

Bible Language Resources

Introduction

There are a host of Bibles now available and Christians are utterly perplexed by this. Most of them are not worth the paper they are printed on since they follow humanist thinking and are not accurate translations of the original text. Others are better translations but are based on very suspect textual manuscripts. Now I have discussed this in other papers and will not go over this ground again, but will only say this to summarise:

1. Regarding texts:

- THE BYZANTINE FAMILY of texts is the most trustworthy and forms the basis of the AV (KJV) and the NKJV. In my view the Majority Text is the best form available and this is close to the Textus Receptus. Some NKJV versions have marginal notes where this differs from the TR.
- THE ALEXANDRIAN FAMILY is untrustworthy for a host of reasons. There are thousands of places where this differs from the traditional text (TR and MT) and also where the two key source manuscripts differ from each other. The difference between an Alexandrian text NT version and a Byzantine (traditional) one equates to content the size of the letter of 2 Peter. Thus all Alexandrian text-based Bible versions are poorly founded. Virtually all modern versions (excepting the NKJV) are of this type.

2. Regarding versions:

- Only literal translations will give you what the text actually says. Versions like the NASB, NAB and RSV are literal translations based on Alexandrian manuscripts.
- Most others are either paraphrases which give you the sense of a passage (e.g. *Good News Bible*, *Living Bible*) or dynamic equivalent translations, which give thought for thought translations of verses rather than word for word (e.g. NIV).
- Some paraphrase versions, seeking to be modern, are truly appalling and bear little relation to scripture at all; one of the worst is *The Message*.

With that out of the way, you can now choose a decent Bible to use for your study and daily reading. However, there are a host of other Bible resources that help to get an accurate understanding of the text. Now I am not considering commentaries, doctrinal and background books here but books that open up what the text actually is. At the end of the day, that is the most important thing for you to have.

In this paper I will mention just a selection of books that give real help in this matter. I am not going to mention the many computer programs that are available but concentrate on books. However, my simple recommendation for a Bible Study program that can be downloaded free is E-Sword (e-sword.net). Some of the resources that I will consider here are available in this package.

Getting to know the Greek and Hebrew text

Serious students will want to gain at least a basic knowledge of the Greek and Hebrew words underneath the English translation. Now this may sound frightening, but there are many aids to make it less threatening. We will not consider here learning Greek and Hebrew but using resources that help us understand the true original words in the text.

Concordances

Both Strong's and Young's concordances will give the student a fair amount of basic information about Greek words in the NT text.

Young's Analytic Concordance. Robert Young, Nelson.

In my view this is the best and most useful concordance, despite its age. The introductory prefaces are extremely helpful on syntax, idioms etc. The index-lexicon at the back is especially of use and modern versions have the Strong's code appended to the words. It not only splits up word meaning but gives the number of times they appear in the text. The main text gives all the various transliterated Hebrew and Greek words under an English word in a system much better organised than Strong's. Sadly, the modern versions (being taken from microfilm) have poor print quality (the typefaces are too small and spindly).

Strong's Exhaustive Concordance, James Strong, Hendrikson.

Hendrikson have produced a much better print quality (why can't Nelson?) and the layout is similar to Young's with the exception that the lists of original words are put as coded numbers at the side of the verses quoted. This requires the continual looking up of these numbers in the index to get to the Greek and Hebrew words. This coded lexicon appears at the back and is often found in other books and Bibles. The codes are linked to many other reference works.

English Hebrew and Chaldee [i.e. Syriac or Aramaic] Lexicon & Concordance, William Wilson, Macmillan.

This is not a primary work but it can be very helpful. There is an excellent sketch of the construction of Hebrew in the introduction, explaining tenses, grammar etc. The word definitions are well-laid out and very good, but it is not as useful as a concordance as Strong's or Young's. The main work is based on an English listing; at the rear is a Hebrew-English index listed in Hebrew script. There is a very useful appendix on paronomasia – or the figure of speech using a play on words (puns), something that is often utilised in the Hebrew and sometimes in the Greek texts.

There are many other concordances available, often for a specific version such as the appalling NIV. Students should make up their own mind what is most useful for themselves. In my view, especially since Young's and Strong's are now cheaply available, and since the Strong's code is linked to so many other useful works, these cannot be bettered by modern reference tools. What would be useful would be new editions of both these works based on the NKJV text.

New Testament Aids

INTERLINEARS

In my view the serious Bible student must have a Greek/English interlinear. It is the only way for a person who knows no Greek to establish what the Greek text actually says. Coded Bibles are all very well but they do not give you all the essential information. Only by

studying Greek and reading the Greek text, or by using a good interlinear, can one really get to what the NT text really says. There have been many of these published, but few are really useful.

