

Finer Grounds

How to Study the Bible

Lesson 2: Sources

Throughout this chapter we will begin to look at some reliable sources that are extremely useful in studying scripture. This is by no means an exhaustive list, but is only intended to help you know some of the most valuable resources available at your fingertips. In this chapter we will learn HOW to use them and in future chapters we will learn WHY and WHEN to use them.

STRONG'S EXHAUSTIVE CONCORDANCE OF THE BIBLE: This is arguably the single most valuable resource available to you outside of the Bible itself. Most likely your church and public libraries have copies of this book. It is also available at no cost on several websites, one of which is www.blueletterbible.org. Always, when you are using a concordance, make sure that the version you are using matches the version of the Bible you are using. Strong's Exhaustive Concordance is only available for the King James Version and the New American Standard Version. An exhaustive concordance allows you to search for a specific word and see each time it is used throughout the Bible. In addition to this, you can use the "Strong's Number" listed after each word to look up the definition of the word in the original language in the back of the concordance.

Step By Step Guide:

- Go to www.blueletterbible.org
- Type the word you'd like to look up in the "Search the Bible" search box
- Select your version from the drop down list (remember only KJV and NASB allow you to use the Strong's Exhaustive Concordance)
- Click the "Search" button

- As you scroll down you will see a list of verses that contain the English word you typed.
- Make sure the "Strong's" box is checked in the menu bar
- Look for the tiny number beside the words throughout the verse. This is the Strong's number. Click on the number next to the word you looked up. (Note: Different numbers may be used for the word you looked up in different verses, this indicates a different word was used in the original language)
- You will be directed to a page that has a plethora of information on the specific word you are looking up, including a pronunciation guide, definition, and a list of how many times this word is used in the original language.

NAVE'S TOPICAL BIBLE: When trying to find information on a specific topic, this is one of the best resources. It is also a very common resource and available for free online in many places including www.blueletterbible.org. Topical Bibles list words alphabetically and then give you references showing where each topic can be found. It is different from a concordance in that it does not list where specific words can be found; it lists where subjects can be found. Larger subjects will also be broken down into subcategories so you can find verses that have a particular emphasis

Step By Step Guide:

- Go to www.blueletterbible.org
- On the very top search bar click "Study" and then "Encyclopedias/Dictionaries"

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- Uncheck all boxes except the one that says "Nave's" and click the "refresh list" button
- You will now be able to browse the subjects alphabetically by clicking on the letters above the boxes you just unchecked

TREASURY OF SCRIPTURE KNOWLEDGE: If you are doing a study of a particular passage or book, this is one of the best cross reference tools available. It is available in book form or on www.blueletterbible.org. A cross-reference links you to other scriptures that support, illuminate or amplify the scripture you are studying.

Step By Step Guide:

- Go to www.blueletterbible.org
- Type the verse reference you would like to use in the "Search the Bible" search bar (remember, be sure to scroll down and choose your version of the Bible) and click the search button
- Click the "tools" button beside the verse that you'd like to use
- Now click the "cros-refs" tab at the top of the box
- This will show you all of the cross-references contained in the Treasury of Scripture Knowledge

INTERNATIONAL STANDARD BIBLE ENCYCLOPEDIA: This encyclopedia contains a wealth of information about various words and concepts throughout scripture. It is an excellent source of background information for any study. It can be accessed online at www.blueletterbible.com.

Step By Step Guide:

- Go to www.blueletterbible.org
- On the very top search bar click "Study" and then "Encyclopedias/Dictionaries"

- Uncheck all boxes except the one that says "ISBE" and click the "refresh list" button
- You will now be able to browse the subjects alphabetically by clicking on the letters above the boxes you just unchecked

BLUE LETTER BIBLE APP: For those of you who are super tech savvy and use your smart phone for everything, Blue Letter Bible has a free app that contains the same tools.

You will notice the conspicuous absence of commentaries on this list. I typically stay away from commentaries until I have studied through a passage this way I am less inclined to be swayed in my understanding. While there are times when they can be extremely helpful, you must remember that these are the thoughts of men and not scripture. Commentaries can be very useful in finding background information such as date, place and information about various cultures.

The Truth for Today Commentary Series bears mentioning because it is written by members of the church of Christ; however, continue to keep in mind that a commentary, no matter who it is written by, should not be your primary source when studying.

In this chapter we have discussed various resources available to you and how to use them. In your homework you will get to put what you learned into practice. One word of caution, Bible study takes time and effort. In the end, however, you will be richly rewarded. While the homework may seem tedious, I do ask that you complete it so that you gain practice and using these sources seems like second nature to you!

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Chapter 1: Homework

Exercise 1:

Today we will be looking at the concept of hospitality in each of your sources.

Start with Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible and look up the word "hospitality." List each verse where this word appears:

Now, look up the definition in the original language for the occurrence of "hospitality" that appears in Romans 12:13 and write it here:

What other verse/verses use this same Greek word?

Were you surprised by the lack of actual listings for the word "hospitality?" Even though there aren't many instances of the specific word in scripture, the Bible is not silent on the issue. To find where the concept of hospitality is discussed we will now switch to the Nave's Topical Bible.

List all verses that discuss specific instances of hospitality:

Which of these instances were rewarded? How?

What other topics are listed that relate to hospitality?

Excellent! Now we are really starting to get a grasp on what scripture has to say about hospitality. Let's look more in-depth at Roman's 12:13, since it deals directly with the subject. Look this verse up in the Treasure of Scripture Knowledge.

List all related verses:

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Now look up "hospitality" in the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia. List any interesting facts you learn about hospitality and the customs surrounding it:

Exercise 2:

We are now going to look at the Babylonian Empire.

How many verses contain the word "Babylon?"

Which book of the Bible mentions Babylon the most?

What is the first account (not simply one verse) in scripture that deals with Babylon (though it is not called Babylon at the time)?

List some interesting cultural facts about Babylon that may give insight to what those in Babylonian captivity may have experienced.

Exercise 3:

Write an outline based on the concept of prayer. Be sure to include verses and some interesting customs regarding prayer.
