark**

### **9.1 Selected Verses Highlighting Differences Between NRSV and NRSVue**

Verse

NRSV Translation

NRSVue Translation

Notes

Mark 1:1

“The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”

“The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ.”

Omission of “Son of God” phrase based on manuscript evidence

Mark 1:40

“A leper came to him and begged him.”

“A man with a skin disease came to him and begged him.”

Modern terminology for medical condition

Mark 14:69

“The servant girl.”

“The female servant.”

More respectful gender language

These examples distill some of the most notable differences in translation philosophy between the two versions, illustrating the NRSVue’s orientation toward manuscript accuracy, linguistic modernization, and gender-inclusive language [8]. Such changes have implications not only for textual fidelity but also for theological interpretation and devotional reading [10]. They reflect a nuanced approach that honors tradition while embracing contemporary academic and pastoral concerns [14].

## 9.2 Summary of Translation Philosophy Reflected in Key Differences

The key differences between the NRSV and the NRSVue highlighted in the selected verses reveal an underlying translation philosophy that balances literal accuracy with contemporary clarity and inclusivity. The NRSVue consciously incorporates updated manuscript research, evident in its omission of certain disputed Christological titles, while also modernizing terminology and enhancing gender-inclusive language. This philosophy aims to harmonize respect for ancient texts’ integrity with the communicative demands of modern audiences, striving for a translation that is both faithful and relevant [4]. The NRSVue shows a willingness to challenge established phrasing when justified by textual evidence, revealing a commitment to critical biblical scholarship [5].

## 9.3 Implications for Readers’ Interpretation of Mark

The translation changes in the NRSVue have substantial implications for readers’ theological comprehension and devotional engagement with the Gospel of Mark. For scholarly readers,

the updated text offers increased reliability and nuance, incorporating manuscript evidence and refined linguistic choices. For lay readers and faith communities, these changes may necessitate adjusted interpretive approaches, as omissions like the “Son of God” phrase challenge traditional understandings. The modernization of terms such as “leper” affects how healing narratives are perceived, fostering a more informed and compassionate engagement with historical context. Gender-inclusive language invites readers to envision early Christian communities more inclusively, influencing ecclesiological reflection [10]. Overall, these updates invite ongoing dialogue between tradition and scholarship in the interpretation and reading of Scripture [16].

## 10. Conclusion and Future Perspectives

### 10.1 Overall Assessment of Differences Between NRSV and NRSVue in Mark

In summary, the NRSVue represents a significant evolution of the NRSV, bringing numerous linguistic, textual, and theological updates to the Book of Mark. These include modernization of terminology, incorporation of recent manuscript discoveries, expanded use of gender-inclusive language, and selective omission or adjustment of Christologically sensitive phrases. While maintaining the NRSV’s foundational translation philosophy and formal tone, the NRSVue advances the field of biblical translation by embedding contemporary scholarly findings and pastoral concerns. However, some of these changes remain contested within certain faith and scholarly circles, particularly those touching upon Christology and doctrinal clarity [4]. The overall evaluation suggests that the NRSVue improves upon the NRSV in textual fidelity and modern relevance, though it invites ongoing critical reflection and dialogue [3].

### 10.2 Impact on Bible Translation Landscape

The NRSVue’s emergence positions it as one of the foremost English Bible translations in academic and ecumenical contexts. Its authoritative scholarship, combined with accessible language and ecumenical intent, give it a central role in the contemporary Bible translation landscape. It bridges denominational divides and supports interreligious dialogue through its scholarly rigor and inclusive translation philosophy. The NRSVue likely will influence future translation projects by setting a high standard for integrating textual criticism, linguistic sensitivity, and theological awareness [2]. Its balanced approach makes it a preferred choice in many academic, ecclesiastical, and devotional settings [24].

### 10.3 Recommendations for Readers and Scholars

For readers and scholars engaging with the Gospel of Mark, it is vital to appreciate the manuscript basis and scholarly rationale behind the NRSVue’s updates. Comparative study between the NRSV and NRSVue can enrich understanding by illuminating textual variants and translation philosophies. Readers should approach these translations with awareness of their impact on interpretation and faith formation, considering both the theological implications and academic advances they embody. Scholars are encouraged to integrate the

NRSVue into research, teaching, and exegesis while also critically evaluating contested translation choices. Such informed engagement will foster deeper biblical literacy and promote informed dialogue between faith traditions and modern scholarship [5], [19].

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