

**BIBLE STUDY TOOLS**  
**DR. PETE THEODORE – SEPTEMBER 2006**

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“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16-17; NIV)

This packet surveys some tools that will help you “be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15; NAS). Everyone who is serious about studying the Bible should start out with at least five basic resources:

- 1) A trustworthy Study Bible
- 2) An exhaustive concordance
- 3) A Bible dictionary
- 4) A solid one, two, or multiple volume commentary on the Bible, and
- 5) A basic word study book.

This is the foundation of a more extensive library that will allow one to grow in understanding, living, and teaching Scripture. After an overview of Bible translations, each of these non-technical components and a few others will be introduced.

<b>BIBLE TRANSLATIONS</b>
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There are a multitude of translations and paraphrases available to you. Each has its own strengths and weaknesses, and all are essentially based on variations of two major translation philosophies.

Formal equivalence (a.k.a. “word for word”) is the approach that a translation should seek to represent as literal a translation of the original language as possible in words, grammar, and word order. The New American Standard Bible, the English Standard Version, and the New King James Version are three excellent examples of this philosophy.

Dynamic equivalence (a.k.a. “thought for thought”) seeks to capture the meaning of the original text with less concern for word translation and word order. The New International Version, Contemporary English Version, New Living Translation, and the Holman Christian Standard Bible represent this approach.

Paraphrases, which add much more interpretation to the translation process but can make for an informative perspective and colorful reading, include the Living Bible, The Message, and Phillips.

A Parallel Bible is a compilation of translations. It lays out the text of several Bible

translations side-by-side for easy comparison. For instance, *The Evangelical Parallel New Testament* provides on each page the New King James Version, New International Version, English Standard Version, Holman Christian Standard Bible, Today's New International Version, New Living Translation, New Century Version, and The Message.

Here is a brief comparison of two of the best-selling translations within the Evangelical community. Both can be purchased in several study Bible formats.

### **New International Version**

Strength – Easy readability (8th grade level). Based on somewhat dynamic translation theory that focuses on communicating meaning of text in a way that our minds easily perceive. Based on this theory, it is an excellent translation.

Weakness – Less literal and consistent in its translation of Hebrew and Greek words and grammar than the New American Standard, especially if you are familiar with the original languages or doing serious inductive study. Occasionally the English rendering of the original language makes an interpretation *for* the reader.

### **New American Standard Bible**

Strength – More consistent and literal in its translation of the words, order, and syntax of Greek and Hebrew. Better study Bible if you prefer the literal translation theory, because the words and tenses of the original languages are more easily apparent.

Weakness – Less natural English that makes it harder to read and understand (11<sup>th</sup> grade reading level). The 1995 update has made this version more readable without violating the formal equivalence theory that undergirds it.

<b>STUDY BIBLES</b>
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The study Bible is a Bible that includes the actual Bible text and many other study helps. The helps may include cross-references, articles on doctrinal topics, notes to explain difficult passages, maps, introductions to each book, outlines, a harmony of the Gospels, a basic concordance, and the like. All of these functions are done better by other resources outside the Bible, but having them in your Bible can be good if you do not own that study tool or for those times when you are not near your resources (e.g., at church or in a community group). You may want to have a plain Bible text for reading in addition to your study Bible.

(1) The first thing to do is choose the translation you want.

Five common translations available in study Bible format are the New International Version (NIV), New American Standard Bible (NASB), New Living Translation (NLT), King James Version (KJV), and New King James Version (NKJV). Virtually all other

translations also offer at least one study Bible.

The NIV is a great balance between literal and highly dynamic translations and has numerous study resources tied to it. The NLT is the most readable, but is not the best version to use for word studies and structural analysis of the text. Owning a NLT study Bible for personal and church use could be helpful, however. The NASB or ESV are the best literal translations, so it is good to have one on hand to compare to other translations.

I wouldn't recommend getting a study Bible in KJV, because its Elizabethan-era English makes it difficult to read and modern discoveries and scholastic advances have made some renderings obsolete. Like the KJV, the NKJV uses a different manuscript basis from most other modern versions, using a literal (formal equivalent) approach and modern English. It is substantially more readable than the KJV. For some word study resources, you need a KJV to find the word that is used in that verse, so it is good to get an inexpensive copy from the International Bible Society (their phone and address is also at the end of this resource).

(2) The second step is to select the kind of study Bible you prefer among the versions available in your translation.

