

## Bible Study Tools & Resources

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1. **Study Bible** – See *Choosing A Bible* on the website
2. **Concordance** (<https://biblehub.com/concordance/> )
  - a. A concordance is an alphabetical listing of every word that is contained in a text, usually listed with a portion of the verse or sentence and a reference where the verse/sentence can be found in the work.
  - b. A biblical concordance also includes a number reference linking it to a specific Greek or Hebrew word.
  - c. The number referencing system was established by James Strong, theologian and a person of great intelligence. His numbering system is still the standard used today and *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance* is still published and widely used today.
  - d. A concordance useful for four purposes:
    - i. finding a verse;
    - ii. cross referencing to other verses;
    - iii. identifying specific Greek or Hebrew words and
    - iv. topical Bible study.
    - v. A concordance is also useful for identifying when two potentially very different Greek or Hebrew words have been translated into a singular English word.

**Consider John 21:15-17 [STOP - READ THESE VERSE BEFORE PROCEEDING]**

**[See Note at end of paper]**

3. **Maps** – maps are useful to understand biblical geography, and adds context and depth to Scripture. (<https://bibleatlas.org/> )
4. **Timeline** (<https://timeline.biblehistory.com/period/egypt-to-canaan> )
  - a. Timelines likewise help to place biblical events in the context of other world events.
  - b. In addition, since not all parts of the Bible are organized in a chronological fashion, timelines can help connect related books in the Bible.
5. **Commentaries** – are numerous. Some are concise single volumes, others can have twenty or more volumes. Matthew Henry's Commentary is well regarded and available free online. (<https://biblehub.com/commentaries/> ; <https://www.blueletterbible.org/study.cfm> )
  - a. Line by line – these commentaries work through a Book of the Bible verse by verse or paragraph by paragraph.
  - b. Subject or topical – focus on a specific Biblical topic.
  - c. Word studies – drill down to the meaning and use of specific words.

### Comments on Commentaries

- Christians have been reading and studying God's word for centuries. Over the centuries some of these Christians have compiled all of their insights about the Scriptures into books called commentaries. Commentaries can be very useful tools in helping us understand a passage of Scripture.

- That being said, in my opinion, one of the worst mistakes someone can make when beginning to study a passage of Scripture is to pull out a commentary and read what someone else has to say about that passage. As I have previously said, reading books or listening to what other Christians have to say about the Bible is not Bible study.
  - Bible study is a very personal undertaking. It is not about learning what a passage of Scripture says, it is about learning what a passage of Scripture says to you. Reading a commentary before you have formed your own understanding of a passage of Scripture will color or obscure a personal insight that the Scripture had for you and so you will miss out on something special just for you.
  - Commentaries can become crutches – it's all too easy just to look up what other people say about a passage rather than working through the process of coming to our own understanding. Once you have gotten there then, maybe, you want to look at a commentary.
  - If you are faced with a particularly difficult passage, rather than opening a commentary try writing down all the questions that you have. Sometimes the process of formulating and writing out our questions can lead us to the answers we seek.
  - When struggling to understand a passage, it can sometimes be helpful to simply read the passage in another translation.
  - Struggling with a difficult Scripture, that is, to really and truly make every effort to understand the Scripture on your own, is one of the best possible ways to connect with the HS. It is in our struggle that we grow deeper in our faith. It is in our struggle that we grow stronger.
6. **Dictionaries** – Biblical dictionaries typically do more than just define a word. Typically they give much more information about the word and its use in a Biblical context. There are a few special dictionaries such as Biblical name dictionaries which provide the meaning of specific names. ([Vine's New Testament](#); [Vine's Old Testament](#))
  7. **Encyclopedias** – Biblical encyclopedias provide a depth of information about places, people and events often giving greater context. (<https://biblehub.com/encyclopedia/> )
  8. **Theology books** – A typical type of theology book is systematic theology. These are often compiled by a single author or small team. While often pulling together disparate Biblical themes they can be theologically biased. Care should be taken in selection to either such books that are theologically neutral or consistent with your chosen theology. Or at the very least be aware of theological biases of any given book/author(s). One excellent book I have found is *Hard Sayings of the Bible* written by Walter C. Kaiser Jr., Peter H. Davids, F.F. Bruce and Manfred T. Brauch. They have done an excellent job of bringing together all the various theological opinions regarding difficult Scriptural passages and clearly identify their particular opinions.
  9. **Bible guides and handbooks** – vary widely in their content but are typically a blend of dictionaries, encyclopedias and commentaries.

10. **Books about the Bible** – It is immensely important to check out the authors of such books, audios, videos and the like. I have found many of these to be very biased and sometimes written by individuals that are not experts in the fields they are addressing. They tend to cherry pick their sources and make less than a thorough investigation of their subject matter.
11. **Bible studies** – Can be a very good way to start your study of the Bible if you are uncertain about where or how to start. They are often similar to commentaries but with guided readings and a series of questions. They can be Scripture or topic specific.
12. **Bible quiz books and games** – Can be useful to test your knowledge about Scripture as well as entertaining and very constructive and educational and a useful alternative offering a break from traditional Bible study.
13. **On-line resources vs. Hard copies** – There are two significant advantages to on-line resources: (1) most of them are free and (2) they are as close as your phone, tablet or computer. There are two significant disadvantages (1) they are typically limited in their content and not as easy to use as hard copies. Hard copies tend to be much more comprehensive and (2) on-line resources tend to be older relying on sources that are no longer covered by copyright protections.

Blue Letter Bible – (<https://www.blueletterbible.org> ). They offer numerous resources including many of the most recent Bible translations. It is easy to move from one translation to another from within any given Scripture. In addition all of the resources are accessible directly from each verse. This allows you to examine a Scripture in more detail without having to access other websites or external resources. I have found this to be a very powerful tool that I rely on heavily for my own Scripture study and sermon preparation. Most importantly – it's absolutely FREE.

Thriftbooks – (<https://www.thriftbooks.com/> ) If you are looking for hard copies of any given resource I would recommend Thriftbooks. They sell both new and used books. Prices are very reasonable, shipping is prompt and the descriptions of the condition of the used books have been very accurate. It is a great way to acquire hard copies of resources at a greatly reduced price.

[I have not been compensated in any way for recommending the resources referenced in this article]

NOTE: Would it surprise you to learn that Jesus is asking Peter if he loves Him unconditionally while Peter speaks of loving Jesus as a friend or brother. How does that change your understanding of what is going on in their exchange?