

Choosing the Right Study Bible

Not a scholar? Not to worry. There's a study Bible out there for you.

Have you ever read a Bible passage and yearned to know more about the historical context of the verse or the meaning of a word? If so, then using a study Bible to better understand God's Word will be helpful to you.

An abundant variety of this type of Bible awaits you in your local Christian bookstore. Choosing among the many you'll see, however, doesn't have to be overwhelming. A few simple guidelines will help you decide which one is best for you.

Purpose. What would you like to use your study Bible for? Do you want to probe deeply into definitions of words? Then try a Bible that discusses the meaning of the original Greek or Hebrew text.

Are you seeking tips on how to apply God's Word to your life? Bibles such as the Life Application Study Bible (Zondervan) explain how to put God's truth into practice.

Do you want a reference work that links all the verses about a certain subject? Then try The Thompson Chain-Reference Study Bible (Kirkbride). In contrast to chain-reference Bibles is the "commentary" Bible, which illuminates the scriptural text by adding alongside it expository prose by a Bible scholar.

Do you want to study maps, timelines and charts? How about outlines or historical backgrounds of books and passages of

the Bible? The Dake Annotated Reference Bible (Dake Publishing) encompasses a variety of such helps. It contains doctrinal charts, prophetic studies and notes about "Dispensational Truth." Another such work is the best-selling Nave's Topical Bible (various), which garners an endorsement from Billy Graham as the book he depends on most during his own study of the Bible.

Translation. Are you shopping for a specific translation? It's likely that you can fill your need for deeper study without giving up your preferred version of the Bible.

You shouldn't have trouble finding study Bibles in the King James Version, New King James Version, New American Bible, New American Standard Bible, New International Version, New International Reader's Version, New Living Translation, New Revised Standard Version and other versions or translations.

Some well-known ministries trust a certain version of the Bible so much that they produce their own special edition of it. One example is Bible teacher Charles Stanley's New American Standard Bible: In Touch Ministries Wide Margin Edition (Lockman Foundation Publications).

Emphasis. Some study Bibles are published with the largest possible readership in mind. Others have a more specific emphasis and are directed toward the beliefs of particular segments of the body of Christ. The Holy Spirit Encounter Bible (Charisma House), Life in the Spirit Study Bible (Zondervan) and Spirit Filled Life Bible (Nelson Bibles), for example, each emphasize the power and person of the Holy Spirit. They will likely appeal to Pentecostal or charismatic believers.

Other study Bibles are tailored for Roman Catholic believers, Baptists or a number of other denominations. Some study Bibles will help you understand prophecy. Others will emphasize the need for soul winning.

When choosing a study Bible for yourself, consider whether or not you would like its emphasis to be upon your personal perspective of the Christian faith. Perhaps you would get more out of one that complements the viewpoints of your particular church, denomination or fellowship.

Age, Gender or Ethnicity. Just as certain Bible translations are prepared so they are easy for children to read, some study Bibles are written with the same purpose. One is the The NIV Adventure Bible (Zonderkidz), which contains study helps and application ideas that take children's developmental stages into consideration.

Bibles such as Revolve and Refuel (each from Nelson Bibles), printed in the style of a contemporary magazine, are meant to help teens realize the relevance of God's Word and its application to their lives. Certain study Bibles narrow their focus to bring gender and ethnic background into play. They may be directed specifically to boys, girls, men, women or people of color.

Format. You might think we've considered all the options for choosing the right study Bible, but let's not forget the high-tech lifestyle. For many students of the Bible, computer software rather than the printed word is the format of choice.

Bible study software is plentiful for the home computer,

pocket PC or PDA. A quick online search will turn up an abundant list.

You have a choice that ranges from the software version of printed study Bibles to entire libraries of Bible helps, such as Biblesoft's PC Study Bible, Bible Works 6, QuickVerse 2005 and eBible Platinum Edition. Add these resources to your laptop computer and you can study God's Word almost anywhere.

A Final Tip. If you are planning to do some comparison shopping, the best way to decide which study Bible meets your need is to look up the same verse or passage in a variety of Bibles and compare the notes and other helps provided. With so many choices available, you can be sure there is a study Bible that is right for you and each member of your family.