

**Why I Buy Electronic  
Commentaries  
(and you should, too)**

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## WHY I BUY ELECTRONIC COMMENTARIES (AND YOU SHOULD, TOO)

I have spent almost forty years building a personal library that helps me in both teaching and preaching. I live by what Erasmus wrote years ago in a personal letter in 1500 that when he got a little money he would buy Greek books, and with the leftover money he would buy clothes.<sup>1</sup> However, several years ago my preference changed from buying paper books to buying electronic books (e-books)—especially with Bible commentaries, due to the number of benefits one gains by using electronic commentaries (e-commentaries). This article will demonstrate the superiority of e-commentaries over their paper counterparts. To accomplish this task, this article will provide seven compelling advantages of digital commentaries, answer eight common objections, compare e-commentary availability, and examine the choice of electronic readers (e-readers) or tablet computers<sup>2</sup> versus desktop/laptop computers.

Of course, the use of commentaries is just one part of the process of properly exegeting the Bible, and it should occur near the end of this process.<sup>3</sup> However, Bible commentaries are worthy of special consideration for three reasons: (1) commentaries take the lion's share of expense for Bible study resources in a good working library, (2) paper commentaries can occupy much shelf space, and (3) a good commentary is an invaluable one-stop shop resource to get a fast grasp of the biblical text when a busy pastor or teacher needs to quickly compose a lesson. Although one should strive to spend as much time as possible to study the biblical text, there are occasionally times when that does not happen. Thus, using commentaries is an integral part of Bible study and exegesis.

### Seven Compelling Advantages

The paper book is not dead, nor is it even on life support. However, the publishing industry is rapidly changing formats from paper to digital, and there are a number of benefits the consumer reaps as a result of this change. It is easy to demonstrate why buying e-commentaries is far superior to purchasing their paper cousins. Although the focus of this article is on e-commentaries, their advantages also fit all e-books. The first

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<sup>1</sup>“Letter to Jacob Batt,” April 12, 1500, Erasmus, *The Correspondence of Erasmus, Letters 1 to 141, 1484-1500*, trans. R.A.B. Mynors and D.F.S. Thomson, *The Collected Works of Erasmus*, vol. 1 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), 252.

<sup>2</sup>The Apple iPad2 is the most popular tablet computer, but a group of Android tablet computers is vying for market share. Tablet computers have much more functionality but are more expensive than e-readers.

<sup>3</sup>For a fine description of the exegetical process, see Craig L. Blomberg, *A Handbook of New Testament Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010).

four benefits apply both to e-readers and computers; the last four benefits apply primarily to computers.

### **Portable**

If you own a laptop computer, tablet computer, or e-reader, you can carry numerous commentaries anywhere—a conference, a ski lodge, a local coffee shop, remote jungle, or anywhere you go. Also, even with a desktop computer using Bible study software, the commentaries can be portable: accessible on both your computer at home and at the office. So, you can work on your sermons or lessons at either location without lugging a box of books back and forth—which I have done many times through the years.

### **Space Saving**

E-commentaries occupy no shelf space. In the academic world as well as the church, we are facing the challenge of the incredible shrinking office. Typically the newer the building is, the smaller the office is, and the modern office today has little bookshelf space. With e-books that problem is alleviated. Of course, if you desire to let other people know you do have a decent library, you could paste photos of your commentaries on your bookshelves with notes that say “Part of My Electronic Library.”

### **Cost Effective**

E-commentaries are less expensive than their paper equivalents. Electronic titles are typically half the cost or less of their paper counterparts. However, with bundled software, such as Logos 4 Scholar’s Platinum, the cost can be one-twentieth of a paper copy.<sup>4</sup>

### **Searchable**

I cannot overstate the importance of this feature. You can find any word or phrase or various combinations of them in any commentary—or search *all* of your e-commentaries or even your entire e-library simultaneously—with a few easy key strokes and in mere seconds. Boolean searches (AND, OR, NOT, etc.) and even more complicated searches take mere seconds with e-commentaries that would take hours or days when using paper commentaries. This feature alone is worth its weight in gold. Additionally, there are specialized searches. Logos 4 allows you to search a commentary for every occurrence of a Scripture reference regardless of how it appears—not an easy task considering the variations, such as John 3:16, Jn. 3:16, Jn 3:16, or 3:16 when the context establishes the reference is in John. This unique search is possible only because of the way they have tagged each Bible reference.

