

Powerful, Easy-to-Use Bible Software

BY CLINTON WAHLEN

One of the most important tools for Biblical research is good Bible software. The three most widespread platforms are BibleWorks, Logos, and Accordance. Bibleworks is a low-cost solution that delivers the largest number of original language resources for the money. Logos is an electronic library with almost 10,000 titles and is the only major platform containing the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*. This software review will concentrate on Accordance. Although written exclusively for the Mac OS, it is arguably the easiest to-use and most powerful computer platform for advanced biblical research.¹

Tagged texts, scholarly tools, and customizable user notes are seamlessly integrated into Accordance. Apps for the iPhone and iPad are also available (reviewed in the sidebar). Unlike Logos, once the initial investment is made in Accordance modules, the user can access them from iPhone and iPad apps at no additional cost. BibleWorks has no plans for a tablet or smartphone implementation of its platform.²

Basic Searches

Searching in Accordance, whether for specific verses or words, is easy, intuitive, and accurate. For either verse or word searches, entries can be copied and pasted or highlighted and dragged directly into the space for text-entry. Additional texts, tools (such as lexicons, commentaries, and Bible dictionaries) and personal notes files can be opened in parallel by selecting the desired resource from the pull-down menus. Resources opened using these menus scroll in sync with the particular verses being studied. Entering the lexical form (or lemma) for searches on tagged texts displays the occurrences of all grammatical forms of a word, as well as the number of hits and the number of verses in which they occur.

A very helpful feature is the linking of texts with formal translations such as the NRSV, NAS95 or NKJV so that when the cursor is placed over a word in one the corresponding word in the other is highlighted, making it easy to see the various ways a given word is translated in a particular version by passing the cursor quickly over the hits in red (or other user-defined color). Clicking on the bars icon enables these hits to be statistically analyzed and graphed in various ways. Parsing and lexical information is displayed in an “instant details box” below the search window. Triple-clicking on a word will bring up information on that word from the preferred lexical tool such as the *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology (NIDNTT)*. Use of quotation marks and special characters (“+”, “*”, “=”) enables other forms of precision searching. For example, all forms of a given root can be found by prefixing a “+” to the word (it is unclear, however, why the noun form *agapē* is required for one root and the verb form *legō* for another). New search windows open as tabs, enabling quick switching from one search window to the other. Diagram 1 illustrates these features by searching for verses that contain either *theos* or *kyrios* and (within three words) the root *agapē*.

More Advanced Searches

Seven useful parallel searches (by reference, section or section number) are available: Old Testament, OT in NT, Gospels, Synoptics, Q-Sayings, Harmony, and Epistles. Sections (such as “The Beatitudes”) can be selected from a list based on the search performed. A plus sign at the far right indicates when more parallels exist than are open, with successive clicks on it opening up additional parallels one at a time. The OT in NT parallel enables the user to choose which text to display for the OT (BHS, LXX or version) and which to display for the NT (GNT or version). The texts are context sensitive. For example, searches on the canonical books of the Septuagint are done by using LXX-1 and on the Apocrypha by using LXX-2, while variations between the Symmachus and Theodotian texts of Daniel are contained in LXX-1 and LXX-2 respectively.

Differences in the two recensions of Daniel can quickly be seen by checking the “Compare Texts” box (see Diagram 2). A vertical red bar indicates where underlined phrases in the other recension are inserted. This comparison feature would be useful also for the parallel texts, but unfortunately that is not yet implemented. When changing search texts, Accordance automatically opens the English translation alongside it (if purchased and at least two texts are open).

One of the most powerful features in Accordance is the construct search. Precise search equations can be constructed limited only by one’s imagination and skill in accurately specifying the search parameters. The simple example in Diagram 3 shows how to search on the word “sacrifice” (both noun and verb forms) when immediately followed by a noun in the absolute state. The elements of the equation were simply dragged and dropped into the equation windows from the choices to the right: (1) “LEX” was dragged into the first field to bring up the Hebrew lexicon from which the two words were chosen; (2) “Noun” was dragged into the second field and “absolute” chosen from the “State” menu; (3) “Within” was dragged over the first two fields and “1” was chosen to ensure that the second word immediately follows “sacrifice” without any intervening word; (4) Finally, “Psalms” was chosen in the range menu to confine the search to that book (new ranges can be defined to match any desired configuration of books, chapters, and verses).

