Behind the Green Curtain: Online Bible Study

Introduction

We finished up a six-week series last Wednesday looking at Philippians. We concluded with a four-man panel discussion of what we had learned. I had a blast with that. We received a lot of positive feedback, but one of the things that I noticed when we all walked up on stage was that we all carried stuff with us. Laptops, books, notes, folders, etc. It got me to thinking that it might be helpful for those of us that teach to show you how the proverbial sausage is made.

That made me think of the Wizard of Oz and one of my favorite scenes:

In this scene, the wizard is found out. Dorothy and her companions realize that what they thought was the wizard was really just a lot of smoke and mirrors.

Tonight, I'd like to take you behind the green curtain of Bible study—to show you some of the tools and processes that I have found helpful over my 20+ years of teaching the Bible.

I was in a training at work earlier today and a lady named Dimenta Alford said the following quote: "We only have so much room for storage . . . and eventually our brains have to let some things go."

That is really the perfect way to walk in to what I really want to talk about tonight—using tools that others have built to help us know God better and live out His word. We simply cannot know it all—and that's a good thing—and there are others that have gone before that have left a legacy of helps.

Process

When someone asks me what my process is for Bible study, I usually respond with a list that looks something like this:

1. Pray for understanding
2. Read the English text of Scripture and write out my questions about the text
3. Meditate and write down my observations
4. Look up the original language (Hebrew / Greek / Aramaic) words in an online interlinear
5. Meditate on the words and write down observations
6. Look at Bible dictionaries, encyclopedias, etc. to get the cultural, political, societal, etc. context
7. Meditate on the context and write down observations
8. Pray for clarity
9. Read commentaries to fill in observations and counter-arguments to any proposed observations
10. Meditate on the commentaries and write down observations
11. Organize my observations into a logical sequence of ideas (this is the lesson) that answers three questions: what does the text say, what is the application, and what is the personalization
12. Proofread everything a few times
13. Wait and pray for clarity
14. Create final versions of teacher handouts and student handouts
15. Post everything online at teachings.jim314.com

I am not saying that your process has to be my process. My process is not found in the Bible. Many of the components are, but the order isn't. I've just found that healthy doses of mediation, reading, and prayer help.

Tens of thousands of websites can assist you with Bible study. Today, I am going to focus on four different categories to help you see the options available. I am giving you a teaspoon of the ocean.

We will start out with some very basic options and move to more and more complex resources. There should be something for everyone tonight.

If you are not computer savvy—don't worry. Everything about tonight's lesson can be found here: bit.ly/FlemingBibleStudy.

Easy English

EasyEnglish.info (2001) – basic Bible commentaries and **basic** Bible translations

Easy English provides Bible commentaries at two reading levels. One is a 1,200-word vocabulary and one is a 2,800-word vocabulary. The reading level is very basic (Kindergarten to second grade). Whether you are looking for a simpler explanation or for a text that is easier to read, this is helpful.

Here is an example from Genesis 1: bit.ly/EasyEnglishExample. Notice the simplified vocabulary and sentence structure, as well as the straightforward commentary. I use this website when I am trying to simplify complex theological concepts. Much of the website is horribly designed, but it is helpful.

YouVersion

(2008) A mobile device application that allows you to read versions from your **mobile** device. You can download versions to your mobile device or you can read versions wirelessly. Note: at different times of the year, different versions are made available for download for free. YouVersion also offers a wide variety of reading plans that are extremely easy to use (my (then) twelve-year-old used it). Over 188,000,000 downloads have occurred and they have over 1,000 bible versions. YouVersion.com

BibleGateway

BibleGateway.com (1993) – access to nearly every conceivable English Bible **translation**, including:

American Standard Version (ASV), **Amplified Bible (AMP)**, Contemporary English Version (CEV), English Standard Version (ESV), Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB), King James Version (KJV), The Message (MSG), New American Standard Bible (NASB), New Internatinoal Version (NIV), **New King James Version (NKJV)**, and the New Living translation (NLT). That probably covers what is in your hands
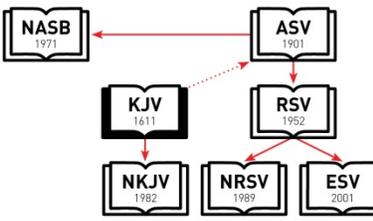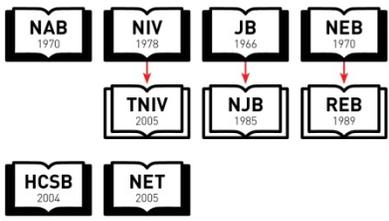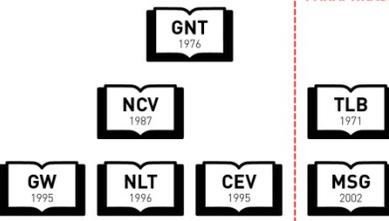
Simple searches for specific words (i.e., "Jesus," "prophet," "love") or passages (i.e., "John 3:16", "Romans 8:28") are possible. Note: when searching for specific passages, you can search for more than one at a time by separating the passages with a comma (i.e., "John 3:16, Romans 8:28").