### **Markable and Note Friendly**

You can add virtual bookmarks, notes, highlights, multi-colored underlines, or symbols to the text which can be saved, revised, searched, or copied. In other words, all of your markings are available regardless of which computer you use to access your digital commentaries. Then you can do a search of specific markings.

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<sup>4</sup>James R. Wicker, “Review of *Logos Bible Software 4, Scholar’s Platinum LE Library*,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* (Spring 2011): 207. The cost averages \$1.40 per volume in this software bundle.

Not only can you type and attach notes to the commentary text, you no longer have a space limitation that a paper commentary has in the margins. You can type a virtually unlimited number of notes, save them, edit them, export them to a sermon or lesson, or search them—far overshadowing the limitations of paper commentaries.

### **Linkable**

With a search engine you can link the commentaries with electronic Bibles, so that wherever you look in the Bible text, the commentaries will automatically open to that passage, too. So, you can virtually “turn pages” in dozens of books with one keystroke—a convenient and time saving tool!

### **Copyable**

Using e-commentaries can speed up the typing of sermon or lesson notes. Sometimes I prefer to cut and paste strategic sections from a commentary directly into my sermon notes rather than typing that section. No, my sermons are not cut and paste jobs from commentaries, but a critical description or application from a commentary can be helpful to read again when reviewing the notes prior to sermon or lesson delivery.

## **Overcoming Objections**

What are the typical worries and hesitations people have concerning e-commentaries? None of these objections are deal breakers, and some of them are simply personal preferences about subjective issues. Only the last three objections below are issues of substance.

### **No Tactile Sensation**

Many people like the tactile feel of holding a book and turning the pages. This is probably a generational desire, and future generations will not likely have this felt need. Yet, although there may be a real preference for most people today to hold onto a book when reading a John Grisham novel, I cannot imagine the need for doing that when using commentaries to prepare for a sermon or a lesson. One does not normally curl up in front of a fireplace and read a commentary!<sup>5</sup> Instead, on top of our desk we pile up a number of commentaries and Bibles open to a specific passage. So, I have four responses to this objection. First, buy an e-reader with some e-commentaries if you want to hold something tactile while curled up on the couch. Second, even better, buy a tablet computer that can read e-commentaries from multiple vendors (see below). Third, even better, buy good Bible study software. Some can download the e-commentaries and e-books onto Apple and Android tablet computers and smart phones.<sup>6</sup> Fourth, with Bible study software, such as Logos 4, on a computer you can use virtual desktops—each one with specific Bible versions, e-commentaries, and Bible resource e-books all open to the same passage. With a couple of mouse clicks you can go from your Sunday morning

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<sup>5</sup>A colleague of mine told me he did read a commentary this way recently. I also sit down and read a commentary from cover to cover when I am reading it in order to write a book review for a scholarly journal. However, this is *not* a typical use of a commentary. I reminded my friend that we seminary professors are *not* normal people!

<sup>6</sup>Logos recently released the beta version of an app for the Android phone and tablet computer.

sermon or Sunday School desktop configuration to your Sunday evening sermon desktop to your Wednesday night Bible study desktop. Meanwhile, the physical desk in your office can be neat, clean, and book free.

### **Slow Retrieval**

Some people claim they can research faster using books than using electronic media. Given the powerful search features with a computer using e-books, this reason is easy to debunk. My experience is that the people who make this claim either: (1) do not have adequate electronic resources (hardware and/or software), (2) do not have the computer skills to adequately use those resources, or (3) have an ingrained generational preference. If it is the second reason, they simply may not have been motivated to learn, such as the Director of Missions friend of mine in the mid 1990s who was determined to make it to retirement without learning how to use the computer. He reached both goals, but he missed out on using a great time-saving tool.

