

How To Do Word Studies

This study is taken from one of the chapters of a set of notes entitled, *Englishman's Greek*, designed for serious students who want to better understand the New Testament in light of its grammar, language and syntax. The entire set of these notes (73 pages) is available from the Middletown Bible Church (\$1.50). It is also available at the website listed below.

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How to do Word Studies

1A. The Importance of Word Studies.

1B. See Matthew 4:4; 24:35; 1 Tim. 6:3; Rev. 22:18-19. Every word that proceeds from the mouth of our God is of utmost importance!

2B. Consider such important words as FAITH, GRACE, JUSTIFY, LOVE, REDEEM, SANCTIFY, GOSPEL, CONFESS, HOLINESS, etc. We need to understand how God defines these crucial terms.

2A. The Importance of Knowing the Meaning of the Greek Word.

1B. Sometimes the same English word may represent different Greek words.

Examples:

1) John 21:15-17. Two different Greek words for "love" are used in this passage; and two different Greek words for "feed" are used.

2) Galatians 1:6-7. Two different Greek words both translated "another." The first means "another of a different same kind" and the second means "another of the same kind."

3) 2 Corinthians 5:18-19 with Hebrews 2:17. The word "reconciliation" is found in both of these passages but there are two different Greek words. A word study of the word in Hebrews 2:17 would reveal that it actually means "propitiation."

4) 2 Peter 2:7-8. Here again we have two different Greek words both translated "vexed" by the KJV translators. The meaning of these two words is similar but not identical.

2B. Sometimes different English words may represent the same Greek word.

Examples:

1) Matthew 28:19 with Acts 15:14 nations=Gentiles

2) Philippians 3:6,12,14 persecuting=follow after=press

3) Luke 4:1 Ghost=spirit

4) 1 Corinthians 13:8 fail=vanish away

5) John 3:8 wind=spirit

6) 1 John 2:20,27 unction=anointing

3B. Sometimes the Greek word is not translated into English at all, but it is merely transliterated into English. So what you really have is a Greek word spelled with English letters!

Examples:

1) See the word list in Chapter 2 for several examples: baptize, demon, evangelize, mystery, parable, prophet, Sabbath, etc.

2) 1 Corinthians 16:22 (compare Galatians 1:8-9). If you were to translate the word "anathema" it would mean "accursed, devoted to destruction." "Anathema" is a transliteration; "Accursed" is a translation.

3) Matthew 1:20 (angel). Compare Mark 1:2 where this same Greek word is translated (angel=messenger).

4) See Revelation 19:1,3,4,6 where we have a Hebrew expression that has been transliterated into Greek: ἀλληλουΐα. The Greek word was then transliterated into English (Alleluia). An actual translation of this word would be "Praise ye the LORD."

5) Sometimes a transliteration can be very misleading. In 2 Corinthians 9:7 the word "cheerful" is the Greek word hilaros (ἰλαρός). If we were to transliterate this word, we would have, "God loves a hilarious giver!" Obviously this is not the meaning of the verse. "Cheerful" is a much better translation. **Hilaros** to the Apostle Paul meant the same as **cheerful** means to us today.

4B. If a person does not know Greek, how can he determine which Greek word underlies the English word which he is studying?

For example, how can one discover that two different words for "love" are used in John 21:15-17 or that "unction" and "anointing" are two ways of translating the same word in 1 John 2:20,27 or that the word "messenger" in Mark 1:2 is the same word as "angel" in Matthew 1:20? To make such discoveries you need a TOOL! You need an interlinear Greek-English New Testament (in which the Greek words are written directly above the English words). I would recommend either one of the following:

1) *The Englishman's Greek New Testament* by Zondervan Publishers.

2) *The Interlinear Greek-English New Testament with a Lexicon* (dictionary) by George Berry (Zondervan Publishers).

Note: There are different Bible software programs that will also help you to see which Greek words underlie the English words if you are more inclined to use a computer in doing your Greek studies.

3A. The Importance of WORD USAGE.

1B. USAGE DETERMINES MEANING.

The question ever before us is this: HOW WAS THE WORD ACTUALLY USED? How was the word used in the New Testament? How was the word used in the Septuagint? (very helpful) How was the word used by other Greek writers?

