

How to Perform a Hebrew Word Study

INTRODUCTION

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A FEW SCRIPTURES ON THE EFFECT OF GOD'S WORD

Deuteronomy 32:46-47+ "Take to your heart all the **words** with which I am warning you today, which you shall command your sons to observe carefully, even all the **words** of this law. "For **it** (God's Word) is not an idle **word** for you; indeed **it** is your life. And by this **word** you shall prolong your days in the land..."

Psalms 12:6+ The **words** of the LORD are pure **words**; As silver tried in a furnace on the earth, refined seven times.

Psalms 107:20+ He sent His **word** and healed them, And delivered them from their destructions.

Proverbs 30:5 Every **word** of God is tested; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him.

Matthew 4:4+ "It is written, 'MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERYWORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD.'"

Luke 1:37ASV+ For no **word** from God shall be void of power.

Jeremiah 15:16+ Thy **words** were found and I ate them, And Thy **words** became for me a joy and the delight of my heart; For I have been called by Thy name, O LORD God of hosts.

Job 23:12+ I have not departed from the command of His lips; I have treasured the **words** of His mouth more than my necessary food. (Job's "secret" for survival)

Related Resource: [The Word of God - Quotations and Illustrations](#)

COMMENTS AND QUOTES ON WORD STUDIES

Simple observation of the effects of God's Word in the preceding passages should leave little doubt regarding the incredible benefit of in depth study of individual **words** in their original language. What effects did you observe? (life, healing, shield, nourishment, power, joy and delight, more valuable than our necessary food).

Someone once said that "words are building blocks of thought" and since God uses the words written in the Bible to communicate with us, it follows that a proper understanding of the meaning of His individual Words in the original language (Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek) is important for a full understanding of His "thoughts" (revelation). Every saint should seek to become competent in doing basic Bible word studies. That is the goal of this page -- to give you a simple method of how to perform studies on Greek words using Web based tools accessible to all. The interested student is referred to more detailed discussions in any number of books on [Hermeneutics](#) (study of the methodological principles of interpretation). In addition, following the basic introduction to word studies, I have attached a more in depth discussion from Dr Stephen Lewis' seminary notes on Biblical Hermeneutics ([see below](#)). See also the simple study on **The Power of God's Word**.

One of my favorite **Spurgeon** quotes related to the **Word of God** - It is blessed to eat into the very soul of the Bible until, at last, you come to talk in scriptural language, and your spirit is flavored with the words of the Lord, so that your **blood is 'bibline'** and the **very essence of the Bible flows from you**. (Charles Spurgeon).

Irving Jensen emphasizes the importance of word studies writing that "Just as a great door swings on small hinges, so the important theological statements of the Bible often depend upon even the smallest words, such as prepositions and articles (**Enjoy Your Bible**).

Irving Jensen's magnum opus **Jensen's Survey of the New Testament** and **Jensen's Survey of the Old Testament** (over 2500 pages total) are both [available free in one Pdf download online](#). If you are studying a particular book, check out this resource to help guide your study of that book. It is a literal treasure chest of material for Bible Study!

Wilbur M. Smith writes, "There is no book in the world whose words will yield such treasures of truth, such spiritual richness, such rivers of refreshing water, such strengthening of the soul as the words with which the

Holy Spirit has inspired the authors of the books of our Bible.”

Scott Duvall - Words are like pieces of a puzzle. They fit together to form a story or a paragraph in a letter (i.e., the big picture). Until you know the meaning of certain words, you will not be able to grasp the meaning of the whole passage. Not knowing the meaning of certain words in a passage of Scripture can be compared to the frustrating discovery that you don't have all the pieces to your puzzle. Like individual pieces of a puzzle, words bring the larger picture to life. Words are worth studying! (**Grasping God's Word: A Hands-on Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible**)

Most of the great doctrines of the Word of God revolve around a single word, such as faith, grace, redemption, justification, gospel, sanctification, etc. It follows that In order to fully understand the meanings the great doctrines of the faith, one needs to study the specific Greek words that are foundational for that specific doctrine. In the present example we will focus on the foundational truth of **redemption**, a vitally important doctrine which permeates Scripture from Genesis to Revelation.

Keep in mind that when the original text of the Bible was translated into English, some 6,000 different English words were used, but the original manuscripts in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts used about 11,280 words according to Irving Jensen (Enjoy Your Bible). So how do you fit 11,280 Greek and Hebrew words into 6,000 English words? The only way is to translate several Greek or Hebrew words with the same English word. An excellent example is the the English word *servant* which in some versions translates up to seven different Greek words, each with a slightly different meaning. Clearly for the most complete understanding of a passage, we need to be able to discover which Greek words were used in that text. Note that the converse is also true -- different English words translate the same Greek word, so we need to be able to identify and understand that Greek word in **context** in order to fully comprehend the passage.

When performing word studies, it is imperative to pay close attention to the **context** in which the word is used, lest we arrive at meaning of the word that was not intended by the Spirit. This caveat should not be surprising, for even in English, context is critical to understand what a given word means. So if I say "*trunk*", what pops into your mind? Now what if the context includes the word "*tree*"? Or what if I am describing a car? Or a big, gray mammal? You get the point. So clearly, you were able to determine the correct meaning of "*trunk*" in each instance by noting the **context**. The same principle applies to Greek Word studies.

In summary, **Greek and Hebrew word studies** are vitally important in order for us to glean the full meaning of God's Word, but they must be performed with a sense of "reverence and awe" lest one derive a meaning which is not what the Spirit intended in a given passage. Every saint should become conversant with Word Studies that they might be better Bereans (Acts 17:11+) when using the Greek and Hebrew Lexicons. Otherwise how do you know their definition is accurate?

John Bunyan author of Pilgrim's Progress alluded to the value of personal original language word studies when he wrote - "Read the Bible, and read it again. Do not despair of help in understanding something of the will and mind of God. Though you have no commentaries and expositions, pray and read, and read and pray. A little from God is better than a great deal from man. What is from man is uncertain and often lost, but what is from God is fixed as a nail in a sure place. There is nothing that so abides with us as what we receive from God. The reason many Christians are at a loss as to some truths is that they are content with what comes from men's mouths without searching and kneeling before God to learn of Him. Even known truths are new to us when they come with the breath of heaven upon them."

Recommended Background Reading:

- [Helpful Hints on Hebrew](#) (another [source](#) scroll to page 104) - Bob Smith
- [What Every Bible Student Needs to Know about Hebrew](#) - David Roper (scroll down to page 106)
- [The Word of God - Quotations and Illustrations](#)
- Simple study on The Power of God's Word.

WEB TOOLS FOR PERFORMING A HEBREW WORD STUDY

Performing a Hebrew word study is not as easy as Greek word study, for there are fewer resources and Hebrew is a more poetic language than Greek. Remember though that the ultimate goal for performing a Hebrew word study is that we might **KNOW** God

better and **GROW** more like His Son learning to walk "in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God" and growing in "the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen." (Colossians 1:10[±], 2 Peter 3:18[±], cp John 17:3, Php 3:10[±], Eph 4:15[±]). Therefore it behooves us as we begin our word study to go to God in prayer beseeching our Heavenly Father to grant that our Teacher, the Spirit would guide us into all truth (Jn 16:13), for **spiritual truth is spiritually revealed by the Spirit** (1 Cor 2:10[±]; see [The Bible and Illumination](#)).

For illustration, we will do a study on the English word **lovingkindness** in Exodus 15:13

"In Your **lovingkindness** You have led the people whom You have redeemed; In Your strength You have guided them to Your holy habitation."

STEP 1: DETERMINE STRONG'S NUMBER & BROWN-DRIVER-BRIGGS (BDB) ABBREVIATED DEFINITION

Enter Verse:

▼

- (a) **Enter** Ex 15:13 in the Search box above.
- (b) **Click** on the word **Lovingkindness** to open a dropdown window.
- (c) **Note Strong's Number** in the Upper Left Corner. (**Strong's 2617**) **Record** that number on a piece of paper for you will need Strong's number to perform Step 2.
- (d) **Note** that beneath the Strong's Number is the **transliterated Hebrew Word chesed** (also spelled hesed, heced in other lexicons). (**Transliterate** simply means to spell out the Hebrew word in the English.)
- (e) **Note** the box labeled **Origin** - This box has the Strong's Number ([02616](#)) of the verb form **chasad** from which the noun **chesed** is derived. Clicking on **ORIGIN** can occasionally give insights into the meaning of the word you are studying. Record your observations.
- (d) **Note** the bottom box labeled **Translated Words** which is the total number of times the Hebrew word **chesed** is used in that the **KJV** or **NAS** followed by all of the ways it is translated into English. By observing the different ways **chesed** is translated you can begin to get a sense of the different nuances of meaning (e.g., "faithful love," "loyalty," "love," etc). **Step 3** will look in more detail at all the OT uses of **chesed** and how they can be used in your word study.
- (e) **Note Brown-Driver-Brigg's (BDB) Definition** - Below is the abbreviated version of BDB's original definition of **chesed**, and if click on **Strong's**, you also get his abbreviated definition. Contrast the brevity of these definitions with the unabridged BDB definition obtained in **Step 2**.