There are many excellent study Bibles to choose from, along with a few poor choices. The NLT is a still fairly new and is a dynamic (thought-for-thought) translation, so it has been published in only one study version so far: *The Life Application Study Bible*, which is also available in other versions like the NIV. This unique resource combines explanation of verses and suggested applications, although some of the note entries are lacking substance.

The notes in *The NIV Study Bible* are edited by several evangelical scholars with dozens more focusing on areas of their expertise. One can also benefit from the *Ryrie Study Bible*, which is available in NASB and NIV. Ryrie was the president and professor of systematic theology at Dallas Theological Seminary. He is solidly evangelical, though his notes come from only one frame of reference. The same can be said of *The MacArthur Study Bible*, whose study notes reflect the thoughts of respected pastor-theologian John MacArthur.

The *Thompson Chain Reference Study Bible* and *The Quest Study Bible* offer various study helps and aid in interpretation. The *International Inductive Study Bible* by Kay Arthur is focused on helping people learn to study for themselves rather than giving all the answers. The *Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible* gives some analysis of Greek and Hebrew words, so that one can gain insights from the original languages.

*The Serendipity Bible* is a helpful resource for developing discussion, interpretation, and application ideas, especially for small groups. Other works focus their editorial efforts on a particular subject. For instance, *The Defender's Bible* is loaded with apologetic insights and *The Women's Study Bible* seeks to package and present material in a way that's attractive and pertinent to women. *The Eight Translation New Testament* is great for seeing how different translators have tried to capture the essence of the original meaning.

Enjoy checking out these and other study Bibles to see what looks most helpful to you. But remember: only the Bible is fully authoritative, not the editorial comments!

## CONCORDANCE

In order to do studies on individual words in the Bible or to find a passage you know the words to, you need a concordance. With a little motivation you can even study the Hebrew or Greek words that correspond to the English translation.

To research Hebrew and Greek and have every word in the Bible categorized, get the exhaustive concordance of whatever translation you use (e.g., the *NIV Exhaustive Concordance*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). With this, you can see every passage containing the translated English word and discover how that word is translated in other passages. You can also find the reference of a verse in order to study its context. Some concordances have an index to tie into other language resources that use Strong's numbering system for biblical words.

A complete concordance includes all the words that the editors consider to be important. It will delete articles, pronouns, and other (mostly minor) words that it will note in the introduction. One cannot do word studies in Hebrew and Greek with this tool.

## BIBLE DICTIONARY/ENCYCLOPEDIA

Another foundational resource for your library is a good Bible dictionary or encyclopedia. Bible dictionaries are not dictionaries in the way we typically think of them. They are actually one-volume encyclopedias focused on Bible people, places, events, doctrines, etc. Multi-volume works are usually called Bible encyclopedias.

### Dictionaries

There are many excellent one volume works, such as the *New Bible Dictionary*, the *New International Dictionary of the Bible*, *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, and the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*.

### Encyclopedias

*The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (rev.), which has 4 volumes, offers a more extensive treatment of issues. *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (4 volumes) and the *IVP Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (3 vols.) are other good multi-volume sets.

### Specialized Works

Some encyclopedias, like Geisler's *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, are

focused on a specific topic—in this case, issues connected with defending the biblical worldview. The *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* and the *Baker Theological Dictionary of the Bible* are excellent in researching theological issues. They include important people, doctrinal developments in church history, and the biblical foundation of various views—most of which is not covered in a Bible dictionary or encyclopedia.

## COMMENTARIES

A commentary is a work that examines the text to describe what it meant to the original author and his listeners or readers. The commentator takes into consideration language, culture, theology, archaeology, and other disciplines to arrive at the intended meaning. Some commentaries try to bridge the gap to modern application as well. There are a multitude of commentaries on the market today for the person unfamiliar with biblical languages, and even more if you want to use an interlinear and wade through some of the comments on the original languages.

### **One-Volume Commentaries**

A library can be started with a good one or two volume commentary on the entire Bible. Some examples include the *New Bible Commentary*, which has been revised to make it more current, the *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*, and the *International Bible Commentary*.

### **Two-Volume Commentaries**

*The Bible Knowledge Commentary* has one volume for the Old Testament and one for the New Testament. Written by Dallas Theological Seminary faculty, it does an excellent job of capturing the essential issues. The *NIV Bible Commentary* is a 2-volume abridgment of the 12 volume *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, which is good if one does not plan to purchase the longer set. *The Bible Exposition Commentary* by Warren Wiersbe is not very “meaty” but is practical, sound, and helpful for teaching.

