

# Word Studies

Hermeneutics Pt.3  
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## Introduction

Tell me your reaction to this quotation from Rick Warren in Purpose Driven Life:

“Conflict is usually a sign that the focus has shifted to less important issues...When we focus on...interpretations...division always happens. But if we concentrate on loving each other ... harmony results.”<sup>1</sup>

He is saying, “Let’s not quibble over interpretations of passages of Scripture. Let’s just love one another.” Why? Why love each other? Because the Bible says to love one another? When the Bible says that, how do you know what it means? If you interpret it to mean we should have kindness and harmony and not fight – that’s your interpretation. What if I have a different interpretation? What if I interpret it to mean we should guard each other from falling into error by exposing bad interpretations in vigorous debate? You see, when Rick Warren says, “Let’s not focus on interpretations. Let’s just love each other in harmony” what he’s really saying is, “Let’s not go with your interpretation of love, let’s go with mine.”

You don’t hear much teaching these days in church on hermeneutics, and you have to wonder if some of the reason for that is similar to why the Roman Catholic Church used to burn people at the stake for translating the Bible into English. Once the common people got an understanding of what the Bible said, they could see the errors of the leaders. I doubt the motives are that sinister in most cases. In some cases it may just be that the leaders themselves have no understanding of hermeneutics. But whatever the motive, the lack of instruction in this area is, in my judgment, a horrendous oversight.

## Review

What is eisegesis? (“Planting” meaning)

What does the word “hermeneutics” mean (hint: it’s a trick question)? Nothing. In themselves, words have no actual meaning. They are only vehicles we use to convey meaning. Meaning does not come from words – only minds.

So technically no word has any meaning. The definition of a word is simply the range of ways the word is typically used. However, talking about words having meaning is a kind of shorthand that is accepted in our culture. So if you want to speak that way, and someone says “What does the word *hermeneutics* mean?” the answer is – It

<sup>1</sup> P.162.

means whatever the speaker or writer was trying to convey when he or she used that word. What does the word “ax” mean? If someone says, “I kept axing the question but no one would answer me” then the word *ax* is being used to convey the meaning that is normally conveyed by the word *ask*. A word means whatever the communicator meant by it.

What does the word *agape* mean? It means whatever idea the writer was trying to convey when he used the word. It was not always used to describe divine love or self-sacrifice for someone else’s benefit. It does not always refer to divine love or self-sacrifice or the love of the will as opposed to emotion.

**John 3:19 Light has come into the world, but men loved (*agapao*) darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.**

**2 Timothy 4:10 Demas ... loved (*agapao*) this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica.**

**1 John 2:15 Do not love (*agapao*) the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves (*agapao*) the world, the love (*agape*) of the Father is not in him.**

So what does *agape* mean? It means whatever thought the writer was trying to convey at the time. And that word could be used to convey the idea of devotion and commitment, it could be used to convey the idea of desire and delight, or preference, it could be used to describe the kind of love God has for us, and it could be used to describe the wicked love evil men have for this world. In fact, the word *agape* could be used to refer to sex. The noun and verb forms of *agape* are used 17 times in the Song of Solomon to refer to sexual love. *Eros* is used zero times.

If you see the word *agape* in a passage, there are a number of possibilities as to the meaning. Is one of those possibilities the idea of anger? No, because that is not in the semantic range (it is outside of the rectangle). How do you determine what is inside or outside of the rectangle? Two ways – by looking up the definition in a lexicon, or by looking up all the ways it is used in the Bible. The second way is much, much more helpful than the first in most cases.

Homework:

The word *paradidomi* (παράδίδωμι) is used 119 times in the New Testament. Sometimes it means “betray,” and other times it does not. Below is a sampling of the various ways it is used. Using only the references below, determine how one should decide under what conditions it means “betray.” Respond to the following argument: Paul was a traitor and betrayer, because the same word is used of his actions as those of Judas:

**John 18:2 Now Judas, who betrayed (παράδίδωμι) him, knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with his disciples...5 "I am he," Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor (παράδίδωμι) was standing there with them.)**

**1 Timothy 1:20 Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over (παράδίδωμι) to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme.**

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**Matthew 5:25 "Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison.**

**10:4 Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.**

**17 "Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues.**

**21 "Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death.**

**11:27 "All things have been committed to me by my Father.**

17:22 When they came together in Galilee, he said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men.

