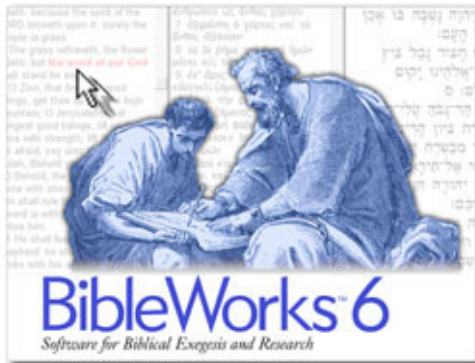


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BibleWorks 6

Norfolk, Va.: BibleWorks, 2004. Software.
\$299.95. ASIN B00026Z8U4.

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Since its beginnings in 1992 *BibleWorks* has become an acclaimed and widely praised software program, focused on supplying tools needed for studying biblical texts, especially in the original languages (Hebrew and Greek). Targeting the same market as their competitors (e.g., Libronix or Gramcord), namely, anyone interested in studying and analyzing biblical texts, from students to pastors to professional theologians, the management of *BibleWorks* has a clear focus that outlines their identity within this market. They want to stick to basic daily tools needed by exegetes for interpreting the Bible in its original languages.

This is a conscious decision against adding modules that are not directly related to their primary focus of interpreting biblical texts in the original languages; books that are not needed on a frequent basis are therefore simply not added. If they do offer an additional module, it is with the sole purpose of enhancing the tools already available for interpreting the biblical texts in the original languages. This is evident from the six modules on offer: three grammars, two lexicons, and one set of primary documents, namely, the third edition of *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, by Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich (BDAG); the fourth edition of *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, by Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm (*HALOT*); *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*, by D. B. Wallace; *Beginning Biblical Hebrew*, by M. Futado; *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, by Waltke and O'Connor; and *Qumran Sectarian Manuscripts*. It is felt that buying large numbers of other books that are not used on a regular basis is risky and potentially expensive.

The prospective buyer should therefore take into account that this software focuses on tools specifically geared to working with the text of the Bible (in its original-language form as well as in translations). The software basically includes texts and numerous translations of the Bible, lexicons, dictionaries, grammars, and concordance facilities. Logos Bible Systems, with their Libronix technology, takes the opposite route by offering a large number (literally thousands) of books on different topics that are electronically available as add-ons and could be built into a personal library. This represents a different philosophy and approach. It should be noted that the prospective user should decide in advance what he or she prefers, since it will be frustrating to have to change software later on, especially since the intention is that one should be able to use the program on a long-term basis. Determine your needs, then make your choice.

BibleWorks should thus be evaluated in terms of its underlying philosophy: it limits itself to high-quality software for analyzing the original languages of the Bible. The central question is therefore to what extent *BibleWorks* is beneficial to students (from the novice to the specialist) of the Bible analyzing the original languages of the Bible. Obviously, concordant or statistical studies are also possible in other languages, although this is not the primary purpose of this software.

My overall impression of this program within its set limits is very positive. It is a highly refined and technologically advanced program that is a pleasure to use. Technology often creates needs people did not even realize they had. In other words, it offers “abilities” and “possibilities” that most people have not even contemplated or thought necessary. Once one is made aware of these possibilities, one is then encouraged to venture further. This drive to continue discovering new possibilities is the stamp of real technological advancement: it does not follow but leads. This is the case with version 6 of *BibleWorks*. I had the experience while exploring the software that I have not even thought of the possibility of or need for certain features, but since they are available, they can be very useful. The examples are ample: the “copy center” for all the choices or the “cloning” facility, to name a few. Other features are a dream come true for biblical scholars; for instance, by moving your cursor over the Hebrew or Greek text, you immediately get the relevant grammatical and lexical information in a pop-up screen. If you prefer, you have the option of opening an interlinear text with three lines: one with the Greek text, one with the basic form of each word underneath the form used in the text (e.g., if an aorist is used in any form, the present active indicative first-person singular form is displayed underneath it), and the last with the relevant grammatical information. What could be easier than that?

Two aspects co-determine the value of software such as this, namely, the database and the ability of the program to process the data and present the results in a quick, accurate,

and user-friendly way. Having the best processing program without a good and reliable database will be of little use, and vice versa. On both these levels *BibleWorks* meets the criteria.

Let us start with the database. There are over ninety Bibles in nearly thirty languages to start with. The most reliable texts of the original languages are part of the package. For translators, this creates the ideal opportunity to compare different translations, even with the help of coloring words or phrases that differ. Needs vary, but as far as I am concerned this is a bit overwhelming. It could also be of considerable help if a file with the translation philosophies—and perhaps a little history—of the different translations were added, even if classification is a difficult matter. The fact that many languages are included (e.g., Dutch, Finnish, Czech, Albanian) is obviously a plus for people in those countries.

