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## Resources for Teachers

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Wendell Willis, Editor

# Resources for Teachers

## Bible Dictionaries

After our previous considerations of how to use a concordance to fullest advantage (in the first two issues of **LEAVEN**). It is time to move on to the next most useful teacher study aid, a good Bible dictionary. While a good English dictionary, like Websters, is a necessity for understanding contemporary word usage, it has little or no value for many areas of Biblical study. Thus there is a real need for the teacher to have a dictionary specifically on the Bible.

Bible dictionaries can be divided into two basic camps. The first choice is one-volume or multi-volume. There is obviously more information in the multi-volume work—but they are also much more expensive. For those who can afford the time (and shelf-space) two current works are worthy of consideration. The first is the **Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible**, (\$112) (2) published by Abingdon Press. It has four original volumes (printed in 1962) and a one-volume supplement done in 1976. The great strength of this work is its scholarly depth and breadth of field. It has good pictorial aids, maps and is thorough to the extreme. On the downside, in addition to cost, some articles present viewpoints that have theological axes to grind, and many are written with limited theological consideration. Still, it is a good collection, and in places great.

Another contemporary multi-volume work in the Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, also in five volumes, edited by M.C. Tenny. An avowedly conservative work, this dictionary often is concerned about apologetic interests, and is defensively polemical. It is however a reasonable alternative (somewhat more expensive, \$129) to the **Interpreter's Dictionary**. The revised edition of last century's **International Standard Bible Encyclopedia**, (Eerdmans) is the other recent multi-volume dictionary set. The four volumes are fairly extensive, but the most expensive of the three, at \$160.

Most teachers will choose to limit themselves to a one-volume dictionary, and the good news is that there are many out there, and some are really good. But one must be careful to get up-to-date help (older works are often reprinted with minor editorial changes in zippy new bindings and promoted as if a new work).

Among the more thorough one-volume works which merit consideration is the **Eerdmans' Family Encyclopedia of the Bible** (\$18.95), basically done by conservative British scholars. Its biggest disadvantage is that it is not arranged alphabetically, but a high percentage of its information is organized under topics (Biblical doctrines, Bible people, places and things, and Biblical archaeology).

This work's organization requires using the index to locate words in their topical setting. However, it is well illustrated, and that will increase its usefulness.

Another good choice is the **New Bible Dictionary** (J.D. Douglas, editor, \$24.95) published by Tyndale. This too is a conservative work, drawing heavily upon British contributors. It is strong in archaeological emphasis, which will be of interest to many. It lacks the extensive illustrations and color photographs many expect, although it does have good bibliographical information for further study. This book may be too technical for some readers, however, for a serious student, it has a lot to offer.

Another good choice is the **Harper's Bible Dictionary** (Harper and Row, \$27.50), which is one of the most recent offerings. It is probably the most comprehensive of the one-volume dictionaries, and has abundant information for the Bible student. It has extensive maps and illustrations, and is very well informed by modern scholarship. Because this volume was done by academic professionals, without requiring of the contributors any religious commitment, there is an uneven theological quality to the work, but this should not be a cause of anxiety, only careful reading.

Next, the **New Westminster Dictionary of the Bible** (\$22.95) is a good scholarly work, that takes a balanced attitude toward debated theological issues in scholarship (such as the writing of the

Pentateuch and the process of forming the canon). It may be less "reader friendly" than the others mentioned.

Finally, there is the **Mercer Dictionary of the Bible** (published by Mercer University Press) which is very comprehensive, and written from a middle-of-the-road to conservative vantage point. Undertaken by the National Association of Baptist Professors, the dictionary is nevertheless wide ranging in its contributors, and could not be said to sponsor a particular denominational position. It contains very nice color maps, and a few illustrations. The biggest disadvantage is its price (\$35 in paperback; \$55 in hardback).

Just one additional word of warning about the reprinting of older works. The **Everyday Bible Dictionary** (reprinting Pleoubet of last century), the **Illustrated Bible Dictionary**, along with a similar revision called **Today's Dictionary of the Bible**, are revisions of another nineteenth-century work by M.G. Easton. While each work has some updating, and the latter is better than most, the average Bible student cannot know which articles are current and which are almost a century out of date. Since the basic need of a Bible dictionary is for accurate information, it seems best to acquire a more recent work, which will be a real benefit to lesson preparation.