18:34 In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

20:18 "We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death <sup>19</sup> and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!"

24:9 "Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. <sup>10</sup> At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other,

25:14 "Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them.

26:2 "As you know, the Passover is two days away-- and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified."

<sup>15</sup> and asked, "What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?" So they counted out for him thirty silver coins. <sup>16</sup> From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over.

<sup>21</sup> And while they were eating, he said, "I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me."

Mark 4:29 As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come."

7:13 Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that."

Luke 1:2 just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word.

Luke 4:6 And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to.

21:16 You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death.

John 18:2 Now Judas, who betrayed him, knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with his disciples.

<sup>5</sup> "Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "I am he," Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.)

19:30 When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Acts 6:14 For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us."

8:3 But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.

14:26 From Attalia they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed.

15:26 men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

40 but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord.

16:4 As they traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey.

Romans 1:24 Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another.

26 Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones.

28 Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done.

6:17 But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted.

8:32 He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all-- how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

1 Corinthians 5:5 hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.

11:2 I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the teachings, just as I passed them on to you.

23 For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread,

13:3 If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

24 Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power.

2 Corinthians 4:11 For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body.

Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Ephesians 4:19 Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.

5:2 and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

1 Peter 2:23 When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.

Jude 1:3 Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.

That Greek word is similar to our phrase “hand over.” It was used to describe the action of handing something or someone over to the control or for the use of the one receiving the person or thing. The English word “betray” is normally used to describe handing a person over to enemies in violation of a trust that you owe to that person. So how do we know when to translate this Greek word with the English word *betray*? When the context indicates that the handing over is being done in violation of a trust that is owed.

# CHAPTER 3

## Steps to Correct Interpretation: Words

### Steps to Correct Interpretation

So, meaning comes from the author's mind, is encoded in language, and if you can decode that meaning correctly you will get the same thought in your mind that the author had in his mind. And only then has communication happened. So how is language decoded? Most of this class is going to focus on how to interpret the various genres of Scripture, but first I want to just cover a few basics of how language is properly decoded. We will talk about defining words, then understanding sentences, then paragraphs.

#### Step 1: Define the Words

There are two steps in interpreting a word. First you have to know the various possible definitions of the word, then you have to discern which of those is being used in the particular context.

##### *Find the Range of Meaning*

We talked last week about the fact that the same word can represent numerous ideas. For example "hand" (on your wrist, on a clock, a hand of cards, assistance (all hands on deck), applause...). The various different ways a word is used is that's word's *range of meaning* or *semantic range*. Think of the range of meaning as a rectangle in the world of meaning. The word "pick" has a huge range of meaning (it is used 18 different ways – to choose or select, use a pick, "to dig, probe, or scratch at with the fingers," pick a flower, pick at your food, pick on someone, pick a guitar, pick a pocket, pick a fight, etc). Those 18 different meanings are 18 different regions in the rectangle of the word "pick." Not only that, but in addition to having multiple definitions (the denotative meaning), words also carry a *connotative* meaning that goes beyond the dictionary definition. For example, if we said, "He's a real politician" or "He's such a bureaucrat," that might mean more than just that he is in elected office or is an official in a government administration. A statement like that carries a negative connotation in our culture.

In Philippians 3:2 when Paul refers to those who teach salvation through circumcision as "**mutilators of the flesh**," he is not just saying they support the practice of circumcision. There is a very negative connotation implied by that choice of words. The *denotative* meaning is the same as if he called them the pro-circumcision group. But the emotional *connotation* adds to the meaning.

##### *The translation problem*

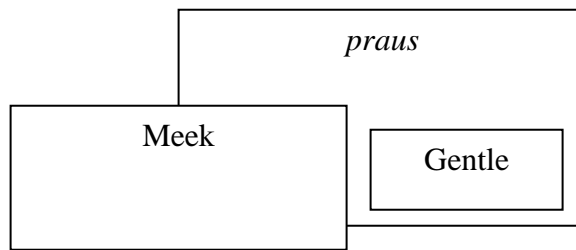
The reason word studies are so important is because in many cases there is no word in English that has the same range of meaning as the Greek word we are trying to translate. That's why there is no such thing as a literal, word-for-word translation. The closest English word sometimes only partially overlaps the range of meaning of the Greek/Hebrew word.

Example #1: *praus*.

