

Biblical Hermeneutics
Methodology of Word Studies
Part 1: Reference Books

I. Introduction

- A. Words are the building blocks of language.
- B. A **word study** is a method of learning the meaning of words in the original languages of the Bible (Greek, Hebrew, Aramaic).
 - 1. The goal of a word study is to determine how a word was used by the author in accordance with the normal usage of the word in the author's time and culture.
 - 2. A word study will yield two things about a word:
 - a. The semantic range of the word in the original language – the possible meanings of the word
 - b. The meaning of the word in the passage you are studying.
- C. There are 2 ways to learn the range of meanings of a word:
 - 1. Look up the meaning of the word in reference books, such as Greek lexicons and word study books.
 - 2. Inductively determine the meaning by looking at the places the word is used in the Bible.

II. Essential reference books

- A. Good Bible study requires high quality reference books that show the meaning of key words.
 - 1. Concordances, Greek/Hebrew lexicons, word study books, Bible dictionaries, a Bible encyclopedia
 - 2. The least expensive way to acquire a good reference library is with Logos Bible software or another good Bible program that includes reference books (Accordance, Bible Works).
 - 3. Since a great deal of new insights have been gained in the last 100 years on the meaning of Greek and Hebrew words, newer reference books are much more likely to be accurate (since 1960). Verify the original publication date of reference books in Bible software and online (e.g. on Wikipedia).
- B. Greek and Hebrew lexicons
 - 1. A lexicon is a dictionary that lists words in one language and the meaning in another language.
 - 2. It helps to have a basic knowledge of Greek or Hebrew or at least the script. Logos Bible software lets you look up words in Greek and Hebrew lexicons, by clicking on an English word in your Bible.
 - 3. Information in a lexicon article on a word
 - a. The semantic range (possible meanings). E.g. the Greek word ἀδελφός (*adelphos*, “brother”) from Bauer’s Greek lexicon:
 - (1) physical brother: a male born from the same parents
 - (2) a person viewed with close affinity (has several subcategories)
 - (a) one who shares the same beliefs
 - (b) a compatriot (citizen of the same country)
 - (c) a neighbor or close friend
 - b. Examples of each meaning: Bible verses and citations outside the Bible where the word is used in a particular way.
 - c. Word roots and etymology (the derivation of the word from older words)
 - d. Irregular forms of words (e.g. an unusual plural or possessive form)
 - e. Bibliography on each word: articles and other books
 - 4. Greek lexicons
 - a. Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (BDAG or Bauer): The standard authoritative Greek lexicon for the New Testament period (called Hellenistic or Koine Greek).

