

Bible Study Tools

The Holy Spirit. The Bible tells us that the Holy Spirit is our helper and teacher. He is our greatest aid in proper Bible study and teaching. (John 14:16, 26) In addition, the Holy Spirit may use many of the tools listed below to illuminate God's truths of the Bible to us.

Prayer. Prayer is our communication with God. If we desire to properly understand God's communication to us, as contained in the Bible, we ought to ask for help and understanding. Prayer should always accompany Bible study.

Self Reflection. Our attitude, desires, biases, and sinful nature can greatly influence how we handle God's Word; therefore, we must examine ourselves for anything that may improperly influence our understanding of the Bible. The Bible reads us and we need to be open to this reality.

“The Story” or Meta-Narrative of the Bible. In order to better see context, one should understand the larger story of the Bible, often called the Story of God's Redemptive History. This is a framework or timeline of the Bible in chronological order. This also includes an understanding of how the Bible is organized. Understanding where a text fits within the Story greatly helps with proper exegetical work and sound hermeneutics.

Jared Jenkins outlines the “scenes” of the Story like this:

Part I – Creation

Part II - Fall

Part III - Redemption

 Scene 1 - A People

 Scene 2 - A Land and a Nation

 Scene 3 - A Kingdom and Kingdom Divided

 Scene 4 - Exile and Expectant Waiting

 Scene 5 - The Gospel - Christ

 Scene 6 - The Church

Part IV - Restoration / New Creation

Translations of the Bible. Different translations may offer non-original readers a different perspective. A good study should include at least one Bible from a formal equivalent (close to word-for-word) translation and one from a dynamic equivalent (thought-for-thought) translation. A good mediating Bible translation is also helpful. But do not feel you must limit your study to a small number of translations; more translations help us see some of the word complexities in the original languages. A parallel Bible is a helpful Bible that puts multiple translations together in one binding for this kind of study.

Study Bible. A study Bible contains boiled down information that comes from many of the tools identified in this list. A Study Bible is an extremely useful tool for studying and teaching the Bible and at least one should be a part of any Bible student's library. The ESV Study Bible is one of the best ones available today.

Concordance. A collection of all the English words contained in a specific Bible translation of the with a scripture reference to aid in locating the word. Most concordances also include a basic Greek and Hebrew word list with key numbers and definitions.

Lexicon. A technical book of definitions and etymology of Greek and Hebrew words.

Cross Reference. Lists of related passages that help guide a student of the Bible to other locations in the Bible in order to help understand an idea or topic as it is presented elsewhere in the Bible. Using the Bible to interpret the Bible is the best way to interpret the Bible and using cross references greatly reduces the time it takes to find other related passages.

Bible Dictionary and Encyclopedia. A Bible dictionary provides articles and info on just about every person, place, or thing in the Bible. Encyclopedias are similar but more detailed. Some Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias deal with technical aspects of Greek and Hebrew language too.

Atlas. Collections of maps to help provide some geographical insight. These often also include journeys and other useful geographical information such as recreated drawings of the Temple grounds, alters, clothing, and a number of other helpful visual aids.

Introduction. A collection of introductory information on books of the Bible that include the author, audience, purpose, time of writing, outlines,, key themes, and all kinds of other information background information.

Other Believers. Studying with others in community allows us to see how the Holy Spirit is working through all of us as we collectively study God's Word. The same Holy Spirit working in you is working in me. One Spirit. . . lots of students. It is often good to consult other trusted and knowledgeable believers to confirm that you are not way off in your findings. Notes from other classes or even transcripts of sermons are also helpful in this regard. A good point to remember is that if you are the only one who as ever discovered what you think you've discovered from the Bible, the chances are fairly good that you are wrong.

Commentary. A commentary is an extensive discussion (typically from a scholar) about the text. These are not inspired like the Bible but they can provide tremendous insight, background information, and technical information. Often they are the result of years of work and study by the author. I recommend that commentaries only be used near the end of your study as confirmation and a check rather than a guide at the beginning of a study. BestCommentaries.com is a helpful online tool for searching out reviews and rankings on commentaries.

Bible Study Software and Website. Many programs and websites provide a collection of the above listed tools to make this work easier. Accordance, Logos, Bible Works, and E-Sword are examples of Bible software. Some of these programs also have phone and tablet apps. Bible.org, Biblia.com, BlueLetterBible.org, and YouVersion.com are examples of helpful websites. But keep in mind that some biblical tools websites are really not what they claim to be.