In my view the Alexandrian textual family should be avoided, which includes the Nestle text and the later UBS-Nestle/Aland texts (e.g. UBS4-NA27, Greek NT). Better is the Byzantine family: the Stephen's (*Stephanus*) text or better, the Scrivener (1881) – Beza (1589, *Textus Receptus*) text. If you can't get anything except the Nestle text cheaply, it will still be helpful in most instances but needs checking on details with a commentary.

The NKJV Greek English Interlinear New Testament. Edited by Arthur L. Farstad, Zane C. Hodges et. al; published by Nelson.

This is superb. The production (hardback) is good and clear. The NKJV text appears in the side column with the Greek text occupying most of the page. Underneath are the relative English words associated with their Greek counterparts. Where necessary underneath those are further clauses expressing the English idiom demanded by the literal translation. There are also word studies of certain key Greek words on most pages with an index at the back. There are also textual comments and references to the Majority Text. No other interlinear is as helpful.

Interlinear Greek-English NT, George Ricker Berry, Baker.

This is a large, well-bound book but the print quality (probably based on microfilm of an old copy) is quite poor. The AV text on the left column is extremely small while the central Greek text is not clear or well laid out. Each Greek word has a corresponding Strong's code and this is very helpful for someone with no other resources. However, e-sword has this facility for free and in a more useful format. The back of the book contains Strong's dictionary definitions but also Berry's own lexicon and comments of Greek synonyms which are very useful, but not vital.

LEXICONS

These give us explanations of the forms and meanings of the NT Greek words and come in various layouts.

1. DICTIONARIES OF ENGLISH WORDS with the Greek words listed that are translated by that English word (e.g. *Vine's Expository Dictionary*).
2. DICTIONARIES OF THE NT GREEK WORDS with explanations and definitions in English (e.g. *Bauer*).
3. LISTS OF GREEK SYNONYMS (e.g. *Trench's Synonyms of the NT*).
4. GOOD CONCORDANCES which give details of Greek words, synonyms, cognate words (related words), word lists and meanings (e.g. *Young's Concordance*).

Vine's Expository Dictionary of NT Words, WE Vine, Hendrikson.

This is a firm favourite. It is a dictionary of English NT words explaining the Greek word(s) behind them. Sometimes there are many; 'come' translates over 20 different Greek words. Vine gives many comments on certain words and these can be very helpful; however, he follows his own theological agenda and this can sometimes be misleading.

A Critical Lexicon and Concordance, EW Bullinger, Bagster.

'Critical' is used in its sense of detailed and scholarly analytical comments and here refers to the study of the Greek words in the text; it has nothing to do with adverse comments. It is similar in scope to Vine but more concise and condensed. It can also be used as a concordance. Beware of Dispensational ideas creeping in here and there, but still very useful; sometimes Bullinger gives an edge that no one else seems to spot.

Synonyms of the NT, R C Trench, Baker.

Another well bound, well laid out book from Baker. Trench takes 106 Greek synonyms, each coded to Strong's code, and gives comments, explaining meanings, similarities and differences. Thus item one refers to *church, synagogue, assembly, congregations*, based on three Greek NT words. This is a helpful aid to understanding NT words, but not vital.

A Greek English Lexicon of the NT & other Early Christian Literature, Walter Bauer (based upon the German work of Arndt & Gingrich), Univ. of Chicago Press.

This is probably the most important academic work in use today. It is very large, expensive and not necessary for ordinary students. The lexicon is laid out according to the Greek alphabet. There is an abridged form of this work by FW Danker.

Greek English Lexicon of the NT, J H Thayer, Baker and others.

Similar to Bauer but older and more concise. Modern versions have supplied Strong's coded numbers to the entries enabling cross-referencing. It is laid out according to the Greek alphabet. As this is available quite cheaply, it is very useful (if you can read Greek letters).

Theological Dictionaries

Theological Dictionary of NT Theology, G Kittel & G Friedrich, 1 volume edition edited by Geoffrey Bromiley, Eerdmans.

The New International Dictionary of NT Theology, Edited by Colin Brown, 4 vols, Zondervan.

These two large works are for the serious student only, but can be extremely useful. They examine the key Greek words in the NT and give essays on their theological import. In studying a subject, such as atonement, these works can give an exhaustive treatment of the root words and apostolic teaching. They develop the theological meaning of the words, gathering information from the whole NT text, rather than just supplying etymological definitions. However, in both there are studies by liberal scholars and, while the technical information is still accurate, this can be unhelpful. Brown's work is better than Bromiley's in my view.

