

A Guide to using Biblical and Theological Reference works

Please note: This guide should be used to familiarise yourself with this writing style. You may find some customisation is necessary to achieve the outcomes for your assessments. Please be sure to read your assignment question carefully, along with any provided documentation in that assignment.

Bible and theology dictionaries, encyclopedias, and handbooks are common reference tools used in biblical and theological studies. They serve a range of purposes in academic study including tracing the usage of words, exegesis and translation, theme study, doctrinal and theological meaning analysis, academic research, overviews.

What is a Bible reference tool?

A **Bible Dictionary** provides short – medium articles on topics related to the Bible. These topics are arranged alphabetically. It may include articles on people, places, themes, cultural practices and theological concepts.

A **Theological Dictionary** examines the theological meaning and development of key biblical terms and concepts. More detailed theological dictionaries will offer word studies on original language terms (Hebrew; Greek) and compare how this term is used across the biblical canon.

A **Bible Encyclopedia** is single or multi-volume, providing extensive scholarly articles on biblical topics. Encyclopedias offer maps, diagrams and pictures as well as descriptive pieces. It may cover archaeological, historical, literary and theological details.

A **Handbook** can be one of two types. 1. Introductory guides which provide easy to access overviews of biblical topics (e.g. *Lion's Handbook of the Bible*). 2. Academic handbooks which include detailed articles, and engagement with major scholarly debates by leading specialists in the field. (e.g., Oxford Handbooks; Cambridge Handbooks).

A **Lexicon** is a dictionary of biblical languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek) that explains the meaning, form and usage of words in their original language.

A **Concordance** is an index of *where* words appear in the Bible. Often arranged by English translation. (E.g. Dove - Gen 8:8; Matt 3:16)

A **Bible Atlas** provides maps and geographical information about the world of the Bible, and it is used to help readers locate places, understand special context, and visualise the landscapes in which biblical events occurred.

What is the difference between a Bible and a Theology dictionary?

A biblical reference work is used specifically for studying the Bible and often examines terms, people, places and topics found in the Bible. Whereas theological works focus on matters of theology, doctrine, and theological concepts.

Why would I use a dictionary, encyclopedia, or handbook?

These tools help you understand the landscape of a topic by providing explanations, background information, and scholarly insight. They support tasks such as word studies, exploring themes, and orienting you to key concepts.

Quick guide to usage

Resource	Primary Focus	Best for	Questions it is addressing
Concordance	Word occurrences in the Bible	Locating terms; tracing usage patterns	<i>Where does this word occur?</i>
Lexicon	Meaning of Hebrew/ Aramaic/ Greek	Exegesis and translation	<i>What does this word mean in this context?</i>
Word Book	Theological use of key biblical words (often via English terms)	Thematic and word study	<i>What does this word mean and how is this concept used across Scripture?</i>
Bible Dictionary	People, places, customs, themes	Orientation to a topic	<i>Who is this? What is this place? What is this custom?</i>
Theological Dictionary	Theological concepts	Doctrinal/ theological study	<i>What is the theological significance of this term or concept?</i>
Encyclopedia	Comprehensive scholarly essays	Academic research	<i>What does current scholarship say about this topic?</i>
Handbook	Book by book overview or in depth articles and analysis	Survey or in-depth	<i>What is this biblical book about? What is the current state of research? What methods are used? Where is the debate heading?</i>
Bible Atlas	Geography and spatial context of the Bible	Locating places	<i>Where is this place? What was it like? Who lived there, and why? What were the natural features?</i>

Recommended Resources

Bible Dictionaries

The IVP Black Dictionary series breaks up the biblical canon into major sections and provides in depth articles on relevant topics by biblical scholars.

- *Dictionary of the Old Testament Pentateuch* ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker. 2003.
- *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical books* ed. Bill T. Arnold. 2006.
- *Dictionary of the Old Testament Prophets* ed. Gordon McConville and Mark J. Boda. 2012.
- *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry and Writings* ed. Tremper Longman III and Peter Enns. 2008.
- *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels 2nd* ed. Ed. Joel B Green, Jeannine K. Brown, Nicholas Perrin. 2013.
- *Dictionary of Paul and his letters 2nd* ed. Ed. Scot McKnight, Lynn Cohick and Nijay Gupta. 2023.
- *Dictionary of New Testament Background* ed. Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter. 2000.
- *Dictionary of the later New Testament and its developments* ed. Peter H. Davids. 1998.

The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary 6 vols. (A-C; D-G; H-J; K-N; O-Sh; Si-Z) ed. David Noel Freedman, Gary A. Herion, David Frank Graf, J. David Pleins, Astrid B. Beck. Yale University Press; Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021.

The New Interpreter's Bible (NIB). 12 vols. Eds. Leander E. Keck et al. Abingdon Press, 2001.

The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (NIDB) 5 volumes. ed. Katherine Doob Sakenfeld; Abingdon Press, 2006. Updated revised version of 1962 volumes edited by George Arthur Buttrick.

One volume dictionaries

Single volume dictionaries are concise, accessible and useful for quick reference and overview work.

The Harper Collins Bible Dictionary. Eds. Paul J. Achtemeier; Roger S Boraas; HarperOne, 1996. Or revised and updated version edited by Mark Allan Powell, 2011.

Walter A. Elwell, *Baker Theological Dictionary of the Bible*. Baker Books, 2000. Evangelical – usually available for free on Bible search engines, short articles

New Bible Dictionary, 3rd ed. Ed. D.J. Wiseman, A. R. Millard, I Howard Marshall, J. I. Packer. IVP, 1996. Evangelical.

Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary. Ed. Chad Brand, Eric Mitchell. Holman Reference, 2015.

Original language dictionaries

These dictionaries are useful for word studies and require original language knowledge. They enable you to find the meanings and examples of word use.

Concise

William L. Holladay, *Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Eerdmans Publishing, 1996.

Frederick William Danker, *Concise Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. University of Chicago Press, 2009.

Advanced

Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament TDOT. 17 vols. Eds. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, Heinz-Josef Fabry. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974-2021.

Theological Dictionary of the New Testament TDNT. 10 vols. Eds. Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Trans). William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964-76.

Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament –TWOT - 2 volumes. Ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr. Bruce K. Walke. Moody Publishers, 1980, 2003.

A Greek- English Lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian Literature BDAG, Eds. Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich. University of Chicago Press, 1979.

Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*. United Bible Societies, 1996.

Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, M. E. Richardson, J.J. Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. HALOT. 5 vols. Brill, 1994-2000.

David J. A. Clines, *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew DCH*, 8 vols. Sheffield Academic Press, 1993-2011.

Speciality topics

Beyond general reference works, there are also specialised dictionaries focusing on particular themes, methods, or sub-disciplines.

Dictionary of the New Testament use of the Old Testament. Eds G. K. Beale; D. A. Carson; Benjamin L. Gladd; Andrew David Naselli. Baker Academic, 2023.

Dictionary of Daily Life in Biblical and Post Biblical Antiquity. 4 vols. ed. Edwin M. Yamauchi and Marvin R. Wilson. 2014-2015.

The Oxford Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation. 2 vols. Ed. Steven L. McKenzie. Oxford University Press, 2013.

Dictionary of Christianity and Science: The Definitive Reference for the Intersection of Christian Faith and Contemporary science. Eds Paul Copan; Tremper Longman III; Christopher L. Reese; Michael Strauss. Zondervan, 2017.

Handbooks

Bible handbooks cover a wide range of biblical topics and can be either concise or detailed, making them useful for gaining an overview of a subject or exploring specialised issues in greater depth.

Lion Handbook to the Bible Pat Alexander, 6th ed. Lion Books, 2025. One volume, concise overviews, maps, charts, images.

Oxford Handbooks. Oxford University Press. Whilst there are too many handbooks to list in full, the examples below illustrate the range they cover.

- *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Studies*. Ed. Judith M Lieu, J. W. Rogerson. 2008.
- *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Law*. Ed. Pamela Barmash. 2019.
- *The Oxford Handbook of Isaiah*. Ed. Lena Sofia-Tieymeyer. 2020.
- *The Oxford Handbook of Jeremiah*. Ed. Louis Stulman, Edward Silver. 2021.
- *The Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Biblical Criticism*. Ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah. 2018.
- *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Approaches to the Hebrew Bible*. Ed. Susanne Scholz. 2020.
- *The Oxford Handbook of Textual Criticism of the Bible*. Ed. Sidnie White Crawford, Tommy Wasserman. 2025.
- *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Monsters*. Brandon R Grafius, John W. Morehead. 2025.

Cambridge Companions and Handbooks, Cambridge University Press. As with the above examples, these companions and handbooks are plentiful. To give you an idea:

- *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Narrative*. Ed. Keith Bodner, 2025.
- *The New Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*. Ed. Ian Boxal and Bradley C. Gregory, 2022.
- *The Cambridge Companion to the Bible*. 2nd ed. Ed. Bruce Chilton. 2008.
- *The Cambridge Companion to the Bible and Literature*. Ed. Calum Carmichael, 2020.

Routledge Handbooks, Routledge

- Patrick Gray, *The Routledge Guidebook to the New Testament*, 2017
- *The Routledge Handbooks in religion series*

- Multiple specialist topics

Atlases

Biblica: The Bible Atlas. Ed. Barry J. Beitzel. Barrons' Educational Series, 2007.

Thomas V. Brisco, *Holman Bible Atlas: A complete guide to the expansive geography of Biblical history*. Holman reference, 1999.

HarperCollins Atlas of Bible History. Ed. James B. Pritchard. HarperOne, 2008.

Yohanan Aharoni, *Carta Bible Atlas*. Abm Komers, 2002.

How to cite reference tools

The easiest way to think about referencing Bible dictionaries, encyclopedias, and handbooks is to treat the articles like chapters in an edited book. Check the referencing style guide for your course. Below are standard examples.

Turabian

Footnote

1. Author's First name Surname, "Entry title," in *Dictionary or Encyclopedia title*, ed. First name surname, vol (Publisher, year), page range.

Bibliography

Author's Last Name, First Name. "Entry Title." In *Dictionary or Encyclopedia Title*, edited by first name surname, vol. [volume number], page range. Publisher, year.

APA

In-text citation

- Parenthetical citations: (Surname, year, p.)
- Narrative citations: Surname (year, p.) defines....

Reference

Author last name, Initials. (Year). Article name. In Editor initials. Last name (Ed.), *Encyclopedia name* (Edition). Publisher.

Bible Software and Online tools

Bible Software platforms (e.g., Logos, Accordance) provide access to a wide range of reference works, including dictionaries, atlases, encyclopedias, and commentaries. These programs are valuable investments for students undertaking serious biblical study. Free online tools can also be helpful (e.g., Blue Letter Bible), offering basic translation aids, maps, introductory word studies, and brief dictionary entries suitable for quick reference and foundational research.