- b. J. P. Louw and E.A. Nida, *A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* (Louw-Nida): A useful supplement to Bauer's lexicon, but not as much in depth. It groups words with a similar meaning (semantic domain) so you can see the words that share a similar meaning. Each word appears under several articles, with a separate entry for each semantic domain.
 - c. Liddell and Scott, *A Greek English Lexicon* (LS or LSJ): The standard lexicon of classical Greek. It covers the full time range of ancient Greek, from 11th century BC through the Byzantine (medieval) period. Be sure that a particular meaning is appropriate in the New Testament period.
5. Hebrew Lexicons
- a. Koehler, Baumgartner and Stamm, *Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (HALOT): The standard modern, authoritative lexicon for Biblical Hebrew.
 - b. Brown, Driver and Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon* (BDB). Still widely used and trusted, despite being written in 1906.
 - c. Holladay's *Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*: Concise, yet reliable and easier to use than BDB. It is an abridgement of HALOT. It should not replace HALOT or BDB for study.
 - d. Clines, David J. A., ed. *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*. A state of the art, authoritative Hebrew lexicon that covers from earliest Hebrew through AD 200, including non-biblical Hebrew, such as the Dead Sea Scrolls, Ben Sira, and Hebrew inscriptions.
6. Lexicons to avoid
- a. Strong's *Greek and Hebrew Lexicon* (in Strong's Concordance): This tells you the ways that the Greek and Hebrew words are translated in the KJV and includes a basic definition of words (a **gloss**). It is out of date (19th century) and never was useful for serious word definitions.
 - b. Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*: This was a masterful work in its time, but out of date (late 19th century). Many word meanings are inadequate, due to the discovery of thousands of Greek writings from the New Testament era. The publication and analysis of these documents around 1900 revolutionized scholars' understanding of New Testament Greek.
 - c. Liddell and Scott, *An Intermediate Greek Lexicon* (use with caution): This abridgment of Liddell-Scott has just the basic word definitions, with no indication of appropriate time periods or how frequently the word is used a particular way. Some meanings were not used in the New Testament period.
7. See Fee, *New Testament Exegesis*, p.p. 104-109 for an example of how to use Bauer's lexicon.
- C. Greek and Hebrew word study books
- 1. Word study books have detailed articles on the meaning of the words in the original languages.
 - a. semantic range and nuances of meaning
 - b. the changes in meaning different periods of history (diachronic study)
 - c. the different uses of words by various biblical authors (synchronic study)
 - d. the theological significance of the words in the New Testament and Old Testament.
 - e. Essays are comprehensive so they can be quite large (the article on *agape* is 35 pages in TDNT)
 - 2. Using a word study book
 - a. To get the most out of word study books, a basic knowledge of Greek or Hebrew is important.
 - (1) However, one can still skim the articles and learn a lot.
 - (2) Some books have the words arranged by English words, rather than Greek or Hebrew words.
 - b. Two ways to use these books:
 - (1) Look up key, theologically weighty words in a passage you are studying.
 - (2) Consult the Scripture index or search with Bible software to find articles on words in the passage you are studying.

3. Word study books must be read with an alert and critical mind to extract the useful information.
 - a. These books blend a study of word meanings, the history of words, and theological usage of words. Read the articles with care to separate the various types of information.
 - b. They typically contain information about the history of the meaning of words.
 - (1) Don't use a meaning from a non-biblical time (e.g. a classical Greek meaning).
 - c. These are sometimes called "theological dictionaries" because they look at the theological significance of the usage of words. Sometimes the author's theology colors his understanding of word.
 - d. Some of these works are subject to various errors in determining word meanings, such as the etymological fallacy and anachronisms.

4. Recommended Greek word study books:
 - a. Thorough:
 - (1) Moises Silva, ed., *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*. 5 vol. (NIDNTTE): The best word study book for the New Testament. Moderate to conservative theologically. More reliable, up to date and easier to use than TDNT. Greek and Hebrew words are transliterated, except in the subtitles of articles. Words are grouped by English meaning, so look in the index to Greek words or search with Bible software. This is an updated and expanded edition based on the *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, edited by Colin Brown (NIDNTT), which is also very good.
 - (2) Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. 10 vols (TDNT or Kittel): A standard word study book with in-depth articles on Greek words and their theological significance, including the changes in meaning through time (diachronic study).
 - (3) Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider, eds.. *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (EDNT): A moderately thorough study of the usage of every word in the New Testament. Easier for non-specialists to read than TDNT.
 - (4) Ceslas Spicq, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, 3 vol. (TLNT) The theological significance of words in the New Testament, against the background of sources near the time of the New Testament. Valuable, but not as in-depth or complete as TDNT or NIDNTT.
 - b. Concise:
 - (1) Verlyn Verbrugge, ed., *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology. Abridged Edition*. A concise, inexpensive 1 volume abridgement of NIDNTT for readers with little knowledge of Greek. The most usable, up-to-date word study book for pastors.
 - (2) Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, Geoffrey Bromiley, eds. *Abridged Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (TDNTA or "Little Kittel"): A 1 volume abridgement of TDNT. Articles are more manageable and easier to read. Greek and Hebrew words are transliterated.
 - (3) William D. Mounce, *Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*. A beginner's word study book, designed for lay persons. It is more accurate and up to date than Vines, but not nearly as thorough as other works listed here.
 - c. Best choices
 - (1) Thorough (best first):
 - (a) *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*
 - (b) *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*
 - (c) *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*
 - (2) Concise:
 - (a) *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology. Abridged Edition*
 - (b) *Abridged Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* ("Little Kittel")
 - (3) Logos Bible software packages have many of these.

