

Discovery Class

Session 6 of 9: Interpretation, Part Two: Word Studies and Grammar

Clayton Valley Church

Session Goals

- *Run a word study on your own, start to finish, with tools you already have.*
- *Know what a tool is telling you when it reports the form of a word.*
- *Recognize which details reward the study of a particular word, and which do not.*

A. Words Matter

Words are symbols that express ideas. Therefore it is important that we properly define words in their biblical context. **Usage always determines meaning.**

B. The Three Steps

a. Pick a word that interests you

A word the passage repeats, a word the argument turns on, or a word your curiosity is driving towards. Not every word needs a study, and the ones worth studying usually announce themselves.

b. Examine the word behind the word

The Greek or Hebrew term the English is translating. You do not need to read the language to find it. An interlinear or a Strong's number will get you there.

c. Note helpful details

Which details pay off will vary by word. Some open up on their grammar, others on their background, others on where else they appear.

- 1. Tense or case.** What form the word is in, and what that form is claiming. Tense is how verbs are categorized. Case is how nouns are categorized.
- 2. Definition.** What the lexicon says, read through rather than stopping at the first line.
- 3. Cultural and historical background.** What the word carried for the people who first heard it.
- 4. Usage.** Where else the author uses it, and where else it appears in Scripture.

C. Word Form

Parsing Words

Definition: Parsing means breaking a word down into its grammatical parts.

You will not need to learn Greek or Hebrew in order to do this. Instead we will use tools (either online or in book form) in order to parse words.

These are here to keep. You will not use all of them on any one word, and you are not expected to memorize any of them.

Greek Verbs

English tense is mostly about the time of an action. Greek tense is mostly about the kind of action. Same word, different question.

Tense	Kind of action	Example
Present	Action in progress	I am walking
Imperfect	Continuous action in past time	I was walking
Aorist	Action occurring at a point	I walked
Perfect	Completed action whose results stand	I stand released
Future	Action still to come	I will walk

The perfect uses a different verb above on purpose. Walking will not carry the idea of a completed action whose effect is still standing, in the same way the verb “released” will.

Tense: the perfect

Ephesians 2:8-9

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

“You have been saved” is a perfect: completed action whose results stand.

Voice tells you how the subject stands in relation to the action.

Voice	What it signals	Found in
Active	The subject performs the action	English and Greek
Passive	The subject receives the action	English and Greek
Middle	The subject performs the action in his own interest	Greek only

The middle voice has no English equivalent, so it is easy to flatten in translation and worth asking about when a commentary makes something of it.

Mood tells you how certain the action is, or whether it is being commanded.

Mood	What it signals	Example
Indicative	Certainty, a statement of fact	he walks
Imperative	Command or entreaty	walk
Subjunctive	Probability, something less than certain	he may walk, 1 Peter 2:12

Greek Nouns

Marker	Options	In English
Gender	Masculine, feminine, neuter	he, she, it
Number	Singular, plural	I, you, he, she, it / we, you all, they
Person	First, second, third	I and we / you and you all / he, she, it, they

Case tells you what job the noun is doing in the sentence.

Case	What it signals	Rough sense
Nominative	Designation	the subject
Genitive	Definition, description	of, belonging to
Dative	Interest, reference	to, for
Accusative	Limitation	the object
Vocative	Address	direct address

Hebrew Verbs

Hebrew works differently from Greek in two ways. The stem of a verb changes the force of the action, and the form marks whether an action is complete rather than when it happened, with time determined by the context.

Force	Active	Passive	Reflexive
Simple	Qal	Niphal	Niphal
Intensive	Piel	Pual	Hithpael
Causative	Hiphil	Hophal	

Niphal covers both the passive and the reflexive of the simple stem, which is why it appears twice. There is no standard causative reflexive, so that cell is empty.

Form	What it signals	Example
Perfect	Past action completed	I watched
Imperfect	Action not yet completed	would, should, may, might watch
Imperative	Positive command, second person	watch
Jussive	A wish or request, second or third person	may he watch, let him watch
Cohortative	A request, or resolve, first person	let us watch, I will watch

D. Etymology, Where a Word Comes From

Definition: Etymology is the history of a word: where it came from, what it is built out of, and how it is related to words in other languages.

Greek builds many of its words out of visible parts. Examples:

Ekklesia, translated “church.” From ek, “out of,” and kaleo, “to call.” The word signifies the called out ones.

Episkopos, translated “overseer” or “bishop.” From epi, “upon” or “over,” and skopeo, “to look.” The word means to look over, to oversee.

Apostolos, translated “apostle.” From apo, “away from,” and stello, “to send.” The word means one who is sent.

One caution. A word is not the sum of its parts. “In-de-pen-dent” does not refer to “a dent in the pen.”

