

Bible Gateway and The New Testament Gateway

Two Biblical Websites

Reviewed by Ryan Combs

BibleGateway.com is a website designed for online study and access of the scriptures. Unlike other sites that may have only one version of the Bible in one language, BibleGateway boasts thirty-five different languages and twenty-one versions of the Bible in English. Among the oldest are Jerome's Vulgate (AD 405) in Latin, the Wycliffe New Testament (1382) in English, the Luther Bible (1545) in German, and the King James Bible (1611) in English. There are also many modern versions, such as the New International Version and modern translations in Chinese, Arabic, and Creole. For those who would prefer to listen to the Bible, the site offers ten different versions and translations to play directly from the Internet in streaming audio.

The site also features a "verse of the day" and a blog—both available through RSS (Really Simple Syndication), which allows users to receive updates through their RSS reader. There is a tutorial, as well as the interactive ability to personalize the site for specific user preferences. For example, users could choose the King James Version, show apocryphal books, display the words of Christ in red, and change the text size as part of their personal default setup. The site also has the complete text for two Bible commentaries and three Bible dictionaries: InterVarsity Press's *New Testament Commentary* series,¹ Matthew Henry's *Concise Commentary on the Bible* (1706), M. G. Easton's *1897 Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, Hitchcock's *Bible Names Dictionary* (1869), and *Smith's Bible Names Dictionary* (1863).

The different versions of the Bible are searchable by book and verse, keyword, or topic, all directly from the home page. The search results are quickly displayed, and it is easy to switch between versions, allowing comparisons between translations or languages. Many of the texts offered on the site are in the public domain and are therefore downloadable as text or PDF files. The versions that are not covered by public domain copyright laws are still available to search and view but not for full download. There

are many versions of the Bible, however, that the site does not include, probably because the publishers will not grant viewing permission without a paid subscription. While the site does not offer every version of the Bible, the use of public domain versions keeps the site free and available to the widest variety of users.

One indication of this wide usage is found in comparing Google search rankings. As of October 2008, typing the word “Bible” into a Google search will result in BibleGateway appearing at the top of the list. (As an interesting aside, typing “Old Testament” or “New Testament” into Google will give you lds.org as the second result after Wikipedia.) These results, calculated by Google and called PageRank, are determined by the number of times other sites link to the page. The more links a site gets, especially by high PageRanked sites, the more likely the site will appear high on Google searches. Holding the primary spot means that most people who search the Internet to read from the Bible will probably end up at BibleGateway, which is useful because BibleGateway offers the Bible as a stand-alone document left to the interpretation of the reader, as opposed to a ministerial site like www.bible.com (currently second on the list in a Google search).

BibleGateway offers a quick tutorial with search examples and functions of the site. Another interesting feature of the site is the inclusion of several reading plans used by permission from *How to Read Your Bible* by David and Renée Sanford.² The plans offer cover-to-cover biographical readings (in which a different person in the Bible is featured daily), survey readings (which include highlights from every book in the Bible), and chronological readings (for key stories placed in chronological order).

Compared to other free-access Bible websites, BibleGateway is robust. Logos Bible Software, which specializes in CD-ROM software of Bible study tools, has created a free-access website that is essentially a scaled-down version of their software. Located at <http://bible.logos.com>, the site looks better, is very easy to use, and is very quick to search but lacks many of the extra functions found on BibleGateway. For example, Logos offers only the Bible (no reference works) and a handful of versions and languages. Logos also offers a site called “What Does the Bible Say about . . .” at <http://wbsa.logos.com>, which is organized by topic and is very useful but not necessarily more useful than BibleGateway’s topical index.

A useful function that is not currently part of BibleGateway is the ability to search multiple translations for the same word. Currently, to accomplish such a search, one would have to perform separate searches within each version. There is also no option available to search within the commentaries or dictionaries on the site; perhaps both of these options are

not in high enough demand to warrant their addition. Overall, the site is excellent at providing what it is meant to provide—access to the Bible for the widest possible audience.

The New Testament Gateway

Mark Goodacre, associate professor of New Testament at Duke University, created The New Testament Gateway (ntgateway.com) as a site for scholarly research in the New Testament and related subjects. Unlike BibleGateway, which houses its own content, this site directs the user to other sites to help them find information. Therefore, the home page layout consists of links to topics, and each topic page is full of other links to books, photographs, maps, and other media.

The site topics include many books and films that touch on the subject of the New Testament. While the media is generally limited to scholarly works, some questionable materials are listed—specifically among the films. Depending on the scholar, any item might be considered important for scholarly research, but most of the popular films listed would be useful only for studies on Hollywood's portrayal of Christ. Further investigation into the Frequently Asked Questions reveals that any media on the site that is linked to amazon.com, amazon.co.uk, or amazon.de provides The New Testament Gateway with a small percentage of the sale resulting from these links. Despite this function of commerce and a few odd items, the site is rich with the best sources about the New Testament.

Most of the sources and subjects covered require prior knowledge of the topics. The items listed on the site are presented without approval or criticism, unless not being included is proof of criticism. In this way, both BibleGateway and The New Testament Gateway present their information without bias. Mark Goodacre freely invites anyone to submit sites they are aware of or their own sites for inclusion in The New Testament Gateway, as long as they meet his requirements of scholarship.

The site also features a weblog available through RSS, which differs in content from the BibleGateway blog. Where the BibleGateway gives infrequent updates regarding new texts of the Bible available online, the New Testament Gateway blog is Goodacre's own academic blog, featuring news items relating to biblical studies, reviews of biblical literature, and reports on the various conferences Goodacre attends and lectures he presents. The blog is understandably updated more frequently than BibleGateway's blog, which usually consists of updates on additional versions of the Bible added to the site. Of particular interest is The New Testament Gateway blogroll, which consists of links to other Bible-related blogs.

The “All-in-One Biblical Resources Search” is another of Goodacre’s projects housed on The New Testament Gateway. It is a collection of searchable websites related to biblical studies, and the sites are linked so that a user can search directly from The New Testament Gateway. The sites are arranged into six different topical sections, representing some of the best biblical scholarship available over the Internet.

The New Testament Gateway is a site that anyone with a serious interest in the New Testament should check regularly. The site provides easier access to a wider variety of sources than searching Google or browsing a library will provide. BibleGateway is also an excellent tool for the specific task of searching the Bible and comparing versions and languages. Both sites provide a free service in biblical study that anyone can use.

Ryan Combs (ryan_combs@byu.edu) is a reference librarian for Brigham Young University’s Harold B. Lee Library, specializing in religion, philosophy, and ancient and medieval studies. He received his Master of Library and Information Science (MLIS) from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and his BA in Near Eastern studies from Brigham Young University.

1. Grant R. Osborne, ed., *The IVP New Testament Commentary Series*, 20 vols. (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1997). All other titles are in the public domain.

2. David and Renée Sanford, *How to Read Your Bible* (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, 2005).