5. Recommended Hebrew word study books:
 - a. Willem A. VanGemeren, ed., *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*. 5 vol. (NIDOTTE). The best word study book for the Old Testament.

- b. R. Laird Harris, Gleason Archer and Bruce Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. 2 vols (TWOT). A good, concise discussion of the meaning of Hebrew words written by top evangelical scholars. This is the most useful Hebrew word study book for pastors. It does not require a knowledge of Hebrew, since the words are also indexed by Strong's numbers.
 - c. William D. Mounce, *Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*. Good for beginners.
6. Dated word study books to avoid:
- a. Even though Logos Bible software is one of the best ways you can do Bible study today, some books in the base packages are old and should be avoided.
 - b. Kenneth Wuest, *Wuest's Word Studies in the Greek New Testament*. 4 vol. A dated, but readable discussion of Greek words. Scholars no longer accept some ideas about Greek.
 - c. W. E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*. Out of date and based on assumptions about Greek not accepted by modern scholars. Use Mounce instead.
 - d. Richard Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament*: A dated work, with many invalid conclusions, based on comparison to Latin and using classical Greek assumptions, etymological fallacies, etc.. Caution: The Logos electronic edition is dated 2003, but the book was published in 1858.
 - e. Marvin Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*: Dated word studies arranged by Bible passage. It is less reliable than Wuest and draws many ideas from Trench.
- D. Bible dictionaries and Bible encyclopedias
1. These explain the word usage in the Bible, the theological significance of words and cultural, and historical and geographic background. Many include maps, photographs and drawings.
 2. They may contrast the meanings of synonyms (words with similar meanings). Some show Greek or Hebrew words in transliterated form, so you do not need to know Greek or Hebrew.
 3. A Bible dictionary is more like a small encyclopedia than a dictionary of word meanings.
 - a. A Bible encyclopedia has multiple volumes and longer articles.
 - b. Rather than a simple word definition, there is an article explaining each topic in some detail.
 4. How a Bible dictionary can help you understand biblical words
 - a. Articles on a topic include a discussion of key Greek and Hebrew words related to the subject.
 - (1) An article on "love" defines Greek/Hebrew words for love and related words (e.g. "mercy")
 - (2) An article on "salvation" explains words related to salvation ("redemption", "justification", "forgiveness")
 - b. Bible dictionaries may also contrast the meanings of synonyms (words with similar meanings).
 - c. Most give the Greek or Hebrew words in transliterated Roman letters.
 - d. Word definitions are generally not as precise or authoritative as a lexicon or word study book.
 5. Suggestions for using Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias:
 - a. There may not be an article title with the exact word you are interested in.
 - (1) Look under generic categories: (see "weights and measures" to find "talent").
 - (2) Look under related words. To find articles on "love", also look under "brotherly love", "ethics", "beloved", "hate", etc.
 - (3) Sometimes the word will be listed under its King James or RSV translation.
 - (4) Consult the index.
 - b. Be careful not to read the meaning of one Greek or Hebrew word into another.
 - c. Filter out irrelevant material. Not everything in the article will be applicable to your passage.
 6. Recommended:
 - a. Bible dictionaries
 - (1) Douglas, *New Bible Dictionary*: A very reliable, basic level evangelical work. The same text, but with more pictures, is in the 3 vol. *Illustrated Bible Dictionary*.

