

BIBLE STUDY TOOLS

BY PENN CLARK

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Martin Luther once said, "Have few books and read them often." Here are a few books that I recommend you build into your study library:

- **The Amplified Bible** was first copyrighted in 1958 by the Lockman Foundation, La Habra, California.

I feel that every Bible student should have a copy of this interesting Bible for personal study. It has been a tremendous asset to me through the years. It has brought certain truths to the surface that I would not have found anywhere else. While I could not do my devotions out of it as some do, it is one of my all-time favorite study tools.

- **New American Standard Bible** was copyrighted in 1960 by the Lockman Foundation, La Habra, California.

To me, this version has class. It is so balanced and dignified. It probably is the version most recommended by Bible teachers because of its literal interpretation of the Greek. It is held by many students of the Word to be the most accurate of all English Bibles. I have a heartfelt respect for it.

- **The Bible: A New Translation**, its first copyright was in 1950 by James A. R. Moffatt, Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., New York.

I like Moffatt's translation of the Bible because it seems to me that he was an original thinker. He didn't follow the ecclesiastical crowd of his day in anything he did. When I was a new student of the Bible, I used a borrowed a copy of Moffatt's translation for a time, as it was not easy to find. You can now find it online.

- **New International Version**, its first copyright was in 1973 by the International Bible Society, Zondervan Publishing House.

This Bible was published in 1978, the year I became a Christian. It seemed like the only choices were The Way or the King James Version. The NIV provided

something in between. I found this edition exciting for a time but grew disappointed with it when I began to look closer at the Psalms, Proverbs, and the Prophets. I was dismayed to find little or no resemblance between what was written here in the NIV and what was in the King James Version. I could not even find the pathways they took to show me how they arrived at such dramatic changes.

- **The Living Bible**, its first copyright was in 1971 by Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton Illinois.

This Bible has grown on me. As a young Bible student, changing from reading the King James to reading this Bible felt as if I were coming down off some lofty place into a more common area. At first, some parts didn't seem very scriptural to me at all. Then, as I learned what the author was attempting to do by paraphrasing the Bible rather than presenting it as a new translation, I came to appreciate his work more and more. Now that I am more of a mature Bible student, it has won me over. It has earned my respect, not just for the spirit in which it was written, but its overall accuracy as a paraphrase. I should also point out that it is based upon the New American Standard. I feel comfortable recommending it to new believers, and I recommend it to serious Bible students as well.

- **Good News Bible**, Today's English Version, American Bible Society, was first copyrighted in 1966.

You will not find another version more frequently sold in yard sales than this one. With over 35 million copies sold at one point, you can find it almost everywhere. I like it for that fact alone. It is a testimony to its appeal to non-churched people who want a Bible that reads as easily as a newspaper. I hope the fact that they are found in everyone's yard sales is an indication that they have all moved on to the New King James Version or something similar. As a translation, I must admit I have not found it useful enough to include among my study tools.

- **The Modern Language Bible**, The New Berkeley Version in Modern English, was first copyrighted in 1945 by Zondervan Publishing House.

This version is often the one found in those little green or red pocket New Testaments put out by the Gideons. Overall, there is not a dramatic difference between it and anything else I have read, but some verses are rendered more useful in the Berkeley Bible.

- **The Authorized Version of the King James Bible** seems to be the version most Greek students work from. I like taking an antiquated statement, word, or expression from the King James and using *The Strong's Concordance* and other translations to make something practical out of it. Granted, you may not have to do this with other translations, but neither can you. It is usually the base from which I begin a deeper study and use it as the cornerstone to which I compare everything else.
- **The New King James Version**, was first copyrighted in 1979, by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Publishers.

A few years ago, I underwent a major change in my writing and pulpit ministry. I switched to the New King James. I love the King James and the New King James, of course, but I find it is far easier for people to understand when I read the New King James Version from the pulpit.

- **The New Testament in Modern English**, its first copyright was in 1958 by J. B. Phillips, Macmillan Publishing Company.

This is my favorite hammock Bible. It reads like a novel. I have not found this with any other translation until *The Message* came out. I do not always agree with J.B., but I have been blessed by his amazing way with words. I came across my first edition in an old box of books, and since then, I have been turning people on to J.B. Now when I come across a copy in a used bookstore, I buy it just to give away to those who have not discovered it on their own.

- **Weymouth's New Testament in Modern Speech**, ("WNT"), also known as *The New Testament in Modern Speech* or *The Modern Speech New Testament*. It was first copyrighted in 1903 by Richard Francis Weymouth, Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., New York.

While this version does not always add anything new or unusual to my studies, I tend to think of Weymouth as "ye old stand-by." When I finally arrive at a particular understanding of a verse, I look to him to see if I am safe.

