

How to Use Concordances

“I have a question about the interpretation of Hebrew and Greek words that I would like to ask you about. When I want to know the Greek word and definition of any word in the New Testament, I go to *Strong’s Concordance* and look up the word and use its reference number to find the original Greek word and its meaning in the dictionary in the back of the book. I have recently been told by an SDA pastor that this is not the most accurate way to define a word. He says I should use the root word definition as the definition of the word I am looking up, instead of using the definition of the word itself. This does not make sense to me, but I have never taken any college courses in Hebrew or Greek, so I am not sure if he is right or not. I have asked some other people about this, but they don’t seem to know either. Can you shed some light on this?”—*Washington*.

Here is my reply:

Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance is the quickest way (other than using a computer program) to find a passage in the Bible. It is unfortunate that William Miller did not have access to it. He only had the older concordance, *Cruden’s*, which is much shorter. (Miller began his studies in 1816, six years before James Strong was born.)

Under a given KJV word, *Strong’s* lists every verse where the word appears, from Genesis to Revelation. In *Young’s Analytical Concordance* (equally as large and expensive), the listing of passages for a given word is split according to the Hebrew and Greek words for that KJV word. As you know, the Old Testament was written in Hebrew and the New Testament was written in Greek. (*Cruden’s* does not give all the word usages. It lacks the Greek / Hebrew lists in the back and has extremely brief definitions.) For example, under the word, “look,” there are 24 subdivisions. Each one contains the places where “look” is based on one of 24 different Hebrew or Greek words.

In addition, *Young’s* also has a Greek and Hebrew vocabulary list in the back.

Both concordances are flawed in their definitions in that, although they give you a quick view of what may be the word’s Greek and Hebrew meanings, those definitions are not totally accurate, for three reasons: First, the definitions are too brief. Second, they do not take into account the mode and tense of each specific word usage. Third, they lump together all the usages of a given word instead of clarifying how they are used in different passages.

The principle of “first usage” is significant. This

is the first time a Hebrew word is used in the Bible. Locate that first usage, and it can help explain the meaning of the word and cast light on how it is used in later passages.

For example, the important word, “sanctuary,” comes from the root, “holy”; and the first time it is used is early in Exodus:

“And He said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.”—*Exodus 3:5*.

Your pastor errs in thinking that the root word will always provide the correct meaning of a Hebrew or Greek word. It can be different! (“Sanctuary” refers to something different than “holy”; yet a fundamental concept regarding it comes from its root, “holy.”) First usage is a valid study tool. But, ideally, it should be the first usage of the Hebrew root rather than the English word.

More on first usage: The important word, “sanctuary,” is a Hebrew derivative of the word, “holy”; the first usage of this is Exodus 3:5. That verse greatly helps in clarifying the meaning of “holy” and “sanctuary.” We learn from it that the fundamental concept of *qodesh* (holy) is actually “something that is totally pure and separated.” For example:

“Look down from Thy holy habitation.”—*Deuteronomy 26:15*.

Strong’s defines *qodesh* this way:

“6944. *qodesh*; a sacred place or thing; rarely abstract sanctity:—consecrated (thing), dedicated (thing), hallowed (thing), holiness, (x most) holy (x day, portion, thing), saint, sanctuary.”

Young’s provides definitions in a different manner. For example, *qodesh*: When you look up “holy” and find Exodus 3:5, you are told (right there in the middle of the concordance) that the root meaning of *qodesh* is “separation, object set apart; *qodesh*.” That is a fairly good definition.

Next, turning in *Young’s* word lists in the back, we find that they are also different from *Strong’s*. *Young’s* lists *qodesh*—not by definitions of the Hebrew word (as *Strong’s* does)—but so you can find all the other words *qodesh* is translated by in the KJV (each of which you can look up in the concordance, if you wish). This can be very handy!

“*Qodesh*: consecrated thing 1, dedicated thing 12, hallowed thing 7, holiness 29, holy day 1, holy portion 1, holy thing 29, saint 1, sanctuary 1, consecrated 1, hallowed 2, holy 219.”

