# What Is Wrong with the SourceView Bible App?

Nothing. Everything. It all depends on how you use it.

Okay, one step back: what *is* the SourceView Bible app? It is the app that builds on the SourceView Bible, produced by David Hamilton and available since 2011. Its unique feature is displaying the text in four colours, depending on the speaker or writer (the "source", hence the name):

- The narrator
- God
- The lead character
- Supporting characters

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During YWAM Together in Kansas City this year, the accompanying app was released (you can watch the event), which can do much more than the print Bible. Rather than explain what this "more" entails, I encourage you to visit the website at http://sourceviewbible.com/ or the iTunes or Google Play store to get an impression. It has much to do with all the various characters or "sources" appearing in the pages of Scripture.

Plus, there is the option to display the text coloured according to the sphere of influence that it touches on. It not clear to me whether this option is included with SourceView or is actually part of the SphereView add-on (see below). Seven such spheres are distinguished. Whether a particular passage is relevant for one or more of these is of course somewhat open to debate. At times, I found it a bit of a puzzle to understand why a particular phrase or sentence was marked for the respective sphere, but this is not necessarily a bad thing: it forced me to think.

SourceView is available as a free download for Apple and Android devices. It can be enhanced by purchasing SphereView, also called Spheres, as an add-on if you want the full functionality. For a limited time, however, you can use Spheres for free. This addition makes it easy to look up what specific books or characters have to say about a particular sphere.

There are lots of Bible apps out there and many of them offer more or less the same features. SourceView and SphereView are different; they do not simply copy what other apps do but make an original contribution to the field.
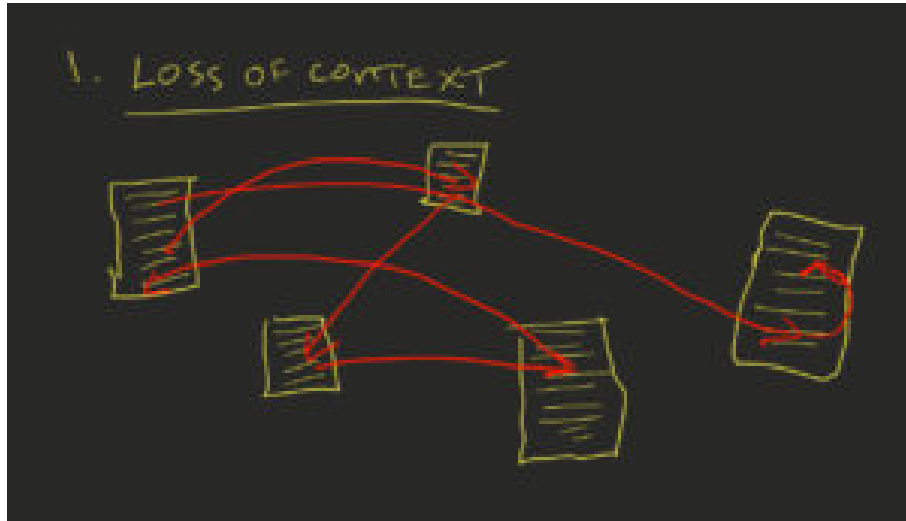
With this in mind, let's return to my question.

## So What Is Wrong with the SourceView Bible App?

So what is wrong with the SourceView Bible app? As I said, everything or nothing, depending on how you use it. Here are some pitfalls to avoid in order to put the app to wholesome use.

**(1) Loss of context.** This is not just a problem of SourceView. Most Bible apps enable us to jump around

from passage to passage and connect and combine verses from unrelated contexts. As if it made no difference for the meaning of a sentence where in the Bible it is placed. In reality, each statement can only be fully understood as an integrated part of the book or document in which it is found. Context is everything, but it is easy to lose in the exciting reality of the hypertext universe.



**(2) An ahistorical reading.** It is easy to treat all text as on an equal level, as if it is all in the same way the word of God to us. In reality, there is an unfolding and a progression in time that needs to be taken into consideration. It took well over 1000 years to produce the Bible. It makes a difference for interpretation and application at what stage in this process a particular text was written. A printed Bible comes with an order that may not be perfect, but at least it is visible at all times: you can see and feel that you are at the beginning, in the middle, or toward the end of the book. Bits and bytes do not have the same visual and tactile quality. Jump around a bit, and you completely lose track of time in more ways than one.

These first two pitfalls are related and they are not new. They are about losing sight of the literary and historical context of each word in Scripture. Obviously, this is not unique to Bible apps. People have been losing sight of context at least since chapters and verses were added to the text. Concordances and topical Bibles come with the same pitfall, yet we do not burn our concordance (assuming we still have one in paper). However, Bible apps like SourceView do increase the risk of this happening, because it is so easy to take off and surf on, jumping from reference to reference. This makes it all the more important to be aware of these dangers.

The next two pitfalls specifically apply to SphereView.

**(3) A "blueprint" mentality.** When it comes to the Bible and how its content relates to the spheres of life, David Hamilton speaks of God's *design*. Landa Cope, a YWAMer who triggered David's study of the spheres in the Bible, uses the term *template*. I like this word because it suggests something that can be adjusted and filled according to need, purpose, and circumstance – much like a template in Microsoft Word.

I get uncomfortable, however, when the word *blueprint* is used in this context. This is the wrong idea. A blueprint is a detailed plan, for instance for building a house, a bridge, or a ship, that needs to be

meticulously followed. The Bible is not a blueprint. And God is not a blueprint kind of God. He used this approach with the tabernacle, but that is about it.

Look at creation. What God wants, and I would argue this applies to human society as well, is creativity and diversity. You don't get creativity and diversity by implementing a blueprint. There is creativity involved in making the blueprint, as any architect can confirm. But once it is there and construction starts, creativity ends. You don't want the builder of a bridge or an airplane to suddenly get creative and try out a few new ideas! But most of life doesn't work this way and cannot be planned ahead in the form of a blueprint.

What God gives us is foundations. This includes some limits. For instance, when it comes to marriage, don't have sex with someone who is not your spouse. It also includes a vision for something good, and ideal to aspire to. Beyond that, things are largely left open; you can make your own decisions. As a result, no two marriages are the same. In short, God's word may well be compared to a template, but it is not a blueprint.

**(4) Treating everything as prescriptive or normative** (especially if it is marked for a particular sphere). In reality, much in Scripture is descriptive. It tells us what happened, not necessarily what ought to happen. Even if it is prescriptive, it may not be universal or its application may come with modifications. Simply doing what the Bible says is not always right. For instance, those who insist women in Western society should cover their heads in church based on 1 Corinthians 11 do the exact opposite of what Paul wanted for the church in Corinth: a culturally proper and non-offensive dress code.

These four pitfalls are not new; new digital possibilities, however, enlarge their potential for damage. The quality of our interpretation, especially in the Age of Bible Apps, depends heavily on our overall grasp of the Bible. So keep reading whole books of the Bible as well.

The SourceView app offers a cool way to do this: get together with three others and read a book out loud, with each of you taking one of the four colours. This turns your reading into a role play.

And yes, it is okay to have fun while reading the Bible.

*How did you like the SourceView app?* Leave a comment!