However, concerning speed, there is one test in which e-commentaries sometimes lose. I can pick up a single commentary from my book shelf and locate a specific Bible passage faster than I can turn on the computer, open the software, and open that same commentary to that Bible passage. Of course, if the computer is running and the software is already open, the electronic version wins. Also, if the challenge is to open multiple commentaries or do word or phrase searches, the computer will always win—especially if a virtual desktop is already set up. So, one must make a choice: stick with paper books to win an occasional single-volume, single verse search and continue with a method of Bible study one is already comfortable with or move to e-commentaries in order to gain speed, searchability, portability, convenience, and other benefits.

### **Eye Fatigue**

This is a subjective objection, as in the lack of a tactile feel desire mentioned above. Some people complain of eye fatigue while staring at a computer screen. However, with most e-readers and computers today one can easily change the font size and background color in order to read the text easier and thus reduce fatigue. Many e-readers use an e-ink technology in order to reduce eye strain. Of course, one should schedule regular breaks for eye rest regardless of whether one is reading a paper or a digital book.

### **Too Many Distractions**

Another subjective complaint is that with e-books one can get too distracted and start surfing the web; whereas, a good old fashioned book does not have such a temptation. I find this reason quite trite and unlikely to be a serious problem for the committed person preparing a sermon or Bible study lesson.

### **Delayed Availability**

There sometimes is a time lag from when the print volume is available to when the electronic volume is available. Also, there are a few commentaries that are not yet available electronically. This objection is easily dismissed. First, companies are rapidly converting commentaries from print to electronic media (see the numbers below). Second, for new commentaries, the trend is to offer both paper and electronic versions simultaneously. Third, some companies, such as Logos and QuickVerse, are selling

certain new commentaries *only* in an electronic format because this version has no paper cost involved and no page restriction that is inevitable with paper copies.

### **Lack of Pagination**

Some researchers do not like using electronic books because of the lack of page numbers, rendering proper footnotes with page numbers impossible. This is a valid concern with some e-readers that do not use page numbers because now a “page” is the amount of words that fit on that e-reader screen, which can easily be altered by changing the font size. So, how does a student record the book page number for a term paper or book review quotation? Also, how does the teacher verify that page number? Thankfully, e-readers are slowly overcoming this problem. For instance, the Kindle 3 does give the original book page number, but the previous versions do not. The only solution for people using some older e-readers today is to cite the chapter and paragraph number, such as how one gives a citation from a book by Josephus; however, this solution can be difficult for an e-commentary and very time consuming for most e-books. The good news is that e-readers are starting to add page numbers, and most e-commentaries and e-books available in Logos 4 retain the page number from the original paper copy, so this objection can easily become a non-issue.

### **Inevitable Obsolescence**

There is a fear that the commentary itself, the software, or the hardware will one day be useless. In other words, the commentary can become out of date, the software can be corrupted or obsolete, or the hardware (computer or e-reader) can crash, become obsolete, get lost, or be stolen. Although these are valid concerns, keep in mind that no format is totally safe. Even the book version of commentaries can become out of date, stolen, indefinitely borrowed, lost, or destroyed by fire or flood.

First, in regard to the commentary becoming dated—this will happen regardless of whether you have a paper or e-copy. All commentaries will go out of date regardless of their format. Each of the following commentaries has been totally or partially rewritten in recent years: ICC, Expositor’s, NIC, and Interpreters, but most commentary volumes and sets are never updated and eventually become obsolete except for a few that become classics. So, one should make wise purchases to get a few decades of useful service, realizing the commentaries will likely eventually outlive their usefulness. Either the commentary set or its format will one day need to be updated, but do not let that keep you from making a decision to buy e-commentaries.

Second, in regard to the software, if data is corrupted or the DVD is lost, one can usually get a free replacement from the vendor. Of course, if the vendor goes out of business, this will not happen. So, choose your vendor carefully (see below for some tips on choosing a vendor).