- (2) *Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Logos Bible software only): a medium level Bible dictionary included with Logos Bible software. Articles are frequently updated and distributed electronically. Articles vary in depth and quality.
 - (3) *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*. A good basic 1 volume evangelical dictionary.
 - (4) *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*: Well written articles by theologically moderate to liberal scholars. This respected reference includes articles by leading Protestant, Catholic and Jewish scholars spanning the theological spectrum from liberal to conservative.
 - (5) Elwell, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*. A useful basic Bible dictionary intended for lay persons.
- b. Bible encyclopedias
- (1) G.W. Bromiley, ed., *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. 4 vol. (ISBE): An outstanding, detailed encyclopedia that should be used by every Bible student. It is theologically conservative to moderate. Avoid the 1915 edition, which dated and liberal.
 - (2) *Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*. 6 vol. (ABD or AYBD): Scholarly, in-depth, authoritative treatment of subjects by the top moderate to liberal scholars.
 - (3) IVP Theological Dictionaries set (Logos IVP Essentials Collection, 12 vol.): *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*; *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*; *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*; *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*; etc. In depth discussion by top evangelical scholars.
- c. See the annotated bibliography in Klein, Blomberg and Hubbard, *Biblical Interpretation* for additional suggestions and comments on various dictionaries.

E. Concordances

1. A **concordance** lists the verses in the Bible where various words are used.
 - a. It is like an index to the Bible.
 - b. An **exhaustive concordance** (or complete concordance) lists all occurrences of every word in the Bible, except little words like “and”, “or”, “the”.
 - c. You can get concordances for most Bible translations and the original Greek New Testament and Hebrew Old Testament.
 - d. Bible software, such as Logos Bible software, is at its heart a computerized concordance.
 - e. A concordance or Bible software is an indispensable tool for inductive Bible study.
2. In order to develop an intuitive feel for a word, you need to read lots of places where the word is used. Studying a word in context will give you a better feel for the word than an article in a lexicon.
3. Some uses for a concordance:
 - a. Find every place a particular word is used in the Bible
 - b. Determine the Greek or Hebrew word that is behind an English word in your Bible translation
 - c. Learn inductively how a Greek or Hebrew word is used, so you can learn its semantic range.
 - d. Find cross references to an idea in a passage you are studying.
 - e. Find a verse reference when you can only remember part of the verse.
4. English Bible concordances
 - a. Strong’s and Young’s concordances are the classic concordances of the KJV
 - (1) Both allow you to find the Greek or Hebrew word that the English word translates.
 - (2) Young’s concordance groups words by Greek and Hebrew words within the listing for an English word used in the KJV.
 - (3) Strong’s concordance assigns a numerical code (“**Strong’s number**”) for each Greek and Hebrew word.
 - (4) The problem with both is that they are based on the KJV. The KJV used a late medieval Greek text (Textus Receptus) which is less reliable than the text used by modern translations, which is based on very early Greek manuscripts.
 - b. The NASB concordance is the best modern English concordance, because the NASB (New American Standard Bible) is a literal translation of the best early Greek and Hebrew texts.