Compare a DICTIONARY. A dictionary is merely a listing of WORD USAGE (a catalog of how words are used in any given language).

2B. ETYMOLOGY DOES NOT DETERMINE MEANING.

"Usage determines the meaning of words"--James L. Boyer, "Semantics in Biblical Interpretation," *Grace Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 2, Spring 1962.

"The meaning of a word depends on its usage, not on its derivation"--"Biblical Exegesis and Hermeneutics," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Macropaedia (1974), Vol. 7, p. 61.

"Usage determines the meaning of words"--Rollin T. Chafer, *The Science of Biblical Hermeneutics* (Dallas, TX: Bibliotheca Sacra, n.d.), p. 28.

Etymology is concerned primarily with the history of a word. It is the study of the derivation of a word. Etymology is the study of the **original meaning** of a word (which is often different than the **true meaning** of a word as that word is currently being used). WORD USAGE is concerned with how words are actually used and how they are currently used; ETYMOLOGY is concerned with how words were originally used. Therefore, it is USAGE not ETYMOLOGY that must determine the meaning of a word.

3B. ETYMOLOGY CAN BE MISLEADING AND THUS HARMFUL

1C. English examples:

1) sincere

The etymology of this word is "without wax" (**sine**=without **cera**=wax). But today if you describe a person as being "without wax" would people conclude that you are describing a sincere person?

2) book

The etymology of this word is "beech-tree." But if you said to someone, "Over the summer I read a very enjoyable beech-tree," would the person understand your meaning?

3) silly

This word originally derived from the verb "to bless."
But it is SILLY to think that we use this word in that way today!

4) etymology

This word is from the Greek **etimos** which means "true," and hence the word means "true meaning." But "etymology" really means "original meaning." So even the word "etymology" does not really mean etymology! In other words, its original meaning does not agree with its current usage, and to find the "true meaning" we must always go by the current usage.

5) understand

But what does "standing under" have to do with understanding?

6) prevent

This word originally meant "to come before" and is used that way in the KJV of 1 Thessalonians 4:15. But we don't usually use this word in that way today. Today it means "to hinder, to keep from happening" as "the father prevented his son from going out into the busy road."

2C. Greek examples:

1) The word for "read" - **anaginoskō** (ἀναγινώσκω)

ana = again **ginoskō** = to know

But what does "knowing again" have to do with reading?

2) The word for "deacon" - **diakonos** (διάκονος)

dia = through **konos** = dust [Note: This derivation is questionable. Some scholars would disagree with the assertion that **diakonos** originally meant through + dust]. But assuming that the derivation is legitimate, what does this really tell us about deacons? "To raise a dust by passing through" and thus a deacon is one who serves energetically! Certainly we would want deacons who "raise a dust" in their energetic service for Christ but to base this on the questionable derivation of this word is not a sound use of language. The word actually means "servant" and deacons are to be humble servants of Christ.

4B. ETYMOLOGY CAN BE HELPFUL.

Etymology can be of great value in **illustrating** the meaning of words. But, the meaning must first be determined by usage. Etymology can serve to illustrate a word **whose meaning has already been determined by usage.**

Examples:

1) covetousness **pleonexia** (πλεονεξία)

pleon = more **exia** = to have

A covetous person is never satisfied. He desire **to have more** and more and more.

2) gospel **euangelion** (εὐαγγέλιον)

eu = good **angelion** = announcement

The gospel is an announcement of good news, glad tidings!

3) moment (1 Corinthians 15:52) **atomos** (ἄτομος)

Compare the English word "atom"

a = un (a negative particle) **tomos** = to cut; hence **atomos** means "uncut, unable to be divided."

How quickly will the Rapture take place?

This is answered in 1 Corinthians 15:52, "in a **moment**, in the twinkling of an eye." The word "moment" is interesting. It is the Greek word "*atom*." The word *atom* means "not cut, you cannot cut it anymore." Suppose you were to keep cutting up a pie into smaller and smaller pieces. If you had a knife sharp enough and small enough you could keep cutting the pieces down to the point where you could not cut the pieces or particles any smaller. We call this an "atom." [However, we now know that you can even cut atoms into smaller particles].