Quality of Tagged Texts and Tools

An important advantage of Accordance that tends to be overlooked is the quality of the databases. Obviously, the integrity of text-based searches depends on the accuracy of the texts being searched. It is significant, therefore, that the names involved with the development of the Accordance texts are leading scholars in their fields. For example, morphological tagging for the Nestle-Aland Novum Testamentum Graece 27th edition was done by William D. Mounce and Rex A. Koivisto. The text for the Greek Pseudepigrapha was entered by Craig A. Evans and morphologically tagged by Rex A. Koivisto, while Martin G. Abegg was responsible for the tagged Qumran texts. The tagged Targum text, based on the electronic text of the Complete Aramaic Lexicon project (CAL), covers the whole Hebrew Bible with English translations of the Pentateuch, historical books, and Psalms. While not perfect, the mistakes in Accordance’s tagged texts are comparatively few. The Targumim, for example, *after* being received from CAL, were thoroughly corrected, the tagging completed, and many sections added. Similar care is taken with the scholarly tools in Accordance. Lexicons, commentaries, and other reference works are divided into different fields, enabling more sophisticated and precise searches. These fields include English, Greek or Hebrew content, reference (for *comments* on particular verses), Scripture (for *citations* of particular verses), manuscripts (P⁵², Λ, etc.), and many more.

Like books on the shelf, the data contained in the tagged texts and tools reflect the date of publication. So, for example, the *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* claims that reference to *hasidim* is not found at Qumran (2:536, 1b), which perhaps was true of then-published manuscripts, but a search using Accordance shows that the term occurs eight times (most significantly in 4Q521, 11Q5, and 11Q6). Another reality when using *any* tagged text is that not all will agree with the way certain words are parsed. This is true also of Accordance in which the classification of the Greek middle seems to be based more on morphology than function. In James 2:4, the verb *diekrithēte* “made distinctions” is either active or middle in meaning but is classified as a passive and the verb *elegchomenoi* “convicted” is classified as a middle even though it is clearly passive with the agency of the action being specified by *hypo*.³ This problem of tagging is illustrated also in Diagram 1 above where *ēgapēmenoi* “beloved” is parsed as both middle and passive although it is everywhere passive in meaning. Conjunctions, on the other hand, seem to be classified based on function rather than part of speech.⁴ Typos in the electronic reference works exist but are exceedingly rare.

Specific Recommendations

For those working with the original Greek and Hebrew, three levels of scholarly bundles are available:⁵

1. Introductory – includes tagged Old Testament and New Testament texts, parallels, basic lexicons and several English translations as well as French, German, Spanish, and Italian versions.

2. Standard – includes everything in Introductory plus several other critical Greek New Testament texts, other lexicons (including Louw and Nida, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, Trench) and two Greek grammars (Burton and Robertson).

3. Premiere – includes everything in Standard plus Spicq's lexicon, a tagged Septuagint text, Brenton's English Septuagint, Steven's Greek grammar and Ross's Hebrew grammar.

The Introductory level is quite adequate, but the Standard bundle is a good value. For Septuagintal studies, Premier is required. Other modules likely to be of interest are the Dead Sea Scrolls non-biblical texts and English translation, and various commentaries (e.g., the 58-vol. *Word Biblical Commentary*).

Conclusion

Put simply, the easier it is to do something, the more likely one is to do it. Since even complex searches in Accordance are not difficult, research possibilities are greatly enhanced. In addition, learning more is made easy by the more than sixty video podcasts and five hours of video instruction downloadable free at accordancebible.com. Bible software modules are like Greek manuscripts of the New Testament: they must be *weighed* not *counted*. Other platforms offer more primary resources for less money, but the quality and accuracy of the tagged texts and research tools provided in Accordance make it a very good option for Biblical scholarship despite the higher price tag.

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¹The review is based on Accordance 9.4.2 on a 15.5-inch MacBook Pro running Mac OS X Lion (10.7.1).

²See "Will BibleWorks Ever Be Ported to a Handheld Platform, Such as a Smart Phone or Tablet?" Online: <http://kb.bibleworksllc.com/ikb/questions.php?questionid=11>. Cited 22 September 2011.

³Observing the problem of tagged texts in their handling of the middle form is Jonathan T. Pennington, "Test Driving the Theory—Middle Voice Forms in Matthew" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the SBL, Atlanta, Ga., 22 November 2010). The outline is available online: <http://jonathanpennington.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/test-driving-the-theory-handout-pennington.pdf>. Cited 22 September 2011.

⁴See Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1996), 669 nn. 3-4.

⁵Details about packages and prices are available online: http://www.accordancebible.com/products/scholars_collection.php.