

INTRODUCTION TO USING ATLA ON EBSCO

The American Theological Library Association Religion database provides good coverage of Christianity and selective coverage of other world religions, especially Islam, Hinduism, and Judaism. It indexes articles and book reviews from most major English language theological journals and from some especially important non-English journals. It also indexes essays from selected festschriften, conference proceedings, and other multi-author books. ATLA covers literature on Bible, theology, church history, pastoral ministries, Christian education, and world missions. ATLA focuses on scholarly theological literature but includes a useful sampling of non-scholarly publications about popular Christian culture and church life especially from the mainline Protestant viewpoint.

From the library website (<http://library.dts.edu>) you can link to databases via the title list page, the topic list page, or the dropdown menu on the library home page. If you are off campus, you must login with your DTS ID and WorldCat password. Password details are here: <http://library.dts.edu/password-wc>.

We access the ATLA database through the EBSCO interface. **This guide assumes you are already familiar with generic EBSCO features.** If you are not, check <http://library.dts.edu/ebSCO-intro>. Assuming that you already know how to use the EBSCO interface in general, let's turn our attention to ATLA-specific issues not covered in the generic EBSCO documentation.

BIBLE SEARCHES IN ATLA

ATLA offers powerful Bible passage searching, but the power comes with complexity. Bible passages are designated in two different ways in ATLA, using two different fields: the Subject field and the Scripture Citation field. See example below. Understanding how these fields are used is the key to successful Bible searching.

How Did They Suppose 'the Perfect' Would Come? 1 Corinthians 13.8-12 in Patristic Exegesis

Authors: [Shogren, Gary Steven](#)

Source: [Journal of Pentecostal Theology](#), 7 no 15 Oct 1999, p 99-121

ISSN: 0966-7369

Publication Year: 1999

Language: English

Subjects: [Bible. Corinthians I 11-14](#); [Fathers of the church -- Biblical interpretation](#); [Heresies and heretics \(Christianity\) -- 0030-600](#); [Knowledge, Theory of \(Religion\)](#); [Eschatology -- Christianity -- History of doctrines -- 0030-600](#)

Scripture Citation: [Corinthians, 1st 13:8-13:12](#)

USING THE SUBJECT FIELD

ATLA provides a Bible subject heading which looks like following.

Bible. Corinthians I 11-14

There is a period after Bible. First epistle is indicated by Roman numeral "I" (uppercase i) and chapters by Arabic "11-14". Notice that specific verses are not indicated at all. In fact, even specific chapters are lacking; rather, ranges of chapters are used. For 1st Corinthians the ranges are 1-4, 5-10, 11-14, 15-16. To obtain a work about chapter 13 you must search for "11-14." But how are you to know what ranges of chapters are grouped together? How are you to know it is 11-14 and not some other range? One approach is to do a keyword search like "1 Cor 13" and then look at a few matching records to see what subject heading is used. Another approach is to browse the subject index.¹ See following image.

Browse an Index:

Browse for:

Term

bible. corinthians i 1-4

bible. corinthians i 11-14

bible. corinthians i 15-16

bible. corinthians i 5-10

bible. corinthians i.

Notice that the period after Bible is necessary when you browse.

Originally the Subject index was the only way to search for bible passages in ATLA. Inability to look for specific chapter and verse proved to be so unsatisfactory that a specialized Scripture Citation field was added. So you will rarely use the subject field to search for bible passages.

USING THE SCRIPTURE CITATION FIELD

ATLA provides a separate Scripture citation field to support searching for specific chapter and verse.

Corinthians, 1st 13:8-13:12

Notice ordinal, 1st, and Arabic numerals for both chapters and verses. Note the repeated chapter.

¹ Access the browse screen by picking the "More" menu, then "Indexes. "Introduction to Using EBSCO Databases" (<http://library.dts.edu/ebSCO-intro>) explains and illustrates the difference between searching and browsing.

Browse an Index: Scripture Citation

Browse for: corinthians, 1st 13:7

Page: [◀ Previous](#) | [Next ▶](#)Select one or more terms and add to search using:

Term	Records Count
<input type="checkbox"/> corinthians, 1st 13:7	1
<input type="checkbox"/> corinthians, 1st 13:8	4
<input type="checkbox"/> corinthians, 1st 13:8-13:12	3
<input type="checkbox"/> corinthians, 1st 13:8-13:13	4
<input type="checkbox"/> corinthians, 1st 13:9	1

The Scripture citation field is indexed so that verse-specific entries are also indexed to corresponding chapters, and chapters are associated with the book as a whole. For example,

Corinthians, 1st 13

will retrieve all specific verses on chapter 13 in the SC index.

