

The Bible Study Tool Chest

How to Study the Bible

Tom Mullenix

There's a copy in the CBCC library*

Concordance*

A concordance is a listing that informs you the places in the Bible where a certain word is mentioned.

You may have one in your Bible. An exhaustive concordance is valuable because it lists every location for every word in the Bible.

Concordances like Young's and Strong's also list the Hebrew and Greek words that are translated as the word you have located in the concordance [they use a numbering system and an index in the back of the book].

Without leaning Greek or Hebrew, you can learn to do word studies with a concordance and a dictionary of Bible words.

With a concordance, you can find virtually any verse if you can remember some of the wording. Each word listed comes with a 5 or 6 word "clue."

There are concordances for most major Bible Translations.

For the serious Bible student, an exhaustive concordance is a must have.

Cross Reference *[In Bibles; stand alone book]*

Many quality Bibles have these – usually in the margins, or at the bottom of the page. A cross reference shows you where a particular word, phrase, topic or event is mentioned at other places in the Bible.

Cross references will make you aware of parallel passages in the gospels and in the Old Testament.

Unfortunately, most are not exhaustive.

I encourage you to build your own cross referencing in your Bible Study Notebook.

Harmony of the Gospels

A harmony of the gospels is a very useful book for studying the life of Christ. It takes the events and teachings in the life of Jesus, and lays them out on the same page. It shows the life of Christ in chronological order and makes it easy to study and compare parallel passages.

You'll have to search at a Christian bookstore, order there, or go on-line because there is not a lot of demand for harmonies.

The Life of Christ in Stereo is a work that kind of melds the gospels into one narrative (more for the effect than for deep study). I found it used on Amazon, and expensive.

Bible Dictionary*

Bible dictionary is a confusing term because, in reality, it is a mini-encyclopedia rather than a listing of the definitions of words.

Bible dictionaries have brief explanations of major Bible words, events, and issues.

Many have pictures. It is a good tool to quickly access an explanation of Bible specifics (history, individuals, etc.)

Bible Encyclopedia

The Bible encyclopedia [such as International Standard Bible Encyclopedia – ISBE] is more involved and has more extensive entries on topics covered in a Bible Dictionary.

Manners & Customs of the Bible*

This is an excellent tool to help the Bible student understand the culture of Bible times. These explanations help you to grasp the background that shapes Biblical events and teachings.

Dictionary of Bible Words*

This reference book gives you the Greek meanings [Vines has a few Hebrew listings] behind words translated in the New Testament. It is a very helpful tool for the Bible student who wants to dig deeper. Some of these works are have connections to the Strong's Concordance numbering system.

Topical Bible

Basically as the title explains, this reference lists major topics in the Bible. For example, the many commands to “_____ one another.” A concordance list is based on a specific word. Although not exhaustive, the topical Bible covers the broader scope. [Nave's Topical Bible is one of the most popular] *I encourage you to build your own topical Bible in your Bible Study Notebook. I did as a teenager, and it helped my understanding of the Bible immensely.*

Bible Atlas*

Like any atlas, a book of maps and charts and pictures to explain Bible geography. Geography is not a popular topic, but very valuable in understanding what is going on in the Bible. It helps us to see that the people writing the Bible were natives to their region. Example: Jesus mentions in the parable of the Good Samaritan that a man was traveling down from Jerusalem to Jericho. There is a ½ mile drop in altitude in 20 miles from Jerusalem to Jericho.

Software

The market is now full of Bible Study Software. The advantage of software is that it bundles many of the tools listed here (along with Bible translations) into one product. Software, although higher priced, is less expensive than attempting to purchase the individual books. Add to that the many options that a word processor provides.

There are some internet based options that are free:

- For Bible translations and concordance function – www.BibleGateway.com
- For many software functions – www.e-sword.net
- A search will turn up other free options.

Overviews

Overviews are very helpful – such as time lines, chronological helps, outlines, etc. They are not easy to find, if you search the back crevices of Bible Book Stores, sometimes you will come across a gem.

Bible Handbook*

Helpful overviews, background, archeological notes, etc.

What study tool is missing? A Bible Commentary. A commentary is someone's opinion; admitted, it is a scholar's opinion, but it remains opinion. It is best to study using the other tools first, be sure you have a grasp of the scripture and what it actually says; then turn to more than one commentary, so you can compare them. Study Bibles have commentaries alongside the scripture text. Be careful that you don't confuse the two. The commentary portion is someone's opinion. Use the opinions of others to shape your understanding, not as the foundation of your knowledge.

