

# SEARCHING THE Cyber-Scriptures

JOHN R. THROOP



## A LOOK AT SOFTWARE FOR BIBLE STUDY

**B**ible study and sermon preparation are great spiritual exercises. Until recently, however, these exercises built more than spiritual muscle. Lugging those hefty texts to a desk where they could be spread out felt like a workout, complete with a weightlifter's bench press. Now, a small CD in a computer is all that you need for personal study or sermon preparation. And complex studies, which used to take hours, can be accomplished in a few keystrokes with a new generation of Bible study software available for desktops, laptops, handheld devices (like the Palm Pilot) and even some Internet-ready cell phones.

Making the right decision on Bible software depends on use and need. A pastor with a more scholarly approach, seminary professor, or Bible teacher will want a product that has multiple translations of the Bible, many original language tools, contemporary and older commentaries, and Bible dictionaries, with the ability to do quick searches between all of these tools.

**The Logos Bible Software Series X** ([www.logos.com](http://www.logos.com)), for example, pro-

## “I can be at the airport, or in a doctor’s office, and scroll and read through the Book of Genesis...”

vides a vast library of resources—up to 2,500 titles from more than 100 publishers—that can interface with dozens of Bible translations, original texts, and an enormous variety of tools. Logos software features the Libronix Digital Library System, a new easy-to-use system designed in response to user feedback.

Logos Series X is built on a new technology called the Libronix Digital Library System. Dan Pritchett, Logos’s director of marketing, says that the company has responded to user feedback on how they actually use the product, and redesigned it for ease of use.

“People now can dive directly into their study of a Bible passage or Bible topic,” he says. “All they have to do is enter passage, click ‘go.’ The software researches the passage and creates a report with links to the right page and paragraph within all the relevant books. It’s like having a personal research assistant.” Additional books can be copied from disk or downloaded from the Logos website directly into the software and unlocked (purchased) via Internet or telephone.

Logos offers a variety of resource combination, such as the Scholars’ Library (232 Bibles and references), but also a Christian Home Series for lay people (60 Bibles and references), and a host of other combinations that can be customized by theological bent or denominational preferences. “A cus-

tommer can order a digital library to their own taste,” Pritchett says.

The Libronix system also will run a new version of the New American Standard Electronic Bible Study System from the Lockman Foundation, together with a new electronic version of the Whole Amplified Bible.

An even more scholarly tool is **BibleWorks 5.0**, published by BibleWorks ([www.bibleworks.com](http://www.bibleworks.com)). Jim Barr, director of marketing, says that,

while the software does not have a huge variety of additional resources, it does offer ninety Bibles in twenty-eight languages, six Greek lexicons, four Hebrew lexicons, nine original Bibles, all linked by an auto-information window that shows the original language and parsing, and the Strong’s Numbering System, when the mouse pointer is placed on a specific verse.

“I was at a John MacArthur Shepherd’s conference, and I overheard one pastor telling another that these resources have saved him over three hours each week in sermon preparation,” Barr says. “He can do exegetical word studies and explore theological terms in just a couple of clicks.”

Barr says that pastors who have been out of seminary for more than six years are discovering how Bible software can save them time and effort. “More recent graduates are used to studying this way now and seminarians have come to expect these tools,” he says.

**QuickVerse Deluxe**, published by Parsons Church Group ([www.parsonschurch.com](http://www.parsonschurch.com)), offers similar tools with an additional feature—a word processing program that allows them to create outlines and sermons directly in the system and import Scripture texts in English, Greek, or Hebrew. If the user is a little rusty in the original languages, QuickVerse also offers a Greek tutor and a Hebrew tutor to sharpen vocabulary and grammar. Parsons also

offers an add-on tool, the Bible Illustrator, which interfaces with QuickVerse. The program offers more than 40,000 sermon illustrations and stories, searchable by topic, verse, or word.

“For pastors to study the word, as well as to prepare sermons, Bible software brings all the resources together at one time and in one place in short order,” says Britt Edwards, vice-president of sales at Parsons. “That’s one of the highlights that pastors constantly identify. They can save time on sermon preparation and deal with the other many demands of ministry.”

The popular **Bible Explorer 3** software, published by Epiphany Software ([www.epiphanysoftware.com](http://www.epiphanysoftware.com)), offers

### SOME SMALL PROBLEMS

Two key issues may affect the future of Bible software for use on handheld and Internet-ready cell phone applications. The first is technical. In addition to a small screen, these devices often have limited memory and slow processing speed, which make it difficult to access large volumes of material easily.

The second is financial. Royalty and licensing fees for copyrighted material—especially expensive multi-volume sets—also are prohibitively expensive for additional applications such as Palm OS or Microsoft CE, which may limit the amount of material available for these systems.

a unique Windows Management System that enables four to six windows to appear side-by-side at a glance, instead of the usual tiled format requiring constant opening and minimizing.