To browse the SC index, click the Indexes button near the top of the page and choose Scripture Citation as the index. If you are browsing for specific verses, then explore the next and previous pages. One reason is that the system sorts character by character, not numerically, and the exploratory browse helps you find unexpected sequences spread over multiple pages. Notice how 2:1 and 2:2 are separated in the following browse:

2:1
 2:10
 2:11–2:16
 2:13
 next screen . . .
 2:15
 2:2
 2:20

Another reason to explore the next and previous pages is that a specific verse can be hiding in a range of verses sorted to another screen. In the following example,

. . .
 2:31–2:38
 2:31–2:33
 2:32
 2:33
 next screen . . .
 2:34
 3:1

. . . verse 34 is on the first screen in the entry 2:31–2:38 and on the second screen as 2:34.

Note also that colons sort after numbers, so Genesis 1:1 is separated from Genesis 1 as follows.

Genesis 1
 Genesis 1–11
 Genesis 1–2
 Genesis 1–4
 Genesis 10
 Genesis 11
 Genesis 19
 Genesis 1:1
 Genesis 1:1–1:13
 Genesis 1:2
 Genesis 2

Because of problems like this, you may wish to search for chapters in the SC field without specifying verses. (Remember verses post up to chapters, so everything indexed under Genesis 1:1 is also indexed under the chapter Genesis 1.)

It is better to search the Scripture citation field from the Index than from the search screen if you have a range of verses to search. For example, a search for

Exodus 19:10–19:15

fails. A search for

Exodus 19

gives over 200 results. It is time-consuming to search through these results to find relevant citations. But by going to the Scripture citation index, you can choose verse ranges that include or overlap with Exod 19:10–15 and search for them.

Some records have both a Bible subject field AND a Scripture citation field:

Subject:	Bible. Corinthians I 11–14
Scripture citation:	Corinthians, 1st 13:8–13:12

Although there are many exceptions, the recent practice seems to be that works about broad topics like authorship of an entire book of the Bible, or works about a large portion of a book, will have a subject heading but not a Scripture citation field.

The Scripture Citation field was an important improvement on the Subject field. But it is still cumbersome to search.

USING THE SCRIPTURES BUTTON (=SR = SCRIPTURE REFERENCE)

There is yet another means of looking for material by Bible passage. This is called “Scriptures” on the menu bar but “ATLA Hierarchical Scripture Authority” on the display page, and SR (for scripture reference) in the search box. It is based on the Scripture citation field, but processed in a unique way to help get around the range problem. All verses and chapters implicit in a SC range are made explicit in the SR display. For example, checking Genesis 1:2 in the Hierarchical Scripture Authority section will include articles indexed for Genesis 1:1-3 (and more) in the Scripture Citation Index.

Scriptures button first level of hierarchy looks like the following.

Genesis [\[Previous Level\]](#)
 Chapter 1 [\[Expand\]](#)
 Chapter 2 [\[Expand\]](#)
 Chapter 3 [\[Expand\]](#)

To find material on a book, click the book name. To choose a chapter of a book, click Expand beside the book title. Then click the chapter you wish or click Expand and choose a verse. You can only choose one verse, chapter, or book. If you wish to search a range of verses or chapters, use the Scripture citation field.

There is another way to use the Scripture Button indexes. You can simply specify the SR field in a search like this:

Searching: [ATLA Religion Database with ATLA Serials](#) | [Choose Databases](#)

SR "Genesis 1:3"	Select a Field (optional) ▼	Search
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So it is easy to use Scripture Button, and this is equivalent to using the SR field qualifier.

The SR Scripture Button is extremely easy to use; just click. You don't have to remember anything about the peculiarities of the ATLA indexes to use it. So many students like it. But Scripture Button indexing is too thorough. For example, if the Scripture Citation field says the article is about Genesis 1-11, then the SR scripture button will index that article for every verse in all eleven chapters! That is not good. Browsing the Scripture Citation allows you to be more precise, but it takes patience.

GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR BIBLE LOOKUP

Here are some general guidelines for finding works on Bible passages in ATLA.

1. The SR Scripture button is the easiest way to find works on whole chapters or single verses. Possible disadvantages are as follows. You cannot select multiple verses with an SR search. The results list will contain irrelevant citations and may require a long time to cull

through. For example, if the article is on a broad topic and the SC field indicates a broad range of chapters, then every verse in all those chapters will be included in the SR index, creating a lot of irrelevant entries. Another disadvantage of an SR lookup is that you cannot get comprehensive retrieval this way because of records that have Bible subject fields but lack the SC field. For routine assignments, this limited retrieval is not a problem; for thesis research it is an issue.