### **Multi-Volume Commentary Series**

Although not all are evangelical, many helpful conservative commentary sets are available for purchase. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (12 vols.) covers the entire Bible very well, though the individual volumes are more expensive because they include many Bible books in each one. All technical references to the languages are footnoted so that they are available to those who want them without bogging down laypeople. Tyndale commentaries are good, and they cover every New and Old Testament book. The *New International Biblical Commentary* series is great, but is not yet complete. Another solid series for the person without biblical language background is *The Bible Speaks Today* series. Although more expensive, the most in-depth English-based commentaries are

usually found in the *New International Commentary on the Old Testament* and *New International Commentary on the New Testament*. The *NIV Application Commentary* is a great new series that seeks to balance a proper understanding of the text and how to apply it today. The *Bible Background Commentary* is unique in that it focuses on the cultural aspects that affect understanding the text.

### **Greek and Hebrew-based Multi-volume Series**

To study a book more in-depth, which may mean using an interlinear at times, there are more commentaries available. *Word Biblical Commentaries* are available on many Old and New Testament books. The *New International Greek Testament Commentary* has some of the NT books. *Pillar New Testament Commentary* and *Baker Exegetical Commentary of the New Testament/Old Testament* are other series that have been recently begun. Keil and Delitzsch's *Commentary on the Old Testament* is an old but reliable set on the Old Testament, as are Hendrickson and Kistemaker's works in the *New Testament Commentary* series.

## **WORD STUDY BOOKS**

### **Basic Old and New Testament**

*Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* and Lawrence Richard's *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words* offer good, basic studies on many words in Scripture. Knowledge of Hebrew or Greek is not necessary to use these.

### **Old Testament**

The *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology* extensively describes the usage of Hebrew words and their meaning. The *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* is much shorter and is organized by Hebrew words, but is tied to Strong's Concordance numbers through an index so that the person without Hebrew knowledge can find words easily. Spiros Zodhiates' *Complete Word Study Dictionary, OT* is also helpful.

### **New Testament**

For a much fuller treatment than Vine's on Greek words, the *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* is offered in three volumes. The multi-volume *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* is for those with some familiarity with the Greek language, while Spiros Zodhiates' *Complete Word Study Dictionary, NT* does not require knowledge of the original languages.

## INTERLINEAR

These works have the Hebrew or Greek text, a “literal” word-for-word rendering into English underneath, and a translation in the margin.

### Hebrew

The *Interlinear Old Testament* is cheaper but has KJV as the margin text and uses the Masoretic text for the Hebrew as opposed to the modern critical texts that new translations are based on. The *Interlinear NIV Hebrew-English Old Testament* uses the NIV as its text in the margin and has a modern critical text for the Hebrew.

### Greek

*NAS-NIV Parallel NT in Greek and English* has both the more literal NASB translation and the more dynamic NIV translation in the margins so that you can compare. Unlike these, the *New King James Version Greek English Interlinear of the New Testament* is based on the majority text of the New Testament Greek text.

## TOPICAL BIBLE

*Nave's Topical Bible* and similar books are a great help for locating passages that relate to a theme or concept in the Bible (e.g. perseverance or work) that may or may not have the actual word which could be found in a concordance. The *NIV Topical Analysis of the Bible* organizes the Bible's teachings in 15 main areas and collects Scripture by subject. It is helpful for studying what the Bible has to say about doctrinal issues. *The New Treasury of Scripture Knowledge* offers several tools, including the ability to do topical study.

## SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

A systematic theology (a.k.a. doctrinal handbook) discusses doctrine by seeing what the entire Bible teaches about various areas of theology. Some major evangelical examples include Erickson's *Christian Theology*, Berkhof's *Systematic Theology*, Reymond's *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, and Grudem's *Systematic Theology*. More accessible yet solid works include Ryrie's *Basic Theology*, Moody's *Handbook of Theology*, Barakman's *Practical Christian Theology*, Milne's *Know the Truth*, and Boice's *Foundations of the Christian Faith*. As with any reference work, you will want to compare the writer's conclusions with Scripture and the church's doctrinal statement.

## ATLAS

To gain insights from an atlas, check out the *Macmillan Bible Atlas*, *The Moody Atlas of Bible Lands*, the *Holman Bible Atlas*, and *The Zondervan NIV Atlas of the Bible*.