There is a logical confusion inherent in this sort of dictionary, that is: a dictionary is supposed to offer definitions and information about the original words, but these dictionaries are really comments on historical ideas founded upon these words, skewed by the authors' views. For this reason some Biblical professors are very critical of such works.

GREEK EXPOSITIONAL COMMENTARIES

These work like a running commentary on the Greek text with explanations of word meaning and the Greek grammar involved.

Word Pictures in the Greek New Testament, A T Robertson, (1934), published by the Broadman Press.

This is probably the standard work of its type and esteemed by many non-specialists. It comments on all the NT books verse by verse but limits itself to explanations of the Greek words and grammar. It tells you those things that lexicons don't, such as the relations of one word to another or the emphasis in the sentence. It is invaluable. There is a free version available as part of the e-sword program.

Word Studies in the NT, MR Vincent, MacDonald

Uses the same format as Robertson. Can be very useful but beware of Arminian leanings where some word meanings are downplayed and, like Vine, he gives comment rather than strictly critical explanations. Available as a free edition to e-sword.

Word Meanings in the NT, Ralph Earle, Baker.

Similar to Robertson in scope and design, and more up-to-date, but nowhere near as useful.

Analytical Greek Lexicon, Bagster.

This is a dictionary containing every NT Greek word arranged according to the Greek alphabet with a grammatical analysis, meanings and showing the root word. Until I had sophisticated software this was the only way that I could definitely analyse what every Greek word meant. Of course Robertson or Vincent could pick out the important words but often a study would rely upon a Greek word that they missed. This dictionary was my only recourse. As such this (or one similar, there are now many) is invaluable for serious students.

Wuest's Word Studies in the Greek NT, Kenneth S Wuest, Eerdmans, 8 paperback vols.

These are somewhere between a normal commentary and a Greek word commentary. There are extended comments but with an emphasis on getting at the Greek text. These studies can be extremely useful.

Old Testament Aids

Hebrew is very difficult to conquer and, being a Semitic language, is alien to English. The words are read from right to left and it is an earthy, pictorial, rough language without the fluidity and finesse of Greek; the grammar is quite different to English forms. While the Greek alphabet has some familiarity to English people through mathematics and astronomy, the Hebrew alphabet is hard to follow without training. Nevertheless, there are books that can help us get to the bottom of the Hebrew text.

INTERLINEARS

Though there are few of these, and they are expensive, the following are very helpful -

The Interlinear Hebrew and English Psalter, Bagster.

This is a lovely little book, now out-of-print but sometimes found second-hand. A literal translation appears under each Hebrew word but the root is in black type and the servile letters distinguished by hollow type. This helps to gain further information on the root word in another dictionary.

The Interlinear Bible – Hebrew / English, Jay P Green Snr. 3 vols. Baker.

This lays out the Masoretic (or Massoretic) Hebrew text [which is the Hebrew consonants with added vowel points¹] with a literal English translation underneath the Hebrew words. It also has the AV printed on the left column. This is the only Hebrew /English interlinear available, as far as I am aware. If you have no access to computer software, this is the only way to establish the correct Hebrew words in the text (unless you can read the Hebrew text that is).

¹ The original Hebrew text was written without vowels. The Masoretes were Jewish scribes that safeguarded the Hebrew scriptures from the 6th century AD onwards and later added vowel points to this text. The English OT is taken from texts found belonging to this school.

LEXICONS

Analytical Lexicons

There are various analytical Hebrew lexicons available which cover the ground of Hebrew words in much the same way as the Analytical Greek lexicon mentioned earlier. However, to use these one must be able to read the Hebrew alphabet pretty well.

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

This is similar to Vine's only listing Hebrew words. Some editions of Vine come with this volume included, making a dictionary of Biblical words (Greek and Hebrew).

This dictionary is really all that most students will need in addition to Young's concordance and the use of commentaries in. loc. It is easy to refer to and use.

The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew-English Lexicon, Hendrikson.

In times past Gesenius was the standard Biblical Hebrew lexicon; indeed he was called the father of modern Hebrew lexicography. However, Wilhelm Gesenius died in 1842 and a new work was called for. Revisions appeared including some of his later work on a Hebrew thesaurus but Hebrew studies advanced and the OT text was scrutinised carefully. Also the deciphering of many archaeological discoveries from Babylonian, Assyria, Phoenicia and elsewhere shed much light on certain words and OT passages.