- (1) Thus you can reliably find all instances of a particular Greek or Hebrew word.
- (2) The concordance uses a number system for Greek or Hebrew words. The numbers are the same as Strong's numbers, with added numbers for words not used in the KJV (e.g. 2603a).
- c. English concordances to avoid
 - (1) Any concordance that is not exhaustive or does not indicate the Greek and Hebrew word.
 - (2) NIV concordance: not based on a literal translation and thus is not as useful for word studies.
 - (3) ESV concordance: does not include the Greek or Hebrew words.
5. Greek and Hebrew concordances
 - a. The best way to find all occurrences of a word with a printed reference book.
 - b. Words are indexed by the dictionary form of Greek or Hebrew words and verses.
 - c. You can find all occurrences of a Greek or Hebrew word in one listing, regardless of how it is translated. With an English concordance you must look up each translation of a word.
 - d. You can use these even if you do not know the original language, since verse numbers are listed.
 - e. Greek New Testament concordances:
 - (1) H. Bachmann and H. Slaby, eds. *Computer Concordance to the Novum Testamentum Graece*. This is based on the best early Greek texts.
 - (2) Moulton and Geden *Concordance to the Greek New Testament*. A 19th century concordance that is convenient to use, but not based on the Greek text that modern scholars use.
 - f. Hebrew Bible concordances: See discussion in Klein, et al, *Biblical Interpretation*, p. 516.
6. "Englishman's" Greek and Hebrew concordances
 - a. These index the words in Greek or Hebrew and display the verses in English.
 - b. Useful if you do not know Greek or Hebrew, but want to find all occurrences of a word.
 - c. In some cases, words are also identified by the Strong's word number.
 - d. Greek concordances:
 - (1) Based on the earliest Greek texts:
 - (a) John Kohlenberger III, Edward Goodrick and James A. Swanson, *Greek-English Concordance of the New Testament* (Zondervan): Based on the UBS 4/NA26 Greek text and the Greek text behind the NIV. Greek words are transliterated. Uses Goodrich/Kohlenberger numbering system. Cross referenced to Strong's numbering and Bauer's lexicon. Includes word frequencies based on the NIV.
 - (2) Based on the Textus Receptus (text behind the KJV) – not as reliable,, but inexpensive
 - (a) G.K. Gillespie, *The New Englishman's Greek Concordance of the New Testament*
 - (b) Ralph Winter, *Word Study Concordance*
 - (c) P. Clapp, *Analytical Concordance to the New Testament*.
 - e. Hebrew concordance:
 - (1) John Kohlenberger III and James Swanson, *Hebrew-English Concordance to the Old Testament*: most up to date
 - (2) A.B. Davidson, *A Concordance of the Hebrew and Chaldee Scriptures*
 - (3) George Wigram, *The Englishman's Hebrew and Chalee Concordance of the Old Testament*
 - F. Bible software
 1. A **Bible software program** is an interactive concordance that lets you search a Bible text for various words and phrases.
 - a. A Bible program replaces a whole shelf of expensive printed concordances – every English Bible, Greek New Testament, Hebrew Bible, Septuagint, and Englishman's concordances.
 - b. Many Logos Bible Software packages replace many shelves of Bible study reference books.
 2. A Bible program contains:
 - a. **Machine-readable biblical texts**. Translations and original language (Greek and Hebrew).
 - b. **Search software**: Quickly find words and phrases and easily browse through the bible.
 3. Some programs include:
 - a. **Note-taking tools**: Highlight Bible verses and reference books and notes to verses.

- b. **Machine-readable reference books.** Logos provides a complete Bible study environment.
 - (1) Bible dictionaries, Greek and Hebrew lexicons, Greek and Hebrew word study books, Bible commentaries, maps, ancient non-biblical literature, books on Bible backgrounds, Bible study guides, topical study indexes and other Bible study reference books.
 - (2) Books are hyperlinked to the biblical text. Click on a word in the Bible to find information.
 - (3) Logos publishes more Bible study reference books in electronic format than any other publisher (> 33,000 May 2013). It is the defacto standard for Christian electronic publishing.
 - c. **Greek or Hebrew Bibles linked to English translations or reverse interlinear English Bibles**
 - (1) Learn about the Greek and Hebrew words while studying the English Bible.
 - (2) Even if you know no Greek or Hebrew, you can access quality modern reference books.
4. Advantages of Bible software compared to a printed concordance:
- a. View matching verses in context, rather than only part of a verse.
 - b. More quickly find verses (an English concordance can take 10-15 minutes to find all verses)
 - c. Easier and quicker to browse through matching verses – click on the verse in your search results.
 - d. Find phrases as well as combinations of words in a verse.
 - e. Search in Greek or Hebrew and display the results in English.
 - f. Search the best scholarly Greek New Testament text.
 - g. Copy a verse list into a word processor file.
5. Other advantages of Bible software:
- a. Compare various translations side by side.
 - b. Advanced programs such as Logos Bible software let you search for grammatical and syntactical features, such as all future tense uses of a certain verb, or all commands in a book.
 - c. Logos lets you read your books on your mobile phone or tablet at no extra cost
 - d. Less expensive than the equivalent printed books
 - (1) Replace thousands of dollars of essential reference books for a fraction of the cost.
 - (2) The Logos academic discounts make this an even better value.
6. Logos Bible software is the best all around program with the richest collection of modern reference books.