The term "*atom*" is also used of time. We can cut time into years and into days and into hours and into minutes and into seconds. An "*atom* of time" is the smallest measurement of time (the point where you can't cut time anymore). In English we might call this a "split-second." How fast will the Rapture take place? In a split second, in the twinkling of an eye. If you blink, you will miss it!

4) confess (1 John 1:9) **homologeō** (ὁμολογέω)

homo = same **logeō** = to say This, "to same the same thing"

When I confess my sins I am **saying the same thing** about sin that God does. I am agreeing with God that what I have done is sinful. I am seeing my sin as God does. God says that I have sinned and I am agreeing with God and saying, "Yes, Lord, I have sinned and done this evil in Thy sight" (Psalm 51).

5B. WORD USAGE CHANGES WITH TIME.

Word usage is not constant through time. Changes in meaning often occur. Language is in a state of constant flux as long as the language is **living** (still being used). Dead languages (such as Latin) never change!

Example:

The King James Bible was published in 1611. Since that time many English words that were then used have changed their meaning and have become obsolete. This is one of the reasons for the word changes that you find in the New Scofield Bible. Some of these obsolete words are as follows:

- 1) "wot" (Romans 11:2)
- 2) "let" (2 Thessalonians 2:7)
- 3) "Ghost" (Matthew 28:19)
- 4) "every whit" (John 13:10)

Can you think of others?

6B. THE SAME WORD CAN BE USED IN A VARIETY OF WAYS.

Consider the word **up**. It is easy to understand **up** toward the sky or toward the top of a list. But when we waken, why do we wake **up**? At a meeting, why does a topic come **up**, why do participants speak **up**, and why are officers **up** for election? Any why is it **up** to the secretary to write **up** a report?

Often the little word isn't needed, but we use it anyway. We brighten **up** a room, light **up** a cigar, polish **up** the silver, lock **up** the house, and fix **up** the old car. At other times, it has special meanings. People stir **up** trouble, line **up** for tickets, work **up** an appetite, think **up** excuses, get tied **up** in traffic. To be dressed is one thing, but to be dressed **up** is special. It may be confusing, but a drain must be opened **up** because it is stopped **up**. We open **up** a store in the morning and close it **up** at night. We seem to be mixed **up** about **up**.

To be up on the proper use of **up** look up the word in your dictionary. In one desk-size dictionary **up** takes up half a page, and listed definitions add **up** to about 40. If you are **up** to it, you might try building **up** a list of the many ways in which **up** is used.. It will take

up a lot of your time but, if you don't give **up**, you may wind **up** with a thousand.

--Frank S. Endicott

So don't be surprised if the same Greek word is used in different ways in the Greek New Testament!

4A. The Procedure for Doing a Word Study.

Step 1

Select the word that you desire to study.

Perhaps it is a word that you came across in your personal study or devotional time, and you want to better understand what this word really means and how it is used in the Bible. For our example we will choose the important verb in 1 Thessalonians 4:17—"caught up." In the Latin Bible this is the verb "rapturō" from which we derive our English word "rapture." Thus this word study will shed important light on the true meaning of the term "rapture." This verse which we have selected is our "target passage." We want to determine the meaning of this particular verb especially as it is used here in this verse.

Step 2

Find every place in the Bible where this word is used.

The fundamental principle for doing word studies is this: **USAGE DETERMINES MEANING**. Sir Robert Anderson has stated it well: "In dealing with a dead language, etymology (the origin or history of a word) may sometimes afford a clue to the meaning of a word, but the only safe and certain guide to its meaning is its use." Since **usage determines meaning**, we must see how our verb in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 (**HARPAZŌ**, ἀρπάζω) is used elsewhere in the New Testament and hopefully this will shed light on its meaning in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 which is our target passage.

Note: The New Testament was written in Greek and the Old Testament in Hebrew (with the exception of a few Aramaic passages). Since the Greek verb we are studying is in the New Testament, we need not consult the Old Testament because God did not use the Greek language when He gave the O.T. The ambitious student, however, could study how the verb is used in the Septuagint which is an ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament, as long as he keeps in mind that the Septuagint is a translation, and is not the

original text God gave.

In order to complete STEP 2, you need a tool called a CONCORDANCE.

