



Thomas Naef

Holy Bits:
A Guide for Using Computers in Biblical Scholarship

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Reviewed by
Mark G. Vitalis Hoffman
Gettysburg, Pennsylvania
www.ScrollandScreen.com

Upon receiving this book for review, my initial response was identified by Naef himself in the preface.

Why publish a “book” about computers and internet resources? This kind of information should be on the internet itself, -- after all, it is easier to update an HTML page than it is a book.

He goes on to answer his own question: “The purpose of this book is to serve as a biblical scholar’s guide to software and internet resources.” Unfortunately, that does not really answer the question of why this guide appears as a printed book. There has been a history of books like this—most notably John J. Hughes’ *Bits, Bytes and Biblical Studies: A Resource Guide for the Use of Computers in Biblical and Classical Studies* [1987], Jeffrey Hsu’s *Computer Bible Study* [1993], and Patrick Durusau’s *High Places in Cyberspace: A Guide to Biblical and Religious Studies, Classics, and Archaeological Resources on the Internet* [1998] of which only the last of these is noted in the bibliography—but the copyright dates indicate the need for an updated resource. (A newer book which I have not read is Roland H. Worth Jr.’s *Biblical Studies On The Internet: A Resource Guide* [2008].)

The problem, of course, is the speed with which resources get outdated and internet links disappear in this field. The Introduction (p. 2) promises that as resources do change, one can consult a related website: <http://www.holybits.info/>. The website, however, offers only very brief descriptions of the chapter contents. It was last updated on 2010.01.30 (as of 2010.06.07), and I could only find one link away from the site besides the one to the publisher. A physical book does, of course, have its own virtues, but as I read through it, I would certainly have liked to click to one of the host of resources Naef references on the internet rather than typing in a long URL.

As for the content, a detailed outline can be found on the [publisher's page](#). Naef himself indicates that the book

gathers information and experience in the field of "Biblical Studies and Computer". Some subjects being treated in the book are of a more general interest like hardware and networks, operating systems, textprocessors and others. The main focus however is on concise subjects for biblical scholars like Unicode, biblical software and websites in the field. Each chapter ends up with a list of URLs for further information about the subject.

I will provide an overview and comments on each chapter's contents. As one reads through the book, it would also be worthwhile to consult chapter 15 entitled "Checklists" which includes diagrams and directions for some of the matters discussed in chapters 1-14.

Chapter 1 is only a few pages long and provides basic definitions of common hardware devices.

Chapter 2 very briefly discusses operating systems and suggest ways of organizing files. Naef impartially covers Windows, Mac, and Linux. His description of Windows is dated enough to indicate only an awareness that Win7 was going to be coming.

Chapter 3 deals with "Standards," and Naef spends a considerable amount of time dealing with XML and Unicode. He gives the steps for installing Greek and Hebrew keyboards, but does not indicate how a user switches keyboards. From my experiences trying to type polytonic Greek and pointed Hebrew in various word processors, one of the best solutions for Windows I have found (which Naef does not mention) is [Tavultesoftware's Keyman](#). For most users, I would point them to the free [Tyndale Unicode Font Kit](#) which is designed for biblical scholars working with Hebrew and Greek and is available for both Windows and Mac. Naef provides layouts for the standard Hebrew and Polytonic Greek keyboards in chapter 15, but these are probably not the ones you would want for biblical work. (For Hebrew keyboard alternatives, check [here](#).) Chapter 3 also describes some ways to convert legacy, non-Unicode fonts into Unicode. (A more complete list for Greek fonts is [here](#).)

Chapter 4 is on "Security," and starts by providing some helpful advice on creating strong yet memorable passwords. (Personally, I use the free, open source password manager [KeePass](#).) He also includes a discussion of "online security" involving privacy and "physical security" involving durability.

