

Expanding Your Preparation

Using Internet Resources

by Eleanor A. Daniel

Many teachers long for added resources to guide them in their study and preparation for teaching adults. Their personal resources have limitations, some more than others. Some do not live near a library that offers much in the way of biblical study resources.

But these limitations need not be a hindrance to effective preparation to teach—not in this day and age—if you have access to the Internet. Imagine expanding your resources exponentially! You can do it with the resources at your fingertips via the Internet.

[Special note: the listing of Internet sites in this article is not necessarily an endorsement of everything to be found on those sites. Some sites undoubtedly have been created by those who hold very different doctrinal convictions from your own. The watchword is “use discretion”!]

Resources for Nearly Any Lesson

Don't have a concordance? Not to worry, just go to www.biblegateway.com. This resource will allow you to search for key words and topics. It has a wide range of Bible versions and can display different versions in parallel columns. Another Bible site is www.blueletterbible.org. This site has several Bible versions as well as commentaries and other study tools. You can even search *Strong's Concordance* and see which Greek or Hebrew word is behind any word in the translation. Want to know what hymn or famous work of art was inspired by a particular Bible verse? This is the place to go to find that out too!

Another helpful resource is www.answers.com. This site provides information for a variety of areas, not just religious studies. When you arrive at the page, click on the “Reference Library,” where one of the choices is Religion & Spirituality. This section features, among other things, a Bible dictionary as well as comparative readings of Bible texts.

A third resource is www.bible-history.com. A long list of categories appears to the left of the screen. Some of these may aid your preparation. This site also includes a number of church history resources. A fourth general resource is the Resource Pages for Biblical Studies that is found at www.torreys.org/bible. Here you can find pages that examine texts and translations, electronic publications, and material relating to the social aspects of the Mediterranean world.

Another source with a great many helps is www.Biblestudytools.com. This site, like Biblegateway, contains several Bible translations. It also has Bible commentaries, encyclopedias, dictionaries, a parallel Bible, and interlinear Bible. Under the search window, in which you can type a topic or subject, you'll find tabs for Bibles, references, Bible study, and pastors. The references tab opens up a wealth of resources including the works of Josephus. For a usually reliable (though not inspired) history of the Jews from the first century, Josephus's works are a wonderful resource.

Archaeological evidence and background for biblical lessons can be found at www.biblehistory.net. This site has two tabs, "Read Book 1" and "Read Book 2" that contain lists (and links) to a number of articles that may prove useful in lesson preparation. Clicking on one of these links will begin a download of a file to your computer (a "pdf") that you can save and use as a handout or simply read in preparation for the lesson. For example, www.biblehistory.net/Joshua.pdf gives some interesting details about a letter that archaeologists have discovered, a letter that was sent from Jerusalem to Egypt asking for help against the "Habiru," probably the "Hebrews" whom Joshua was leading in the conquest of the land of Canaan.

For Old Testament studies, some Jewish resources can be helpful. One such site is www.jewishencyclopedia.com, which provides the entire text of the 1906 print edition of the Jewish Encyclopedia online. Topics can be found instantly by typing the word, *Rahab* for example, (with quotation marks) in the search window. This not only gets you the article on Rahab, but every other mention of *Rahab* in other articles as well.

The site www.newadvent.org is an online Catholic encyclopedia. Click on a letter of the alphabet just below the header to get a list of topics that begin with that letter. If you just don't know where to look, the site www.gotquestions.org might be useful. Just type your question in the search box.

General search engines can also provide help. Probably everyone knows of Google (www.google.com), but there are others, such as Bing (www.bing.com), Yahoo (www.yahoo.com) and Ask (ww.ask.com). There are others, but space does not allow a full listing.

Helps for Lessons from the Uniform Series

Standard Publishing has two Web sites that you will find helpful. To gain access to articles and essays in *The Lookout* magazine, go to www.lookoutmag.com. There you will find three weekly columns that are of great help to anyone teaching lessons from the Uniform Series: “This Week with the Word,” “The Lesson and Life,” and “Where You Live.” These features provide brief notes on the lesson text, application of the text to life, and some poignant questions to engage a small group discussion of the text.

Another resource from Standard Publishing is a treatment of the lesson each week at www.christianstandard.com, which is the home page of *Christian Standard* magazine. One of the topics on the menu is “Sunday School Lesson,” which features an essay that develops the lesson, again from the Uniform Series, for the week. Other publishers of Uniform Lesson material have their own web sites, and much can be gleaned from these sources as well. Again, space does not allow a full listing of such sites. But if you are using the Uniform Series, your printed material will almost certainly include a URL (the web address) for the publisher.

Sites Providing Helps for Presentation

Publishers are increasingly adding digital media to the printed curriculum. Videos, audios, and PowerPoint presentations are becoming common supplements. You can find additional presentation helps online. Here are three potential sites to assist you:

www.bibleteachingnotes.com

www.bible.org/index.php

www.mintools.com/teaching-ministry.htm

These resources are not tied to any specific lesson or topic. They will provide continuing help to enhance your teaching.

Criteria for Selecting Internet Resources

Just as every book on a topic in a library is not necessarily useful for every purpose, the same is true of Internet resources. Also remember that Internet resources can be posted far more easily than books can be published, making it possible for anyone to distribute any notion or falsehood via the Internet easily. So be selective in what you use. Here are a few guidelines:

- Make sure to explore general resources (such as those listed in the first section above). Tried and true Bible dictionaries, maps, and treatments of history such as those at Bible Gateway will generally serve you well.
- Treatments of texts such as those found on *The Lookout* and *Christian Standard* sites are also good places to begin. These are not exhaustive treatments of the text, to be sure, but they provide a tone and direction that can serve as a helpful comparison with other material you find.
- When you find unfamiliar ideas and theories, see how those square with accepted resources. If they disagree, search a bit more to see if you find the unfamiliar view critiqued by other sites.
- Information from Web sites by biblical studies professors at reputable colleges and seminaries often are good to use for comparison with ideas acquired from other, lesser known sites.
- Discuss your findings—especially those of which you are uncertain—with your minister or another knowledgeable Bible teacher in your congregation.

Even after you've had opportunity to determine the worth of the material, it's still vital to "be selective." In fact, it is only after you have done your evaluation of a site's material are you equipped to be selective.

Conclusion

Internet resources expand your opportunities for study and presentation of Bible lessons. The Internet provides a library at your fingertips. But one additional caution is in order: *There are no shortcuts to good preparation.*

Internet sites, as much information as they may give you, cannot prepare for you. You have to search-and-read, assess the validity of the information, assemble (and sometimes discard) that information, and weave what is useful and relevant into your presentation. A web site cannot determine the key idea you will emphasize in the lesson. Nor can it shape the outline or choose the teaching methods and illustrations. A big pile of information left unorganized is just that.

In other words, you still have to do the hard work of preparation if you want to teach effectively. But if you use your expanded study possibilities wisely and prepare well, you will enjoy the fruits of your labor as you present effective Bible lessons.