- **The New Testament—An Expanded Translation, by Kenneth S. Wuest** was copyrighted in 1961 by Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

When I was a new believer looking for a good Greek translation, the only thing that was readily available to me was the Wuest Greek Bible. He is so readable, and his constant mention of other Greek scholars has made me familiar with

their work. His approach is the most original I have seen. He begins by taking each verse of an epistle apart, allowing you to see his reason for the changes he is about to make and then giving you his new rendering before moving on to the next verse. At the end of a chapter, he gives the entire chapter rewritten as it might be in a Greek New Testament. I have always been fond of Wuest, perhaps because he was the first Greek scholar I could understand.

- **The New Testament—An American Translation by Edgar J. Goodspeed** was copyrighted in 1923 by the University of Chicago.

I have only had a copy of this New Testament for a short time, so I have not been able to use it enough to say much about it. The reason I snapped it up was because I see Goodspeed's name being referred to as a credible scholar in various writings.

- **The Twentieth Century New Testament: A Translation into Modern Speech**, was first copyrighted in 1900 by Fleming H. Revell Company.

I found the only copy I have ever seen in a used book sale years ago. It was introduced as a "tentative edition" put out by the publishers to receive criticisms and suggestions for a final version to be published later. To me it is a smooth-flowing and always interesting translation. I do not know if it was ever widely published, and I have not seen it in bookstores, but then again, I never sent in any of my criticisms or suggestions they were looking for either.

- **The Worrell Translation with Study Notes** was copyrighted in 1904 by A. S. Worrell and published by the Gospel Publishing House, Springfield, MO.

I was introduced to this version years ago by seeing how often Kenneth Hagin made reference to its author in his books. While the translation is not extraordinary, his footnotes are sometimes interesting. Nearly half of each page is made up of footnotes.

- **The Jerusalem Bible** was copyrighted in 1966 by Darton, Langman & Todd Ltd. and Doubleday and Company, Inc.

What I appreciate most about this Catholic Bible is its use of the English language. It is a beautiful translation and has been most helpful in my studies. It is always crisp and clear. Some of the footnotes are helpful, but it sometimes gives the impression they are written by detached intellectuals.

- **The Message** was copyrighted in 1994 by Eugene H. Peterson and published by NavPress.

There has not been a new translation that has excited me as much as this one. It is actually fun to read. What a fresh and exciting work! It has made me go back to my old King James more than once to see how he arrived where he did. It seems that he approaches Scripture from a completely new angle. I love my edition and recommend it to others.

- **God's Word Translation** (GWT) was published in 1995 by God's Word to the Nations Bible Mission Society (www.godsword.org) in Cleveland, Ohio.

This Bible accurately translates the meaning of the original texts into everyday language and is both readable and reliable.

EVEN MORE TRANSLATIONS

There are other translations out there that are not listed here. There have even been a couple of new ones since I have compiled this list for our students. The ones I am reading now are *The Passion Translation* and *The Kingdom Translation* by N.T. Wright and published by HarperOne. I also just read in the news that one of our popular Pentecostal Bible schools, Oral Roberts University, is planning to come out with their own modern language translation in the near future. Some people may be waving their arms, saying, "Enough is enough!" But I am all for this. I feel it is part of God's grace for us today. I am grateful for any light these translations shed on the Scriptures, or anything that causes people to dig into God's Word more. If we can make the Bible more readable or more attractive, I am for it, so long as people fall more in love with the wonderful Word of God and learn to handle it with integrity.

OTHER STUDY TOOLS

BIBLE DICTIONARIES

A good Bible dictionary is a necessary tool for deeper study. It is like an encyclopedia that covers every topic in the Bible. The one that I use is the *Second Edition of the Bible Dictionary* published by Tyndale House Publishers. It is much more in-depth than *Smith's Bible Dictionary*.

LEXICONS

A lexicon allows you to study Greek and Hebrew at a more advanced level than *The Strong's Concordance*. It is more in-depth, but not all the depth is practical. Every nuance can be a nuisance. One body of work belonging to Dr. Spiros Zodhiates is a King James Bible which has key words underlined and number coded. In the back of this Bible, he has included the *Strong's*

dictionaries as well as his own lexical aids. This has been a very useful tool for me. The only drawback that I have found after extensive use is that he tends to steer away from the supernatural or miraculous.

THE OXFORD DICTIONARY

There are two reasons why this is such an invaluable tool. One is that it is likely the most authoritative book on the English language in print. *Webster's* is an excellent dictionary for Americans, but the King James is not written in American English. Both the King James and the *Oxford Dictionary* were British-born. They speak the same language. In other words, you could look up in the *Oxford Dictionary* almost any word in the King James and get a definition that fits what the original translators intended. It has solved puzzles for me that Dr. Strong could not. It often goes into great depth and is conservative in its approach to the Bible. You could get saved reading this dictionary. I almost did. As a non-believer, I was writing a story and relied heavily upon this dictionary. As I was looking things up, I was amazed at how it treated spiritual things in a literal way. Christianity is clearly presented. It convinced me that I should take this "stuff" more seriously. I was saved a few weeks later. The dictionary helped convince me.

