

Choosing Bible Software By Mark Ward

C.S. Lewis had no Bible software. Nonetheless, he somehow managed to become quite adept at reading the New Testament in its original language. Computers and software have greatly accelerated the speed at which we can perform many of our tasks, but that doesn't mean there is no longer any virtue in the old ways. Newer-is-better thinkers have fallen into what Lewis called "chronological snobbery" by forgetting the paper past. But those who maintain an older-is-better mindset, Lewis said, can be equally guilty.

Pastors can be guilty of either snobbery. Some should click their blog readers closed, shut down their computers, and feed from the distraction-free quiet of a Greek New Testament, a (paper) lexicon and a notepad. Some pastors have let their software waste their precious study time by tempting them to chase down a thousand rabbit trails. Others have resisted joining the computer age, spending extra hours every week laboriously pouring over books in their libraries and writing and rewriting sermon notes by hand. However, a great number of pastors have realized that they've been paperbound too long and are ready to harness the power of a computer. Those men need to buy and master the right Bible software.

Assess your needs

It is possible to buy large libraries of books in Bible software packages, but bigger is not necessarily better. Most likely you won't want to read *Pilgrim's Progress* or even Spurgeon's sermons on a computer screen. It's tiring for the eyes. Don't buy a large bundle of books in a software package if you will not read them sitting in front of your computer.

You are much more likely to use reference works on computer. These kinds of resources don't require you to read much at a time, and they're instantly searchable. Consider these types of references:

Language resources—Lexicons, grammatical references, and morphological and syntactical Bible text databases utilize the function of a computer perfectly. This is the primary value of Bible software.

Commentaries—Commentary software enables you to consult dozens of commentaries quickly, and you can take hundreds of volumes with you on your laptop.

Bible dictionaries—An integrated Bible dictionary lets you double-click on "Gath Hopher" while reading about Jonah and get a quick dictionary article.

Theological journal articles—These articles sometimes more accurately address your question than does a commentary, and you would almost certainly miss them if they weren't available on your computer.

Follow this principle when considering Bible software: The books most useful to have on your computer are reference works and any other books that you turn to frequently and read in small doses.

Be willing to invest

We have all heard it said: "You get what you pay for." It's true that some excellent published works may be obtained free on the Internet at places like www.ccel.org. However, when it comes to Bible software, the best tools require an investment.

A monetary investment is not the only one you will make. You will need to learn how to use the programs you buy. Many software publishers provide training videos for their programs. Training seminars are also available around the country. Plan to spend several hours learning your software before you use it for exegesis. You will be amply rewarded.

Software you should consider purchasing right away

Take a look at *BibleWorks* (or *Accordance* for Mac users) and *Logos*. These are the only Bible software packages written for serious exegetical work. Nothing else is worth the money of a pastor or student who uses Greek and Hebrew, and little else is worth the money for those who don't. Let me explain some of the most valuable features of these programs.

BibleWorks is the Windows program built for original language work. The program allows fast searches, comparisons of translations, and ready access to lexical and grammatical works—these are its hallmarks. I particularly enjoy taking notes in this program. I adapted my pastor's illustration filing system for use in *BibleWorks*, and now every time I turn to any verse upon which I've made notations, I have illustrations, exegetical thoughts, quotations, teachers' comments and sermon notes. The basic package costs \$350 (\$250 for students). For \$125 you can add BDAG (the Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich lexicon). It is the standard Greek lexicon, and it's packed with helpful material.

Accordance is the Mac equivalent in many respects to *BibleWorks*. It far surpasses *BibleWorks* in the number of add-on books it offers, and it is easier to learn. If you're a Mac user, you have a difficult decision to make. You could buy the *Accordance Scholar's Core Bundle* (containing the absolute necessities minus the Septuagint), add *BDAG* and a few Bible translations, and wait until *Logos* for the Mac comes out (my recommendation), or you could throw in your lot with *Accordance* and buy books for it instead. On the other hand, if you have one of the newest Macs, it will run Windows and PC software.

Accordance offers fewer book packages (one reason I recommend waiting for *Logos*), but the program itself is well designed. Powerful searching is simple. Comparing Bible translations is a snap. Looking up words in a lexicon is as easy as a mouse click. And *Accordance* does not try to wow you with a huge list of books you will never use.

Logos is a growing company dedicated to quality work. You may not be able to afford one of their largest software packages, but go to logos.com and find the page comparing the books available in their graduated software packages. Carefully compute the value of the books you feel you could really use, giving preference to the kinds of works most useful to have on computer. Then buy the package that best suits your needs and your means.

For advanced exegetes, *Logos* provides something no one else does right now: syntax searches. This is an exciting field full of study possibilities. *Logos* also makes it possible to type in a reference and have the software look up that passage in a large number of commentaries.

Choosing

BibleWorks and *Logos* are different enough that each is worth having. *BibleWorks* is first priority because exegesis is first priority. *BibleWorks* makes searching, lexical work,

and note-taking a joyful experience. *Logos* can do some of the same things, but it was designed to be a searchable library of various works. *BibleWorks* gives you fewer books on purpose in order to keep its price down. Mike Bushell, head of *BibleWorks*, has a master of divinity degree and knows what pastors and scholars need.

To summarize, I recommend *Accordance* for Mac users, *BibleWorks* for Windows users, and *Logos* for both.

Many programs can be purchased at prices below the manufacturer's suggested retail price, but here are the early 2007 retail prices for some recommended programs: *BibleWorks 7*, \$350; *Logos Scholar's Library Gold*, \$1,400; *Accordance*, \$250; *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, \$100; *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis (NIDOTTE)*, \$100; *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology (NIDNTT)*, \$100. Other recommended Logos packages are: *IVP Essential Reference Collection*, \$90; *Theological Journal Library, Vols. 1-9*, \$300; *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, \$175; *WEA Theological Library*, \$20.

If you absolutely cannot purchase Bible software, try the free programs *eSword* (for Windows) or *MacSword* (for Macs). For Bible software accessible on the Web, see the list at [HYPERLINK "http://www.tyndale.cam.ac.uk/Tyndale/BibleSoftware.htm"](http://www.tyndale.cam.ac.uk/Tyndale/BibleSoftware.htm)
www.tyndale.cam.ac.uk/Tyndale/BibleSoftware.htm.

Finally, be wary of the get-it-done-faster spirit that computers can abet. That spirit is not conducive to meditation. On the other hand, don't, through laziness, fail to get the most out of the powerful laborsaving tool that the Lord has placed in your hand. After some careful research, invest in some good Bible software, learn how to use it to your advantage, and put it to good use for the benefit of your ministry.

The fact that various software packages are recommended in this article does not constitute an endorsement by the author or by TCP of the contents or of any author, theological position, publisher or other organization(s) associated with the software.

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