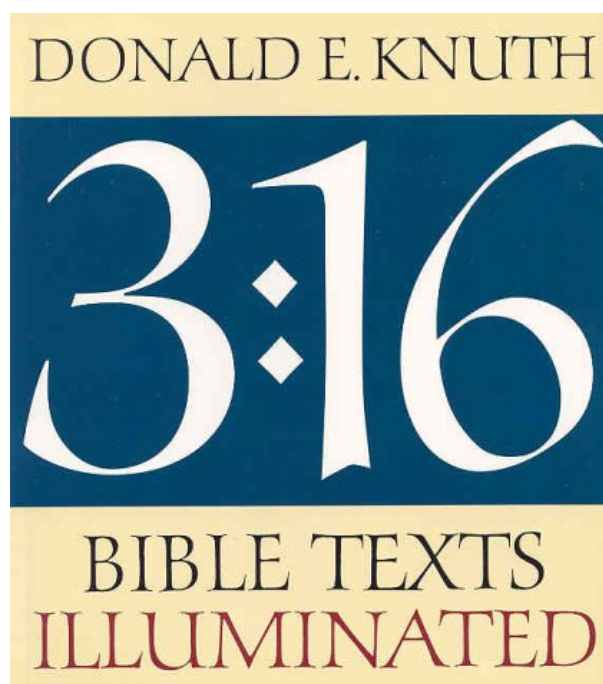


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What happens when a world-renowned computer scientist applies scientific methodology to studying the Bible, writes about his findings, and has some of the world's best calligraphers illustrate the work? The result is 3:16 Bible Texts Illuminated, a treasure of profound biblical insight and enchanting calligraphy that will enlighten your mind, your eyes, and your spirit. Donald E. Knuth so loved the Bible that he dedicated five years of his life to creating this masterpiece. With it, you will learn about each 3:16 verse of the Bible, how it came to be written, and how it contributes to the wholeness of the Bible.

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- 268 pages

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Highly Illuminating Book. Buy It Now!

By B. Marold

'3:16 Bible Texts Illuminated' by computer scientist extraordinaire and lifelong Lutheran, Donald E. Knuth is one of those truly unique books which seems to be perfectly composed to illuminate a subject virtually everyone takes for granted. The best analogy I can think of in another field is the little book 'The Elements of Style' by Strunk and White, which provides a brilliantly concise set of instructions on writing better.

Knuth's book is a wondrous amalgam of at least three different interests, Christianity, Computer Science, or more exactly, meticulous scholarship, and the art font design and calligraphy. The very title of the book has a dual meaning in that Knuth's commentary illuminates the 59 selected verses from the bible, plus the very artistic renderings of these texts by 59 of the world's greatest calligraphers, in much the same way that they may have been 'illuminated' in Medieval hand-written copies of the Bible.

I am tempted to call this 'Bible Commentary for Dummies', but it does not have the glib, simplistic tone of the 'Dummy' franchisee. What it does share with this series is that it is a superb introduction to the world of Bible scholarship and the fact that the history of those words on the printed page of your Bible have a density of meaning and penumbra of alternate interpretations which will boggle the mind.

While Bible commentary is a major field of professional scholarship, my sense is that the average Christian is not nearly as caught up in the discussion of scripture as their Jewish brethren. In fact, the Hebrew embraces one of the classic methods of enlightenment, which is deep study of the Torah and Talmud and the many historical commentaries made of these sacred books. Where the average devout Jew will spend much

time reading his Maimonides, I suspect very few Lutherans spend much quality time reading the writings of Luther, let alone St. Augustine or even Jonathan Edwards.

These 59 verses, the 16th verse after the beginning of Chapter 3 of each book were basically chosen at random to be the text for a Bible study class conducted by Knuth at his church several years ago. The only verse not chosen at random was this verse from the Gospel of John, which is arguably the most important verse in all of the New Testament. Knuth picked this number because he wanted to be sure that at least one out of all the verses would be interesting and important. He was probably as surprised as his readers to find that every verse had much to offer, as long as Knuth gave each his thorough scholarship that placed the words of the text in their context.

Of course, one can wonder, which translation did Knuth use? It turns out that Knuth did original translations of all the verses from the original Hebrew and Greek, and, he says this was one of the very best decisions he ever made in his intellectual life. This is primarily because there is literally very little consensus on the correct translation of the source text, assuming there is even agreement on what the source text should actually be. The second and possibly more important reason for his reader is that a new translation, especially of the more familiar texts, will give one a new and better perspective than the same old King James quote or some other of the dozens of modern translations.

For each verse, there are three pages of text plus one full page of art giving the calligrapher's interpretation of the text. All of the calligraphic works are beautiful to look at. Most are pretty standard, letting the ingenuity of the font and standard transformations of size and coloring to convey emphasis or special effect. Some, however, are far more imaginative, incorporating pictures and even mirror images of text to help 'illuminate' the words. While the range of styles is great, my first impression is the work of Ben Shawn with mixing words and pictures.

My only argument with this volume is that Knuth does little to explain much of the reasoning behind his selection and his method of scholarship. Fortunately, he has done this in a more recent book, 'Things a Computer Scientist Rarely Talks About' which dedicates much of his six lecture to the background to this book, both its art and its scholarship. In this book, for example, we learn of both the many pitfalls to accurate translation, and how a person with no knowledge of either Hebrew or Greek could go about translating these texts. The secret lies in the enormous body of concordances compiled over the years which detail everything you will ever want to know about each and every Hebrew and Greek word in the Bible.

I found it ironic that while Knuth indicated that a really good translation had to go so far as to pay attention to the way the author of a particular chapter used their words, in the commentary, he jumps thousands of years to use references to the New Testament (originally Greek) to explain concepts in the Old Testament (originally Hebrew).

While I think this is a superb introduction to the material and techniques of really diligent Bible study, one will get much more out of this book if you have at least two other books at hand. The first is a good, modern Bible translation to look up the hundreds of verses cited in the text. The second is a set of really good maps of the ancient lands of and around Palestine and modern Israel. 'The Oxford Bible Commentary' has an especially good set of maps covering various periods of the Bible texts.

While I may not be the best person to judge this, I do believe there is no particularly strong Lutheran bias in the scholarship, although Luther is cited more often than many major Christian commentator.

This book is a real gem. Read it from cover to cover!

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Five Stars

By Brian

Thanks!

9 of 9 people found the following review helpful.

Very Interesting

By Mark Nenadov

This is a truly unique work. Knuth has obviously studied a lot in order to produce this study and it shows. The concept in and of itself, composing a book of 3:16 of every book of the Bible that contains the said verse, is unique. And the word art is truly wonderful touch. And the overview of each book of the Bible being covered is great.

I don't necessarily agree with every single thing that Knuth says here, but generally I found his comments to be very deep and insightful. Knuth here shows that many of the good attributes of a computer scientist can be applied to Bible study, with great results.

Truly one can be a man of faith and a man of reason, logic, and science. I highly recommend this book for any interested Christian who also is involved in Computer Science. If for nothing else, it is a worthwhile on the basis of the scripture word-art alone.

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