2. The Scripture Citation browse provides flexible access to ranges of verses or chapters. It allows high precision. For best results, begin by browsing the Scripture citation field. Browsing will confirm what the correct format is and will identify ranges of chapters or verses you may wish to include. You can also execute a Scripture citation search without browsing, designating a chapter but not verses, e.g.,

Corinthians, 1st 13

One disadvantage of a Scripture citation lookup is that you cannot get comprehensive retrieval this way because of records that have Bible subject fields but lack the SC field. For routine assignments, this limited retrieval is not a problem; for thesis research it is an issue. Another disadvantage is that it takes time to use.

3. Be very careful if you try to match a subject heading like “Bible. Corinthians I 11–14” exactly. Punctuation is more flexible when you search than when you browse. When searching, you can opt to omit the period after Bible, and capitalization does not matter, and extra spaces cause no problems; nevertheless, it is still easy to make a mistake. One easy way to guarantee correct form is to browse or to click a hyperlink in a record. Then you can edit as needed. Often you can simply omit “bible” in the heading like this: Corinthians I 11–14. See figure below.

4. To do a comprehensive but low precision Bible passage search, use both the Subject field and the Scripture citation field, linking them with a logical OR as in the figure below.

corinthians i 11-14	in	SU Subjects	<input type="button" value="Search"/>
OR		corinthians 1st 13	in SC Scripture Citation
AND			in Select a Field (optional) Add Row

BOOK REVIEWS IN ATLA

ATLA is a major source for reviews of theological books. Because some reviews use initials instead of author’s first name, and some reviews omit book subtitles, use last name and a few words from the title to search for reviews. Here is a search for Buist Fanning’s *Verbal Aspect in the New Testament*.

fanning	in	AU Author	<input type="button" value="Search"/>
and		verbal aspect	in TI Title
and			in Select a Field (optional) Add Row

“Author” could mean author of the book or author of the review.

ESSAYS IN ATLA

ATLA indexes essays and chapters in multi-author books. In the example below, Daniel Fuller is the author of the essay entitled "Progressive Dispensationalism and the Law/gospel Contrast: A Case Study in Biblical Theology." The book title is *Biblical Theology: Retrospect and Prospect*. The editor of the book (Scott Hafemann) is not provided on this screen.

1. [Progressive dispensationalism and the law/gospel contrast: a case study in biblical theology](#)



Periodical

By: **Fuller**, Daniel P. Source: *Biblical theology: retrospect and prospect*, Downers Grove, Ill. : InterVarsity Pr ; Leicester : Apollos, 2002 p237-249.. Publication Type: Essay

Subjects: Calvin, Jean, 1509-1564 -- Theology -- Soteriology; Bible. New Testament -- Theology; Dispensationalism; Law and gospel

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Once you have searched ATLA and identified an essay of interest, then you must search WorldCat to determine if DTS owns the book that contains the essay and obtain the book call number. Often you can click Check for Print Book to do this. Otherwise, you must manually search. The author and title of the essay may not be listed in the WorldCat. You must search WorldCat by the title of the book (not title of the essay), perhaps combined with name of book editor (not name of essay author), to get the book call number.

USING SPECIAL INDEXES

ATLA includes some special indexes. You should read the online help about these indexes before using them because they can both help and hurt you. For example, there is a classification code assigned to book records that looks something like a subject heading. It appears only on book records so you will retrieve only book records if you use it. That might not be what you expect or want. The special indexes can add precision to your searches. For example, search for "sermon*" by subject and retrieve many thousands of records. About half are sermons and half are articles about sermons. There is also a special subject genre field. Search for sermon* by subject genre and you retrieve only the half that are sermons. (The general subject category includes both the genre, sermons, and the topic, sermons.) You will almost never need to use these special indexes, but sometimes you could benefit from using them, so it is worthwhile to read about them after you are familiar with the basic indexes.

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volume and year. It is hard to remember all that. So when you follow the link, it is wise to right click the link and pick "Open in a New Tab". That way ATLA is in one tab of your browser and the new window in another. You can read rather than remember the citation.

You may be tempted to limit your searches to articles available online. Don't do this! Some ATLA articles are available full text online but most are not available online. Of the articles that are available online, some are stored at the EBSCO website, some are stored at a publisher website, and still others elsewhere. The difference is very important. When you limit a search to full text, you will match only articles stored at the EBSCO website. So this option delivers less than you would expect.

TRANSFERRING RECORDS TO ZOTERO

It is possible to export records from ATLA and import them into Zotero bibliographic management software. See <http://library.dts.edu/zotero.pdf> for a general overview of using Zotero.