Here is an example from Genesis 1: bit.ly/BibleGatewayExample

BibleGateway.com also has Bible commentaries, but they are not as exhaustive as some other resource we will look at.

A note about Bible versions

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FORMAL EQUIVALENCE WORD FOR WORD	INTERMEDIATE	FUNCTIONAL EQUIVALENCE MEANING FOR MEANING
• **theory:** 'literal' or *word-for-word* • **aim:** to retain the *form*, i.e. the words and structure, of the original text as much as possible • **result:** an English translation that is primarily accurate, yet also comprehensible	• **theory:** mediating between 'literal' and 'idiomatic' • **aim:** to retain the *form* of the original text where possible, without compromising its *function*, i.e. to convey meaning • **result:** an English translation that is both accurate and clear.	• **theory:** 'idiomatic' or *meaning-for-meaning* • **aim:** to retain the *function* of the original text, i.e. to convey meaning, as much as possible • **result:** to produce an English translation that is primarily natural and easy to understand **Paraphrase** = re-wording a text in the *same* language, rather than translating it from one language to *another*.

ASV	= American Standard Version	
ESV	= English Standard Version	
KJV	= King James Version	
NASB	= New American Standard Bible	
NKJV	= New King James Version	
NRSV	= New Revised Standard Version	
RSV	= Revised Standard Version	

HSCB	= Holman Christian Standard Bible
JB	= Jerusalem Bible (Roman Catholic)
NAB	= New American Bible (Roman Catholic)
NEB	= New English Bible
NET	= New English Translation (online translation)
NIV	= New International Version
NJB	= New Jerusalem Bible (Roman Catholic)
TNIV	= Today's New International Version
REB	= Revised English Bible

CEV	= Contemporary English Version
GNT	= Good News Translation (Good News Bible)
GW	= God's Word
MSG	= The Message
NCV	= New Century Version
NLT	= New Living Translation
TLB	= The Living Bible

The best Bible version is the one that fits your current reading level and facilitates ==regular== use. The English is just the starting place. Let's move towards better picture quality with HDTV.

Interlinears

For hundreds and hundreds of years, the most well educated people on the planet were priests. Priests knew multiple languages (Latin plus their native tongue) and were trained in higher mathematics (in order to calculate Easter). Up until about 20 years ago, access and understanding of the original languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek) was limited to clergy and seminary students.

Then, the internet happened.

Christians began dumping dozens of older commentaries, dictionaries, encyclopedias, and original language word resources online. The backbone for most of the original language word resources are Strong's numbers (the numbers that Dr. James Strong and his team assigned to each original language word).

Strong's numbers fit perfectly with web design and ==online== interlinears were born. Here is an example of 1 Thessalonians 5:17 with the King James Version and the *Textus Receptus*: bit.ly/StudyLightInterlinearExample

StudyLight

StudyLight.org (2001) – <mark>commentaries</mark>, interlinears, dictionaries, and encyclopedias, including:

Barnes' Notes, Calvin's Commentary, Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, **Guzik's Commentaries**, **J. Vernon McGee's "Thru the Bible,"** The Pulpit Commentary, Scofield's Reference Notes, Spurgeon's Verse Expositions, Stedman's Expository Studies, **The Treasury of Scripture Knowledge**, Wesley's Explanatory Notes, **Robertson's Word Pictures**, Vincent's Word Studies, The Fourfold Gospel, Ironside's Notes, Luther's Commentary on Galatians, **The Treasury of David**, Thompson Chain Reference, Baker Evangelical Dictionary, Easton Bible Dictionary, Hitchcock Bible Names Dictionary, Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, **International Standard Bible Encyclopedia**, and The Jewish Encyclopedia

Note: The vast majority of the free commentaries, dictionaries, and encyclopedias that are available free online are there for one of two reasons. Either the copyright expired because a publisher desired to make the work widely available free to the world or because there was no longer any financial gain in publishing the work. Commentaries tend to be common and the only source of <mark>Truth</mark> is the Bible. Everyone (and their doctrine) is fallible. 'For now we see in a mirror, dimly' (1 Corinthians 13:12a).

Classic.StudyLight.org enables you to see all of the resources attached to a word more easily than the StudyLight.org.

Here is an example from Genesis 1: bit.ly/StudyLightClassicExample

Note: It is normal to be overwhelmed with the breadth and depth of material available. I have mastered very little of this—this is simply one beggar showing other beggars where to find bread.

BlueLetterBible

BlueLetterBible.org (1995) – <mark>original</mark> language word study tools

BlueLetterBible.org is helpful for original language word studies. Here is how to use it:

1. Hover over "Search"
2. Lexiconc Search
3. Type in a word
4. Press 'Enter'

PreceptAustin

PreceptAustin.org (2008) – <mark>every</mark> conceivable electronic Bible study link or sermon on the internet

When you are comfortable with the concept of commentaries, spend some time here.

A Final Thought: Why Do We Have the Bible?

2 Timothy 3:16-17: 16 All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every <mark>good</mark> <mark>work</mark>. (Not to fill our heads with facts or to impress each other)