

RESOURCES FOR BIBLE STUDY

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God communicated with man in human language. He expects us to read and understand His Word. Bible study is not just for professionals. Bible study is for all who want to know God and His will for their lives.

Religious leaders cannot perform our godliness for us. God created each person with a mind as a gift from Him. God's message of salvation is offered and addressed to all men. Our salvation is conditioned upon our individual response. Because of the importance of our relationship with God it is imperative that we seek to read with understanding His Word so we can obey His will.

Every person who can read basic literature can profitably read the Bible. Reading any book written in a culture and language different from one's own presents some difficulties. Readable, reliable translations of the Bible help us cross the language gap.

Valuable reference books are available to help us cross the historical and cultural gap in understanding the background of the Biblical events.

A contractor or carpenter has many specialized tools that the ordinary person will not own. But every household handyman needs some basic tools (such as, a hammer, saw and pliers). Preachers and Bible teachers should have an extensive library containing many helps for Bible study. But every Christian needs some basic resources for Bible study.

STUDY BIBLE

Every serious Bible student needs a standard, fairly literal translation of the Bible. When studying the Bible the reader wants to know as exactly as possible what God said through the original writers. One should select a version that accurately reflects the original meaning of the Hebrew and Greek texts. Accuracy and clarity are the most important standards in the translation chosen for a study Bible.

It is helpful to have a Bible which has the prose sections printed in paragraphs and the poetry printed in poetic form. The type size should be large enough for ease in reading. The lifetime of a Bible depends on the original quality of the cover, paper and binding, on frequency and carefulness in handling, and on exposure to sunlight and dampness. The most durable covers, genuine morocco or top grain cowhide, are more expensive but are worth it if one expects long use of a Bible.

A translation by a committee is usually to be preferred over a translation by an individual. A one-man translation is more likely to reflect his theological and cultural peculiarities. Of course a committee may share prejudices as well. The theological bias of the translators is often in translations, for example the Calvinism in the *King James Version*, liberalism in places in the *Revised Standard Version* (especially the Old Testament), and the

Jehovah Witness doctrines in the *New World Translation*.

A study Bible usually includes center references, an introduction to each book, a concordance, maps and sometimes a Bible dictionary. Study Bibles are available with minimal helps or extensive helps. More helps do not necessarily make the best study Bible. Choose the one with the helps you will use. One should avoid Bibles with notes offering doctrinal comments on the text. Some readers think the notes are inspired in the same way the Biblical text is inspired. Study Bibles with doctrinal notes often advocate their author's particular theology, for example the *Scofield Reference Bible* teaches dispensational premillennialism. A study Bible developed by several editors representing a broad range of backgrounds is usually a better choice.

The *New American Standard Bible (Reference Edition)* (Foundation Press; Collins-World; several publishers) provides a good choice. The center references, notes on word meanings and the brief concordance increase its usefulness. *The Master Study Bible* (Holman) adds many extra helps to the reference edition. The *New American Standard Bible* rates high in accuracy because it attempts to preserve the meaning of each word and phrase in the original. At times its readability suffers because of being overly literal. Continuity of thought is hindered by the fact that it is usually printed with each verse as a separate paragraph.

The *Revised Standard Version* is available in the *Harper Study Bible* (Zondervan). Harold Lindsell, former editor of *Christianity Today*, wrote the notes in this study Bible. This readable translation is weakened in a limited number of places especially in the Old Testament because of the liberal bias of the translators but it is one of the better choices for New Testament study.

Perhaps the most extensive study Bible using the *King James Version* is *The Thompson Chain Reference Bible* (Kirkbride Bible Co.). The *Dixon Analytic Bible* has the *King James Version* with the *American Standard Version* in brackets accompanied with many helps. The *New King James Bible* (Nelson) is available in a

reference edition. This updating of the KJV replaces obsolete words with words in current use.

The *New International Version Study Bible* (Zondervan) has the basic study Bible helps with notes, some doctrinal in nature, as well. *The NIV Thompson Chain Reference* is also available. The *New International Version* uses contemporary language with a high degree of readability, but in some places it sacrifices literal accuracy.

In addition to one's primary study Bible it is helpful to have another translation of the Bible. If a study Bible is chosen from the *New American Standard Bible*, the *Revised Standard Version*, or the *King James Version*, then the *New International Version* would be a good choice for a second version. Comparison with another version often enables one to have a better understanding of a passage.

