

A Guide to Biblical Resources for Orthodox Christians

by Father Emmanuel Kahn



The best known Biblical resource for Orthodox Christians is ***The Orthodox Study Bible*** published by Thomas Nelson (2008) and available from Ancient Faith Publications at www.ancientfaith.com/publishing . Of particular interest is the ten-page essay by Metropolitan Kallistos, “How to Read Your Bible,” which is also available from Ancient Faith as a small pamphlet. The Metropolitan sets out how to read Holy Scripture “in obedience, as a member of the Church, finding Christ everywhere [and] seeing everything as part of my own personal story.”

The most recent Biblical resource for Orthodox Christians is by the Orthodox theologian, David Bentley Hart: ***The New Testament: A Translation*** (Yale University Press, 2017). He has sought “to write a translation of scripture not shaped by later theological and doctrinal history” (p. xvi). His “principal aim is to help awaken readers to mysteries and uncertainties and surprises in the New Testament documents that often lie wholly hidden from view beneath layers of received hermeneutical and theological tradition.” He hopes that his “translation would succeed, in many places, in making the familiar [become] strange, novel, and perhaps newly compelling.” His translation is, in his words, “an almost pitilessly literal translation” (p. xvii). I find this an attractive and insightful translation, far superior to *The New International Version* and *The English Standard Version*.

All Biblical translations evoke controversy. Therefore, it is often helpful to consult an Interlinear Hebrew-English Old Testament and an Interlinear Greek-English New Testament which contain paraphrases of each word in the Bible. One does not need to know Hebrew or Greek to use an interlinear text. Of particular interest is James Strong's ***The New Strong's Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*** (Thomas Nelson, 2010; ISBN: 978-1-4185-4237-5, reasonably priced and far superior to numerous other editions). For the New Testament alone, Alfred Marshall's ***New Testament: Revised Standard Version: Interlinear Greek and English*** (Marshall Pickering, 1968) is often available second-hand at a reasonable price from www.abebooks.co.uk or www.abebooks.co. This interlinear text has the advantage of linking well with the many volumes over many years of Thomas C. Oden's ***Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*** (InterVarsity Press). Professor Oden and his colleagues have created a magnificent compilation of how many Church Fathers interpreted specific Biblical verses. The six volumes covering the Gospels are of great help to Orthodox preachers. However, because this is "an ecumenical project ... designed to serve Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox lay, pastoral and scholarly audiences" many disputed texts, especially on Church governance have not been chosen for translation.

Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright have co-chaired a team of scholars to produce ***A New English Translation of the Septuagint and the Other Greek Translations Traditionally Included under That Title***, (Oxford University Press, 2007) **with updates for corrections and Second Edition which includes the New Testament** (2013). The full text is available free online at <https://netbible.com> (with a reasonable charge for the notes). The authors have set out their principles of translation at <https://netbible.com/files/pdf/net-bible-abbrev.pdf>, striving to balance "paraphrase" and "dynamic equivalence" ending up "somewhere between the two extremes." Critical reviews suggest that the online text and notes are far superior to the paper versions.

There are a number of other helpful Biblical resources for Orthodox Christians, especially for parish libraries, but they are expensive. To link reading the Bible with insights from the Church Fathers, following the Church Calendar and Lectionary, a valuable tool is ***The Bible and the Holy Fathers for Orthodox: Daily Scripture Readings and Commentary for Orthodox Christians*** compiled by Johanna Manley, and available from www.HolyApostlesConvent.org in Menlo Park, CA. In an introduction to this volume of some 1,100 pages Archimandrite Justin Popović notes that: "The Bible is in a sense a biography of God in this world. In it the Indescribable One has in a sense described Himself." Further volumes in this series include ***Grace for Grace: The Psalter and the Holy Fathers*** and ***Isaiah through the Ages***. In an introduction to that final volume Archpriest Georges Florovsky reminds us that: "God has spoken 'at sundry times and in diverse manners' (Hebrew 1.1). He

has revealed Himself through [the] ages, not once, but constantly, again and again. He has led His people from truth to truth.”