Third, concerning the hardware, one must come to terms with the reality of the need to update hardware from time to time. Go ahead and purchase a good computer, e-reader, or both, as well as good Bible study software. Since most companies update versions every year or so, do not procrastinate while waiting until the next version comes out in order to get a better product, such as the future iPad 4, Kindle 4, Logos 5, BibleWorks 10, or Accordance 10. The problem is that there will *always* be newer versions around the corner, so it is tempting never to make a purchase. Instead, decide that if you get two to five good years of good use out of a product, whether it is a

computer, e-reader, Bible software, or e-commentaries, then you have made a good purchase because it gave you reliable service during those years. A friend gave me this advice twenty years ago, and it has served me well.

### Proprietary Anxiety

The last objection is the most substantial. BibleWorks actually embraces this concern as well as the previous objection, and for this reason they offer few electronic resources other than Bible translations and language tools for this Bible study software.<sup>7</sup> There are actually two worries: (1) most electronic commentaries are proprietary, meaning that each one will work with only one Bible study software or certain e-readers or tablet computers, and (2) there is the attendant danger that the company producing the software, computer, or e-reader will go out of business. Although these are valid concerns, I believe they are not deal breakers.

All digital software is proprietary in some way—needing both specific hardware (the computer or e-reader) and specific software (the operating system and/or program) to make sense of the ones and zeros that comprise the digitalization of the commentaries. In other words, the *New American Commentary* one purchases for Logos 4 will not run on BibleWorks 9, Accordance 9, a Kindle, Kobo, or Nook. A Nook book is a Kindle catastrophe and a Kobo calamity! They are all proprietary to some extent, although the landscape is continually changing. E-readers cannot read content from other e-readers or tablet computers, but tablet computers and even smart phones can usually read e-reader books, such as Kindle and Nook books.<sup>8</sup> So, if you decide to change from using a Kindle to a Nook, you must buy a new copy of the *New American Commentary*. Thus, it is helpful to know that some electronic formats are *less* proprietary (and usable for more e-readers, computers, and smart phones) than others: such as ePub and pdf. However, *none* of these formats will work with the best Bible study programs because their e-commentaries are proprietary.

The second concern is mostly alleviated if you carefully choose the company from which to buy your e-commentaries and if you continue to upgrade your software and hardware from time to time. Although this means additional cost, the new features of the software or hardware are usually worth it.

Here are some pointers in choosing a good company. First, look for a company that most publishers use (in my opinion, the front runner for Bible study software is Logos 4). The more publishers a Bible software company partners with, the more businesses have a vested interest in helping insure the future viability of that company. Second, look for a strong company: one that is large, has a good market share, good customer service, a good reputation, and a promising future. Third, find a company from which you can download your software to restore digital copies if they get corrupted on your computer. Fourth, look for a company that sells a product that will allow the most versatility in hardware. For e-readers, the iPad (Apple), Kindle (Amazon), and Nook

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<sup>7</sup>This is an excellent Bible study software, but it offers only one Bible commentary that links with its software.

<sup>8</sup>For example, an iPhone and iPad, as well as Android phones and tablet computers, can read Nook and Kindle products by downloading a free app for each product. Nook and Kobo can read pdf and ePub books, but the Kindle can read pdf but not ePub books.

(Barnes & Noble) are the front runners. For Bible software, Logos (pc or Mac), BibleWorks (pc), and Accordance (Mac) are the best.<sup>9</sup>

Now that the great virtues and few debatable vices of e-commentaries are clear, the reader may be anxious to go ahead and purchase some. However, there are still some matters to consider. First, should you buy commentaries to use primarily on an e-reader or computer? Second, what kind of e-reader or computer should you buy? Third, for a computer, should you buy commentaries as stand-alone books to read or books that will work with Bible study software?<sup>10</sup> To help answer these questions, it is good to compare the number of e-commentaries that are available for purchase (or as a free download for some out-of-copyright commentaries) in each platform/program. Then it will be helpful to compare computers versus e-readers.