Definition [Brown-Driver-Brigg's | Strong's]

Brown-Driver-Brigg's Definition

1. goodness, kindness, faithfulness
2. a reproach, shame

Strong's Definition From [H2616](#); **kindness**; by implication (towards God) **piety**; rarely (by opprobrium) **reproof**, or (subjectively) **beauty**: - favour, good deed (-liness, -ness), kindly, (loving-) kindness, merciful (kindness), mercy, pity, reproach, wicked thing.

STEP 2: DETERMINE BROWN-DRIVER-BRIGGS UNABRIDGED DEFINITION

Explanation - Brown-Driver-Briggs (BDB) is considered to be one of the most comprehensive Hebrew lexicons available to the English speaking student and is based on the classic work of Wilhelm Gesenius, the "father of modern Hebrew lexicography." BDB gives not only dictionary definitions for each word, but relates each word to its Old Testament usage and categorizes its nuances of meaning. The definitions are in English and Hebrew, but don't be put off by the Hebrew, as the English definitions are all you need.

Samuel 15:22); — so Wū Now Hi (1Samuel 15:4) Che; Ke Hi (1 Samuel 15:6) al. below 2 (or 1); — נְשֵׂי הַקֹּדֶשׁ *men of piety* Isaiah 57:1 (צִדִּיקִים); plural *pious acts* 2Chronicles 32:32; 35:26; Nehemiah 13:14.

4 lovely appearance: הַשְּׂדֵה הַצִּיץ הַשְּׂדֵה Isaiah 40:6 all its loveliness as the flower of the field (so Thes Hi De Che Di and others; but δόξα ^{m5} 1Peter 1:24 & *gloria* ^{m9} favour an original reading הודו Lo orוודו Ew, see Br^{MP} 375; Du הדרו).

II. of God: kindness, lovingkindness in condescending to the needs of his creatures. He is חַסְדִּים their goodness favor Jonah 2:9; חַסְדֵי Psalm 144:2; חַסְדֵי אֱלֹהֵי God of my kindness Psalm 59:18; in Psalm 59:11 read חַסְדֵי אֱלֹהֵי my God with his kindness ^{m5} ^{m9} Ew Hup De Pe Che Bae; his is the kindness Psalm 62:13; it is with him Psalm 130:7; he delights in it Micah 7:18.

1 specifically lovingkindness:

a. in redemption from enemies and troubles Genesis 19:19; Genesis 39:21 (J), Exodus 15:13 (song), Jeremiah 31:3; Ezra 7:28; Ezra 9:9; Psalm 21:8; Psalm 31:17; Psalm 31:22; Psalm 32:10; Psalm 33:22; Psalm 36:8; Psalm 36:11; Psalm 42:9; Psalm 44:27; Psalm 48:10; Psalm 59:17; Psalm 66:20; Psalm 85:8; Psalm 90:14; Psalm 94:18; Psalm 107:8; Psalm 107:15; Psalm 107:21; Psalm 107:31; Psalm 143:8; Psalm 143:12; Job 37:13; Ruth 1:8; Ruth 2:20; men should trust in it Psalm 13:6; Psalm 52:10; rejoice in it Psalm 31:8; hope in it Psalm 33:18; Psalm 147:11.

b. in preservation of life from death Psalm 6:5; Psalm 86:13; Job 10:12.

c. in quickening of spiritual life Psalm 109:26; Psalm 119:41; Psalm 119:76; Psalm 119:88; Psalm 119:124; Psalm 119:149; Psalm 119:159.

d. in redemption from sin Psalm 25:7; Psalm 51:3.

e. in keeping the covenants, with Abraham Micah 7:20; with Moses and Israel חַסְדֵי (הַ) keep-eth the covenant and the lovingkindness Deuteronomy 7:9,12; 1 Kings 8:23 2Chronicles 6:14; Nehemiah 1:5; Nehemiah 9:32; Daniel 9:4; with David and his dynasty 2 Samuel 7:15 = 1 Chronicles 17:13; 2 Samuel 22:51 = Psalm 18:51, 1 Kings 3:6 (twice in verse) = 2Chronicles 1:8; Psalm 89:29; Psalm 89:34; with the wife Zion Isaiah 54:10.

2 חַסְדֵי is grouped with other divine attributes: חסד ואמת *kindness (lovingkindness) and fidelity* Genesis 24:27 (J), Psalm 25:10; Psalm 41:11; Psalm 40:12; Psalm 57:4; Psalm 61:8; Psalm 85:11; Psalm 89:15; Psalm 115:1; Psalm 138:2; [2](#) ואמת עם עשה ח ^{m5} S 2Sa 2:6; 2 Samuel 15:20 (^{m5}, see Dr); with אמת Genesis 24:49; ואמת ח Exodus 34:6 (JE), Psalm 86:15; also אמת ח Micah 7:20; Psalm 26:3; Psalm 117:2; ח חמונה Psalm 88:12; Psalm 89:3; Psalm 92:3; ח חמונה Psalm 89:25; ח חמונה Psalm 98:3; ח חמונים Psalm 77:9; ח חמונים Jeremiah 16:5; Hosea 2:21; Psalm 103:4; ח חמונים Psalm 9:23; Psalm 101:1; ח חמונים Psalm 36:11; ח חמונים Psalm 23:6.

3 the kindness of God is

a. **abundant:** חַסְדֵי abundant, plenteous in kindness (*goodness*) Numbers 14:18 (J), Nehemiah 9:17 (Qr), Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; Psalm 86:5; Psalm 103:8 (compare Exodus 34:6 J E; Psalm 86:15); חַסְדֵי רַב Nehemiah 13:22; Psalm 5:8; Psalm 69:14; Psalm 106:7 (^{m5} ^{m9} Aq Targan, to be preferred to רַב־חַסְדֵי); חַסְדֵי לַמְּסִיחִים Lamentations 3:32; Psalm 106:45 (Kt ^{m5} in both to be preferred).

b. **great in extent:** חַסְדֵי greatness of thy mercy Numbers 14:19 (J); חַסְדֵי וְלֹאֵלֶיךָ Psalm 145:8; it is kept for thousands Exodus 34:7 (JE), Jeremiah 32:18, especially of those connected with lovers of י, Exodus 20:6 = Deuteronomy 5:10; for 1000 Generations Deuteronomy 7:9; it is great as the heavens Psalm 57:11; Psalm 103:11, compare Psalm 36:6; Psalm 108:5; the earth is full of it Psalm 33:5; Psalm 119:64.

c. **everlasting:** חַסְדֵי לְעוֹלָם Jeremiah 33:11; 1 Chronicles 16:34,41; 2Chronicles 5:13; 7:3,6; 20:21; Ezra 3:11; Psalm 100:5; Psalm 106:1; Psalm 107:1; Psalm 118:1; Psalm 118:2; Psalm 118:3; Psalm 118:4; Psalm 118:29; Psalm 136:1 (26 t.); חַסְדֵי לְעוֹלָם Psalm 138:8; חַסְדֵי לְעוֹלָם Psalm 103:17; חַסְדֵי לְעוֹלָם Isaiah 54:8; חַסְדֵי לְעוֹלָם Psalm 52:3.

d. **good:** חַסְדֵי חַסְדֵי Psalm 69:17; Psalm 109:21; חַסְדֵי חַסְדֵי Psalm 63:4.

4 plural mercies, deeds of kindness, the historic displays of lovingkindness to Israel: shewn to Jacob

Genesis 32:11 (R); but mostly late Isaiah 63:7; Psalm 25:6; Psalm 89:2; קָרַב חֶסֶדִי Isaiah 63:7, see 3a; promised in the Davidic covenant Psalm Psa 89:50; חֶסֶדִי מִרְחֵם mercies to David Isaiah 55:3; 2Chronicles 6:42; mercies in General Lamentations 3:22; Psalm 17:7; Psalm 107:43f. — חֶסֶד in proper name, masculine חֶסֶד־ see below חֶסֶד. On Leviticus 20:17; Proverbs 14:34 see חֶסֶד below חֶסֶד.

