
Oxford Biblical Studies Online (OBSO) is the online version of the Encyclopedia of the Books of the Bible (reviewed by Graham Hedges in the Spring 2012 edition of Refer) plus lots more! It features authoritative scholarly texts and reference works coupled with all of the interactive tools you would expect from a modern online resource. OBSO gives users the opportunity to research into the background, context, and issues related to the Bible as well as providing access to various translations of the Bible including the apocryphal New and Old Testaments.

From the home page it is possible to use the navigation bar to browse resources, use the quick search box or access the “Focus on ….” pages – a collection of essays, articles and illustrations related to Biblical studies. A Bible Verse Look-up box is also on the homepage; this can also be found throughout OBSO. The advanced search facility offers full text searching of articles and also the option of selecting a number of topical filters e.g. medicine, arts and literature, geography to give more accurate results listings. The topical filters are also available to users who are browsing alphabetically. The advanced search facility also gives users the option of searching just for images and maps. Texts from selected Oxford Bibles can be viewed in a side-by-side display.
with the user's choice of commentary and annotations from the Study Bibles, the stand-alone *Oxford Bible Commentary*, and A-Z concordances for the NRSV and NAB translations. It is also possible to compare and contrast 2 translations of the Bible by having 2 versions side by side. When reading passages from the Bible readers can make use of the “Look it up” tool which enables them to highlight particular words and then get definitions or explanations from some of the other resources that make up OBSO.

6,000 A-Z entries from various Oxford publications including the Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Oxford Companion to the Bible are available. Entries can be browsed alphabetically if users want to use the resource like they would a printed reference book but there is of course easy searchable access to the hundreds of essays in the Oxford Handbook of Biblical studies, Oxford History of the Biblical World, Oxford Illustrated History of the Bible and the Oxford Bible Atlas via the quick search or advanced search options. Within each entry there are live links not only to Bible passages but also other entries and essays making the whole resource very quick and easy to use. It is possible to email links to articles in OBSO and non-subscribers will be given free access to the articles for 5 days.

There is a very detailed timeline available for those who want to look at the chronology of biblical events.
It’s possible to select just entries relating to Biblical rulers or the more general Biblical world or even have both in the timeline and each entry has a “learn more” link for additional information. There are various tools and resources that provide the user with added extras - I have for example been doing some research on women’s ministries recently for work and found the Index of Women very useful. The scripture references include complete stories not just specific verses where a name may be mentioned. Unnamed women also appear in the index e.g. Samaritan woman at the well, Naaman’s wife’s maid, Reuel’s daughters. We all know the risks of using poor quality web sites so the addition of a carefully selected list of recommended websites for further research is a welcome addition. Other additional tools of particular note are the photo essays collection and the thematic guides. Regular updates are planned for OBSO and each update will bring additional essays and also additional images from the Biblical art programme. Subscribers can sign up to an update alert service.

The OBSO is a well researched resource with contributions from a range of academics mainly from the UK and North America. It is an ecumenical resource so the articles are written from a range of perspectives and the topics covered are wider than just the Bible itself as other ancient texts and apocryphal books are covered and there is extensive scholarly coverage of more general themes related to Biblical times which puts the Bible into it’s geographical, cultural, and historical context. I would recommend this resource for both students and those who just generally want to look a little deeper at specific Bible verses or themes.

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