The database also offers lexicons and dictionaries in Greek, such as Louw and Nida, BDAG (sold as an add-on), the UBS Greek dictionary, the Friberg Greek lexicon, and Liddell-Scott (abridged; the full dictionary is available via a Web link to Perseus). Hebrew lexicons and dictionaries include Harris, Archer, and Waltke's *Theological Workbook of the Old Testament* (TWOT); *HALOT* (sold as an add-on); and Brown, Driver, and Briggs (in different languages). Apart from the grammars mentioned above, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* and Futado's *Basic Hebrew for Bible Study* are also available. Smyth's very good Greek grammar is available via the Web on Perseus. One also has access to the *Faussett Bible Dictionary*; *Easton's Bible Dictionary*, and the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*; this latter section is clearly the weak spot in the database. The lexicons (if one is willing to buy BDAG and *HALOT*) and grammars are sufficient and of good quality. For a program focusing on analyses of the original biblical texts, there is still space for expansion and improvement. I am thinking of dictionaries such as the New International dictionaries, the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, or Kittel, even in its abridged form, to mention a few. It may be debated whether these theological dictionaries should be added to *BibleWorks*, with its very specific focus. I believe so, and the fact that other encyclopedia-like sources are already part of the program indicates that the *BibleWorks* management agrees. If this is indeed the case, then they should give more attention to this aspect.

In the end, the database is sufficient but could most definitely be improved. I hope the availability of add-ons indicates development in that direction. It will make a very good program even better. The ideal would, however, be not to sell these resources as add-ons but to incorporate them into the basic software from the start.

This brings us to the second aspect of a good software program: the program's ability to analyze data and display the results in a reliable way. This is where *BibleWorks* really excels. The primary purpose of such software should be processing large amounts of material as quickly as possible. When it comes to speed, it is a matter of split seconds or, with more complex searches, a second or two—compared to other similar programs *BibleWorks* seems to have the edge over most, if not all. Features such as parsing are immediately (with the blink of an eye) available. Speed is no longer a problem.

In the different searches I performed, I could not find any problems or inaccuracies. What is amazing is the versatility and wide range of the software, such as the possibilities to choose one's own search limits and to set one's own preferences, the powerful search possibilities, ranging from basic to very advanced searches. The results of searches and other processes are displayed in a user-friendly way. You can search in different sources in the database, and the results are given in such a way that it could even be processed further. A network of links is available; for instance, after a search the different verses where a particular word is used are displayed with the full text in the Bible versions of your choice. You can even have different choices of sets of Bible versions and toggle between them. From there you can process the material even further by clicking on a particular word. By moving your cursor over the words in the versions on display, a pop-up screen gives the Greek or Hebrew word with lexicographical information that is translated in that way. At the bottom of the screen even more information on certain verses is displayed. Different grammatical searches are equally easy to do. Doing these basic searches is as easy as pressing a button on the keyboard.

This is, however, not the case with the more advanced searches, in spite of the graphical interface. It is complicated, and the procedure takes a lot of time to master, and even then I did not feel completely confident. A complicating factor is that if one does not use the procedure for a while, many of the finer details are forgotten, and forgetting one step or action affects the whole search. This will always be a problem, since I do not know of anyone who constantly and permanently does complicated searches. Executing such searches is more the exception than the rule, which means that there will always be intervals when one does not use this feature and forgets how to do so easily. Although help functions are available, in some cases it did take me some time and effort to find the solutions I was looking for.

It sounds impressive and appealing that a program could assist in advanced searches: processing data is the big advantage of computer technology and should be used to maximum capacity. My experience—not only with *BibleWorks* but also with other similar programs on the market, such as Libronix—is that it takes a lot of time to plan and execute such a search, and this presupposes the ability to work out how the search

facility itself works. In the end, one should also be sure that one can do something with the results and that the results make exegetical sense. This requires careful planning. I think that this is one of the major areas where programmers should still spend some time and energy, and here I include all programs I know of, not only *BibleWorks*. We need an easier and more convenient way of executing more complicated searches.

There are many other features in *BibleWorks* that are very helpful. There are the synoptic displays, the quick links to the dictionaries, the interlinear displays, history lines, flash cards for learning Greek and Hebrew, sentence diagramming, all features that cannot be discussed here but should be experienced. Many features are as much fun to work with as they are helpful. I can also vouch for the friendliness and willingness of the staff to assist. My dealings with the *BibleWorks* staff always left me with the impression that these are people who are committed to their product and fully convinced of its worth and therefore always willing to help. I also experienced a problem-free installation, a huge relief since few things are more frustrating than getting a new product with all the excitement involved and then struggling for two weeks just to get it up and running.

As I have indicated, I am absolutely convinced of the usefulness, reliability, and quality of this program. There are, however, a few related issues dealing with the overall presentation that I feel should be raised. This is intended as constructive criticism in order to add to the pleasurable experience of getting acquainted with and working with this program.

The language and abbreviations both on-screen and in the printed manual are frustrating. Too much knowledge of terminology is expected of the user of the software, both as far as computer language is concerned and as far as the language used in the program and user guide is concerned. In the manual we have a mixture of computer and ordinary language and vocabulary. The problem is that if one is not familiar with a particular word or phrase, communication breaks down. In the presentation of the material there are too many unfamiliar names, abbreviations, and the like. The positive aspect is that this can be easily corrected by thoroughly and systematically going through the available material and rewriting the difficult sections and replacing problematic words. The program will always have a “cloud of difficulty” hanging over it as long as this problem remains.

The icons should be systematized and, if possible, be made more user-friendly. For instance, there are at least three Alfa signs I encountered. The pop-up descriptions going with the icons do not always communicate clearly. There are also icons that duplicate functions. This contributes negatively to the professional image of the program. A little more order and clarity would increase the user-friendliness of the program.

This is a program that will never disappoint any user interested in analyzing the original languages of the Bible. On the contrary, the excellent features of this program, the speed and search capabilities, the quality of the database and fonts, and many other aspects not even touched on in this review make this program a joy to work with. Buy it and try it—you will not be disappointed.