Chapter 5 describes "Text: Processors and Editors." The usual suspects are mentioned—Microsoft Word, OpenOffice, WordPerfect—but Naef devotes quite a few pages to XML editing and template and style creation. In particular, he recommends the [DocBook](#) schema. While I certainly understand the value of valid XML coding, I am thinking it is unlikely many biblical scholars are going to take the time to learn how to use it properly. The usual suspects mentioned above have ways of working with XML, albeit not altogether satisfactorily, and most of the academics I know who are writing have managed well enough with Word and its ability to save documents in various formats. (The biggest advantage I can see of using XML for biblical studies is to identify Bible references and to associate Greek or Hebrew word forms with their

lemmas. Start [here](#) for further discussion.) Under this category of word processors, a major omission, in my opinion, is that of [Nota Bene Lingua](#) (Windows) which has been designed with the needs of biblical scholars from its inception. Another technical, scholarly word processor is [Classical Text Editor](#), and [DavkaWriter](#) and [Mellel](#) are word processors for those especially interested in English-Hebrew composition.

Chapter 6 focuses on “Presentations.” It provides some guidelines for how one should prepare in advance and suggestions on being a better presenter. Regardless of the presentation software used, additional guidelines are provided for how to use slides and plan their layout and offers considerations of typography and use of non-Latin characters.

Chapter 7 deals with “Bibliographical Software.” Naef rightly notes the importance of having a good system for storing bibliographical data so that it can be reused and formatted in a variety of ways. Under the subcategory of free bibliographical software, I concur with his positive assessment of Zotero. Since one can attach notes, tags, related content, etc. to entries in Zotero, it really becomes more of a bibliographic database. It integrates well with Word, and users can choose a variety of bibliography styles to generate both footnotes (as I shall demonstrate here¹) and bibliographies. An additional benefit is that the resources in BibleWorks or Logos can easily be imported into Zotero. The only drawback to Zotero is that it requires Firefox as your browser, but there is also a benefit as well since this means that your bibliography is stored ‘in the cloud,’ can be synced across multiple computers, and can be accessed from any internet connected device. If you do not use Firefox, Naef identifies a number of other free bibliography programs as well commercial ones. An important omission here is the [Ibidem](#) program that is part of Nota Bene. A useful table comparing features of the bibliographical software options is provided on page 125.

Chapter 8 surveys “Bible Software,” and Naef’s first comment is on the need for some kind of standard for biblical resources. He notes that some projects are using Zefania XML but that Open Scriptures (OSIS) looks to be gaining more support. (Start [here](#) for more info.) Moving on to proprietary Bible software, Naef basically gives an introduction, describes resources available, and then looks at how searching biblical texts works. He goes into more detail on some aspects than may be needed for people who are not familiar with a program, and a screen capture illustration would have been helpful to give a feel for each. Fairly, but somewhat unevenly in terms of length, Naef describes BibleWorks (the latest version 8), Logos (presumably version 3 and not the recently released version 4), the Stuttgart Electronic Study Bible (which works with Logos’ Libronix Digital Library System), the Dead Sea Scrolls Electronic Library, and Accordance. He also notes a couple of free Bible software programs: BibleDesktop

¹ Thomas Naef, *Holy Bits* (Gorgias Press, 2009). Incidentally, on page 55, Naef notes that there is a template available that follows the SBL stylesheet and provides a link to the XML page [here](#). It is not clear how to install the SBL style, so here is what you need to do. Open that link in Firefox. From the menu: File > Save Page As > then: a) delete the “.xml” at the end of the file name so that the last three characters for the extension are: “.csi”; b) choose All Files in “Save as type”; c) save it somewhere where you can easily find it. Next, locate the file you just saved and right-click > Open with > Firefox (or, if Firefox is not listed, Choose Program > Firefox). When the message pops up asking whether to install, click on Install.

and The Word. There are, of course, quite a few other software packages available, especially free ones. (I would make particular note of [E-Sword](#) and [LaParola](#). For descriptions and evaluations of other programs, try [Bible Software Review](#), my own [Scroll and Screen](#) and [blog](#), and this [review of 20 less technical programs](#).) No mobile Bible software programs are indicated. In the end, the reader who is not familiar with Bible software has some idea of the scope of the programs listed but would be unable to know what program to get.