II. חֶסֶד noun masculine shame, reproach, only absolute: — חֶסֶד הוא Leviticus 20:17 (H) it is a shame (shameful thing); חֶסֶד חַטָּאת Proverbs 14:34 sin is a reproach to peoples.

As you can see, BDB's format is somewhat intimidating, so below is an attempt to help you decipher the many notations in the BDB definition...

STEP 3: EXAMINE ALL USES OF THE HEBREW WORD IN OT PASSAGES

Enter Strong's #

In the search box above **Enter Strong's Number** for the word you are studying (as an example use lovingkindness - chesed and enter 2617) to retrieve a brief definition beneath which is a table labeled "**Frequency/Word [Book|Word]**" (Note: the chart below is just an example - it does not copy well so you need to see the original chart). This table is a list of all the OT uses of chesed in the OT - KJV (248) , NAS (248) and HCS (246). Now click on a book name like Genesis and in the right column you can see all the verses that use chesed and how each use is translated into English.

Dr Robert Lewis (from his study on [Hermeneutics](#)) gives some simple guidelines for examining all the uses of a Greek or Hebrew word in Scripture --

The basic procedure for study is to look up each of the verses in which the target word appears, determining the possible meanings for the word, and then make a decision--based on the **context (Keep Context King)** of the verses being studied--about the meaning to assign to the word in that verse....Remember that the meaning of a word depends on its **context**. For instance, the English word "run" can have many meanings. You can say that paint "runs" down a wall or that you will "run" a classified add; and you can refer to a "run" on a bank, a long "run" of a Broadway play, or a 10K "run" for charity." And so you see that the single, simple English word "run" has multiple distinct meanings depending on the context. The same principle applies to word studies in which one examines every OT use.

Let's review how to do a study of all the uses of a Hebrew word - [Click here](#) for the Frequency Chart (the example below . Then **Click** Genesis to open all the uses with the English translation highlighted for easy recognition (eg. **lovingkindness**). Now click on Exodus in the **KJV** and **HCS** (Holman Christian) versions and note the different ways **chesed** is translated. I personally do most of my word studies in the **NAS** but often check the other versions. The **HCS** translation of **chesed** as **faithful love** is worth noting. As noted it is always important to examine the **context**, which you can do by clicking on the verse (e.g., open uses in Exodus and click Exodus 15:13 under **Verse Results**) and toward the bottom of the new window select **Show Context** ([see below highlighted in yellow](#)). With some practice and reliance on your Teacher, the Holy Spirit, you will begin to glean a good sense of how a word is used in the OT and thus how it is "defined." The **Frequency/Word** list also gives you a quick sense of which book has the most uses (e.g., 127 uses of chesed in Psalms, which is almost 50% of all the OT uses).

Frequency / Word [Book | Word]

Verse Results

New American Standard

Exodus 15:13

"In Your **lovingkindness** You have led the people whom You have redeemed; In Your strength You have guided them to Your holy habitation

Exodus 20:6

KJV (248)	NAS (248)	HCS (246)	
Genesis	Genesis	Genesis	but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me a keep My commandments. Exodus 34:6 Then the LORD passed by in front him and proclaimed, "The LORD, th LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and
Exodus	Exodus	Exodus	
Leviticus	Leviticus	Leviticus	
Numbers	Numbers	Numbers	
Deuteronomy	Deuteronomy	Deuteronomy	
Joshua	Joshua	Joshua	
Judges	Judges	Judges	
Ruth	Ruth	Ruth	
1 Samuel	1 Samuel	1 Samuel	
2 Samuel	2 Samuel	2 Samuel	
1 Kings	1 Kings	1 Kings	
1 Chronicles	1 Chronicles	1 Chronicles	
2 Chronicles	2 Chronicles	2 Chronicles	
Ezra	Ezra	Ezra	
Nehemiah	Nehemiah	Nehemiah	

New American Standard Version

Options

Exodus 15:13 [Read Chapter](#) | [Listen to Chapter Audio](#) | [Show Context](#) | [Study Tools](#)]

[[Multi-Translations](#) | [Strong's Interlinear Bible](#)]

In Your lovingkindness You have led the people whom You have redeemed; In Your strength You have guided them to Your holy habitation

When I perform **Hebrew word studies**, Step 3 is one of the primary tools I use to arrive at a definition. In fact if you look at many of the popular lexicons like the Theological Wordbook of OT words and Vines Expository Dictionary of OT words, you will note that often their definitions are a compilation of the information gleaned from the various uses in the Scripture. In the case of *chesed* there are 248 uses which makes for a lengthy study (when there are that many uses, I usually do not examine every use.) Below is an example of my personal definition of *chesed* gleaned just from examination of the Scriptural uses.

Hesed can be "*defined*" or "*described*" Biblically as God's **lovingkindness** to man (Ge 19:19; 24:12; Ex 15:13; 20:6; 2 Sa 2:6; 7:15; 1Ki 3:6; 8:23; 2 Chr 6:14; Ezra 7:28; Job 10:12; Ps 17:7; Pr 16:6; Je 9:24; 32:18; Hos 2:19), as **abundant and great** (Ex 34:6; Nu 14:18, 19; 1 Ki 3:6; 2 Ch 1:8; Ne 9:17; 13:22; Ps 5:7; 33:5; 86:5, 13; 119:64; 136; La 3:32; Joe 2:13; Jon 4:2), as **everlasting** (1Ch 16:34, 41; 2 Ch 5:13; Ezra 3:11; Ps 100:5; 118:1, 2, 3, 4; Is 54:8, 10; Je 33:11; La 3:22), as that which **can be trusted** (Ps 13:5; 52:8), as that in which **we can rejoice** (Ps 31:7, Ps 59:16), as that which **evokes** (or should evoke) **gratitude** (Ps 107:8, 15, 21, 31, 138:2), as that which is **proclaimed** (Is 63:7, Ps 92:2), as **precious** (Ps 36:7-see notes below), as **good** (Ps 69:16), as **marvelous** (Ps 17:7; Ps 31:21), as **multitudinous** (Isa 63:7), as **great** (Ps 117:2) as **better than life** (Ps 63:3), as that for which saints should pray (Ps 17:7, 25:6, 143:8, 36:10, Ge 24:12, 2Sa 2:6) One can also gain some sense of the "variegated" meaning of **hesed** by observing the Biblical effects or associations of **hesed** on individuals (some contexts speak of Israel) -- **drawn by** God's hesed (Jer 31:3), **preserved by** God's hesed (Ps 40:11), **revived according to** God's hesed (Ps 119:88), **comforted by** God's hesed (Ps 119:76), **looking for forgiveness** of one's sins through God's hesed (Ps 51:1), **receiving mercy** through God's hesed (Israel = Isa 54:8), **heard by God on the basis of** His hesed (Ps 119:149), to be **pondered in worship** (Ps 48:9), **expecting** God's hesed when in affliction (Ps 42:7,8), **crowned** with God's hesed (Ps 103:4). (**For my full definition click Lovingkindness-Definition of Hesed**)

Now compare the definition of **chesed** by **W E Vine** ([online version](#)) to illustrate how even this well respected lexicon tends to define the OT word by discussing its uses in Scripture...

Hesed has both God and man as its subject. When man is the subject of *chesed*, the word usually describes the person's kindness or loyalty to another; cf. 2Samuel 9:7...Only rarely is the term applied explicitly to man's affection or fidelity toward God; the clearest example is probably Jer 2:2...Man exercises *chesed* toward various units within the community—toward family and relatives, but also to friends, guests, masters, and servants. Hesed toward the lowly and needy is often specified. The Bible prominently uses the term hesed to

summarize and characterize a life of sanctification within, and in response to, the covenant. Thus, Hosea 6:6 states that God desires “mercy [RSV, “steadfast love”] and not sacrifice” (i.e., faithful living in addition to worship). Similarly, Micah 6:8 features checked in the prophets’ summary of biblical ethics: “and what doth the Lord require of thee, but...to love mercy?” Behind all these uses with man as subject, however, stand the repeated references to God’s hesed. It is one of His most central characteristics. God’s loving-kindness is offered to His people, who need redemption from sin, enemies, and troubles. A recurrent refrain describing God’s nature is “abounding/plenteous in hesed” (Exodus 34:6; Nehemiah 9:17; Psalm 103:8; Jonah 4:2). The entire history of Yahweh’s covenantal relationship with Israel can be summarized in terms of checked. It is the one permanent element in the flux of covenantal history. Even the Creation is the result of God’s checked (Ps 136:5-9). His love lasts for a “thousand generations” (Dt. 7:9; cf. Dt. 5:10 and Exodus 20:6), indeed “forever” (especially in the refrains of certain psalms, such as Ps. 136) ([Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words. 1940](#))

Yes, this method of determining the shades of meaning of an OT word takes some work but it can be extremely rewarding and significantly enhance your understanding of how the Spirit used the word in the OT.