So *qodesh* is translated in the KJV 304 times by 12 different words or phrases. If you look up each of

those words in *Young's Concordance*, you will obtain a much better understanding of its meaning. This is a useful way to better understand the meaning of the word. As you do your search, keep in mind the underlying meaning, as interpreted by first usage. Scanning through the concordance listings (the short phrases by each text reference beneath the word "holy," etc.) will help you know where to begin your research.

In order to better understand the meaning, see how the passage is used in the Spirit of Prophecy! This is very important. There you will find a fully inspired commentary on the meaning of the verse.

What does "touch" mean? Look it up in the concordance; it is obvious that it means what you think it means: to touch something or somebody.

But then, having looked up the word "touch" in the concordance, now turn to John 20:17; and, if you know the Greek, you will find it means something quite different. The Greek word used in that verse is *haptomai*, the reflexive of *hopto*, "touch."

But neither *Strong's* nor *Young's* knows both meanings of *haptomai*! Here is *Strong's* definition of the word:

"680. *haptomai*, reflexive of 681; properly to attach oneself to, i.e., to touch (in many implied relations):—touch."

Here is *Young's* definition:

"To touch, hold on, embrace; *haptomai*."

Strong's says that the root meaning is kindle (a fire):

"681. *hopto*; a primary verb; properly to fasten to, i.e. (special) to set on fire:—kindle, light.

Well, now we are thoroughly confused. What does John 20:17 mean?

Scanning through the usages of *haptomai* in the New Testament, it is obvious that they mean to touch something in order to receive something personally valuable.

But after the time of Drs. Strong and Young, in the twentieth century, it was discovered that *haptomai* also had a second idiomatic meaning in the first century A.D., when Koine Greek was used:

In the late nineteenth century, God's prophet for our time in history applied that other definition. Without having studied Greek, she gave exactly the correct meaning of "touch" in John 20:17.

"Springing toward Him as if to embrace His feet, she said, 'Rabboni.' But Christ raised His hand, saying, Detain Me not; 'for I am not yet ascended to My Father: but go to My brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father; and your Father; and to My God, and your God.' And Mary went her way to the disciples with the joyful message."—*Desire of Ages*, 790.

The book typesetters did not place "Detain Me

not" in quotation marks, for they thought it was not in the Bible. Yet it actually is; it is the meaning of the original Greek of the passage!

The verb, *hypto*, means "to touch." But *hyptomai* is in the reflexive. Normally, in the reflexive, it would mean "to touch on behalf of oneself." But, by the first century A.D., when Classical Greek had changed into Koine Greek, *hyptomai* had acquired a special meaning: "Do not hold me back, do not hinder me, do not detain me," for I have something I must do right now.

In the very next paragraph Ellen White explains this further:

"Jesus refused to receive the homage of His people until He had the assurance that His sacrifice was accepted by the Father. He ascended to the heavenly courts, and from God Himself heard the assurance that His atonement for the sins of men had been ample, that through His blood all might gain eternal life."—*Ibid*.

You can always trust the Spirit of Prophecy. Bank on it. Stick with those books. In the strength that Christ ever gives to His humble children, obey those books, and your future is assured.

Another interesting passage is very important to us, doctrinally:

"Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven; but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."—*Matthew 5:17-19 [italics mine]*.

According to modern antinomian (anti-law) theory, Christ said that He was about to destroy the Ten Commandments. Obviously, the meaning of "fulfill" and "fulfilled" (the same Greek word is used for both) is crucial. If the Protestants are right, then Jesus said, "I am not come to destroy but to destroy, and heaven and earth will not pass till all be destroyed." Yet, in this passage, He repeatedly exalts the importance of that law!

The key Greek word in the passage is *pleroo*. What does *Strong's* say that it means?

"4137. *pleroo*: to make replete, i.e. (literally) to cram (a net), level up (a hollow) . . . (be) complete and expire, fill (up), fulfil, (be, make) full . . ."

Well, *Strong's* has it wrong. *Pleroo* is never used in the sense of "expire" in the New Testament. The word does not mean that.

Protestant writers declare that the following passages prove that *pleroo* means "bring to an end": Romans 15:19, Colossians 1:25, Mark 1:15. But not one of them means to end or get rid of.

“From Jerusalem, and round about until Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.”—*Romans 15:19*.