1. *The Englishman's Greek Concordance* is the ideal tool because it gives you all the information you need very quickly. It will list every place the verb is found in the New Testament. Also it is not necessary to know Greek in order to use this concordance.
2. *Young's Analytical Concordance* or *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance* may also be used, but it will take you many more steps to find the same information. This is because these concordances are arranged according to the English words, not the Greek words.
3. There may be computer programs which can give you the information you need. But what you need to find is every place in the New Testament where the verb HARPAZŌ is found.

Note: You don't want to find every place where "caught" or "caught up" is found because these English words may be translated from different Greek verbs, and we are only concerned about the verb HARPAZŌ. Also there are places where HARPAZŌ is found but the English text does not translate it as "caught" or "caught up" at all (such as John 10:28 where it is translated "pluck" or Jude 23 where it is translated "pulling").

With the help of a concordance you will find that in addition to 1 Thess. 4:17, the verb HARPAZŌ occurs in 12 other places in the N.T.

Matt. 11:12 take	John 10:28 pluck	2 Cor. 12:2 caught up
Matt. 13:19 catcheth away	John 10:29 pluck	2 Cor. 12:4 caught up
John 6:15 take by force	Acts 8:39 caught away	Jude 23 pulling
John 10:12 catcheth	Acts 23:10 take by force	Rev. 12:15 caught up

Step 3

Study and classify usage.

What meaning makes the best sense in each passage? Is the word used in different ways? Pay close attention to the context of each passage. Look at each passage where the word is used and try to get a "feel" for the word. On a piece of paper write down some comments as to how the word is used in each of the different passages that you look at.

The following is a study of the word HARPAZŌ and how it is used:

Matthew 11:12. Used of something being taken violently by force.

Matthew 13:19. Used of the devil snatching away and removing the seed (of the Word) that was sown in the heart.

John 6:15. Used of the Jews who wanted to take Christ by force and make Him King.

John 10:12. Used of a wolf who catches and takes away the sheep (snatches them, grabs them by force).

John 10:28-29. Used of God who will never allow the true believer to be plucked out (removed, taken, snatched) from Christ's hand and from the Father's hand. No wolf will ever catch or snatch these sheep (cf. John 10:12). The believer will never be raptured from God's hand.

Acts 8:39. Used of Philip who was supernaturally caught away (removed, suddenly taken from one place to another). In this case it involved sudden disappearance ("the eunuch saw him no more").

Acts 23:10. Use of Paul who was taken by force, grabbed and taken away from the Jews for the sake of his own safety.

2 Corinthians 12:2,4. Used of Paul who was caught up (snatched up, quickly taken up) to the third heaven or paradise. He was not sure whether this happened in the body or out of the body, but he knew that he was removed from earth to heaven.

Jude 23. Used of snatching (pulling out, quickly removing) something from the fire.

Revelation 12:5. Used to describe the ascension of Christ. He was caught up (quickly removed) from earth to heaven.

Note: The ambitious student could also study the verb HARPAZŌ as it is found in the Septuagint. The book *A Concordance of the Septuagint* (Bagster) reveals that this verb is found in the following places in the Septuagint (ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament): Gen. 37:33; Lev. 6:4; 19:13; Deut. 28:31; Jud. 21:21,23; 2 Sam. 23:31; Job 20:19; 24:2,9,19; Psalm 7:3; 9:30 (twice); 21:14; 49:22; 68:5; 103:21; Isa. 10:2; Ezekiel 18:7,12,16,18; 19:3,6; 22:25,27; Hos. 5:14; 6:1; Amos 1:11; 3:4; Micah 3:2; 5:8; Nahum 2:12. My copy of *A Concordance of the Septuagint* was difficult to read because the print was somewhat smudged. Because of this, some of these references may be inadvertently copied in error. Most, however, should be correct.

Step 4

Step 4
Summarize your conclusions.

Write a brief paragraph in which you describe how this word is used in the New Testament. Here is an example of a summary paragraph that might be written for the verb HARPAZŌ:

As used in the New Testament, the verb HARPAZŌ means “to take, take by force, snatch, snatch up, grab, remove quickly, catch up, catch away, pluck out.” It always involves some force outside the person (or thing) acting upon it and causing the person (or thing) to be taken or snatched up or removed. It often implies sudden removal and it often refers to a person being quickly (and supernaturally) taken from one place to another.

