

Faith Pulpit

The Value of Bible Software for Ministry, Part 2

Choosing the Right Bible Software: A Closer Look at BibleWorks and Accordance

There are numerous Bible software programs available to students of God's Word. We will raise three basic factors to consider in choosing the right program for your circumstances. First, consider the cost. For the most part, you get what you pay for, because most of the databases for biblical research (e.g., various Bible translations, lexicons, and dictionaries) are available to any software maker. While some of the databases are public domain and are therefore free, other databases cost money. The price of the software usually reflects the kinds of databases that the software producer includes with the program.

Another factor that distinguishes programs is the actual program that accesses the databases—its interface and search engine. Features to look for include ease of use, search capabilities, flexibility, and support. Personal preferences (such as Macintosh vs. PC) also come into play at this point.

Finally, consider how the software producer markets the program. Some Bible programs appeal to the masses through lower cost, basic tools, and a few popular translations; often no knowledge of Greek or Hebrew is needed. If you have little or no training in the biblical languages you may want to consider E-Sword. This is a free program that has several translations, some good research tools, and a basic search engine.¹ At the other end of the spectrum are BibleWorks and Accordance. They advertise themselves as premiere software for exegesis and research. While there is an attempt to appeal to laypeople, it is clear that their focus is exegetes who are serious about studying the original languages. Someone without any language training could use BibleWorks and Accordance in a limited way but would not be able to employ all their powerful features.

The two programs most commonly used by the faculty and students at FBBC&TS are BibleWorks and Accordance. In the following section, we will highlight some of the similarities and differences of these two programs.

Similar Features

(1) Word studies. While Accordance and BibleWorks function in different ways, they are capable of performing many of the same tasks. By simply dragging your mouse over tagged terms you can parse instantaneously and use lexicons such as BDAG, Louw-Nida, HALOT, and BDB.² After selecting a default lexicon, you can read the lexical entry for any term by simply touching the cursor on the term. Integrating the lexicons with the biblical text is a wonderful time saver. For example, in a Greek class here at Faith the students are required to look up and record the definitions of several terms in Ephesians 1:1–14 in the standard Greek-English lexicon, BDAG. Students who complete this assignment manually spend an average of four hours, while students who use Accordance or BibleWorks often finish in less than an hour.

(2) Lexical and grammatical searches. Beyond using the lexicons, you can conduct simple word and phrase searches in the original languages or any English version in all or just part of the Bible. For example, perhaps you are looking for the phrase root of bitterness, but you cannot remember where to find it. After choosing a search version, let's say the NKJV, you can type in all or part of the phrase in the search engine and quickly discover that it occurs in Hebrews 12:15. Now your attention shifts to the term root. Either by using Strong's numbering system (for those with no knowledge of Greek or Hebrew) or through your own knowledge of Greek, you can search for all the instances of *rhiza* (the Greek term meaning "root") in the New Testament. In under a second you find that *rhiza* occurs seventeen times in sixteen different verses (it occurs twice in one verse). At this point, you can investigate each passage to discover any parallel uses of *rhiza* that might shed light on Hebrews 12:15. This kind of research is invaluable in understanding a term's semantic range—all the different ways biblical authors use a term.

Both Accordance and BibleWorks are also capable of doing complex lexical and grammatical searches and analyses. Their respective search engines use the same databases (morphologically tagged texts) to find grammatical and syntactical relationships. Here is a practical example. In the Pastoral Epistles course offered last fall at FBTS, students were required to write a philosophy of pastoral ministry based on the imperatives Paul wrote to Timothy and Titus. Without Bible software, a student would have to hunt for the commands verse by verse. With BibleWorks or Accordance, however, a student could easily isolate the imperatives by taking some specific steps. First, you must limit your search to just the Pastoral Epistles; next, you must select a morphologically tagged text as your search version (this is how the search engine finds inflected meaning); last, you need to search for verbs in the imperative mood. The results of the search show that there are ninety imperatives in the Pastorals. These kinds of lexical and grammatical searches are incredible; they are limited only by your creativity and expertise. The powerful search engines in BibleWorks and Accordance are the single most important feature that separates them from lesser programs like E-Sword.

(3) Sentence diagrams. Both BibleWorks and Accordance have sentence diagramming tools that enable the exegete to display graphically the grammar and syntax of a passage. Many pastors find this step invaluable in sermon preparation. A sentence diagram shows the thought flow of the biblical author and helps the exegete distinguish the central ideas of a passage from the subordinate ideas.

