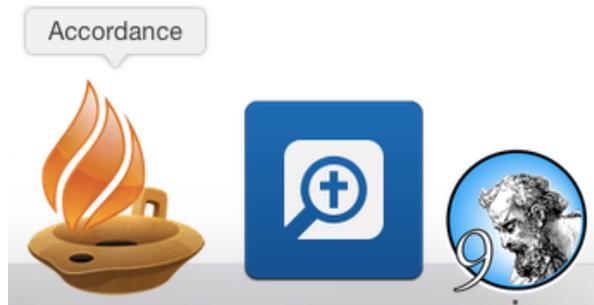# Options for Mac Bible Research Software

Gregg Strawbridge, Ph.D.

<u>Prolegomena</u>

During the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS) meeting in San Diego (11/19-21/2014), I reconsidered Bible research software. I had not done this in several years. When I graduated seminary in 1990, all the way until 2006 I used the PC/Microsoft platform. I even worked through all of the various challenges of those mouse-less DOS days when you had to play Function Key "twister" to perform any software task. I adapted to the ridiculous iterations of "Windows." Successfully plugging any device into a Windows machine required the technical wizardry of a nuclear bomb engineer. Doing audio work and some video, I at once hoped for and dreaded every update. Then it all came crashing down for me when I tried to upgrade to Windows Vista (that version whose name should not be spoken). I lost basically all connectivity on all devices and my Windows desktop (2007). Seriously, there was no "driver" for my HP laser printer. At this point, the measure of the sins of Microsoft was complete for me. A few months before I had purchased the first "Black Mac" notebook which ran the Intel chip. Very soon I was a Mac disciple. Every successive Apple product became even better and better. At present, I would say that my MacBook Air is positive proof of Postmillennialism.
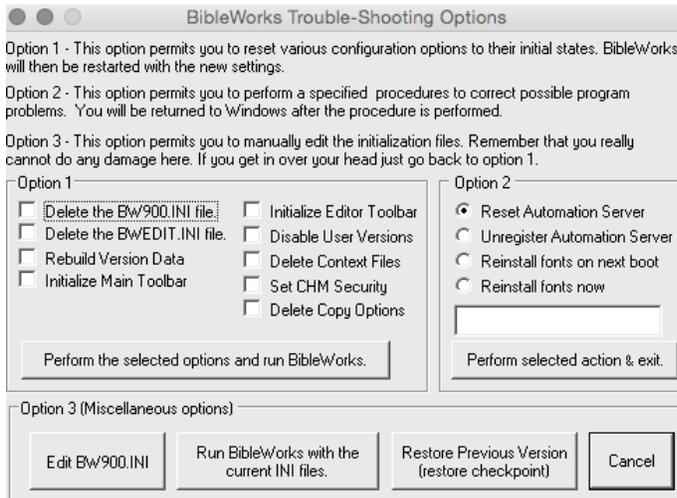
Most of that software transition was easy for me. However, it was a little more bumpy on Bible software. In my PC days (prior to the second work of grace), I had used Logos a bit and then settled on BibleWorks (BW). I tried a PC emulator for a few months (Fusion) in which I could run BW. However, I enjoyed the Mac platform so much I found it harder and harder to crank up an emulator and run PC software. I finally even repented of Word Perfect. I also found that my Mac ran the PC software in Fusion *faster than any PC!* At the time (circa 2007), I approached both Logos and BW at an ETS meeting (also in San Diego) to discuss the shift. Both representatives were pretty affirming that, "If you are committed to the Mac, then go with Accordance." So I have been with Accordance for lo these many years.

But "the times, they are a'changin." Thankfully, the soft-sphere has changed in terms of crossing the great divide of PC and Mac. Whereas once it was a grand canyon, now it is just across the street. At ETS 2014 everyone at BW and Logos were very comfortable promoting their software on the Mac platform. (I think that has been the case for some

years past, too.) A few months ago, I was graciously given copies of BW and Logos for review and comparison.

