

Dr. David Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Session 22, Word Meaning Level Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Session 22, Word Meaning Level, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Mathewson's lecture discusses potential pitfalls in biblical word studies. He highlights the dangers of **etymological fallacies**, **anachronisms**, and relying solely on modern translations or word derivations to understand ancient texts. He emphasizes the importance of considering the **historical context** and avoiding overemphasis on individual words at the expense of broader grammatical and literary analysis. The lecture uses examples from the New Testament, illustrating how misinterpretations can arise from neglecting context and grammatical nuances such as verb tense and conditional sentences. Finally, the lecture stresses the need to understand a passage's place within the larger literary context of the entire book to correctly interpret its meaning.

2. 15 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Session 22 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Introduction & Languages → Introductory Series → Hermeneutics).



**Mathewson_Herme
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3. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided lecture excerpts on hermeneutics and word studies:

Briefing Document: Hermeneutics and Word Studies

Main Themes:

This lecture focuses on the proper methods of word study within the context of biblical hermeneutics, particularly when dealing with the original languages (Greek and Hebrew) and their relationship to English translations. The lecture identifies common fallacies and pitfalls to avoid, as well as providing guidance for correct application. It transitions from the micro-level of word study to the macro-level, encompassing grammar, syntax, and broader literary context.

Key Ideas and Facts:

1. Fallacies to Avoid in Word Studies:

- **Etymological Fallacy (Root Fallacy):** Giving too much weight to the historical origins of a word when determining its meaning in a specific text.
- Quote: *"The first one we discussed was what is often known as an etymological or root fallacy where the origins or the history of a word is given too much weight in determining what a word means at a certain time."*
- **Importance:** Words evolve in meaning over time, and the ancient root may not reflect the contemporary usage.
- **Anachronism (Semantic Anachronism):** Reading a later meaning of a word back into its original context. This can be done in two ways:
 - Reading later Greek/Hebrew meanings back into an earlier text.
 - Quote: *"That is reading a Greek or Hebrew word in light of a later meaning... to assume that a later meaning of a Greek or Hebrew word is necessarily what it meant in its original context is certainly a fallacy..."*
 - Reading modern English meanings back into the ancient text, especially using modern English derivatives of Greek/Hebrew words.
 - Quote: *"...the danger of reading a Greek or Hebrew text in light of a Hebrew word in light of the English word we use to translate it thinking that what the word*

means in English is what it would have meant in Greek... or...interpret a word in a Greek or English word in terms of our modern-day derivations of those words."

- **Example:** The word "hilarion" (Greek) meaning "cheerful" in the Bible is not equal to the modern English word "hilarious," and using the modern definition leads to misinterpretation.
- Quote: *"The problem is that's reading the word hilarion in Greek in anachronistically in light of our English word hilarious which is now means something very different from how Paul was using the term..."*
- **Example:** The Greek word that is usually translated into "hope" in the Pauline texts is a "certainty that one can stake one's life upon" and is not to be confused with the modern English usage which is usually an "uncertain wish."
- Quote: *"usually we use the word hope as something that we wish will happen but we aren't certain whether it will or not whereas the Greek word that is usually translated hope is at least in Pauline text frequently refers to something that is a certainty that one can stake one's life upon..."*
- **Importance:** The meaning of a word is determined by its contemporary usage within its specific historical and literary context.
- **Reinventing the Wheel:** Ignoring the established conclusions of previous lexical analysis.
- Quote: *"A fifth fallacy or at least a fifth thing to avoid is what I call not reinventing the wheel that is to recognize that much hard work has been done in lexical analysis..."*
- **Importance:** While new work is important, foundational conclusions should be respected, and energy should be spent on areas that require further investigation.
- **Obsession with Words:** Focusing too much on individual words while neglecting the larger context and structure of the text.
- Quote: *"don't become so obsessed with words but realize that words are not the ultimate bearers of meaning or carriers of meaning..."*
- **Importance:** Words are the building blocks of meaning, but meaning is communicated through clauses, sentences, paragraphs, and whole discourses.