(4) Multiple version displays. Both programs allow you to display multiple versions simultaneously in a variety of formats. For example, you can create and display your own customized parallel Bible based on any version available. In addition, both are capable of importing text into word processing programs like Microsoft Word a very helpful feature for writing papers, sermons, and lessons.

Different Features

(1) Platform. Perhaps the greatest difference between these two programs is that Accordance runs on Macintosh (Mac) whereas BibleWorks runs on Windows (PC). Emulators are available, allowing Accordance to run on a PC, and vice versa, but the performance is not as stellar as in the native environment.

(2) User-friendliness. In most reviews, user-friendliness clearly favors Accordance, as is the case with most Mac products. Loyal Accordance users tend to emphasize user-friendliness as a key selling point. Some students at Faith have actually switched from BibleWorks to Accordance because of this very feature. The makers of BibleWorks 7 (newly released in February 2006), however, claim that its new interface is now more intuitive and easier to use than earlier versions have been. To enhance user-friendliness, BibleWorks has also produced some very helpful tutorials and has excellent customer support. Concerning Accordance's tutorials, a training seminar DVD to help consumers use its more powerful features has just become available.

(3) Cost. Stated simply, Accordance users usually spend more money than those who use BibleWorks. The structure of how you purchase the programs is entirely different. BibleWorks is available for a set fee of \$350. What you receive for your \$350 is very impressive: over ninety translations (including KJV, NKJV, NASB, ESV, NIV, NET Bible, NLT, plus many foreign translations), Greek and Hebrew texts (including UBS4, NA27, Majority Text, Textus Receptus, BHS, and LXX), and an array of lexicons and reference tools.³ New in BibleWorks 7 are helpful features like integrated satellite maps, sentence diagrams of the entire NT, audio Greek and Hebrew flashcards, and advanced grammar and textual criticism resources. There are more resources ("modules") available for additional fees (BDAG, LSJ, HALOT, etc.), but the bulk of the program is acquired in the initial purchase.⁴

Accordance, on the other hand, is completely a modular program. The program itself is just \$39, but includes very little (only KJV and ASV). Most of the resources in BibleWorks are also available in Accordance, but must be purchased individually. With Accordance, you purchase the modules that you desire, and build the program the way you want it. This is a great feature of Accordance because you

purchase only the tools that you will use. Starting out, most people spend \$200 to \$400 for Accordance. After the initial purchase, as your studies take you in different directions, you can purchase the tools that suit your specific needs. Some modules for Accordance are not currently available in BibleWorks (e.g., NIDNTT, NIDOTTE, IVP Library, etc.) and vice-versa (e.g., BDF, EDNT, etc.).⁵

Conclusion

Bible software is a wonderful tool for the church today. If used properly it can enhance and strengthen the ministry of those who “rightly divide the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). In his final charge to Timothy, Paul commands him to “Preach the Word” (2 Timothy 4:1,2). Foundational to this chief charge is the task of faithful exegesis of the Scriptures—solid exegesis precedes relevant exposition. While Bible software can never replace the rigors of linguistic study or a real knowledge of the exegetical method, it can assist and enable contemporary expositors of God’s Word to fulfill Paul’s imperative in a more efficient manner. We hope this article will help you decide whether investing in a Bible program such as Accordance or BibleWorks is right for you and your situation.

Works Cited

1. You can download and use E-Sword free of charge at www.e-sword.net.
2. BDAG=Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (3rd ed.) by W. Bauer, F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich. Louw-Nida=Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains (2nd ed.) by J. P. Louw and E. A. Nida. HALOT=The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament by Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner. BDB=Hebrew-Aramaic and English Lexicon of the Old Testament by F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. Briggs.
3. UBS4 (United Bible Society) and NA27 (Nestle/Aland) are editions of the Greek NT. BHS (Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia) is the Hebrew OT. LXX is the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the OT.
4. LSJ=A Greek-English Lexicon (9th ed.) by Liddell, Scott, and Jones.
5. NIDNTT=New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology by C. Brown. NIDOTTE=New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis by W. VanGemeren. IVP Library=Several valuable and useful dictionaries. BDF=Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature by Blass, Debrunner, and Funk. EDNT=Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament by Balz and Schneider. For more complete and up-to-date information, visit their web pages: www.bibleworks.com and www.accordancebible.com.

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