That Greek word was normally used to convey the idea of the graciousness and gentleness of true humility. It is often connected with being afflicted or lowly or downtrodden. When that kind of suffering has a humbling effect, and as a result of that humility the person is soft and non-threatening and gentle – they would use this word *praus* to describe that. Although sometimes they would use the word *praus* just as a synonym for being lowly and downtrodden – or poor.

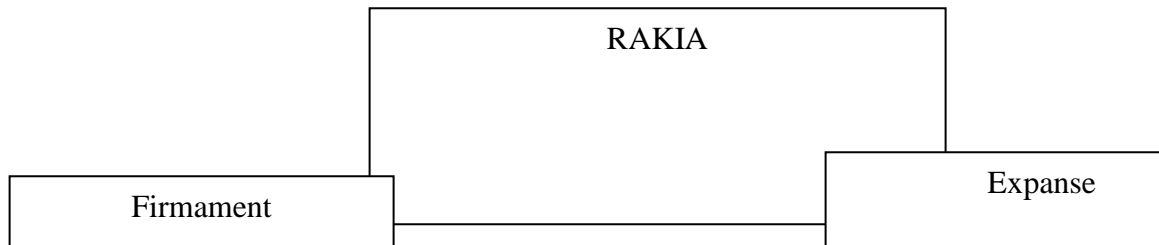
So what English word can you use to translate *praus*? Usually they use the English words *meek* or *gentle*. The problem is, those two words have a slightly different range of meaning than *praus*. *Meek* is often used to describe timidity or spineless weakness, but *praus* is not used that way in Scripture. So if you are translating and you use the word *meek* to translate *praus*, you are introducing a possible understanding that was not a possibility in the original. Someone could be reading the English Bible and read "Blessed are the meek for they will inherit the earth" and think, *Maybe that means blessed are the timid*.

Another possible English word that could be used would be *gentle*. That word, however, is narrower than *praus* (*praus* means more than just *gentle*). The English word *gentle* doesn't have any connotations I described a second ago.



Example #2: RAKIA

Refers to some thing that has been spread out. The King James Version translation “**firmament**” (something firm) intersects slightly – it is a *thing*. The New International Version translation “**expanse**” has the idea of spread out, but implies no substance (we might use the word “expanse” to refer to empty space).



There is no English word that traces the boundaries of the semantic range of RAKIA. We don’t have an English word that refers to a substance that has been spread out. That presents a dilemma for translators. If you take the word-for-word approach, and translate it with one English word, you fail to communicate the whole idea. If you use a phrase to translate that word, you give the reader the impression that there was a whole phrase in the original, rather than one word. That is why there is no perfect translation. They all try to find some middle ground between those two difficulties.

Another example is when Jesus said, “*tetelestai*” on the cross. It literally means “It is finished.” But when “It is finished” was stamped on the top of an invoice, it meant, “paid in full.” How do you communicate all that in a translation without turning it into a commentary? There simply is no single English word that means, “It is finished – debt paid in full.” And the more explanation of things like that you give, the less it is a translation and the more it’s a commentary. That is why word studies are important. The translations are very helpful, but they can’t give you all of the meaning that was in the original.

**Translations**

This is why it is useful to look at more than one translation. When the same word is translated very differently in two different translations, that clues you in to the fact that you are probably dealing with a Greek or Hebrew word that doesn’t have a clear counterpart in the English language. When that happens, don’t just pick the one you like the most and go with that. Use it as an alert to let you know you need to do a word study.

A great example of how not to go about interpreting the Bible is Rick Warren. In his book Purpose Driven Life he makes the point, on p.161 that we should focus on areas of agreement rather than on areas of disagreement when we deal with each other. To prove that he quoted Romans 14:19.

**Romans 14:19 So therefore let us pursue peace and the things concerning the building up of one another**

You might hear that and scratch your head and think, That verse doesn’t say anything about focusing on points of agreement rather than points of disagreement. And you’re right – it doesn’t. But Warren wanted a Bible verse to support that point, so he found a paraphrase (the Phillips Bible) that renders the verse this way: “Let us concentrate on the things which make for harmony.” That does sound like it supports his point. But the parts of that paraphrase that support his point are aspects that are not actually there in the Greek.

A few pages later Warren uses that same verse to make a completely different point. In this section Warren is arguing that any time you criticize a Christian, that is energy that should have been spent another way. But the verse doesn't say anything directly about the use of your energy.

