

Bible Study Tools

By Rebecca S. May

- *What is the most important Bible study tool?*
- *Why study the Bible?*
- *What is the most important thing to remember when using Bible study tools?*
- *What is a good on-line tool?*

Whether you are building a house or painting a picture, you need some tools. The same is true if you desire to study the Bible. It is possible to study with only the most important of tools, the Bible. In fact, the most skilled craftsman can build an entire house with only the minimum of basic tools. If, however, you have not reached that level in your Bible knowledge, you will need the assistance of some Bible study tools.

Paul said, *Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth* (2 Timothy 2:15).

This brochure is **not** written to lead you through someone else's study of the Bible. This brochure is created to provide suggestions to aid the *diligent workman* in his or her own personal study of the Bible so that he or she will be capable of *handling accurately the word of truth*.

Basic Tools

A Bible Study Method

Before we discuss products, we need to explain procedure. A proper method for studying the Bible involves three steps:

Observation: *What do I see?*

Interpretation: *What does it mean?*

Application: *What must I do?*

For an overview of this Bible study method see the three *Concepts'* brochures by Jerry Collins, [Observation](#), [Interpretation](#), and [Application](#). For a more in-depth study of this Bible study method, see *Living by the Book* by Howard Hendricks.

Translations

Now that you understand the procedure, you will be able to start your own study. The first and most important tool is, of course, the Bible. Notice I did not say your Bible or any Bible. It is vitally important that you have an accurate translation of the Old and New Testaments prior to beginning your study. Imagine trying to build a house with your kids' plastic Fisher Price hammer. For information on Bible translations, see the *Concepts'* brochure titled *An Evaluation of English Bible Translations* by Chuck May.

Bibles

Now that you know which translations are reliable, you should consider which study Bible will be helpful. A study Bible contains interpretations of selected verses by the author of the study Bible. It also contains helpful maps and charts throughout the books to aid you in your study.

Here are some study Bible suggestions, based on various acceptable translations:

- The *Ryrie Study Bible* of the New American Standard Bible (NASB)
- The *Scofield Study Bible* of the King James Version (KJV)
- The *Nelson Study Bible* of the New King James Version (NKJV)

A Commentary

Next you will need a single or two-volume commentary on the entire Bible. A commentary is like an expanded study Bible. It gives you additional information on more verses in every book of the Bible.

IMPORTANT NOTE: With any Bible study tool, the author's *opinions* are represented. These are not necessarily the opinions of the Relational Concepts staff, nor can they guarantee a proper interpretation of the intended meaning the authors of the Bible had when they wrote.

A helpful single-volume commentary is the *Wycliff Bible Commentary* published by Moody, edited by Charles Pfeifer and Everett F. Harrison. A good two-volume commentary is the *Bible Knowledge Commentary* published by Victor Books, edited by John Walvoord and Roy Zuck.

A Dictionary

In order to look up terms, both in the text of Scripture and in your commentaries, you will need a Bible Dictionary. Almost every publishing house produces a dictionary, and most of them are very helpful. For example:

- *The Holman Bible Dictionary*
- *IVP's New Bible Dictionary*
- *Eerdman's Dictionary of the Bible*
- *Zondervan's Pictorial Bible Dictionary*
- *The New Unger Bible Dictionary*

With a proper understanding of Bible study methods, an accurate translation, a reliable commentary, and a Bible dictionary, you are well-equipped to begin your own personal study of the Bible.

This basic level of study may be enhanced by a Bible handbook, a Bible atlas, or an encyclopedia of the Bible. Several Atlases and Encyclopedias are interactive (that is, they come with a compatible CD-ROM), such as *Encountering the New Testament* by Walter Elwell and Robert W. Yarbrough.

Specialized Tools

Evaluating Commentaries

After completing the first level of study you may wish to begin a more in-depth or detailed study of the Bible. This will involve the use of individual commentaries on individual books of the Bible. Trying to decide which commentaries are worth using or purchasing can be a time consuming and frustrating task. There are three books which will aid in your selection of a commentary:

- *Old Testament Commentary Survey* written by Temper Longman III and published by Baker
- *New Testament Commentary Survey* written by D.A. Carson and published by Baker
- *A Guide to Selecting and Using Bible Commentaries* written by Douglas Stewart and published by Word

The authors of the above books have used the majority of commentaries available on each book of the Bible, giving summaries, making recommendations, as well as listing some of the positives and negatives of each book.

If you are unsure about the history or theological views of a particular author, refer to *Bible Interpreters of the 20th Century: A Selection of Evangelical Voices* published by Baker, edited by Walter A. Elwell and J.D. Weaver.

Recommended Commentaries

Here are some suggestions of individual volume commentaries:

- The *Word Biblical Commentary* series (also available on CD-ROM)
- The *Expositor's Bible Commentary* series published by Zondervan (also on CD-ROM)
- Individual commentaries written by John MacArthur, William Hendricksen, F.F. Bruce, Zane Hodges, and John Walvoord, to name a few.

Because these commentaries will use not only biblical terms but theological terms, it is a good idea, at this point, to have a theological dictionary such as *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* edited by Walter Elwell.

For a complete package of commentaries, dictionaries, encyclopedias and various specialized Bible study tools, consider the following CD-ROM packages:

- *Baker's Digital Reference Library*
- *Nelson's Electronic Bible Reference Library*
- *Accordance* (for MAC users)

This level also involves an evaluation of the biblical languages of Greek and Hebrew. A good *Greek-English Interlinear* (gives the Greek word for selected English translations) is published by Baker and edited by Jay P. Green. To define Greek and Hebrew words, based on their English translations, use *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance* for KJV or *Broadman & Holman's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* for NASB. (Concise or Complete concordances do not contain every word in the Bible.).

The best all-inclusive specialized tool for evaluating the biblical languages is *The Complete Word Study of the Old and New Testament*. It contains Strong's dictionary, lexical aids, and a translational reference index. It is published by AMG and is edited by Spiros Zodhiates.

Questions and Answers

Q: *What is the most important Bible study tool?*

A: An accurate translation of the Bible.

Q: *Why study the Bible?*

A: In order to *Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth* (2 Timothy 2:15).

Q: *What is the most important thing to remember when using Bible study tools?*

A: It is important to choose a trustworthy tool, not to tell you what to believe but in order to help you in your own personal study of the Bible.

Q: *What is a good on-line tool?*

A: You will find almost any reference or tool you may need from www.bible.org. This sight is run by the *Biblical Studies Foundation* and is the best on-line source for all three levels of Bible study tools, as well as providing links to other helpful biblical sights.