### E-Commentary Availability Comparison

This search is limited to Bible e-commentaries that are: (1) in English, (2) multi-volume sets on the Old Testament, New Testament, or the entire Bible (thus excluding multi-volume sets on one book of the Bible), (3) Christian (thus, not including a Jewish commentary on the Talmud or a commentary from a cult perspective), and (4) true commentaries versus collections of sermons (such as *Chrysostom's Homilies Collection*) or study guides. Using these parameters, I found 230 e-commentary sets. There are many additional single-volume commentaries, but including them would make this search prohibitive for this comparison.

Although it is ideally best to buy the finest single volumes from the best commentary sets, there are three drawbacks to this method. First, it is hard for the average Bible student to know what are the best volumes in a series. Although there are some helpful books and websites that evaluate commentaries, the recommendations are still somewhat subjective.<sup>11</sup> Best Commentaries is an example of a helpful website that ranks Bible commentaries.<sup>12</sup> It gives a rating for each commentary volume based on an algorithm that includes the average review rating, total number of reviews, and the number of copies that libraries order. The site also posts some reviews as well as recommended lists from notable scholars such as D. A. Carson. Yet, the ranking differences can be hard to meaningfully interpret. For instance, the top ten commentaries on Matthew have just a seven-point spread: from 78.5 to 85.5.<sup>13</sup>

A second drawback with single-commentary purchasing is that it will invariably leave one short on certain books, such as Nahum or Jude. Third, one can usually find the

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<sup>9</sup>Accordance can run on a pc with a Mac emulator, and BibleWorks can run on a Mac with a Windows emulator, but neither company offers a separate product for a pc and a Mac. However, Logos 4 does offer both.

<sup>10</sup>One can purchase certain commentary sets to use on a computer as a stand-alone product. However, these are proprietary and will not work in tandem with Bible study software. To use a set with Bible study software, be sure to purchase it through the software vender or in the correct software format. For instance, all e-books in the Libronix format will work with Logos Bible study software.

<sup>11</sup>See John Glynn, *Commentary and Reference Survey*, 10<sup>th</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2007); D. A. Carson, *New Testament Commentary Survey*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007).

<sup>12</sup>Best Commentaries web site, Internet, [www.bestcommentaries.com](http://www.bestcommentaries.com), accessed 8-30-2011.

<sup>13</sup>Matthew Rankings, Best Commentaries web site, Internet, <http://bestcommentaries.com/matthew/>, accessed 8-30-2011.

best prices when buying full commentary sets. So, it is best to have at least several full commentary series in order to have some commentaries on every Bible book. Thus, this comparison focuses on commentary sets.

Interestingly, calling the sales departments of book publishers is futile for learning the various electronic formats in which their commentaries are available. They are interested in selling paper books and will simply suggest you consult the web sites for Bible study software and e-readers. I tried B & H, Fortress Press, and Baker Academic, and I finally took their advice to search online book sources, even though it is a time-consuming process.

The following two charts show the availability of multi-volume commentary sets. Typically, they are available only in individual volumes for e-readers and tablet computers, but they are available in sets or in individual volumes for Bible study software. The first two rows indicate the number of hits when searching for “Bible commentary” or “commentary.” The number of hits for “commentary” is much higher because it includes secular commentaries, such as a commentary on Plato’s writings. Since all of the hits contain individual volumes of sets as well as much repetition of the same titles, the numbers are not too helpful. I show them to illustrate how hard it is to find the various commentary titles from a vendor. For instance, for e-commentaries that Kobo offers you must either type in a specific commentary name to search for it, or you must look at 4,430 icons and descriptions in the category of “Bible Commentary.” This is ridiculous. Nowhere is there a list of the different sets of commentaries sold by Kobo. Even with most major Bible study software companies, there is no easy way to see what commentaries are available other than wading through dozens of screens containing numerous individual and series commentary icons.<sup>14</sup>

The third row is the most important one because it shows the actual number of different sets of commentaries that are available in each format/platform. The leader among e-readers that read their own format books is the Kindle (87 different e-commentary sets). Kindle ties the iPad among e-readers and tablet computers for being able to read the most e-commentaries from its own format as well as multiple e-reader formats (99 different e-commentary sets). However, the winner among Bible study software and overall champion is Logos 4 (113 different e-commentary sets).

