Biblical Commentaries and Encyclopaedias

Teacher Background

Bible Commentaries provide background information and theological interpretation of scriptural texts. They are available in a wide variety of translations and editions in both static and electronic forms. Bible commentaries provide contextual information about scriptural texts including the social, cultural, political and historical background. They provide detailed information about Bible books and the authors’ purpose and audience. Unfortunately, most Bible commentaries are designed for serious biblical students and are often inaccessible to young people. Further, many of the free online websites containing Bible commentaries are fundamentalist in nature, taking a very literal approach to the interpretation of scriptural texts. Teachers should consult the resource list at the back of this module for a list of suggested editions for use in classroom settings.

While there are a variety of commentaries, all systematically explain the meaning of biblical passages, arranged in biblical order (book, chapter, verse). Application commentaries not only explain the original meaning of biblical passages, they also discuss the contemporary significance of those passages and how it is derived from the text. Devotional commentaries focus on the spiritual significance of the text for our lives. Expository commentaries focus on explaining the biblical text. Exegetical or critical commentaries focus primarily on technical issues related to the Hebrew/Aramaic or Greek texts and their interpretation and one written primarily for specialists.

A Bible Encyclopaedia is really an expanded dictionary; this is typically a multi-volume work providing detailed contextual information of biblical topics, words, names, places, events, theology and teachings, arranged alphabetically. Bible Encyclopaedias come in a variety of formats but are usually designed to provide practical reference materials about significant words in the Bible as well as giving detailed information on the language and literature of Bible lands and the historical and religious environments of the people of the Bible.