## MANNERS AND CUSTOMS

There are many resources that help one understand the cultural factors that influence the life—and therefore the understanding of Scripture to the original readers. Among them are *New Manners and Customs of Bible Times* (\$22), *Manners and Customs in the Bible* (\$8), *IVP Handbook of Life in Bible Times*, *The Bible Almanac*, and *Archaeology of the Bible: Book by Book*.

The *IVP Bible Background Commentary* (2 vols.) is arranged by chapter and verse instead of topic but also gives insightful nuggets for understanding the background that underlies biblical texts.

## BIBLE INTERPRETATION

Although there are many, two helpful books on Bible study are *How to Understand Your Bible* by Sterrett and *Living by the Book* by Hendricks. *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* by Fee and Stuart and *Reading the Bible with Heart and Mind* by Longman are excellent introductions to the principles of interpretation as they apply to various kinds of literature (genres) in the Bible: prophecy, narrative, poetry, wisdom, parable, epistle etc.

## COMPUTER SOFTWARE

In recent years there has been an explosion of quality electronic Bible study tools. In addition to multiple searchable versions of the Bible, many of the resources mentioned above and other helpful tools are bundled into software packages. Some shareware versions are free, with the most expensive retailing for over \$500. By buying a full program, such as Bible Works (the one I use virtually every day) or Logos, you will get several thousand dollars worth of resources for comparatively little. If you do not wish to access the original languages, cheaper programs are available. Some of the most popular are QuickVerse from Parsons, Gramcord, Online Bible, and Biblesoft. I encourage you to explore the ever-growing world of computer-based software. You may start with catalogs like those from CBD (see below).

## INTERNET RESOURCES

Before you panic about the cost of purchasing a bound copy of all the works surveyed above, many tools referred to in this packet—along with others—are available free online. Some of the electronic tools on the internet are even faster and offer better editing abilities (e.g., cut and paste) than printed works. Not every site on the world wide web is

biblically sound, of course, but the following sites offer a tremendous wealth of tools and information to help facilitate your study of Scripture:

[www.bible.org](http://www.bible.org)  
<http://bible.crosswalk.com>  
[www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com)  
[www.crosssearch.com/Reference/](http://www.crosssearch.com/Reference/)  
[www.studylight.org](http://www.studylight.org)  
[www.unboundbible.org](http://www.unboundbible.org)  
<http://bibleresources.bible.com/>

[www.bible-history.com](http://www.bible-history.com)  
[www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org)  
[www.holylandphotos.org](http://www.holylandphotos.org)  
[www.equip.org](http://www.equip.org)  
[www.leaderu.org](http://www.leaderu.org)  
<http://bible.oneplace.com>

## ORDERING

Christian bookstores have or can order most of the aforementioned resources. To save 20-50% off retail, you should order the more expensive books from a catalog. The discount will more than cover the postage unless you have a small order. Although there are many others, Christian Book Distributors (CBD) remains the largest catalog distributor.

Christian Book Distributors  
P. O. Box 7000  
Peabody, MA 01961-7000  
1-800-247-4784  
<http://www.christianbook.com>

The International Bible Society publishes Bibles for mass distribution, so it is the cheapest way to get Bibles in the versions they carry (KJV, NKJV, NLT, CEV, NASB, NIV, and NIrV—the NIV simplified for children).

International Bible Society  
P.O. Box 35700  
Colorado Springs, CO 80935-3570  
1-800-524-1588.

You can also search for used copies of books for far less than retail at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com). Moreover, you can compare prices of various online retailers using services provided free at <http://www.addall.com> and <http://www.campusi.com>. Finally don't overlook our own church library, which offers many quality resources for you to check out and use.

Enjoy exploring these tools and using them to expand your knowledge, communication, and application of God's Word!

**Community Group Development Proposal**

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--leave a possible bookmark with the PBIs listed.

Radio Bible Class has a booklet on bible study – jennifer ordered

--tell them how important their role is in guiding people toward understanding truth

--How are they doing? How is their grp doing? What are they studying?

**Purpose:** To increase biblical literacy and spiritual maturity within RHCC by building into the lives of our community group leaders (teachers) without burdening them with additional programming responsibilities.