**Romans 14:19 So therefore let us pursue peace and the things concerning the building up of one another.**

And the Philips paraphrase doesn't support that other point.  
"Let us concentrate on the things which make for harmony."

So Warren went to The Message, which says this: "Let's agree to use all our energy in getting along with each other."

It is obvious he doesn't really care what Romans 14:19 means. He is just rooting around through the various paraphrases until he can find some wording that supports the point he wants to make.

This is not to say there is no value to paraphrases. I think there is. But whenever you see something in a paraphrase or translation, and that idea doesn't seem to be there in another translation, let that drive you to study to find out whether or not that idea was intended by the author.

Discovering how a word is used in a specific context is a two-step procedure. First, you determine the semantic range, then you pinpoint what part of that range is being used. There are two ways of discovering the range of meaning of a word: Look in a lexicon (dictionary). Observe how the word is used in the rest of Scripture.

### *Dictionary*

You could easily spend hundreds and hundreds of dollars on Bible dictionaries and lexicons. BY FAR the best bang for the buck is the Hebrew Greek Key Word Study Bible. It has a simple lexicon in the back for a quick definition, as well as another word study section for a more detailed explanation of the more important words. Ninety-nine percent of the time this is all you need for step 1. I do NOT recommend the Strongs lexicon (which is what the free Bible software programs use). Nor do I recommend Vines dictionary.

### *Concordance*

Now that you've looked up the word that gives you a good starting place, but step #2 is the most important step- depending on how often the word is used. The more often the word is used, the more helpful this step will be. If it is used a lot, in many cases you can even skip step 1 once you become skilled at step 2 (just by looking at the English translations you have essentially done step 1 to some degree).

Depending upon the word, #2 is a process that can take just a few minutes or several hours. The best tool for word studies is Bible Works for Windows software. But if you don't have \$350 you can get by with the free Bible software programs (E-Sword or WORDsearch).

The only way to look up all the uses of a Greek or Hebrew word is with a Greek or Hebrew concordance. An English concordance (like Strong's or Young's) won't help. For example, if you are studying the word *angelos*, and you look up the word "angel" in Strong's, you will not see all the uses of that Greek word. You will only see the ones that are translated in the King James Version by the word "angel." And unless you know all the other ways that word is translated in the King James Version, you won't be able to look up all the uses.

### *Exercise #1:*

**James 5:14 Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord.**

Let's do a word study on the word sick (*astheneo*). The Key-Word Study Bible, for some reason, does not provide the number for this word in James 5:14.<sup>2</sup> So we're forced to go right to step 2. This word appears 33 times in the New Testament. The following is a sample:

**Matthew 10:8 Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy...**

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<sup>2</sup> The number is 820.



**Matthew 25:36** I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

**Acts 9:37** About that time she became sick and died

**Acts 20:35** In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

**Romans 4:19** Without weakening in his faith, [Abraham] faced the fact that his body was as good as dead

**Romans 8:3** For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son

**Romans 14:1** Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters.

**1 Corinthians 8:11** So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge.

**2 Corinthians 11:20** You even put up with anyone who enslaves you or exploits you or takes advantage of you or pushes himself forward or slaps you in the face. **21** To my shame I admit that we were too "weak" for that!

**2 Corinthians 12:10** That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

**2 Corinthians 13:3** since you are demanding proof that Christ is speaking through me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you. **4** For to be sure, he was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God's power. Likewise, we are weak in him, yet by God's power we will live with him to serve you.

Here we see that the semantic range is much larger than our word "sick," and slightly larger than our word "weak." The general idea seems to be "without strength" and the type of strength is determined by the context. It could be the strength of physical health, or the strength of social standing, or the strength of solid faith, or the strength of financial riches, etc.

And that is exactly what you would have found if there had been a number in the Key-Word Bible. The Key-Word lexicon gives this definition: "weak or ill." In the word study section it says this: From asthenes (822), without strength, weak, sick. To be weak, infirm, sick (Mt.10:8; 25:36; Lk.4:40); weak spiritually, as in faith (Ro.4:19, 14:1, 2; 1 Cor.8:9; weak in riches, poor, indigent (Acts 20:35); weak; destitute of authority, dignity, or power; contemptible (2 Cor.11:21).

So is James 5 saying that you should go to the elders for prayer when you have a physical disease, or when you are spiritually weak?