That does not mean that Paul fully preached to everyone in that area, so he could now stop and go somewhere else. Paul had not spoken to everyone in that area, and he did not intend to stop going back and preaching there some more. Instead, it means that, throughout that area, Paul fully preached Christ’s gospel—and no other gospel! Nor does it mean that, henceforth, he was going to stop preaching the truth about Christ, because now he had fully preached it!

Here is another passage:

“I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the Word of God.”—*Colossians 1:25*.

This does not mean that Paul was going to stop preaching to the Colossians; but that, acting on his commission as a minister, he intended to fill them up with the Word of God! That is what God’s true preachers in every age should do. I hope your pastor is doing it.

“And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.”—*Mark 1:15*.

It is true that the 69 of the 70 weeks, in Daniel 9:24-27, had ended at that time; however, “ending” is not the meaning of this passage. It does not mean “the time has ended,” but “the time has fully (*pleroo*) come.” Time for what? “The time has fully come for the start of the announcement of the kingdom of God. It is now time for you to repent and believe the message we bring to you!”

So Mark 1:15 is not talking about how the time prophecy has ended; but, instead, that its timing has brought them to something new. New things must be learned, new decisions must be made! That is the message of Mark 1:15.

Matthew 2:22 and John 7:8 follow the same pattern, which is this: The “fulfillment” of a prophecy (according to the Greek usage of *pleroo*) is not about the end of a prophecy, but about the predicted event which is about “to be made full”; that is, about to fully (actually) occur!

However, in the case of Matthew 5:17-19, Jesus is not talking about a time prophecy—but about the sacred law of God. Predicted events may come and go, but the foundation of God’s throne stands fast forever.

So then, what did Jesus mean when He said, “I am not come to destroy the law or the prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill” (*Matthew 5:17*)? He meant, “I am not come to destroy the Ten Commandments or the witness of the Old Testament prophets, but to help you fully obey the one and better understand the messages of the other.”

We know this is true because of how *pleroo* is used elsewhere. Here are some examples:

Christ did not say that His baptism would destroy righteousness, but that it would provide a full example of how it was to be done, as well as—by His own example—explain more fully its meaning, which was the beginning of a life dedicated to helping others.

“Suffer it to be so now; for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.”—*Matthew 3:15*.

“These things write we unto you, that your joy many be full.”—*1 John 1:4*.

“These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.”—*John 15:11*.

Also read John 16:24, 2 John 12, Philippians 2:2, John 17:13, and 1 Corinthians 10:6.

Thus we find that an outstanding way to understand a word is to see how it is used elsewhere in God’s Word.

Whereas *pleroo* means “fill up to an overflowing abundance,” *teleios* means “arrival at a point of utter completion, reaching the uttermost, or ultimate.”

“Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”—*Matthew 5:48*.

In this life there are completions we can reach. The New Testament mentions some of them. And Jesus is speaking about this kind of objective:

“Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.”—*Ephesians 4:13*.

“Now the God of peace . . . make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”—*Hebrews 13:20-21*.

“But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.”—*James 1:4*.

“Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?”—*James 2:22*.

“Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and [returning] of faith toward God.”—*Hebrews 6:1*.

Another example of an erroneous definition is found in that famous passage in Matthew:

“I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”—*Matthew 16:18*.

Strong’s defines “rock” in this way:

“4073. *petra*: feminine of the same as 4074; a (mass of) rock (literal or figurative)—rock.”

For 4074, *Strong's* has this:

"4074. *Petros*: apparently a primary word; a (piece of) rock (larger than 3037); as a name, *Petrus*, an apostle—Peter, rock. Compare 2786."

For 3037 and 2786, *Strong's* provides this:

"3037. *lithos*: apparently a primary word, a stone (literal or figurative);—(mill-,stumbling-) stone."

"2786. *Kephas*: of Chaldaic origin, the Rock; Cephas, a surname of Peter:—Cephas."

There are several problems here for the person who is set on trusting in James Strong to provide him with accurate definitions:

First, "rock" (*petra*) in Matthew 16:18 is the neuter of *petros*, not its feminine. There is some careful theological balancing here. If the noun was masculine, it would represent Peter. That is what the Vatican would like it to be, something Greek grammar will not permit. Protestants deftly call it feminine, for then they can say it represents "the Church." But, in reality, it is in the neuter gender and refers to Jesus Christ. (*Young's* does not define the gender, only calling it a "rock or stone.")