A paraphrase, such as the *Living Bible* or the *Good News Bible* (TEV), is useful for a general grasp of a book or passage. But such paraphrases are not accurate enough to be recommended for a study Bible because so much of the translator's opinion is expressed in such an expanded translation.

In 1987 Moody Press published *The Discovery Bible: New Testament*. It uses the text of the *New American Standard Bible* and has a system of helps which enables the English reader to gain insight from the Greek original. One can learn what word or words conveys emphasis in the Greek. The mode of action expressed by Greek tenses can be learned. One can learn which Greek synonym underlies the English word.

BIBLE DICTIONARY

The *New International Dictionary of the Bible, Pictorial Edition*, edited by Merrill C. Tenney with J.D. Douglas as revising editor, has concise, conservative articles about Bible people, places, things and topics. For those wanting a more extensive

reference set, the five-volume *Zondervan's Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, edited by Merrill C. Tenney or *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Eerdmans) recently revised, would be good choices. A Bible encyclopedia is not limited to Bible words. It deals with any topic the editor feels is relevant to Bible study.

Vine's *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Revell, MacDonald) gives to the person who does not know the Greek language the most help in understanding New Testament words. Many Bible students testify that this is one of their most used and appreciated Bible study aids.

CONCORDANCE

Since there are about 31,000 verses in the Bible it is difficult at times to locate a verse. A concordance is a valuable study aid. A concordance has an alphabetical listing of the words used in the Bible and gives each reference where the word is used. A concordance serves two basic functions: locating the reference in the Bible where the statement is made and listing the references for each usage of the word in the Bible, a definite benefit in word and topic studies. Young's (Eerdmans) and Strong's (Abingdon) are the two standard exhaustive concordances. They list every time a word is used in the *King James Bible*. Thomas' *New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance* (Holman) is arranged in the same way as Strong's. Exhaustive concordances are available on other versions. See Chapter 10 for more information on the use of concordances and dictionaries.

BIBLE HANDBOOK

Halley's Bible Handbook has served as an invaluable tool for years and is still worthy as a reference work which gives

background, introduction, and survey of each Bible book. *The Eerdmans' Handbook to the Bible*, edited by David and Pat Alexander, provides much background information and is beautifully illustrated with color pictures. One limitation is its acceptance of some questionable positions (e.g., the late date for the exodus).

BIBLE SURVEY

Surveys give a brief discussion of the author, occasion and an overview of the contents of each Bible book. William S. Deal has given us a concise and reliable survey in his *Baker's Pictorial Introduction to the Bible*. For more detailed studies of this type I have found Samuel Schultz's *Old Testament Speaks* (Harper) and Merrill C. Tenney's *New Testament Survey* (Eerdmans) to be useful. For a survey of the historical section of the Old Testament, William Smith's *Old Testament History* (College Press) as rewritten and updated by Wilbur Fields is excellent.

BIBLE INTRODUCTION

Bible introduction concerns the origin, transmission of the text and authority of the Bible. The best up-to-date general book in this area is *A General Introduction to the Bible* by Norman Geisler and William Nix (Moody). (This material is condensed in *From God to Us*.) The following books are good, nontechnical works addressed to the general reader: Neil Lightfoot, *How We Got the Bible* (Abilene Christian University Press); William Kimball, *The Book of Books* (College Press); Paul Little, *Know Why You Believe* (InterVarsity; Scripture Press); and Lewis Foster, *Selecting a Translation* (Standard).

Of technical introductions, Gleason Archer's *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Moody) and Donald Guthrie's *New Testament Introduction* (InterVarsity) are recommended.

BIBLE STUDY METHODS

J. Ridley Stroop's *Why People Do Not See the Bible Alike* (20th Century Christian) is a fine Biblical study stressing that the spirit of the Bible student must be one of humility, open-mindedness and honesty in seeking to learn what God has had to say in His word. Robert Palmer's *How to Understand the Bible* (College Press) gives an excellent survey of the basic principles of interpretation. T. Norton Sterrett in *Understanding and Applying the Bible* (Moody) clearly states good principles, but in a few places he adopts doctrinally questionable positions. Knofel Staton's *How to Understand the Bible* (Standard) is good on motivation and method.

