

STAGE TWO: PRELIMINARY STEPS - Assemble a Basic Bible Study Library

Introduction

The Bible student should assemble their Bible study library of resources to help them with their studies. The Bible student's library can begin with a book or two and grow from there.

Very importantly, although one has to be discerning, the internet provides a wide variety of quality resources. Websites like preceptaustin.org and bible.org are two good options. Warning: Preceptaustin.org will give you data overload!

The discussion below pertains to the contents of a basic Bible study library. My plan is to add to this listing in the future.

A Study Bible

The first Bible study tool is a study Bible. Two important considerations exist with respect to selecting a study Bible. The first is the English translation. The second is the kind of format and information in the Bible.

Referring to the selection of the English translation, the original biblical texts were written in either Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek. Therefore, whatever English translation the student uses, it is just that, a translation. No single translation can reflect all of the nuances of the original languages. Thus, it is important for the student to consider carefully their choice of a Bible translation.

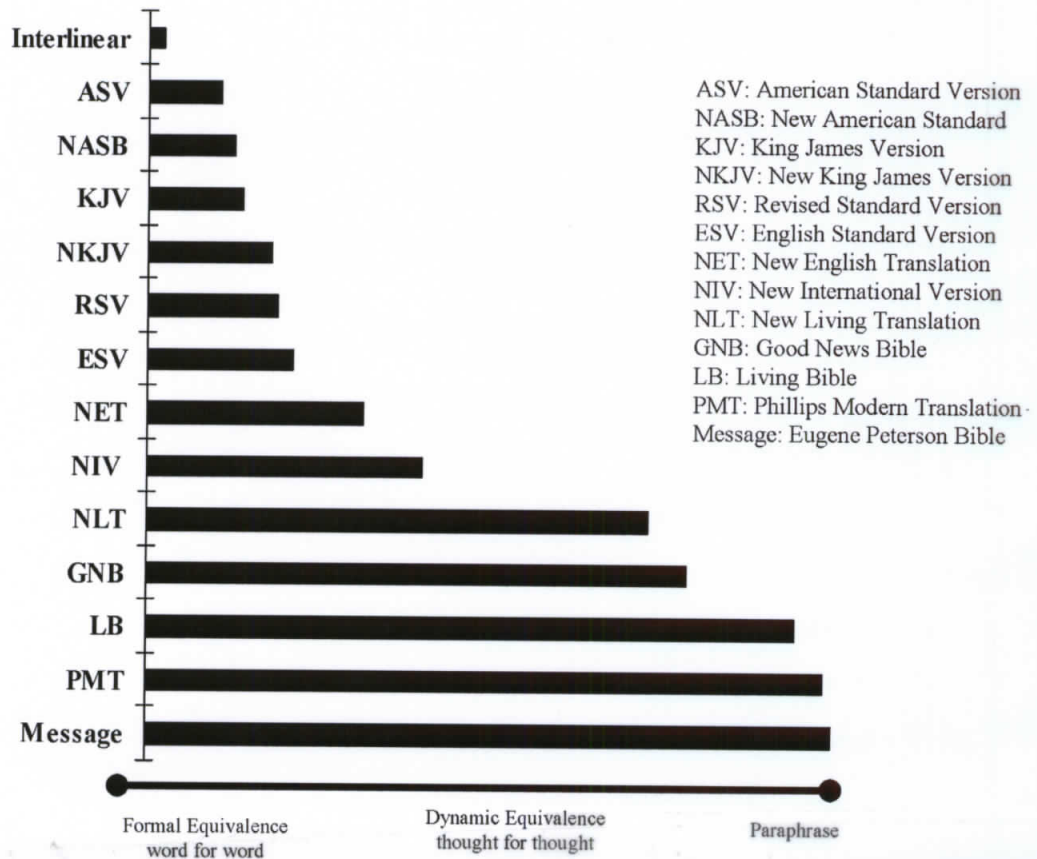
At one end of the spectrum of English Bible translations are formal translations which follow the form of the Greek and the Hebrew (and Aramaic). This type of translation is a more literal translation keeping in mind that no translation is one hundred percent literal. The New American Standard Bible (1995 or 2020) is a more literal translation. At the other end of the range are functional translations, which duplicate the actual effect, i.e., the function, of the original language in the modern language (e.g., English). The New Living Translation and God's Word are more functional translations.

I suggest that the Bible student use both major kinds of English Bible translations. The formal translation will tie you a little more closely to the original language. In many cases, the functional translation will make the meaning of the text more clear.