Another important Biblical resource available from Orthodox Logos Orthodox Christian Bookstore at www.orthodoxlogos.com/company.php is a two-volume translation of the New Testament with extensive notes, ***The Orthodox New Testament Vol. 1 The Holy Gospels*** and ***Vol. 2 Acts, Epistles and Revelation***. This publication “is based on the traditional [King James] text of the Greek-speaking churches, first published in 1516 ... compared with the approved text of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, published first in 1904.” These 1,270 pages contain exegesis from many Church Fathers and translations of numerous Greek phrases. An opening reflection from St. John Chrysostom urges: “The Scriptures were not given to us that we might only have them in books, but that we might engrave them on our hearts.”

I believe that the Church Fathers continue to offer the best possible guides to both the Old and New Testaments. In this context, three contemporary studies from scholars at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology in Brookline, MA are of great value (see: <https://holycrossbookstore.com/>): Eugen J. Pentiuc’s ***The Old Testament in Eastern Orthodox Tradition*** (2014, Oxford University Press) and Theodore G. Stylianopoulos’s ***The New Testament: An Orthodox Perspective, Vol. 1, Scripture, Tradition, Hermeneutics*** (1997 Holy Cross Orthodox Press) and his later collection of essays, ***Encouraged by the Scriptures: Essays on Scripture, Interpretation and Life*** (2011, Holy Cross Orthodox Press). Of special interest is Professor Stylianopoulos’s focus on a “multilevel hermeneutic” that considers in turn “the exegetical level, the interpretive level and the transformative level.” Archpriest Gregory Hallam has prepared the template below which has been drawn from the E-Quip Course in Orthodox Faith and Life (see <https://www.equip-orthodox.com/>).

Professor Stylianopoulos offers a fitting conclusion to this guide. He writes that the Incarnation is “the key paradigm for the right understanding of the nature of Holy Scripture, that is, Scripture as the word of God communicated in human words. The Bible has been affirmed to be, simultaneously, a book of God and a book of the Church. It is a book of God as it bears witness to the self-revelation of God through his redemptive acts and saving will. It is a book of the Church as it is the written and collected deposit of the living faith and developing traditions first of Israel and then of the Church in all their historical contingencies. To do justice to the intrinsic nature of Holy Scripture, these two elements, the divine and the human, like two threads inextricably interwoven and interpenetrating, must always be held together....” (p. 45, *The New Testament: An Orthodox Perspective*).

A Template for the Orthodox Interpretation of Biblical Texts

by Archpriest Gregory Hallam

In accordance with the proposal of Fr. Theodore G. Stylianopoulos that Orthodox Biblical interpretation ought to have a three-level approach, the following template is offered for preachers, teachers, Bible study leaders, catechists and students of the Scriptures generally:¹

Level	Process	In Tradition / Fathers (Theoria)	Applicable Now (Praxis)
Exegetical	Historical / Contextual <i>(using the full range of critical tools)</i>		
	Allegorical / Typological <i>(as derived from Tradition)</i>		
Interpretative	Spiritual / Ethical		
	Personal / Social		
Transformative	The Call to Holiness		
	The Call to Witness		

¹ In *“The New Testament, An Orthodox Perspective, Volume 1: Scripture, Tradition, Hermeneutics,”* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1997, Chapter 7) Fr. Theodore sets out three levels serving a sound Orthodox hermeneutical process. These are:

1. Exegetical - using all critical, contextual, textual and literary methods to determine “the level of understanding of the biblical text in its historical context of literary form and conceptuality ...” (p. 190).

2. Interpretative – evaluating means derived from the exegetical stage as applicable contextually to the reader’s contemporary issues and concerns (p. 197).

3. Transformative – experiencing life changing practical applications of insights derived from the previous two stages. In ALL of these three levels, the Orthodox context must be the Church as the locus of divine revelation and inspiration. Here the Holy Spirit leads us into all truth as manifested in the Biblical text, the teachings of the Fathers and the liturgical context. In Ch. 4, p. 115 f. Fr. Theodore explains the historical and spiritual exegetical approaches which, following the Fathers, must be applied throughout. Classically these have concerned the Antiochian emphasis on the “literal” or historical approach and the Alexandrian emphasis on the allegorical and typological interpretations that reveal the inter-connectedness of all Scripture in Tradition at deeper levels of understanding.