2. The Example of "Flesh" (sarx) in Galatians 5

- The Greek word *sarx*, translated as "flesh," can have a broad range of meanings: physical flesh, the entire body, ancestry, or humanity in rebellion against God.
- The context in Galatians 5 suggests Paul is not speaking against the physical body itself but about the *entire self* under the influence of the present evil age.
- The NIV's original translation of *sarx* as "sin nature" is potentially misleading, as it may imply an ontological part of one's being which creates sin. The 2011 version reverted back to "flesh".
- Understanding "flesh" as the entire self, susceptible to sin and relying on the resources of this present evil age, is crucial for correctly interpreting the text.
- Quote: *"...the term flesh that we translate flesh in English refers to my entire self my entire physical spiritual makeup my entire self as weak and susceptible to sin..."*

3. Grammatical Analysis

- **Importance of Literal Translations:** Literal translations (formally equivalent) are more helpful when performing grammatical analysis as they are closer to the original text structure.
- Quote: *"Here probably a more formally equivalent translation is of help a form even a formal equivalent that is a more literal translation will not capture completely and perfectly the grammar of the Hebrew and Greek text but it'll hopefully bring you closer to it than other types..."*
- **Tense Systems in Greek:** The Greek tense system is not primarily concerned with the time of an action, but with *aspect* – how the author chooses to view the action.
- **Aorist Tense:** Views the action as a whole, irrespective of duration or completion. It is considered the default tense.
- Quote: *"The Aristents could look at an action as a whole as if the author stands back and just sees the whole event whether it was a real brief event and happened instantaneously whether it was repeated whether it took place over a long period of time the Aristents would be as if the author stands back and looks at the action as a whole..."*
- **Present Tense:** Views the action internally as it develops and unfolds, allowing the author to zoom in on the details of the event.

- Quote: *"the present tense would be as if the author decides to enter the action and see it internally as it develops and unfolds in front of him..."*
- **Misinterpretations to Avoid:** Do not assume that the aorist tense necessarily means the action was instantaneous or "once-for-all", and do not assume that the present tense means the action is continuous or habitual.
- **Importance:** Understanding the function of aspect and the limitations of Greek tenses is critical to interpretation.
- **Conditional Statements (First Class Conditions):** First-class conditional statements (if...then) in Greek do not automatically mean "since...then." These require careful consideration of context and should not always be interpreted as a reality.
- Quote: *"you often find commentaries and other tools of locating first class condition sentences in greek and therefore drawing the conclusion this is really happening it should be translated not if that's that's not strong enough but you should translate it since..."*
- **Importance:** Greek is a language like any other, and imposing too much precision on it can lead to unnatural interpretations.
- **Participles:** Participles must be understood as modifying the main verb. For example in Ephesians 5, the participles that follow the command in verse 18 to "be filled with the spirit" describe what it means to be filled with the spirit.
- Quote: *"and all those participles singing speaking giving thanks they all go back and modify the command to to be filled with the spirit and i think they simply explain and describe what does that mean what does that look like..."*
- **Connectors (Conjunctions):** Words like "therefore," "but," "and," and "because," connect ideas and clauses. It's important to trace the flow of thought these words provide.
- **Importance:** Grammatical analysis helps identify structural connections, modify relationships and the flow of thought in the text.

4. Literary Context

- **Importance:** Understanding how a passage fits within the broader context of a book is vital to accurate interpretation, just like understanding a scene in a movie requires understanding the movie as a whole.
- Quote: *"one of the most important things that you can do in hermeneutics or interpreting a biblical text is to and one of the most valuable aspects is to be able to explain how your text contributes to the argument that's going on..."*
- **Types of Relationships Between Passages:** Chronological, explanatory, illustrative, cause-effect, question-answer, particular-general, comparison-contrast.
- **Example:** Philippians 4:13 ("I can do all things through him who strengthens me") should be understood within the context of Paul's teaching on contentment in all circumstances, not as a general promise for success in any endeavor.
- Quote: *"chapter 4 verse 13 is referring to Paul's ability Christ enabling him to be content in any circumstance whether he has abundance or whether he's struggling to to survive and eke out an existence..."*
- **Example:** Exodus 18 (Jethro's visit and Moses' delegation of judges) can be understood as less about how to delegate and more about recognizing the human limitations of Moses and how the power of leadership rests with God, as the following stories in Exodus portray Moses as a leader completely reliant on God to help him accomplish great feats.
- Quote: *"you actually have these two stories then where moses is portrayed as very human and very weak..."*

Implications:

- Word studies should be approached with caution, avoiding common fallacies.
- Understanding Greek verb tenses requires careful consideration of the author's chosen "aspect" instead of a simplistic time-based system.
- Grammatical analysis of connectives, and participles can help in understanding the flow of thought within a passage.
- Interpretation requires constant attention to the larger literary context. Understanding how individual passages fit within the whole structure of a book reveals a deeper level of meaning.

- English translations can often be helpful, but a good commentary is still essential to be able to glean the nuances of meaning in the original languages.

Conclusion:

This lecture stresses the importance of a holistic approach to biblical interpretation, moving beyond simplistic definitions of words and employing careful analysis of grammar and literary context. The lecture acts as a practical guide to properly interpret scripture using the original languages and to use hermeneutics in a more accurate and complete manner.

4. Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Session 22, Word Meaning Level

Word Meaning, Grammar, and Context: A Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. What is the etymological or root fallacy in word studies?
2. Define semantic anachronism and provide an example.
3. Why is it problematic to read ancient words through the lens of modern English translations?
4. According to the lecture, what is a key mistake to avoid concerning lexical analysis?
5. Explain the importance of recognizing that words combine to form larger units of meaning.
6. Why is a formal equivalent translation helpful when doing a grammatical study?
7. How do Greek verb tenses primarily function (as opposed to English verb tenses)?
8. Explain the concept of aspect in Greek tenses using the parade analogy.
9. What is the function of connectors such as "therefore" and "because" in a text?
10. Why is it crucial to understand how a passage fits within the broader context of a book?

Quiz Answer Key

1. The etymological or root fallacy is giving too much weight to the origins or history of a word in determining its current meaning, ignoring how its usage has changed over time. It focuses on the past rather than the present use in a text.
2. Semantic anachronism is reading a word in its original language (Greek or Hebrew) in light of a later meaning. An example is interpreting the Greek word "hilarion" as "hilarious" in 2 Corinthians, when "hilarion" meant "cheerful."
3. It is problematic because modern English translations may not perfectly capture the nuances of the original language and meanings of ancient words. It can lead

to inaccurate interpretations based on current usage and associations of the English words.

4. A key mistake to avoid concerning lexical analysis is to “reinvent the wheel” and not recognize the vast amount of existing research on lexical word meanings. Instead, energy should be directed towards areas that have not yet been thoroughly explored.
5. Recognizing that words combine to make clauses, sentences, paragraphs, and discourses is vital because meaning is not solely contained within individual words but in the relationship between them. This view considers the whole rather than an isolated focus on terms.
6. A formal equivalent translation (literal translation) is helpful because it attempts to preserve as much of the original grammatical structure as possible, bringing the reader closer to the grammar of the Hebrew or Greek text. This helps reveal potential interpretive issues within a text.
7. Greek verb tenses primarily function to indicate the aspect, which refers to how the author chose to view the action (e.g., as a whole or as it unfolds), rather than the time of the action (past, present, or future), like English verbs. Aspect represents the viewpoint of the author.
8. The parade analogy illustrates aspect by showing that the same parade can be viewed differently: a helicopter view sees the entire parade as a whole (Aorist tense), while a street view sees the parade as it unfolds in its details (Present tense). These represent two ways of viewing a single event.
9. Connectors function to link words, clauses, sentences, and paragraphs, which can indicate relationships (cause/effect, contrast, conclusion). These show the logical progression of an author's thought and how different parts of the text relate to each other.
10. Understanding a passage in its broader context is important because it shows how a text fits into the larger argument or narrative of the book. This helps to understand the purpose and contribution of a particular passage and helps to avoid misinterpretation by isolating a text from its literary context.

Essay Questions

Instructions: Answer each of the following essay questions in a well-organized essay format.

1. Discuss the various fallacies and missteps in word studies mentioned in the lecture. Why are these important to avoid, and how might you do so?
2. How does the lecture describe the differences between English and Greek verb systems, specifically focusing on the concepts of tense and aspect? How can understanding this difference help readers of biblical texts?
3. Explain how to utilize an English translation and commentaries to make observations regarding the grammar of a biblical passage when you lack the knowledge of the original languages.
4. Discuss the significance of connecting a biblical text to its larger context. Use the example of Philippians 4:13 or the Exodus passage in the lecture to illustrate how considering the broader context can affect understanding.
5. Explain how analyzing connectors, literary types, and the flow of thought contributes to a deeper understanding of the relationship between different sections of biblical texts.

Glossary

Anachronism/Semantic Anachronism: Reading a word in its original language (Greek or Hebrew) in light of a later meaning that is not consistent with its original historical context.

Aspect: A feature of Greek verbs that expresses how the author chose to view an action—as a whole (Aorist tense) or as it unfolds (Present tense)—independent of when the action occurred.

Connectors: Words such as "therefore," "because," and "but" that function to link words, clauses, sentences, or paragraphs, indicating relationships and progression of thought.

Etymological/Root Fallacy: Giving too much weight to the origins or history of a word to determine its meaning, ignoring the evolution of usage over time in a specific context.

Formally Equivalent Translation: A translation approach that prioritizes maintaining the grammatical structure and form of the original language (also called "literal translation").

Lexical Analysis: The process of studying the meanings of individual words in their contexts, considering their range of meanings, functions, and usage in a specific context.