<u>Bible Works 9</u> (sorry, now there's BW 10, but I started work on this in 2014 …)
Installation - I was really excited to get a box-set copy of my old friend, Bible Works. When I returned from San Diego, I tried to install it, but alas, the DVD discs are Windows only. Hopefully, BW 10 (and beyond) will do this better, but the installation was an issue. At one point I even had to "force quit" and start again. PC users may not understand this point, but in the Macs almost never crash (yes, it's true). It actually took hours for the installation from the discs. Clearly this process must be simpler and faster to make BW a Mac-friendly product. After several cryptic coded messages, including this one (below), BW finally opened and somehow I managed to open two instances (?). How is this even possible? Enough on the installation, but seriously, it needs some attention.
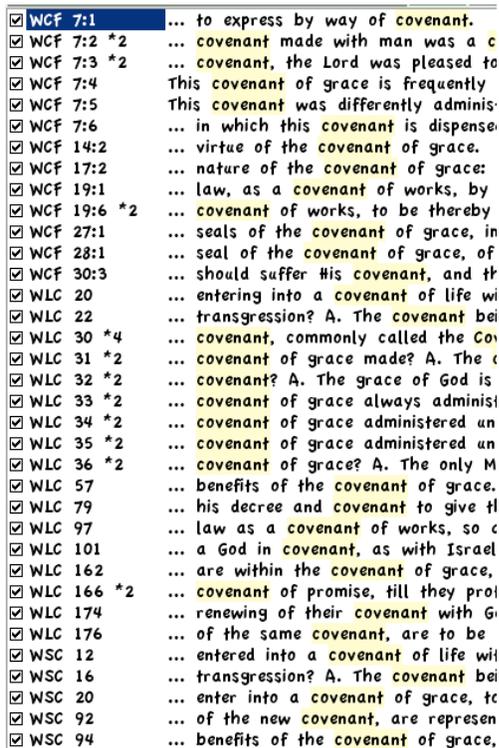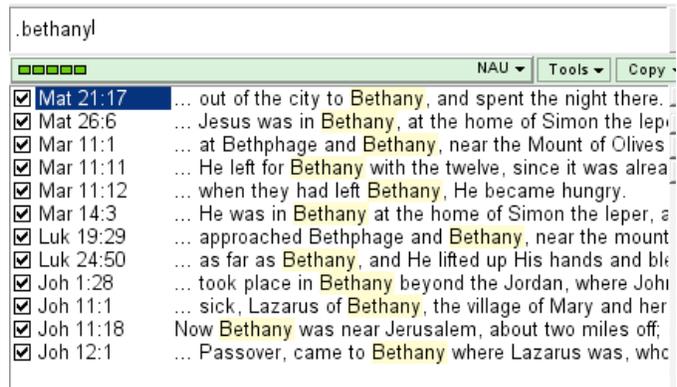

<u>BW Function</u>
Having BW back on my screen is like seeing *an old friend*. Very nice. First impression - wow - so much exegetical information at my fingertips! Then check out the really interesting Bible versions right out of the basic version. Does any other program have the new English translation of the Peshitt by Janet Magiera? Or all of these?
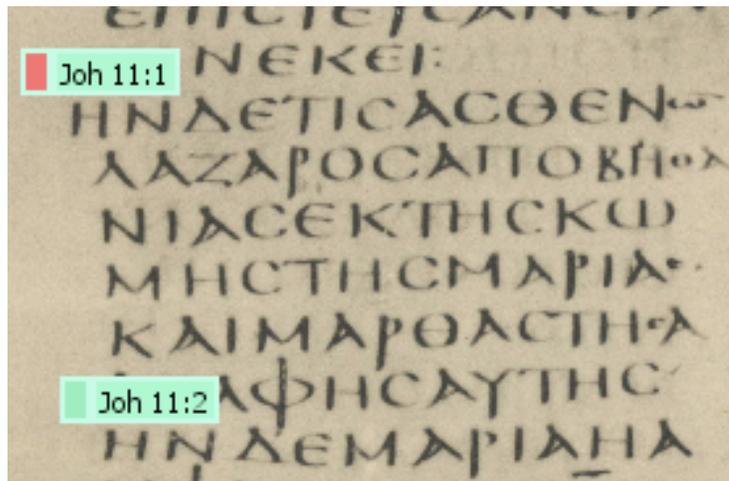
1. PES - the Aramaic NT (ships with BW7)
2. MGI - the Magiera NT English Peshitta Translation (2006)
3. MRD - the Murdock Peshitta English NT Translation (1851)
4. NOR - the Norton Peshitta English NT Translation (1881)
5.. LEW - the Lewis Peshitta English NT Translation (1896)
6. ETH - the Etheridge Peshitta English NT Translation (1849)

