

HOW TO BUILD YOUR RELIGION REFERENCE LIBRARY

Must haves to deepen your understanding of the world, grow your faith and enrich your life!

As you build your collection of Bible and religious studies resources, you will discover more about what the Bible says and means, explore your faith with others, and gain insight into Christian tradition and how it is different from other religions. The importance of a strong, deep reference library to your faith and knowledge is immeasurable.

Bible resources have one main goal: to provide information that gives you greater understanding of the Bible. Dollar for dollar, Bible reference books are an exceptional value because typically they are larger books that contain more key information than general trade books. Good resources are investments that pay dividends as long as you keep opening their covers.

Below is a guide for how to begin building your collection of Bible resources.

Step 1: You should begin by purchasing the Bible in a translation you can easily understand.

Your reference library needs a firm foundation!

Step 2: Purchase a Good Dictionary and Encyclopedia

Dictionaries and encyclopedias provide easy-to-use collections of articles arranged A to Z. Each article explains the Bible's terms, teachings, persons, places, and history and their importance to Christian faith and practice.

You can't understand the story of the Bible without a way to look up unfamiliar words, persons, events, and places.

A good dictionary and encyclopedia are essential!

Step 3: Get a Commentary.

Commentaries give you a verse-by-verse or chapter-by-chapter explanation of Scripture with practical topical studies throughout.

Commentaries provide information from experts in biblical studies who explain the context, meaning, and theological importance of Scripture. Commentaries are arranged by book of the Bible and will either be one-volume or several volumes.

There are different types of commentaries to meet your needs. Devotional commentaries focus on the spiritual significance of the text for our lives. Expository commentaries focus on explaining the text. Most expository commentaries use historical, geographical, and cultural information as well as discussions of the original languages to explain the text. Critical commentaries primarily for specialists focus on technical issues related to the Greek or Hebrew texts, their interpretation, history, and original context of Scripture.

Step 4: Find a trustworthy Bible Handbook

Handbooks are a basic companion to Bible reading, especially for those less familiar with the Bible. A handbook is an at-a-glance survey of every book of the Bible addressing “who, what, where, when and why.”

To use a handbook, you simply open it to the book of the Bible you're reading. All of the relevant information is right there. You don't need any advanced knowledge to use it.

Step 5: Buy a Concordance

A concordance will help you find every word in the Bible each place it occurs. This type of reference book will help you find relevant Bible passages quickly and easily because it lists words alphabetically.

A concordance is the perfect companion for your Bible. To get the most out of your concordance, always read the context in which a verse is found, not just the verse or piece of a verse. For example, Psalm 14:1 says, “There is no God,” but the context tells you that this is what the fool says. When you do a word study, read the verses you find in their context. Very few words—especially abstract words—have only one, clear-cut meaning.

Step 6: Add Bible Study and History Resources

Bible study and history resources explain life during Bible times, the history of ancient Israel and its neighbors, and Judaism and Christianity grew out of the faith of the ancient Israelites.

If you have a Bible you must understand how it came into being in order to grasp the Bible's importance. You need to know how the Bible was passed down over the centuries. These resources explain the history of English Bible translations. You will begin to understand the many methods of reading the Bible that exist.

A guide to the Bible and its times puts a wealth of information at your fingertips. It covers the people of the Bible and how they lived, so you can understand the differences and similarities between their lives back then and our lives today.

Step 7: Purchase A Good Set of Maps or an Atlas.

You will understand the Bible better when you see where Bible events occurred and where important cities and nations were located.

Information on historical data, climatology, and other insights pertaining to biblical geography and cities illuminate the Bible stories and help you put biblical places into a contemporary context.

Understand current events by comparing ancient countries and nations like Israel, Judah, Egypt, and Babylon to what countries exist in those places today. There is no better way to understand events in Israel, Iraq, and Egypt than by understanding that biblical history influences life in the Middle East today. Gain information about climate and weather, travel and roads. Learn how geography played a role in the history of Bible times.

Step 8: Add Word Studies and Language Tools to Your Collection.

A word study book is a type of dictionary that focuses on what biblical words mean in relation to the Hebrew and Greek words behind the English translation.

Unlock the deepest meaning of Scripture through a close study of words and their shades of meaning in Hebrew or Greek. Once you begin using a word study, if you find yourself drawn to the biblical languages, you can build your faith by studying the Word of God in the original languages.

Use a word study book to understand the meanings and significance of all the main words in the Bible. These books provide you with linguistic, biblical, historical, and theological information about words. As you learn about the English words we use to translate the Bible, you might find that you become more interested in the original biblical languages. Add a good Hebrew or Greek grammar to your library, so you can dive deeper into the world of the Bible.

BROADENING YOUR REFERENCE LIBRARY

A good reference library doesn't just include Bible Study tools. The best library will build on a biblical foundation with books on Christian life, the church, and world religions.

Step 1: Buy Books on Christian Life and Church History

Your faith grows when you learn more about Christian theology and history. You will strengthen your Christian Life by better understanding how traditions developed from the biblical texts. You will learn about the Trinity, the origins of baptism, and spiritual warfare. A strong reference on church history will help you understand what it means to be Protestant, Catholic, or Orthodox. Better understand how denominations are different or similar.

Step 2: Add Books on World Religions

We live in a world where your neighbor might be Jewish, Muslim, or Hindu. Introductions to other religions will help you understand your co-workers, friends, and neighbors. Resources on other religions and apologetics will help you communicate your faith to them more effectively.

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