**James 5:14** Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. **15** And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well

From that translation it seems that the context calls for an interpretation that points to physical sickness. However the word translated sick in verse 15 is a word that sometimes means sick and other times means weary. It is only used two times in the New Testament – here and in Hebrews 12.

**Hebrews 12:3** Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

So the work can be used to describe spiritual weariness or physical sickness. Which is it in James 5? Let's look some more at the context.

**James 5:15** And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well

What about that word **well**? That's the word normally translated "saved." Most often it refers to salvation, but it can also refer to physical recovery or any other kind of recovery or restoration.

And then you have a different word for "healed" in verse 16. That word most naturally refers to physical healing, however there are a few occasions in Scripture where it refers to spiritual healing in a metaphorical way.

So the word definitions could really go either way all the way through. What do we pick up from the rest of the context?

### **15 ...the Lord will raise him up.**

That is the normal word for resurrection. But when it appears in contexts that are not talking about resurrection from the dead it means "to awaken" or "to stir up." And each of the times in the epistles when it is translated "awaken" it refers to awakening from a state of spiritual lethargy – never physical sleep.

### **15 ...If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. 16 Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.**

The idea of being awakened from a spiritual stupor combined with the focus on confession and forgiveness of sin, it seems to me more likely that this whole passage is speaking of spiritual weakness rather than physical illness.

Now please, don't let that example scare you off. Most of the time it won't be nearly that difficult. That is an especially difficult passage. I just use it as an example to show you the importance of the word study process.

#### *Exercise #2:*

**Heb 6:4-6 It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, 5 who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, 6 and have fallen away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.**

You want to know what kind of group is being discussed here, and so you begin studying each phrase. You get to the phrase **tasted the heavenly gift**, and you want to know what tasting means. There is a huge debate over this text because of the implications for eternal security. Those who believe that it is impossible for a true Christian to fall away want to interpret this passage as referring to unbelievers. Most agree that the heavenly gift refers to the Holy Spirit, and so many have suggested that these people, even though they have had some experience with the Holy Spirit, still are not true Christians because all they did was taste a little bit on the tip of their tongue, without having fully partaken.

The word is used 15 times in the New Testament. Here is a sample:

**Matthew 16:28 I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."**

**Matthew 27:34 There they offered Jesus wine to drink, mixed with gall; but after tasting it, he refused to drink it.**

**Luke 14:24 I tell you, not one of those men who were invited will get a taste of my banquet."**

**John 2:9 and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine.**

**John 8:52 Abraham died and so did the prophets, yet you say that if anyone keeps your word, he will never taste death.**

**Acts 10:10 He became hungry and wanted something to eat**

**Acts 20:11 Then he went upstairs again and broke bread and ate.**

**Acts 23:14** They went to the chief priests and elders and said, "We have taken a solemn oath not to eat anything until we have killed Paul.

**Colossians 2:21** "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"?

**Hebrews 2:9** But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

**1 Peter 2:3** now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

What is the semantic range of that word? (experience, partake, taste, eat) How do you know when it means "taste" in the sense of a small sample? Are any of those indicators present in Hebrews.6? Notice also that the only other time the writer of Hebrews uses the word is in 2:9, where it must refer to a full partaking.

Let's do another one:

*Exercise #3:*

**John 10:28** No one can pluck them out of my hand

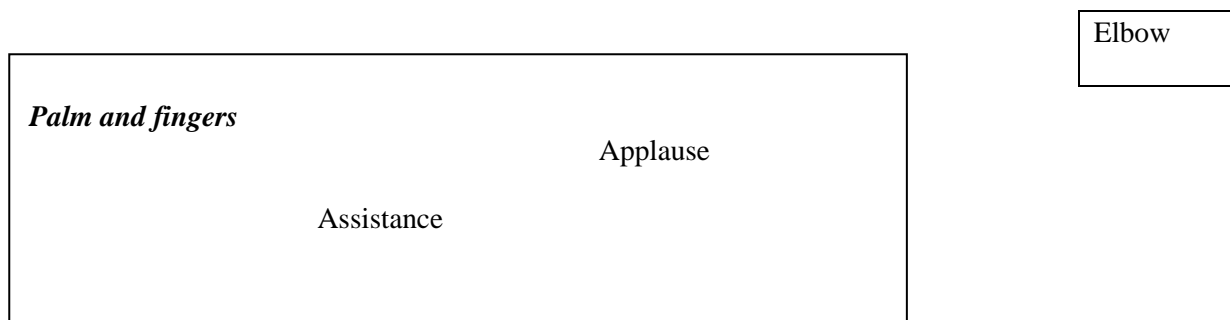
This is another passage that is used in the eternal security debate. Some have suggested that the term "pluck" refers to apostasy (you cannot remove yourself from His hand). So you may want to study that word to get an idea of whether it is talking about mere removal, or implies something of an attack from an outside hostile force. When you do your search and look for nearby uses, you find the same word was used by Jesus in the very same discourse.