I get the feeling that I would pay a *million* dollars for these in Accordance, but they are in the box in BW! Another first impression is how swift and agile the information displays. It's lightening fast. I was not aiming to become an expert user, but it has a very

intuitive interface. For example, I put my new BW to work on a sermon from John 11. Let's observe the word, Bethany. Double click and not only do I see the lexical information, but also, on the left, a window with all uses of the term. At a glance I see this. Of course all programs should do this, but in BW it is immediate.

As a Presbyterian Minister, I also love that the Westminster Confession and Catechisms are integrated into the content so well. This is very helpful. I love the Manuscript function. I am looking at an image of a Fourth Century text (*Codex Sinaiticus*). I once saw the actual Codex in
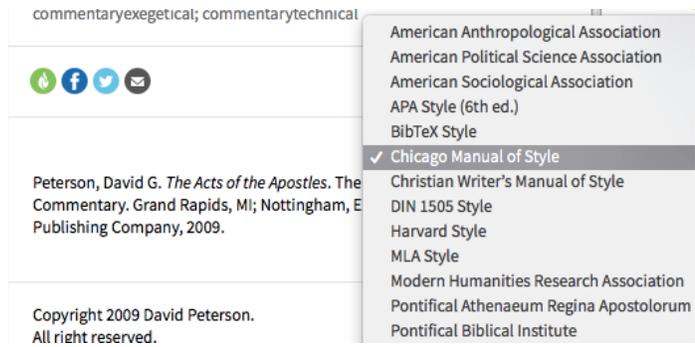
the British Museum. This is a very helpful tool for scholarly inquiry, and the general education of students on the textual basis for our Bible. The blazing data from cross references, lexicons, translations, manuscript images, and even the textual apparatus is amazing.
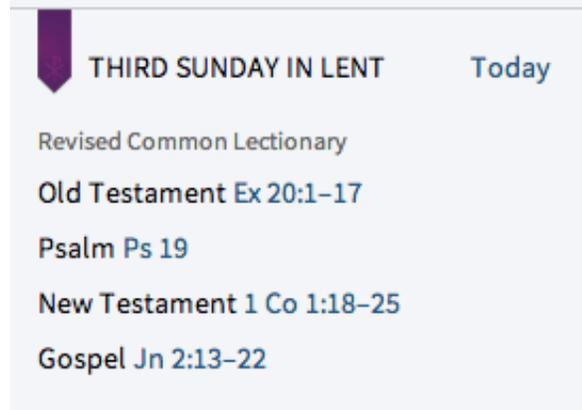
I like BW and for the price, it is a very sensible purchase for a serious student of the Bible. I do have a few concerns about it. Some of these will certainly be addressed in future releases (I hope). 1) The installation process is a problem for Mac users. 2) While the functionality and information is amazingly fast, it is packaged in a very unattractive interface. This is an aesthetic concern, but one that will matter to Mac users. For all the

ease of use, it does not look or feel like Mac software. The user *experience* is part of the use. And as my first zeal to look at it has passed, I find myself less and less opening it for routine study. 3) BW does not integrate commentaries into their program, as does Accordance and Logos. BW has the motto of "focus on the text." It provides excellent exegetical tools such as dictionaries, lexicons, grammatical analyses, search engine, etc. However, part of the exegetical process, is learning the exegetical possibilities via scholars who comment on the text.