STEP 4: CHECK [VINE'S DICTIONARY OF OT WORDS](#)

This 1940 Pdf edition of [Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words](#) states that it has no copyright and therefore I presume it can be used. (If you find out otherwise please let me know). The most efficient way to search this Pdf of Vine's is by using the **Strong's number**. For example, continuing our study of checked, if we search using Strong's Number 2617 we retrieve 5 hits but only one is the Hebrew word **hesed**. This resource includes both Hebrew and Greek words, and Greek words with the same Strong's number will be retrieved. This resource is more difficult to search by the English word. E.g., if you search for "**lovingkindness**" you will not find Vine's definition of checked, because he spells it **loving-kindness**" (hyphenated). Note also that Vine does not have an entry for all OT words, in contrast with the **BDB** which has definitions for all the Hebrew words.

STEP 5: CHECK [GIRDLESTONE'S SYNONYMS OF THE OT](#)

This 1897 work on the Hebrew synonyms examines 127 Hebrew terms (e.g., altar, almighty, atonement, etc). Using the **Septuagint (Lxx)**, Girdlestone ([see right side to "Search for..."](#)) explains the relation of the Hebrew word to the corresponding Greek word in the NT. This work is designed to be used by those who understand little or no Hebrew. In the alphabetical list below there is no hit for Lovingkindness but there is one for **Mercy**, which is our Hebrew word **checked**.

Choose a letter to browse:

[A](#) [B](#) [C](#) [D](#) [E](#) [F](#) [G](#) [H](#) [I](#) [J](#) [K](#)

[L](#) [M](#) [N](#) [O](#) [P](#) [R](#) [S](#) [T](#) [U](#) [V](#) [W](#)

STEP 6: CHECK WEBSTER'S ENGLISH DICTIONARY

Don't overlook the value of a simple study of Webster's dictionary when doing **WORD STUDIES**. For the plain definition of a word, I prefer the 1828 edition as it is more Bibliocentric (often using Scripture to illustrate definitions).

Search the **MODERN EDITION** of Merriam-Webster's Dictionary

[Click and enter WORD between QUOTES to search](#)

SEARCH FOR WORDS IN WEBSTER'S 1828 ENGLISH DICTIONARY...

STEP 7: IN DEPTH WORD STUDIES

Click for a list of over 400 in depth definitions of Hebrew words on this website including many of the more common Greek words. This list will be expanded over time.

STEP 8: PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Now take the insights you have gleaned and practice re-phrasing the verse by substituting some of the definitions/insights you have gleaned from the above steps. Your goal is to arrive at a better understanding of the verse. **A word of caution is in order.** You need to be aware that many Hebrew verbs have more than one meaning, so you must be careful that the definition you substitute into the verse makes good sense in **context**. Otherwise you might misinterpret the passage.

Let me give you an example of improper use of the definition of *chesed* (2617) in interpreting a passage, by "rephrasing" or "amplifying" Proverbs 14:34 -- "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is [goodness, kindness in doing favors] to peoples" Clearly the **context** of this passage indicates this sense of **chesed** is totally inappropriate, even absurd! So again just a reminder to be very careful when "amplifying" passages with the shades of meaning you discover for a given Hebrew word, always assiduously seeking to **Keep Context King!**

MORE ON ORIGINAL LANGUAGE WORD STUDY Dr Stephen Lewis

The following excerpt is a more technical discussion of Word Studies from a seminary course by **Dr Stephen Lewis** entitled

[Bible 405: Hermeneutics: — The Study of the Interpretation of Scriptures — \(click for Pdf of the entire study\)](#)

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HERMENEUTICS AND THE GRAMMATICAL INTERPRETATION

Grammatical interpretation presupposes the legitimacy of the normal, literal, customary, usual sense of words and sentences, which in turn is based on the basic principles of logic and communication.

I. MEANING OF WORDS (LEXICOLOGY)

Lexicology is a study of how word meanings are determined. At least four factors influence the meaning of a word: etymology, usage, synonyms and antonyms, and context.

A. Discover the Etymology of the Words - Etymology refers to the root derivation and development of words. In etymology the aim of the student is to get back to the root meaning of a word and to view the word's

development in order to see if and how these two factors help determine its meaning.

1. Sometimes the original (root) meaning of a word gives a clue to the meaning in the biblical text. For example, the Hebrew word *hebel* (01892) used in Ecclesiastes 37 times and translated "vanity" or "futility," originally meant "breath" or "vapor," and thus in Ecclesiastes it means that which is transient or valueless.

2. Sometimes seeing the component parts of a word helps determine its meaning.

a. The English word "hippopotamus" is derived from two Latin words-- "hippo" for horse and "potamus" for river--and thus this animal is a kind of river horse.

b. The Greek word "ekklesia" (church) comes from "ek" (out of) and "kalein" (to call or summon), and thus it refers to those who are called out from the unsaved to form a group of believers. Originally *ekklesia* referred to an assembly of citizens in a Greek community who were summoned by a town crier for transacting public business. How then are we to understand the words church in the wilderness" in Acts 7:38?

3. Sometimes a word in its development or history takes on an entirely different meaning From what it originally meant.

a. Nice - Latin "nesius" = ignorant

b. Kaphar (03722) = covering (Hebrew) atonement

c. Eirene = peace from; peace of mind; well being; peace with God

4. Sometimes a word means something entirely different from its component parts (the whole is not the same as the sum of its parts).

a. Broadcast = casting seeds widely (originally)

b. Dandelion = (French) = lion's tooth

c. Aletheia = not hidden = truth

5. **(Caution)** A biblical word should not be explained on the basis of its English etymology. For example, the biblical word "holy" is not derived from the English word "healthy" and therefore "holy" in its etymology does not mean being spiritually healthy. Nor does the Greek word "dunamis" (power) mean dynamite. Instead it means a dynamic, active, living force.

6. For other examples of how Greek words have changed and how they have taken on new meanings in the New Testament, see [Terry - Biblical Hermeneutics \(online\)](#) and Fisher, [How to Interpret the New Testament](#) pp. 102-8.

B. Discover the Usage of the Words

1. **Importance of Usage** - Often the etymology of a word does not help us discover the meaning of that word. Therefore we need to consider its current established usage by the writer and other writers. This practice is called "usus iouendi" (use by the one speaking--or writing).

a. The word "trunk" comes from the Old English word "tronke" meaning box. But that understanding of the etymology doesn't indicate what a given writer, means by the word. Trunk may mean (a) the main part of a tree, (b) the torso of the human body or the thorax of an insect, (c) the shaft of a column, (d) a large piece of luggage, (e) the luggage compartment of a car, (f) the part of the cabin of a boat that projects over the deck, (g) the proboscis of the elephant, (h) men's shorts (plural), (i) a circuit between two telephone exchanges, etc. The way the writer uses the word--not its etymology--tells the reader what he means by it.

b. The Greek word "pneuma" (spirit) is derived from "pneo" (to breathe), but in the Bible the word "pneuma" only occasionally means breath. What other meaning does it have?

2. Kinds of Usage

a. Usage by the same writer in the same book. Ask, How does he use this word elsewhere in this book? For example, does the word "prophets" in Ephesians 2:20 refer to Old Testament prophets or New Testament prophets?

b. Usage by the same writer in his other books. For example, study John's usage of "light"

and "darkness" in his Gospel, Epistles, and Revelation.

c. Usage by other writers in the Bible.

(1) How do other writers use "almah" (virgin) in Isaiah 7:14?

(2) The Greek word "stoicheia" (elements) means basic components of the universe in II Peter 3:10; elementary or basic truths in Hebrews 5:12; and simplistic teachings or outward acts of religion in Galatians 4:3,9 and Colossians 2:8,20.

d. Usage by other writers (contemporary and otherwise) outside the Bible.

(1) O.T. Ugaritic and Aramaic

(2) N.T.