Another small plus is that the *Oxford* is the only dictionary I have seen which gives the historical origin of an English word along with the definition. Dr. Strong says in his opening of "Plan for the Book" that each word is "tersely analyzed and expressed." Often he would only use one big word where several would be more helpful. He is so concise in his definitions that sometimes he leaves me with no more understanding of what he meant than when I started. When this occurs, I look up his terse words in the *Oxford Dictionary* and am often satisfied with more detail.

COMMENTARIES

I have not owned a set of commentaries yet, so I cannot speak much from personal use. I am concerned when I hear a sermon that sounds like the preacher is reading from a commentary, giving three or four opinions for what a passage might mean and letting the hearers decide which one they prefer. I have no doubt that a good set of commentaries would be useful as long as they do not replace prayerful, reliance upon the Spirit of Truth as we meditate upon Scripture. They should not be our first step in study, but perhaps the last to confirm the truth we have been given.

STUDY BIBLES

By far, the best study Bible I have seen is the *Spirit-Filled Study Bible* published by Thomas Nelson. I study all study Bibles, and this one is the best I have found. The notes at the bottom of each page are fact-filled, spiritually balanced, and downright meaty. Many of the notes I have found in other study Bibles are so general, non-committal or "safe" that they say nothing. The "helps" in this edition are well written and really do help.

One time when Dick Mills was at our church, he gave me an edition as a gift. I tried to refuse it, but he was so insistent that I finally took it. I almost missed it. I honestly suspected that the

Spirit-Filled Bible was another “Charismatic” novelty item to make money. He told me that he had contributed the Word Wealth studies in it, so it gave me a further incentive to look into it. I took it home, and it knocked me out. I told Heather what a wonderful work it was. I found rare insights in the footnotes—insights that I had arrived at in my own study but had never seen in print before. It was a joy to read, and my enthusiasm must have caught Heather’s attention because she “stole it” from me, and I had to buy myself another copy. I highly recommend this work as an aid to study the Scriptures.

NAVE’S TOPICAL BIBLE

Originally produced by Orville J. Nave, A.M., D.D., LL.D. while serving as a Chaplain in the United States Army, he referred to this work as “the result of fourteen years of delightful and untiring study of the Word of God.” *Nave’s Topical Bible* consists of 20,000 plus topics and subtopics, and 100,000 references to the Scriptures. This is a great addition to a serious student’s bookshelf.

ONLINE STUDY TOOLS

Here are some great study tools and other resources that I often use:

- *Olive Tree* has a great app with a wide range of Bibles and study tools available. This is currently my favorite Bible study tool: <https://www.olivetree.com>
- *Bible Study Tools* is a website loaded with a lot of great study helps, and it is free: <http://www.biblestudytools.com>
- *Crosswalk* Bible study tools include many translations and *The Strong’s Concordance*: <http://bible.crosswalk.com/>
- The Parallel Bible is a great tool on *Bible Hub*. It allows you to see the same verse in many different translations: <http://bible.cc/>
- The Amplified Bible, among many other versions, is available at *Bible Gateway*: <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=isaiah+58&version=45;>
- *Christian Classics Ethereal Library* has the Phillips Translation online, which is one of my favorite Bible Study tools: <http://www.ccel.org/bible/phillips/JBPNT.htm>
- *Scripture Text* has *The Message* online: <http://scripturetext.com/>

- *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* is available at:
<http://www.menfak.no/bibelprog/vines?word=t0003387>
- The *Unbound Bible* is a good collection of searchable Bibles with various English, Greek, Hebrew, and ancient translations: <http://unbound.biola.edu/>
- The *Blue Letter Bible* provides tools for in-depth Bible study:
<http://www.blueletterbible.org/> Click on Study Tools to find Harmony of the Gospels and many other useful charts and outlines.
- The *e-Sword* app has a free Bible program you can download: <http://www.e-sword.net/features.html>
- *The Strong's Concordance* is also available at:
<http://www.eliyah.com/lexicon.html>
- *Easton's Bible Dictionary* is available at:
<http://www.ccel.org/e/easton/ebd/ebd3.html>
- *Smith's Bible Dictionary* is available at: <http://www.studylight.org/dic/sbd/>
- *Naves Topical Bible* is available at: <http://www.studylight.org/con/ntb/>
- *Thompson Chain Reference* can be found at:
<http://www.studylight.org/con/tcr/>
- *YouVersion* is an ad-free Bible app: <https://www.youversion.com>
- *Pastor's Resource* by Rick Warren is at: <http://pastors.com>