

e-Sword: What Bible Software Ought To Be!



This month I'm interrupting our series on the Windows Registry to address something of far greater importance. Our editor-in-chief Steve Hewitt chose to give me the singular honor of reviewing a Bible program called *e-Sword* (www.e-sword.net). I will, therefore, make a desperate attempt to do it justice.

e-Sword (eS) is a totally free Bible search and study program that author Rick Meyers has graciously given to the Church. In

the screen and the "Commentary" view to the right. This design nicely facilitates synchronization, so that when you click on a verse in the Bible view, all the commentaries and dictionar-

case you're thinking, "Oh, it's free so it can't be very high quality," I hope this article will dispel such notions, because here is a "Class A" piece of software (written in Visual Basic 6) that has been downloaded upwards of 4,000,000 times (which demands over five terabytes of bandwidth each month!).

e-Sword Features

Figure 1 should quickly show you what eS is all about. Most of what you need is right in front of you. In the upper left corner is the "Scripture Lookup" box, in which you can type in the reference you want, or you can navigate to it in the "Bible Tree" below (a feature you can turn off if you prefer, which I do; you can also change the entire layout of the main screen if you want). The Bible window displays a tab for each translation you have installed. The same is true for the "Dictionary" view at the bottom of

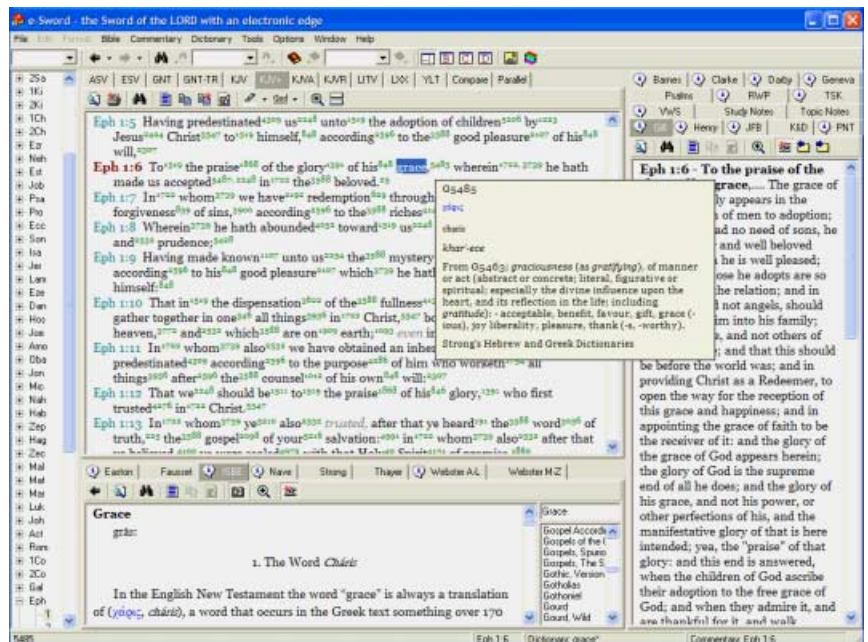


Fig. 1 – *e-Sword*'s main screen, showing a looked up verse (Eph. 1:6), the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* entry for "grace," a ToolTip for Strong's G5485 (*charis*), and John Gill's commentary.

ies follow.

You'll also see two arrow buttons right beside the "Lookup Scripture" box that enable you to go back to the previous reference and forward to the next reference. Clicking on the list arrow beside those arrows also displays a neat little "Verse Trail" window.

Figure 1 also demonstrates just how many high quality (and absolutely free) resources you have been given. Dictionaries include: Easton, Fausset, the invaluable *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Nave's, Strong's, Thayer's, and even Webster's 1828 dictionary. Even more of a blessing are the commentaries: Barnes, Clark, Darby, Geneva, Gill, Henry, Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, Keil and Delitzsch, People's, Treasury of David, and Treasury of Scripture Knowledge, as well as Robertson's and Vincent's word studies. More are also available.