Logos 6 Bible Software

It took a bit longer than I thought to get Logos. Thankfully, after it was all set in my online Logos account, I simply downloaded a Mac-friendly .dmg file, then the online process of download took over. Logos is clearly compatible and user-friendly in the Mac environment. No issues here. I received the "Gold" version which is $1549.50 (at the time of this writing). I was first impressed by an amazing interconnection of content and the feel of the interface. It is rich with content and related apps. Getting into Logos over a couple of weeks, I have seen that it sets a very high standard for content and user interaction.
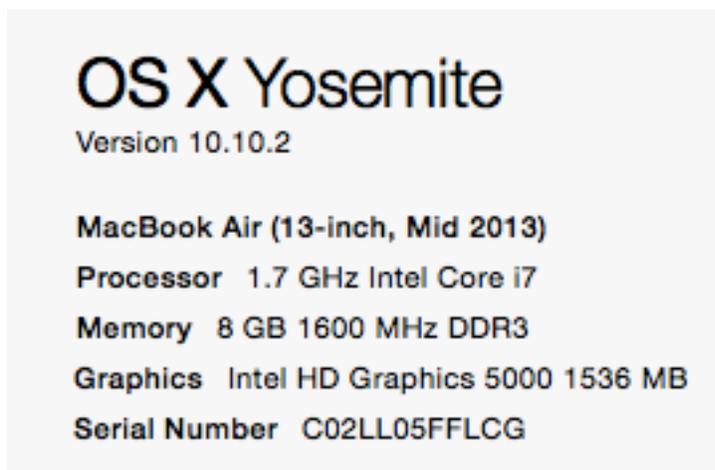
I really appreciate the connection on the home page to the Revised Common Lectionary. This is very helpful. I simply click on one of the texts and now I have a rich display of the Lectionary text. Hats off here. I love the idea of reading the Bible with the Church together.

I see that 924 resources are downloaded in the Gold version. Wow. I have continually discovered amazing features in Logos, like "visual copy" and "style citation." Visual copy is a helpful tool for those creating graphical banners or slides, etc. When I search on a passage an amazingly long list of citations with mouseover popups comes up. These include citations from the Church Fathers and alternate texts, like the Dead Sea Scrolls. Not all of this information is *relevant*, and some appears extraneous, but it is present for inquiry. Information overload is a distinct possibility with Logos. However, Logos has a deep structure and organization in such schemes as "The Exegetical Guide"

and "Passage Guide" and "Topic Guide," as well as "Sermon Starter Guide." These serve as a coherent way to present the vast information.

Logos is clearly a world-class kind of product. It provides a user friendly and up to date feel. It seems to operate as a kind of online portal, rather than a static program with all the content resident. It may be run "offline," but it seems to assume a full and fast internet connection. I have two concerns about Logos. 1) I feel that it would take a fair amount of training or experience to use it well. I actually watched introductory videos that were available, but they were only for version 5 (not version 6). Though helpful, I am not able to intuit getting around very well. I realize this would change with experience. 2) My computer runs Logos sluggishly, despite the fact that it is a late 2013 MacBook Air. I frequently see the spinning beachball of frustration. (This is not a matter of space or ram, etc.). It doesn't run Accordance or Bibleworks sluggishly at all. 3) While the magazine style format presents hosts of articles upon opening the program's Home, it is more of a cause for "rabbit trails" rather than research. The plethora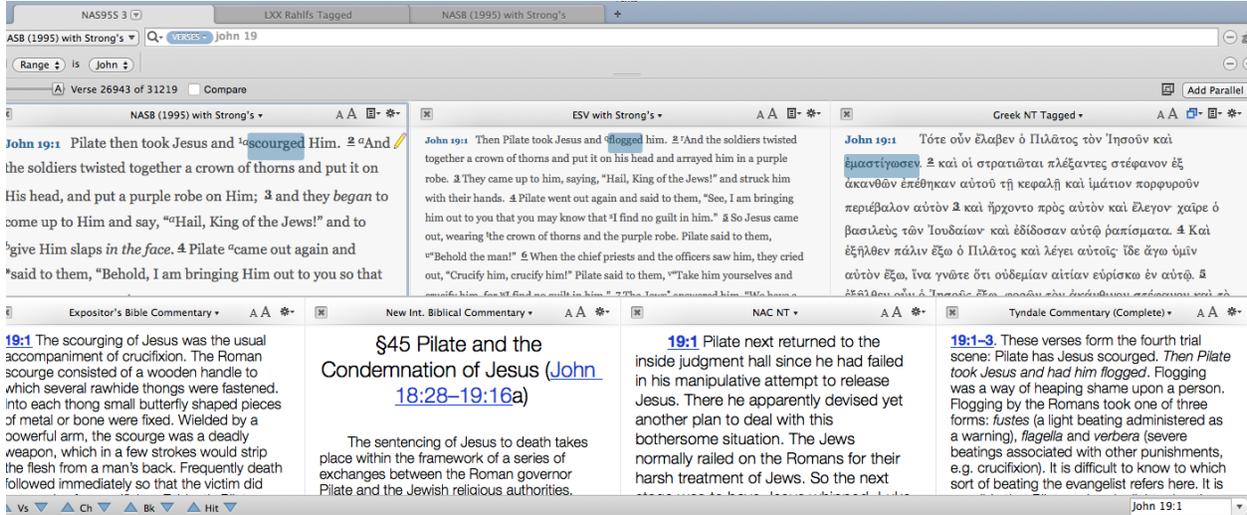 of articles and photos that are presented upon opening the program don't assist me with the task at hand, namely, the next passage in the Gospel of John.