Chapter 9 is basically a listing of "Utilities" under the headings of "Graphics," "Internet," "Document Utilities," and "Diverse Utilities." Most of the information is quite basic: a listing of Internet browsers, anti-virus software, email clients, etc. There are quite a few unexplained acronyms used. More helpful is a longer description dealing with PDF tools. He mentions the use of PDF-XChange and OpenOffice as free ways of creating PDF files. To these I would also add [PDFCreator](#), an open source virtual printer that is able to create PDF files that handle embeddable Greek and Hebrew Unicode fonts (such as Cardo).

Chapter 10 references "Online (Extra)Biblical Texts." It includes a long list of web sites that most biblical scholars will find useful to bookmark, and many of them are not on the usual list of links. For quick access to biblical texts from your browser, I recommend going to the [Bible Study Tools](#) site. Next, click on the dropdown arrow in the search bar of either IE or Firefox. The browser should recognize that this page has a search dialogue on it and offer to add that search engine to your list of search providers. (I suggest the Bible Study Tools site, because it includes the NRSV among the many versions available. The [Bible Gateway](#) is another provider you might add for other Bible versions.) The [Tyndale ToolBar](#) is another excellent way to access biblical texts quickly from a browser. One major omission among the many sites he lists for accessing biblical and extrabiblical texts is the [Noncanonical Literature page at the the Wesley Center Online](#). It does identify the sources of the texts it puts online (a critique Naef mentions of the [site](#) he mentions) and includes a full collection of "OT Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha," "NT Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha," and "Other Noncanonical Early Christian Literature." Many good sites are listed in this chapter, but again, it would certainly be nice to have these links available on the web instead of needing to type them manually.

Considering my initial reservations about printing a *book* that deals so much with internet resources, it is a bit remarkable that Chapter 11 on "Online Books and Journals" begins with this observation: "The paper production of journals and books is prohibitively expensive. Putting the same information on a server is much cheaper." I agree, but this does raise the issue of print versus online publishing, particularly with regard to matters of quality assurance, peer review, and compensation to the author. In any case, this chapter does indeed provide a collection of links to online books and journals. The listing of journals is particularly helpful.

Chapter 12 lists "Online Bibliographies" but only free ones are listed. While this is a very useful list, and scholars will likely want to consult some of the bibliographies in specific areas of study, there are some important tools I use that should be included. First, I mentioned above the [Tyndale ToolBar](#). It includes a bibliography search feature that allows one to look up an author or title in Index theologicus (cited by Naef) and a number of the online libraries he mentions.

Second, [WorldCat](#) is another outstanding resource. I particularly appreciate that it searches books, DVDs, CDs, and articles. It also has ways of creating lists, building bibliographies, and creating easily exported data. It also can indicate whether a book is shelved at a nearby library. Further, like some library sites, it is recognized by Zotero so that one can quickly add items to a personal Zotero database from which they then become accessible in MS Word. Mention should also be made of [NotaBene's Archiva](#) program which is able to search online libraries, import them into NotaBene's Ibid module through which they are then available in the NotaBene word processor.

Chapter 13, "Different Thematic Resources," begins: "Find in this chapter some interesting websites." Indeed, there are quite a few sites, some well-known and others less so, which are worth bookmarking in your browser under the headings of "Ancient Languages," "Dictionaries and Lexicons," "Patristics," and "Archaeology." I have a particular interest in digital biblical mapping resources, so in addition to the BibleAtlas.org site Naef mentions, I would point to [my page of links](#) and [Mark Goodacre's at NT Gateway](#) for many more mapping sites.

Chapter 14 lists and briefly describes a variety of "Institutional and Personal Websites." The headings which organize this chapter are "Bible (and Religion) Study Portals," "Organizations and Societies," "Institutions," and "Individuals." It is something of an eclectic mix, but it includes ones that are worthy of note.

Chapter 15, as noted above, is simply a "Checklist" containing charts, illustrations, and directions related to material in the previous chapters.

Summary: At a list price of USD\$104, this book is more likely to be a library purchase rather than an individual one. There are some incorrect hyphenations and some odd expressions suggesting that English is not Naef's first language, but the value of the book is not in its grammar but in the resources it identifies. As mentioned above, it would be preferable to have the book's related website updated with the links, but that would also render buying the book irrelevant. So, check out the book at a library, bring along your computer, and enter the URLs of the rich collection of resources.