

Resources for Biblical Interpretation*

Study Bibles, Bible Studies, and Companion Works

Concordia Self-Study Bible (1986, out of print)

As the forward to this Bible notes, “The *Concordia Self-Study Bible* is a Lutheran edition of *The NIV Study Bible*. The notes have been edited and revised to provide a distinctively Lutheran emphasis.” In addition, “Introductions to each of the books of the Bible have been expanded to highlight the gospel thrust of the book and to include pertinent statements by Martin Luther on the book’s message.”

With regard to biblical interpretation, the CSSB includes a section titled “Introduction to the Concordia Self-Study Bible.” It is subtitled “Principal Teachings of Scripture.” These pages outline the “teachings of scripture [that] govern the interpretations that distinguish this edition.” In other words, these are teachings of Scripture that govern a Lutheran understanding of the Scriptures. These include:

- The Grace of God
- Through Faith Alone
- Scripture Alone
- Law and Gospel
- Word and Sacraments: Means of Grace
- Christology

Also helpful to the one studying God’s Word are the many study notes, maps, charts, informative articles, and introductions to each book.

The Lutheran Study Bible (2009)

The Lutheran Study Bible is the successor to the *Concordia Self-Study Bible*. Rather than being a Lutheran edition of an existing study Bible, TLSB is an entirely new work making use of the English Standard Version and adapting some features of the ESV Deluxe Reference Edition. According to the forward, six goals shaped this work. Concordia Publishing House sought to create a study Bible that does the following:

1. Presents justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, as the chief teaching of Scripture.
2. Properly distinguishes and applies Law and Gospel (reading the Bible as a book about justification).
3. Emphasizes God’s work through the means of grace.
4. Functions from a “Scripture alone” point of view and presents a “Scripture interprets Scripture” approach to using the Bible.

* This list of resources available from Concordia Publishing House and the Commission on Theology and Church Relations was compiled by the CTCR in response to the Synod’s request (in 2016 Res. 3-07) to help the church “address the challenges raised by current trends in [Biblical] interpretation.”

5. Equips the laity for works of service, with a particular focus on evangelism in their various vocations/callings in life.
6. Presents a uniquely Lutheran study Bible that features genuinely Lutheran notes and comments throughout, references to the Lutheran Confessions where appropriate, a focus on the Small Catechism for helps and explanations, citations from Luther throughout, and materials to aid daily devotion and prayer.

With regard to biblical interpretation, this study Bible has a section titled “Reading, Understanding, and Applying the Bible.” The information in this section’s subsections is more in depth than in the previous CSSB but is still necessarily cursory. The subsections are as follows:

- How to Read and Study the Holy Bible
- Law and Gospel: Identifying God’s Ways with Mankind
- Luther’s Small Catechism
- The Unity of Scripture
- The Lectionaries
- A Two-Year Reading Plan

Also included in this study Bible are many useful articles, charts, and maps, as well as an extensive “Biblical Chronology and World History.”

Lutheran Bible Companion (2014)

Volume 1: Introduction and Old Testament

Volume 2: Intertestamental Era, New Testament, and Bible Dictionary

These two volumes, as the title states, are intended as companion works for *The Lutheran Study Bible*, though they can be used profitably alongside any Bible. In the foreword, Lutheran Hour Speaker Rev. Gregory P. Seltz calls the *Lutheran Bible Companion* “a cradle of scholarship—historical, archaeological, theological, and biblical—that allows the reader to start anywhere in the Bible and see the big picture even as one studies a specific book.”

With regard to biblical interpretation, the introduction in volume one is written in an instructive manner, teaching the reader how to use the *Companion* as well as “How to Read and Study the Bible.” This article is a reprint of the material in the introduction of TLSB, but is presented in a more readable format than is possible in the study Bible. The *Companion* also includes the articles on Law and Gospel and the Unity of the Scriptures from the TLSB. In addition new articles on “The Purpose and Language of the Bible,” “The Nature of Biblical Miracles,” and “The Land of the Bible” are included. The chronology found in TLSB is repeated, but again in a more readable format, and a section called “General Tools for Studying the Bible” is added, giving a wealth of information on a variety of Bible study resources for many topics at varying levels of difficulty.

