

INTRODUCTION TO USING ATLA

The American Theological Library Association Religion database (ATLA) is produced in several versions; we use ATLA PLUS, the most comprehensive version. ATLA provides good coverage of Christianity and limited coverage of other world religions, especially Islam, Hinduism, and Judaism. ATLA covers Protestant and Roman Catholic 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. It indexes articles and book reviews from most major English language theological journals and from some non-English journals. It also indexes essays from selected festschriften, conference proceedings, and other multi-author books. It provides full-text pdfs for about 40% of the items indexed.

From the library website (<http://library.dts.edu>) you can link to ATLA and other 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 will be prompted to login using your OneLogin account when you select a database at the library website.

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 supports several different ways to lookup material by Bible passage. The options are complex. Each option has strengths and weaknesses; there is no one best approach.

Bible passages are designated in two different ways in ATLA, using two different fields: the Subject field and the Scripture Citation field. Understanding how these fields are formatted is the key to successful Bible searching and browsing. See example below; it has **both fields**.

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 subject heading which looks this:

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, pre-defined standardized ranges of chapters are used. For 1st Corinthians the ranges are chapters 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.



Beginning with the image at left, pick the "More" menu, then "Indexes." That takes you to the browse screen (see image below).

At the browse screen, use the checkboxes to select headings of interest. Click "Add" to insert the headings in the standard search box (where you can edit them if you wish). Click "Search" to retrieve matching records. For more about browsing, see "Introduction to Using EBSCO Databases" (<http://library.dts.edu/ebSCO-intro>).

Browse an Index:

Browse for:

Page: [◀Previous](#) [Next▶](#)

Select one or more terms and add to search using:

Term	Records Count
The term(s) you entered could not be found. The list below is in alphabetical order.	
<input type="checkbox"/> bible. corinthians i 1-4	363
<input type="checkbox"/> bible. corinthians i 11-14	699
<input type="checkbox"/> bible. corinthians i 15-16	403
<input type="checkbox"/> bible. corinthians i 5-10	649
<input type="checkbox"/> bible. corinthians ii	161

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 specific bible passages.** The Bible subject headings are useful for topics that cover an entire book, such as these:

bible. corinthians i – authorship
 bible. corinthians i -- theology

USING THE SCRIPTURE CITATION FIELD (= SC FIELD CODE)

ATLA provides a separate Scripture citation field to support searching for specific chapter and verse. This works for the Bible, but also for Talmud, Quran, etc. There are separate browse indexes for each source, but they all share the same field in the record. **So when you browse, you will be using what is labeled the “Bible Citation” browse to retrieve records based on the “Scripture Citation” field.**

Here is an example of the format for a bible citation: “Corinthians, 1st 13:8–13:12”. Note ordinal “1st” and Arabic numerals for both chapters and verses. Note the repeated chapter.

Access the browse screen by picking the “More” menu, then “Indexes.” Pick “Bible Citation” index. See following image.

Browse an Index:

Browse for:

Page: [◀ Previous](#) [Next ▶](#)

Select one or more terms and add to search using:

Term	Records Count
<input type="checkbox"/> corinthians, 1st 13:7	2
<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

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
 2:13
 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, verse 34 is on the first screen in the entry 2:31–2:38 and on the second screen as literal 2:34.

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

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

Genesis 1
 Genesis 1–2
 Genesis 10
 Genesis 11
 . . .
 Genesis 19
Genesis 1:1
 Genesis 1:2

One nice feature is that indexing is “posted up” one level, so records about verses are posted up to the chapter level. A search for a chapter like << "SC Corinthians, 1st 1" >> includes everything on every verse contained in the chapter. See image below.

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

"corinthians, 1st 1" SC Scripture Citation ▾

TEMPORARY WARNING: This posting-up feature broke in the summer of 2018. EBSCO has promised to restore the old behavior. Until then, you must use the following work-around to get all of a chapter.

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

"Corinthians, 1st 1" SC Scripture Citation ▾

OR ▾ "Corinthians, 1st 1:*" SC Scripture Citation ▾

The above is equivalent to using an SC field code as follows.

