

According to the Literature: A Review of Bible Software

By Martin Weber

With the release of its new *Scholar's Library, Series X*, Logos Research Systems has expanded its already massive biblical studies library and upgraded its formerly inadequate original languages research capabilities. For lay Bible teachers without formal theological training—and for pastors too busy to use seminary scholarship skills—Logos contains a trove of easily accessed information.

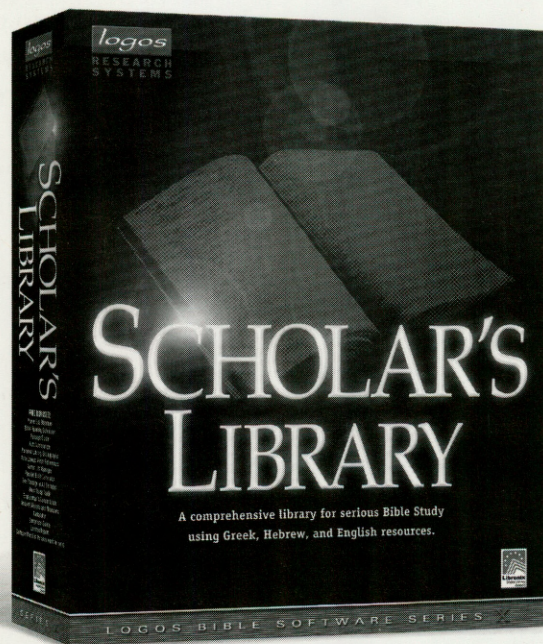
Logos offers various options for scriptural study, including “Passage Guide”—the most useful gateway to numerous study tools. You can limit your search to “Bible and Commentary.” “Exegetical Guide” is especially useful for those familiar with Greek or Hebrew,

and the “Word Study Guide” opens a subterranean mine of Scripture gold for those without a working knowledge of original languages. The most interesting option is the “catch-all” feature that searches the entire library—even maps and hymns—for a passage.

All this (and much more) doesn't come cheap. *Scholar's Library, Series X* retails for \$599.95. Before balking at that price, one glance at your television might help you decide whether biblical media is worth as much investment as secular media. Or consider the \$5,000 plus it costs to buy the Logos library separately in print, plus the room needed to shelve the books. If the price is still too high, consider the entry-level version: *Logos Bible Software, Series X Christian Home Library* at \$149.95.

What makes this unique among the numerous Bible software packages is the Libronix Digital Library System, which synchronizes any given scriptural passage with a vast

Scholar's Library by Logos Research Systems is one of several software programs available to Bible students. For those who appreciate primary research, BibleWorks is another option.



library of commentaries and other sources. Some are classics, like John Calvin's *Institutes*, whereas others are contemporary best sellers like *The Message* paraphrase. Among the many reference works are trophies of great value, my favorite being Kittel's landmark *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* in both formats: the ten-volume unabridged version and the one-volume "little Kittel's."

Other resources include an array of Bible outlines, atlases, maps, devotionals, and assorted ministry aids for small groups, leadership, nurturing, and Christian living. I expected these to be the usual Bible software assortment of aging throw-ins of dubious relevance and value. Instead, Logos includes cutting-edge releases like *Christianity Today International* and the *Leadership Journal* from quality publishers, along with works by authors such as John Maxwell and Bill Hybels. I found a wealth of practical help for my own ministry in areas like discipleship and outreach—the very things seminaries ought to be teaching pastors.

Also bundled are timeless tools such as *Treasury of Scriptural Knowledge*, a delightful topical study tool that for the last fifteen years has enriched my devotional reading of Scripture. If you find a verse that especially feeds your soul, you may crave more like it. So call up TSK, click on the key word, and green pasture appears. Although *Nave's Topical Bible* does the same for more exhaustive study (Logos bundles the newest edition), TSK is more compact and manageable for personal devotions.

Beyond numerous books and references packaged with Logos, others are available by purchase. Many already come with the Logos installation disks in "locked" form. To make your purchase and activate it, type in your address and credit card information. Instantly you have your book. One such resource is the *College Press NIV Commentary*, available volume by volume for \$21.95.

Some add-ons for Logos, such as the *SDA Bible Commentary* set, must be ordered from individual publishers. Version 2.1 of the new commentary package is available from Review and Herald for \$199, plus an unlock fee for the complete writings of Ellen G. White. On the same CD is Leo Gugliotto's *Handbook for Bible Study*, a recent winner of the coveted Gold Medallion Award.

So what's the downside of Logos Bible software? I contacted the publishers of its main competitor, BibleWorks (for whom I've done promotions), to see

whether they could point out weaknesses in Logos that I missed.

BibleWorks' publishers acknowledge the superiority of Logos for those who prefer a library format—Scripture software with myriad commentaries, teaching aids, and practical helps. The publishers of BibleWorks regard their product as superior in pure biblical scholarship—the primary research of original languages. In their own words to me:

BibleWorks was designed from the ground up around the Biblical text. Logos is a library reader that was never intended to do the kinds of things that BibleWorks does. That is why it is two orders of magnitude slower on many searches than BibleWorks.... People need to compare (1) speed (2) features (3) value (4) support (5) documentation and (6) reputation.

Searching with BibleWorks is unquestionably quicker than with Logos, which is encumbered by Libronix. If you still prefer the library format, either discipline yourself with a few seconds of patience or indulge yourself with Pentium 4 hardware.

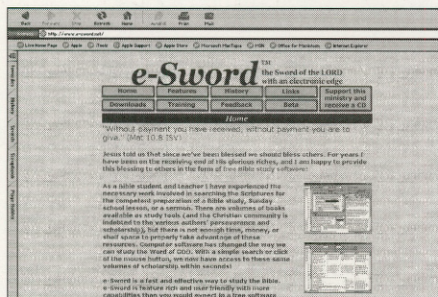
The bottom line is this: If you are focused on the nitty-gritty of pure biblical scholarship (morphological tagging, translating, and so forth), BibleWorks is best. But for lay scholars and busy pastors needing to prepare a practical yet substantive Sabbath School lesson or sermon, Logos is the way to go. Metaphorically, BibleWorks has a Ph.D. in biblical languages, whereas Logos has a "rubber meets the road" D.Min. (doctor of ministry).

As usually happens with new versions of competing products, the gap is narrowing between these giants of Windows-based Bible software. Logos Research Systems now offers a new Biblical Languages Supplement add-on that greatly enhances its capacity for primary research (see www.logos.com/bls). And BibleWorks will soon launch a new version in which the publishers will upgrade their woefully anemic library with undisclosed yet enthusiastically heralded offerings (see www.bibleworks.com).

So when it comes to Logos versus BibleWorks, it's your call. Or you can avoid spending altogether and go the freeware route. One cost-free option would be *e-Sword*, which offers a basic yet substantive array of public domain commentaries and other study aids (including my beloved TSK) along with the good old

King James Version of the Bible.
Download directly from the Web
site at www.e-sword.net.

Freeware has its place, particularly
for starving students, but it cannot



compare with software from Logos or
BibleWorks. If scriptural study is
important in your devotional life and
of service to your church, either pack-
age is a worthy investment that serves
its own purpose with distinction.

Martin Weber is senior pastor of the Roseville,
California, Seventh-day Adventist Church.

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