Classical Greek

Papyrus

LXX

Josephus and Philo

C. Discover the Meanings of Similar and Opposite Words (Synonyms and Antonyms)

1. SYNONYMS - Seeing how a word differs from its synonyms can help narrow down the meaning of a given word.

a. In the phrase "commandments and teachings of men" (Colossians 2:22-note), "commandments" suggests laws to be obeyed and "teachings" (i.e., doctrines) imply truth to be believed, and both pertain to man-devised ceremonies which are encumbrances.

b. In Romans 14:13 an "obstacle" (**proskomma**) means a slight offense, something that disturbs another, whereas a "stumbling block" (**skandalon**) means a more serious kind of offense, something causing another to fall.

c. What synonyms are evident in Colossians 1:9-12-note, Col 1:21-23-note?

d. For other examples of synonyms see Unger, Principles of Expository Preaching, pp. 126-27 (see page 4a) and Terry, Biblical Hermeneutics, pp. 191-202. Also see Girdlestone's [Synonyms of the Old Testament Their Bearing on Christian Faith and Practice](#) (see right side to "Search for...") and [Trench's New Testament Synonyms](#) (another [source](#)).

2. ANTONYMS - Seeing how a word differs from its exact or near opposite can help determine its meaning.

a. In Romans 8:4-9 does "flesh" (**sarx**) mean the physical body or the sinful nature? The answer is found by noting how it contrasts with the word "spirit."

b. Does "death" in Romans 6:23 mean physical death or spiritual death?

D. Consider the Context

How does context differ from usage? Usage pertains to a use of a word or phrase by an author or author in varied contexts, whereas context refers to the material which precedes and follows the word or phrase.

Considering the context is extremely important for, three reasons (a) Words, phrases, and clauses have multiple meanings (e.g., "trunk," "by the trunk," "bug," "he bugged him," each has several meanings), and thus examining how they are used in the context can help determine the meaning. (b) Thoughts are usually expressed by a series of words or sentences, that is, in association not isolation. Thus "the meaning of any particular element is nearly always controlled by what precedes and what follows" (Mickelsen, Interpreting the Bible, p. 100). (c) Often false interpretations arise from ignoring the context. For example, "Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Thy inheritance" (Psalm 2:8) is often misapplied by missionaries and others. What does the context suggest for its meaning?

Several kinds of contexts should be considered.

1. The immediate context. Often the sentence in which the word is used clarifies the meaning.

a. What does "faith" mean in each of these verses? Jude 3; Galatians 1:23, Romans 3:3,

Romans 1:17; Ephesians 2:8, James 2:19,20

b. Does "**salvation**" or "**saved**" always mean **deliverance from sin**? See below for the various meanings of the word "Salvation".

1. Safety or deliverance from difficult circumstances.
2. Physical health.
3. Israel's national release from oppression by many enemies.
4. Deliverance from the penalty of sin by the substitutionary death of Christ.
5. Find deliverance from the presence of sin. Verses

Look up the following verses and for each verse write the number for the definition that best describes the meaning of the word "salvation" or "saved" in that verse. Ex 14:13, Luke 1:71, 18:42 ("made you well" is literally "saved you"), John 3:17, Acts 15:11, 16:30, 27:20, Ro 5:9, 13:11, Phil 1:19, James 5:15 ("restore" is literally "saved")

c. The word "**law**" has several meanings, which can be ascertained from the way it is used in the sentence.

Romans 2:14b; 8:2 = a principle

John 1:17,45 = the Pentateuch

Matthew 22:40 = All the OT except the Prophets

Romans 2:12; 8:3 = the Mosaic system

d. "**In the last days**" (and "the last hour") is often assumed to refer to the same period of time. But note how its usage in its immediate contexts determine its meaning:

Hebrews 1:2; 1John 2:18; 2 Timothy 3:1; 2 Peter 3:3

e. The Greek word "**parousia**" is often assumed to refer always to the Rapture. But the contexts where it occurs show how its etymological meaning of "presence" relates to one of three things:

The personal presence of individuals (1Cor 16:17; 2Cor 7:6-7;10:10; Phil 1:26; 2:12).

Christ's presence in the air at the Rapture (1Corinthians 15:23; 1Th 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2Th. 2:1; Jas 5:7-8; 2Pe 3:4; 1Jn 2:28).

Christ's presence on the earth with His saints immediately after the Tribulation (Mt 24:3,27,37,39; 2Th 2:8-9; 2Pe 1:16; 3:12).

2. The context of the paragraph or chapter. Sometimes the meaning of a word, phrase, or sentence is clarified only by the paragraph or chapter in which it occurs. For example:

a. John 7:39 explains John 7:37-38.

b. John 1:21 explains John 1:20.

c. Hebrews 7:21 explains Hebrews 7:20.

d. Does "fire" in Matthew 3:11 ("baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire") mean spiritual dynamics? See how fire is used in verses 10 and 12.

e. When Paul says in I Corinthians 10:23 that "all things are lawful," does he include such things as murder, and adultery? The chapter context answers the question; see

f. Anacoluthons (parenthetical statements) need to be kept in mind in understanding the thought of a paragraph. For example, Romans 2:13-15 are parenthetical, and thus 2:16 continues the thought of 2:12.

3. The context of the book. Sometimes the scope and purpose of the book as a whole must be seen in order to clarify certain words or phrases.

a. For example, does I John 3:6-10 mean that a Christian never sins?

b. Understanding that the Book of James emphasizes evidences of true faith helps us understand his discussion of faith and works in James 2:12-25.

c. Sometimes the purpose of a book is explicitly stated, as in the following: Luke 1:4; John 20:31; Philemon 17; I Timothy 3:14-15; II Peter 1:13; I John 5:13; Jude 3-4; Revelation 1:19. Other times the purpose is determined by inference (based on statements or emphases in the book), as in Matthew; I Corinthians 7:1; Galatians 5:1-4; Hebrews 2:6; 6:1,11; 10:23,35-36.

4. The context of parallel passages.

Parallel passages may be verbal parallels (in which the same or similar words, phrases, or sentences occur) or idea parallels (in which the same or similar ideas are expressed but in different words). For example, the word "hate" in Luke 14:26 is clarified by the parallel passage in Matthew 10:37. Close parallels exist between Kings and Chronicles, between the accounts in the Gospels, between Romans and Galatians, between Ephesians and Colossians, between II Peter and Jude, between Daniel and Revelation, and between single passages (e.g., cf. Isaiah 2:2-4 with Micah 4:1-3; cf. Romans 4:3 with Hebrews 11:8-10,11-19; and cf. Matthew 11:12 with Luke 16:16 and John 16:15).

5. The context of the entire Bible (the analogy of faith).

Galatians 5:4, "you have fallen from grace," may seem to teach that a Christian can lose his salvation. But this would contradict the entire tenor of Scripture, which is inspired by God "who cannot lie." The same is true of Philippians 2:12 which may at first glance seem to suggest that a person can attain salvation by works.

The corollaries of this principle are these: (a) An obscure or ambiguous text should never be interpreted in such a way as to make it contradict a plain one. For example, "baptized for the dead" in I Corinthians 15:29 should not be interpreted to mean that a person can be saved after he has died. This would contradict the plain teaching of Titus 3:5, etc. (b) A complex, ingenious, or devious interpretation should not be given preference over the simple and more natural explanation. For example, how should Matthew 16:28 be interpreted? (c) The Old Testament sheds light on the New Testament (e.g., Cain, Balaam, and Korah in Jude 11) and vice versa.

II. HOW TO DO A WORD STUDY

A. The Bible was originally written in three languages. The Old Testament was written primarily in Hebrew, with Aramaic (a closely related language) being used to write parts of Daniel, Ezra, and a verse in Jeremiah. The New Testament was written entirely in Greek. When we do a word study, we want to determine the meaning of the Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek word which underlies the word used in the verse we are studying. This can be done in at least three ways.

1. Commentaries - The simplest way to find out the meaning of a word in a particular verse is to look up the discussion of that verse in two or three commentaries. A good commentary should give you an explanation for any significant word in the verse you are studying.

2. Word Study Books - Another way to find out the meaning of a word is to look it up in a word study book. A very complete tool for the Old Testament is the Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, edited by R. L. Harris, G. L. Archer, Jr., and B. K. Waltke (2 vols.; Chicago: Moody Press, 1980). A similar tool for the New Testament is the New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, edited by Colin Brown (4 vols.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975-78).

A briefer and far less expensive option is the Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words by W. E. Vine (various publishers). Some editions of this book also have a limited number of Old Testament word studies included, as well.

3. Concordance Studies - A third way to find out the meaning of a word in a particular verse is to do a concordance study. An English concordance lists all or most of the occurrences of a particular English word in the Bible. The verses are usually listed in the order in which they appear in the Bible. The basic procedure for study is to look up each of the verses in which the target word appears, determining the possible meanings for the word, and then make a decision--based on the context of the verses being studied--about the meaning to

assign to the word in that verse.

B. SELECTING WORDS TO STUDY - Three principles are useful in helping you choose words on which you will want to do major word studies.