Present Tense (Greek): A verb tense used to indicate that an author is viewing an action as it develops and unfolds, often giving a detailed perspective. It does not necessarily indicate a continuous or habitual action.

Aorist Tense (Greek): A verb tense used to indicate that an author views an action as a whole, with no particular emphasis on its internal development or duration. Often considered the default tense.

Sin Nature: A term used in some translations of the Bible, particularly in reference to the Greek word "sarx," to indicate a human tendency toward evil or a state of rebellion against God. Can be a controversial translation and lead to a misunderstanding.

Sarx: A Greek word frequently translated as "flesh" in English, which can refer to the physical body, the entire self, or humanity under the influence of sin.

5. FAQs on Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Session 22, Word Meaning Level, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ: Interpreting Word Meaning and Context in Biblical Texts

1. What is the "etymological or root fallacy" and why is it problematic when studying biblical texts?

The etymological or root fallacy occurs when we place too much emphasis on the historical origins or root meaning of a word when determining its meaning in a particular context. This is problematic because the meaning of a word evolves over time. Therefore, the original meaning might not reflect how the word is used in a specific biblical passage. Instead, we should focus on how the word was understood during the time it was written, which can often be different from the word's original etymological root.

2. What is "semantic anachronism," and how does it negatively impact biblical interpretation?

Semantic anachronism, also known as anachronism, is the error of reading a later meaning of a word back into its earlier use in the text. For example, assuming that a word in the original Greek or Hebrew text meant the same thing as its derivative English word means today. This leads to misinterpretation because words change their meanings over time, and using a modern understanding of a word can severely distort the author's original intention. It is crucial to consider what a word would have meant in its historical and cultural context.

3. Why is it dangerous to interpret biblical words through the lens of modern English translations or derivatives?

Interpreting biblical words based on how they are translated or used in modern English can lead to misunderstandings. Often, the English word used to translate a Greek or Hebrew word is not an exact equivalent, and the nuances of the original language can be lost. Furthermore, we might use an English word that is a derivative of a biblical Greek or Hebrew word, but now that English derivative has come to mean something very different from the word's meaning in its original context. Relying on English translations without considering the original language context can result in inaccurate or flawed interpretations.

4. Why should we avoid "reinventing the wheel" when conducting lexical analysis, and what does that mean in practice?

"Reinventing the wheel" refers to the practice of expending time and energy on lexical analysis or word studies that have already been thoroughly done. It is essential to recognize and use the existing resources such as commentaries and lexicons that contain research on biblical word meanings. Instead of repeating work already completed, one should utilize already existing resources to build and focus on areas that may not be covered, and so maximize the time spent in Biblical analysis.

5. Why is it important not to be overly focused on individual words when interpreting the Bible?

While word studies are an important part of biblical interpretation, it's crucial not to get so obsessed with individual words that you ignore other vital aspects of communication. Words only combine to make clauses and clauses form sentences, and sentences form paragraphs, which in turn form entire discourses. Meaning is not just conveyed by words themselves but by how words are put together in a larger context. To focus too intently on isolated words can cause us to lose the overall message and author's intention.

6. How do Greek tenses, specifically the Aorist and present tense, differ from English tenses, and why is this difference important for interpretation?

Unlike English, where verb tenses primarily indicate the time of an action (past, present, or future), Greek tenses primarily focus on aspect, which describes how the author views the action, irrespective of when the action actually occurred. The Aorist tense views an action as a whole, while the present tense views the action as it unfolds, with more focus on its details. Understanding this difference is crucial because commentaries might try to assign more weight to a particular tense than is actually warranted, which can lead to flawed interpretations of the biblical text.

7. Why is it important to pay attention to grammatical connectors like "therefore," "but," and "because" when interpreting a biblical text?

Connectors act as links between words, clauses, sentences, and paragraphs, which are helpful in understanding the relationship between different parts of a passage. Paying attention to these connectors helps trace the flow of thought and argument, indicating relationships of cause and effect, contrast, and consequence. However, care must be taken to determine the range of that connection because it could simply be connecting words, sentences, paragraphs, or even very large sections of text. These connectors can help identify how ideas and points within a text relate to each other.

8. Why is understanding the broader literary context essential when interpreting a biblical passage, and what are some ways to examine that context?

Understanding the literary context is critical because it reveals how a particular passage fits into the overall argument or narrative flow of a book, and can help to avoid misunderstandings. To determine the significance of a passage, we must consider the material that comes before and after it. We must examine the connections, themes, and relationships between paragraphs to understand why a specific section of text is placed in the narrative where it is. By doing this we can better understand what it contributes to the main ideas and arguments in that text.