For those who use handheld devices, like personal data assistants (PDAs) or pocket computers, the Gramcord Institute ([www.gramcord.org](http://www.gramcord.org)) makes a number of Bible software tools available. “We’re finding already that Pocket PC/CE platforms are increasingly a part of the pastor and the student’s work,” says Paul Miller of Gramcord.

**John R. Throop is a management consultant and pastor of Christ Church Limestone near Peoria, Illinois.**

They want the same material in the handheld as in the desktop.”

Miller says that he already carries thirteen Bibles, several commentaries, and the Greek and Hebrew texts in his Jornada pocket personal computer, thanks to Gramcord Lite.

Another feature offered by Gramcord is a Macintosh platform for Bible software. In addition to existing products, such as **Gramcord For Mac**, product development has centered around the **Lightning Study Bible System** in conjunction with Heavenward Software. A layperson-oriented system and a scholar’s version (the SBL edition) are available. Users can choose between thirteen CDs with 200 titles and develop a customized system—all for Mac as well as for Windows.

Another significant provider of handheld and Internet-ready cell phone (WAP) products is from **Olive Tree** ([www.olivetree.com](http://www.olivetree.com)). Drew Haninger of Olive Tree says that he uses a Sony Clié handheld with a memory stick that “enables twenty-five Bibles, several dictionaries, and original language text.”

He also has used a cell-phone version—which can be another way of connecting with the Lord, he suggests. “I can be at the airport, or in a doctor’s office, and scroll and read through the Book of Genesis,” he says, “although at present I can do it only half a verse at a time.” Since the display panel on a cell phone is very small, the text is also not easy to read.

An Internet-enabled Bible study system, along with a Mac platform, is offered from the **Online Bible** ([www.onlinebibleusa.com](http://www.onlinebibleusa.com)). Internet systems have copyright and royalty issues to deal with, so the amount of freely downloadable material is limited—and a licensing system has yet to be developed. In the meantime, Online Bible offers both Internet downloads of public domain Bibles and materials, as well as royalty material on CD-ROM.

According to Dave Pohl, production and distribution agent for Online Bible, the Internet Bible opens opportunities beyond study. Christians now

can use another term for “www” he says—worldwide witness. Pohl relates the story of a young woman who used the Internet Bible during a chat room discussion about the Bible and Jesus with a woman from Germany.

The German woman said that she knew nothing about either topic, so the American woman opened the Internet Bible with German and English in parallel on line. “The German woman professed faith in Jesus Christ during that chat session,” Pohl said.

Bible software in a variety of languages, including Spanish, is available through the **Lockman Foundation** ([www.lockman.org](http://www.lockman.org)), publisher of the New American Standard Bible and the Amplified Bible.

“There’s a whole in-terface of Spanish products,” says Pike Lambeth of Lockman. “We offer the New American Standard Version and a group of commentaries and dictionaries both in Spanish and English.” Lambeth says that there’s clamor for Bible software for Spanish-speaking pastors in Central and South America and in American cities. Several Spanish software products are available through Bibleworks 5.0.

Whatever program you choose, these new Bible software tools can help you get into great spiritual shape without the physical workout. As for physical conditioning—well, that’s another story. □

## FOCUS ON Logos Bible Software Series X

The Logos Bible Software X, which uses the Libronix system, provides several starting points for research and reflection. I can begin with a passage, and move into various resources: the Bible text itself, text and commentary, a word study incorporating Greek and Hebrew, or a passage guide. Or, if I prefer, I can enter a topic, such as “kingdom of God” or “discipleship,” and the Libronix system presents relevant verses on those topics, all hyperlinked.

Entering Mark 1:1-8, for example, I have access to an excellent commentary by the evangelical scholar John D. Grassmick in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*. Textual cross-references are hyperlinked so I can point, click, and get to the text—and then click on the tools taskbar to return to the original text. I also can identify a preferred commentary for passage study.

What if I want to get other points of view? I can click on a reference search bar for a particular Bible verse and get notes from other study Bibles, Bible dictionaries, and a wealth of commentaries,



some older and some newer. I can make my own notes on a text with the notes tool, and I can highlight a passage with an electronic marker.

When I select a passage, the software presents me with hyperlinks to various commentaries. In addition, there is a cross-reference to *The Treasury of Scripture Knowledge* for additional background material. Finally, there are twenty topics supporting this passage from which to choose (such as “messenger,” “honey,” and “repentance”) that provide further material. If I click on “word study,” the software generates key words in the passage such as “beginning,” “gospel” and “Jesus,” together with hyperlinks to the relevant lexicons.

I also have the option of starting a Bible reading plan tailored to my interests and time—again, with a wealth of tools at my fingertips so that I can go as deep in study as time and interest allow. There also are morning and evening devotional commentaries in the library, and in the basic library more than 100 books by Christian authors such as Bill Hybels and Ben Patterson. JRT