1. Select words known beforehand, or recognizable by context, to be theologically "loaded."
2. Select words which will obviously make a difference in the passage's meaning, but which seem ambiguous or unclear.
3. Select words which are repeated or which emerge as motifs.

C. FORMS IN WHICH NEW TESTAMENT WORDS APPEARS - In the various tools which you will be using to do word Studies, the target word can be written in three different ways.

1. The English word itself may be used.
2. The Greek word may be transliterated. That is, the Greek word is written using letters of the English alphabet.
3. The Greek word is written using the letters of the Greek alphabet. The Greek word--whether written in the letters of the Greek alphabet or transliterated into English letters--may appear in either its **contextual** form or its **lexical** form. Which form is used depends on which tool you are using.

a. Contextual form - Greek words may have various prefixes or suffixes, so the spelling may differ slightly in different contexts.

b. Lexical form - One fixed form (i.e., spelling) has been traditionally been selected for listing Greek words in the lexicons (dictionaries). This is the form listed in the back of Strong's Exhaustive Concordance or listed in Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words.

D. UNDERSTANDING CONCORDANCES - As was mentioned earlier, our goal is to determine the meaning of the Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek word which underlies the English word in the verse we are studying. Since we must depend on English concordances, a few things need to be kept in mind.

1. Translation Differences

On the one hand, several different English words may be used to translate one word in the original language. For example, in Titus 2:2,6 the Greek "sophronein" occurs. This can be translated "to be sensible" (NASB), "to be self-controlled" (NIV), to "be sober-minded" (NKJV). or "to be temperate" (NKJV). Even within a translation, more than one English word may be used for the same original word (e.g., "sober-minded" and "temperate" in the preceding example).

On the other hand, the opposite situation may also occur. That is, more than one word in the original languages can be translated by the same English word. For example, in the KJV alone, the English verb "dwell" is used to translate 31 different Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek words!

2. Choosing the Right Concordance

In light of these translation differences, two things become important. First, we need, if possible, to use a concordance which is keyed to the translation we are studying. Or, we need to have available a copy of the translation to which the concordance is keyed. For example, if we are studying in the NIV, but our concordance is based on the KJV, then we will need to have a copy of the KJV Bible on hand so we can quickly look up the correct English word in the concordance.

3. Finding the Right Verses to Study

Second, we need a way to determine which word in the original languages is being used. Fortunately, this is relatively simple to do (see V.). Once we know the original word, then we only need to look up those verses in which this word is used, not all the verses in which other original words are used. This greatly simplifies our job and also guarantees much greater accuracy in our results.

E. PROCEDURE FOR A CONCORDANCE STUDY

STEP 1: Locate the other verses in which this same Hebrew / Aramaic / Greek word is used. There are several ways to do this, depending on which concordance you use. Detailed instructions for three different concordances are provided in IV.

STEP 2: Classify these verses into major categories of use. The same word may have a somewhat different meaning, depending on the context in which it is used. Remember that the meaning of a word depends on its context. For instance, the English word "run" can have many meanings. You can say that paint "runs" down a wall or that you will "run" a classified add; and you can refer to a "run" on a bank, a long "run" of a Broadway play, or a 10K "run" for charity.

STEP 3: Determine the category which best fits the word in the verse you are studying. After you have listed all the possible categories of meaning, go back to the verse you are studying. Which of these possible meanings is most appropriate for the word in the context of your verse? This is the category of meaning you will choose for the word in your verse.

STEP 4: Write up the results of your study. Briefly list the possible meanings of the word and the preferred meaning for it in the verse you studying. Then explain how that meaning affects the interpretation of your passage.

NB.: To do a more thorough word study, there are a couple of other steps you can take.

STEP 5: Look up the word in Vine's Expository Dictionary or another word study book. Summarize the information given there. See how the author's categories compare with yours, and note which category he chooses for your target verse. (See Appendix B.)

STEP 6: Look up the verse in two or three good commentaries. See if the meaning these authors have assigned to the word agrees with what you have chosen for it.

F. HOW TO USE DIFFERENT CONCORDANCES

1. Strong's Exhaustive Concordance by James Strong (various publishers).

- a. Look up the English word in Strong's. (Note that Strong's is based on the KJV).
- b. Find the listing of the verse you are studying and note the number next to it on the right side of the column. This number refers to the specific Greek, Hebrew, or Aramaic word which is used. If you wish, you can turn to the back index to find out what the original word actually is.
- c. Mark the other verses in the list in Strong's which have this number next to them. (If it is a verb, you may also need to look under other spellings of the verb: keep, kept, keepeth.) These are the verses you will want to look up as you do your concordance study.

2. Young's Analytical Concordance by Robert Young (Eerdmans and various publishers).

- a. Look up the English word in Young's. (Note that Young's is based on the KJV.)
- b. Locate the listing of the verse you are studying. Note that Young's already lists words in groups according to which Hebrew / Aramaic / Greek word is used. That is, he has already gathered into one list the verses which use the original language word you are studying.
- c. These are the verses you will want to look up as you do your concordance study.

3. The Word Study New Testament by Ralph D. Winter (2 vols. Pasadena, Ca: William Carey Library, 1972).

- a. This two volume set gives you clear directions for use. Briefly, you look up the verse in Volume 1. This is a KJV Bible with a code number written over most of the words. You then look up that number in Volume 2, which is a concordance. There you will find a handy list of every New Testament verse which uses that Greek word.
- b. These are the verses you will want to look up for your word study.
- c. If you are looking up a New Testament word, this is the most accurate tool you can use for concordance studies. The concordance (which is a specially marked edition of the classic Englishman's Greek Concordance) lists all the times this Greek word occurs in the

New Testament, no matter how it is translated into English.

G. HOW TO USE LEXICONS AND WORD STUDY BOOKS

1. Lexicons

- a. A lexicon is a dictionary.
- b. The most useful one for New Testament studies is: Walter Bauer. *A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*. 5th ed. Trans. by W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. W. Danker 2nd English ed. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1979.
- c. It gives not only all the possible meanings of a Greek word; it also gives the Scripture references where the word is used with that meaning.
- d. To use it, look up the Greek word in Strong's and then find this word in the lexicon. Or, use the numbering system in *The Word Study New Testament* to quickly find the exact page on which the Greek word is located.

2. Word study Books

- a. **W. E. Vine. Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words** (various publishers).
 - 1) Vine's lists the word in English according to the King James Version.
 - 2) Look up the Greek word in Strong's and then find this word under the English listing in Vine's
 - 3) Be sure to note whether you are dealing with a noun, verb, adjective, etc.
 - 4) Vine's is also helpful for synonyms, since several similar words (all translated by the same English word) are often listed under each English heading.
- b. **Colin Brown, ed. The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology**. 3 vols. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975-78.
 - 1) This is a word study book which often gives lengthy discussions of different words.
 - 2) Note that although you do look up the word in English, the English is not keyed to a single Bible version.
 - 3) For this reason, the fastest way to look up a discussion is to use the Greek word index at the end of Volume 3.
 - a) Look up the transliterated form of the Greek word (i.e., the form written in English letters), which you got from the back of Strong's.
 - b) The volume and page numbers of the primary discussion of the Greek word will be given in bold print next to this word in Brown's index.

III. HOW TO DO A FULL-BLOWN WORD STUDY WORKING WITH THE GREEK AND HEBREW

The necessity for studying important words will become more obvious as you spend more time working through various passages and learn that many of the key interpretational problems in Scriptures stem from lack of clarity of definition. Thus, I have included this summary to help those of you who would like more in-depth material to work with.

A. This first section will deal with how to do brief overview studies of words using some of the languages tools that are available to you.

1. First, identify the Hebrew or Greek words you wish to study that lie behind the English translation you are using. This can be done through Young's or Strong's Concordances, the *Word Study New Testament* (WSNT), or you may use a Hebrew or Greek Interlinear.

[If you have taken Hebrew or Greek classes, then look up as many of the important words as you have time for in the "lexicons" (a fancy word for dictionary; specifically BDB {Brown, Driver, and Briggs} or BAGD {Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, and Danker}). Cf. Fee, *New Testament Exegesis*, 83-93 and especially "How to Use Bauer,"

87-89 for a very helpful explanation and example of how to do short word studies.]

2. For particularly important words, you might try to use Englishman's Hebrew Concordance or Englishman's Greek Concordance or WSNT to find all the occurrences of that word in the OT or NT.

N. B.: There are several concordances that allow you to do this more directly in the original language, and they usually put those terms in the context of the original language. But: One needs to be realistic about his or her limitations in this area. Many know enough to be dangerous, but not enough to impress those who is seriously interested in the languages.