But even that's not all. Under "Topic Notes" you will also find more resources, including: 2000+ Bible Illustrations, Anti-Nicene Fathers (9 volumes), Schaff's Church History, Calvin's Institutes (Beveridge translation, of course), and many others. There are also four daily devotionals available: *Day By Day Grace* (Hoekstra), *Our Daily Walk* (Meyer), *Devotional Sermons* (Morrison), and, of course, Spurgeon's classic, *Morning and Evening*.

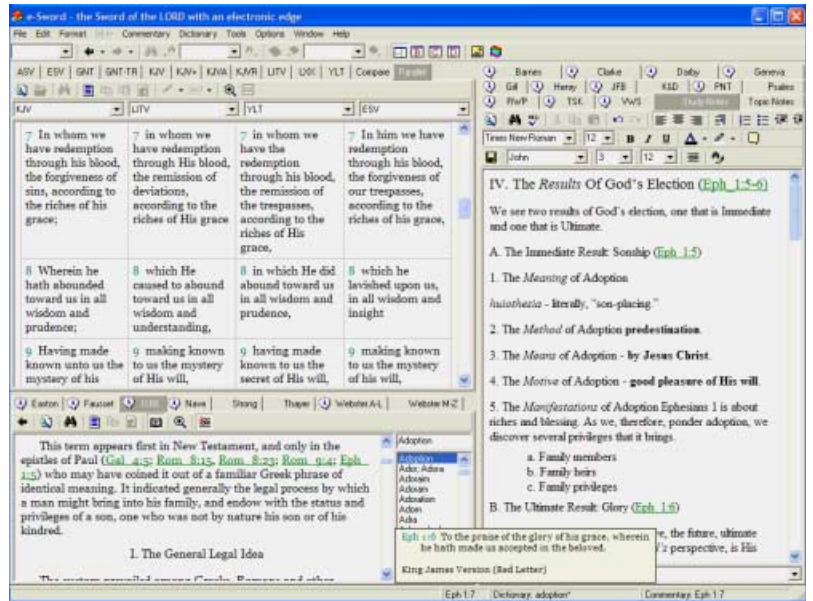


Fig. 2 – e-Sword's parallel Bible translation feature and "Study Notes" word processor.



Fig. 3 – Microsoft Word toolbar macros for e-Sword.

On top of all that, there's also a "STEP Reader" that includes several free full libraries of selected authors, including the works of Bunyan, Meyer, Newton, Pink, Ryle, and a Wesleyan collection. This tool also enables you to read any other STEP titles you might already own. What a wonderfully handy tool!

Moving to Figure 2, the "Parallel" translation feature is really cool. Four separate columns enable you to see a parallel comparison of the current chapter in four translations. In contrast, the "Compare" tab displays the current verse in all the translations you have installed, which reminded me of the same feature in *BibleWorks*.

Figure 2 also displays the "Study Notes" feature, which is a nice RTF word processor that acts very much like *MS-Word*. For illustration, I put in a tiny snippet from my own exposition of Ephesians 1:5-6. Notice the name of the file at the bottom ("Ephesians Sermons.not"). The list arrow to the right lists all your stored .not files. This is actually a very good little word processor, complete with formatting, numbering, bullets, text alignment, indenting buttons, find and replace, a spell checker, and print preview. A really clever feature is the "Format Scripture ToolTip" button (or Ctrl+J), which as Figure 2 illustrates enables you to highlight a Scripture reference and turn it into a popup displaying the verse's text in your preferred translation. You can also import and export your note files.

