

# Lesson 7 - Interpretation Tools

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Finally! This week we move beyond making observations and asking questions about those observations. When most people want to know how to study the Bible, they often mean they want to know how to understand it. If we look at that same idea from the perspective of the inductive bible study method, they are wanting to know how to interpret what the Bible means. Interpretation is the act of answering the questions we have asked about the text. This week we will look at some tools that will help us find the answers to our questions.

## Where to Find Your Answers

Your own prior knowledge and the text itself are the most obvious places to search for answers. Next week, we go into more detail about those answers, as well as how to organize your information so you can answer your interpretive question. This week, we will look at the sources of information *outside* your own knowledge and the text. Those outside sources can be put into four broad categories - lexicons, commentaries, theology books, and sermons.

We are going to attempt to divide our discussion about these four categories into print and online versions. However, the division is not so simple. Most printed books today come in corresponding digital formats. The small percentage of exceptions generally come from smaller publishing houses that are relatively new and/or address a very narrow portion of the theological spectrum. Many of the classic resources that you can purchase relatively cheaply are also available online at no cost. As we move through our discussion, the overlap will be obvious.

## Lexicons

Dictionaries provide the definitions of words and sometimes their etymology, or their origin. A lexicon is essentially a dictionary with a small subset of words for that language. It is a compilation of words used in a particular area of interest, along with their definitions. In order for a lexicon to be of any use, you will need to know the word in its original language. This need is met by having a concordance. A concordance is nothing more than a list of every word found in a text and references to where it is used in the text.

The most well known concordance is *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*. First published in 1890, *Strong's*, as it is commonly called, is an index of every word in the King James Version of the

Bible. *Strong's* even includes every incidence of the definite articles “a”, “an”, and “the”. Every entry includes the location where the word appears — book, chapter, and verse — and the word in the original language — Hebrew for those in the Old Testament and Greek for those in the New Testament. Each Hebrew and Greek word is given a numerical index for quick reference. That number can be used to look up the word in the included dictionary *Strong's* provides.

A few concordances exist for other translations of the Bible. However, *Strong's* has become the standard. Concordances for more recent translations almost always refer back to *Strong's* and use its numerical index since the Greek and Hebrew words have not changed, only the contemporary translation. Most, if not all, contemporary lexicons will use *Strong's* numbering.

Lexicons that are closely associated with *Strong's* and are considered dependable standards are *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* and *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicons*, or as they are commonly known, *Thayer's* and *Brown-Driver-Briggs* or even *BDB*. The only caveat to these recommendations are their ages. While the thoroughness and scholarship is unquestionable, our language has changed quite a bit in the one hundred plus years since any of these resources were first published. Both of these resources are included free of charge on platforms like [blueletterbible.org](http://blueletterbible.org), [biblehub.com](http://biblehub.com), and [studylight.org](http://studylight.org).

If you want to do a deep dive into word meaning and usage, and you are not opposed to spending a little money, the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by G. Kittel, is the way to go. The ten volume set known simply as *Kittel* is no longer in print. However, you can occasionally find a complete set for sale for a few hundred dollars. What makes *Kittel* so valuable is the exhaustive treatment it gives each word. How the word was used in classical Greek versus Koine Greek (the language of the NT), how it may have been in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the OT), and how the word was used outside of the Bible itself are all given attention.

A one volume version, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Abridged in One Volume*, known as *Little Kittel*, was produced in 1985. It only focuses on Biblical usage of the word. It can still be purchased for around \$100.

If you decide to purchase a lexicon for your personal library, keep in mind one important consideration — the thoroughness or depth of the lexicon. As already noted, lexicons with simple definitions are freely available online. Spend your money wisely on a lexicon that will add to your understanding beyond a simple definition. Lots of options are available.

## Commentaries

Commentaries are probably the first resource we think about when we are looking for help in understanding the Bible. Commentaries range from the notes in your study Bible to multi volume sets on one book of the Bible like Martin Lloyd Jones fourteen volume set on Romans.

When choosing a commentary, you must decide how technical you want the author's treatment of the text to be. Commentaries are usually categorized as either *expository*, meaning they provide commentary on the English translation of the text, or *exegetical*, meaning they provide commentary on the basis of the original language of the text. Exegetical commentaries usually provide the author's own translation of the text, along with details on any origins of the words, critical matters, or language variations about the text. Both exegetical and longer, more in-depth expository commentaries include extra analysis or discussion about themes or important theological matters that might relate or connect to the text in some way.