3. Look up the references and see how the word is used in various contexts. List out those occurrences that use the word in basically the same way. Try to specify as clearly as possible how the word is used in this passage. Use your English concordances to find English synonyms for the Greek word used in this text--i.e. other ways in which this term could be translated.

[There are some simple overview of terms to be found in texts such as Girdlestone 's Synonyms of the OT or Trench 's Synonyms of the NT that can be helpful, though some information gleaned from these works may be dated. You may well find your own thoughts on the usage of a given term in context to be adequate.]

B. For a very critical word or two, you might want to do a moderate length, full-dress word study (8-10 hours worth of study). To do this on your own you might include all or most of the following.

1. Etymology.

(Often this is not too significant, but this area may need to be researched if it is a particularly rare word. Although few words in the NT are truly singular terms [technical term: hapax legomena], such concerns are more common in the OT. Useful sources might include BDB, L&S, BAGD.)

2. Classical Greek usage is important to gain a view of the background of the term in its original languages, It often allows us to see some of its more concrete usage's, while the NT tends to use terms in more theological or metaphorical usage's. (Sources: L&S; generally covers anything prior to the second century BC) The key in this step is to identify the various categories of usage a word can take.

3. The Septuagint (i.e. LXX) allows us to see how the Greeks around 250-150 BC used various terms as they translated the OT. (Source: Hatch and Redpath [H&R], although a knowledge of both Greek and Hebrew is helpful to use this too.) Write down the Hebrew words most often translated by the Greek word under study, along with any illustrations from non-metaphorical examples. Try to identify any differences from how the word was used in the classical language (i.e., are there any new or omitted categories of meaning?).

4. Koine (literally "common") is the name of the Greek in which the NT was written). (Source for word studies: Moulton and Milligan [M&M].) How does the Koine compare or differ from classical Greek or the LXX?

5. NT: How often and where are the majority of these occurrences found? Can you form various categories of usage's (especially separating literal and metaphorical usage's, if appropriate).

a. Survey all of the NT occurrences.

b. Categorize the word according to its usage. ("Probe the circles of context")

1) First make a list of the categories of meaning found in the whole NT. (For an example of how this is done, see BAGD.)

2) Then do the same for all the writings by that particular author (this is important especially if the writer wrote several different books or a large amount of material [e.g. Luke].

3) Do the same for the author's use in the particular book in which the studied word occurs.

4) Finally, identify the meaning in the passage at hand.

c. Finally, write out a couple of sentences of what the term means in this particular paragraph or text.

6. Finally, consult BAGD, Kittel (TDNT), or the New International Dictionary for NT Theology (NIDNTT edited by Colin Brown). Kittel and Brown are particularly significant works that can be consulted on virtually any word in the NT. They are masterful works, but they must be used with discretion since they reflect various

theological biases--often not amenable to conservative thinkers. The solution is to do some comparative work, after you have done the technical work and see how your conclusions line up with theirs. This does not mean they are wrong all the time. It is probably best for you, in full-blown word studies, to look to these sources last, for then you are better able to evaluate their work based on your own.

Lastly, you should check a good commentary to see how they have understood the word.

N.B.: your ability use such tools and perform such in depth study depends upon the skills you have developed and the time you have available for study. One can obviously go into great depth if one wishes and spend several years doing an authoritative word study. The result of a series of such studies--in the form of scholarly articles, doctoral dissertations, and books--is found in works such as Kittel and NIDNTT. Even the busy Christian worker should to a study like this on an important word from time to time. It will build a background of understanding in one's mind as well as develop "biblical theology" in one's mind.

C. After you have done what your skill and / or time allows concerning your inductive study, you might wish to read the articles for other key word in NIDNTT, Kittel. Theological Wordbook of the OT (TWOT), Theological Dictionary of the OT (TDOT, Botterwick & Wiggren, though this work has yet to be completed in the English language). Should you feel lost in such works, you may want to simply consult Vine's Expository Dictionary which does on occasion include selected OT words in the more recent editions. While the work is old and has been surpassed due to some questionable methodology, it will still add much to your work. Be honest with your own abilities and try to build upon them. At the same time, it will be helpful to your own growth to challenge your knowledge by working in texts that will push you.

IV. FORMS OF WORDS (MORPHOLOGY) AND FUNCTIONS OF WORDS (PARTS OF SPEECH)

A. Morphology

Morphology refers to the way words are "inflected," that is, formed or put together (e.g., with something at the beginning of the word--a prefix, or at the end of the word--a suffix, or in the middle). Adding an "s" at the end of the noun "fuse" makes it plural, but adding "re" at the beginning of "fuse" makes it the verb "refuse," or changing the "e" at the end to "al" makes it a noun "refusal." "He" means that the pronoun is in the nominative case, but "him" is in the accusative case. "Eat" is a verb in the present tense but when the "e" is transferred to the end, it becomes "ate" and is in the past tense. In Greek and Hebrew the meanings of words are changed similarly by inflections at the beginning, middle, or end. Thus morphology is an important part of the grammatical approach to interpretation, which seeks to give attention to every detail of the Scriptures because of their verbal inspiration.

B. Parts of Speech

The parts of speech refer to the function of words in a sentence.

1. What are the parts of speech?

The eight parts are these, grouped in two families - noun & verb

PARTS	WHAT THEY DO	HOW THEY VARY
NOUN FAMILY		
Nouns	As subjects they identify what or who is discussed. As objects (of verbs or prepositions) they identify the recipient of the action or mode of being.	Case (can be nominative, accusative, genitive, dative, or vocative) Number (can be singular or plural) Gender (can be masculine or feminine)
Pronouns	They are substitutes for nouns and refer to persons or things named or understood	Case, Number, Gender
Adjectives	They describe nouns.	To agree with the nouns they modify in case, number, and gender.

Prepositions	They point to means (through or by), position (in, out, over, under, etc.), origin (from), possession (of), etc.	
VERB FAMILY		
Verbs	They assert something about what the subject is or does.	Tense (past present, or future) Voice (active or passive) Mood (indicative or subjunctive) Person (first, second, or third) Number (singular or plural)
Adverbs	They modify verbs (or other adverbs or adjectives), telling how (manner or quality), when (time), where (place), how much (degree), or why (purpose or result).	
Conjunctions	They are connectives, joining words, phrases, or clauses, to show connection (and), continuation (and, then), contrast (but, except), inference (then, so, therefore), explanation (for instance), cause (because, for), intensity (besides, even), or addition (also).	
Particles	They express a negative (not, nor), interrogation (why), affirmation (certainly, indeed), or exclamation (surely, oh, etc.)	

2. Why know the parts of speech?

The grammatical function of a word in a phrase or sentence often helps determine its meaning. For example, by itself the word "cutting" could be a noun, verb, or adjective. Which is it in each of these sentences?

- a. The cutting of the grass took time.
- b. He was cutting the grass.
- c. He made a cutting remark.

3. How do the parts of speech help in Bible hermeneutics?

The following are a few examples of how knowing certain facts about the parts of speech in phrases and sentences in the Bible can be helpful in interpretation.

- a. In Job 21 :2-3a the verbs "listen" and "bear" (with me) are in the plural and the pronoun "you" is in the plural, and so Job is addressing the three friends. But in Job 21:3b "you" is singular and so he is speaking to Zophar.
- b. In Matthew 6, the nouns, pronouns, and verbs in verse 1 are plural, those in verses 2-4 are singular, those in verse 5 are plural, in verse 6 singular, in verses 7-16 plural, and in verses 17-18 singular.
- c. Romans 12:1-19 is all in the plural, but in verses 20-21 Paul switches to the singular.
- d. The singular "seed" in contrast to the plural "seeds" is important in Paul's argument in Galatians 3:16.
- e. In Ephesians 2:8 the gender is important in determining what the word "that" (which is the gift of God) refers to. Does it refer to grace, or to faith, or to salvation?
- f. In Ephesians 2:20 the phrase "the apostles and prophets" has only the one article "the."

