

# The Bible

## Bible Study - How To Study Linguistically

### Introduction

When an individual reads the first creation narrative (Gen. 1:1-2:3), it is easy to assume that there is impressed on their mind the repetition of the words, “And God said” (Gen. 1:3, 6, 9, 11 etc.). They would understand that God is a communicator. In the first creation narrative God communicated His will through His spoken word (Heb. 11:3). He also creates and makes (Gen. 1:1, 16) and forms man (Gen. 1:27-29). A careful reading of Leviticus will show that almost the entire book is made up of God as the Communicator, for the expression, “the Lord spake unto Moses” occurs 33 times. Since words are the most precise way of communication, one of the ways to study the Bible is in the words which are used. On this matter several considerations must be observed which will be mentioned now and then developed:

- a) The same word can be used in a variety of contexts.
- b) A great deal depends on the ancient meaning of the word as distinct to the modern use of the same word.
- c) Consideration needs to be observed in the tense of the word. Is it present, active future, passive, singular, or plural, etc?
- d) A word can have a different meaning in what it conveys and what it means.
- e) Several Greek words can be translated by the same English word.
- f) A Hebrew or Greek word can be translated various ways.



### Clarifications

The same word can be used in a variety of contexts.

- a) The same word such as “Lion”, “bear”, “Lamb”, can be used in a variety of contexts. For instance, consider the word “bear”. It is evident that the word has a different meaning when it is recorded that David killed a bear (1 Sam. 17:36) or when the Lord said concerning Israel, “I bear you on eagles’ wings” (Ex. 19:4); or when Cain said, “My punishment is greater than I can bear (Gen. 4:13); and when the law stated, “Thou shalt not bear false witness” (Ex. 20:16). Therefore, words must be taken in the context in which they are found.
- b) A great deal depends on the ancient meaning of the word as distinct to the modern use of the same word.
  - i) One of the most precious words to the child of God is the word “hope”. We “rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (Rom. 5:2) and “hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:7). In today’s world, to hope for something does not mean to have full assurance such and such will definitely happen. Here in March on the west coast of Canada we hope that tomorrow there will be a change in the weather and be a bright sunny day, but reality is, it will probably not be, but we can hope for it. The scriptures never use the word in that way. When God uses the word hope it indicates the definite assurance, a joyful expectation of that which will be or already is. Our hope, definite assurance of salvation (Col. 1:23; 1 Thess. 5:8), is a present reality. The coming of the Lord is our hope, a joyful expectation that will happen.
- c) Consideration needs to be observed in the tense of the word. Is it present, active future, passive, singular, or plural etc.?
  - i) While an individual does not need to be a Greek scholar (although it must be a great advantage to be fluent and have full understanding of the ancient languages), there are advantages in recognizing that there are 23 different prepositions in Greek. Furthermore, words can be in the “active”, “aorist”, “future”, or one of several pronouns, “perfect”, “subjective”, etc. In this sort of study one must be very careful in what word is used and how it is used. For instance, in John 3:16, “believeth” is the tense past, “believed” or “present”. It is in the present active participle, which means it is a present ongoing activity. The individual is at this moment “believing”.

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- d) A word can have a different meaning in what it conveys and what it means.
- i) An illustration of this is the word “baptize”. It does not mean to be “put into, put under, and taken out”. It means to be “put into”, period. We were, “Baptized into Jesus Christ” (Rom. 6:3) and thankfully will never be taken out, for if such were the case, we would lose our salvation. However, the word when used in Corinthians when Paul wrote, “were ye baptized in the name of Paul?” (1 Cor. 1:13), Paul speaks of our water baptism as an illustration of the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord. It clearly shows that it is not the literal meaning but the symbolic teaching that is involved (Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12).
- e) Several Greek words can be translated by the same English word.
- i) In the New Testament the word “crown” and “crowns” is mentioned twenty-one times, but it is not always the same Greek word. The Greeks had two different words for a crown:
    1. Stephanos refers to the crown which indicated victory at the games, civic merit, etc. It was made of ivy, olive twigs or gold leaves, sometimes flowers, and worn on the head. There may be one occasion when this word is used for a kingly crown and that is when the soldiers were mocking the Lord (Matt. 27:29).
    2. A “diadēma” was a kingly or imperial crown which indicates a kingdom. The Hebrew equivalent is used when God, speaking of Israel, said, “Thou shalt also be a crown (stephanos) of glory in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God” (Isa. 62:3). It was normally white linen, or a silk band, or ribbon encircling the head. Sometimes the kingly crown (diadēma) was woven with a laurel wreath as Plutarch described the crown offered to Antonius by Caesar.
    3. When Peter spoke of the “crown of life”, it was not a symbol of royalty but victory. There are three occasions when the word “diadēma” is used. In Revelation 12:3 and 13:2 it is associated with Satan, but in Revelation 19:12 it is associated with the Lord.
- f) The words “no” and “not”
- i) “Mē” is an absolute, whereas “Ou” is conditional. Both words are used when our Lord said, “He that believeth on him is not (ou) condemned (for there is still the possibility of them believing) . . . he that believeth not (mē) is condemned already (Jn. 3:18).
- g) A Hebrew or Greek word can be translated various ways.
- i) One of the great problems with translation is oftentimes, for some reason I am not aware of and have never been able to discover, a Hebrew word will, within the same context, be translated two different ways. For instance, in the following note the words “blemish” and “spot”.
    - (a) “If his offering be a burnt sacrifice of the herd, let him offer a male without blemish: he shall offer it of his own voluntary will at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the LORD” (Lev. 1:3).
    - (b) “This is the ordinance of the law which the LORD hath commanded, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring thee a red heifer without spot, wherein is no blemish, and upon which never came yoke” (Num. 19:2).

An individual could not be faulted for assuming the word translated “blemish” (Lev. 1:3) was the same Hebrew word as “blemish” in Numbers 19:2. However, that would be wrong, for the word “Spot” in Numbers 19:2 is the same Hebrew word as “Blemish” in Leviticus 1:3 and the word translated “blemish” in Numbers 19:2 is totally different.

- (a) The word translated “without blemish” (tamiym) is also translated “without blemish” (38 times); “without spot” (6 times); “perfect” (15 times), and “upright” (8 times).

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**May God grant us good understanding as He, by His Holy Spirit, deigns to guide us into all truth.**  
**John 16:13**