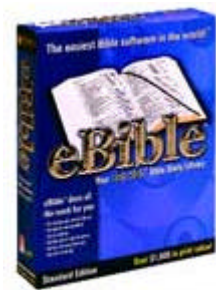


## Bible Software Revisited

Just as with in-print Bibles, a lot of revisions are going on in existing Bible software at the same time a few new products are making their debuts. The push seems to be toward a flashier interface that opens the way to deeper scholarship and more detailed features, such as maps, timelines, genealogies and other special helps. And if price point is important in Bibles, it is even more important in their software versions. "The inventory risk to medium and small stores took [Bible software] out of the picture," says Wayne Kinde, associate publisher of Nelson's reference and electronics division, which recently released *eBible* software. High prices discouraged purchases and ultimately led many stores to return software to publishers by the caseload. "So Bible software companies have been kind of steadying and repositioning themselves," Kinde says.



From Nelson, cheaper and easier.

Logos Research Systems released *Logos Bible Software Series X*, intended for religion professionals and scholars. The software is free and plugs into Logos's Libronix Digital Library System, which buys licenses to other publishers' research tools and makes them available via an Internet gateway for consumers to purchase and download. New to *Series X* is a feature called a "passage guide," which Dale Pritchett, v-p of sales and marketing, describes as "like having your own little research assistant." Users type in a topic or passage they want, and the guide scans the

entire purchased library and highlights appropriate selections.



Popular plug-in, from Tyndale.

Nelson has focused a lot of attention on price point and ease of use with *eBible*, which was released last March. Three versions are available—Discover, Standard and Deluxe—allowing the consumer to decide how deeply to plumb the text and how much to pay. Through the Libronix system, *eBible* allows access to a wide range of Nelson reference products, including concordances, commentaries and atlases. Of chief concern to Nelson was making access to these texts as easy as possible, so the software features a "one click" search feature and a Web site-like look. Says Kinde, "We are trying to empower at the most basic entry level possible." He says this was the opposite approach taken by many Bible software producers, who tend to market to pastors and scholars first, hoping lay users will follow.

Tyndale's *iLumina: Interactive Bible and Encyclopedia Suite* (Sept.) is a digitally animated Bible—the first, Tyndale claims. But the comic book-look is only skin deep. The product takes as its inspiration Microsoft's popular *Encarta* software and is augmented with an encyclopedia, atlas and a "time travel" feature, among others. "*Encarta* targets the general computer-using audience, and that is what we are targeting," says Michele Buc, consultant to Tyndale on the product. Plans are to release other "plug-in" products that will work with *iLumina*. First among these is *Left Behind: iLumina Edition*, (Sept.), interactive software about the enormously popular fiction series that will work with *iLumina*'s features. Buc, head of her own software consulting firm, said plug-ins are a hot trend: "Everybody wants to add pieces."

BibleWorks also is focusing on plug-ins and add-ons to its *BibleWorks 5*, which premiered last September, with two new modules-for-purchase, a Greek lexicon for the New Testament and a Hebrew and Aramaic lexicon for the Old Testament, both of which released last April. Currently, BibleWorks has available 90 texts in 28 different languages. Jim Barr, marketing director, says he sees a trend toward the small, and says a student version of *BibleWorks 5*—minus the academic texts—is in the thinking stage. Also in demand, but not yet in the works, is PDA software. "It's very hard to get [the *BibleWorks 5* programs] down to something that small," he says.

Publishers of Bible software agree that the future is bright. Barr of BibleWorks said his company has doubled its business in the past five years—a phenomenon he credits to computer-savvy younger pastors replacing older ones. "Students coming through seminaries today have had computers forever," he notes. "They are now pastors and they expect to use one at church."

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