Step 5
Apply your results to the target passage.

How does what I have learned about this word help me to understand its meaning in the target passage? How does my study of HARPAZŌ help me to understand the meaning of “caught up” in 1 Thessalonians 4:17?

It is helpful to write out your results. Here is our example: The verb “caught up” in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 means “snatched up, caught up, taken away quickly, suddenly removed.” Just as Philip was supernaturally and quickly caught away from one place to another (Acts 8:39), just as the Lord was supernaturally caught up to heaven at the time of the ascension (Rev. 12:5), just as Paul was supernaturally taken to the third heaven (2 Cor. 12:2,4), so it will be that living believers at the coming of the Lord Jesus will be supernaturally caught up and suddenly removed from earth to heaven. It also implies “sudden disappearance” (Acts 8:39 and compare Hebrews 11:5). Someday believers will be suddenly acted upon by an outside force as our Lord calls us to be with Himself! “Even so, be coming, Lord Jesus!”

Step 6
Check your results with a lexicon.

A lexicon is a dictionary. A Hebrew lexicon would give the meanings of the words found in the Old Testament. A Greek lexicon would give the meanings of the words found in the New Testament. Consulting the lexicon should be your last step. After you have done all your work, then you can consult the lexicons to see if they give the correct meaning. Remember, the person who wrote the lexicon had to follow the same steps that you followed. What does the lexicon say about how the word is used throughout the New Testament (just as you did in STEP 4)? What does the lexicon say about how the word is used in your target passage (just as you did in STEP 5)? Do you agree with the

lexicon? Remember, lexicons are not infallible. Here are some examples of what the lexicons say about the verb HARPАЗŌ (see chart on the next page). You will notice that these dictionaries basically are in agreement with what you have already learned about the verb.

Lexicon or Dictionary	The Meaning of the Word in General	The Meaning of the Word in 1 Thess. 4:17
Arndt & Gingrich	snatch, seize, take suddenly, carry off, snatch or take away	snatch or take away (in such a way that no resistance is offered)
Thayer	seize, carry off by force, snatch out or away, to seize and carry off speedily	used of divine power transferring a person marvelously and swiftly from one place to another: "to snatch or catch away"
Vine	to snatch or catch away	used of the rapture of the saints at the return of the Lord
Bullinger	to snatch away, to carry off (suddenly and by force)	to snatch away, to carry off (suddenly and by force)
Kittle	to take something forcefully, often with the thought of speed, snatch	to catch up or away, expressing the mighty operation of God

Please notice that the lexicons did not really tell you anything that you did not first learn yourself. Thus you are not depending on the lexicons, but you are just using them as a helpful check or confirmation of what you have already discovered by your own study of how the word is used in the Bible.

The following is a listing of helpful dictionaries that can be used without a knowledge of Greek or Hebrew:

Greek

A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament by Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich used in connection with the *Index to the Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich Lexicon* by John R. Alsop (Zondervan). The *Index* helps those who do not know Greek to be able to use this lexicon.

Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words. Easy to use. You look up the English words and it will discuss the underlying Greek words.

A Critical Lexicon and Concordance, E.W. Bullinger. Similar to Vine's. But be careful because Bullinger, though a fine scholar, denies eternal punishment and is ultra-dispensational in his thinking.

Hebrew

Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament by Brown, Driver and Briggs used in connection with the *Index to Brown, Driver & Briggs Hebrew Lexicon* compiled by Bruce Einspahr. This lexicon is probably the best available. Though it was done by unbelieving liberals, the definitions, for the most part, are accurate.

Old Testament Word Studies by William Wilson. This is the closest thing to Vine's that we have for Old Testament word studies.

Nelson's Expository Dictionary of the Old Testament, edited by Unger and White.

Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, Harris, Archer, Waltke.

Two other helpful word study books:

Synonyms of the New Testament by Archbishop Trench (Greek words).

Old Testament Synonyms by Girdlestone (Hebrew words).

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.

—John Bunyan

George Zeller (revised 2004)

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