E. Word Study: Galatians 6:1

Galatians 6:1

Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.

Step a. The word: restore

Read Galatians 5:16 through 6:5 first. Paul has just finished walking by the Spirit and listing the fruit of the Spirit. This verse is what he says to do when someone falls.

Step b. The word behind the word: katartizo

Step c. The details

1. Form. A present imperative. It is a command, and the present carries action in progress, so this is ongoing work rather than a single act.

2. Definition. Read the whole entry, and note which sense the lexicon assigns to this verse.

3. Background. Outside the New Testament this word was used for putting something back into working order: setting a broken bone in the Greek medical writers, and refitting a ship for sea. The picture underneath the word is repair of something that already exists.

4. Usage. Paul first, then wider.

1 Corinthians 1:10

...but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.

2 Corinthians 13:11

Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.

Matthew 4:21

And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. And he called them.

Mark 1:19

And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets.

What have you discovered about the meaning of “restore” in Galatians 6:1?

F. Syntax

Definition: When we study syntax we examine how words combine to form grammatically correct phrases, clauses, and sentences.

The article

In Greek the presence of the article tends to identify, and its absence tends to qualify.

Matthew 1:20

But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife..."

Matthew 1:24

When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife,

The angel is introduced without the article in verse 20. By verse 24 the article has appeared, marking him as the one already named.

Antecedents

A pronoun points back at something. Finding what it points at is often the difference between a vague sense of a passage and seeing what is happening in it.

3 John 9-10

I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority. So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, talking wicked nonsense against us. And not content with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church.

The pronoun in verse 9, "who," points back to someone. Who is it? What does this phrase show us about this person?

Who is the "them" who is put out of the church?

What does this entire passage tell us about what Diotrephes is doing?

Some Suggested Resources

To use while you study

- The Strongest Strong's Exhaustive Concordance, Kohlenberger and Swanson. Find every place a word is used.
- New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, Abridged Edition, edited by Verlyn Verbrugge. New Testament. See what a word carries.
- Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, Harris, Archer, and Waltke, one-volume edition. The Old Testament counterpart.
- STEP Bible, Blue Letter Bible, Logos, Accordance.

If you want to go further

- Exegetical Fallacies, D. A. Carson. How word studies go wrong.
- Greek for the Rest of Us, William Mounce. Enough Greek to use the tools well, without a language course.

Homework

This week is three word studies, start to finish. A worksheet for each one follows. They are yours to keep and you will not turn them in, so write on them freely and bring your questions to class.

Question 1: “truth” in 3 John

Using STEP Bible, or another resource you prefer, do a full word study on “truth” in 3 John. Fill in the New Testament worksheet with what you found.

Question 2: A Verb from 3 John

Select a verb from 3 John that interests you. Do a full word study on it and fill in a second New Testament worksheet.

Question 3: A Word from Psalm 34

Go to Psalm 34, select a word that interests you, do a full word study on it, and fill in the Old Testament worksheet.

Word Study Worksheets

Five sheets follow. The first three are for this week, one for each homework question, and they are yours to write on. The last two are blanks, one New Testament and one Old Testament, kept clean so you can copy them for any word study you run later. Every parsing term carries a short definition, so a sheet works on its own without these notes in hand. The full reference tables are in Section C if you want the whole grid.

New Testament Word Study Worksheet

For Question 1: "truth" in 3 John

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE		
STEP A: PICK A WORD <i>A word that repeats, a word the argument turns on, or a word your curiosity is driving towards.</i>		
ENGLISH WORD SELECTED	WHY DID YOU PICK IT?	
	☐ It repeats ☐ The argument turns on it ☐ It sparks curiosity	
STEP B: THE WORD BEHIND THE WORD <i>Use an interlinear or a Strong's number. You do not need to read the language to find it.</i>		
GREEK WORD	STRONG'S NUMBER	DEFINITION
STEP C: PARSING AND FORM <i>Uncover using STEP Bible, Blue Letter Bible or another tool.</i>		
VERB FORM Tense: ☐ Present (in progress) ☐ Imperfect (past, continuous) ☐ Aorist (action at a point) ☐ Perfect (done, results stand) ☐ Future (still to come) Voice: ☐ Active (subject acts) ☐ Passive (subject receives) ☐ Middle (acts in his own interest) Mood: ☐ Indicative (fact) ☐ Imperative (command) ☐ Subjunctive (probability)		NOUN OR ADJECTIVE FORM Case: ☐ Nominative (the subject) ☐ Genitive (of, description) ☐ Dative (to or for, reference) ☐ Accusative (the object) ☐ Vocative (direct address) Number: ☐ Singular ☐ Plural Gender: ☐ Masculine ☐ Feminine ☐ Neuter Article: ☐ Present (identifies) ☐ Absent (qualifies)
WHAT DOES THIS FORM TELL YOU ABOUT THE MEANING OF THIS WORD?		
STEP D: LEXICON DEFINITION		
STEP E: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND <i>How was the word used outside the New Testament, in ordinary Greek or in the Greek Old Testament?</i>		
STEP F: USAGE		
CONTEXT LEVEL	REFERENCES	MEANING YOU OBSERVED
Same book		
Same author		
Rest of the New Testament		
SUMMARY: WHAT DOES THE WORD MEAN AS THE AUTHOR USES IT HERE? <i>Two or three sentences in your own words.</i>		