**John 10:12** The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it.

So now you know that within the range of meaning of that word is the concept of being attacked.

*Pinpoint the meaning*

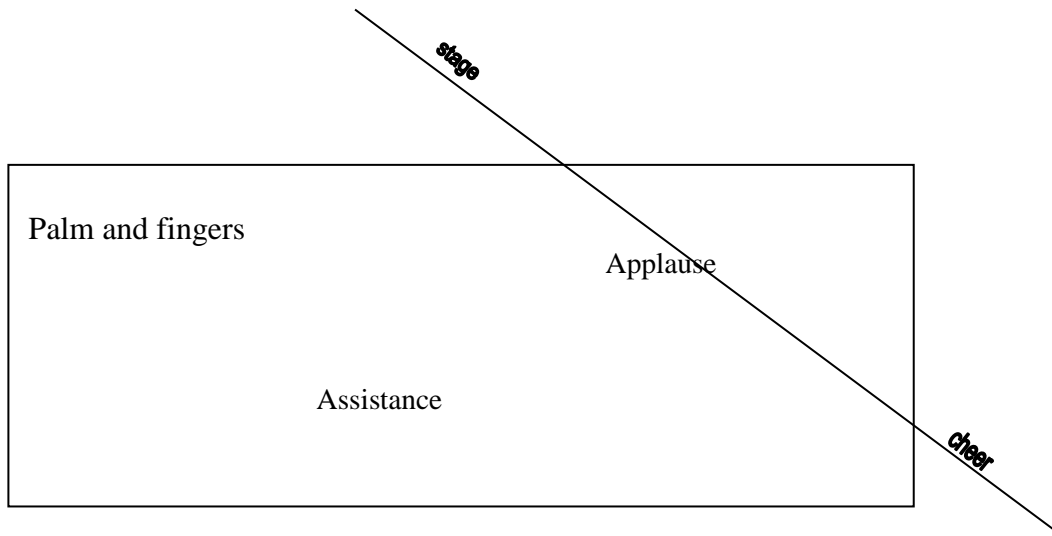
When you determine the range of meaning of a word, the purpose in doing that is to find out how wide *and* how narrow the range of possible meanings is. That is important, because a word can never mean something that falls outside of its range of meaning (obviously – because if it did, that meaning would be within its range of meaning). So let's take our box that shows the range of meaning of the word "hand." The word "hand" can mean a few different things, but it never means "elbow." So if you are studying a passage where the word "hand" is used, and the context seems to point to the meaning "elbow," you have to keep looking, because that word never means "elbow."



Once you have an idea for the range of meaning, you are ready to determine which idea within that range is present in the passage you are studying. This is where most people go wrong in doing word studies. They find the range of meaning and then teach either all the meanings or whichever ones they find most interesting. When people do that they are skipping the most important step. In an individual usage, a word does not mean everything in the whole range. Context is like a road passing through the range of meaning. Where the road of context intersects the range of meaning – that is the (only) meaning for that word in that passage.

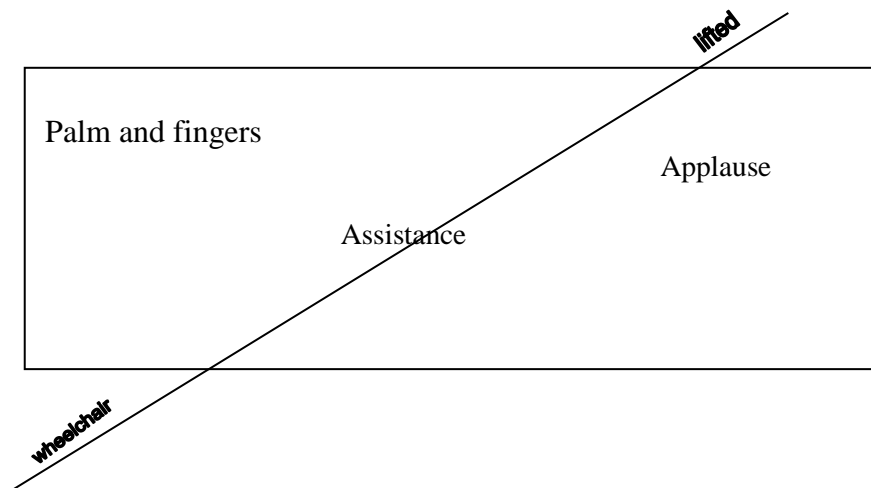
Consider the following paragraph:

