

The Study of Words and the Use of Same

Some Bibliographic Notes in brief:

The following are useful works in this study but, as with all such works, must be read with due care.

Barr: THE SEMANTICS OF BILICAL LANGUAGE  
Carson: EXEGETICAL FALLACIES  
Girdleston: SYNONYMS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT  
Silva: BIBLICAL WORDS AND THEIR MEANING  
Trench: THE STUDY OF WORDS

Students often begin doing word studies before anything else and in a very undisciplined way. Word studies superficially offer promise of great success as it is very satisfying to say, "the Hebrew word in this place is..." and then to give a dictionary intonation of its meaning and implication. But this is tenuous at best and often misleading. A full study of words (or a word) may be very rewarding or it may amount to a catalog of what one does not know but if done well the results are a lifetime tool of study. As with our other workbook lessons, this is a short piece and not exhaustive but hopefully it will help you in the process and the above mentioned books are all useful in making sure the process is accurate.

1. The General Importance

Languages are made up of words and people choose words to indicate the intent of their ideas. If you doubt this, intentionally garble a few words when you are speaking to someone and the point will soon be made albeit your conversationalist may think you an idiot in the process. It is customary to think that people use words without reflection and the truth is that some measure of speech is involuntary. But when a point is to be made, persons of average intelligence choose their expressions as thoughtfully as possible so as to admit of no misunderstanding.

There are some common fallacies in word study...the idea that a given term will have an identical meaning in every usage, that the variation of a word actually gives a variation to an idea or a doctrine, that a word is understood in every age the same, and so forth. We may not treat all of these but we will try to show the more positive side of the action so that our exegetes will not pass up the meaning of words.

2. Notes on Procedure

The first item is almost absurd...but one needs to determine what word one is studying. The second item is not very impressive, either, but one should learn all the ways in which that word has been translated or understood. In the third place one should learn all the terms that have been similarly translated or understood in the subject language. A concordance will help on all of these and it is not hard to gain this sort of information but it is absolutely necessary in the matter of word study. Following such basic stuff the following steps are vital:

--Determine the basic meaning of a term...what it means at root or heart and how it is normally understood.