New Testament Word Study Worksheet

For Question 2: a verb from 3 John

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

STEP A: PICK A WORD

A word that repeats, a word the argument turns on, or a word your curiosity is driving towards.

ENGLISH WORD SELECTED

WHY DID YOU PICK IT?

☐ It repeats ☐ The argument turns on it ☐ It sparks curiosity

STEP B: THE WORD BEHIND THE WORD

Use an interlinear or a Strong's number. You do not need to read the language to find it.

GREEK WORD

STRONG'S NUMBER

DEFINITION

STEP C: PARSING AND FORM

Uncover using STEP Bible, Blue Letter Bible or another tool.

VERB FORM

Tense: ☐ Present (in progress) ☐ Imperfect (past, continuous)
☐ Aorist (action at a point) ☐ Perfect (done, results stand)
☐ Future (still to come)
Voice: ☐ Active (subject acts) ☐ Passive (subject receives)
☐ Middle (acts in his own interest)
Mood: ☐ Indicative (fact) ☐ Imperative (command)
☐ Subjunctive (probability)

NOUN OR ADJECTIVE FORM

Case: ☐ Nominative (the subject) ☐ Genitive (of, description)
☐ Dative (to or for, reference) ☐ Accusative (the object)
☐ Vocative (direct address)
Number: ☐ Singular ☐ Plural
Gender: ☐ Masculine ☐ Feminine ☐ Neuter
Article: ☐ Present (identifies) ☐ Absent (qualifies)

WHAT DOES THIS FORM TELL YOU ABOUT THE MEANING OF THIS WORD?

STEP D: LEXICON DEFINITION

STEP E: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

How was the word used outside the New Testament, in ordinary Greek or in the Greek Old Testament?

STEP F: USAGE

CONTEXT LEVEL

REFERENCES

MEANING YOU OBSERVED

Same book

Same author

Rest of the New Testament

SUMMARY: WHAT DOES THE WORD MEAN AS THE AUTHOR USES IT HERE?

Two or three sentences in your own words.

Old Testament Word Study Worksheet

For Question 3: a word from Psalm 34

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE		
STEP A: PICK A WORD <i>A word that repeats, a word the argument turns on, or a word your curiosity is driving towards.</i>		
ENGLISH WORD SELECTED	WHY DID YOU PICK IT?	
	☐ It repeats ☐ The argument turns on it ☐ It sparks curiosity	
STEP B: THE WORD BEHIND THE WORD <i>Use an interlinear or a Strong's number. You do not need to read the language to find it.</i>		
HEBREW WORD OR ROOT	STRONG'S NUMBER	DEFINITION
STEP C: PARSING AND FORM <i>Uncover using STEP Bible, Blue Letter Bible or another tool.</i>		
VERB STEM, THE FORCE OF THE ACTION Simple: ☐ Qal (active) ☐ Niphal (passive or reflexive) Intensive: ☐ Piel (active) ☐ Pual (passive) ☐ Hithpael (reflexive) Causative: ☐ Hiphil (active) ☐ Hophal (passive) <i>There is no standard causative reflexive.</i>		VERB FORM, WHETHER IT IS COMPLETE Form: ☐ Perfect (action completed) ☐ Imperfect (not yet completed) ☐ Imperative (command, second person) ☐ Jussive (a wish, second or third person) ☐ Cohortative (a resolve, first person) <i>Hebrew marks whether an action is complete rather than when it happened. Context supplies the time.</i>
WHAT DOES THIS FORM TELL YOU ABOUT THE MEANING OF THIS WORD? 		
STEP D: LEXICON DEFINITION 		
STEP E: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND <i>What did this word carry for Israel in worship, in the covenant, or in daily life?</i> 		
STEP F: USAGE		
CONTEXT LEVEL	REFERENCES	MEANING YOU OBSERVED
Same book		
Same section or author		
Rest of the Old Testament		
SUMMARY: WHAT DOES THE WORD MEAN AS THE AUTHOR USES IT HERE? <i>Two or three sentences in your own words.</i> 		

New Testament Word Study Worksheet

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