BIBLE COMMENTARIES

One should not be a slave of any Bible teacher or commentary. What is said or written must be evaluated in the light of facts and common sense. The reference books listed in this chapter will greatly aid you in coming to the understanding of the meaning of Bible passages through your own study.

Some Christian leaders, who consider their own opinions as infallible, teach against the use of commentaries. How could it be proper to hear oral explanations of the meaning of a Bible text but then it becomes wrong to read written explanations in a commentary? It is good to consult commentaries and learn what others have thought about the meaning of a passage. Just as it is unwise to reject all commentaries as unnecessary, it is also unwise to unthinkingly accept everything a commentary says. It is dangerous to always let others do our thinking for us. Do not be content to be spoon-fed the Bible.

A commentary can suffer from certain flaws. It can be too long so that the direct meaning of the text is lost in the many words used to explain it. Often commentators practice *grasshop-*

per exegesis. They explain the obvious and jump over difficulties without a word of help. A good commentary must avoid the extremes of being shallow and superficial or of being excessively technical. Watch for doctrinal bias in commentaries.

A good commentary will help the student see how the Biblical author has developed his subject and how each section relates to the overall plan and purpose of the book. The commentator should study the meaning of words and sentences in the light of the historical setting. He should explain words and customs that are unfamiliar to the general reader. Other scriptures should be used to throw light on the text being explained. The reader should be informed of false teachings that are mistakenly based on the text. The reader should be helped to see the true doctrine taught in the text and how its truth applies to us today.

As one advances in Bible study he or she will want to purchase some commentaries. Sets of commentaries are often uneven in quality so one may choose to select the best commentary available on the Bible book currently being studied. Choose quality rather than quantity. It is better to have one or two good commentaries on a Bible book rather than to have three or four poor ones. If possible before buying, read enough in the book to know you are going to find it of value to you. Make sure the author is Bible-believing and competent in his explanation of the meaning of the scriptures. If you have not studied the original languages don't buy a technical commentary even if a preacher or teacher raves about it.

Use a commentary as a tool to help you better understand the Biblical author's intended meaning. No commentary is infallible or has final authority. Use commentaries as aids to assist you as you use your own mind and common sense to intelligently read and understand God's Word. (See the booklist, pp. 143-159.)

FIVE BASIC BOOKS

The following five books would be a good beginning of

resources for rewarding Bible study; *New American Standard Bible (Reference Edition)*; *The New International Dictionary of the Bible*; *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*; *Halley's Bible Handbook*; and Robert Palmer's *How to Understand the Bible*. Many would not spend money for Bible study resources yet they would spend the same amount on a trip to Six Flags or to a major league baseball game. It's a matter of priorities.

Visit and browse in a Bible book store. Question those who have used the books. Make a list of those books you would like to have in your library. Make the list available and drop hints for birthday and Christmas.

The Bible is an inexhaustible gold mine of God's precious promises and wonderful truths. Some people only know of these treasures secondhand. Do not settle for second best. Secure the tools and dig into the mine for yourself.

Study Questions

1. Why is it important that we learn to study the Bible for ourselves?
2. What should one look for in a study Bible?
3. Why is a translation made by a committee to be preferred over that made by an individual?
4. What is the danger of doctrinal notes in a study Bible?
5. What four translations are listed as the text for a study Bible?
6. Why is a paraphrase not a good choice for a study Bible?
7. What dictionary is helpful for the Bible student to understand New Testament words?

8. What is a concordance and what are its uses?
9. What Bible handbook has been a standby for years?
10. What topics are studied in Bible introduction?
11. What should be one's attitude toward Bible commentaries?
12. List some flaws in poor commentaries and strong qualities of good commentaries.
13. What guidelines are given to be considered in purchasing a commentary?
14. What five books are recommended as a beginning Bible study library?

Project

Make a list of twelve books you would like to have in your Bible study library. Talk with your preacher or a Bible teacher. Visit a Bible book store. Learn the name of the author or editor, the title of the book, the publisher and the price.

Choose one book for each of these categories: study Bible; other translation; Bible dictionary; concordance; Bible handbook; Bible survey; Bible introduction; Bible study methods.

Choose four commentaries that you believe would be a help to you in your study.

Itemize your information in this fashion:

	Author	Title	Publisher	Price
Study Bible				
Other Translation				
etc.				