After his amazing performance, he walked to the center of the stage. The announcer said, “Let’s give him a hand.” The whole auditorium erupted with in a loud cheer. The words in that paragraph are like a line of boxes, one of which is the word “hand.” The context of that paragraph is in the realm of a performance, a stage, and auditorium and a loud cheer, which makes a line that intersects our box at the point of “applause.”



Now consider another paragraph:

He wheeled his wheelchair up to the stage. After three failed attempts to get up onto the stage, a man sitting up front said to his friends, “Let’s give him a hand.” The four of them lifted him in his wheelchair onto the stage. This context is one in which help is being given, which is like a line that intersects our box at the point of assistance (the sentence wouldn’t make sense with the meaning “applause” or a literal hand).



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### *How to do a Word Study*

#### **Wrong Way**

Find out all the interesting ways a word is used and teach those as “insights” into the passage you are studying.

#### **Right Way**

Find out only in what way the word is being used in this context.

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Those examples are very easy, because you already have tremendous skills at hermeneutics. You know how to interpret language. The trick is applying what you use everywhere else to the Bible. So let's try it with a biblical word.

Example 1: *angelos* (often translated "angel")

Within the range is a simple messenger, or a spiritual being sent from heaven. Compare James 2:25 and Hebrews 1:14.

**James 2:25 In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the (*angelos*) and sent them off in a different direction?**

**Hebrews 1:14 Are not all (*angelos*) ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?**

The line of context tracking through the range of meaning for *angelos* in James.2:25 intersects at the point of a human messenger. In Hebrews 1:14 it is a spiritual being from heaven. What would you say to a Bible study leader who was teaching a study on James 2 and said, "I looked up this word in the Greek and found out that it's the word for *angel*. Those spies were not human beings; they were angels from heaven!"?

Example 2: *eirene* (εἰρήνη) "peace"

Within the semantic range are the following uses:

- absence of trouble in general
- interpersonal relationships that are free from hostility
- inner tranquility (even in the midst of trouble).

In the following uses of that word, determine which of the meanings is called for by the context.

**1Thessalonians 5:3 While people are saying, "(*eirene*) and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly,**

**2Thessalonians 3:16 Now may the Lord of (*eirene*) himself give you peace at all times and in every way.**

**1Thessalonians 5:13 Live in (*eirene*) with each other.**

Example 3: *peirasmos* or the verb form *peiraso*

Within the range of meaning:

- trial or test
- temptation (enticement to evil)

**James 1:12-13 Blessed is the man who perseveres under (*peirasmos*), because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. 13 When (*peiraso*), no one should say, "God is (*peiraso*) me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he (*peiraso*) anyone**

Review Questions:

What does "semantic range" mean?

Why don't translators just translate word for word?

How does one determine which of the possible meanings of a word is the intended meaning for a specific text?

Homework: Do a word study to determine the meaning of the word "easy" in Matthew 11:30.

For my yoke is easy (*chrestos* - χρηστός) and my burden is light." That Greek word is used only here and in the following six passages:

**Luke.5:39 And no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for he says, `The old is *better* (*chrestos*).'"**

**Luke 6:35-36 ...the Most High...is *kind (chrestos)* to the ungrateful and wicked.**

**Romans 2:4 Or do you show contempt for the riches of his *kindness (chrestos)*, tolerance and patience...**

**1Corinthians 15:33 Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts *good (chrestos)* character."**

**Ephesians 4:3 Be *kind (chrestos)* and compassionate to one another**

**1Peter 2:3 you have tasted that the Lord is *good (chrestos)*.**

Do not use any other source than your Bible for this. Note how the word is used in those passages, determine a range of meaning from that, and then decided where the context of Matthew 11 intersects that range of meaning.