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<sup>14</sup>However, even the automated search button on Logos.com for “multi-volume commentaries” misses about a dozen sets that a more thorough search finds: [http://www.logos.com/products/search?Product+Type=Add-on+Products&Product+Type\\_Add-on+Products=Collections&Product+Type\\_Add-on+Products\\_Collections=Series+%2F+Set&Resource+Type=Commentaries&start=0&sort=title&pageSize=15](http://www.logos.com/products/search?Product+Type=Add-on+Products&Product+Type_Add-on+Products=Collections&Product+Type_Add-on+Products_Collections=Series+%2F+Set&Resource+Type=Commentaries&start=0&sort=title&pageSize=15), accessed 8-3-2011.

E-READERS/TABLET COMPUTERS <sup>15</sup>	Formats		Tablets		E-Readers			
	ePub	pdf	iPad	Android devices	Kindle	Kobo	Nook	Sony Reader
“Bible commentary” hits	83	n.a.	81	n.a.	2,807	4,430	617	396
“commentary” hits	350	n.a.	167	n.a.	4,899	11,654	5,686	2,652
Actual commentary sets	<b>43</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>22 [99]</b>	<b>[95]</b>	<b>87 [99]</b>	<b>27 [51]</b>	<b>82 [95]</b>	<b>29 [50]</b>
The numbers in brackets include e-commentaries that are readable from other formats.								

BIBLE SOFTWARE <sup>16</sup>	Accordance	Bible Explorer	BibleWorks	E-Sword	Logos	PC Study Bible 5	QuickVerse	WordSearch
	9		9		4			9
“Bible commentary” hits	n.a. <sup>17</sup>	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	1,435	n.a.	n.a.	42
“commentary” hits	112	528	1	17 <sup>18</sup>	1,923	72	65	298
Actual commentary sets	<b>48</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>61</b>

The third chart shows the platform availability of nine major Bible commentaries. Notice that once again, the front runners are Logos 4 and the Kindle with using its own format. However, the iPad ties the Kindle when one includes multiple-format-reading capability, since it can read Kindle books, Nook books, pdf, and Logos 4 books.

<sup>15</sup>eBooks.com, Internet, <http://www.ebooks.com/>, accessed 8-1-2011 (for ePub format books); iTunes store, download available at <http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/ibooks/id364709193?mt=8>, accessed 8-1-2011; Kindle eBooks, Internet, [http://www.amazon.com/Kindle-eBooks/b/ref=sv\\_kinh\\_1?ie=UTF8&node=1286228011](http://www.amazon.com/Kindle-eBooks/b/ref=sv_kinh_1?ie=UTF8&node=1286228011), accessed 8-1-2011; Kobo web site, Internet, <http://www.kobobooks.com/lists>, accessed 8-1-2011; Nook Book Store, Internet, <http://www.barnesandnoble.com/ebooks/index.asp?r=1>, accessed 8-1-2011; Reader Store, Internet, <http://ebookstore.sony.com/>, accessed 8-1-2011.

<sup>16</sup>Accordance 9 web site, Internet, <http://www.accordancebible.com/store/Commentaries>, accessed 8-1-2011; Bible Explorer web site, Internet, <http://www.bible-explorer.com/fulllibrary.php>, accessed 8-1-2011; “Full Contents,” BibleWorks web site, Internet, <http://www.bibleworks.com/content/full.html>, accessed 8-1-2011; e-Sword web site; Internet; <http://www.e-sword.net/>, accessed 8-1-2011; Logos web site, Internet, <http://www.logos.com/products>, accessed 8-1-2011; BibleSoft.com Add-ons, Internet, <http://www.biblesoft.com/new/products/addons.asp#BibleCommentaries>, accessed 8-1-2011; QuickVerse Product Comparison Chart, Internet, <http://www.quickverse.com/shopfiles/ViewCharts.asp?ID=41238>, accessed 8-1-2011; QuickVerse Commentaries, Internet, <http://www.quickverse.com/Shopfiles/books.asp?category=72>, accessed 8-1-2011; WORDsearch web site, Internet, <http://www.wordsearchbible.com/bible-study>, accessed 8-1-2011.