Conclusion

This review provides a few impressions and not a comprehensive assessment. It is addressed to Mac users or those in transition to a Mac. If you are a PC user, may the Lord have mercy on you. From my own experience with these programs, I conclude that BW and Logos are fine products and for most study needs, these programs will do very well. Using these at first, I found very helpful and surprising resources. Now that I write this conclusion after a few months, I will say that I have regularly gone back to Accordance and have not incorporated either BW or Logos into my regular Bible research and preparations. I think this is for several reasons: 1) Accordance is quick and a "program" rather than an online portal (over against Logos). 2) Rather than "just the text" in BW, I have my windows arranged in Accordance to present the last passage I studied, as well as four commentaries in the window. I am accustomed to this arrangement which gives me synchronized scrolling with text(s). When I type John 18,

all the texts follow. 3) I can see the "Logic" of Logos, especially as we online, "world without end." Though I am often online, still, I like the way that Accordance is a fully functioning program on my own machine. I feel that using Logos is like being plugged

into the Matrix. From the cloud, magically, vast information appears. Partly due to my lack of skill with Logos, I find it difficult to do the basic tasks I need to do: reading the text along side the original language, while viewing multiple commentaries as I scroll through the text, creating off-shooting searches, and with ease returning to the main text. On the other hand, BW feels like a Windows program. Logos seems like a website. Accordance functions as true Mac software.[1]

Finally, cost is a huge factor for most of us. With the support of my church, thankfully, I have a great deal invested in Accordance, especially in commentary sets. A few years ago I redid my home office and limited my bookshelf space. If I had a digital version, I gave away printed commentaries to ministerial students. In my circles, I could probably be brought upon charges at presbytery for abandoning the printed page in favor of bytes. So a brief apology is in order. 1) This saves me shelf space; 2) it benefitted the students; and 3) it provides the same information in a much more useable form in study. 4) I have not abandoned "books." However, I have drawn a line between books like Arthur Quiller-Couch's, *Oxford English Verse* (which I own) in its 1919 edition and say, Dallas Theological Seminary's, *Bible Knowledge Commentary* (1985), eds. Roy B. Zuck and John Walvoord (hereafter, BKC). In the former case, it is a glory to hold the book and leisurely browse its pages; in the later case, not so much. For example, in Accordance I can easily scroll to the John Walvoord's "Revelation" commentary in the BKC to discover that the "New Jerusalem" in Rev. 20:2 will actually be suspended in space as a

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[1] Just so it's clear, Accordance provided me no "freebies" for this review.

literal "satellite," hovering above the earth (2:984). While it is helpful in may respects, I am very happy to let BKC reside in the digital domain.

So if you are in it for the long term, getting such digital resources is certainly cost effective. Both Logos and Accordance provide a useful platform for this. Logos has, by far, the largest collection of digital resources. Accordance has some unique Hebrew resources and all the vital commentary sets. In terms of cost, BW provides much more exegetical bread on the table for the money. At this date, the newest version of BW is $389 and the resources and functionality is in no way matched with Logos or Accordance for the cost. Since this world is constantly changing, check out the latest on these products:

http://www.bibleworks.com/

https://www.logos.com/

http://www.accordancebible.com/