

Adventures into Android Bible Software and Apps



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I've been venturing into the waters of Android over the last few months and of course had to look at Bible apps. Below is based on a post I made on my personal website (<http://www.kevinpurcell.org/archives/1281>). In case you are not a regular reader of my website – shame on you – I wanted to reproduce it with some alterations thanks to the help of Craig Rairdin of Laridian who made a thoughtful comment on the blog post. He is also one of our inaugural inductees into the Christian Computing Magazine's Hall of Fame. Hit the link above and be sure to read his full comment below the post. Read on for the updated version:

Now that I have been using an Android Phone and Tablet, I have finally been able to test and use Android Bible software and apps. The phone I have is the HTC Thunderbolt, a fast Verizon LTE phone that has a beautiful 4.3" screen but unfortunately is still stuck running Android 2.2 also called FroYo (short for Frozen Yogurt) instead of the latest update called Gingerbread or Android 2.3.

On the tablet side, I am using an ASUS Eee Pad Transformer. It is running the latest version of Honeycomb 3.1 and while I've only had it a few days, I am really enjoying the tablet and Android in general. As my readers know, I've jumped from the Windows side to Apple for my computing needs. In the mobile realm I've gone the other way – somewhat away from Apple to Android the more Windows-like mobile OS. I say that because it is more open than Apple's iOS and takes a little more effort to learn but once you do you have a

power and customizability.

At this point, I've mostly used Olive Tree's Bible Reader (<http://bit.ly/ocIHMg>), YouVersion's Bible (<http://bit.ly/mWgEZ1>), and app called DailyBible (<http://bit.ly/oFhLIR>). I'm running the beta version of Logos (<http://bit.ly/o0p95F>) and a very early pre-release of Laridian's PocketBible (<http://bit.ly/ogUoDV>). Those last two are in the very early stages so it is not really fair to compare them to OliveTree and the others, which have been running on Android from its earliest days. OliveTree has a larger development team, so they can afford a little more diversification.

While all of these are good apps, they have one thing in common. They lag behind their iPad/iPhone counterparts running on iOS in features and sometimes in stability. Let's take Olive Tree Bible Reader as an example. The iOS version is rock solid and has a lot of

great features. It has split screen capability and markup features like book bookmarks and notes. The most recent stable Android version only recently added some of these features, but not all of the iOS features are present yet.

Logos has a good iOS app. They haven't even released an Android version yet, but do have a public beta (see link above). Their beta is little more than a book reader. You cannot compare translations, there is no Passage Guide or Word Study Guide and like the iOS version it has no note taking feature, bookmarking or highlighting.

Laridian's Android app is an alpha, not even a beta. I downloaded it and they have a great start, but it is definitely missing most of the great features of the iPhone version.

Why are iOS apps so far ahead of Android?

1. iOS is ahead of Android. The operating system was released before Android.
2. Android apps don't sell as well as iOS apps. Developers are not making as much money on the Android platform as they are on the iOS side.
3. Android is not as stable. Honeycomb which is the nickname for the latest version of the Android tablet platform is just not as stable as iOS is on the iPad.

Some other significant issues I learned from developer Craig Rairdin. He commented on my aforementioned post about this subject saying that there are some additional reasons for the disparity for many Android and iOS developers who work on one app and try to make them run on both platforms natively.

1. Apple keeps moving the goal posts which is to say their constant updating of the OS – the methods developers use to get apps running on the OS changes as well as the legal ways developers can make money through their apps. I can see how this must be frustrating. Imagine if in the middle of the Super Bowl the NFL made a first down 20 yards instead of 10 and said touchdowns now only count five points instead of six? Or what if the state passed a law saying that the speed limit was 63 instead of 65 and that the limit was in effect whether the signs had changed or not? That's not exactly what Apple does, but it helps you see the problem. The change in how Apple handles in app purchases and book apps were drastic differences in the rules making it harder on book apps like Laridian's and the others' than say games or apps that turn the phone's camera flash into a flashlight.

2. iOS is more stable despite how frustrating as Apple makes it because of the above change to the rules. Rairdin believes that coding tools are more stable

and easier to use on the iOS side. I won't go into the technical reasons for this since you can read his remarks.

3. Apple's changes slows down Android development for small teams. If a developer is working on an Android Bible app, when Apple makes a change that breaks the iOS app, he or she needs to stop everything to fix the iOS app leaving Android development to wait.

4. Apps that run great on older Android phones might not run on newer versions of the OS and vice versa. This is one of the most frustrating things with Android. Instead of the OS maker controlling when a user gets the update, the phone carriers control it. For example Sprint phones might get an update but AT&T phones might not. Or Verizon phones might get it but Sprint doesn't. At least with an iPhone, everyone has access at once.

I hope Google fixes some of these issues so that the apps are more equal in feature set. Right now it seems that from both an app and operating system standpoint Android is just a little bit behind iOS in general. That is too bad, because from a hardware perspective there are plenty of great Android devices that are as good if not better than the iPad 2. I really like my ASUS Eee Pad Transformer. I also really like my HTC Thunderbolt although I'd suggest waiting for the upcoming Droid Bionic if you want a truly great Android smart phone. Android has some incredible features like openness and much better navigation software. You also have more options for apps because of the Amazon App Store. On the tablet side Honeycomb 3.1 is better than Honeycomb 3.0. I just hope 3.2 will be that much of an improvement and that ASUS pushes it out soon after

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