As an alternative to this feature, if you prefer using *Word*, Rick has also written four macros and a Toolbar (Fig. 3) for it. In order from left to right, the buttons are "search e-Sword," "paste verses" from it, "select Bible translation," and "convert Scripture reference," which automatically inserts

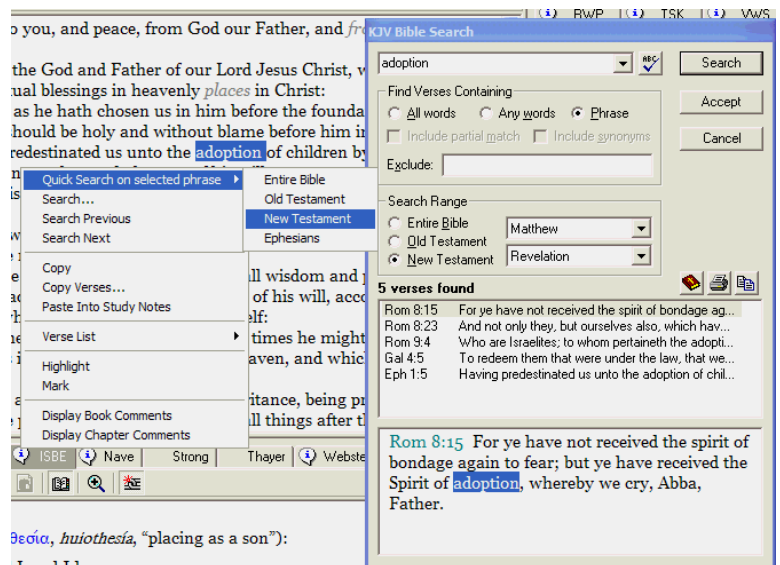


Fig. 4 – e-Sword's search features.

the verse text after you type just the reference and highlight it (very nice!).

Figure 4 illustrates two approaches to searching in eS. One, of course, is by just displaying the “Search” dialog box and entering search criteria. This includes not only the options displayed, but wildcard searches are also supported, which greatly expand searching power. The other approach to searching is by highlighting a word, *right-clicking* on it, and then selecting the “Quick Search” option to locate occurrences of that word elsewhere in Scripture. I must interject here that I was *extremely* impressed that this “Quick Search” also works on Strong’s numbers, enabling you to find the frequency of any Greek or Hebrew word. Additionally, the “Extended Verse Search” feature enables you to search multiple translations simultaneously.

The “Tools” menu lists several rich additions to eS. Besides the “Daily Devotions” mentioned earlier, “Bible Reading” is a small applet that includes a wizard that enables you to generate your own Bible reading plan. Similar applets are “Prayer Requests,” which tracks prayer requests, and “Scripture Memory,” which aids you in creating your own system for this important part of Christian living. All four of these tools also have an option to display them at startup. What struck me most about these additions is that only a spiritually minded person would think of them. This helps underscore the motive behind this whole project.

Finally, among several other features that space doesn’t permit me to detail (highlighting, bookmarks, verse list, font control, background texture, and more), eS also includes a “Graphics Viewer,” complete with maps courtesy of the American Bible Society (16; Fig. 5), NASA satellite images of the Holy Land area (18), Clarence Larkin’s classic charts (58), Doré New Testament woodcuts (45), classic Bible maps (4), ancient Mediterranean maps (9), and the Son Light Bible Atlas (14). Once again, this is first-rate stuff in Bible software.

Oh, and BTW, I do want to mention that eS and many of its add-ons are also available for your *Pocket-PC*.

Rick has also secured a wonderful arrangement with AMG Publishers, something that no one else I know of has done. For almost half of the hardcover price (\$40), you can add AMG’s *The Complete Word Study Dictionary*, which includes *both* the *New Testament Dictionary* by Dr. Spiros Zodhiates and the *Old Testament Dictionary* by Dr. Warren Baker and Dr. Eugene Carpenter. Here are *detailed* studies of the Hebrew and Greek words of the text, which should be at the very heart of any Bible teacher’s study. These works are, IMHO, modern day classics and have never been more inexpensive to own.

For another \$10 (this time *less* than half the hardcover price), you can own AMG’s *Key Word Commentary*, in which the 929 chapters of the Old Testament and 260 chapters of the New Testament are outlined, analyzed, and summarized. Ten comments about each chapter are emphasized: Before and After, Analysis of the Chapter, Key Verse, Key Word or Phrase, Key Event, Person or Theme, Key Thought, Key Thing to Look For, Key Bible Cross-reference, Key explanation, and Key Quote.

