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The United Bible Societies' New Testament Handbook Series

Bellingham, Wash.: Logos Research Systems, 2003.
CD-ROM. \$524.80.

<http://www.logos.com/products/details/1782>

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The *United Bible Societies' New Testament Handbook Series* produced by Logos Research Systems, twenty digitized volumes of commentaries on the translation of the Greek text, bundled with two English versions of the New Testament and a variety of tools, focuses on “achieving a clear and accurate understanding of the biblical text.” The information provided with the software comments that “It’s as though you have a UBS Translation Officer looking over your shoulder as you work.” As luck would have it, I received this software package for review during the week when I was preparing for a workshop on the Bible and homosexuality for a local Methodist circuit. Since part of the discussion is concerned with translation questions, I thought the software might provide a helpful addition to my resources and a quick way to track down details on the few New Testament verses in question. I was right on the first question: it does provide a commentary on translation issues in the passages. Once loaded and installed (a procedure that took less than ten minutes), it provided the translations of the verses immediately, in two versions, the Good News and the King James.

Starting with Rom 1:26–27, I found a comment in the handbook that the translation “men do shameful things with each other” might also be translated “men have sexual relations with each other, and this is shameful” or “. . . and this is bad.” Turning to the Word Study tool, I found “that which is unseemly,” linked with Strong’s Greek Concordance 808, but clicking on the link did not immediately produce the concordance references. A second

menu suggested that I might search “my library” or the Internet. “My library” produced a reference to “shame” in Rev 16:15. Deeper searches in the translation handbook on Revelation provided the further information that “shame” in the Greek “they see his shame” is “regarded by many as a euphemism for ‘private parts’ of the body,” itself a euphemism. Disappointed but not defeated, I returned to the option to search the Internet, but since the search used “G808” it produced 8,830 Google references, none of which (as far as I looked) was to a Greek concordance; the search tool is not surprisingly no help as it is configured. The main menu promised a thematic search tool but omitted the information that it could be found on one of the toolbars, not in the menu itself. I eventually found it and entered “homosexuality,” but the search produced nothing. The Help menu did not help. So, in the end, all I found after spending nearly an hour exploring were a few snippets of information; repeating the exercise now, with more practice and less pressure, I still needed about half that time.

Other tools are available in the program. The “Parallel Versions” tool provided the text in both versions included here but would not easily allow me to cut and paste the verses in order to print a parallel-versions handout. In the commentary window, however, I was able to copy the comment on the verse (by right-clicking, as the “Getting Started” menu promised) and then was allowed to print it. There are some nice touches: the biblical text is easily searched, and all the biblical citations function as hyperlinks, including a pop-up preview window when you hover over them. Choosing “all versions” enables scrolling through the entire text, using up and down arrows. The “synopsis” tool also provides a commentary.

The most useful aspect of the program is the ability to search the entire database for references to a passage, which yields links to commentary in the handbooks. Searching the database for references to Mark 1:1, for example, provides a number of links. Sometimes this is disappointing: the link to 2 Corinthians cites 2 Cor 2:12–13, with a note on the meaning of gospel as good news, using Mark 1:1 as an example. More helpfully, the link to 1 John 1:5 leads to a discussion of the problem of rendering the word “God” and a further link to an extended discussion of Mark 1:1.

Returning to the main menu, “Latest News” takes you to the Logos website, where you can order their products. The price of this package is \$524.80, advertised on sale for \$399.95. The twenty-one-volume *United Bible Societies’ Old Testament Handbook Series* is available at a special preproduction price of \$179.95, and delivery is promised for May 2004 (see further <http://www.logos.com/products/prepub/details/1904>). Other electronic resources are also available at similar prices. The website indicates that these tools are intended primarily for pastors: “Pastors are at the heart of our market—and in our hearts as well. We understand that pastors are buried under a huge load of

responsibility and conflicting demands and that it can be difficult to preserve the all-important time for Bible study and sermon preparation. Logos Bible Software ... automates the mechanical tasks of Bible study and it facilitates the deeper research you want to do for sermon preparation.” The main packages range from the *Scholar’s Library* with Greek and Hebrew versions and tools (\$599.95; <http://www.logos.com/scholars>) to a *Christian Home Library* (<http://www.logos.com/christianhome>). The *United Bible Societies’ New Testament Handbook Series* is intended to be used with one of these packages as a base for biblical study, although it also functions as a stand-alone product.

In all, this software includes the excellent UBS translation commentaries on all the books of the New Testament, with two English translations and no Greek tools. It takes some practice to find what one is looking for, and one cannot use it to do everything. But it works well and displays nicely. I am happy to have it, and I might use it to check translations for sermon preparation or teaching in my congregation, but without the Scholars’ Library it is less likely to be useful for my research. Whether it is worth \$399.95 depends on the work you want to do and the tools you already have. If translation questions are important to you, this may be a welcome addition to your print library.