<< SC "Corinthians, 1st 1" OR SC "Corinthians, 1st 1:*" >>

Note in this example, to get everything in SC on chapter one, we specify the entire chapter 1 OR chapter 1 colon asterisk. The colon is important. We don't want to omit the colon as in

<< SC "Corinthians, 1st 1*" >> because that would match chapter 10, chapter 11, etc.

USING THE SCRIPTURES MENU CHOICE (= SR FIELD CODE)

There is yet another means of looking for material by Bible passage. This is called “Scriptures” on the menu bar but “ATLA Hierarchical Bible Authority” on the display page. Functionally the interface works like a browse. In the image above we have selected the Scriptures menu choice. Click “Expand” adjacent Genesis to show a list of chapters. Click “Expand” adjacent chapter one to display a list of verses. Click a chapter or verse to retrieve material.

Take note of the following two characteristics to this approach.

First, the Scriptures menu choice (which displays a browse-like interface) is easy to use in the sense that you don’t have to remember how a bible passage citation is formatted in ATLA (e.g. Corinthians, 1st 13:8–13:12). What could be easier than just clicking book and chapter links? So if you rarely use ATLA and you are likely to forget all the interface details, just remember the Scriptures menu choice way of searching for chapters.

Second, the Scriptures menu choice provides a special kind of deep indexing. It is based on the Scripture citation field, but is processed (indexed) in a unique way to help get around the range problem. All verses and chapters implicit in the SC field are made explicit in the browse display. For example, if the SC field says “Genesis 1:1-3” then it will index the article for each of the verses in the 1-3 range. So you can click “Genesis 1:2.” This is both an advantage and a disadvantage. Consider another example where the indexing is too inclusive. If the Scripture Citation field says the article is a survey about Genesis 1-11, then it will index that article for every verse in all eleven chapters! It is posting **down**. So clicking “Genesis 4:4” would retrieve the article on Genesis 1-11. There is a small probability the survey article specifically mentions Gen 4:4. This kind of indexing is an advantage if you wish to be thorough (obsessive compulsive?) but it is a disadvantage if you wish to see only a few articles focused on specific verses.

With the browse interface that you access via the Scriptures menu choice, you can only click one verse or chapter at a time. There is another way to use the deep indexing, and this other way

allows you to choose multiple verses or chapters at once. Instead of using the Scriptures menu choice, instead of browsing, you can simply specify the SR field code 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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You can also search for multiple verses such as this: << SR "genesis 4:1" OR "genesis 4:2" >>.

One minor disadvantage of an SR lookup (browse or search) is that you cannot get totally exhaustive retrieval this way because some records lack the SC field. SR indexing thoroughly exploits the SC field, but this can only retrieve records that have SC fields. In extreme cases it is also necessary to use the subject fields. For routine assignments, SC/SR is all you need.

GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR BIBLE LOOKUP

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

1. It is often good to begin a bible lookup by using the "Indexes" => "Bible Citation" menu choice (which displays a browse interface). It provides flexible access and allows you to make relevance assessments. It allows greater precision than the Scriptures menu choice and it can be as thorough if you patiently browse and select all relevant index entries. The browse inserts text into a search box. You can edit the search before executing it. If you know what you are doing, you can revise some SC entries to use SR deep indexing for single verses or chapters.
2. To do a very 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 image below.

corinthians i 11-14	in	SU Subjects	▼	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	▼	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 (preaching). 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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Many articles are available online. If an article is available online as part of the database you are searching and is stored at the EBSCO website, then there is a clickable link that says “PDF Full Text” or “HTML Full Text.” HTML documents usually lack page numbers and usually convert footnotes to endnotes. Bad. Use pdf. It preserves page numbers, footnotes, exotic fonts, charts, etc. Some articles have a link that says “Check for Full Text.” That means the article may be available online if you click the link. Some articles in that journal are available online from another source, and this may be one of them. The link will take you via an openURL resolver to a listing of what is available and where. When you follow that link, you may have to search again for the specific article in another database. So you need to know the author and title and journal 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> for a general introduction to Zotero.