Consequently the *Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew-English Lexicon* appeared in 1906, taking 23 years to compile. It was so different from Gesenius that it is often referred to as the *Brown-Driver-Briggs*. The 'New' edition appeared in 1979 and has much improved the old one. It adds corrections and an index (the lexicon is based on root words not the actual words as they appear in the OT) to help find words and included the Strong's code to aid cross-reference. So, by looking up an OT word from Strong, one can identify the correct entry in the BDB and read the discussion of the Hebrew or Aramaic word required.

While this is not necessary for the average Bible student, it is invaluable for the serious student. Although computer software programs have superseded it (such as Bible Works), this is the best tool in book form for investigating the meaning and derivation of Biblical Hebrew words. The original work of Gesenius (*Gesenius' Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the OT*) is still available from Baker, including Strong's coded numbers, but the New BDB is better.

Synonyms of the Old Testament, Robert Baker Girdlestone, Baker

This is the equivalent for the OT as Trench on the NT. It contains much valuable information and shows the bearing that the Hebrew words have on doctrine. It spends 29 pages on the name of God alone. There are useful indices at the back.

THEOLOGICAL DICTIONARIES

New International Dictionary of OT Theology and Exegesis, Van Gemeren (ed.), Paternoster.

This is similar in scope to the Greek word by Colin Brown, only based on the Hebrew OT. Useful for the serious student.

Bibles with additional lexical information

The Zodhiates Hebrew Greek Key Study Bible, Spiros Zodhiates, AMG.

This large Bible comes with all the important words in the Bible books annotated with Strong's code. This code can then be referred both to the Strong's definition at the back, or to Zodhiates' own lexical notes, which are very good. In this way the key words in verses can be examined to check what they truly mean. Recently published versions also have codes for the parts of speech of some words. This comes in AV, NIV and NASB versions. If you only had this Bible and Young's concordance one could get as much information as most folk could ever require. It is expensive (over £40).

The Newberry Bible or *The Englishman's Bible*, Thomas Newberry, Bagster.

This is an old Bible that is unique. It employs a system of codes superimposed on the text to identify morphology (forms of the original words). Thus it will identify a plural Hebrew form by a code when the text is translated as a singular word or identify the gender of a word etc. There are numerous other features. It is only available in the AV and rarely in print today. Commonly found in second-hand bookshops and usually expensive.

Young's Literal Translation, Robert Young, Pickering & Inglis.

This does what it says; it is a literal translation of the original texts. Some dislike this for being too rigid but it can be very helpful.

Concise Critical Comments, Robert Young, G Adam Young & Co.

This is a companion book to the above. It is mostly succinct comments aimed to open up the meaning of the literal text.

Robert Young is the same man who produced the very useful Young's Concordance.

General linguistic works

Figures of Speech used in the Bible, EW Bullinger, Baker.

This is a handbook on Biblical figures of speech and is of great value when used alongside lexicons. Bullinger lists 217 different figures and shows how understanding the figure is vital to understanding the text. Through failing to see the intended figure of speech, many translators have failed to translate the text correctly. Though first published in 1898, I know of no other similar more modern work. However, one must always beware of Bullinger's Hyper-Dispensationalism tendencies.

Biblical Words and their Meaning, Moisés Silva, Zondervan.

This is an introduction to lexical semantics. It is intended for Bible students with a basic knowledge of Hebrew and Greek and discusses Biblical linguistics. This is a technical linguistic work that is only necessary for serious students interested in the modern debates.

Living Words, Anthony E Gilles, St Anthony Messenger Press.

An obscure book but containing helpful comments on key Greek words and intended for folk with no special knowledge of linguistics. Each word is explained by a key passage of use, (based on a literal translation followed by four modern translations), given the correct pronunciation and followed by his comments. While there is useful information, the number of words covered is limited and the author appears to be Roman Catholic and must therefore be treated with caution. Not a vital tool for students.

NT Words, William Barclay, SCM.

This is a collection of essays on certain Greek words, some of them substantial. While of interest one must remember that the author was a liberal and his comments must be checked.

Conclusion

There are many other works that could be mentioned and new ones appear all the time. There are, for instance, new technical books appearing that are based upon the Majority Text, which in my view is the safest NT text. While it is very similar to the Textus Receptus and from the same Byzantine family, it improves TR where it is very weak, especially in Revelation.

As computer programs improve and become ever more available, books like these discussed become less necessary. However, it is far easier to read the printed page and this doesn't do so much damage to the eyes; also computers break down and require power. There will always be a place for basic language tools to open up the Biblical text. In my view the one's that I have highlighted are the best basic tools for the average, serious student.

It should also be remembered that the best commentaries will give sound advice on the meaning of the original words in a given text. Trustworthy commentators ought to be consulted when forming ideas about certain words to avoid running away with mistaken ideas.

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