Second, *petros* is not a rock larger than *lithos*. For *lithos* also, at times, represents Christ. In Mark 12:10 (Matt 21:42, Luke 20:17), it is the immense cornerstone of Solomon's Temple, rejected for a time, which represents Christ (*DA 597-600* tells the story). *Lithos* is also the massive boulder of Matthew 21:44 (Luke 20:18); this is Christ. Everyone who is saved must "fall and be broken" on Him.

Third, *petros* and *kephas* represent the frail stone of Peter, not a strong rock as indicated by *Strong's*.

For a thrilling Bible study about Christ the Rock of our salvation, read: Isaiah 28:16, 1 Corinthians 3:9-11, 1 Peter 2:4-6 (yes, Peter said it), Ephesians 2:20-22. And there is more: Daniel 2:34, 44; Zechariah 9:10; Luke 1:30-33; Daniel 7:14, 27, Daniel 4:34, Isaiah 60:12, Micah 4:7, Daniel 6:26, and Revelation 11:15. How triumphant will be His victory!

Another example of erroneous definitions in *Strong's* may be found by tracking down the meaning of "wine" in John 2:3-10. *Strong's* says it was actual wine:

"3631. *oinos*: a primary word (or perhaps of Hebrew origin), wine (literal or figurative);—wine."

If you will take the time to check in an exhaustive Greek-English Lexicon, such as *Liddell and Scott's*, you will find that *oinos* can mean grape-juice, wine, or even grape jam. It is wrong for a concordance to say that every time *oinos* is used in the New Testament, it can only mean wine. (*Young's* says *oinos* means "wine or grape juice," which is correct.) As

usual, in order to settle the question of the exact type of juice at the wedding, in John 2:3-10, we check with the equally-inspired Spirit of Prophecy, and find a very clear statement (*DA 149*).

Let us complete this brief survey with an extremely important word: the one that unlocks the door to the inner meaning of Hebrews 6:19 through 10:22. This is the word, *hagia*, in the Greek.

It is explained in some detail in my book, *Biblical Defense*, 251-263, so I will only touch briefly on it here.

People complain that *Hagia* is not in *Strong's Concordance!* Here is the definition at the back of *Strong's* for the eight *Hagia* passages:

"39. *Hagion*: neuter of 40 [*hagios*: sacred, holy]; a sacred thing (i.e. spot);—holiest (of all), holy place, sanctuary."

As for *hagia*, it is not there—anywhere in *Strong's*. (It is not in *Young's* either, which gives the definition, "place set apart, *hagion*.") Once again, *Strong's* lumps together all the various meanings. So a person coming upon the *hagia* passages in Hebrews (8:2, 9:2, 9:8, 9:12, 9:24, 9:25, 10:19, 13:11) will select the definition he prefers. This is how the translators of the *New International Version* usually did it, translating most of them as "most holy place"—the second apartment of the sanctuary. That is why Desmond Ford, and fellow travelers, only quote from the NIV. They use a mistranslation to prove an error.

But if you will carefully read pp. 251-263 of my book, *Biblical Defense*, and the pages around them, you will clearly see that the second apartment of the *heavenly* Sanctuary is not mentioned in the book of Hebrews. Paul wrote the book about A.D. 65, when Christ had been ministering His blood in the first apartment for 34 years. Nearly 1800 years must elapse before He would enter the second apartment. Christ's ministry in that apartment was not present truth for Paul and his readers. In the providence of God, it would not be until after October 22, 1844, that Christ's followers would understand the transition.

Why is *hagia* not in *Strong's* or *Young's Concordances*? Because it is the neuter plural of *hagion*, and they only list words by their singular form. Once again, we find that concordance lists and definitions do not tell the whole story.

So, in conclusion, it is nice to be able to use Bible concordances—and we all do. They are a wonderful help. However, none of the concordances (or Bible commentaries, for that matter) are fully accurate in their comments or definitions. Fortunately, the Spirit of Prophecy always is.

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