Bible Version Sampler

Translation – a rendering of the same ideas in a different language than the original.

- The New Testament was written in Koine` (Coin-aye) Greek – common Greek as opposed to classical Greek. Bible translators struggled originally in their translation because they were trying to do it with the classical language. After they did some archeological findings of notes, letters, receipts, etc. it was discovered that the language used in the New Testament was language of the common people – street Greek.
- God intends for his word to be understood by the common man. Thus the need for translations that make understanding easy.

Paraphrase – a free rendering of the sense of the passage in other words – usually uses the same language. [Can back up to the original] Examples: The Living Bible, The Message, The New Testament in Modern English – Phillips (available on-line)

Version – a translation, translated by committee. This limits the possibility of bias. A translation or paraphrase by one person has more opportunities for bias creeping in. For example, Kenneth Taylor did an excellent job of making the Bible more understandable for readers in the 1970's (as opposed to the common King James Version), but some of his biases do enter into the text.

- Paraphrases are wonderful for devotional reading and for shedding light from a different angle on the text. If you are struggling through a “dry spell” in your devotional time, I suggest reading a paraphrase. However, for serious Bible study, always rely on a version (translated by committee) and / or versions.

Dynamic Equivalence – making the concept expressed in scripture understandable in another culture. [also in TEV, CEV, and NLT]

- Examples: Missionaries are translating the Bible for Eskimos. They come across the phrase about Jesus, “the Lamb of God.” Eskimos don't have a word for lamb in their language, so:
 1. The translators can coin a word for lamb, and spend a lot of time and effort teaching the people what that means.
 2. They can look for something close in the Eskimo culture – a dynamic equivalent – for something defenseless, in need of protection and care. (baby seal)
- In Papua New Guinea – “I am the bread of life” to those who have no concept of bread. To what was Jesus referring? The staple of the Jewish diet. So, Jesus' statement became, “I am the sweet potato of life.”

King James Version – KJV (1611 – Revised 1627)

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

New King James Version – NKJV (1982) *Gideon's now distribute this version.*

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

New American Standard Bible – NASB (1960) (Revised 1995)

Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

New International Version – NIV (1973)

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Living Bible – (1971)

And, so, dear brothers, I plead with you to give your bodies to God. Let them be a living sacrifice, holy—the kind He can accept. When you think of what He has done for you, is this too much to ask? Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but be a new and different person with a fresh newness in all you do and think. Then you will learn from your own experience how His ways will really satisfy you.

Revised Standard Version – RSV (1946)

I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Phillips – The New Testament in Modern English (1958)

With eyes wide open to the mercies of God, I beg you, my brothers, as an act of intelligent worship, to give him your bodies, as a living sacrifice, consecrated to him and acceptable by him. Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold, but let God remold your minds from within, so that you may prove in practice that the plan of God for you is good, meets all his demands and moves toward the goal of true maturity.

New Living Translation – NLT (1996)

And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

The Message – Eugene Peterson (1993)

So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life – your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.

Contemporary English Version – CEV (1995)

Dear friends, God is good. So I beg you to offer your bodies to him as a living sacrifice, pure and pleasing. That's the most sensible way to serve God. Don't be like the people of this world, but let God change the way you think. Then you will know how to do everything that is good and pleasing to him.

Amplified Version – (1958)

I appeal to you, therefore, brethren, and beg of you in view of [all] the mercies of God, to make a decisive dedication of your bodies – presenting all your members and faculties – as a living sacrifice, holy (devoted, consecrated) and well pleasing to God, which is your reasonable (rational, intelligent) service and spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world – this age, fashioned after and adapted to its external, superficial customs. But be transformed (changed) by the [entire] renewal of your mind – by its new ideals and its new attitude – so that you may prove [for yourselves] what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God, even the thing which is good and acceptable and perfect [in His sight for you].

Da Jesus Book – The New Testament in Hawaii Pidgin (2000)

Bruddas and sistas, so den, wat? God, he give you guys plenny chance. Az why I like aks you guys, let God take ova you, jalike you giving one sacrifice, but alive. But you know wat God like you guys do? He like you guys go all out fo God. Fo make lidat, good you know, cuz dat fo show God love and respeck. Eh! No make like how da peopo nowadays telling you fo do! Mo betta, you guys let God make you guys tink diffren inside, so you can tink new way bout everyting. Den you can go figga how God like you do. And da ting God like you do, stay good, and make God stay good inside, and everytime stay perfeck.