Many publishers produce commentary sets that cover the entire Bible. Scholars who are experts on specific books are chosen to write the individual volumes. Often, smaller books that are related are joined together in one volume. As a result, a commentary set may only include fifty volumes, yet cover the whole Bible, and have fifty different authors.

The decision to purchase an entire set of commentaries by a single publisher can be evaluated two different ways. Those who think such a purchase is a positive choice cite the familiarity the end user gains with the set. Every volume follows a similar format, making its use easier each time. In some cases, a theological consistency on important doctrines can be assumed across all volumes.

Negatively, the "best" scholar is not always chosen because he may have already been contracted by another publisher. Your particular volume on Acts may have been written by the fifth or sixth best scholar. Plus, the theological consistency is hard to maintain across all volumes.

If you decide to purchase a commentary, there are a few trusted websites that can help you choose the right one for you. [Bestcommentaries.com](http://Bestcommentaries.com), [ligonier.org](http://ligonier.org), and [challies.com](http://challies.com) all provide valuable recommendations. They give recommendations based on how technical a particular title may be, along with theological "warnings" to consider in spite of the scholarship of the author. Generally speaking, when consulting these three sites for the five best commentaries on any book of the Bible, widespread agreement exists. Among all three lists of top five titles, there are usually only about seven or eight total titles mentioned.

Some commentaries can be found online. Online platforms like [blueletterbible.org](http://blueletterbible.org), [biblehub.com](http://biblehub.com), and [studylight.org](http://studylight.org) all provide commentaries from the last few hundred years that are in the public domain.

## Theology Books

Many people do not think to consult a book on theology when it comes to interpreting the Bible. When someone says, “theology,” many people think systematic theology and an orderly progression of topics, maybe with a scripture index in the back. Trying to sort through what may seem like a disconnected series of topics, looking for a particular verse, is too difficult to attempt. However, a good theology book will have a scripture index and you can cross reference all those seemingly disconnected topics to see the many implications a single verse may have.

The term “theology book” is intentionally broad. It includes books like *The Holiness of God* by R.C. Sproul and *The Theology of Paul* by James D.G. Dunn. It includes that pamphlet on how to overcome anxiety that you picked up from your church’s resource center. Theology books even include books you might consider personal improvement or discipleship titles like *How People Change* by Paul David Tripp.

Here’s the bottom line. Any resource that references scripture and a valid explanation or application of it can be used to help you in your work of interpretation of scripture.

## Sermons

Sermons should be obvious resources to aid in your interpretation of scripture. A legitimate, real sermon will be based on a scriptural text. If you can find a sermon from a trusted expositor on your specific text, use it as a resource. Finding these sermons is easier than ever today. The entire catalog of many preachers can be found online. Someone has taken the time to transcribe the sermons from those preachers in the past and place them online with easily searched indices. The sermons of various early church fathers are even available in multiple forms today.

A quick internet search will reveal a treasure trove of sermons available to you. Since it’s the internet, it also means it comes with a warning. It is recommended that you search for a specific preacher instead of a specific text. Once you find a place to get the sermons of that preacher, you can search for the text. If you only search for a text, you will be rewarded with all sorts of

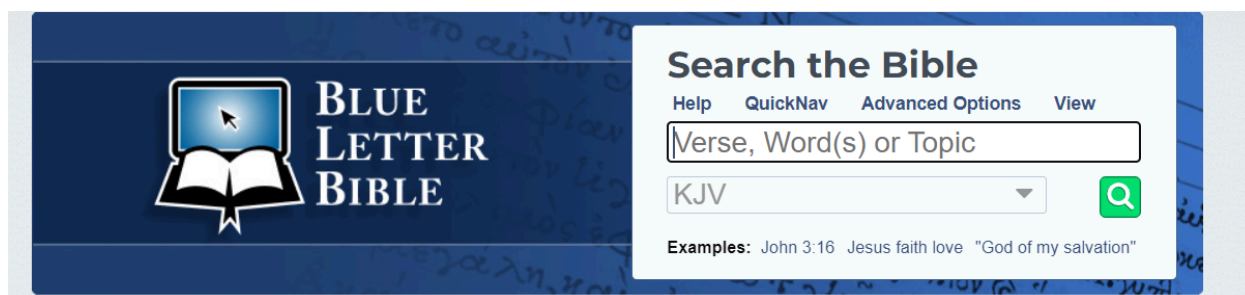
possibilities and you probably do not want to take the time to vet each one, especially if the name is unknown to you.