**Process:** Identify who is responsible for the teaching in each CG. Divide all the leaders into two equal groups based on existing relationship, geography, and/or some other criteria. Have Pete & Gregg each commit to meeting individually with each leader at least once during the ministry year. The objective for these meetings would be two-fold:

- (1) To check-in with and encourage each person in their own spiritual journey.
- (2) To provide informal training and tools to benefit the leader's confidence in accurately handling the Word in their CGs (e.g., principles of biblical interpretation skills).
- (3) To diagnosis possible "next steps" that would help leaders or groups develop greater biblical literacy and fidelity.
- (4) To develop long-term relationships in which each teacher has a pastoral contact to resource them, challenge them, etc.

**Parameters:** Develop some standardized questions that each group leader is asked so that we can get an accurate representation of something measurable. compile responses and take next steps.

### **Possible Pros & Cons:**

#### Pros

personal, pastoral input

opens up long-term relationship

-the process is simple

-build in flexibility to accommodate various schedules and needs (meals, coffees, etc.)

-provides the ability to tailor training to a person's point of need, whereas a classroom setting may present material that is too simplistic or advanced for an individual and thus considered irrelevant.

-can open up doors for further spontaneous and strategic opportunities

-have some budget for meetings and resources

#### Cons

class training may need to be reduced

may need more budget for mtgs (e.g., meals) and for resources to give out

--Put on a bookmark for CG leaders

During the mtg w/ CG leaders, focus in on the rule of context!  
–b/c that’s the major key to understanding scripture, whether you’re studying thru a bk, or answering discussion questions that point to a specific verse.

#### Select Principles of Biblical Interpretation

- When the plain sense makes good sense, seek no other sense (or you have none-sense!)
- The Bible interprets itself; use Scripture to interpret Scripture
- Plain interpretation (Take the language of the Bible at face value – interpret words in their normal (plain & ordinary) meaning.)
- Text always has one meaning, several principles and countless applications – the one meaning is the intended meaning of the original author to the original people. (one interpretation, multiple implications)
- Looking at a passage read before, during and after.
- When in doubt – seek it out – it’s OK to say you don’t know and have them seek out the answer then discuss. Equip people going through the process of having to seek it out.
- Knowing the author, his circumstances, who he’s writing to
- Historical and cultural context
- Understanding the language of the day

Bookmark in the shape of a fat key and laminated?

Points bulleted w/ keys?

2<sup>nd</sup> idea: Make the bookmark a big puzzle piece; then title it: Putting the Puzzle Together

## **Keys to Unlocking Scripture**

[NOTES: Use a “key icon” for the bullets. Can make the main point bold & larger font, w/ the subtext non-bolded & in a smaller font. Put the text over a large gold “key” image (watermark?) on a 1/3 sheet of paper & laminate. Perhaps put the RHCC tree logo on the back. Space permitting, I’ll put some websites for further study on the back of the bookmark – more than the 3 below. If it’s virtually impossible to fit these on 1 side of the bookmark, I can eliminate one – prob #7.]

**Prayerfully seek the help of the Holy Spirit.** He inspired the Bible, and He wants to illumine it for you!

**Ask questions of the text.** Based on careful observation, pose and answer questions like who, what, when, where, why, how. Note clues like “therefore,” “for,” “then,” “also,” “however.”

**Interpret the Bible literally.** Understand the words and grammar in their normal sense. When the plain sense makes good sense, seek no other sense...or you have nonsense!

**Consider the immediate context.** Read and understand what proceeds and follows your passage.

**Keep the whole Bible in mind.** Understand each part in view of the whole, realizing that Scripture progressively unfolds. Scripture will compliment but not contradict itself. Investigate cross-references and parallel passages to let the Bible interpret itself.

**Remember the original author and audience.** Determine who the author is and what he intended to communicate to his particular readers in their historical setting before making applications. A text has one meaning but numerous implications.

**Move from known to unknown.** Interpret difficult, obscure, and controversial texts in light of those that are clear and easily understood. Get a grasp on basic doctrine!

**Let the Bible speak for itself.** Interpret experience in light of Scripture, not Scripture in light of experience.

**Realize your limitations.** When in doubt, seek the answer out! Look to trusted people and resources for insight.

[For back of bookmark; make sure font/formatting is consistent with front. Use “key” icon/bullet again]

## **Key Internet Learning Sites**

The following on-line resources offer a tremendous wealth of tools and information to help facilitate your study of Scripture:

www.bible.org

<http://bible.crosswalk.com>

www.biblegateway.com

www.crosssearch.com/Reference/

www.studylight.org

www.unboundbible.org

<http://bibleresources.bible.com/>

www.bible-history.com

www.ccel.org

www.holylandphotos.org

www.equip.org

www.leaderu.org