For each book of the Bible, the companion volumes offer engaging, full-color, resources with many photos, diagrams, maps, and charts, as well as bibliography for further study. These resources can help those studying the Bible, especially with context and background especially.

The end of volume two includes articles on archaeology, ancient literature, church history, and how the Bible came to be. Finally, there is a Bible dictionary.

Bible Studies

Concordia Publishing House produces a great variety of Bible studies including **Today's Light**, **LifeLight**, and **God's Word for Today**. While none of these are specifically about the task of biblical interpretation, each of them puts into practice the Lutheran hermeneutics described in the resources above.

Entry Level Resources

Interpreting the Scriptures (1967, out of print)

This small volume by Herbert Mayer was part of the Concordia Leadership Training Series, meant “for church school teachers and others.” It was an “attempt at providing a brief and nontechnical course on this very important subject.” An Instructors Guide was also available. While still useful and beneficial, it was replaced by Lane Burgland's *Reading the Bible with Understanding*, described in the next entry.

How to Read the Bible with Understanding, 2nd edition (2015)

This second edition renames Lane Burgland's 1998 work *Reading the Bible with Understanding* while also updating and expanding the contents. Part One deals with various principles of interpretation, explaining each principle and giving examples of the principles applied to biblical texts. Part Two introduces the reader to some of most prominent types of literature contained in the Scriptures. The goal is to help readers of the Bible understand how to handle the different genres they encounter in the text. Part Three gives an overview of the formation of the biblical canon as well as a discussion of English versions of the Bible. Extra-canonical ancient writings are also discussed. Part Four is focused primarily on application. This volume can be used profitably by individuals or by study groups wanting a basic introduction to biblical interpretation.

Intermediate Level Resources

A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles, LCMS 1973, Adopted in Convention

This document is not intended to deal solely with the issue of the interpretation of Scripture, as the title makes clear; however, the single largest section within the document sets forth the LCMS understanding of Scripture, including the following sub-topics, addressed in the format of thesis/antithesis : Inspiration, Purpose, the Relationship between the Gospel and Holy Scripture, Authority of Scripture, Canonical Text of Scripture, Infallibility, Unity, OT Prophecy, Historical Methods of Biblical Interpretation.

Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Lutheran Confessions, Revised Edition (1983; first edition, 1968)

In the face of the challenge of historical-criticism and the rising unrest that would become Seminex Ralph Bohlmann put together this “handbook for students” that sets forth a “clustering of citations from the confessional writings on various aspects of Biblical authority and interpretation.” His claim is that “the raw data of the confessions, carefully and honestly observed, make it abundantly clear the confessions do in fact set forth and employ a consistent understanding of the nature, authority, and interpretation of Holy Scripture, and that they do so for theological reasons.” He goes on to say, “To subscribe to the Lutheran Confessions in any

strong and meaningful way is also to subscribe to their view of Holy Scripture and its proper interpretation.”

This book will not be for the general reader but can be helpful for church leaders who have familiarity with the Confessions. It addresses the various principles of interpretation and how those are put to use in the confessions.

Various CTCR documents related to biblical interpretation:

- 1965 Seven Theses on Reformation Hermeneutics (adopted by CTCR in 1971/1969)
- 1966 Lutheran Stance Toward Contemporary Biblical Studies
- 1972 Gospel and Scripture
- 1973 A Comparative Study of Varying Contemporary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation
- 1975 The Inspiration of Scripture
- 1996 Prophecy and Typology
- 1998 Biblical Revelation and Inclusive Language

Advanced Level Resources

What Does This Mean? Principles of Interpretation in the Post-Modern World, 2nd Edition, Revised (2013)

As author James W. Voelz notes in his preface to the 2nd Edition, Revised, this book “does *not* essentially *prescribe* what should happen as one interprets the Scriptures. Rather, it generally *describes* what happens when one interprets. And what happens is very complex, indeed.” The complexity of what happens in the process of interpretation is reflected in the complexity of the contents of this book. Written at a graduate level and using much technical language, the descriptive approach of this book is not intended for those just beginning to learn the art of biblical interpretation. For those who have whetted their appetite with the resources listed above and continue to desire more, this will be the resource to take them to the next level. Topics include textual criticism, linguistics (semantics, pragmatics, and application), and a final part titled “The Lutheran Confessional Approach.”