<sup>17</sup>The designation “n.a.” (not available) means there was no way to search for this category.

<sup>18</sup>The list of commentaries is available only when clicking on “Download” and “Commentaries” while running the E-Sword free Bible study software program.

COMMENTARIES	Format		E-Reader/Tablet Computer					Bible Study Software							
	ePub	pdf	iPad	Kindle	Kobo	Nook	Sony Reader	Accordance 9	Bible Explorer	BibleWorks 9	E-Sword	Logos 4	PC Study Bible 5	QuickVerse 2011	WordSearch 9
<i>Anchor Bible Commentary</i>		+	[+]	[+]	+							+			
<i>Baker Exegetical Commentary on the NT</i>	+		+	+	+	+	+					+			
<i>Expositor's Bible Commentary</i> (rev. ed., 13 vol.)	+		+	+	+	+	+	+				+			
<i>International Critical Commentary</i>			[+]	+		+						+			
<i>New American Commentary</i>	+		+	+	+	+	+	+				+	+		+
<i>New International Commentary on the OT/NT</i>			[+]	+								+			+
<i>Pillar NT Commentary</i>			[+]	+				+				+			+
<i>Tyndale OT/NT Commentary</i>			[+]	+				+				+			
<i>Word Commentary</i>			[+]	+	+	+	+	+				+			

The check marks in brackets include e-commentaries that are readable from other formats.

### E-Reader versus Computer Bible Study Software

There are a number of factors to examine when considering purchasing an e-reader, tablet computer, or a notebook computer. This section will address some major hardware and software features relevant to e-commentaries, but it will not address the following hardware features that should factor into the decision: price, weight, screen size and visibility, battery life, wifi and 3G capability, memory type and size, and number of available e-books.

Here are the advantages of buying e-commentaries to use with Bible study software on a computer. First, it is easier to buy an entire commentary set for Bible study software; whereas, an e-reader typically limits a purchase to single-volumes of any commentary. Second, one can do advanced searches with Bible study software, but e-readers have limited or no search capability. Third, Bible study software is designed for research and study of multiple books simultaneously; whereas, an e-reader is built for pleasure reading of or limited research in only one book at a time. Fourth, one can use sophisticated notes and markings with Bible study software versus simple notes and markings (or none at all) with an e-reader.<sup>19</sup> Fifth, some e-readers have no page numbers, which presents a considerable problem for research.

<sup>19</sup>For most of these comparisons, tablet computers have similar limitations to e-readers; however, the app called iAnnotate is a powerful book highlighting, marking, and note-taking program available for the iPad.

Yet the e-reader and tablet computer have some advantages. First, they are lighter, thus easier to use while away from a desk. Second, they are simpler to use. Third, they are typically easier to read in direct sunlight. Fourth, there are some formats that are less proprietary, such as PDF and ePub, whereas all Bible study software formats are proprietary.

The best usage is in one that allows one to read the e-commentaries across various platforms. The Kindle Whispersync technology allows books to be read across all platforms, and you can stop reading an e-book on the Kindle and resume reading on the same page on your pc, Mac, iPad, iPhone, Android, Windows 7, or Blackberry smart phone. The Kobo can be read across similar platforms (but with the Palm Pre instead of the Windows 7 phone). The growing availability of e-books across various platforms is helpful; however, when one owns an e-reader or tablet computer, the pc or Mac that one may use with it just becomes a large e-reader because the proprietary format (such as ePub) is not compatible with any Bible study software. So, you still have a stand-alone commentary with limited searchability due to the e-reader format. However, Logos 4 allows the user to access and make use of all platforms, and it is the only product that does so. Its e-commentaries (and all e-books) have full searchability and functionality with the rest of the Bible study software on a pc or Mac and to a little lesser extent on an iPhone, iPad, Android phone, or Android tablet computer. The phones and tablet computers access one's books via the Logos cloud, and one can download books to read when there is no wifi capability.