It is not repeated before the word "prophets." Therefore there is one foundation consisting of both apostles and prophets, not two foundations.

g. But the genitive case in which "the apostles and prophets" occurs could be a possessive genitive (the Ephesians had the same foundation the apostles and prophets had), or subjective (the foundation they laid), or appositional (the foundation which consists of the apostles and prophets). Though the Greek wording does not indicate which kind of genitive it is, the latter is more probable.

h. Does I Corinthians 3:9 mean that we are workers along with God or that as workers together with each other we belong to God? The answer is the latter because the phrase "of God" in Greek is in the genitive (possessive) case. It reads literally, "Of God we are fellow workers."

i. In Revelation 3:10 the Greek preposition "ek" means "out from," not "out through," and thus is a strong argument for the pretribulation rapture. (See Jeffrey L. Townsend, "The Rapture in Revelation 3:10," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 137 [July 1981: 252-66].)

j. The antecedent of the pronoun "he" in Daniel 9:27 is "the prince who is to come" (in v. 26), not the Messiah. Thus the one who will make a covenant with many is the Antichrist (the view of premillennialism), not Christ (the view of amillennialism).

k. In Ephesians 2:13-22 the aorist (past) tense is used for what has been accomplished by the death of Christ were brought near," v. 13; "made both groups into one," v. 14; "broke down the barrier," v. 14; "preached peace," v. 17); but the present tense is used for the effect of that death for believers ("establishing peace," v. 15; "we have," v. 18; "being fitted together," v. 21; "is growing," v. 21; "are being built together," v.22).

l. The present tense may refer to something that is permanently true (e.g., "in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form," Colossians 2:9), or continuous ("we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ," Philippians 3:20), or repeated ("when you see a cloud ... you say," Luke 12:54), or habitual ("No one who is born of God sins," I John 3:9), or the future ("They divide my garments," Psalm 22:18).

m. In Romans 3:23 the first verb "have sinned" is in the aorist tense (undefined past action) and could therefore be rendered "all sin" to express gnomic or proverbial action which is true at any time. The second verb "fall short" is in the present tense and should be rendered "are continually coming short" or "come short" (Dana and Glaze, *Interpreting the New Testament*, pp. 152-53).

n. The perfect tense in Hebrew expresses completed action, whether past, present, or future (but usually past). (The imperfect expresses incomplete action.) Why then is the perfect often used when speaking of prophetic events? Be-cause those events are so certain of fulfillment (of being completed) that the perfect tense is very appropriate. This is called the "prophetic perfect." These verbs are often translated in the past tense, as, for example, in Isaiah 53:2-9.

o. The importance of conjunctions is seen in Ephesians 4:11. The first four occurrences of the word "and" is the same Greek word ("kai"), but the fifth occurrence of "and" (between "Pastors" and "teachers") is a different word ("de"), and can best be rendered by a hyphen ("pastor-teachers").

p. The conjunctions "for" and "therefore" are important in interpretation. "For" introduces a reason for the preceding statement(s). In Romans 8, "for" (Greek, "gar") occurs fifteen times. And in Romans 1:15-18 one reason builds on another: Paul was "eager to preach the gospel" (v. 14), "for" he was "not ashamed" (v. 15), "for it is the power of God to salvation" (v. 16), "for in it the righteousness of God is revealed" (v. 17).

V. RELATIONSHIPS OF WORDS (SYNTAX)

The word **Syntax** comes from the Greek "syntassein," which means "to place in order together." According to Webster's Dictionary, syntax is "the way in which words are put together to form phrases, clauses, or sentences." It is a branch of grammar. Single words by themselves seldom convey a complete thought. For

example, the words "man," "hard," "ball," and "hit" do not convey a meaningful specific thought. Therefore they need to be put together. But the way they are arranged can change the meaning.

A. Phrases - A phrase consists of a short grammatical group of words without a verb. Examples of prepositional phrases from Colossians 1:2 are "of Jesus Christ," "by the will of God," "to the saints," "at Colossae," "from God the Father." An example of an adverbial phrase is "whether thrones or Dominions" (Colossians 1:16). An example of a participial phrase is "having made peace" (Colossians 1:20). An example of an interpretive question pertaining to a prepositional phrase is in Ephesians 1:4: Should "in love" go with verse 4 or with verse 5?

B. Clauses - A clause is a grammatical unit of words comprised of a subject and predicate (e.g., "the blood ... cleanses," "Christ died," "who has qualified us," "so that you may walk").

Clauses are either dependent or independent. Dependent clauses "depend" on an independent clause (e.g., "We give thanks ... since we heard of your faith"). Dependent clauses are of various kinds:

Causal: "We give thanks . . . because of the hope laid up" (Colossians 1:3,5).

Concessive: "Even though I am absent in body . . . I am with you in spirit " (Colossians 2:5).

Comparative: "As you have received. . . so walk in Him" (Colossians 2:6).

Conditional: "If you have died with Christ . . . why do you submit yours lives?" (Colossians 2:20).

Purpose: "We pray for you ... so that you may walk. . . worthy" (Colossians 1:10).

Result: "Pray ... so that we may speak forth" (Colossians 4:3).

Temporal: "When He had disarmed. . . He made a public display" (Colossians 2:15).

Kinds of Clauses and Sentences - Indicate which kind of dependent clauses are in these complex sentences (whether Causal, Concessive, Conditional, Comparative, Purpose, Result, Temporal).

1. "Children be obedient ... for this is well pleasing to the Lord" (Colossians 3:20).
2. "If you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking (Colossians 3:1).
3. "Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self" (Colossians 3:9).
4. "I say this in order that no one may delude you" (Colossians 2:4).
5. "When you were dead ... He made you alive" (Colossians 2:13).
6. "Let your speech always be with grace ... so that you may know (Colossians 4:6).
7. "Epaphras (is) always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers that you may stand perfect" (Colossians 4:12).

C. Sentences

1. Sentences, as to their structure, may be Simple, Compound, or Complex.

A Simple sentence has only one independent clause (a subject and a predicate [verb]). For example, "Set your mind on the things above" (Colossians 3:2).

A Compound sentence has at least two independent (and coordinate) clauses. For example, "You laid aside the old self ... and (you) have put on the new self" (Colossians 3:9-10).

A Complex sentence has at least one independent and one dependent clause.

2. Indicate whether the following sentences are simple, compound, or complex.

1. "Husbands, love your wives, and do not be embittered against them" (Colossians 3:19).
2. "When Christ ... is revealed, then you also will be revealed" (Colossians 3:4).
3. "Put on a heart of compassion" (Colossians 3:12).
4. "Let the peace of Christ rule ... and be thankful" (Colossians 3:15).

5. "You have been made complete... and He is the head" (Colossians 2:10).
6. "Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders" (Colossians 4:5).
7. "In them you also once walked, when you were living in them" (Colossians 3:7).

3. Sentences, as to their purposes, may be as follows:

A statement: to assert a fact, opinion, complaint, emotion, observation, etc. (indicative mood)

A question: to raise an inquiry (interrogatory mood)

A command: to give an order or charge (imperative mood)

A request: to ask for something (optative mood)

A wish: to express a desire (subjunctive mood)

a. In the interpretation of certain verses it is important to note whether they are statements, commands, or questions, etc. For example:

(1) Is John 5:39 a statement or a command?

(2) Is John 12:27 a statement or a question?

b. The importance of noting the various aspects of syntax (word relationships) is seen in Acts 2:38.

D. Word Order and Repetition

The order of words is also significant in Bible interpretation. In Greek, emphasis can be given to words, phrases, or clauses by placing them at the beginning of a sentence (and sometimes at the end) in contrast to the normal word order of subject, verb, and object. For example, "in Christ" is at the beginning of Ephesians 2:13 and thus is emphasized. In I Corinthians 1:17 the negative idea is emphasized by the word "not" being placed at the beginning.

In Hebrew the normal word order is verb, subject, object. Thus if the subject or the object comes first, that is emphasized. For example, in Isaiah 1:14 the order is object, verb, subject, thus stressing the object: "Your new moon festivals and your appointed feasts I (literally, my soul) hate."

Emphasis in Hebrew is also given by repetition, for example, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts" (Isaiah 6:3).

VI. SUMMARY OF PROCEDURES IN GRAMMATICAL INTERPRETATION

A. Procedure in Discovering the Meaning of a Word

1. Discover the etymology of the word.

2. Discover the usage of the word.

- a. By the same writer in the same book.
- b. By the same writer in other books.
- c. By other writers in the Bible.
- d. By other writers (contemporary and otherwise) outside the Bible.

3. Discover how synonyms and antonyms are used.

4. Consider the context.

- a. The immediate context.
- b. The context of the paragraph or chapter.
- c. The context of the book.
- d. The context of parallel passages.
- e. The context of the entire Bible.

5. Decide which one of several possible meanings best fits the thought of the passage.

B. Procedures for Discovering the Meaning of a Sentence

- 1.** Analyze the sentence and its elements, noting its parts of speech, the kind of sentence it is, the kinds of clauses it has, and the word order.
- 2.** Discover the meaning of each key word (see the five points above under "A") and how they contribute to the meaning of the sentence.
- 3.** Consider the influence of each part of the sentence on the thought of the whole.

- **See full article - it is excellent - [Bible 405: Hermeneutics: The Study of the Interpretation of Scriptures \(click for Pdf of the entire study\)](#)**