The below chart shows where some popular English translations fall on the literal-functional spectrum. Taken from page 77 of the workbook for the Bibliology and Hermeneutics course of The Theology Program now available at Credo House, Oklahoma City, OK.

Translation Theories:

- Formal Equivalence (word for word)
- Dynamic Equivalence (thought for thought)
- Paraphrase



The second consideration is the format and content of a study Bible. A study Bible contains footnotes and other reference materials that help the Bible student to understand better the passage. **Please note that the theology of the study Bible editor may impact the substance of the footnotes, etc.**

In my opinion, the most helpful study Bible is The Thompson Chain Reference Bible (available in many English translations). This study Bible contains thousands of subject matter classifications by number where each number identifies relevant verses. The description from the christianbooks.com website reads:

Scripture is presented with a reference system that acts as a guide, not merely a tool, allowing you to explore a specific topic methodically through the entirety of the text. Relevant scripture verses are linked together, with over 100,000 topical references and 8,000 chain topics, enabling a study of the Bible that is relevant for all of the faithful- from those interested in what the Bible says about a particular word of interest to those wanting to prepare a sermon that delivers the unity of God's special revelation to a divided world.

There are three companion references to the Thompson Chain Reference Bible worth having:

The Thompson Exhaustive Topical Bible, (1997) B.B. Kirkbride Bible, Co., Indianapolis, IN 46206

The Thompson Chain Reference Bible Companion, (1997) B.B. Kirkbride Bible, Co., Indianapolis, IN 46206

The Thomson Chain Reference Bible Survey, (1981), Word Books, Waco, TX 76703

Of course, there are many other great study Bibles. However, the Thompson Chain Reference system is very helpful when looking up passages on a specific topic.

A Bible Background Commentary

The second Bible study tool is a Bible Background Commentary or Bible survey. This tool provides basic background material that often the Bible student cannot obtain from the biblical text itself. Even though they are relatively old, two very good surveys are:

Jensen's Survey of the Old Testament, (1978) Moody Press, Chicago, Illinois

Jensen's Survey of the New Testament, (1981), Moody Press, Chicago, Illinois

A Bible Dictionary

The third Bible study tool is a Bible dictionary that contains definitions of biblical terms. One good dictionary is:

The Tyndale Bible Dictionary. Elwell, W. A., & Comfort, P. W. (2001) Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

An Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible

The fourth Bible study tool is an exhaustive concordance of the Bible. There is a Bible exhaustive concordance for most major English translations. Most exhaustive concordances list every English word and key it to its corresponding Hebrew or Greek word using Strong's reference numbers. Since I prefer to use the New American Standard Bible translation, my preferred exhaustive concordance is:

The New American Standard (updated edition) Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, (1998), Foundation Publications, Inc., Anaheim, CA

Original Language Lexicons

The fifth Bible study tool comprises lexicons (or dictionaries) of the original languages that define the original words in English. One very good lexicon is:

Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words (2006) published by Zondervan

A Book of Bible Maps

The sixth Bible study tool is a book of Maps. These are very helpful to understand the biblical narrative better. One good book of maps is: Zondervan NIV Atlas of the Bible.

Systematic Theology Books

The seventh Bible study tool comprises a systematic theology book. My preferred systematic theology book is:

Dr. Wayne Grudem's Systematic Theology, (1st or 2nd editions)

An English Dictionary

The eighth Bible study tool is an English Dictionary. Sometimes it helps to know with certainty the definition of an English word used in one's English translation of the Bible. A desk dictionary is: Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary. A much larger dictionary is the Webster's Third New International Dictionary.

How to Study the Bible Books

The ninth Bible study tool comprises books about "how to study the Bible." Two good "how to study" books are:

How to Study Your Bible by Kay Arthur et al. [(1994), Harvest House Publishers, Eugene, OR],

Knowable Word by Peter Krol [(2014), Cruciform Press, Minneapolis, MN]

Conclusion

The order in which I suggest the Bible student build their library is as follows:

Stage 1:

- Two study Bibles with one being a more literal translation and the other being a more functional translation.
- An exhaustive concordance corresponding to the more literal translation.
- A how to study the Bible book.
- An English dictionary.

Stage 2:

- A Bible background commentary.
- A book of maps.

Stage 3:

- A Bible dictionary.

Stage 4:

- A Systematic Theology book.

Stage 5:

- An original language-English lexicon

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