



***The Personal Size Reference Bible: English Standard Version***

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**Introduction**

The year was 2003 and I was a Sunday school teacher in my former church, teaching a class of young men ages 8-16. One Sunday morning the Sunday school director gave me a copy of *Revolution: The Bible for Teen Guys, New International Version*. I remember appreciating it at the time but sort of writing it off because I regularly read and taught from the KJV. But once I started to flip through that Bible I discovered that I'd sit there and read it for 4 or 5 hours at a time. Some of the special features were nice and it had a certain look that was appealing, but it was the text itself that I was taken with, there was something special about this Bible that kept me in it for hours at every sitting. It wouldn't be until years later that I'd realize it was the single-column format that held my attention.

So it was with this in mind that I started to seek out single-columned Bibles in this past year. There's something about the single-column format that just makes a Bible easier to read. I'm sure studies have been done to pinpoint what that is exactly, but my uneducated guess is that we're taught to read (English at least) from left to right straight across the page. There's something natural and intuitive about reading a single-column Bible, for me at least. But there's other benefits as well that I'd like to note. It wasn't until I started with single-column Bibles that I was truly able to appreciate the poetic sections of Scripture. It's not that they say anything differently, but they're formatted in such a way as to make the parallelism that's conspicuous in

the original languages more readily apparent to those of us reading in English translation. There's also the benefit of paragraph divisions that appear clearly in single-columned Bibles but are somewhat muddled in a double-column format. By reading the Biblical authors in paragraphs we're able to see their thoughts more clearly for some strange reason. Again, I'm sure there are more technical ways to put this, but unfortunately, I'm not the one to put them that way.

My appreciation for the single-column format led me to Crossway's *ESV Personal Size Reference Bible* because in addition to my love for the single-column format, I also love cross-references that lead me further into the text. But there were a few other factors in my requesting this specific Bible for review. To start, I was looking for a Bible that I could carry around without feeling like I was lugging around a cinder block. I don't know if you've noticed, but a lot of Bibles are humongous for no good reason. I was also looking for something durable with sewn binding. My experience with Bibles that have glued binding has not been overly-positive. A few have fallen apart on me. In addition to this I wanted something that would lay open flat in my hand and feel comfortable for those times when I have to preach or teach. The *Personal Size Reference* ESV seemed a perfect match.

### **Text**

I was a bit worried initially because the text appears in 7 point type. My eyesight isn't what it once was so there was a fear that the small type would be hard to read. Fortunately, it's not when held at the proper distance. For my eyes I can see the text just fine when the Bible is within 18" of my line of sight. This means that I can sit or stand and hold it at stomach level and read with ease. Past that things get a bit blurry for me. But this is for the Biblical text only; the cross-references and concordance appear in smaller print that I need to be closer to read.

### **Cover**

The genuine leather cover is a bit stiff. When I first received this Bible it sat out in the cold for a few hours so I decided to let it warm up before opening it. Once it acclimated to the inside conditions I was surprised at how stiff the cover was. It was honestly stiffer than any bonded leather Bible I've ever owned and certainly more stiff than the synthetic TruTone and DuoTone covers that are on the market. After a couple of months of daily use the leather has loosened up a bit but it's still fairly stiff. I'd imagine that continued use will help it to get to the point that one expects when dealing with genuine leather. I'll also note the ribbon marker here. I *love* ribbon markers, but not when they're too short. Unfortunately, the ribbon marker in this edition is an inch or two too short. It barely makes it to the side of the Bible when sliding it out.

## Features

The cross-reference system is fantastic; everything I expected. The references appear on the inner-margins of each page but they don't run into the gutter so that you can't see them. The print is small but manageable. When it exceeds the space available in the inner-margins it runs off into the page's footer but appears above footnotes. The footnotes are those that come standard in every ESV, or at least every ESV that I've ever owned. They fall into four main categories 1) Alternative Translations, 2) Explanations of Greek and Hebrew Terms, 3) Other Explanatory Notes (e.g., clarifying additional meanings or important grammatical points, noting when additions have been made to the English text, etc.), and 4) Technical Translation Notes (see xii-xiii for fuller explanations). Each book of the Bible is given a brief introduction that I'm sure some will find useful. I personally think it's a bit superfluous and wouldn't miss them if they weren't there.

## Translation

I know it's popular nowadays to speak evil about the ESV but I've honestly never had a problem with it. There was a time when I'd quote it exclusively on my blog because it was close enough to the KJV with which I "grew up" with and contemporary English that everyone could understand it. That's also largely the reason why I like it for Sunday service and Bible study (when I'm not teaching). My pastor reads from the KJV so when I have the ESV on hand it's close enough that I can follow along with little to no problem, and yet contemporary enough that I might be able to catch something that the KJV doesn't make clear. There are always things to quibble with about translations, and if I had to compare it to others of its ilk then I might give the NRSV a slight edge, but I'd just as soon leave the debates about translation to the experts. As a native English speaker/reader I have no problem understanding the ESV and that's what matters most.

## Conclusion

At the end of the day the *Personal Size Reference* ESV has become my most regularly used Bible at the moment. It suits my purposes just fine and for that reason alone I can recommend it. There's room for improvement to be sure but I think that the positive far outweighs the negative. Anyone looking for an affordable Bible that can travel with them easily would do well to invest in this one. The only thing I'd say is that you might carefully consider your cover preference before making your purchase. I suspect that had I gone with a synthetic TruTone cover I would have been met with the desired feel that I thought genuine leather would bring.