## Online Platforms

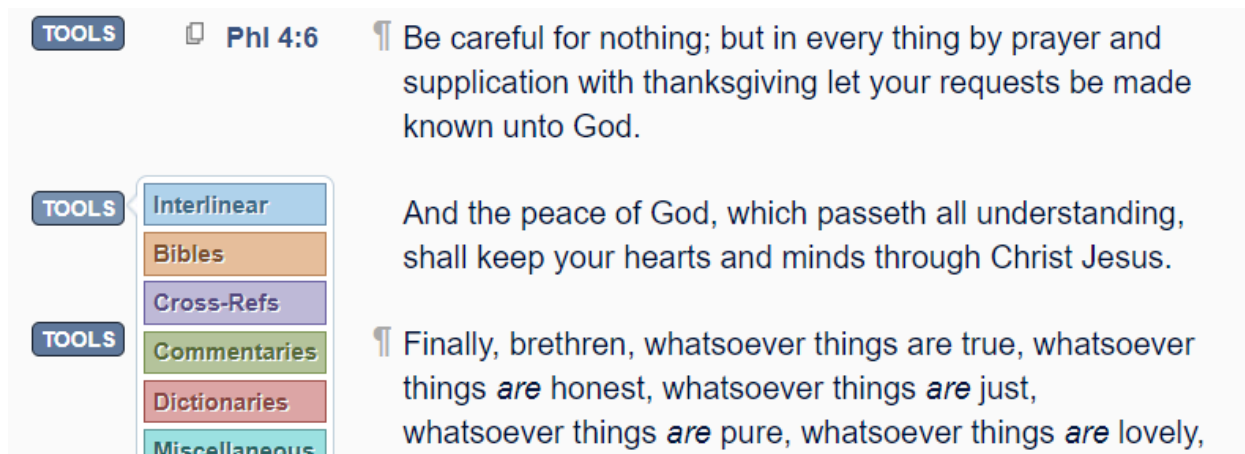
The online platforms [blueletterbible.org](http://blueletterbible.org), [biblehub.com](http://biblehub.com), and [studylight.org](http://studylight.org) were mentioned earlier. All of the features of Blue Letter Bible and Bible Hub are free. Study Light has some features which require a paid subscription. Let's highlight some of the more important features of these tools. You can watch a brief video highlighting how to find the important features of these platforms at [bit.ly/OnlineToolsVideo](http://bit.ly/OnlineToolsVideo).

### blueletterbible.org


Many resources and articles can be found under the STUDY tab across the top of Blue Letter Bible's homepage. The best way to interface with the tools when you are working on a specific verse is to begin by typing the verse's reference in the site's search bar.



Once you are given the verses you are studying, click the TOOLS button to see the quick options available to you.



The most useful of these tools is the INTERLINEAR tool. When you select this option, you will be given the verse in its original language in parallel with its English translation. From here, you can click on the Strong's number, which will provide a lexical entry, plus other places in scripture where that particular word is used. You can also click on the Parsing button to receive more information about its verb tense or noun usage.

English (NASB) [?]	Strong's	Inflected, Root & Transliterated	Parsing
will guard <a href="#">PHRASE</a>	G5432	φρουρήσει φρουρέω <i>phroureō</i>	 <a href="#">V-FAI-3S</a>

## biblehub.com

Another online tool with many of the same features is biblehub.com. Bible Hub's commentary base is broader and more easily accessed. Let's take a look at that feature plus three more features you might find useful.

Just like the previous tool, the best way to access verse specific information is to begin by entering the verse into the site's search bar.



The screenshot shows the Bible Hub website interface. At the top, there is a search bar with the placeholder text "Enter Reference or Keyword" and a search icon. Below the search bar, there are various Bible versions (NIV, NLT, ESV, BSB, KJV, NKJV, NRSV, NAB, AMP, CSB, HCS, CEV, GNT, ARA, ASV, DBY, DRB, ERV, OJB, ISV, KJP, NET, NHE) and study tools (Parallel, Sermons, Audio, Visuals, Comment, Interlin, Hebrew, Lexicon, Strong's, Multi). The main content area features the Bible Hub logo, "Online Bible Study Suite", and a link to "Get the free Bible Hub App!".