The following chart demonstrates how many platforms the particular product in the left column can use. Although Logos 4 will not work on the Blackberry, Palm, or Windows 7 phone, its full functionality with Bible study software and use on Apple and Android phones and tablet computers, makes it the best choice for functionality in all three worlds: desktop/laptop computer, tablet computer, and phone.

CROSS PLATFORMS <sup>20</sup>	pc	Mac	Android phone	Android tablet	Blackberry phone	Blackberry Playbook	iPhone	iPad	Palm Pre phone	Windows 7 phone
iPad					+			+		
Kindle	+	+	+	+	+		+	+		+
Kobo	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	
Nook	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+		
Sony Reader	+	+								
Accordance 9	+ <sup>21</sup>	+					+	+		
BibleWorks 9	+	+ <sup>22</sup>								
Logos 4	+	+	+	+			+	+		
WordSearch 9	+	+								

### Conclusion

Since e-commentaries are reference books they are different from typical e-books. So, some of the needs for advance searching of contents, marking, cutting and pasting sections into a word processor, being part of a Bible study software program, and virtual linking with other commentaries and Bibles are not necessary for an e-book such as the latest Tom Clancy novel. Yet, many of the experiences and needs of working with e-commentaries are the same for using all e-books. So, they are a good test case for the usefulness and viability of e-books.

Weighing all of the considerations mentioned above, in my opinion Logos 4 is the best product for using e-commentaries. First, it is a Bible study software, allowing the

<sup>20</sup>"Comparison of e-book formats," Wikipedia, Internet, ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comparison\\_of\\_e-book\\_formats](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comparison_of_e-book_formats), accessed 8-1-2011; "Amazon's Revolutionary Wireless Reading Device," Internet, [http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B002Y27P3M/ref=sv\\_kinh\\_0](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B002Y27P3M/ref=sv_kinh_0), accessed 8-1-2011; Kobo web site, Internet, <http://www.kobobooks.com/desktop>, accessed 8-1-2011; Nook apps web site, Internet, <http://www.barnesandnoble.com/u/free-nook-apps/379002321>, accessed 8-1-2011; "Reader Pocket Edition," Sony web site, Internet, <http://store.sony.com/webapp/wcs/stores/servlet/ProductDisplay?catalogId=10551&storeId=10151&langId=-1&productId=8198552921666257813>, accessed 8-1-2011; "iPad and iPhone," Internet, <http://www.accordancebible.com/Accordance/iOS>, accessed 8-1-2011; "System Requirements," Internet, <http://www.bibleworks.com/content/sys-req.html>, accessed 8-1-2011; "Logos Bible Software for Your Mobile Phone," Internet, <http://www.logos.com/mobile>; WordSearch web site, <http://www.wordsearchbible.com/ws9/>, accessed 8-1-2011.

<sup>21</sup>Accordance 9 will run on a pc with a Mac emulator program; however, Logos 4 and WordSearch 9 actually have separate versions of the program for a pc or a Mac.

<sup>22</sup>BibleWorks 9 will run on a Mac with a Windows emulator program; however, Logos 4 and WordSearch 9 actually have separate versions of the program for a pc or a Mac.

user more powerful tool array and virtual links with other commentaries and Bibles than the e-reader, tablet computer, or phone will allow. Second, Logos has the most e-books (almost 12,000 titles) and e-commentaries (113 different sets) available for purchase among Bible study software or e-readers. Third, it is one of the three largest and best Bible software companies (along with BibleWorks and Accordance), giving more assurance of longevity than smaller companies. Fourth, it is the only product that allows a person to use cross platforms with Bible study software, capturing the best of three worlds: on a desktop/laptop computer, e-reader/tablet computer, and phone. Most e-readers have cross-platform capability, but they do not use Bible study software and are limited in functionality.

However, using e-commentaries with *any* e-reader or Bible study software can be a rewarding and fruitful experience: spiritually, financially (less expensive), and physically (no more lugging heavy commentaries). So, take the plunge into the digital world of e-commentaries and reap many benefits.

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