Finally, for only \$20, there is also AMG’s *Encyclopedia of Bible Facts*, which contains over 100,000 interesting Bible facts, including: archaeological findings, New Testament manuscripts, culture, people, prophecies, and many others. It also directs you to the words of the Bible itself, with summaries of its teaching, its key words, its books, its individuals and events.

Improvements?

I hesitate to mention weaknesses because I feel like I’m looking a gift-horse in the mouth, so I do so with all due respect. Improvement could be made in the Help. It’s currently a bit rudimentary and needs a little more detail on how to do certain things. While this is a pet peeve of mine, as I used to write documentation professionally, I think it’s a fair observation. There’s not a single word, for example, about importing and exporting files, the *Word* macros, and several other features. While most features are not hard to figure out, better documentation would speed the process. I should note that Rick does provide a “Training” Web page with several demos *and* a 105-page tutorial manual (written by a third party in PDF format) that demonstrates almost every feature. Sorry, but I still prefer immediate access through the



Fig. 5 – e-Sword’s Graphics Viewer displaying one of the sixteen maps from the *American Bible Society*.

Help system.

Like many products today, eS is a bit slow in loading and sometimes in searching. Additionally, it's just a bit bothersome that layout changes (such as not displaying the "Bible Tree") do not take effect until you restart the program. It would also be nice if a "Save Desktop" feature could be added, enabling you to save various desktop setups.

In the same vane as wildcard searches, I need to make a special note on Boolean logic. Rick has successfully simplified this for the non-techie using "All words" as an implicit AND statement and "Any words" as an implicit OR statement. For example, I got exactly the same result with "grace truth" using "All words" as I got using "grace AND truth" in QuickVerse 4 (Jn. 1:14, 17; Col. 1:6; 2 Jn. 1:3). I also got virtually the same result using "grace truth" with "Any words" as I did "grace OR truth" in QV4. That, however, is as deep as the Boolean logic goes. Rick felt that since his target audience is often the less savvy user, less would be more. I, however, would prefer the "other" more—full Boolean logic. To be fair, of course, many products today don't have this capability at all, thereby weakening their search capability.

Finally, it would also be nice if the graphics files in the viewer were not proprietary, or if the viewer would at least enable you to view and/or import other standard graphic formats (i.e., .jpg, .tif., .bmp, etc.).

These observations, however, in no way detract from the overall quality and functionality of this superb program. Believe me, I can *much* more severely pick apart several other products.

Support for the Project

I am compelled to say here that I was shocked (and just a tad appalled) when I read these words on the donation page: "If this ministry blesses you, are you willing to join me in it? Less than 1% of the people who download e-Sword return to say 'thanks' and donate."

Come on now, Christian Brothers and Sisters, as our Lord Himself declared, "Freely ye have received, freely give" (Matt. 10:8; cf. Acts 3:6; 20:33-35). Here is a brother who *demands nothing* for the ministry God has laid on his heart (and that is, indeed, what *ministry* [*diakonia*] is all about). Should we not, therefore, encourage and support him? I *strongly* urge you to help this ministry by giving what you can. If you still need incentive, a donation of \$15 or more gets you a CD with most of the available resources on it.

Summary

In short, *e-Sword* is first-rate Bible software that is on the same level as commercial products, some of which cost hundreds of dollars. Its free price tag is truly what Bible software ought to be and challenges all other products to reexamine their own approach.

While I am more than aware that publishing costs money and that books have authors who deserve a royalty for their work, *e-Sword* throws down the gauntlet. I'll probably ruffle a few feathers with my next statement, but I would challenge all Bible software companies to offer the program itself free and charge only for the resources that demand it. I've seen companies, for example, that charge high prices even for public domain titles (e.g., \$40 for Hodge's *Systematic Theology*). We should all find that troubling to say the least. What is our true motive in all this, *ministry* or *money*? Will not God bless a giving spirit (Rom. 12:13; 2 Cor. 9:7; Eph. 4:28)?



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