The site will display the verse in all twenty-three of the translations it contains. To see the commentary entries, click the “Comment” tab at the top (circled in **pink** below).

The screenshot shows the Bible Hub website interface. At the top, there is a search bar with the text "Enter Reference or Keyword" and a search icon. Below the search bar is a navigation menu with various Bible versions (NIV, NLT, ESV, BSB, KJV, NKJ, NAS, AMP, CEV, GNT, ARA, ASV, DBT, DRB, ERV, GWT, ISR, ISV, KJP, NET, NHE) and study tools (Sermons, Audio, Visuals, Comment, Interlin, Greek, Lexicon, Strong's, Multi). The "Comment" tab is circled in pink, and the "Sermons" tab is circled in green. A pink arrow points to the search bar, and a green arrow points to the "Sermons" tab. Below the navigation menu, the page displays the title "Philippians 4:7" and a list of commentary entries. The entries are organized into two columns: "EXPOSITORY (ENGLISH BIBLE)" and "EXEGETICAL (ORIGINAL LANGUAGES)". The expository column includes "Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers" and the exegetical column includes "Meyer's NT Commentary".

As you can see in the screenshot above, commentary entries are listed in two columns. Expository commentaries are in the left column, exegetical on the right. If you look right below the verse listing at the top of the screen, you will see links to numerous other commentaries that are not necessarily listed on this results screen. When you hover over any of the links, the full name of the commentary will be displayed.

If you click on the “Sermons” tab (circled in **green** above), a list of sermons using the selected verse as its main text will be provided. A screenshot of a partial list is provided below.

## ◀ Philippians 4:7 ▶

[Sermons](#)
[Topics](#)
[Themes](#)
[Library](#)

*And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

Sermons		
<a href="#">Characteristics of Peace</a>	<a href="#">G. S. Bowes, B. A.</a>	<a href="#">Philippians 4:7</a>
<a href="#">God's Peace</a>	<a href="#">J. J. S. Bird, M. A.</a>	<a href="#">Philippians 4:7</a>
<a href="#">How to Keep the Heart</a>	<a href="#">C. H. Spurgeon.</a>	<a href="#">Philippians 4:7</a>
<a href="#">Peace Protecting</a>	<a href="#">H. W. Beecher.</a>	<a href="#">Philippians 4:7</a>
<a href="#">Peace Protective</a>	<a href="#">Matthew Henry</a>	<a href="#">Philippians 4:7</a>

There are some other features on Bible Hub you might find useful. A secondary set of tabs, beginning with “SUM” is listed below the main tabs. Here is a brief description of what some of those tabs provide for you.

- SUM provides a summary of the chapter you are referencing.
- OUT provides an outline of the entire book.
- QUE provides a set of questions you could use in a Bible study on this verse.
- TOP provides a set of topics and themes relevant to the selected verse.

## studylight.org

Study Light provides over one hundred commentaries. Many of those require a paid subscription in order to access them. Despite this small obstacle, one useful, and free, reference tool provided here bears investigation. The site’s commentary page, accessed under its “Tools” menu or directly via [studylight.org/commentaries](http://studylight.org/commentaries), provides the theological stance and church affiliation of every commentary author it provides. Many of these same authors are available on the previous two platforms discussed. If you were curious about the stance of one of the authors you consulted on one of those other platforms, you might be able to find him here.

## Let’s Study the Bible

This week, practice using some of the tools we’ve covered in this lesson. The three online platforms will be the easiest to use, but feel free to use whatever tool you’d like. Answer the questions below using the tools of your choice.

Answer the following questions about Philippians 4:7 “And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”



1. What is the Strong's number for "peace"?
  - a. How many times does the word for "peace" occur in the KJV?
  - b. How many times does it occur in *Philippians*?
2. Where else is the word for "will guard" used in the NT?
  - a. Which one seems out of place with the others? Why?
  - b. With what military term does "will guard" connect? (*HINT: Use the Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges commentary on biblehub.com*)
3. What is the Greek word for "mind" in this verse?
  - a. How is it used in the Bible?

**BONUS:** How many sermons did Spurgeon preach using this verse as his main text? What were the titles of those sermons?