

NE502 Exegetical Methods
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Word Studies and How to Do them

The tools for word studies include:

- (1) A good concordance, preferably one in Greek or that keys the word to the Greek. The United Bible Societies has a somewhat brief concordance done by Schmoller (*Handkonkordanz*), now in a new compact size! Check it out. There is also a massive Computer Concordance (*Komputer Konkordanz*) to the NT edited by Aland. It's very expensive, but the library has a copy of it. Those who have computer software (such as GRAMCORD and other programs) can use them for such study.
- (2) A good lexicon: The *Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich* lexicon updated by Danker (BDAG) is a "good lexicon." I encourage you to use it. The dictionary in the back of the UBS text is not a "good lexicon" as it is too brief to be helpful for a full word study..
- (3) One or more "ready-made word studies." These include:
 - (a) *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, known popularly as "Kittel's" but abbreviated in academic or student writing as *TDNT*, in ten volumes; also in a one-volume edition without all the technical data; both published by Eerdmans.
 - (b) *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. by Colin Brown; 3 vols.; Zondervan; abbreviated as *NIDNTT*.
 - (c) Very brief entries are found in the new *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (3 vols.; Eerdmans); covers every word in the NT; sometimes only a few sentences; some entries are helpful. Abbreviated *EDNT*. Some bible encyclopedias have entries that are relevant or helpful (although you'll have to get at them through equivalent English words, which is challenging).

Cite material in #3 by author, "article," *set/book*, volume.page.

The purpose of a word study:

First, what are we looking for in a word study? Simply, what a word connotes in context or what it brings to its context. While recognizing that sentences, and not simply words, are units of meaning, remember that every speaker or author has a choice of words to use, and that sometimes the words are interesting or significant. In the sentences "she cooked a meal" and "she served a meal" you have two different verbs not because they convey a shade of nuance or meaning, but because the activity being described is different. But in "she prepared a meal" and "she prepared a feast!" the word "feast" has been chosen over "meal" because of the speaker's appreciation or admiration. So sometimes the choice of words, when there are options, is informative. If you didn't know the language and did a word study of "feast" (using dictionaries and other tools) you might find that it tends to connote either a large dinner or a festive celebration meal. In this case you might justly deduce that the author's statement "she prepared a feast" might imply more than "she prepared dinner." And so on. So we are trying to find whether there are particularly nuances, technical uses

of words, significant backgrounds, etc. that caused an author to use certain words.

How to proceed:

- (1) Check out the range of meanings for a word in BDAG. BDAG will give you the range of meanings for a word **as they judge they are found in the NT itself**. This means they have possibly excluded some other possible meanings not found in the NT. Sometimes access to other lexicons of ancient Greek are helpful (Liddell and Scott is the lexicon of classical Greek; Lampe is the lexicon of patristic Greek, but is also a supplement to L-S in this way: it does not include words which are covered in L-S).
- (2) Use a concordance to find references to the word you are studying in the writings of the author you are studying. Paul may use "righteousness" differently than does Matthew, for example. If you want to know what Paul means by "righteousness" you have to look at Paul's use of it, not Matthew's. If words have a range of possible meanings there is no guarantee that the author has to mean the same thing with the same word. Don't just compile a list of references, though; you are looking for comparable trains of thought, ideas, argumentation, etc. You have to actually read each verse reference and see how the word is used. If you had the time, inclination, and resources, you could do the same for the word you are studying in the Greek OT (the Septuagint). The concordance to the Septuagint is edited by Hatch & Redpath.
- (3) Check your preliminary findings against "ready made" word studies (like Kittel's, etc.) but remember that they don't have any secret knowledge or insight. They are drawing their conclusions and offering their interpretations based on the same data in the NT that you have. This does not mean that they are not to be trusted. It simply means that often statements of what a word means in a certain context are interpretative. (To find a word in NIDNTT you will have to use the Greek indices in the back of each volume, since the entries are by English words. You may find a Greek word discussed in more than one place).
- (4) Always keep in mind the goals of synthesizing and summarizing what you have found with the aim of providing a clear paraphrase of the sense of the passage or word you are studying. Sometimes a good paraphrase requires more than a simple synonym; you might need a phrase or short sentence to explain what the word which you are studying means at this point.

How to pick words for word studies:

- (1) Common theological terms (Kingdom of God, righteousness) are often fruitful; they obviously require more investment of time. Remember: you don't have to do everything in a passage the first time you study something. Accumulate data, wisdom, insight over the years of your ministry.
- (2) Favorite terms of an author. Examples: boasting in Paul; "signs" in John.
- (3) Terms which affect the meaning of the passage. "Let us have peace" or "we have peace" in Romans 5:1 might depend on what "peace" connotes in Paul. Some argue that the word "hypocrite" in Mt. 23 should be translated "false teacher."
- (4) Terms which are ambiguous. Who are the "magi"? Kings? wise men? astrologers?